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A Russian Gil Blas, or The Adventures of Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov

Vasily Trofimovich Narezhny

Ronald D. LeBlanc (Translator)

University of New Hampshire, ronald.leblanc@unh.edu

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Vasily Trofimovich Narezhny

_A Russian Gil Blas, or_
_The Adventures of Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov_

[Translated into English by Ronald D. LeBlanc]
Abstract:

Although Vasily Trofimovich Narezhny (1780-1825) is generally considered to be one of the pioneers of the modern novel in Russia, his works have yet to be sufficiently recognized for their many artistic merits. He receives little critical attention in most histories of the rise of the novel in early nineteenth-century Russia. Born in Ukraine, but educated in Moscow, Narezhny wrote lengthy satirical novels imbued with a sardonic tone and an earthy brand of realism that tended to offend the refined aesthetic sensibilities of many contemporary followers of Nikolai Karamzin and his dominant school of literary Sentimentalism during the early years of the nineteenth century. Moreover, as I have argued elsewhere (see The Russianization of Gil Blas, 1986), Narezhny's reworking of his putative model, Alain-René Lesage's extremely popular Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane (1715-1735), was mistaken for an imitation of this very tame and light-hearted French roman de moeurs. Soviet scholars, as a rule, failed to recognise it for its bold attempt to revive the genre of picaresque fiction that had flourished two centuries earlier, during the so-called Spanish Golden Age, through works written by such native novelists as Mateo Alemán, Francisco Gómez de Quevedo, and the anonymous author of Lazarillo de Tormes. Following the example of these enterprising literary forerunners in Spain, Narezhny sought to depict, in a highly satirical manner, the adventures of a lowborn rogue, Prince Gavrilo Chistyakov (he's an impoverished "prince" in name only), who lives by his wits in a sinful and morally bankrupt Russian society that is filled with hypocrisy, deception, and falsehood. The tsarist censors, deeply offended by the sharp social criticism to be found in A Russian Gil Blas, refused to allow Narezhny's novel to be published when it was submitted to them to consider for publication in 1815. Indeed, his novel would only see the light of day during the Soviet period (in 1938, to be exact), when it was hailed as a realistic satire of life in Russia under corrupt tsarist rule. It is my hope that this English-language translation of Narezhny's Rossisskii Zhilblaz will enable, among others, American and British readers who cannot read Russian to become acquainted at last with this rollicking novel written by a pioneering Russian writer who has dwelled for far too long -- and far too unfairly -- in relative obscurity.
Acknowledgements:

I wish to acknowledge here the several friends and colleagues of mine who have contributed to this English language translation of Vasily Narezhny's Russian novel. They include Andrei Zorin, Lynn Visson, Piero Garofalo, Scott Smith, Doug Smith, and Stephen Dodson. To varying degrees, they provided me with much-needed (and much-appreciated) advice, with illuminating responses to my numerous queries, and with many helpful suggestions. Any errors in translation are, of course, my own, and not theirs.

The largest debt of gratitude that I owe, however, goes to my wife, Lynda Galard-LeBlanc, who showed remarkable patience and forbearance during the several years that it took for me to complete this project. She not only read the entire manuscript several times, but also tolerated the seemingly endless hours that I spent holed up in my study while working on this project. I owe her a debt of gratitude that I can never hope to repay fully.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the fact that this is, to the best of my knowledge, the first translation of Narezhny’s novel into English. My hope is that this translation might encourage other scholars of Russian literature to translate it, to write studies about it, or even merely to read it. There has long been a paucity of critical literature on Narezhny's works, which I think is a shame, and I hope that this situation will change, the sooner, the better. For my own personal assessment of Narezhny’s A Russian Gil Blas, see The Russianization of Gil Blas: A Study in Literary Appropriation (Slavica Publishers, 1986).
Some Russian Terms:

*arshin*: a Russian measure of length (equal to 28 inches).

*droshky*: a low, four-wheeled open carriage formerly used in Russia (it consists of a long bench on which the passengers ride sideways or astride, as on a saddle, with their feet on bars near the ground).

*kaftan*: an ankle-length garment, with long, flowing sleeves, that was worn by men (this loose type of dress was a variant of the robe or tunic).

*kokoshnik*: a traditional Russian headdress worn by girls and women to accompany the *sarafan*.

*sarafan*: a long, trapezoidal jumper dress (pinafore) worn by girls and women (it forms part of a Russian traditional folk costume).

*sazhen*: a Russian measure of length (equal to 7 feet)

*shtof*: a Russian liquid measure (equal to 1.23 litres).

*verst*: a Russian measure of length (equal to .66 miles).
Speaking Names:

There is a trope in Russian literature called говорящее имя (“speaking name”), whereby a literary character’s surname indicates, or strongly suggests, some distinctive character trait. The main character in Denis Fonvizin’s famous comedy, The Minor (1782), for instance, who is named Mitrofanushka (“Momma’s boy”), is characterized as a vulgar, selfish brat who lacks any maturity. Narezhny follows close behind Fonvizin in this regard, endowing many of the characters in his novel with a “speaking name” that signals to the reader what can be expected in the behavior of that character throughout the novel. One important difference, however, is that Narezhny often uses these names sardonically, so that the reader must be careful not to take the name too literally.

Here are some examples from A Russian Gil Blas:

**Gavrilo Chistyakov**: the adjective чистый (“clean,” “pure,” “chaste”) generally applies to the main character sardonically: he gets married three times (and has numerous sexual relationships) as well as performs various immoral acts.

**Ivan Prostakov**: the adjective простой (“simple,” “plain,” “naïve”) here seems to indicate two main character traits: a straightforwardness and simplicity (one that contrasts sharply with his wife’s personality) and the naïvete of a simpleton.

**Prince Svetlozarov**: the adjective светлый (“light,” “luminous,” “cheerful”) applies only to the false identity that this villainous imposter seeks to project as he attempts to seduce wealthy young women (in an effort to get them to marry him).

Most of the time, the “speaking names” in Narezhny’s novel, as one might well expect, derive from Russian surnames. But there are instances where they come from Latin names as well, as in the case with a high-ranking government official, the ruthless grandee Latron (cf. “robber,” “brigand”), as well as the eccentric metaphysician Trismegalos (cf. “thrice blessed with greatness”), where reference is made to his great fondness not only for metaphysics and the Church Slavonic language, but also for punch. A similar fondness for alcoholic beverages is indicated by the name of a local metaphysician called Bibarius (cf. “inclined or addicted to drink”).
Homo sum, humani nil a me alienum puto (Terence)

AUTHOR’S FOREWORD

The outstanding literary work written by Alain-René Lesage, known under the title, The Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillane, has brought, and continues to bring, as much pleasure and profit to the reader as it brings honor to, and amazement at, the gifts of its publisher.

France and Germany likewise have their fictional heroes whose adventures are known as those of A French Gil Blas and A German Gil Blas. That is precisely the reason why I have decided, following their example, to give this new literary work of mine such a famous name for its title and, in this way, ease the labor of those who would set out in search of whom to compare me with in this work of literature.

The rules that I have sought to preserve are essentially the following: plausibility, propriety, the similarity between my depictions and those of nature itself, the representation of mores and manners among various social estates and personal relationships. The aim of all of this is exactly the same one that Lesage had outlined for himself: namely, “to combine the pleasant with the profitable” (dulce et utile).

But since these two words, “pleasure” and “profit,” are almost always understood in one’s own way, and since we see incessantly, — if only we truly look, and not simply sleep with our eyes open, — that one and the same thing, one and the same sensation, movement, desire, and feeling of revulsion, is called useful by one person and baneful by another, is called pleasant by one person and abominable by another, I, therefore, without attempting to escape the common lot of every earthly being, am calmly handing myself over to the free judgment of each and every reader, without worrying myself terribly much whether he or she will exactly consider “pleasant” and “profitable” that which seemed such to me. What is more, to worry oneself about such a thing would be, in all respects, both “unpleasant” and “unprofitable.”

I pray that frenetic lovers of metaphysics, Church Slavonic, and “all things German” will not become angry with me for not speaking about them with the proper deference. This does not at all mean that I consider metaphysics to be a foolish branch of scholarly knowledge, Church Slavonic to be a barbaric language, and all those things that have been thought up by the German mind to be a stupid contrivance. God forbid that I would do something like that! But it has always seemed to me that crossing the proper limits, in whatever domain that may be, is utter folly. Metaphysics is, without a doubt, a lofty branch of scholarly knowledge and it rarifies human reason, not to such an extent, however, that it could ascertain what the Supreme Being was doing before He created the world and what He will be doing after it has been destroyed. Yet there are some intrepid scholars who have embarked upon that quest. — Church Slavonic is indisputably an elevated, precise, and bounteous language; he among us, however, who, when standing in front of a beautiful woman, would fondle her ear by means of such appellations as “nice-looking
virgin,” or “turtle dove more beautiful than paradise” – would probably come near to being considered a madman. And yet there are such knights-errant who are to be found among us even now, and they are not without their followers! As far as the term “all things German” is concerned, a term that I understand to mean, following the lead of our forebears, “all things foreign,” I know that I would consider myself very insulted indeed if someone were to call me a person who condemns all of those things that are not of our own making. – That would be an excessive favoritism on our part toward all of the things that are native to us, which is likewise no good at all. Every bias leads to delusion, and I don’t know what could be worse, and consequently more harmful, than delusion reinforced by obstinacy.

In describing human life in its multi-variegated relations, I could not help but paint those pictures that will make elderly devout worshippers, male and female alike, become embarrassed. Perhaps this same reaction will occur with young people as well, but let these young people, after they have felt the baseness of the vice of another, blush with shame without themselves being subjected to it, rather than blushing with shame years later for having done it, and that at an age when there will be few opportunities, and little strength, for them to resist it.

I have put on display for Russian readers a Russian hero, assuming that it is much more sensible to take part in the affairs of a fellow countryman than in those of a foreigner. – For what reason Lesage, with his famous Spanish hero, was unable to do this, I will leave it to each and every reader to guess for himself or herself. For several decades, we, too, in our homeland, could not dare to depict our own mores and manners in an impartial manner. To the extent that talent and experience sufficed in me, I have made use of everything that I could to please certain of my readers: namely, those who are able to distinguish the truly “pleasant” and “profitable” from their common synonyms, and who, consequently, make it worth their while that people labor for the sake of their aesthetic enjoyment.
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Chapter 1: An Evening in the Country

In a small village that stands near the border between the Oryol and Kursk governorates, there lived, in their manor house, the landowner Ivan Efremovich Prostakov and his family. In his younger years, he had served in infantry regiments and had been present in several military campaigns, and he had even taken part in several battles. Although, it’s true, he remained silent about his past, his wife made up for this silence by talking about it very often, showing the hole in his full-dress uniform as authentication of his prior military service. Whether this hole had been made by a bullet, or by an enemy bayonet, or was simply torn on a nail, – that she couldn’t say for certain, because there was no unmistakable sign of its origin. And her husband, for his part, couldn’t recall, since it had occurred such a long time ago, and he didn’t at all like to tell falsehoods. Upon his discharge from the military as a captain, he had been living comfortably in this village on the revenue that he received from his estate, which was more than sufficient in light of the pattern of his simple life. He was quiet, meek, and sensitive to all that was good in people; he occupied himself with household matters, and during his leisure time he liked to read books and to smoke his pipe. His worthy spouse, Maremyana Kharitonovna, was fairly corpulent, splendidly prideful, and excessively vainglorious. She could never forget the fact that her father, of blessed memory, had once been a wealthy nobleman in a southern region of Russia who hosted balls, theatre performances, and masquerades at his home, “and even masquerades,” she would repeat not infrequently when conversing with her female neighbors. “Only it’s a shame,” she would continue, “that father, having failed to marry me off profitably, lost the means to host balls and masquerades. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have been married off to a mere captain!” At this point, she would look all around with gloomy eyes and walk up to the mirror, but even it couldn’t provide her with any consolation. She was already the mother of three grown children. It may be ascribed to her credit, or to the credit of her husband, that even up until now she had been completely obedient to him and had spent no less time toiling in the kitchen than discussing the theatre performances and masquerades that used to be hosted by her late father. The Prostakovs had three children: two daughters and a son. Since the latter was still matriculating at the Cadet Corps military school, we won’t say another word about him in this story, other than to mention the fact that he was likewise named Ivan. This is the one thing that he warrants for the time being.

The daughters were named Elizaveta and Katerina. The latter, who was the younger of the two, was the spitting image of her mother when she had been a young girl, although she didn’t detest the captain, her father, since he was wealthier than all of their nearby neighbors, and, consequently, she was more elegantly attired than her girl friends in the village were. Nevertheless, she was always eagerly telling them about her venerable grandfather, who used to host balls, theatre performances, and even masquerades at his home. Her female guests would shrug their shoulders, while Katerina would sigh.

Her elder sister, Elizaveta, was in every sense her complete opposite in terms of thoughts, feelings, and actions. In her gloomy eyes, there swam a gentle sensibility; in her every movement, an innate tenderness manifested itself. The innocent simplicity of her soul even seemed at times to be due to a certain bashfulness. When her sister would talk about their grandfather’s theatre performances, and about his luxurious banquets, and then would sigh, Elizaveta would go out into the garden,
lean against a cherry tree, look up at the cloudless sky, at the playful stars, and she would likewise sigh.

What was her innocent heart pining over?

Three years earlier the two sisters had been matriculating at the boarding school in town. Although their father had been extremely opposed to this idea, his wife had won out.

“What will come of this,” Maremyana Kharitonovna would shout, “when my daughters won’t have been schooled in how to play the piano, how to dance, and how to speak French?”

“My sisters didn't know how to do any of those things, and they still don’t know how to do them even now, just the same as I don’t,” her husband would reply. “And yet they are no less fortunate or less happy for that. They were fine daughters, fine wives, and fine mothers, and they are even fortunate and happy with how their children have turned out, even though they didn't send them to a district boarding school.”

He, it seems, was not reasoning poorly, yet the daughters were nonetheless sent off to a boarding school, they were brought up and educated there for five years, and then, in a flash, they were suddenly summoned back to the village. And what was the reason why?

In this same boarding school, there happened to be, by the way, a certain young man, the son, so people surmised, of a very impoverished nobleman. He was accepted there because some unknown person was paying a large amount of money to cover the cost of his tuition. And so, was this student some sort of relative of this unknown benefactor? Or was he not, perhaps, the illegitimate son of the benefactor’s son or daughter, or even of the benefactor himself? All of these things are possible, but, for the time being, I don’t know anything more about it, the same as this young man himself didn’t know anything more about it at the time, except for the fact that his name was Nikandr.

This ingenious fine fellow cast upon Elizaveta eyes that were, at first, curious, later attentive, but then, after a short time, passionate. Elizaveta responded in kind to these glances. Their friendship grew with each passing day and, finally, it reached the point where once, during off hours, while strolling in the garden of the boarding school, he somehow found himself alone with Elizaveta. He glanced at her, she glanced back at him; he took her hand and squeezed it; she squeezed his hand in return; finally, he made so bold as to squeeze her herself, holding her body close to his heart and planting a passionate kiss upon this young beauty’s flaming lips. – Oh, how happy they were at that moment! But alas! What consequences ensued!

“Grand dieu!” a raspy voice rang out from behind them. They looked back to see who it was, and, – who can describe their horror? – old madam Ulrika, her mouth wide open and her eyes popping out of her head, was running as fast as she could.

With trepidation, the young lovers rushed off in different directions, but that didn’t help. The young male pupil was kicked out of school, for they didn’t know where to dispatch him, and, out of indulgence toward the wealthy family name of the Prostakovs, a formal letter was sent to the
father, requesting that he please send a carriage to fetch the two damsels, that is to say, his daughters.

Madam Ulrika was, of course, one of the best boarding school housemistresses around, so she didn’t exploit the tenderness of her young female pupil for evil purposes. But it’s also true that the young male paramour was, in his own right, a great pauper, and therefore he wasn’t worthy of any serious attention in this incident. If it had happened that some wealthy young prince had fallen in love with a penniless female pupil, then one would think that even our madam wouldn’t have compelled other gallant preceptresses to laugh at their expense and to mock them.

Three years had passed since this incident had taken place, when one rainy autumn evening the entire family gathered together in the drawing room to watch, while yawning, the tobacco smoke that was emanating from the pipe that Mister Prostakov was smoking, and then to listen to the Gil Blasesque adventures that he was reading aloud while lying on the sofa.

MAREMYANA: “No matter what you say, the theatre performances that my late father used to host were much more appealing than these Madridian adventures!”

PROSTAKOV: “Perhaps that’s the reason why he’s deceased!”

Everyone fell silent. After a certain interval of time had elapsed, the reading began anew.

MAREMYANA: “Oh, my God! – How charming was the parity that used to reign in masquerades! You would come, you would sit, you would dance, – and no one would know you.”

PROSTAKOV: “Perhaps that’s the reason why some worthless scoundrel, – a scoundrel who doesn’t merit being spit upon by any sensible, worthy person, – would come, would sit, and would dance with you. And what consequences ensued?”

Maremyana once again fell silent and left to go into the dining room to set the table for supper; Katerina was quietly dancing a waltz in front of the mirror, while Elizaveta was sitting at the head of the sofa, inclining her head sadly upon her arm.

“What is it that you’re doing, Katerina?” – her father asked, getting up angrily.

“I’m waltzing, father.”

“Who enjoined you to waltz around while I’m reading a book, and a good one at that? It would be an entirely different matter if I were reading some foolish comedy or some cheap, frivolous novel, such as, for instance, *The Fashion Shop*, *The New Sterne*, and other silly things of that sort, or even those longer works, translated from the French, that our book stalls are filled with.”

“Mother says that no one can enjoy sitting down to read a book or to embroider a garment.”
“Enjoy?” her father said in an even angrier tone of voice, while lifting himself higher off the sofa. “You’re too young to be troubling yourself about trying to find enjoyment. It’s enough for you to be trying to please your father and mother.”

Katerina left to go to the dining room, prancing slightly, however. Her father sighed, and then took to reading aloud again. Elizaveta sighed, inclining her head even lower than before, but the reasons for her sighs were coming from completely different sources.

The clock in the hall struck eight, and Katerina entered the room again.

“Father! Dinner is served,” she said, “and mother has already taken her seat.” Then she withdrew.

Prostakov had scarcely managed to remove his cap and lift his feet off the sofa when a servant suddenly came running in headlong through the other set of doors, and then said, out of breath: “Master! Some prince is standing in the entrance hall, requesting permission to come in. I can’t remember what his surname is, – it’s such an odd one!”

“A prince?” Prostakov exclaimed, straightening out his dressing gown.

“A prince!” two voices chimed in, and the mother came running out with her younger daughter.

“A prince!” the exclamation could be heard resounding in the servants’ hall, the maidens’ quarters, and the kitchen. In a word, nothing could be heard throughout the entire Prostakov household except for the vociferous exclamations “A prince!” “A prince!”

“What’s the meaning of all this? What’s all of the shouting and noise about? It’s as if a prince were some kind of monster or a cherub,” Prostakov said with vexation, picking off the feathers that were all over his dressing gown.

“Ask him to come in!” he told the servant.

The servant withdrew. The curious gazes of all of the family members were directed at the door, the mouths of all of them were wide open, their breathing had stopped; it was only due to the heaving of their bosoms that one could see that they were not statues. To tell the truth, besides Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov, who had been seeing princes for about twenty years now, no one else in the household had the least idea of how a prince should look. For the most part, they thought that he would be a giant, dressed all in gold, and that he would be wearing expensive jewelry. In a word, they thought that he would be a creature that didn’t at all resemble an ordinary human being.

**Chapter 2: A Prince**

Finally, the moment of dénouement had arrived. The door opens and, – oh, God! What a sight!

“Oh!” exclaimed Maremyana and her daughters, “Oh, Lord!” They darted out of the room. Prostakov himself took a step backwards, turned pale, and crossed himself. “It’s indeed a monster,” he said to himself, and he took yet another step backwards.
What was it that had frightened them so much? Well, it’s pardonable for the women to have been frightened since they had never been engaged in battles, and if they had been, then it was really only battles with chambermaids and barefooted houseboys, for men have vested themselves with the authority to cope with footmen, coachmen, cooks, and grown men in general. But for Prostakov to have been frightened as well, – oh, that’s amazing! Prostakov, who had been engaged in battles and had been wounded, as was evident from the hole in his full-dress uniform, – even Prostakov was horrified. His hair stood on end, and if it hadn’t been that he had held onto his cap with his hand, although that hand was trembling, then the cap probably would have flown off his head and landed at the feet of the ghost or, at any rate, werewolf, that had just entered the room.

They stood there for a long time in silence. The ghost itself, seeing the continuous look of horror on the faces of the master of the house and of the members of his family, knit its brow anxiously. Noticing this, Prostakov bit his lips because the ghost, it seemed, wished at last to say something.

It’s time for me to reveal to the reader the reason for this general horror.

This ghost had the look of a man who was going on fifty years of age. Its hair was tousled and covered with mud that had also stuck to its face and hands, which were all scratched up and bleeding; its clothes were all tattered; one foot was bare, the other was wearing a bast shoe; the ghost was shivering from the cold; its eyes were languid and cheerless.

“Dear sir,” he said (we are already calling him a “he” and not an “it,” that is, a ghost, since everyone had noticed in him several features of the male gender), – “Dear sir! I sincerely beg your pardon for frightening you and your venerable family. Misfortune and unhappiness have befallen me. I’m suffering from hunger and thirst; for entire days and nights on end not a single crumb of bread has visited my mouth; I venture to seek charity and shelter at your home for this night.”

He said this, and then, with his mud-caked hand, he wiped his eyes, from which tears had rolled out.

“Are you unfortunate and unhappy?” quickly asked Prostakov, who had hopped three paces over toward him, and his face brightened.

“Yes, I have been rather unfortunate and unhappy, for a time at least.”

“Lad!” Prostakov exclaimed to his servant, “take this gentleman to the kitchen and see to it that he is given a bath. In the meantime, Maremyana, prepare for him some fresh linen, some boots, a frock coat, and other things of that sort that he might need.” “My dear sir!” he continued, addressing the stranger, “just as soon as you are feeling quite yourself again, I invite you to come back here; we shall await you to have supper together with us.”

Making a deep bow, the stranger withdrew.

“My God!” said Prostakov’s wife and daughters, who had suddenly entered the room.
THE WIFE: “Why is it that you do everything impetuously, without thinking first?”

THE HUSBAND: “I wish to do things after feeling first.”

THE WIFE: “What you feel is nonsense.”

THE HUSBAND: “That’s quite possible, but go prepare some fresh linen for our guest.”

THE WIFE: “Perhaps he’s a criminal of some sort?”

THE HUSBAND: “Even the greatest of criminals has the right to some pity.”

THE WIFE: “And what if he’s a robber?”

THE HUSBAND: “I would feed a hungry robber and then deliver him into the hands of justice officials.”

THE WIFE: “Yes, right after he has succeeded in strangling you during the night!”

THE HUSBAND: “You’re always talking such nonsense. He’s unarmed and, from exhaustion, can scarcely stand on his own two feet.”

THE WIFE: “It’s all just a sham, a mask that he’s wearing! . . .”

THE HUSBAND: “Go prepare the linen. Do you really not want to have supper? Because I and everyone else here won’t take a seat at table until he comes back.”

“My God, how stubborn you are!” said Maremyana, walking off and rattling her keys.

“Father,” said Katerina, “it seems to me that mother is somewhat right. After all, it’s improper to admit a wicked man into one’s home.”

“That’s true, my daughter,” the old man replied, “but one must first make absolutely certain that he’s indeed wicked; and to consider him such on the basis of his muddied face, his beggarly clothing, and his timid look, and then to refuse him a crust of bread to eat and a corner in the house where he can spend the night during the rainy autumn season, – may God preserve you, my children, from such fastidiousness and scrupulousness! I would be a hundred times calmer while looking at your faces in the grave than seeing them with these rosy cheeks of yours, shiny from contentment and serenity, with eyes and hearts that are made of stone. Sensitivity is the true measure of the nobility of a human being. It places him upon the highest rung of creation. The wolf and the bear have just the right amount of intelligence needed to distinguish a tiger from a timid lamb and to know that they should run away from the former and chase after the latter. The sensitive person, even if he’s unfortunate and unhappy, shall some day, – if not today, then tomorrow, – find those kindred souls who shall understand him, who shall befriend him, and he
shall be happy in his rags and tatters. But the hard-hearted man, – he shall remain unhappy forever: amidst wealth, glory, and grandeur, while wearing a crown and a purple mantle.”

The old man fell silent, but his eyes were beaming with pleasure. He glanced over at his daughters: Katerina had turned away, fixing her earring, while Elizaveta was standing there, with eyes that had welled up with tears and that were directed downward, and with her hands pressed crosswise against her bosom. The old man sighed, Elizaveta sighed; he glanced over at her, he understood the throbbing of her heart, and he silently moved over to the sofa.

After half an hour had elapsed, the stranger reappeared, although dressed now in the dilapidated, albeit fairly clean, clothing provided by his host. Prostakov noticed, with displeasure, such parsimony on the part of his wife, but in this instance he remained silent.

The stranger timidly walked up to him, bowed his head low, and mumbled through his teeth something by way of expressing his gratitude.

“We shall talk about that later,” said Prostakov, “but right now it would be best for us to go sit down at table. I think that’s now the most essential thing for us to do.”

As soon as Prostakov saw that his guest had eaten his fill and was rather cheerful after imbibing several glasses of wine, which the host had obliged him to drink, wishing to improve his depleted energies, the latter said: “I consider you an honest and honorable man, and I hope to God that I haven’t been deceived in that regard. But tell me, please, why did you take it into your head to tell our servant that you’re a prince, when your frightful appearance betrayed you all at once? Does an unfortunate and unhappy man really find it necessary to be a prince in order to arouse compassion? Apparently people spoke ill of me to you.”

Everyone turned their searching eyes toward the stranger in anticipation of his reply. The lady of the house held back her spoon, which she had just wanted to lift up to her mouth, and cast sly glances in her husband’s direction.

“That I’m a prince by birth, – that’s as true as is the statement that I now exist. My name is Prince Gavrilo Simonovich of the Chistyakov princely line,” he said, glancing merrily at the entire assemblage.

Everyone was amazed, as if struck by thunder. Maremyana, gasping loudly, dropped her spoon and splashed sauce all over herself.

“Oh, my God!” she repeated several times in succession, sponging herself off with a napkin and staring fixedly at Prince Gavrilo Simonovich of the Chistyakov princely line.

Finally, after several instantaneous questions and answers, everyone calmed down. Only Mrs. Prostakov was repeatedly apologizing that she hadn’t been able to recognize the prince in him at first sight, although his external appearance sufficiently demonstrated that.
“Enough of these vacuous lies,” said her husband, drinking down a glass of wine. “In the condition that His Excellency was in at that time, he looked more like a devil than a prince.”

Everyone broke out laughing, even Prince Gavrilo himself, who was scratching his forehead.

The master of the house continued: “Wife! It’s now time for us to go to sleep: take the prince to the bedroom that’s next to my study. Order that the steam bath be heated up a bit in advance, and inform the servants that we shall all be drinking tea together.”

Chapter 3: Weeding the Cabbage Patch

Morning came. Although it wasn’t the most beautiful morning ever, it seemed that way to the hosts and their guest. He felt comfort and solace, and they were happy about that. They all drank tea together, they all spent time together before dinner, they all had dinner together, and so on. One day passed, and then another, and then an entire week passed in this manner, and then several weeks following that. Although Prince Gavrilo, on more than one occasion, was all set to take his leave of his hospitable hosts, these two men would now and again postpone the parting; each day of their mutual companionship expanded their mutual trust: the guest was finding in his host an elderly man who was kind and intelligent, both by nature and by experience; while the host, with each passing day, was finding in his guest more and more sincerity and straightforwardness. As their mutual compassion progressed, their hearts grew closer, and when a month of the prince’s stay in Prostakov’s home had passed, it seemed to everyone that he had grown up here and had grown old here.

One fine morning, when the intensely cold weather that signals the approach of winter had confined everyone to their warm rooms, Prostakov, after breakfast, started a discussion, in passing, about past events in his guest’s life.

“I understand,” said the prince, “and I shall grant your wish presently. Although I shall blush many a time, I shall gladly make this sacrifice for the sake of your amicability.”

Prostakov gave a signal to his daughters, and they stood up and were starting to leave, when the prince restrained them, telling their father: “You may set your mind at rest, my good man; my tale shall in many respects serve as an edifying lesson for your children.” Accordingly, each of them took a seat, and His Excellency began the narrative account of his past life:

“My birthplace was the village of Falaleevka, which is located in the Kursk governorate. It’s famous for its fertile soil, and it fills the granaries of Petersburg and Moscow with grain; but it does have one strange shortcoming, if one may call it that: namely, that there are as many princes in that one village as there are noblemen in Little Russia and earls in Scotland. It’s six of one and half a dozen of the other.”

“One must give our princes their due: they are much smarter than foreign earls and counts. As I have not infrequently heard it said, when a count is getting up from his woolen felt bedding in the morning, he says to his son: ‘Well, count, have my boots been cleaned?’ ‘Why, of course, Your Excellency, look at how
my hands are still covered with black boot polish.’ And a countess who is cleaning a saucepan in the kitchen in the morning says to her daughter: ‘Well, countess, have you milked the cows?’ ‘Why, of course, Your Excellency, my feet are still covered in cow manure and there is a bump on my forehead, – the damned beast kicks so much.’”

“Our Russian princes are a hundred times smarter than that. They are engaged in tilling the soil and farming: they plow, they harvest, they sell grain, and they live peacefully and fraternally with their own serfs and with the serfs of others. And it’s only during major holidays, when everyone has gathered together in a tavern, that the peasants will speak ill of their princes, if only some ruffian is not afraid to deliver a blow to someone, which happens not infrequently.”

“My venerable father, Prince Simon Gavrilovich Chistyakov, was one of those princes. On his deathbed, he said to me: ‘My dear son, I’m leaving you not entirely unfortunate and unhappy: you have a large enough field, a small harvest, a vegetable garden, a modest orchard, and, most of all, the peasant Ivan and his mother Marya. Be industrious; work without being ashamed of your empty title; and God will increase your property.’”

“After my father’s passing, I executed his last will and testament religiously for some time; but, of course, the demon of animosity begrudged me my peace and quiet by meddling in my affairs.”

“Next door to my house lived Prince Sidor Burkalov, along with his comely daughter, Princess Feklusha. Her dark eyes, her rosy cheeks, – in a word, I rather took a fancy to Feklusha; but I didn’t think at all about marrying her, for the prince, her father, owned only one peasant girl, that is to say, one princess, his own daughter. By the way, he owned nothing and nobody: neither any property, nor any serfs. Furthermore, what little that did remain after his late wife had passed away, he, either through carelessness or from grief over her death, would from time to time hand over to the Yid Yanka, the village innkeeper. Thus, I firmly decided not to woo the beautiful Feklusha and seek her hand in marriage, although I was in love with her and began unwittingly to follow after her everywhere that she went. She noticed this and, it seemed, was not displeased by it.”

“Once I met up with her while she was bent over beneath the yoke for her water buckets, and I said, pitying her: ‘Oh, princess! That, of course, must be heavy for you?’ ‘What am I to do?’ she replied, blushing. I took the buckets from her and carried them to her house. ‘Thank you, prince,’ she said. I patted her on the shoulder, she squeezed my hand, we looked at one another for a moment, and then she said: ‘Early tomorrow morning, at dawn, I shall be weeding the cabbage patch,’ and then she paused. ‘I shall help you,’ I exclaimed, embracing her and kissing her. She appeared to get a little angry at this show of affection, pushing me away and leaving.”
“Well,’ I thought to myself, when I was alone, back in my bedroom, ‘she got angry at me and most likely doesn’t love me.’ Having plunged into sadness, I went out to my vegetable garden and walked around in a mood of profound melancholy. Soon, however, I cheered up. ‘What is there to be sad about? She looked at me so merrily today. If she doesn’t come out to weed the cabbage patch tomorrow, then most likely she’s angry, but if she does come out, then I shall run over to help her.’”

“Making up my mind in this manner, I eagerly awaited the dawn. I walked around the vegetable garden wearing a long face and not paying attention to what I was doing. Intoxicated with rapture, I tread upon a row of vegetables, trampling them and ruining everything. At last dawn broke. Holding my breath, I approached the wattle fence that separated our two gardens and directed my eyes through the wattling, and my gaze was fixed stock-still upon the row of cabbages. The dawn was becoming more crimson and more vivid, but still there was absolutely no sign of Feklusha. My heart was pounding extraordinarily strongly. If a sunflower swayed, I would shudder. ‘It’s her,’ I would think to myself; but then the sunflower would stop swaying, and Feklusha was still not there. Despair was making my heart whirl. I withdrew my head from the fence and glanced sadly at the rising sun. ‘Witness to my woe, why is it that you appear?’ Suddenly a strong wind blew, and something began to make an unusual noise. ‘Here she is now!’ I exclaimed aloud, unable to contain myself, ‘Here, at last, is the beautiful Feklusha!’ With the strong assurance that she had at last made her appearance, I scrambled onto the top of the fence, looked all around in an instant, and what should I behold? Horror gripped me! The wind had knocked down a scarecrow, which was designed to chase away sparrows, and it was lying upon a row of peas. With a breaking heart, I climbed down from the fence, glanced at my vegetable garden, and gasped. A cold sweat stood out on my forehead. ‘Damned princess! Ungrateful Feklusha! Everything here has been broken to pieces and trampled down for your sake, and you’re not even here! My beautiful green beans, my dear cucumbers, my adorable pumpkins, what are you good for now! Oh, what a scoundrel I am! . . .’ Sobbing inconsolably, I arrived back at my small peasant hut and decided not to leave it for at least five days, and I kept my word until that very evening. Impatience took hold of me at that point, and I went out to the gates: I knew that at this time of day she likewise came outside. And, indeed, she was already standing there. Having decided that I wouldn’t look at her, I turned away from her contemptuously and went over to the other side of the street. And I didn’t look at her for at least a minute.”

“Prince!’ she said to me in an undertone, and I turned around in an instant.”

“‘What is it now?’ I replied with a sigh, ‘What more do you want from me? I no longer have a vegetable garden. Go ahead and take a look, you hard-hearted woman! Your heart shall be bathing in blood. And even the most wicked Turk couldn’t have done anything worse than what you have gone and done to me!’
But such is the power of love . . . She walked up to me, took me gently by the hand, squeezed it, and then said to me with a smile: ‘I saw your vegetable garden today, and I guessed how it had come about that it was so ruined, and tears welled up in my eyes.’”

“Is that all that you have to say?’ I cried inconsolably.”

“‘Well, my dear, calm down,’ she said even more tenderly. ‘Do you know that large sunflower in the corner of the garden, the one on the right side near the bean arbor?’”

“How could I not know it!’ I joined in merrily, and, taking her by the hand, I wanted to embrace her, but remembering yesterday’s incident, I suddenly shrank back.”

“Just as soon as my father comes home from that damned Yid today and falls asleep, I shall be standing right next to that sunflower. For today he brought Yanka my silver earrings and my silk scarf, the last of the property that remained for me after my late mother passed away.’”

“Oh, my sweet princess,’ I exclaimed with admiration. ‘You’ll receive today two sets of earrings and two silk scarves; after my mother passed away, a few of her things remained, and my late father wasn’t in the habit of traveling down the road that leads to the Yid Yanka.’”

“We parted. And after waiting for dawn to arrive, I crossed over the fence with my gifts and went quietly into the bean arbor. ‘Cruel Prince Sidor,’ I said to myself softly, ‘you’re enjoying yourself with the Yid, while I’m suffering.’ An hour passed, and still no Feklusha. A daze seized me. I thought that perhaps she wanted to behave toward me the same way that she had yesterday, and I vowed to my guardian angel, and to hers, that I would treat her garden worse than I had my own.”

“Finally, a short while later, my sun began to shine: the princess appeared. We took a seat in the arbor and made up over what had happened yesterday. I offered her my gifts, she accepted them graciously, and the morning light found us engaged in the friendliest of conversations.”

“Oh, what an unexpected surprise! How could I have ever thought that you would do such a wonderful thing?’ Feklusha exclaimed. As we were parting, she began to cry: ‘Is it possible that you’ll abandon me after all this?’ . . .”

“Never, my dear friend,’ I exclaimed solemnly. ‘My house would sooner burn to the ground and my fields be ruined by hail. Tomorrow I’ll go to see Prince Sidor, and I’ll ask him for your hand in marriage; he, I suppose, won’t refuse my proposal.’”
“Oh, of course not,’ she said. She dried her tears and betook herself home.”

“I don’t know how I could have sworn allegiance to her and vowed my desire to seek her hand in marriage, when just a minute earlier, before she appeared, I wasn’t even thinking about doing any of this. The reason for this, of course, was that my imagination was inflamed, my blood was ablaze, such that at the time it seemed to me that I had never entertained any different intention than to marry Feklusha, and I was very pleased with myself. But, alas! As soon as I had climbed on top of the fence and had glanced down at the garden, my heart filled with indignation, and the desire to marry Princess Feklusha nearly deserted me. I stepped into my cottage and was regenerated. ‘How stupid you are, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich!’ I exclaimed to myself with a sigh. ‘Why did you promise to seek her hand in marriage, and, what’s more, to do it today! You could at least have put it off for a week. With what intention am I marrying her? My grain hasn’t been harvested, my garden is all trampled down: what am I going to live on?’”

“Following this prudent line of reasoning, I decided against going to see Prince Sidor. When nighttime fell, however, I found myself standing in the row of green beans. Feklusha was already there, and, as I observed, with tear-stained eyes.”

“‘Why didn’t you come over to see my father today?’ she asked in a sad voice, extending her hand out to me.”

“I placed a silver ring upon her finger.”

“‘My dear, neither one of us has anything that we own right now. Wouldn’t it be better for us to wait a month or two? By that time, we shall have harvested our grain and, as I’ve been noticing, my cow shall have calved. Isn’t that the case? It would be much nicer if we could get married in a manner that is a little more elegant. We don’t want to bring shame upon ourselves, you know! Don’t forget who you are and who I am; and an event of this kind happens just once in a lifetime.’”

“‘Yes, of course, that’s true,’ the princess replied sheepishly, ‘but if by that time . . .’ She stopped speaking. I understood what she meant to say, and a cold sweat beaded on my brow at the mere thought of her becoming pregnant. I quickly regained my composure, however, and spoke to her at length, and quite eloquently, about the decorum that should accompany the wedding of the eminent Prince Chistyakov and the eminent Princess Burkalova. This calmed her down, and we parted, each of us satisfied with the other.”

**Chapter 4: The Intention to Marry**
“Although, as I said earlier, I never thought for a moment that I would ever actually marry Princess Feklusha, I didn't forget to pay visits to the bean arbor and to haul there with me what remained of the small estate that my mother had left me upon her passing. Since I hadn’t bothered to take a look at the field myself, I couldn’t know that Ivan, my peasant, was being lazy, and instead of mowing our field was mowing someone else’s field and was receiving payment for doing that, payment that he then drank away or squandered on the same kinds of princesses as my Feklusha. I was incessantly roaming about, searching for Her Excellency, growing tired of her tantrums about receiving a marriage proposal from me, just as she was growing tired of my procrastination in proposing marriage to her. And since I had nothing left to offer her as a gift, not even a ribbon, we sometimes ended up quarreling. I was hoping, however, to make some money soon through the sale of some spare grain, and so I was feeling fairly calm, waiting for the harvest to be completed; and Ivan and Marya kept assuring me that there were no more than two days of fieldwork left. Suddenly, to my great surprise, I noticed a change in the way that I was being treated, not only by my fellow princes, but also by the peasants and even by the old peasant women in the village. ‘My God, what could this mean?’ I thought. ‘Have people already found out about my intimate relationship with Princess Feklusha, and that’s why each person that I encounter on the street gets angry when he sees me? For previously every single one of them could only dream of having the great good fortune of me becoming his son-in-law or brother-in-law.’ I must admit, without boasting, that I was among the best prospects for a fiancé in the entire village.’ My chagrin was increasing with each passing day, as I was seeing people’s hostility toward me, until finally it reached the point where even the little kids, when they saw me, would point their fingers at me and say mockingly ‘Ooh!’”

“‘What on earth could this mean? Is it possible that even the little kids understand about these intimate relationships, and that their stupid fathers are explaining these matters to them so early in life?’”

“An inadvertent incident revealed to me the reason for all of this changed behavior toward me on the part of the people in the village.”

“One day, when the sun was just setting, I was standing there, leaning my back against the fence and looking sadly from time to time at my garden, in which there was nothing growing there anymore. Even what had remained intact after my heroic deed was being choked by nettles or eaten up by worms.”

“I was suddenly roused from my reverie by the voice of my neighbor, who, while sitting against the same fence at a short distance away from me, was harvesting cabbage heads, while his seven-year-old son was pulling out carrots.”

“‘This is hard work, dad,’ said the child.”
“‘Toil, my son,’ his father replied, ‘toil by the sweat of your brow. If you don’t toil during the summer, there shall be nothing for you to eat during the winter. That’s how it is, for example, with our dissolute neighbor, Prince Chistyakov (whose surname very much befits him): everything is just as cleaned out in his house as it is in his field and in his garden. He doesn’t even bother to take a look at them during the entire summer. What’s he going to do during the winter? Toil, my son, toil, don’t be as stupid as he is!’”

“I was petrified. ‘How can this be?’ I thought. ‘Let’s suppose that everything is cleaned out in my house and in my garden, – this is indeed true. But am I the one who’s at fault? These were all unfortunate incidents! These were accidents! But in the field . . . Oh, my God!’”

“I set off for my hut all atremble.”

“‘Ivan! Has my grain been collected and placed into haycocks?’”

“‘Yes, of course!’”

“‘All of it?’”

“‘Down to the very last seed!’”

“‘Good, we’ll show those lazy ne’er-do-wells that they shouldn’t abuse us. As soon as the sun rises tomorrow, harness the horse to the cart: we’re going out to the field. We need to transport the grain while the weather is still good.’”

“The next day, contrary to my wont, I got up out of bed with the dawn and called out to Ivan to find out whether the horse had been harnessed. But there was no response. I repeated the call, but in vain. I get up, get dressed, and go out to the mudroom: no one is there. I go outside to the courtyard and see that my poor old nag is standing by the fence unharnessed. My heart sinks; I go out to the garden, wondering whether Ivan might not be sleeping there, and I see only Marya, who, while sitting leisurely on a seedbed, would pull a turnip the size of a walnut out of the ground, clean it off with her apron, and then toss it into her mouth, repeating each time, ‘Would the turnip look like this if that lazy scoundrel Gavrilo Simonovich took after his late father!’”

“‘You lazy good-for-nothing!’ I exclaimed angrily, giving her a kick in the behind with my foot. She turned a somersault from out of the seedbed and into the furrow; somehow or other she managed to scramble out of it, she made the sign of the cross on herself several times, and then she said to me: ‘What can I do for you, Your Excellency?’”

“‘Where is Ivan?’ I asked angrily.”
“‘Your Excellency should know that better than I do, because Ivan was just saying that Your Excellency had ordered him to run an errand for Your Excellency . . .’”

“‘May the devil take you and all of your Your Excellencies,’ I said. ‘Where is he right now?’”

“‘Ivan said that I ordered him to do what?’ I interrupted her, speaking even more angrily.”

“‘That’s the reason why he left last evening and hasn’t been around here since then.’”

“‘How can I reason with a brainless old hag like this!’ I thought to myself. ‘I had better go back to bed: who knows, with any luck he might show up.’”

“‘When your son arrives,’ I said to her, ‘have him harness the horse and wait for me.’”

“I slept until noon.”

“‘Ivan?’ I asked upon awakening. Marya was standing next to me and crying. ‘What’s the matter, Marya?’”

“‘Oh, master,’ she said sobbing, ‘Ivan has run away!’”

“‘Run away?’ I exclaimed and jumped out of bed like a madman. ‘Where has he run off to?’”

“‘God only knows!’”

“‘How do you know that he has run away?’”

“‘Today Makrusha, Princess Ugorelova, told me that he had tried to talk her into running away with him.’”

“I stood there for a long time, lamenting my situation; finally, I went out to the courtyard to harness the horse myself and to go reap the grain. I had been a master at doing this when my father was still alive. But, alas! What horror I suddenly felt now! The poor old nag, evidently from long-term fasting, had died. I sincerely mourned her death and then set off on foot to my field.”

“After I had walked past several acres of land and had still not reached my field, everything started to become blurred before my eyes. Is it possible that this is my field? I seem to remember it fairly well; but now I see a meadow, since there are entire herds of cattle roaming about. I went up to the field and my heart stopped:
everything was crushed, thrashed, and trampled down. Bracing myself, I walked up to the cowherds.”

“'You lazy good-for-nothings!' I exclaimed angrily. 'How dare you? . . .' And my lips froze.”

“'What can we do for you, Your Excellency?' said one of them, approaching me with a smirking grin on his face. ‘This field is ours!'”

“His derisive tone brought me to my senses.”

“'What do you mean yours?'”

“'Your Excellency’s peasant, Ivan, told us that you had suddenly grown rich and therefore there’s no way that you wanted to bear the moniker of a plowman: that’s very base for a prince. He sold us this field in your name, and we gave him the stipulated amount of money in the presence of many witnesses.’”

“He fell silent and smiled. This man’s contempt didn’t drive me to despair. Ivan’s flight clearly demonstrated the truth of what he had just told me. I braced myself and, to all appearances, rather nonchalantly returned to the village. For a long while, I could hear the laughter that was following behind me. ‘Farewell, Your Excellency,’ they were shouting after me. ‘Have a nice trip, Your Excellency!’”

“When I got home, I could stand it no longer: I fell face down on the floor, and it was only after an hour that I was able to think clearly. My God, how my heart was heavy then! The only personal property of mine that remained was a single cow. I implored Marya not to starve it to death, too, just as her son had starved my old nag to death.”

“I spent several days in a deep despondency. Her Excellency, the radiant Feklusha, not infrequently came to visit me at my home to remind me of my promise to marry her. I suffered torments, and tried to procrastinate as much as I could.”

“One evening, while sitting forlorn at the window, I meditated upon my woeful fate and the means of repairing it. I racked my brain to no purpose; nothing, absolutely nothing, came to my mind. Suddenly Marya came up to me and said: ‘Your Excellency! . . .’”

“'Go to hell, where your son is now sitting!'”

“'I don’t call you by that name to insult you. I want to be of some help to you and offer you my advice. It seems to me that you’re now concerned about how to correct your situation.'”
“Easily, perchance!”

“I’ll tell you the most sure-fire way to do that!”

“The most sure-fire way?’ I exclaimed, leaping up. ‘The most sure-fire way? And, what way, in your opinion, is that?’

“Through marriage!”

“I was dumbfounded! The word marriage was like a thunderclap for me. It occurred to me that Princess Feklusha had somehow charmed Marya into speaking to me about marriage at a time when she didn’t have the time to do it herself.”

“May the devil take female dispensers of advice such as you yourself?’ I said, turning away and holding on to the back of my head.”

“Why not get married?’ Marya said indulgently, ‘for example, if you have your eye on a maiden who is honorable, intelligent, hard-working, energetic . . .’”

“Yes, she is very hard-working and energetic.’”

“And, what’s more, rich!’”

“At mention of the word rich I opened my eyes wide.”

“Well, isn’t this, after all, the case? Isn’t Mavrusha, our village elder’s daughter, just such a maiden?’”

“I was indescribably bewildered.”

“The village elder’s daughter?’ I said through my teeth, stuttering. ‘And who shall enjoin him to give his daughter’s hand in marriage to someone like me?’”

“It’s enough that she likes you,’ the old woman replied cheerfully. ‘In her eyes, you would make an excellent bridegroom, and she, – I’ll tell you in advance that she and I have discussed all of this, – she has revealed her utmost desire to become your wife, and thus the wife of a prince, and she is competent enough to know how to behave in a way that accords with such a noble rank. Harbor no doubts about being successful in having your proposal be accepted! Tomorrow is a holiday: get dressed up a bit better than usual, come first to the church to pray, in earnest, and then go to the village elder’s house.’”

“Marya left, and I began to get myself ready. I took out the full-dress uniform of my great-grandfather, who had served as a non-commissioned officer in some regiment: I examined it thoroughly, and it looked to me as being very appropriate
for a wedding ceremony; I removed the broadsword from the nail it was hanging from and cleaned it with a piece of cloth; and I dusted off the hat. In a word, I visualized how extremely surprised the peasants would be when they would see me dressed up in this attire, and especially when they would learn of the village elder’s desire to give his daughter’s hand to me in marriage. And while I was lying in bed, I daydreamed: ‘And so I’m getting married to Mavrusha! And just as soon as I’m married, I’ll have enough money, and I’ll be pleased. Straight away I’ll go and buy a place in town and build a house there, because truly it’s entirely inappropriate for Prince Gavrilo Chistyakov to have to live out in the country. My princess has a delicate constitution; she’s not accustomed to pulling weeds or to sowing seeds, nor to washing clothes; her job is to get all dressed up, to dance a little dance, and to sing a little song.’”

Chapter 5: A Marriage Proposal

“Morning had hardly dawned, and I was already up and about. The image of beautiful Mavrusha was incessantly scampering around in my mind’s eye; but, I must confess, the image of a town house, of a carriage, of footmen, and of the other conveniences in life that I would receive in her dowry was captivating me even more.”

“While examining my grandfather’s uniform coat, sword, walking stick, and other signs of my gentility, I rejoiced in spirit and in my thoughts; I thanked wise Marya a thousand times over for coming up with such a clever idea. ‘Is it really possible,’ I said to myself, looking into the shard of a mirror puttiwed into the wall, while turning about in front of it, ‘Is it really possible that the village elder, however wealthy and haughty he may be, by the way, would refuse such a man as myself? Certainly not: in no way, and by no means! First of all, he wouldn’t venture to offend the gentility of my forebears. Secondly, – and even more importantly, – he wouldn’t venture to offend my own gentility, outfitted as I am with this broadsword, which demonstrates, by its very antiquity, the antiquity of my noble house.’ In a word, nearly an hour before the commencement of mass, I was ready. I walked around the hut just like a Spaniard, I looked at everything sternly, and if I happened to come across a cat or a little watch dog, I would draw my sword threateningly, and chase after them threateningly, repeating the kinds of words (ones that my late father used to recount to me, although neither he nor his father had ever seen combat) that are usually uttered in battle while one is pursuing the enemy.”

“In the heat of such noble enthusiasm, I broke into pieces more than one clay pot and two glassware items in my palace; twice I hooked Marya, who shrieked as a result, and, what was most regrettable of all, I tore a hole in the flap of my uniform coat against a nail. I was petrified, and Marya even more so. ‘Oh, my God!’ we both exclaimed in terror. ‘What can we do now? Soon the church bells shall start ringing for mass! Sew it up? We don’t have enough flossy thread to wrap around a finger. Oh, this is just wonderful! Of course, it’s fate itself that,
after directing your steps towards that insolent cat, the flap on your grandfather’s uniform coat should poke against a nail . . . Tell all those who ask, –indeed, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to tell even all those who don’t ask, – that this hole occurred as the result of a bullet shot when one of the Chistyakov princes was taking part in a very frightful battle.”

“Upon hearing such a wonderful plan, I wanted to show my joy, so I jumped up in the air an arshin high and landed on the ground. The broadsword I was carrying got tangled up between my legs, and its hilt, which had most likely been eaten through by rust, broke off, bounced, began to jingle, and landed at the feet of the astonished Marya. “‘My God!’ I said in a drawling manner as I got up from the floor. ‘Well, what do you have to say now, Marya?’ Marya reflected for a moment, then she smiled and said: ‘God arranges everything to Your Excellency’s advantage. If someone asks you the reason why your broadsword doesn’t have a hilt, you can say that your militant forebear, while fighting against the infidel Turks, lost it; and if someone asks you how he lost it, then reply that he, while smiting his foe, hit him with his broadsword and the blade fell off.’”

“‘So the hilt remained in his hands,’ I said, perplexed as I pondered Marya’s idea.”

“‘That’s it precisely! He threw away the hilt, as a needless thing for him, but he picked up the blade and kept it.’”

“‘Bravo!’ I said with delight, and I set off for the church because the bells had already been ringing for a while. I think that Caesar Augustus himself was never as proud during his triumph after the victory that decided his fate,1 as I was when I was hoping to receive the hand of Mavrusha, the village elder’s daughter, in marriage. I had already charmed her; now it only remained for me to charm the village elder, and this, it seemed, would be no small wonder. A uniform coat with a hole in it and a broadsword without a hilt. Oh, these are the great enticements against which it’s difficult to stand one’s ground! These are the kinds of thoughts that were going through my mind as I was entering the church; but, alas, no one was showing surprise. Everyone was smiling contemptuously; and as I was moving past the village elder, he rather loudly broke out laughing, because everything is permitted for a village elder. I glanced back proudly and noticed a blush on Mavra’s face, but the village elder continued to laugh.”

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1 Caesar Augustus (63 BC – AD 14), also known as Octavian, was the first Roman emperor, reigning from 27 BC until his death in AD 14. When Prince Chistyakov mentions the “victory that decided his fate,” he’s most likely referring to the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC, when Caesar Augustus joined his forces with those of Mark Anthony and Marcus Lepidus to defeat the assassins who had murdered Julius Caesar, and these three leaders subsequently formed the Second Triumvirate.
“‘This is merely envy,’ I said to myself, and I looked proudly all around me; but the most profound indignation, and even disdain, was inscribed on all of their faces, except for that of Princess Feklusha, who was standing by the doors. My gaze met her gaze. She became confused and cast her eyes down. It seemed to me that she had become rather portly ever since she had stopped visiting me about three weeks earlier. This discovery caused me to wipe the sweat off my brow, and I walked out of the church. My conscience was tormenting me.”

“‘What am I to do now?’ I said to myself, as I was standing at the gates of the fence, rubbing my hands and trying to stir up at least one decent idea. Finally, something brilliant penetrated into my soul; my mind was illumined with light. ‘Yes, I’ll do this,’ I exclaimed, and I set off for the village elder’s house, vowing to myself that I would be no less courageous than my forebear had been in the battle where he received the wound in his uniform coat and lost the hilt from his broadsword.”

“I’m walking toward his house with a firm step and I’m just about to enter, when I see that a great deal of preparation is being made in the house for the reception of guests.”

“‘Oh, of course!’ I said with a stutter. ‘There’s going to be a holiday celebration held here today.’”

“‘That’s so,’ replied Pegasiya, the village elder’s wife, knitting her brow. ‘Today is our daughter Mavrusha’s name day.’”

“‘This is very fine and good,’ I said, not knowing a more appropriate response to make, and I stood there on the threshold, frozen like a statue.”

“‘What can I do for you, Prince?’ Pegasiya asked. ‘If you have any business to discuss with my husband, then I beg you to wait: he shall be here shortly.’”

“The word prince brought me back to my senses; I glanced at the hole in the flap of my uniform coat and at my hilt-less broadsword, and then I strode into the room with an air of importance and sat down on a chair.”

“At my leisure, I scrutinized the décor of the room, and I couldn’t help but honestly admit that I had never seen anything better, and in my own mind I already designated for myself the items that looked a little nicer than the rest and that the village elder would undoubtedly be including in the dowry for his daughter. The paintings especially attracted my interest. They, like a fire, were burning with color. I get up from my seat and examine them in order. My God, what wonders! In the first one, blue mice are burying a purple cat. ‘These, apparently, are foreign animals from overseas,’ I thought to myself, and I turned my attention to the second one. Oh, horrors! Here the Last Judgment was represented. Hell had its jaws opened very wide; boyars, priests, village elders,
princes, murderers, and arsonists were being dragged into its mouth; they all had faces that had turned blue from fear. I looked at the painting more closely and saw the depiction of the sins that were also being dragged into the jaws of hell. Here was Pride, there was Cruelty, Hypocrisy, and so on. I ran my eyes over the greater part of them and inwardly rejoiced that I wasn’t a murderer or an arsonist. It’s true that when I looked at the depiction of Pride, I did blush a little, as the seducer of innocence suddenly caught my eye. I turned pale and took a step back. Then I approached the painting again to take a closer look and to satisfy my curiosity about what shall be done to the seducer of innocence. Feklusha vividly presented herself to my imagination.”

“I see that devils are pulling the tongues out of the throats of sinners with red-hot pincers, as they keep repeating: ‘Don’t lie! Don’t swear! Don’t flatter!’”

“My hair stood on end. ‘Oh, beautiful and innocent Princess Feklusha! What shall become of your poor Prince Gavrilo Simonovich?’ I grabbed my hat and my walking stick, I wanted to run away and abandon my claim to the wealthy Mavrusha so as not to become a laughing stock to people with evil tongues. But just then the village elder, his daughter, who was holding his hand, and a multitude of the noblest princes and peasants of our village entered the room.”

“‘Welcome, prince,’ the village elder said with a friendly smile on his face. ‘You, by the way, have come at a most opportune moment: today is my daughter’s name day. I pray you shall join us for the holiday meal.’”

“‘I came here not with that intention at all,’ I replied, adjusting my tie and blushing once again; I couldn’t continue to speak, to say even a single word. If the village elder had been the least bit quick-witted, then he could have easily surmised, from my flushed cheeks and my downcast eyes, what it was that I wanted to speak with him about; but he was like a man with a heart of stone in this instance.”

“‘Go ahead and speak, prince,’ he said merrily, and I somehow was able to get him to notice that I wanted to speak with him in private.”

“He ushered me into a special room, sat me down, then sat himself down, and again asked me the reason for my coming. I don’t know how I was able to carry on such a dramatic conversation with him, as you yourself shall now hear:

I: “I heard from my late father that you and he were true friends.”

HE: “Do you wish to speak with me frankly? And you shall not take offense if I speak the truth to you?”

I: “Oh, I entreat you to do so! The matter for which I have come here demands frankness.”
HE: “That’s true, your late father and I lived in a friendly, neighborly manner! He was intelligent, kind, and, – what’s most of all needed in our way of life, – rigidly patriarchal, in the spirit of the *Domostroi*.”

I: (blushing and twitching) “That’s true.”

HE: “Do you wish to say anything further?”

I: (casting my eyes down) “On the basis of that friendship, I cherish the hope that you won’t refuse me the hand in marriage of your daughter Mavrusha, whom I adore.”

“I must confess that I was lying. Not only didn’t I adore Mavrusha, but I didn’t even love her. But her father’s wealth touched me to the quick, and it was his wealth that I adored more. The village elder opened his eyes wide and looked me over from head to toe. I was confident that it hadn’t dawned on him to notice the hole in my uniform coat and my hilt-less broadsword. But then, knitting his brow, he said: ‘Prince! How are you going to feed your wife?’”

“What was I to say? Having turned pale, I remained seated. I couldn’t open my mouth to speak.”

“‘Young man,’ the village elder continued, ‘when your farm takes on a better appearance, when you bring it back at least to the condition that it was in when your father was alive, then you may come here and explain yourself. I shall take a look, and perhaps . . . But for now, good-bye!’ He stood up and left.”

“An iceberg was lying upon my bosom. It was only with much difficulty that I, staggering from shame and despondency, was able to stand up and take my leave. Everything had grown dim in my eyes: now I was seeing objects double, now I was seeing objects completely disappear. Not withstanding such a perturbation of my mental faculties, I was able to notice that the guests were looking at me as if I were some kind of monster. The table was set. Bottles of vodka, mead, and beer were sitting on it, as were servings of food. Everyone was waiting for me to leave, after which time the blessing by the priest and the banquet were to follow. I doubled my pace, taking quick strides. But who can describe the predicament that I was in at that time? The upper tip of my hilt-less broadsword, which was protruding out quite a bit, caught hold of the hanging end of the tablecloth; with my rapid movement, the tablecloth moved, making all of the bottles of vodka and wine, as well as all of the food items, shake. ‘Oh!’ resounded from all sides. I got frightened and made an effort to take one more step, and, as a result, all of the items on the table, which had been making clanging, jingling, and creaking

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2 The *Domostroi* [literally, the “construction of household order”] was a sixteenth-century handbook filled with strict rules, instructions, and advice for maintaining patriarchal order (and control) in Russian Orthodox households.
noises, now found themselves on the floor. I myself tumbled down to the floor. With the speed of a whirlwind, I jumped back up onto my feet, but my boots were by now full of wine and vodka, and greasy noodles were running down my face.”

“I tried with all of my might to flee from there; the peasants were staring at me in surprise, and the little kids all around were hollering: ‘Look, look, the prince has gone crazy!’”

“I ran all the way home in this attire. Poor Marya broke out in tears. ‘What is the meaning of this?’ she asked, trembling in fear.”

“‘My fate is a cruel one,’ I replied, choking with anger and shame. ‘Help me get out of these clothes right away; I don’t want to have dinner; I need to compose myself.’ I threw off my uniform coat and my boots, I washed myself off, and then I lay down on my bed, but I couldn’t fall asleep. My shame was incessantly standing right there before my very eyes.”

Chapter 6: Yet Another Prince

At this point in the narrative account of his past life, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich had to postpone the continuation of his story due to the following circumstance. Around four o’clock in the afternoon, Katerina was playing the piano and singing an aria in the drawing room, while Elizaveta was reading a book in her bedroom. Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was strolling through the streets of the village in his warm overcoat, while Prostakov was smoking his pipe and reading a book in his small study. His wife, sitting at the window, was darning stockings.

THE HUSBAND ( softly): “How majestic is his every word! How his every thought is a lesson to us!”

THE WIFE ( just as softly): “Well, it’s of no use! Where there’s a word, there you’ll find nonsense! Where there’s a thought, there you’ll find tomfoolery!”

THE HUSBAND ( softly): “How noble must have been the look on his face at that decisive moment!”

THE WIFE ( softly): “When he was amusing himself with Princess Feklusha in the bean arbor? Or when he was running home after knocking over the entire banquet table at the home of the village elder?”

THE HUSBAND ( loudly): “How majestic must have been his face at that moment!”

THE WIFE ( just as loudly): “When he appeared at our home for the first time, bespattered with mud, dressed in rags, with an ugly mug that was all scratched up? I’m surprised, My Lord, that you find in him so much that’s admirable. Perhaps he’s indeed
kind, but I must confess that the brain in his head isn’t worth a kopeck. It’s no joke! What prompted him to trample down his garden?"

THE HUSBAND: “Either you, my wife, have lost your mind, or else you never had one to begin with. I’m reading the story of Peter the Great, and I was speaking aloud to myself about the situation that this singular hero was in, when he was able with one word to disarm a crowd of conspirators.”

THE WIFE: “And here I thought that you were speaking about our Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. I don’t find anything admirable in him.”

THE HUSBAND: “Why do you search everywhere for what’s admirable? What do you find that’s admirable within yourself? He, as is evident, doesn’t know the ways of the world, but such a lack of knowledge is salvational for him! He’s open-hearted, and he reveals his sinfulness with all of the open acknowledgement of a child. That’s enough! The person that always goes around without wearing a mask is the one that we can unerringly call kind and good! You’re incessantly repeating to me that he’s very simple. Good! If I were to go with you and our daughters to Petersburg or Moscow, I assure you that the majority of the people there would, without hesitation, call us vulgar fools”

THE WIFE: “I don’t believe that at all! Distinguished members of the gentry from Moscow and Petersburg attended the theatre performances, masquerades, and balls that my father hosted, but not a single one of them ever displayed any signs that I was a fool.”

THE HUSBAND: “I can believe that. Now, please, stop bothering me!”

He turned away and took again to reading his book and smoking his pipe, and peace and quiet were restored, but not for long. With uncommon urgency, the elderly servant Makar entered the room where the Prostakovs were sitting: “Master! A prince is standing at the foot of the stairs down below and is requesting permission to enter your home and to stay here until such time as they have finished repairing his carriage.”

“Repairing his carriage?” the husband and his wife exclaimed, each of them getting up from their seats. “What’s the meaning of this? What carriage?” Prostakov asked. “Perhaps you’re right, wife. Perhaps he is some kind of idler, and perhaps even a secret enemy of our peace and quiet. No! No! Get him out of here right away! Go tell him, Makar, not to set foot on a single step of my staircase. And he’s still scoffing at us! Isn’t that the case? Always enjoying free admission to our home, and now he’s asking for permission to enter? Evidently he’s completed his business here, and now he wants to amuse himself a little.”

Just as Prostakov, with anxiety and sorrow, was finishing up his speech, one which his wife endorsed, as signaled by the look in her eyes and by her sigh, and while the servant was still standing there, not understanding anything that was going on, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich suddenly appeared. Everyone was struck dumb. Then the prince walked up to Prostakov and said to him, with signs of some uneasiness on his face: “As your servant
was telling you, Prince Svetlozarov is at the bottom of your staircase, awaiting your reply.”

“How is that? What?” the husband and his wife exclaimed, again in unison. They looked at one another, and then at Prince Gavrilo, in bewilderment.

“How is that possible, my dear sir?” proclaimed Prostakov. “So you mean to say that the carriage that is being repaired in my village is not yours?”

“Mine?” said Chistyakov with a bitter smile. “There was a time, it’s true, when I used to travel in a carriage, but nowadays I must detest that earlier time. You can hear all about the circumstances of my past life just as soon as you wish to do so and if you shall give me permission to stay here for a few days.”

“You may stay here for the rest of your entire life!” Prostakov exclaimed joyfully, embracing him. “For a few seconds I offended you, thinking that the carriage was yours and that for some reason you were trying to deceive us with your feigned poverty. Please forgive me!”

“Trying to deceive you?” said Chistyakov with extreme discomfiture, and he turned away so as to hide the tears that were welling up in his eyes. Prostakov became extremely confused; he was pained and vexed that he had entertained, even if only for a minute, some suspicion about the honesty of his guest. He held out his arms to him with an expectant look. The prince understood his gesture, they embraced, and their hearts were reconciled.

In the meantime, the two daughters, as well as a few peasant girls and female servants, had gathered in their rooms, and they all repeated under their breath: “We’ll see what kind of person this other prince shall be?”

“My dear sir,” Chistyakov said to Prostakov with an imploring look on his face, “for as long as this prince, who appears, by his outward appearance, to be wealthy, shall be staying at your home, I humbly beg you to give me a different first name and surname. I swear to you that I make this request not at all with the design of trying to deceive anyone; I have instead some important reasons for doing this, reasons that you shall learn about in due time and that you shall be content with. Don’t let either him or his people know that I am a prince and, at that, Prince Chistyakov. That would induce this wealthy and arrogant prince to have some fun at my expense, and I don’t think that this would be very pleasant for you.”

“Without a doubt!” exclaimed Prostakov, and he dispatched his servant to grant the prince permission to enter. The servant left, and Prostakov continued: “And so you shall stay here with us and be known simply as, well, let’s say, Terenty Pafnutyevich, an impoverished nobleman who lost everything in a lawsuit, and a friend, or even a distant relative, who is staying in our home.”
“But the surname,” Chistyakov said quickly, “I can’t concoct that out of the blue.”

Everyone assumed the look of inventors: Prostakov wiped his brow; Maremyana peered up at the ceiling and silently moved her lips. But none of them could come up with a decent surname for their guest in a hurry.

“My God! He’s already just a short way off, and I still don’t have a surname.” They all remained silent. Suddenly a crow sat upon the windowsill and began to caw frightfully.

“That’s a bad omen!” Maremyana cried out.

“Bravo!” exclaimed Chistyakov. “What could be better than that! Call me Mister Krakalov [Mister Cawing]. That, it seems to me, is a wonderful surname, and a most unpretentious one for a nobleman who has lost everything in a lawsuit.”

Everyone approved of his choice of surname, and at that very same moment the strictest order was given throughout the household not to speak about any Prince Chistyakov, but to call him simply Krakalov instead.

The doors open noisily and, like a turbulent gust of wind, a new prince comes flying in and produces a creaking, shuffling sound. He appears to the naked eye to be around thirty-five years old, but he’s still so lively, so dexterous, so attractive, that one could easily be mistaken and say that he’s no older than twenty-five. His face is delicate; at first sight, an air of importance that was proper for his dignity and, together with that, an exquisite amiability, invited a favorable disposition toward him from people, except for Prostakov and Prince Gavrilo Simonovich.

“Allow me to ask, in which one of you do I have the honor of seeing the master of the house?”

Prostakov walked up to him in a straightforward, Prostakovian manner, took him by the arm, and said: “I’m the master of the house, this is my wife, and these are my daughters. Pray be seated.”

In the meantime, he himself calmly took a seat. But Madame Maremyana and both of her daughters, on the other hand, began to examine the new guest from head to toe.

He was magnificently attired, and the fragrance that he exuded could be detected from over two meters away. He was wearing an expensive signet ring on his hand. He was sprawled out in an armchair, playing with a watch chain in his left hand and holding in his right hand a small walking stick whose gold handle he was clicking against his teeth.

“These are your daughters, you said, Mr. Host?”

“Hardly had Prostakov opened his mouth to reply, when Maremyana chimed in: “That’s so, Your Excellency. This is our elder daughter, Elizaveta, and that’s our younger one,
Katerina. The former is already nineteen years old, while the latter is not yet seventeen. They were both educated at a boarding school in the provincial capital, even though it cost us . . .”

Prostakov was seething with indignation. He cast an angry look in her direction, one that stunned her all the more since she seldom saw such looks coming from him. The prince didn’t notice any of this since he, as an adroit person, was observing, with a favorable look, her blushing daughters.

“And this, madam,” said the prince, turning to her and pointing with his walking stick at the impoverished Chistyakov, who was standing at the far window and, not looking anywhere in particular, was counting the fingers on his hand. “This, of course, must be one of your next door neighbors?”

“This is . . .” she said, stammering and glancing over at her husband.

“This,” Prostakov replied drily, “is a distant relative of ours, Terenty Pafnutych Krakalov, a nobleman who lost everything in a lawsuit.”

“I’m very glad that I have the honor of meeting you,” said the prince, turning to Chistyakov, nodding his head and shuffling his foot without rising from his seat.

“There’s nothing to be glad about, Your Excellency,” replied Chistyakov, bowing low, then leaving to return to his room.

After they had drunk some tea, the prince requested permission to witness the artistic talents of their daughters. Maremyana joyfully acceded to this request. They went to the drawing room, but there was a predicament: who was going to play the piano and who was going to dance with the prince? Maremyana insisted that her daughters would, in turn, perform both of these arts, but Elizaveta stubbornly insisted that she was prepared to play the piano, but that by no means would she dance.

“But make no mistake, I want you to!” Maremyana exclaimed with a flush of anger on her cheeks.

“Don’t force her to dance under compulsion,” said Prostakov rather angrily. “What’s done against one’s will never turns out well. Play the piano, Elizaveta; let Katerina dance with the prince.”

Their mother fell silent. Elizaveta sat down at the pianoforte, the prince took Katerina’s hand tenderly, and the dances began.

One wouldn’t have thought that Prince Svetlozarov, who was already of an age when a man unwittingly, without any intention of doing so, takes on a grand air, one wouldn’t have thought, I say, that the prince could resemble a carefree young man who is intoxicated with the flattering hope of finding love and happiness. One might have
likened the prince to the eternally young Apollo, if that god were ever to perform a
cabriole on Mount Olympus. But, for all that, Katerina did manage to exceed the
expectations of her mother, who was following her daughter’s every step, her every
movement, with eyes that were glistening with joy. Prostakov, however, who was sitting
in the corner and knitting his brow, could finally stand it no longer. He said under his
breath to Prince Chistyakov, who had already come into the drawing room and was
standing right beside him: “Don’t you think that the evil spirit has settled in among us?”

“Yes, most likely it’s him,” Chistyakov replied with a sigh, shrugging his shoulders,
“although there’s no bean arbor here, however . . .”

“The devil everywhere casts his nets in the same manner,” replied Prostakov, likewise
with a sigh.

Thus proceeded the greater part of the evening, and in the house the clocks struck nine.

Prostakov could stand it no longer: “Isn’t it time for Your Excellency to rest a while so as
to gather his appetite? It will soon be time for us to have supper.”

The prince didn’t utter a word in response, but simply continued to whirl around until
such time as the piece of music had ended. With an endearing smile on his face, he went
up to Maremyana Kharitonovna, inclined his head, and said: “I must give you your due:
your charming daughter dances like an angel. Oh, if only she had more practice. But
how can she practice – and with whom – as long as she’s living in the countryside!” “For
our village girls, this is the very latest art,” Prostakov said drily, “if only they were
intelligent enough to realize that.”

Maremyana interjected: “Oh, my lord! How is one to know their fate? Perhaps it shall
befall them to spend their entire adult lives in a city, perhaps even in the capital.”

Her husband, as usual, cast a meaningful look in her direction. She fell silent.

The prince walked up to him: “You, I seem to recall, wished to say something to me?”

“Would you like to rest for a little while? It’s time for us to have supper and then go to
sleep.”

“Go to sleep?” exclaimed Maremyana with extreme anxiety, lowering her arms to signal
her loss of heart.

The prince took out his watch: “My God! What on earth are you saying? Go to sleep at
ten o’clock? This means wasting one’s time. Are these not the best hours for enjoying
pleasure?”

3 Apollo, one of the Olympian deities in classical Greek and Roman mythology, was
recognized, among other things, as the god of archery, music, and dance.
“Don’t feel obliged to go to sleep then, prince,” said Prostakov, who then approached his wife. “What are you moaning about, my lady?”

She secretively took him by the hand and led him out to a separate room. And, by the look on her face, she gave Chistyakov to understand that he should follow them there.

“Oh, what an amiable man this prince is!” she said rapturously.

“You could have told me that afterwards,” her husband replied angrily.

**THE WIFE:** “You’re always getting angry, my dear. That’s really offensive, and the more so in the presence of strangers.”

**THE HUSBAND:** “Don’t provide me with a reason to get angry.”

**THE WIFE:** “You yourself have just provided one.”

**THE HUSBAND:** “How did I do that, for example?”

**THE WIFE:** “You’re getting ready to go to bed, and yet you didn’t give any thought as to where to put our guest?”

**THE HUSBAND:** “In this room, on the sofa. For an out-of-town visitor, who shall be traveling farther tomorrow, not much is needed; as for his servants, let one of them go to where the carriage is being repaired and let the other one sleep in the vestibule.”

**THE WIFE:** “Oh, my God! Such an eminent nobleman on the sofa?”

**THE HUSBAND:** “For someone who’s weary, this place here is much better.”

**THE WIFE:** “You weren’t thinking this way, however, when Prince Gavrilo Simonovich came to our door!”

**THE HUSBAND:** “That’s because I wasn’t thinking of letting him go anytime soon: he was unfortunate, as was evident by every look on his face and by every beat of his heart. But this visitor travels in a carriage; several people tend to his every whim. Yes, and what is there for him to do here?”

**THE WIFE:** “Oh, my dear friend! If only he would stay here for a few days! How might we prevail upon him to stay?”

**THE HUSBAND:** “You have lost your mind!”

**THE WIFE:** “Well, so at the very least, my dear, let’s yield to him the room where Prince Gavrilo Simonovich is currently residing.”
THE HUSBAND: “Prince Svetlozarov shall be more dissatisfied if we force him not to sleep by himself.”

THE WIFE: “That’s not what I’m saying. Prince Gavrilo Simonovich shall move for a time to one of those small rooms in the garden.”

Chistyakov joyfully gave his consent to this arrangement at once. The wife thanked him sincerely and, before her husband was able to utter “Yes” or “No,” the order was already given to transfer to that small room a bed, several chairs, and the linen that Prostakov had given him as a gift.

In this way, whether he wanted to or not, her husband as well had to give his consent to this arrangement.

The evening went by in a noisy and disorderly fashion – they sang, they danced, they laughed, they flattered, and so on and so forth. And poor Prostakov, with an extremely sullen look on his face, entered his bedroom after midnight, at twelve thirty, something that had never happened with him since the day he retired. The new guest made himself comfortable in his room, while the new Terenty Pafnutych Krakalov set off for his small garden hut and was happier than usual at the thought that this hut more closely resembled his ancient princely palace than did the house of Mister Prostakov.

Chapter 7: The Guest

Everyone slumbered, or at least lay in bed, longer than usual. Never had Prostakov looked as sullen as he did that morning. His dissatisfaction with the prior evening had left its imprint on his cheeks and his eyes, but most of all on his heart. In order to clear away some of this gloom, he intended, after getting dressed plainly, just as he usually dressed in the morning, to visit his new hermit, Krakalov, and to shatter his melancholy with this simple, but kind, man. He descended the stairs leading down to the garden, removed his hat, crossed himself, and said: “Thanks be to you, o Lord, that His Excellency, an already aged profligate, shall be leaving today. I’m not even planning to invite him to stay for dinner. May he go to hell!”

He entered Mister Chistyakov’s hut, but he didn’t find him there. Instead the boy who had been assigned to serve him told his master that Mister Krakalov had left an hour ago to go for a stroll and had left a note for him. Prostakov took the note, unfolded it, not without much effort, and read the following: “My venerable benefactor! I have considered every minute that I have spent with you to be the utmost pleasure, but the presence of this prince weighs upon me. In offending me, he doesn’t bother me in the least, but I know that he bothers your sensitive heart. And that’s the reason why you should not expect me for tea today. I’ll come to dinner, and I hope that at that time you’ll meet not Mister Krakalov, but, to be sure, your most faithful friend Chistyakov.”
“Of course, of course,” said Prostakov with a satisfied smile. “The profligate shall, of course, understand that by not wishing to detain him, people are wishing sooner to be free from him.”

He set off for a walk about the garden, spending about an hour doing this, since although the morning was wintry, it was rather tolerable, and the sun was shining against a cloudless sky. As he was walking out of the garden, he took it into his head to pass through the courtyard and inspect the stables, the coach house, and so forth. He ascended to the courtyard and his surprise was considerable when he saw an unfamiliar carriage that people were taking something out of. He approached impatiently and asked: “Whose carriage is this? Whom else has the Lord granted to visit us?”

The servant replied, “Prince Svetlozarov.”

Prostakov was astonished at first, but then he thought that, of course, the tender boyar considers it a lot of trouble to walk over to that place where the carriage is being repaired, a distance that, in truth, stretches about four vers. “What is it that you’re doing here?” he asked again.

The servant replied: “The prince’s toiletry articles are inside this small chest; his traveling wardrobe is inside this portmanteau; and his money, his valuables, and his necessary papers are inside this casket.”

Prostakov took a step back, adding: “Who could be fancier than these distinguished gentlemen! In order to drink some tea at the home of a rural nobleman, they need to drag along their toilet articles, and their wardrobe, and their papers. Really, I wouldn’t have called him to account if he had taken a seat in his carriage wearing the same attire that he had worn yesterday when he first appeared here, that simple traveling frockcoat.”

Scarcely had Prostakov set foot inside his bedroom than a man informed him that they had long been waiting for him in the drawing room. He changed his sheepskin coat for his frockcoat and entered the drawing room. He was extremely surprised to see the look of immense joy on the faces of everyone except Elizaveta. He had hardly managed to take his seat when Maremyana Kharitonovna, turning to him with a triumphant air, said: “You’ll not believe, my friend, how gracious His Excellency is being toward us. Just imagine: I was able to convince him to give us his word that he would not only not leave us today, but that he would stay here with us for a week or two.” Prostakov was petrified. His eyes were fixed stock-still upon his wife, who couldn’t understand how he was so indifferent to such happy news.

Collecting himself a little, he turned toward the prince so as to make some kind of bow to him, but spotting on Katerina’s hand a diamond ring that yesterday had been on Svetlozarov’s hand, his eyes grew dull, paleness suffused his cheeks, his sensations ceased, and he drooped over the arm of the chair.
“Oh!” resounded from all sides. No one could understand what had happened to him. They all rushed forward, fussied over him, and brought him various spirits. It ended with them laying the unconscious old man down on his bed.

He remained in that condition for a few hours. At last, he regained consciousness, seeing Elizaveta and Prince Chistyakov standing beside his bed and weeping. They raised a joyful cry and rushed forward to embrace him.

“Where’s your mother? Elizaveta! Where’s your sister?”

“They’re eating. I’ll go get them right away.”

In several seconds, they all came running in to see him. Maremyana threw herself into his embrace. Katerina kissed his hand.

“Leave me alone, my foolhardy daughter and your even more foolhardy mother. It’s enough for me to have here the hearts of my kind daughter Elizaveta and of this venerable friend of mine. Leave me! I don’t like cruel hearts and flighty, pompous souls.”

Maremyana and Katerina, who were standing there, nearly broke into tears. Elizaveta fell down on her knees, squeezed his hand to her heart, and, sobbing, asked him: “Father! What are you displeased at?”

“My sensitive daughter,” he said, “does even your kind heart not understand?”

She drew a sigh and lowered her eyes.

“All of you, go have dinner; and you go, too, my worthy friend! Or don’t you hear how our guest, while walking through the reception room, is whistling a song? Get going. I’ll rest here for a while, and then I myself shall come. We must endure whatever fate sends us. The more unpleasant it is, the more pleasing our forbearance is for God in heaven.”

“God grant that this be true,” said Prince Chistyakov. “From this moment on, I’ll be drinking tea together with Prince Svetlozarov.”

Everyone left. Prostakov, after thinking it over properly, found that he had been more rigorous than he ought to have been. “Prince Svetlozarov is a profligate, that’s true, but shall he be able to corrupt my family in just some ten days or so, when I have been trying to sow the seeds of virtue and sensitivity in the heart of each one of them for more than twenty years? He’s not so guilty, however; my wife’s foolhardiness is the reason for all of this. As God is my witness, everything shall go fine. I shall try not to violate decorum, but at the same time I can’t serve as an accomplice in their tomfoolery. I have wonderful places to take walks, a vast field, and a good and kind friend in Chistyakov.” Without delay, Prostakov did what he said he would do. He got dressed, left his room, and explained himself rather skillfully with the prince, when providing reasons for his
attack. All went well. He made peace with his wife and Katerina, but he severely chastised the former to be more frugal in paying compliments and the latter to be more frugal in receiving them.

For some reason he didn’t give up paying frequent visits to the secluded abode of his friend, and he sauntered about the snow-covered plains both with his friend and alone by himself. And the days passed rather pleasantly. Mother and daughter understood all of the benefit of his words of advice, and Prince Svetlozarov, noticing this, himself became more constant and more engaging. And although Prostakov’s heart never did open up to him, the prince was at least tolerable for him. Not to see him at all, however, was much more pleasant. It was as a result of this disposition that he decided to make a short trip to a neighboring town for a few days. He did this under the pretense of some fictitious necessity, leaving Prince Chistyakov to keep strict watch over his family and his entire household. This struck Maremyana as offensive, Prince Svetlozarov as strange, and all of them as incomprehensible.

One evening, a rather gray, overcast one, all of the family members and both of the princes had gathered together and were awaiting Prostakov’s return, for he wanted to be home precisely on that day, around evening time. The appointed hour passed, and he was not yet there. “Is he far away now?” each of them asked in turn, and no one was able to give an answer. Yet another hour passed, and he was still not there yet. Everyone sat there silently and worried anxiously: Maremyana was sitting on the sofa, with Katerina beside her on one side and Prince Chistyakov on the other; Elizaveta was sitting by the window that faced out onto the courtyard, observing the snowy clouds that were floating across the sky. She was glad that no one could hear her sighs, and, if they did hear them, she was glad that they were attributing those sighs to one thing, for everyone was sighing over Prostakov’s delay in arriving home.

Finally, Elizaveta cried out: “Father is coming!”

They all raised a cry and a clamor together: “He’s coming, he’s coming,” such that Prostakov heard this in the courtyard and smiled agreeably. He entered the house and everyone rushed forward to embrace him. The deeply moved Maremyana upbraided him for the injustice he had committed by not arriving at the appointed hour.

Prostakov, with a satisfied look on his face, said: “I sat for an extra hour at the home of a priest who is an acquaintance of mine. I happened upon a young man there, one with a pleasant and intelligent face, and learned that he was a painter by craft. I got into a conversation with him and found that he had honorable principles, ample knowledge, and life experience far beyond his years. I decided to take him along with me so that he could paint portraits of all of my family members and, in the meantime, give some painting lessons to my daughters, especially Elizaveta, who has a great fondness for painting.”

“Won’t he perhaps want to charge a high fee for those lessons?” Maremyana noted.
“No,” replied her husband. “He’s a poor man and of such humble origins that he doesn’t even have a surname and is called simply Nikandr.”

Prince Chistyakov and Elizaveta winced softly, each of them recalling the name of a person who was near and dear to them, someone whose acquaintance we shall make shortly.

At last, this Nikandr entered the room. Everyone pressed toward him. Elizaveta likewise stood up to get a look at her future teacher, and her heart quivered from a feeling of joy that staggered her. She recognized in him her friend from town, and she took a step back so that he wouldn’t notice her extreme discomfiture. Nikandr likewise recognized her, and his confusion was indescribable, but those who were there attributed this to the timidity of a young man standing before a wealthy squire.

“Well, Mister Krakalov,” Prostakov said merrily, “here’s a companion for you for the time being. I’m certain that you shall be pleased with him.”

“You’re absolutely right!” replied Chistyakov. “Although I don’t know many of the branches of scholarly knowledge, I do love knowledgeable people with all of my heart.”

The evening passed in a merry fashion. Mrs. Prostakov was especially pleased that the painter would be lodged with Prince Chistyakov and that he wouldn’t require any costly remuneration.

Chapter 8: Wedding Preparations

Several days in a row were spent in the assignment of lessons, and especially the examination of Nikandr. The young man turned out to rate higher than Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov had hoped and expected.

“I must say, on my honor, that he speaks French wonderfully,” Prince Svetlozarov said one evening, sitting all sprawled out on the armchair while awaiting the start of the dancing.

“He plays the pianoforte even better,” said Maremyana, adjusting her bonnet.

“And he draws superbly and tastefully,” Katerina retorted.

Elizaveta glanced over at him with the tenderness of an angel, and her eyes were asking: “Isn’t it true that your heart is the best thing of all and that your love is constant?” In his eyes, she read his satisfactory response, she sighed sweetly, and a gentle pleasure flooded the inside of her soul.

The times for their lessons were allocated in the following way: the study of languages and drawing in the morning, and of music in the evening.
One day, just as they are getting up from the dinner table, a man delivered a letter to Prince Svetlozarov. He looked at the inscription, and his countenance changed. He broke the seal, read the letter, becoming greatly confused, and then said through clenched teeth: “I must yield to the almighty force of circumstances. Harness my carriage this very minute!”

No matter how much they importuned him, trying to find out the reason for such an abrupt departure, he was content to give the response that domestic matters brook no delay. And to the extreme pleasure of the larger part of the family, especially Prostakov and Prince Gavriilo Simonovich, his carriage began to clatter out of the courtyard. As he was leaving, he bade farewell in a friendly manner and promised to visit again, in a short time, such a kind family. Maremyana Kharitonovna sank into a reverie, Katerina sighed, Elizaveta remained in the same state as she had been before, with the only difference being that her sighs and the fluctuation in her breathing were now not the consequence of the grief that she felt in her heart, as they had been formerly, but the gentle rapture of love and hope that she was feeling. Thus flowed days and weeks. With each passing day, Prostakov was more and more sticking close to Prince Chistyakov and his young friend Nikandr with a heart-felt attachment, for these last two people loved each other with the most tender affection.

Long December evenings had arrived, and during one of them, while Nikandr was playing music with Elizaveta in the dining room, and the Prostakovs, Prince Chistyakov, and Katerina were sitting near the fireplace in the living room, the master of the house suddenly said with alacrity: “Why, prince, have we forgotten all about the continuation of your adventures? Or don’t you recall? Winter evenings, after all, are the most proper time for hearing them.”

“Readily,” replied Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, “but only if you agree to listen further.”

“I seem to recall that I had stopped at the point where I had returned in great despair from the home of the intractable village elder and lay down on the bed, hoping somehow to chase away my grief over the loss of Mavrusha and her wealth. However, sleep escaped me. I sighed, I moaned, and I didn’t know what to do. Finally, I got up and, after bemoaning my fate, I sat down by the window, laying my head upon my arm. With great indignation, I looked at the kittens and the puppies frolicking about, and I said to them: ‘You useless creatures! You’re enjoying yourselves, while the prince, your potentate, is in despair!’ I turned my head and, – oh, perplexity! – I saw the village elder coming over to see me with two of the most important princes in our village. I jumped up to my feet, stretched, made an attempt to say something, but my tongue wouldn’t stir. Thank God that the village elder soon extricated me out of this painful situation. He was the first to speak, and he said this: ‘Young man! You, to be sure, were born under a lucky star! Your fate shall soon change. My daughter has overpowered all of us, and I’m inclined to call you my son. Do you sense your own well-being? And shall you be grateful?’”
“‘Oh, most magnanimous of all the village elders in the whole wide world!’ I exclaimed with the kind of amplitude with which the merry-andrews in our district capital used to cry out from the scaffolding about the days of Easter. ‘My gratitude to you will be ineffable.’”

“‘Good,’ he continued. ‘I shall pose several questions to you, and you must swear to me that you shall answer them truthfully.’”

“‘I swear, my benefactor,’ I exclaimed even more loudly, and I fell at his feet.”

“‘Have you loved any of our village maidens before now?’”

“‘None, my father,’ I said, stammering slightly, which they attributed, however, to my absent-mindedness, which resulted from my unexpected well-being, and to my natural timidity.”

“‘Shall you follow the patriarchal rules for household management set forth in the Domostroi?’”

“‘To the extent that my mind and my strength allow!’”

“‘Shall you always love my daughter constantly?’”

“‘I shall love her until the end of my life, more than I love my very own self!’”

“‘In that case, everything is fine,’ said the village elder triumphantly. ‘My son! May God bless . . .’”

“And he fell silent . . .”

“I was waiting in vain for the termination of the ceremony. I thought that perhaps I had not bowed low enough and that it was difficult for him to lay his hands upon me, so that’s why I lifted my head, when suddenly I felt from behind a terrible blow strike me across my cheek. I saw stars, and I fell to the floor in extreme discomfiture. ‘You ne’er-do-well!’ a voice rang out. In the situation that I was in at the time, however, I couldn’t recognize that it was him speaking. A silence continued for some time. I came to my senses a little, but I didn’t dare, not only to utter a single word, but even to open my eyes.”

“Suddenly I heard the voice of the village elder: ‘Let’s go, princes! Wasn’t I the one who told you, when you were trying to persuade me to agree to the blandishments of my daughter, that this is a true rogue and a complete brigand? Let’s cast him aside, let’s go!’”

“I heard them leave, and I thought that one of them had remained behind. Getting up, I looked all around me, and my hair stood on end: I saw Prince Sidor
Arkhipovich, just barely sitting on a bench (that’s how the Yid Yanka treated him to a drink), and beside him the softly crying Feklusha, who was looking at me tenderly.”

“Her father cast his fiercely bloodshot eyes upon me and, as a meaningful gesture, patted his daughter’s belly with his hand. She walked up to me with that tenderness, that sweet openness which had distinguished her in my eyes during the first days of our love.”

“‘What!’ she said, and tears were again welling up in her eyes. ‘And now you wish to be a betrayer? What do you find so appealing in Mavra? Her youth? She’s no younger than I am! Her beauty? You used to find me attractive! Her chastity? Oh, I, too, used to be chaste! Her wealth? You may be right there, but God smiles upon the poor as well!’”

“I didn’t expect such eloquence from her. She moved me, and I was instantly inclined in her favor. Perhaps it was the obvious impossibility of extricating myself out of these circumstances and the terrifying eyes of Prince Sidor. I don’t know for sure what was the real reason. All I do know is that Princess Feklusha seemed to me at that point in time just as kind, just as beautiful, and just as sweet, with the corpulence that she had recently acquired, as she had looked the first time that we met in the bean arbor, when she had a slender light waist. With love, resoluteness was born, and I embraced her with fervor, as my bride. I’m now certain, contrary to what many people say about the love between spouses being much colder than the love between lovers, that perhaps this might be partly true. But, on the other hand, the love of the former is much more tender, more nourishing, and more noble than that of the latter. In a word: Feklusha and I spent the evening very pleasantly together and had supper together.”

“In the morning we saw that Prince Sidor Arkhipovich of the Burkalov princely line was still in a deep sleep, and therefore we could converse together freely.”

“‘So then, my dear princess, today’s the day of our wedding!’”

“‘That’s so, my dear prince!’”

“‘What do you think you’ll be wearing to the altar?’”

“‘I myself don’t know, perhaps the green dress or the scarlet taffeta dress that you gave me as a gift.’”

“‘Don’t wear either the one or the other,’ I replied. ‘Wear the white calico dress instead. It shall look much more becoming on you, especially on a day such as this.’”
“She agreed with me. We got up out of bed and got dressed, and then I hurried over to see the priest to persuade him ahead of time to marry us as late in the day as possible, since my bride’s corpulence might give birth to a certain stir among the village folk.”

Chapter 9: The Wedding

“I came back from the priest’s house feeling that my mission there had been a success. Although it’s almost a universal custom here to get married right after mass, I persuaded him, with compelling arguments, to grant us an indulgence so that the branches of two illustrious family names, the Chistyakovs and the Burkalovs, wouldn’t be subjected to common shame, and, what’s more, that a small scandal wouldn’t be created in the parish. When I got home, I found Feklusha in the kitchen together with Marya, the two of them toiling away as they prepared a light dinner and a more sumptuous supper. We were expecting only the priest, one of the princes, and about two elderly peasants to come to our house, for all of the other princes, one after another, had rejected our invitation. I became thoughtful and meditated upon this for a short while, but my future father-in-law, who was already up out of bed, said to me: ‘What are you so sad about, my son? After all, Prince Chistyakov, are you any less of a man as a result of the fact that our other princes won’t be attending your wedding?’”

“Leading Feklusha aside, I said to her: ‘My friend, I shall now reveal to you a new element that I want to add to our wedding ceremony, one that I have been keeping secret from you! You know that I’m an enthusiast of reading novels. In one novel, I observed how in foreign lands the bride is bedecked with a crown made out of roses when they lead her into the church. But since there are no roses here where we live and, what’s more, the season for them has passed, I shall search for some different flowers to adorn you with in a bridal crown. You’re by no means worse than a foreign bride from overseas. Moreover, you are all the same a princess.’ She squeezed my hand, and I smiled at the thought of my splendid contrivance.”

“We finished dinner hastily.”

“‘Princess,’ I said, ‘it’s time for you to try on your wedding dress, and I’ll go in search of some proper flowers. So where is your trousseau?’ She blushed and said innocently: ‘I received this dowry from my fiancé!’”

“At this point, she took out a key to a trunk that had already been carried over to my house, just like all the rest of my father-in-law’s property. She started trying to unlock the trunk, but she had no luck: the key was turning round in the lock and that was all. I looked at her for a good long while, and, finally, I said, impatiently: ‘Come on, give me that thing, I know how to work it better than you do.’ But I, too, kept turning and turning the key, with the same result. ‘What the hell!’ I exclaimed, lifting up on the lid of the trunk, and it opened without any
effort on my part. ‘Well, there’s no lock here,’ I said and, looking inside the trunk, I saw that there was nothing there. The princess, kneeling down and looking at the bottom of the empty trunk, turned pale. I was almost in the same emotional state as she was.”

“‘Well, so what dress are you going to wear to the altar?’ I asked, getting a bit angry. ‘The red one, the green one, or the white one?’”

“Feklusha started to cry. She held out her hands to me and said with a feeling of commiseration: ‘These are all the pranks of my father!’”

“‘So where is he?’ I exclaimed angrily and stood up.”

“‘Don’t be angry, my dear friend, don’t scold him. I would rather go to the altar wearing a holiday sarafan jumper made out of printed cloth than see him sad. God shall help us. We shall still amass some things.’”

“‘Whether we amass some things or not,’ I said in a surly manner, ‘that’s not the point. But how shall it look for Prince Chistyakov to go to the altar with his princess bride dressed in a wedding dress made out of printed cloth? That would be painful. Be that as it may, I still wanted to make you a crown of flowers in the foreign manner that is popular overseas.’”

“Feklusha started to cry again.”

“‘Don’t cry, my dear friend,’ I said to her, growing softer, when suddenly a ray of insight illumined me. I went out to the kitchen and saw that Prince Sidor Arkhipovich, sitting on a bench, was peacefully smoking his pipe and chattering with Marya.”

“‘Father,’ I said rather dryly, ‘where is Feklusha’s dress and linen?’”

“‘Ask the Yid Yanka about that, my son: he’s the one who ought to know that better than I do.’”

“‘Marya! Come with me!’”

“We went outside. Marya was looking at me with surprise. We walked up to the cowshed, where my last remaining piece of property was standing, – the cow. After tying it around the horns with a rope, I gave Marya a large switch to hold and ordered her to prod the cow.”

“‘Your Excellency, most excellent prince!’ the old woman said fearfully, ‘where are you taking the cow?’”
“I remained silent. We left the courtyard and directed our steps in the direction of the Yid Yanka’s palace.”

“Where are you taking her?’ Marya cried sorrowfully.”

“Prod the cow, Marya,’ I replied. ‘You see, it’s being obstinate.’”

“So what am I to do, your Excellency?”

“Strike it a little harder,’ I said pompously.”

“So where are you taking her? Tell me that at least. If you’re taking her to be slaughtered, that’s to no purpose: I have prepared a pair of geese for supper, a pair of home-bred ducks. They were no more than five or six years old.”

“Strike the cow a little harder,’ I shouted.”

“Yes, but where are you taking her?”

“To the Yid Yanka,’ I said under my breath, ‘so that I can buy back my bride’s wedding dress!’”

“Horror-stricken, Marya almost fell into a dead faint, and that, of course, would have happened, if she hadn’t grabbed hold of the tail of the cow, who either had already flown into a rage because I was dragging her so fiercely, or else didn’t recognize Marya, and kicked her pretty hard with her leg, such that the poor old woman fell down to the ground and started rolling.”

“Getting up off the ground and shaking the dust off herself, she said: ‘If that’s the case, if this is for the sake of Fekla Sidorovna, then let it be as you wish!’ She wiped away her tears and calmly prodded the cow.”

“It was a festive day, and there was a fair number of people of every rank and age out on the street. Everyone knew that I was getting married that day, no matter how much I, by the way, tried to conceal it.”

“‘Look! Look! There goes the groom,’ some were saying, pointing at me with their fingers. Others were replying: ‘Hush, don’t bother him, today he’s hosting a ball to celebrate his wedding, and he’s taking his cow to the Yid.’ Evidently, an evil spirit had put them wise, or else Prince Sidor had blabbed about the wedding dress being pawned at the Yid’s shop, and each could guess that, on such a festive occasion, I was going to redeem it.”

“Although I was extremely embarrassed, the image of dear Feklusha was exhilarating me. ‘How beautiful she shall look,’ I thought, ‘dressed in a white
dress and wearing a crown of flowers! Then we’ll see what you have to say, you damned gawkers!”

“In this manner, mustering up my courage and taking up arms against the bystanders, I briskly led my cow to the Yid and, despite the mixed outcry of the people in the crowd, I kept shouting: ‘Strike her harder, Marya!’”

“We reached the abode of the progeny of Israel. We quarreled a little, we made a bit of noise, first raising the price, then lowering the price, and it ended with Yanka giving me the entire estate of my future wife, and, what’s more, five rubles in cash and two shtofs of vodka. I thought that even the most distinguished of my forefathers had not celebrated a wedding of similar magnificence. I gave Marya the vodka to carry, while I, with Feklusha’s clothes in a bundle and the five rubles in my hand, rushed straight home, fast as an arrow, to prove my love to my most excellent bride.”

“‘Here, princess, take this and dispose of everything as you will,’ I said, handing over to her the bundle with her clothes inside it. ‘Go ahead and choose whatever dress catches your fancy: whether it’s the red one, or it’s the green one, they are both taffeta dresses, or if it’s the white one, it’s of fine muslin. It’s true, princess, that my mother was a little taller than you are, but you’ll make up for it by being twice as wide right now.’ My future father-in-law was sitting in the other corner of the room, and it was noticeable that half of the beverages for the wedding had sneaked away. I made a remark about this to her. She backed me up, within sight of her father, agreeing that my remark was just. So we both put in place some measure to hide the other half of the beverages a little farther away from him.”

“‘Don’t be sad,’ I said to her softly, but with a triumphant look on my face. ‘Marya shall bring enough liquor to the reception.’”

“‘What!’ my future princess objected, dumbfounded, and throwing off the cats so that she could put on her shoes. ‘Just where shall Marya be getting the liquor?’”

“‘Be quiet, my friend,’ I answered in an outright princely manner. ‘You’ll find out more about that later.’ At this point, I led her behind the partition and into a different small peasant hut, which we had christened with the majestic name bedchamber, and I slipped into her hand the five rubles that I had received from the Yid. ‘Only don’t tell your father! This money is for our household expenses!’ I whispered into her ear.”

“‘God forbid!’ she replied after a certain frenzy that she was brought to by such unexpected news. Never in all of her born days had my princess suddenly come into possession of such a large amount of money. How charming did matrimony now seem to her!”
“While we were having supper, discussing, thinking, and rethinking such things as how I had settled accounts with the Yid and some other concerns that occupied us, it had grown dark.”

“‘Feklusha! Go get dressed, while I go search for the flowers to place on your head.’”

“The princess started to clear off the table, while I set out for the garden and sank into a reverie: ‘Where am I going to get flowers now? It’s the autumn season, everything has faded and fallen!’ As I was walking past my deserted garden, racking my brain, I suddenly caught sight of the scarlet heads of a burdock plant. A scintilla of delight animated my heart. I rushed over to the plant, tore off fifty-odd of its heads, and then quietly set off for home in complete delight. ‘Really, are these any worse than roses?’ I thought to myself. ‘A rose will blossom nicely, it’s true, and the aroma isn’t half bad, but it always fades so quickly that, before you know it, it’s already gone! But a burdock plant? Oh, most beautiful of flowers! The autumn wind blows upon you in vain, for you are always blossoming! Oh, Divine Providence! If I had not been yearning for Feklusha when she didn’t come out to weed the cabbage patch at dawn, and if I hadn’t trampled down all of my garden, the burdock plant would likely have been destroyed by Marya!’”

“‘Thinking along these lines, I entered the room where Feklusha was waiting. She was already dressed in her white dress and girded with a belt of roses. She couldn’t get enough of seeing how she looked in the fragment of my mirror.’”

“‘Here is your crown,’ I exclaimed joyfully, and I poured out onto the table the entire bunch of flowers that I had picked.”

“‘This is burdock!’ she said sadly.”

“‘Yes, burdock,’ I replied, ‘the only flower that one can find at this time of year. Don’t touch it, I shall do everything myself, but right now I’m going to get dressed.’”

“My grooming and dressing were soon completed. I donned the uniform jacket, my ordinary clean canvas pantaloons, and a hat. Then I started making the crown, and it seemed to me so sweet, so pleasant, and so easy, in the best way possible. All that it took was to lean one flower head up against another, and they would lace together in a trice. The crown was ready in two seconds, and then I, with a triumphant look on my face, placed the crown of burdock upon the head of my Most Excellent princess. I lightly pressed down on it, and it adhered so tightly that I was not afraid that even one little flower head could fall off.”

“In this way, after taking my Feklusha’s arm on mine, I led her to the church, accompanied by the invited guests.”
“What would Mavrusha, the village elder’s daughter, say now if she were to see my bride attired in such finery? Aha! See, this is what being married to a prince means.”

“But scarcely had I made my appearance outside, when my eyes grew dim. A multitude of people were standing all around. All of them raised a terrible roar of laughter. What was the reason for this, – even to this day, I don’t know. Feklusha became confused, her step was uneven, and, as a result, her corpulence, was even more noticeable.”

“‘Don’t lose courage,’ I whispered in her ear, and I moved forward with the most princely steps. But alas! Trouble only gives birth to more trouble! I don’t know why Feklusha took it into her head to scratch her scalp. One of the burdock flowers fell out of the crown. She caught sight of this misfortune and wanted to repair her attire. A second flower fell out. The princess became completely flustered. ‘Don’t touch it any more,’ I said to her softly.”

“Some of the curious onlookers, however, picked up the two fallen flowers. ‘Burdock!’ resounded from all sides, and the laughter increased. Feklusha nearly fell into a dead faint. ‘I’m dying from shame,’ she said, leaning her elbow on my arm. ‘This shall pass,’ I replied somewhat angrily.”

“At last, we arrived at the church and were married, without incident, since the priest, as the invited guest, didn’t admit anyone extra there. At the end of the wedding ceremony, he gave us this bit of unsolicited advice, – don’t go home by way of the street, but better by way of the gardens.”

“We followed his advice. Although this route was more difficult to navigate and much longer, no one, on the other hand, troubled us.”

“We reached home safe and sound. My father-in-law and several other guests were already seated at table and were playing with a gift from the Yid Yanka. Everything was peaceful and quiet. It’s true that several peasant men and women were planning to encroach upon our wedding reception by climbing over the fence, so as to poke fun at us again, but, unbeknownst to us, my father-in-law, who was quick-witted this time, went outside with a frightful cudgel in hand and threatened to break their arms and legs in two. They jumped down from the fence, left, and did not appear again afterward.”

Chapter 10: Despair and Consolation

“For some time our life together passed in the intoxication of love, reverie, and, therefore, happiness, too. I’m certain that human happiness isn’t always the fruit of the mind, but more the bloom of the imagination. Princess Fekla Sidorovna seemed to me to be the only woman in the world. Her caresses inspired me every
hour. I was cheerful and content, more so than the village elder, especially while the amount of money given to me by the Yid Yanka for the purchase of my cow could still be drawn from little by little. But, alas, after a few weeks, this money had all dried up! Looking at my beautiful spouse, I absolutely didn’t know what to do. Often, while losing myself in thought, I would exclaim: ‘Oh, my father, how true were your admonitions! And your unfortunate and unhappy son didn’t want to follow them! If I had cultivated the field, without relying on my peasant Ivan; if I hadn’t ruined the gardens after having become angry that the princess hadn’t come out to weed the cabbage patch; if I hadn’t, for her sake, pilfered the estate left to me by my mother, then she would now own it, and my cow, meanwhile, would be back at home, and we would not have to be suffering extreme privations in all things!’ But what’s to be done? I looked from one corner of the house to the other, from the floor to the ceiling, both here and then there, everything was empty. The day when my wife would give birth to our child was fast approaching, and not only didn’t we have anything with which, somehow or other, to meet our new guest in the world, but also we ourselves were only just managing to keep from dying from starvation, and that only thanks to the kindness of our peasant woman Marya. Only Prince Sidor Arkhipovich, my father-in-law, worried about this less than everyone else.”

“Nothing remained for me to do but to ask for assistance from compassionate hearts. Extreme privation and the near impossibility of somehow finding a more honorable way to support myself compelled me to do this. By no means had I forgotten my illustrious ancestry, however, and so I decided not to offend the ghosts of my venerable forebears, who truly had never begged for alms, and to act in the same way as noble Spaniards do, that’s to say, instead of asking for five kopecks, they say, with a majestic tilt of their head: ‘My dear sir! Please oblige me for a short time with a loan of fifty thousand piasters!’ An indulgent man, understanding such language, will give the supplicant two kopecks, and the crazy don, taking this money with a haughty look on his face, replies: ‘Very well! In a short period of time, just as soon as my circumstances improve, you shall receive your capital with the specified percent of interest.’”

“It seemed to me that I, as a prince by birth, was not in the slightest degree worse than a Spanish don, and therefore I settled upon this profound reasoning.”

“Late in the evening, on a rainy autumn day, my princess began to experience labor pains. Kind Marya attended upon her. I broke into a run to seek a loan for some money, but to whom could I go first? I set off haphazardly, and the first house that, in my opinion, was worth going to visit was the house of Prince Boris. I was feeling more hopeful when entering his place due to the fact that he had attended my wedding a few weeks earlier and had been treated and entertained rather well there.”
“Ah! My dear friend,’ he said cheerfully, getting up from his three-legged straw chair and holding out his hand to greet me. ‘Welcome! Come right in! So is the princess feeling well?’”

**PRINCE CHISTYAKOV**: “Not completely, Your Excellency. You can’t be unaware of what condition that she was in at the wedding: she’s now experiencing labor pains.”

**PRINCE BORIS**: “Congratulations, my dear friend! May God grant you an heir!”

**PRINCE CHISTYAKOV**: “I wish for the same thing myself, but I must confess, prince, that these circumstances demand expenditures. And I don’t have a kopeck in my house.”

**PRINCE BORIS**: “Oh! That’s extremely bad, as I know from my own personal experience! What I need to do is get my house renovated. My daughter is engaged to be married. I need to make a trip to town to make several purchases, but since I have no money, I just sit here at home.”

**PRINCE CHISTYAKOV**: “But, Your Excellency, I need very little money!”

**PRINCE BORIS**: “I would think that you, dear friend, selling your field so profitably, received no less for it than I received for the grain that I sold. Forgive me, my dearest friend, forgive me. God is merciful. It may be that next year the harvest shall be a little better in your garden.”

“He left for his special cenacle,4 while I, with an aching heart, left for the courtyard. The night was no better than the day had been. Gloomy clouds were floating across the sky in flocks. Rain was pouring down in buckets. I was just about to return home, but I thought to myself: ‘What shall I find at home? A suffering wife and, perhaps, even a crying baby!’ ‘My God!’ I said to myself in terrible discomfiture, ‘To what end does every man strive with such pleasure to produce in this world a creature similar to himself, yet rare is the man who thinks about how he shall support the existence of his child and its mother, not to mention his own existence?’ I was soaked through to the bone, but still I wanted to try my luck and attempt to find happiness. Wherever I went, however, people all over the place were telling me now about the field that I had sold, now about the garden that I had trampled down, now about my row of green beans. Others, like my father-in-law, Prince Sidor Arkhipovich, who was living with us at the time, were advising me to sell his house and to improve my situation with the money. ‘That’s not such bad advice,’ I thought, ‘but it’s not appropriate

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4 A cenacle (gorenka or gornitsa) was a main upper room in an old Russian house that was used for the reception of guests. The word can also mean the site of Christ’s Last Supper, since it is, in English, a derivative of the Latin word “cena,” which means “dinner.”
right now.’”

“In a word, I roamed around the streets of the village until such time as the lights had been extinguished everywhere. I knocked in vain at the doors of the homes of the village elder, of the priest, and of all the clergy of the parish. No one even took the trouble to ask who was there knocking and what did he need?”

“For the first time in my life, a feeling bordering on despair struck my soul. Never before had I had a wife, and although the princess was almost the same thing for me, I hadn’t seen her before struggling with the pain that accompanies the appearance in the world of the fruit of a star-crossed love.”

“Since there was nothing more to be done for it, however, I started to plod home.”

“As I approached the gates, I was extremely surprised to see that the house was fairly well illuminated. My heart relaxed. My wife, sure enough, must have been hiding some kind of treasure from me, since the house was so luxuriantly illuminated on the night when she was about to be undergoing the labor of childbirth. I walked up to the doors with a feeling of joy in my heart, and my ears were struck with the sound of an infant’s babyish cry and of a mother’s painful howl. ‘And so, has she delivered? What’s making her scream so loud?’ I thought. I had heard that as soon as a woman delivers a baby, then she can indeed refrain from screams.”

“I opened the door, and I walked in. ‘Oh, merciful God!’ I thought. In the middle of the room I saw a table covered with a large sheet. There were four candlesticks standing around it. And lying upon it was the breathless body of my father-in-law, Prince Sidor Arkhipovich Burkalov.”

“‘What am I, an unfortunate and unhappy soul, to do now?’” I exclaimed, and I fell to the floor unconscious.”

“When I had regained consciousness, I could see at my feet the sobbing Marya and at my head the Yid Yanka.”

“‘So you are here, you accursed one!’ I said angrily. ‘I suppose that you were the death of him?’”

“‘Not by any means, Your Excellency,’ replied the Yid. ‘He himself was somewhat imprudent. Since early this morning, he had been sitting the whole time at my place. And why shouldn’t he! I’m glad to have nice guests. Toward evening, a number of other people came over to my place and they started trying to comfort him in his affliction, prompted by the suffering of childbirth experienced by his daughter and the loss of his property. And he took comfort up until the time when I had to remind him: ‘Your Excellency,’ I said, ‘it’s time for
you to get some rest.’ ‘That’s none of your business, Yid,’ he replied in a surly
manner, raising a stick and waving it at me. ‘You know for yourself how the
deceased was! I fell silent. The consequence is obvious. He suffered a stroke or
something like it, and he died suddenly. I ordered them right away to put out the
lights, and a workman and I lifted him upon our shoulders and we carried him
here. I swear to Moses, I gave to Marya, without any interest, enough money for
her to be able to take the candlesticks from your church and to hire a psalm
reader.’”

“I glanced over at Marya, and her satisfactory response corroborated Yanka’s
words. He soon left. My heart was bleeding! My wife was sobbing, our baby
was crying. The thought of how would I be able to feed them the next day
weighed upon my soul. I sat by the window, leaning my elbow upon my hand,
and looked with a vacant stare at the bluish-purple corpse of my father-in-law.
Some time passed in this manner, time that was a thousand times more sorrowful
than the time that I had spent waiting for the dawn so that I could see Princess
Feklusha weeding the cabbage patch, and, not seeing her, had trampled the
garden.”

“My rooster had already crowed several times; the psalm reader was yawning
after each word. Moreover, out of a different room, I could hear the sobbing of
my princess and the howling of our young prince. I wanted so much to go inside
to see them, but Marya would by no means allow it, since this sort of thing was
not done in any of the princely families in our neighborhood. I had to agree, but I
didn’t know what I should do further, and it was boring to look at my father-in-
law. I considered it better that I go to the cowshed, which had been vacant since
the time when I had taken my cow to the Yid Yanka, and make an attempt to see
whether or not I might not get some sleep there. And, contrary to my
expectations, I truly did soon fall fast asleep. The sun had already risen high in
the sky, and I still hadn’t left my bedchamber yet, when I heard the howl of
Marya, who was searching everywhere for me. I came out of the cowshed, and I
saw at the gates a multitude of people of both genders and various ages gathered
there, looking at what was going on. I couldn’t comprehend what pleasure these
people could possibly find in looking at scenes similar to this one. If I had been a
wealthy man, then, consequently, they might have yawned at the magnificence
and splendor that would be accompanying the body of my father-in-law as it was
being carried to his illustrious ancestors. But was it worth the effort to see the
disfigured corpse of someone who had passed away suddenly and virtually from
intemperance .................................................................
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“I myself couldn’t look at him without trembling!”
“...The funeral mass shall begin soon,” I thought, ‘and there’s still no coffin, at least not one that Prince Sidor could be buried inside.’ ‘Wait a minute,’ I said to myself upon reflection, ‘I can dress my father-in-law up in the uniform coat that I inherited. It’s no longer of any use to me. I shall make the coffin myself out of the boards that I have in the courtyard. Alas! It’s necessity, and nothing other than necessity, that compels me to do this!’”

“I split the boards, fastened them together, planed them, and replaned them, and I did all of this with great zeal and haste so as not to be late for the mass, whose time was fast approaching. Suddenly I heard a noise behind me, I looked around, and my astonishment was indescribable!

“I saw upon the fence, from the side of the garden facing my father-in-law’s property, a brand new coffin dyed with red clay. I looked at this coffin with rapture, the way that a bridegroom looks at his nuptial bed, and in the stillness of my heart I thanked Divine Providence, assuring myself that this was His doing, the more so since some invisible hand was supporting the coffin. I was afraid to approach it, as if I would be walking toward something sacred, and so I stood there, with my hands at my side, since the axe and the plane had fallen from them long before. But what was my surprise! A little farther off I saw a small beard protruding, then an entire head, and I recognized who it was. I suddenly rush towards him, crying with all of my might: ‘Yanka! Yanka!’ ‘Hold up the coffin!’ he said. ‘I’ll climb up onto the fence, and together the two of us shall take it down from there.’”

“Solemnly we carried this handsome coffin into the room, much to the surprise of Marya and the two shepherds who had bought my field from Ivan. They had come to render some assistance in my time of troubles. ‘We wouldn’t have dared to offer our services, of course,’ they said, ‘if we hadn’t seen that none of your fellow villagers of the first order wished to do that.’ The look on my face thanked them.”

“‘Dear, kind Yanka!’ I said, ‘With the help of these honest people, go place the body into the coffin, while I run over to the priest’s house to make arrangements.’”

“‘Make arrangements?’ Yanka said with surprise. ‘So what arrangements need to be made here? This isn’t a matter of buying and selling.’”

“‘So that my father-in-law may be buried with the appropriate honors!’ I replied.”

Chapter 11: A Funeral and a Sermon
“At the priest’s home, they told me that father had already left for the church, so I hurried over there and I found, fortunately, that he hadn’t yet begun to put on his vestments.”

“What say you, prince?” he asked.”

“I’m experiencing destitution, father, and I need to ask for your assistance,’ I replied sorrowfully.”

“This often happens, my dear lad!”

“What am I to do, father! A year ago, I buried my father. A few weeks ago, I got married, and at that time I experienced only a slight destitution, since the matter consisted simply in getting married a little later than usual. Today, I’m experiencing extreme destitution, since I’m getting ready to bury my father-in-law, and I don’t have any money to pay for it.”

“The priest said very gloomily: ‘I have heard about this, and his death is rather dubious’”

“Why is that, father?’ I asked him fervently.”

“He died at the Yid’s tavern, and, as rumor has it, possibly from drinking wine.’”

“That’s not a feasible claim,’ I replied. ‘One can die suddenly anywhere.’ The priest was surprised by the firmness of my reply and remained silent.”

“Buoyed by his reaction, I continued: ‘As far as the Yid Yanka is concerned, then I must tell you that he’s the kind of Yid the likes of which there are too few in this world.’”

“That may well be, my son! There are honest people in every rank and station,’ he said. My humility had softened him. He said: ‘Bring your father-in-law to the church for the funeral mass, and I shall deliver a sermon as well, by the way, both for your satisfaction and for your edification.’”

“I left in a state of extreme rapture.”

“And a sermon as well!’ I said to myself, smiling. ‘Why, that’s an honor that not a single village elder, not a single prince in our village, has ever received. Thank you, father, thank you!’”

“The church bells had begun to toll for my father-in-law. I, along with the two shepherds, lifted the coffin up and carried it to the church, since decorum didn’t allow Yanka, as a Yid, to carry the coffin of an Orthodox Christian.”
“It wouldn’t be boasting on my part to say that everyone’s eyes popped out of their heads when they saw such fine ornamentation. All of them maintained a profound silence, meekly bowing and crossing themselves. I was filled with rapture. I walked along, holding upon my shoulders the head of the coffin, not looking around at anyone, just like a hero parading in triumph.”

“We were walking past the rows, when from behind me a whisper could be heard: ‘Truly, it’s magnificent! Who could have imagined it!’”

“‘Aha,’ I said to myself with pompous pride. ‘You couldn’t imagine this, could you? There are plenty of things that you can’t imagine! And here you have Prince Gavrilo Simonovich of the Chistyakov princely line!’ The funeral mass was nearing its conclusion, my heart was trembling from something strange stirring inside me. How was I going to be able to listen to the sermon, when in my presence they shall be eulogizing the virtues and the great merits of my father-in-law? Won’t this be self-praising? Won’t this be unforgivable pride? And it’s pride that had just now led me astray! Let’s allow him to depart this life with some humility!”

“I took a step backwards, but a false conscience said to me: ‘Where are you running off to? Or do you make so bold as to boast of the good deeds that another person has performed? It’s more likely than not that the priest was making a fool out of you. Why on earth would he deliver a sermon about such a man, although he is, nevertheless, a prince by birth? Surely, surely, he was making a fool out of you.’”

“After listening to this inner voice of my conscience, I started stepping backward again and came to a halt at the feet of the deceased. But how great and how unpleasant was my surprise when, at the conclusion of the funeral mass, they set up a lectern and the priest came out to deliver his sermon! All of the princes, peasants, princesses, and princelings were moving forward, and thus they squeezed me up against the coffin, so that even if I had wanted to step away, that was no longer possible.”

“A silence had spread throughout the church. All eyes were turned now upon the priest, now upon me. ‘How odd this is!’ people were saying under their breath. ‘Evidently, something is being concealed here; evidently, their poverty is willful! About three years ago, the former village elder was buried, but there wasn’t any sermon delivered at his funeral.’ No matter how softly they were whispering, I didn’t utter a single word, and I cast my eyes down with a slight blush of undeserved pleasure. It was pleasant for me to hear them voice their misconception, as though I had some intention of appearing poor but was actually a very wealthy man. Soon after this, I myself became embarrassed of such weakness of mind or, better to say, such stupidity on my part. In time, I learned that the greater part of people act this same way.”
“The priest looked all around him, took out a small notebook, and then began his sermon:

‘Devout Christians! Listen to what I’m going to say to you now. My funeral oration won’t seem proper to you, since a great holiday shall soon be at hand: namely, in eight days, on next Sunday. A holiday, my most blessed Orthodox listeners, both you men and you women alike, the word holiday is for many of you a highly seductive word. Rather than thinking about the deity and about prayer, you, when getting out of bed, – judge for yourself, you Orthodox believers, whether this isn’t indeed the case! – you think only about incontinence, intemperance, and drunkenness. And you think up what you can pawn if you don’t have any cash on hand!’”

“Such a prelude to his sermon astonished me. I lifted up my eyes and blushed even more, not out of embarrassment, as I had before, but out of some kind of secret presentiment.”

“The priest continued his sermon:

‘Although, my Christian men and women, the church during days of holiday celebration held in honor of certain saints allows believers to partake of wine and holy oil, which in many places you shall find in the holiday celebration of Kievan saints: for example, permission to partake of wine and holy oil is granted in remembrance of Aleksei the Man of God, and permission to partake of wine and holy oil is granted during the Feast of the Annunciation. But, – oh, my Orthodox believers! – have those, who are able to read, ever read, or have those, who are not able to read, ever heard, where it was written that, to commemorate Aleksei the Man of God, permission is granted to get dead drunk and that, to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, permission is granted to stagger along the street, weaving from side to side, to hit one’s head against fences like one possessed, and to wallow in the mud like a filthy pig! No, this isn’t written anywhere, and yet it occurs in our village not infrequently.’

‘But let us leave this topic. You’re able to feel how loathsome the sins of intemperance, incontinence, and drunkenness are, how they aren’t pleasing to God, and how, even in the eyes of us sinners, they’re repugnant. Let’s turn our conversation toward those who, in their own way, turn even workdays into holidays of this kind. They don’t do anything other than drink heavily and then go to sleep, drink heavily again, and again go to sleep. What comes of this? These people are a disgrace to the world and to their fellow human beings. Little by little, they drag out of their house everything that they own, down to their very last straw, and they are reduced to beggary. At first, they become repugnant to other people, then they become repugnant to themselves. Their conscience begins to torment them violently. But instead of
showing repentance and ceasing to commit these sins, they, these accursed ones, at the instigation of so many damned souls, think once again to drown their conscience in wine and start drinking even more heavily than they did before. And what follows from this? Their children begin to hate them and cease to obey them any more; their sons debauch young maidens; their daughters allow themselves to be deceived by young lads; everything in the home is turned upside down. Their malfeasant fathers see this behavior, and yet they don’t dare to say a word, since such malfeasance is taking place right in front of their very eyes. And how does this all end? From an excess of intemperance, incontinence, and drunkenness, their body is growing weaker by the minute, and they, who by the number of years that they have lived should live for a long time still, are dying without having repented, leaving their family in shame, sorrow, and poverty.’

‘Having ears to listen, you should go ahead and listen! Amen.’

“‘Amen! Amen!’ the shepherds whispered into my ear. Because I had started trembling from the middle part of the priest’s sermon, and spasms had seized me by the time of sermon’s end. And I, no doubt, I would have fallen down onto the floor, if it hadn’t been so crowded in the church, and if my two trustworthy shepherds, one on each side of me, hadn’t held me up by the arms and supported me.

“I stood on my own two feet without, to all appearances, any assistance, listened to the funeral dirge, and then, after placing the coffin on my shoulders, as well as on the shoulders of my fellow pallbearers, we carried it to the spot where it would be buried in the ground. There was no one there except for us pallbearers. With tears in my eyes, I filled the grave with loam, sighing and thinking: ‘Oh, dear father-in-law of mine, Prince Sidor Arkhipovich! Did it have to be this way, that both your death and your funeral would be just as humiliating for our memory of you, as your life has been humiliating for your children?’ I invited the two shepherds to come to my home to give each of them at least a crust of bread in return for their labors. They accepted my offer in an amicable way, and the three of us set off together, with me crying and them sighing the entire time, but all of us together did head to my home.”

No sooner had Prince Chistyakov uttered these words, words uttered with the feeling that accompanies an unpleasant recollection, than suddenly a servant ran into the house with the report that Prince Svetlozarov deigns to arrive! “Oh, how inopportune this timing is,” Prostakov said, getting up from his seat. Maremyana hurriedly tossed beneath the sofa the stockings that she was darning, Katerina, blushing, hid hers inside her pocket, while Prince Chistyakov said, with a sigh: “Now I shall become once again Mister Krakalov, the nobleman who lost everything in a lawsuit.”
Chapter 12: A Minor Discovery

About a week had already passed following Prince Svetlozarov’s second arrival in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov. It had passed in a state of giddiness that the husband extremely disliked. Elizaveta was rigorously engaged in her education: she was reading, writing, and drawing. Nikandr was so diligent as her tutor that in the house they didn’t know whether the female student was studying, – or the male teacher was teaching, – more than either of them desired to. Katerina usually sang songs, played the piano, and performed dances, guided in these artistic pursuits at all times by the prince. Maremyana was incessantly running from the reception room to the kitchen, and from the kitchen to the reception room, laughing, exclaiming, and tweaking. Chistyakov would usually leave the living room, where Elizaveta was having her lessons with Nikandr, and proceed to the reception room, where the prince and Katerina were raising hell, turning it into a regular Sodom. Chistyakov would smile, shrug his shoulders slightly, and scratch his head. And Prostakov, seeing all of this, would knit his brow and shiver severely. Life proceeded in this fashion for yet another week or so, when Prostakov, one fine day, decided that he needed to go take a look at his barnyards, his drying barns, and everything else pertaining to agriculture, for he was planning to travel to town to purchase some items for the Christmas holiday, either things that were needed for their everyday domestic life or holiday gifts for everyone in the household. This was something that he did every year at this time without fail. He invited Prince Gavrilo Simonovich to walk through the village with him. The old man said with a kind-hearted smile: “God, by no means as any sort of just deserts, has rewarded me with much good fortune: I have servants, carriages, a tranquil home, and a plentiful table. And this good fortune occurs without interruption. So this is why I wish that those who serve me have some relaxation, some peace and quiet, and some guiltless pleasure, even if it is only for just a few days each year! Both the chambermaid and the peasant girl, just like my own two daughters, possess the same identical striving to please, to love and to be loved. And in order for this to happen, sometimes one needs, in addition to beauty and innocence, a few fine items of apparel and millinery. Gold, precious stones, and pearls sparkle on my daughters. Why then shouldn’t I wish that my house serfs and peasant girls possess some scarlet ribbons, a colorful bodice made out of printed cloth, and some copper signet rings with glass on foil? By depriving either one of my daughters of a ring that she doesn’t need, – since they possess a sufficient number of them without it, – I can embellish all of my village and my house for several years in a row.”

Thus reasoned Prostakov each year right before his annual trip to town. And he reasoned in this very same way in front of Prince Chistyakov, while he was examining his agricultural facilities, and, after each interval of time, he would ask: “Isn’t this true, my dear friend?”

With heart-felt emotion, Chistyakov would shake the hand of this good-natured old man and say through his tears: “This comforts your heart! Oh, it’s pleasant for me to hear about this! How pleasant it must be for you to be doing this?”
“That’s what I feel,” said Prostakov, glancing up at the sky, which was bespangled with stars. “Yes! I sincerely believe that if monarchs were wise interpreters of the human heart, they would take wealth away from cruel people, who use it for ill purposes, and give it to kind, poor people. But . . .” He sighed, and both of them continued on their way, when suddenly Prostakov came to a halt: “Tell me, please, my friend, Gavrilo Simonovich, why is it that you’re often smiling when we’re coming out of the drawing room and going into the dining room? Are you noticing something going on there?”

“I’m surprised that you’re not noticing what’s going on in there,” answered Chistyakov with a pompous air that would have made his remark amusing for everyone else, but not for Prostakov. The latter, who was accustomed to seeing him always being gentle, good-hearted, and incapable of stupidly giving himself any airs and graces, was himself surprised at the surprise expressed by the prince.

“What is it that you’re surprised at, my dear friend?” Prostakov asked gently.

“I’m surprised, my dear and kind Ivan Efremovich, at how you are rather unperceptive. God has given you a most kind heart, and you . . .”

“Go on, continue,” said Prostakov impatiently.

“My observation is perhaps a vacuous one, just as you have already seen a multitude of such vacuous observations that I have made in the narrative account of my life story thus far, and, as you shall see at least as many very vacuous observations that shall be made in my narrative account in future, but all the same it’s an observation that I’ve made.”

“So what is that observation?”

“When I happen to be in the drawing room, where Elizaveta is studying, I find that Nikandr, when he’s teaching a lesson about the French language, is explaining things to her in Russian. And it’s not just me, but any Russian child, in any Russian village, would understand that it’s a matter of learning a language. So when I hear him speaking in a foreign language, I’m absolutely certain that it involves nothing other than pronunciation that’s going on here, it’s simply pronunciation. The calm look on the faces of the male teacher and his female student would convince anyone of that.”

“Poor Prince Gavrilo Simonovich! Truly your observation is hardly one of those very vacuous observations that you just made mention of. Go on, my dear prince, continue!”

“After listening to them for a few minutes, I walked out into the reception room. There was Prince Svetlozarov, almost clutching Katerina in his warm embraces, and she was doing the same to him, as they twirled, leapt, cavorted, and twirled again. Their bosoms were bumping into each other, their lips were breathing as if they were on fire, his eyes were sparkling with devouring sparks, while hers were sparkling with melting exhaustion. When the dance had ended, they sat down right next to each other, they explained their thoughts to each other, and all of this was done in a foreign language.
You see all of this, yet you don’t understand a word of it, you only knit your brow. How can I not help but smile?”

This time, the observation provided by Prince Chistyakov was one of his correct observations.

After the prince had fallen silent, Prostakov dwelt for several moments in exemplary perturbation.

“Oh, what a lunatic I am!” he exclaimed, firmly wiping his brow. “And I call myself a father! Do I deserve that name? Though their mother, who is a weak, vainglorious woman, could forget herself, flattering herself with foolish hope, but to have me doing this as well? I didn’t want to observe anything, except frolic and wantonness, and so I merely knit my brow because they were disturbing me, preventing me from reading a book or conducting a conversation. Oh, how unperceptive I truly am! I’m going to throw that damned profligate out of my house this very minute. And I’m going to take hold of my daughter and compel her to confess to everything.”

He was just about to run off to do this, but Prince Chistyakov stopped him.

“Hold on, dear friend,” he said. “I’ve only made an observation, but I’m not saying that I have uncovered the actual truth. Although experience has taught me quite a bit, there’s no point in life where I could sooner have been mistaken.”

“What then shall we do?” Prostakov asked impatiently, stopping and looking fixedly at the prince.

“Have Prince Svetlozarov leave,” replied Chistyakov calmly. “You should have him do this soon, for there are no more than twelve days remaining before the holiday, and I don’t think that he shall act like an impudent fellow about this. In order to discover the truth properly, we must know beforehand how to lay the foundation for its discovery. If you proceed directly to speak to Katerina about this, you know how generally girls in such situations are stubborn and shrewd. She shall see right away that you only suspect her, and her heart shall take courage and bear up. The first thing that you need to do is give her to understand that you know everything, and demand from her only submission and confession.”

“And so then, prince . . .”

“And so then, you must skillfully charm the truth out of Elizaveta. It can’t be that such a constant and intelligent girl didn’t observe at least something, provided that something did indeed happen. They share the same bedroom. She could have heard her sighs, perhaps she even saw her tears. And perhaps she heard the confession itself, but is remaining silent out of modesty.”
Silently Prostakov shook Prince Chistyakov’s hand, embraced him, and said: “You’re my true friend. I have no doubts about that. But what there is in you that seems surprising to me is that having been brought up in a village, having lived your whole life in poverty, in complete ignorance of high society, you’re able to see things so clearly, while I meanwhile . . .”

Embarrassed, he stopped talking.

“Who was it that told you,” replied the prince rather sternly, “that I know absolutely nothing about high society? There shall shortly come a time when you’ll find out who I am, and you’ll agree that one can be poor and still come to know a thing or two about the vainglorious and debauched world of high society. A year of suffering, even in rural life, would sooner teach one to come to know the stirrings of the human heart than would twenty years of a peaceful, contented life spent within your family circle and the circle of several neighbors who are likewise calm and likewise happy. Oh, venerable, kind elder! Do you think that the princes and the counts and the great people of that world of high society, those who are close to the throne, are full of power and majesty? Or do you think that they don’t trample their gardens when their Feklushas don’t come out at dawn to weed the cabbage patch? Do you think that they don’t climb over the fence? Oh, all of this happens all right, but only in a different form! I ruined the vegetable plants in my garden. They ravage entire villages and cause people to shed tears and entire thousands to walk the face of the earth, while I, instead of doing that, walked it alone. My crumpled garden recovered the next spring and produced vegetable plants that were none the worse in any way for the ones that were trampled. But who would, in his heart, sweeten the tears of sorrow that fell from the eyes of a family that has been orphaned? Who would resurrect the victim of a premature death? Neither the unfortunate tears of wives nor the howls of defenseless babes!”

“Who are you, oh, incomprehensible one?” asked Prostakov, recovering his senses after the petrification caused by the words that his guest had spoken.

“I’m Prince Gavriilo Simonovich, of the Chistyakov princely line. Forgive me, kind lord. When speaking with you in private, I shall speak simply, as I would with a friend.”

“No! One should never forget decorum. And so I shall say that your surprise and the idea that I don’t have any understanding of high society life compelled me to speak in this manner. But I swear to you that all that I have said in recounting the story of my life is the absolute truth. By the same token, I assure you that I shall speak the truth in what follows of my life story, if you shall wish to hear it.”

One again, they promised each other a mutual friendship that would be indissoluble. They set off for home, and what a pleasant surprise awaited them there: Prince Svetlozarov’s harnessed carriage was standing at the entrance!
“What, is the prince going somewhere?” asked Prostakov of the man who was standing there.

“He was just waiting for you so that he could bid you farewell,” was the reply, and they both hurried into the reception room: they embraced and bade farewell to the prince, each trying to deceive the other. The prince promised to visit them again, following the holidays, so that he could enjoy the pleasantness of life among the members of a charming family.

“You are very gracious, prince,” Maremyana was about to mention, becoming embarrassed and taking a seat, but her husband’s loud voice interrupted her speech. He said: “I would be delighted, prince. Come and be our guest: you are very welcome here.”

They parted. Following the advice that Prince Gavrilo Simonovich had given him, Prostakov postponed until the next morning a testing of Katerina’s heart. In the meantime, he announced to the entire household that the next day he would be going into town.

Chapter 13: A Major Discovery

As was the custom, people in the village would usually get up very early in the morning, even despite the fact that winter was coming on, and especially when, due to certain circumstances, the day was more unusual than others, which likewise happens only very rarely in the village. It was very early morning, and everyone had already gotten up out of bed. The traveling vehicle was harnessed; all that was needed was for Prostakov to take a seat and set off. He, of course, would have taken a seat and would have set off, but the observations that Prince Chistyakov had made the day before were lying heavily upon his heart. And what father wouldn’t have been feeling this way if he had found himself in a similar situation? And so he decided to postpone his trip for a day and, in the meantime, he took Elizaveta by the hand, and she didn’t turn away from him, and then he led her into the drawing room, where a fire was blazing in the fireplace. He sat on the sofa and wanted to say something to the girl, who was taken by surprise, but his tongue wasn’t able to express all that was contained in his heart. Several times he opened his mouth to speak, uttered a sound, and then fell silent.

“What has happened to you, dear father?” asked his daughter, who was more scared than surprised.

THE FATHER (rubbing his hands): “What? Is Prince Gavrilo Simonovich still not up yet?”

HIS DAUGHTER: “I saw him in the reception room.”

THE FATHER: “Ask him to come here, and you yourself come, too!”

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His daughter left. “Indeed,” said Prostakov, recovering from being temporarily tongue-tied. “I don’t know how to begin. If I tell her very explicitly, perhaps I shall uncover for this innocent girl that which her heart hasn’t yet discovered. But nothing comes from remaining silent.”

Prince Chistyakov entered the drawing room with Elizaveta.

“Hello, my friend,” said the old man. “You don’t know the state of confusion that I’m in. Please take the trouble to speak with Elizaveta about the continuation of our conversation yesterday!”

The poor innocent girl gasped. Everything suddenly presented itself to her: have they already discovered now her secret relationship with Nikandr? Does her father perhaps wish to give her hand in marriage to Prince Chistyakov? She started to tremble.

“You’re her father, and you should be the one to tell her what your paternal heart suggests to you,” Chistyakov said drily. He wished to leave, but the old man detained him.

“Then I shall speak to you without any preface,” he said, taking hold of the delicate hand of his daughter tenderly. “Answer me truthfully, Elizaveta, as your sense of duty commands.”

“I’m prepared to do so, father,” she said, and her hands fell to her side. Everything portended a terrible tempest for her tender heart. But on this occasion she was mistaken.

“I don’t demand anything more from you,” said the old man, “than simply complete candor. Have you observed any sort of change in Katerina’s conduct?”

ELIZAVETA: “She loves me just the same as she did before.”

PROSTAKOV: “I’m certain of that. But have there been any changes in her lifestyle?”

ELIZAVETA: “I haven’t observed any. She gets up in the morning, she occupies herself with various things, she plays the piano, and then she retires to bed again at the usual time.”

PROSTAKOV: “The question is not about the time when she does these things, but about whether she’s doing these things in the usual way?”

ELIZAVETA: “It seems to me that she’s doing these things in the usual way.”

PROSTAKOV (with annoyance): “There’s no getting any sense out of this girl.”

Prince Chistyakov walked up to Elizaveta and took her hand. She was much calmer now, seeing that the main conversation was inclined toward her sister. And he said to her:
“You’re a good daughter, of that I’m certain. And he’s a tender-hearted father, of that everyone is certain. His parental heart is troubled. It seems to him that your sister Katerina has been looking upon the ingratiating manner of Prince Svetlozarov not indifferently. If the prince’s intentions had been honorable, he would have revealed them to your father by now. Despite his silence in this instance, he’s able to be pleasing. But your father can’t look upon this matter indifferently, if this man is winning her affection without the honorable intention of truly loving her. You can help him resolve this mystery: is this the way it is or not?”

Elizaveta was in a difficult predicament. This situation was very unpleasant for her, but Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was looking at her with such an expression in his eyes that she had to say something, but what exactly? She was confused.

“Speak,” he said peremptorily. “Your kind and tender-hearted father is awaiting your reply.”

“Oh!” said Elizaveta, “I know this, and I feel it, but what am I to say? I don’t know anything.”

“That’s a lie!” retorted Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, in such a severe tone of voice that Elizaveta started to tremble, and her father gave a start.

“Prince! You aren’t to frighten her . . .”

“Isn’t it true, dear Ivan Efremovich, that you’ve called me a friend? And if that’s the case, then I wish to prove to you that I’m worthy of that name. I want to be your friend, in any event, when things touch upon your peace of mind, your interests, your happiness. And so, my dear lady, your excuses are in vain. Your father and his friend want to know the truth. Every look on your face shows that the truth is known to you, and only stubbornness . . .”

“Oh, no!” said Elizaveta through tears.

“Well, such a false tenderness! That’s forgivable, but don’t forget that it’s not some outsider who’s trying to find out the secrets of your sister’s heart! It’s your father, and I’m his friend.”

Elizaveta lowered her eyes and, looking over her fingers, she said, “Yes, it’s true, I did observe something unusual . . .”

“Well, did you now!” exclaimed Ivan Efremovich in exultation, jumping up from his armchair and wrapping his sheepskin coat tighter around himself. “So tell us quickly, my daughter, what is it that you’ve observed?”

“For some time now, Katerina has not resembled herself. All night long she sits by a candle and doesn’t do anything. Last night she was sighing and crying, and I noticed,
through the curtain over my bed, or at least it seemed this way to me, that she was reading some kind of paper, as if it were a letter.”

“So!” her father exclaimed in a burst of anger.

“No, it’s not so!” objected the prince. “Don’t forget for one moment that you’re a father. It’s true that you’re at the same time a judge, but not the kind who condemns at the first possible explanation, without hearing the justification on the part of the accused! Likewise, don’t forget that you’re about to pronounce your paternal verdict not upon a son, but upon a daughter! Oh, my friend! Who can comprehend that horrible labyrinth of tenderness and cruelty, of love and deception, of affection and aversion? Who can comprehend the heart of a woman?”

“My Katerina is still so innocent, and in the meantime she’s receiving letters from a lover, without her father’s knowledge. Really, isn’t this the very same thing as coming out in the morning at dawn to weed the cabbage patch?”

“I won’t speak to that, so as to pronounce a judgment upon myself,” the prince continued. “Oh, God preserve me from that! But the point is that you shouldn’t condemn your daughter severely, yet neither should you close your eyes to what she has been doing. You shouldn’t say to others, and especially to yourself, that she’s innocent! Perhaps her heart truly is innocent, but sometimes a woman is in love and her heart doesn’t ask for advice. I swear to God that vanity alone, sometimes pernicious vanity alone, changes everything. Base your behavior, my dear and venerable friend, upon that. Be the kind of father that one should be, and that’s enough. In this name alone, all of one’s responsibilities consist. Now go to your daughter.”

Prostakov was listening poorly, so shocked were all of his senses by the words spoken by his guest. However, he did trudge over to his daughter’s bedroom. Elizaveta remained behind.

“But tell me, prince, for God’s sake,” she said in a somewhat elevated tone of voice. “You advise my father not to be a severe judge, but in the meantime you yourself instill in him a lack of trustfulness in his daughter’s innocence! How is one to reconcile these two things?”

“What is innocence?” asked the prince in an even more elevated tone of voice.

Once again Elizaveta lowered her eyes.

“Young daughter of my friend!” he continued, taking Elizaveta’s hand with sensitivity. “Someone, like me, who has for such a long time been a plaything of the whims of various people, someone who has been deceived so much, someone who has been so deprived of peace and quiet, – oh, someone like that should be the unhappiest of all the sons of the world if his eyes weren’t any more farsighted than before, when he used to consider himself happy and successful after catching a spring butterfly or plucking
burdock to place in a crown on his fiancée’s head! Don’t think, however, my young friend, that I was a misanthropic hater of mankind, and especially a misogynistic hater of women. No. Now, at an age when my hair is beginning to turn white, I still love the lovely color in nature. But I also love to distinguish a burdock plant from a rose. Elizaveta! Long ago I understood the beating of your heart. Looking into your eyes, I admire what I see there. Yesterday I uncovered your sister’s secret and revealed it to your easygoing father. But, Elizaveta! Every day I observe the flame in your eyes, the fluctuations of your breast, the roses that make their appearance on your cheeks and then disappear in a flash, and I remain silent. I see right through your heart, I see its innocence, and I admire it silently. You shall always dwell in innocence, Elizaveta, and God shall reward you for that!”

He wiped his eyes with a handkerchief and left the room. The embodiment of sobbing innocence was covering her face with her hands.

She was still in this position when her father entered the room, leading Prince Chistyakov by the hand.

“Elizaveta, get out of here!” he said.

Left alone, the two men maintained their silence for a long time, until Prince Chistyakov broke it at last by asking, “What did she say?”

“You were right,” replied Prostakov, as if he were being roused from sleep. “You, my friend, know the heart of women very well! She confessed to everything, recounting how the prince had made a declaration of love to her, how he had pleaded with her to accommodate his desire, and how she, taking pity upon him for his sufferings, assented to him asking me for her hand in marriage.”

“I didn’t even know that one could give one’s hand in marriage out of pity,” said the prince.

“Don’t be so very exacting, my friend! Here’s a letter from the prince.”

“Well, wasn’t I the one who told you so?”

“Right from the very beginning, I gave you your due. I still haven’t read this damned sketch. Would you please be so kind! I can’t see anything in this light, and my glasses are in the bedroom.”

“Why do you call it a damned sketch?” said the prince. “If this prince, in his essence, is truly capable of love, if he, at last, feels that which up until now he hasn’t felt for even one single woman, although he has loved thousands of them on end, that’s to say, if he has come to know, through his own experience, tenderness, has come to know the gentle, and by no means tempestuous, stirrings of the heart, stirrings that say to a man,
‘Formerly, you could love many women, and you were unhappy, but with her you shall only be happy,’ then in that case this shall be a blessed sketch. We shall see!’

“Most gracious maiden! I thank you a thousand times over for the scrap of paper given to me in which you permit me to ask your most venerable father for your hand in marriage! And so, my sweet young friend, and so your tender heart responds to mine? Oh! How happy I am at this moment! I hope that your father shall not refuse to grant me your hand in marriage, since you have already granted me your heart. He’s somewhat miserly, that’s the reason why your elder sister remains, to this day, a spinster. But I have an estate, I possess some money and some precious gems. I won’t be requesting anything from him, except for the hand of his adorable daughter. For several weeks, I’m going to be visiting the villages that I own. After I have arranged agricultural matters over there, I shall be asking in writing for your father’s permission to come back to your home as your fiancé. My well-being shall be complete when I shall have received a satisfactory reply from him.

Prince Svetlozarov.”

“Well, so what do you think of this?” asked Prostakov after thinking properly about the matter for a moment. A look of satisfaction was evident on his face, a look that he was trying to conceal.

“I think that this letter was composed not any worse than other letters that are composed in such a situation.”

“To what end do you make a remark like that?” Prostakov objected with some annoyance.

“I want to know your thoughts on this matter,” replied Prince Gavriilo Simonovich coldly.

“I believe,” said Prostakov, once again after thinking properly about the matter for a moment, “that if his intentions are such as he explains them here, and if my daughter shall assure me that she would be happy with him, and if he comes to ask me in writing about my consent, then I don’t find anything harmful here, and I think in advance that I shall give him my blessing.”

“We shall see,” said the prince indifferently. “God grant that all shall perhaps be for the best. However, we shall see.”

“No doubt, we shall see,” was Prostakov’s reply, as he was leaving to go to the reception room.

Around dinnertime of that same day he departed, as planned, for town to purchase gifts for the upcoming Christmas holiday.
Chapter 14: A Great Discovery

A deep silence fell upon the village following Mister Prostakov’s departure for town. Maremyana was occupied with kitchen tasks and the darning of old linen. Katerina walked about looking crestfallen and didn’t do anything. Looking at herself in the mirror occasionally, she noticed that she had lost a little weight. Elizaveta, as before, occupied herself with her lessons with Nikandr. And Prince Gavrilo Simonovich usually sat in his little peasant hut in the garden, reading the *Lives of the Saints*. Only twice a day would he leave that hut to go to the house to have dinner and supper. And all of them together were glad to see, while Prostakov was absent from home, that the tempest within Katerina’s heart was quieting down. They would have been able to think the same thing about Elizaveta as well, but none of them knew about the conversation that she had had with Prince Chistyakov, and neither he nor she had any desire to reveal anything about it. And not everyone’s eyes were as discerning as those of Prince Gavrilo Simonovich.

Day after day passed by. Maremyana unrelentingly asked the prince to continue the narrative account of his life story, but he didn’t want to do that without Prostakov around, and so he flatly refused. What was there to do? A tiresome monotony was tormenting everyone, except Elizaveta and Nikandr. In every moment that they spent together, in every activity that they engaged in, they were finding thousands of various charms in one another, and they were content and happy.

Every day Maremyana would repeat over and over again: “My God! All of the linen has been darned all over again, and yet he’s still not back.” Every day she would also add: “He’s probably is running late, but he’ll be back today.” She would sit with a lit candle until midnight; but he would still not be back, so she would put out the candle, sigh, and go to bed. What a marvelous thing it is – the habitude of a husband to his wife and of a wife to her husband – even if they never loved each other with that impetuous, ardent kind of love that’s depicted so wonderfully in books sometimes by those who have never felt it themselves! And why shouldn’t it be this way? Isn’t it often the case that a poet, while sitting at a soiled desk by a frozen window on a winter’s night, shivering all over from the severe cold and blowing on his ossified fingers every minute, – isn’t it often the case, I say, that he describes, on the sheet of paper lying right in front of him, all of the charm of a spring morning? His shepherd and shepherdess are strolling along a flowery meadow, enjoying the beauty of a cloudless sky; flowers are exuding their sweet fragrance; trees are adorning themselves with fresh young leaves; gurgling streams, sparkling with foam, are inviting the sweet couple to repose! “Oh, how charming this is!” says the poet to himself, his teeth chattering from the cold. “Oh, what a delectable picture this is!” says the poet, as he himself, meanwhile, looks at the thick spiral of vapor coming out of his mouth as he exhales.

If it happens with great people – such as the poets, the sons of Zeus, the prophets on earth – that they say the complete opposite of what they feel, and that solely by force of habit, then why would Maremyana not love her husband likewise by force of habit, having lived with him for about twenty-five years in a marital union? Living together with him all of this time, she almost never agreed with him on anything, and it was only the
imperious look on her husband’s face, for all the meekness of his nature, that was able to preserve this advantage, that could stop her tongue from flapping. But when he wasn’t at home, and especially when he was gone for several days, she genuinely missed him and grew annoyed, forgetting entirely that he was merely a captain, while her father had been a born nobleman who hosted balls, theatre performances, and masquerades. Her daughters were missing him as a kind father, nothing more. Katerina was afraid that he might resume his moral admonitions, the ones that he had heard in the reasoning of the prince. And Elizaveta, without that worry, was happy. Only Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was awaiting the return of the master with unfeigned impatience, for he loved him not by force of habit, as his wife did, not from a sense of filial obligation, as his children did, but as a friend, loving in him solely the good, sensitive heart that was still flourishing in the cold winter of his declining years of old age. Snow was whitening atop his head, but in his soul, in his heart, lovely spring roses were blooming. It was in this disposition that Christmas Eve found the family.

The day was a very awful one, the kind that could only occur at the end of December. The wind was blowing from all different directions; snowflakes were falling, swirling, surging. In a word, it was a terrible snowstorm or blizzard. Mrs. Prostakov avouched that only her grandmother, who was seventeen years old during the time of Peter the Great’s campaign, had seen a comparable storm, and that if God were to unleash a third storm of this magnitude upon the Russian land, then it would almost certainly mean the end of the world. Everything was gloomy, awful, and vacant throughout the entire house. Everyone was silent: if one of them reluctantly asked a question, another even more reluctantly replied to it. Prince Chistyakov, who had arrived in time for dinner, was all huddled up, shivering. Mrs. Prostakov kept repeating, over and over again, “My God! If such a snowstorm were to find him on the road!” Everything fell silent, and it was gloomy again, just as before. Only Elizaveta and Nikandr, being animated by the divinity that was filling their hearts and being warmed by the ardor of the love with which they breathed, were sitting quietly in their tutoring room. Not only was a storm, a snowstorm, or a blizzard unable to interrupt their studies, but I can say, with assurance, that such a phenomenon of nature was imparting to their thoughts that indescribable delight of pleasure, that ineffable bliss that loves to feed upon the extraordinary, since its flame is unique to a singular object in the world.

“Really, what’s the good of such wondrous things as bits of scholarly knowledge imported from overseas!” said Maremyana, yawning and looking at her yawning daughter Katerina and at the yawning Prince Chistyakov.

“My late father never wanted to have us study these things, despite the fact that he had his own theatre in our house.”

“But just take a look at Elizaveta! It’s as if she were picking flowers on a merry summer’s day, despite the fact that snow is beating against the windows. Oh, scholarly knowledge imported from overseas! . . . Katerina! I would have wanted you to study this more diligently. It’s a pleasure, truly, to watch Elizaveta studying.” So as not to disturb the two young people while they were doing their academic exercises, Maremyana walked on tiptoes toward the doors and stopped there. Katerina and Prince Gavrilo
Simonovich were sitting quietly next to the stove.

The young lovers were reading some book, and they were deeply moved by it. On this occasion, they were conducting a lesson not about scholarly knowledge imported from overseas, since even Mrs. Prostakov could understand some of what they were saying, and they were speaking in Russian.

Nikandr was reading aloud: “Oh, you, everlasting, benevolent, life-giving flame, poured over the entire orb of creation. Oh, love! My soul blesses you, stretching out before the throne of celestial mercy with gratitude for having placed you in my heart!”

He stopped reading and put the book down. He looked with a feeling of inexplicable tenderness at the luxurious loveliness in which Elizaveta’s eyes were swimming, at the stirring of her bosom, which gave the happy lover to know: “I’m certain of this, for I myself feel the same way.”

“Do you understand, Elizaveta,” he asked, “the full force of these words?”

“I feel that force,” she replied, glancing at him. A scarlet glow illuminated her cheeks, and her eyes glistened. Nikandr lay his head upon her bosom, sighed, lifted up the book, lay it back down again, and, it seemed, felt a sweet torment devouring him, but not for all the riches of the world did he wish to be cured of that torment.

“It’s as if they are taking part in a theatre performance,” Maremyana Kharitonovna thought to herself, not at all understanding a conversation of this sort.

Elizaveta broke the silence: “Why are you so gloomy? Is it because it’s not enough for you to share that sacred feeling that fills our souls and with every moment animates our being? Or is it because we are unfortunate and unhappy at the present time? We shall have to be satisfied with this until such time as merciful God makes us even more fortunate and happy in the future!”

“Take a look at this, if you will!” her mother said to herself. “She’s speaking exactly the same way as that madcap actress who helped my father to ruin himself. Yes, truly, she is exactly the same as that actress!”

Nikandr replied: “Lovely maiden! Yes, that’s so. Loving you with a most sacred love and seeing that love being requited by you is a blessing that I wouldn’t exchange for all of the blessings of this world! But you don’t have the authority to arrange your life by your own hand: you have parents. No matter how gentle, no matter how kind your father is, he’s nonetheless a wealthy nobleman, while I’m the poorest of creatures in the entire Russian land, one who finds himself with neither a father, nor a mother!”

**ELIZAVETA:** “You shall find them in our family. As soon as my father returns, I shall reveal everything to him. I shall plead with him, beseech him, implore him.”
NIKANDR: “And what if he refuses to give me your hand in marriage?”

ELIZAVETA: “Don’t frighten me with such cruel divinations! But if he were indeed to extirpate all of his pity toward me and look upon my bitter torments with indifference, – well, what of it? He can only refuse to allow me to join my life with the one to whom my soul is devoted. But all of the earthly forces in the world are powerless to have me join my life with that of another. The laws of heaven extend to the wealthy as well as to the poor, to the noble as well as to the plebeian, to the parents as well as to their children.”

NIKANDR: “And while banished Nikandr shall be dragging out his doleful life in the wilderness, some handsome young nobleman shall visit the Prostakov home.”

ELIZAVETA: “Even if he were to be an angel incarnate himself, I wouldn’t pay him any attention!”

NIKANDR: “Oh, my inestimable friend! You still don’t know the meaning of time, of the insistence of parents, of the entreaties of a handsome young man.”

“Nothing in this world shall separate our souls,” Elizaveta exclaimed solemnly, extending her arms out toward him. And Nikandr, with the quickness of the wind, jumped up from his chair and plunged into her warm embrace.

Maremyana, wiping the tears from her eyes, said in a breathless voice: “No, this isn’t the way that it’s done in a theatre performance!”

Her horrible scream resounded throughout the entire house.

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich and Katerina jumped up in terror. Members of the household staff came running in from all corners of the house: from the maidservants’ room, from the servants’ room, from the kitchen. And they all listened as Maremyana, standing at the threshold and slapping her haunches with both hands, was shouting frightfully: “Idler, rogue, thief, monster, fiend, devil, demon!” But none of these people knew the reason for such anger, and they all looked at one another, gaping in amazement with their mouths wide open. Only Prince Gavrilo Simonovich and Katerina, with tender complicity, were looking at the offenders, who were standing there in a state of some level of unconsciousness. Who could describe the surprise of Prince Gavrilo when he saw that Elizaveta, – instead of running off in terror to her bedroom, falling into a dead faint upon the bed, and surrendering herself up to paroxysms of hysterical crying, – takes the astounded Nikandr by the hand and, with a gentle majesty, leads him toward her mother, at which point the two of them drop down upon their knees?

“Mother!” she said, lifting her eyes up to her. “In the person of this young man, I present you with the gift of a son.”
“Oh!” Maremyana began to shout again, stretching both of her arms out to them with vehement anger. “Oh, you shameless, good-for-nothing girl! Is this what I taught you?” She rushed toward the both of them, but the devil tripped her up: the large pocket on her skirt caught against the key in the door lock, and she darted forward and fell like a rock upon the two offenders kneeling in front of her. And they all started rolling on the floor.

“Help me! Help!” Maremyana shouted, getting up from the floor. “These brigands shall be the death of me yet.” And, upon saying this, she ran up to Elizaveta and gave her two very sound slaps to the face, and then it fell to Nikandr’s lot to receive the very same gift, only with specified percentages of interest. Elizaveta was on the verge of losing consciousness. They picked her up and carried her over to the bed, where they lay her down. Nikandr stood there like one possessed. He set his eyes upon Maremyana and was motionless.

“Why are you looking at me like that, you murderer?” she said, straightening out her crumpled bonnet. “Get out this very minute, get out of this house, and if, at any time, you show your face near our house again, then don’t blame us for what shall happen to you. Get out of here, get out!”

“Oh, penury!” said Nikandr, walking out of the room with sluggish steps and wringing his hands. “Oh, Divine Providence! Why do you endow poor people with a heart? Why do you make those people, whom fate has condemned to a lifetime of affliction, even more unfortunate and unhappy?”

Exclaiming in this fashion, the poor young man trudged over to the small peasant hut in the garden. There he found Prince Gavrilo Simonovich packing his valise, or, more accurately, his leather handbag, and large tears, one after another, were falling onto his linen.

“Oh, penury! Oh, Divine Providence!” Nikandr exclaimed again, and he threw himself facedown upon his bed. When the initial tempest in his heart had passed, he stood up, walked toward the prince, and asked him in a soft voice: “What is it that you’re doing?”

**THE PRINCE:** “I’m packing your valise. You see, they have declared that you must leave here.”

**NIKANDR:** “I don’t need to take anything with me. I’ll go with what I’m wearing now while standing here. Why go to my death with a burden on my shoulders?”

**THE PRINCE:** “That’s true. But why go to your death?”

**NIKANDR:** “What’s that you say? Do you think that I’ll continue to live after all that has just happened?”

**THE PRINCE:** “Of course, I do. That’s precisely the reason why I’m packing your valise.”


NIKANDR: “You understand the human heart very poorly.”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich looked at him rather sternly at first, but then, taking his hand with fatherly tenderness, he said: “Young man! You can see the gray hairs on my head and yet still you speak this way to me! Why would you think that I haven’t endured many such tempests as the one that you’re suffering presently? Oh, my young friend! You’re still studying, trying to get to know people’s hearts, while I’ve had enough of that. The end of my days is not far off. And so listen to your elder: he shall speak to you like a father.”

“Patience is the greatest of all human virtues. Store everything in your heart and shield it with patience. Don’t think that only poor people have need of it! No, not at all! People lying on opulent beds and sitting on lustrous thrones not infrequently lament their fate without the virtue of patience. It will elevate you in your own eyes, and that’s the best thing of all. Let people revile you, let them blacken the memory of you with slander. You shall glance up at heaven, you shall deliver your soul to the source of all virtues, and you shall say: ‘Heavenly Father! I’m innocent!’”

“You’ve been ordered to leave, and so go ahead and leave! You’ve been ordered to leave today, during a storm, one that’s so terrible that even the dogs aren’t coming out of their burrows. What’s to be done! You’ve been ordered to leave, and they have the right to order you to do this. Comply with their wishes and leave. Your valise is ready.”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich took a small purse out of his pocket and gave it to his young friend, saying: “Here are fifty ten-ruble coins, made from pure gold. They’re for you. You’re surprised? You want to ask me where I could have got my hands on so much money as this? Oh, that doesn’t concern you! This money has cost me many a woeful hour! And I’ve wept, my son, and I’ve suffered in my day, but not for long. I took the balm of patience, and I calmed down. I’m certain that you’ll apprise me of your place of temporary residence, especially if you’ll have need of anything. As much as it’s in my power, I shall help you, and two thirds of what I have I would cede to you. Forgive me, my son. And may God bless you!”

Nikandr fell to his knees. Prince Gavrilo Simonovich placed his hands on Nikandr’s head, lifted his eyes up to the heavens, and said tearfully: “Merciful God of all creation! Deign to send to this youth in his present life still more joyous hours, if he shall be kind and good, and if he shall not deviate from your paths!”

Then he placed the valise on Nikandr’s shoulders, fastened it, and, taking him by the hand, led him out of his small peasant hut in the garden.

“Forgive me, my son!” “Forgive me, my benefactor!” – these were the only words that the youth and his elder uttered in their final exchange. Nikandr’s sobs could be heard from a distance away.
Chapter 15: Despondency

After such an unpleasant day, there followed a still more unpleasant evening. The snowstorms and blizzards hadn’t abated; the wind was howling across the garden and jingling in the cracks of the shutters for the windows. Elizaveta was talking deliriously while lying in her bed. Katerina was weeping and sighing while sitting on the edge of her bed. And Madam Maremyana Kharitonovna, whose initial outburst of anger had now passed, was running from room to room, calling for help from all of the domestic servants. They all came, but no one was able to provide any help.

I don’t know how to combine both pomposity and kind-heartedness in a single heart. These two nuances of one’s disposition, however, were united in Mrs. Prostakov. To expel Nikandr from their house in such foul weather was an act of pride and haughtiness. To regret doing this two hours later was characteristic of her compassion and kind-heartedness. What troubled her most of all was the thought of what and how she should tell her husband about this incident. He was incomparably sweet-tempered, but from the first day of their married life he had wanted to be the boss in the house, and he had been that up until now. Dozens of times, at every whistling of the wind in the windows, she would run over to the window, take a look, and would have given up a dozen of her best dresses if only she could see Nikandr returning. She would watch, she would look, and she would listen, but all that she saw was the snow falling and all that she heard was the whistling of the wind. This is how the night found the Prostakov family at home in their village. Elizaveta dozed off for a short time, or, as her mother would say, fell asleep.

The chimes struck nine o’clock. “Oh, how late it is!” said the mother and her daughter, sighing and glancing at one another. “How late it is, and yet he’s still not back!”

I consider it somewhat proper for me here to provide a brief treatise on the words “Oh, how early it is!” and “Oh, how late it is!” And to do all of this at one and the same time.

When an unfortunate and unhappy criminal, sitting in a dungeon, awaits the sound of the nine o’clock chimes, when they summon him to those secret places, where chains, tongs, axes, and all of the weapons used for torture are lying, then he, hearing the sound of the bell, winces and says, gnashing his teeth, “Oh, how early it is!”

When a love-struck young man, receiving, for the first time, a tender, propitious smile from his belle, who appoints a sweet tryst beneath the shade of a branchy oak tree, as soon as the evening glow appears and stars dot the heavens, he is waiting, afraid to breathe, afraid to make the slightest sound. He listens, the chimes strike nine o’clock, and he says with a sigh: “Oh, how late it is! and she is still not here yet!”

I could cite no fewer than a thousand examples from which the reader would see that, at one and the same time, it seems early for some people, late for others. But incidents of the highest importance are drawing me away, namely, how, just as soon as the Prostakov women, – the mother and her younger daughter, – uttered “Oh, how late it is,” the sound
of the lash of a whip resounded in the courtyard. The clatter of the hooves of tired horses and the noise made by servants could be heard.

“He’s arrived home! He’s arrived home!” was resounding from every quarter. Maremyana and Katerina were watching the door to the reception room, not daring to take a breath, when, after several minutes, Ivan Efremovich tumbled into the reception room, dressed in his travel vestments. Following all of the greetings, endearments, questions, and answers, Prostakov said: “I would’ve been home by dinner time, if the weather had not been so insufferable. The wind was striking the eyes of the horses, and they, from want of habit, were becoming rabid: they were constantly swerving and tearing the harness. It took all that we had to repair it.”

While the servants were carrying in large boxes filled with his purchases, and then opening them up, Prostakov asked: “Why is it that I don’t see the others here? Where are they?”

“I think,” replied Maremyana in embarrassment, “that they’re already asleep.”

“Asleep?” said her husband incredulously. “It’s surprising that both Prince Gavriilo Simonovich and my Nikandr, and my kind, gentle Elizaveta would be asleep, while my wife and Katerina would be awaiting the arrival of their father and friend! Avdotiya! Go wake up the young lady and order her to come here. Ivan! Go wake up Gavriilo Simonovich and Nikandr. Tell them that I’ve arrived.” The servants withdrew, and Prostakov started to show his family members the gifts that he had bought for them.

“This is for you, my dear,” he said to his wife. “Here’s some taffeta, here’s some satin, here’s some muslin, and all sorts of similar nonsense. And this is for my daughters, with the following breakdown. In this box, there is some cloth, cashmere, good canvas, and other things of that sort for the prince and his colleague. And in this other box, for one final breakdown, there are several good Russian and French books, a collection of prints by a famous artist, a box of paints, and a few more little things. Why is it that I’m not seeing anyone else coming here to greet me?”

Avdotiya came in, and the look on her face alone was enough to explain in advance the answer to that question. No matter how much Maremyana stared at her, no matter how much she winked at her, no matter how much she grimaced at her, what could the poor girl understand, when all that she knew was by way of guessing?

“Shall Elizaveta be coming out any time soon?” asked Prostakov.

“She won’t be coming out at all,” replied Avdotiya. “She has a head fever, she has chills all over her body, and she has God knows what else.”

“What’s the meaning of this?” the surprised old man asked with the concern of a father.
“This illness shall pass,” said Maremyana with a certain feigned calmness. “Soon after dinner, she started feeling a little poorly: her head began to ache. Surely it’s just a minor cold, but it shall soon pass. She shall feel much better if we allow her to rest.”

“So be it,” was Prostakov’s reply, “but where is . . .”

At this moment, Ivan entered the reception room. “What is it?”

“Prince Chistyakov won’t be coming!”

“Surely they have all decided to make my holiday worse than a mere workday,” Prostakov said angrily.

“Why is it that His Excellency won’t be coming, when I asked him straight from my heart to welcome me home? What does he deign to be doing that prevents him from coming?”

The servant replied: “He’s sitting in a corner of his room; there’s a lighted candle and a Bible in front of him. He, it seems, isn’t reading it, but is instead looking up at the ceiling and weeping bitter tears.”

A terrible frost, one that was a hundred times colder than the blizzard howling out in the courtyard, permeated Prostakov’s bosom. “He’s weeping?” he said in a wild voice that made Maremyana and her younger daughter begin to tremble. “He’s weeping beneath the roof of my house! He, a virtuous man to whom I have given shelter! Oh, I pray to God that my family isn’t to blame for his tears! Otherwise, I myself shall request that bolts of thunder rain down upon the heads of those insensitive people who are responsible for extracting tears from the eyes of this unfortunate, unhappy, but good and kind, man.”

“How can one know, my dear?” said Maremyana. “Everyone has his own reasons!”

“No doubt,” her husband replied. “And I don’t even want to penetrate into the secrets of his heart until it shall open itself up of its own accord. But what about Nikandr?”

They were all profoundly silent.

“I must have lost my way en route, and I’ve accidently stopped in at an insane asylum,” Prostakov said with annoyance. “Where’s Nikandr, and what’s he doing?” he asked a servant, who was standing there like a statue and who didn’t utter a single word in reply to this question.

Prostakov glanced over at his wife with a searching look. Trembling, she took him by the hand, led him into the living room, and said: “My dear! Nikandr is no longer staying in our house!”
“Where then is he staying?” her husband asked, with the tone of voice that he might use if his wife, when wishing to straighten his necktie, were to tear off the entire end of the jaconet, so poorly was she able to control her trembling hands. But she had to explain everything the way that it was. Maremyana was drowning in her tears as she recounted to her husband the daytime scene: the reading, the confession, the embraces, the slaps in the face, and the expulsion from the house. “I think, my dear, that even you would have done the very same thing,” she said toward the end, snuggling up to her husband.

Prostakov stood there for a long time in a most gloomy mood of despondency. He looked now at his wife, now at the snow, which was still clinging to the windows in whole piles. Then he took a seat and asked her absentmindedly: “What is it that you told me just now?”

Maremyana took courage somewhat and went up to him with the look of a person whose actions had formerly been calumniated due to ignorance, but who now had been exonerated and had regained all of his prior trust. She told him: “I think that you yourself would have done justice to my actions and that you yourself wouldn’t have wanted to see temptation taking place in your own home and, God forbid, over time, debauchery as well. You likewise would have ordered Nikandr to leave, that ungrateful, that . . .”

“Perhaps,” her husband retorted more loudly than usual, so as to put a stop to the fervent eloquence of his wife. “Perhaps I, too, would have done the same thing, and precisely the very same thing. But I swear, by the great interpreter of the human heart, that I wouldn’t have done it as terribly as you did! It’s true that I never had it in mind to give Nikandr the hand of my daughter in marriage. And, what’s more, even Prince Gavriilo Simonovich himself says that one should never forget decorum: everyone should follow his own road, and not impertinently slide ahead, but neither should he remain behind only due to pusillanimity. What’s the whole point here? Nikandr fell in love with our daughter: it’s a very simple act of nature and a very common one. He’s young and passionate, she’s good-looking and prosperous. And, for a poor person, that likewise serves as a remedy in matters of the heart. Elizaveta responded to him in kind, which is even more common: he’s learned, affectionate, sensitive, so what more does she need? She thought about the fact that we look upon him with favor, and so she, with all of her trust in us, as you said, extended both of her arms out to him.”

“How’s that, my dear?” asked Maremyana with bewilderment and annoyance. “You would have just stood there watching with indifference, as this dissolute wench and her young insolent fellow throw themselves at each other, wrapping their arms around each other, and falling on each other’s neck, just as the actors used to do at my father’s theatre performances?”

“You didn’t guess right at all, wife of mine,” Prostakov said in turn, likewise with annoyance. “I’ve long been telling you that I would have done the very same thing, but only not in the same manner. Noticing this indecency, – for my conscience calls this, if not something worse, then probably an indecency, – I would have led Nikandr away to his small peasant hut in the garden and said to him: ‘Young man, you love my daughter
Elizaveta, but she shall not become your wife. And so, if you are honorable, you shall leave us. Apply to me in all instances of hardship that you might encounter, and I shall assist you, as it’s within my powers, for I have come to love you, and I shall continue to love you, as long as you don’t abandon the paths of kind-heartedness and sensitivity. So, young man! You don’t have any parents. I shall take the place of a father for you, but I won’t give you Elizaveta’s hand in marriage, for ‘one should never forget decorum.’ This is what Prince Gavril Simonovich once said, and my conscience vouches that he spoke the truth. Of course, I wouldn’t have allowed Nikandr and Elizaveta to see each other, but I wouldn’t have driven him out of the house, until such time as I had found him a proper place in the civil service. You see, my dear, the results would have been the same, and the young man would have left our home showered with blessings, instead of now being encircled by a tempest whistling amidst the forest gloom or amidst a knobby field, carrying snow upon his shoulders and frost upon his face as he battles against the cold and against wild beasts in the wilderness, and as he utters, gnashing his teeth, a well-deserved curse upon our heads.”

Maremyana started to weep, her husband started to choke from tears, from anger, from vexation, and from sensitivity.

“Oh, Maremyana!” he exclaimed. “Oh, you cruel, inhumane woman! Who instills such ferocity in your heart? Is it possible, after reproaching me so much, that you don’t feel a terrible pang of conscience?”

She stood there silently. Suddenly the door to the reception room opened and Prince Gavril Simonovich entered, like a ghostly apparition in the night. His eyes were bloodshot from the tears that he had shed, his cheeks were pale, his knees were shaking. He slowly walked forward, and Prostakov, with a shriek, fell into his warm embrace. “I know the whole story,” he shouted. “All of it has been made known to me, my worthy friend. Oh, if only I could someday expiate her cruelty!”

“There is Divine Providence, and He never sleeps,” said Prince Gavril Simonovich, pointing up to the heavens.

“I believe, I believe, and I can only put my hope in Him!”

When everyone had somewhat regained their composure, Prostakov asked his wife coldly: “What did you give him for the road?” His wife glanced at him and stood dumb. “What did you provide him with?” he asked, with an air of importance, getting up from his armchair and not moving from the spot. His wife lowered her head and continued to remain silent. “Oh, I understand it all now! To my bitter misfortune, I understand it all very clearly!” exclaimed Prostakov, throwing both of his hands up to his forehead and covering his face.

“Don’t fear,” said Prince Chistyakov. “I provisioned him rather well, and he shall want for nothing for the time being.”
“You did this? But what do you yourself possess?”

“I shared with him as much as I had in my possession, bestowing upon him my parental blessing, and I let him go.”

“May the Eternal Avenger reward you and bless you,” exclaimed Prostakov, embracing him for a second time.

Chapter 16: The Yid Yanka

My God! What the passage of time can do to a person!

In the twenty-first year of my life, would I have ever permitted anyone, even the most intractable professor, to convince me that by age twenty-eight I would be able to forget, although not entirely, that which had previously been the object of my most impetuous passion, or at any rate be able to remember only the name of that love object, and remember it for only five minutes, and no more? Where did my former feelings go? Did they disappear inside me entirely? Did the blood in my veins cool? No, all of these feelings nearly grew stronger. Where then did my former self go? I myself don’t know, but I feel that this self doesn’t exist any longer, and I’m certain that seeing the object of my desire, at the mere recollection of which my soul formerly would have blazed up with a sweet fire and all of my being would have been reborn, now, I say, I glance upon that love object no differently than upon the sheets of paper which, using a red pencil, I used to besmirch with drawings of ugly mugs during the first months of my apprenticeship, or several years ago, which was even more offensive, when I besmirched sheets of paper while composing some verse quatrain. Isn’t it true that, even for great poets and artists, it’s consoling to see one’s childish works? But they look upon these works with the same smile that indicates clearly: what a difference there is between them and their current creations!

Oh, my friends! If you are weeping beneath the yoke of cruel misfortunes, take comfort! Some time shall pass, and you shall see roses blossoming on your sweetbrier plant. If you are suffering torments from the devouring passion of love and you see that the object of your desire is straying too much from a feeling of compassion, oh, take comfort and be calm! Imagine that after a few years, – well, let it be a few decades, – the beauty of your proprietresses, their female charms, the tenderness of their looks, of their smiles, all of this, all of this, shall pass, and pass irreversibly. And in place of the current goddesses there shall appear – alas! – fearsome fates, which, if they won’t cut the threads of your days instantly, then at the very least they shall slay you sluggishly, by means of growling, strumming, suspicion, spite, and malice, in a word, by means of all sorts of infernal torments.

Grant everything to time, my friends, and take comfort in the manner that I, not infrequently, take comfort, granting everything to this gratuitous physician.
Thus, in this or another manner, reasoned everyone in the Prostakov family, only, finally, every one of them truly did somewhat calm down, of course, some more and others less. Prostakov was rather cheerful and went about his business as before, that’s to say, he spent the day overseeing farming operations with Prince Gavriilo Simonovich and he spent the evening in conversations with everyone gathered together.

He had long ago reconciled with Elizaveta, only he never could cease to marvel at the fact that he himself was the one who had brought his daughter’s boarding school lover to their home.

Just like Katerina, he was calmly awaiting a call from Prince Svetlozarov. Prince Chistyakov was talking and joking, and this pleased the entire family so much that Maremyana Kharitonovna bestowed upon him a cheerful look, her husband bestowed upon him a friendly handshake, Katerina bestowed upon him a perceptible desire to listen to him more and more, and the delicate Elizaveta bestowed upon him a gentle smile.

Some readers shall perhaps remind me that I haven’t said how it was that the impoverished Prince Gavriilo Simonovich, who was almost a pauper, could give fifty gold rubles to his favorite?

I haven’t in the least forgotten about this, and I shall tell you when it seems to me apropos. Only I must forewarn you that it shall not happen any time soon.

“‘Well, my dear friend,” Prostakov said one fine day, glancing cheerfully at his guest.” “For a long time now you haven’t told us anything about what happened with you after the funeral for your venerable father-in-law, Prince Sidor Arkhipovich Burkalov? We have all gathered here together now to hear it.”

“‘With heart-felt pleasure,” replied Gavriilo, and after a short silence, he began:

“I had stopped my narrative at the point where I was entering the gates to my house, accompanied by the two honest shepherds, whom I was planning to reward for their labors by giving each one of them a crust of bread.”

“Upon entering the room, the same room where the coffin of the deceased had stood earlier, my eyes popped out of my head and my jaw dropped from a pleasant sense of puzzlement. In the middle of the room stood a table, covered with a tablecloth and set with five or six food items, several bottles of wine, and a large carafe of vodka. My guests struck a similar pose of surprise. Princess Fekla Sidorovna, meanwhile, who had already regained her health and, with Marya’s permission, could attend our funeral repast, was sitting in the corner with our newborn baby in her arms.”

“‘What’s the meaning of this?’ I asked just as soon as I had regained the use of my tongue. I was at the point of thinking again that my wife truly did possess a large treasure, but that she had concealed it from me so that I, – being by nature
generous, which I had demonstrated to her by my dragging all of my mother’s clothes over to her house and later by my sacrificing my sole piece of personal property, the cow; – wouldn’t take that treasure down the same road for a ransom. But her father’s funeral stopped me from thinking this way.”

“In lieu of giving me a reply, my wife took me by the hand and led me to the mud room, led me past the courtyard, and led me up to the cowshed, and – oh, miracle of miracles! – I could see that my cow was standing there over a large haycock.”

“Princess!” I asked with a stammer, ‘isn’t this witchcraft? Or is this a most wicked dream?’ I rubbed my eyes forcefully, wishing to make certain that what I saw was real.”

“No, my dear prince,” Feklusha replied with a smile. ‘It’s neither witchcraft nor a dream. Be seated and eat dinner with our guests, and later I shall provide you with an explanation.’ Hence, we proceeded to eat our fill of this gift sent to us from on high in such a miraculous way. The shepherds, who didn’t know anything about the origin of the splendid coffin or the source of the abundant dinner, thought that I was indeed wealthy, but that I was concealing my wealth. They ate like starving wolves, not pausing for a minute, and the only words that were heard during the entire dinner were these: ‘This wine is truly magnificent, Your Excellency, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich!’ ‘This dish has an especial taste, Your Excellency, Princess Fekla Sidorovna!’ My wife and I glanced at each other silently: she smiled, while I settled down to eat, again not understanding how my wife was able to afford buying back the cow and paying for such a splendid banquet.”

“Finally, the funeral repast came to an end. My guests, the shepherds, left, saying over again and again incessantly: ‘We’re much obliged, Your Excellency, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich!’ ‘We’re grateful beyond measure, Your Excellency, Princess Fekla Sidorovna!’ ‘This is precisely the trouble,’ I thought. ‘This isn’t the same tone of voice that you had used when you were escorting me off my trampled field.’”

“I requested from the princess the explanation that she had promised me, and she handed me a large letter. I unsealed it, I looked at the signature, and I saw, – oh, how is it that I didn’t guess this before! – I saw the signature of the Yid Yanka. I took a seat with a slight stir and read it aloud to my princess:

“Most Venerable Prince Gavrilo Simonovich! I give thanks to the Great Preordination, in whose eyes a prince and a peasant are equals, as are the village elder and the Yid Yanka. Having been predestined by Sabaoth, the Lord God of Hosts, I lend money from time to time to the Christians of this village, although only a little at a time and only an amount that I can afford to loan them. But if the princes and peasants of this village had been wealthier than me, then I am sincerely certain that poor Yanka would
have died a long time ago from starvation, and that after being tossed into a field at a crossroads, he would have become the spoils for carnivorous wild beasts. This is so! I accept pawns and I charge interest, but who doesn’t accept them? The only difference is that a Yid tolerates (sometimes by necessity) repayment of the loan several months beyond the due date, while a Christian would simply toss a fellow Christian into jail the very next day. Prince! I was born into the world with the aim of loving all of those people who surround me like brothers and friends, but no one wishes to see in me either a brother or a friend. What’s to be done? Ingratitude has sometimes been the distinguishing feature not only of entire families and regions, but also of centuries and peoples. So is the poor Yid Yanka not to expect ingratitude? Oh, no! He isn’t so lucky as that, and long-term experience has so confirmed this in him that he doesn’t even seek any remuneration, but his heart ardently loves to loan money. Don’t think, dear prince, that in telling you this I’m giving you something to make note of! Oh, absolutely not! You’re good and kind, but poor. God enjoins us to provide assistance to the poor: the God of the Jews, the God of the Christians, the God of all God’s creatures! I’m returning your cow to you, for neither I, nor my children, have any need of it right now. I want your father-in-law’s funeral repast to be, at least to some extent, worthy of the social rank of both of us, and I sincerely beseech you to accept this gift with favor. As soon as you find yourself having need of anything, come see me, and I shall endeavor to satisfy your want as far as is possible, without summoning promissory notes, brokers, and witnesses for help. Despite how pleasant it is for me to loan money to honest people, I sincerely wish (and I think that you would be satisfied with the fulfillment of my wish) that you shall never have any need for anyone. But if God on high does not deign this to be the case, know that Yanka’s heart and his trunk are open to you.

With profound esteem, I remain
your most devoted servant,

Yanka the Yid

““Oh, Yanka, Yanka!” I exclaimed, groaning. ‘Your virtue is worthy of every Christian.’”

“My wife and I spent the entire evening in raptures, dreaming about our future farming. I was cheerful and merry beyond measure, for I was looking at my son and my wife, whom I hadn’t seen for more than a day, and I thought about the return of my cow. At our leisure, we built the most magnificent of all possible castles in the air.”

“‘The cow is again back with us,’ said Princess Fekla Sidorovna. ‘What more do we need? We can sell father’s house and, after buying back the field, we can buy
a quantity of seed for the sowing. The wheat and the rye shall grow, and we'll have a good crop. Our garden is now more enormous than it was before, and there shall no longer be any need to trample it. Oh, I have a presentiment that, with time, we shall be, if not wealthier than all of the other princes in our village, then at least more satisfied, for we'll try to be content with what we might have.’”

“My wife’s prudence delighted me. I fell into her warm embrace and vowed never again to trample any gardens, and, to this day, I have kept my word. But she . . . Alas! How many tears did my Princess Fekla Sidorovna’s failure to keep her word cost me!”

“Towards nighttime, a rather severe autumn rain began to fall again. But, I can assure you, I looked upon it with pleasure, such that the state of my heart was, in our eyes, now changing acts of nature. It’s true that quite a bit of merriment was also imparted to us at the time by our treasure: by the return of our cow.”

“At this point in time, a stranger came to our house, and he said that he was a driver taking a merchant, his master, to a trade fair, that foul weather had caught them by surprise afield, that they were expecting to take shelter in this village until the weather calmed down, but, unfortunately, the lights were extinguished everywhere, and they weren’t able to get a single person to respond to their knocking at their gates.”

“I can believe that,” I said, glancing at my princess. ‘Do you recall, Feklusha, what the weather was like the night that you gave birth to our child? No one wanted to unlock the gates anywhere.’”

“There’s a difference here,’ my spouse replied, with an air of importance. ‘You were here at that time, but right now this man is driving a merchant, and, perhaps, a wealthy one.’”

“Oh, a very wealthy and very generous merchant,’ the driver joined in.”’

“Even if he were more generous than all of the generous men here on earth, I still wouldn’t be able to let him in. I have only two rooms, this one here, where we’re now standing, and another one that is ten times smaller, where we sleep. Judge for yourself, my friend: I have a small baby who cries every minute and fusses all night long. In a word, your master would spend the night more peacefully in his wagon than in my house.”

“The driver was saddened by this news, and so were we, when suddenly I remembered that I still had the entire empty house of my deceased father-in-law, and I invited the driver to quarter himself there for the night. My invitation was accepted joyously. Marya lighted a fire in the hearth to boil some water (I didn’t know at the time why this was being done for the merchant, but a few years later the light in my eyes was opened: the boiling water was meant for drinking tea)
and to warm up some roast beef. I gave to the merchant, – an old man with a terrifying beard, but a pleasant and nice-looking person, – the key to the cabinet where my father-in-law’s books were kept. I had never even looked inside this cabinet.”

“‘In the event that you take it into your head to amuse yourself for a while with some reading,’ I said with a boastful look on my face to show the merchant that I wasn’t just a typical prince in our village and that I knew how to read.’”

“‘We shall see, perhaps I shall,’ replied the merchant. ‘I intend to stay here until such time as I take it into my head to leave. I trust that you won’t charge me for the lodging.’”

“‘Godness, no! I don’t have any need for that house at all.’”

“It struck me unpleasantly, however, that instead of showing surprise at the fact that I was able to read, he would be talking about rest and relaxation. In order to astound him, and to punish him for his prior lack of attention, I told him even more shamelessly that I myself loved to read, and that my wife and I not infrequently spent entire evenings reading aloud to each other by turns.”

“The merchant lifted his eyes up at me, and I couldn’t help but start to blush, having lied so outrageously, since Feklusha wasn’t able to distinguish more than the first five letters of the alphabet. I, on the other hand, actually read only slightly worse than the bald sexton Yakov, who was the wonder of all the neighboring parishes.”

“‘That’s nice,’ said the merchant very drily. ‘I myself spend my free time reading.’”

“I left him with a feeling of dissatisfaction. ‘This merchant is either a bit stupid or very rude if he doesn’t know how to, – or doesn’t want to, – make distinctions between people,’ I said to the princess upon entering her bedroom, after having taken the night light from the table and leading her, along with our son, there.”

“The merchant stayed with us for about a week. He came by my house several times to pay us a visit, he spoke often with the princess, and, it seemed to me, he was greatly satisfied with the arrangement. We tried, as much as our circumstances allowed, to regale him. It was especially noticeable how he had been charmed by my son.”

Chapter 17: A Treasure

“Several days after the merchant had begun his stay with us, our son was baptized. When Marya, – who had been at the ceremony with the priest, the godfather, and the godmother, – came home and announced to us that they had
named him Nikandr, I winced and was struck dumb, and my princess broke out in tears. Marya, who was likewise weeping, assured us that there was no way that she could prevail upon the priest and convince him to give the child a better name."

“You’re surprised, my friends, not seeing the reason for our sadness,’” said Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, directing his attention toward the members of the Prostakov family, who were indeed surprised. “Our sadness was, perhaps, somewhat fanciful, but, for all that, it was no less painful.”

“‘Oh, the villain! Oh, the tyrant!’ I exclaimed furiously, fearing to take my son into my arms. The priest had truly made a most trenchant mockery of us, offending us and even causing us a lot of trouble. Not only in the high-ranking families of the Chistyakov and Burkalov lines of princes, but also in all of the noble houses of our village, there wasn’t a single name of that sort to be found. And thus this news saddened us beyond measure. It’s well known that every family has its favorite names, which, being passed down ancestrally from grandfathers to grandsons, produce the result that in the entire village only a few names are heard, male as well as female. My son, in accordance with the unwritten law in the village, should have been named Simon, and his son should have been named Gavrilo, and so forth, in sequence. Judge for yourselves what must have been the indignation that was felt by all of the people of noble birth in our village when they heard about my unusual and, consequently, unforgivable freethinking on such an important occasion.”

“‘How,’ asked the village elder to the guests who had gathered at his house at that time, ‘how can one do nothing but abuse the memory of one’s own father? And Prince Gavrilo obviously does this! Isn’t it said somewhere (sexton Yakov knows very well where) that the blessing of fathers is what builds homes? How then can the late Prince Simon bless his grandson Nikandr? It shall serve him right if his home, which is collapsing, crushes all of the unrighteous men. But in order for such a temptation not to spread, and in order for us not to bring upon ourselves a righteous punishment from God, I think, on the strength of the authority given to me, that I should notify everyone in the entire village that, as much as possible, they should guard against going to the home of Prince Gavrilo, since that would be trying God’s patience.’”

“I found out about all of this an hour later. The Princess Ugorova, with whom my wife had been friendly when they were still single, came to visit us. I shuddered at the thought of the danger that we all found ourselves in.”

“‘Let this sin revert back upon the head of the one who’s guilty in this matter,’ I exclaimed. ‘I swear that I’m not guilty!’”

“Noon had arrived, and I was sent to call upon my guest to settle accounts. When I entered the small peasant hut, I saw that the old man was reading one of my
books with profound interest and that five or six other books were lying by his side. The merchant removed his glasses, invited me to take a seat, and asked in a friendly manner: ‘Are these your books?’"

“‘Yes, they’re mine, and they fell to my lot by way of inheritance.’”

“‘I imagine that you don’t need them in your everyday life in this village?’”

“‘Oh!’ I said to myself, ‘obviously you don’t know that I’m a native-born prince!’ And I was already thinking of some more skillful way to let him know that I wasn’t the lowest of the enlightened people in the village, without appearing to be a braggart, when the merchant, without waiting for my reply, asked me bluntly: ‘You wouldn’t mind letting me have these seven books, now would you? You’ll have even more of them remaining.’”

“‘Why not, my dear sir, if . . .’”

“‘I don’t wish to offend, so I would give you good money for them.’”

“Upon saying this, he pulled a large leather bag out from under his blouse, untied it, counted and recounted, all of this being done aloud, and then, after laying out on the table a hundred rubles in gold coins, he asked blandly: ‘Would you be satisfied with this amount?’ I got up from the bench with a convulsive movement, all of my veins were shivering and my eyes were starting to wander. The merchant had most likely made a mistake. He misread my feeling of the highest degree of unexpected happiness for the height of indignation.”

“‘Why are you getting angry?’ he asked, grabbing again for his bag. ‘If this is too little, then tell me straight out.’”

“Upon saying this, he laid out on the table another fifty rubles worth of the same gold coins. I glanced at the money and at him, and the whole time I was in my prior state of agitation. The merchant frowned a little, laid out yet another fifty rubles, and then asked coldly: ‘Would you be satisfied now?’”

“Horror at the thought that I might offend such a venerable man returned to me somewhat the use of my senses. ‘Quite enough!’ I said, clicking my teeth and rubbing my hands, as if I were suffering from terrible chills, even though sweat was pouring off my face. The merchant assumed a cheerful look again. He gathered up the books, called for his coachman, and ordered him to place them in the wagon. Then, turning around to face me, he said: ‘I thank you, my dear host, for the quiet and comfortable quarters.’ Upon saying this, he pulled a handful of silver coins out of his pocket, laid them down on the table, shook my hand in a friendly manner, and left feeling so satisfied that it was as if he had unexpectedly received some treasure. He soon hid himself from view, but I was still in a state of semi-consciousness. It seemed to me that at the slightest noise the merchant
would return to take his money back. I jumped up with a cry, rushed over to the
table, and covered my bosom with my treasure. But the merchant didn’t return,
and I at last came back to my senses somewhat. I looked over the money again,
mechanically hid it in my pocket, and ran home like a desperate man. Both
Princess Fekla Sidorovna and Princess Makrusha Ugorelova, who was still
visiting with her, were horrified when they glanced over at me. They both
gasped, while Marya raised a cry.”

“‘What has happened to Your Excellency,’ she shrieked.”

“‘Nothing,’ I replied. ‘Where is my son Nikandr? I want to see my son, even if
they had named him not merely Nikandr, but something even more stupendous!’”

“My wife, her guest, and Marya gasped and crossed themselves. I ran to the
bedroom, caught hold of the child in my arms, flew out, like an arrow, onto the
courtyard, and shouted with all of my might: ‘This is my son Nikandr, Nikandr!’
Feklusha and the princess beseeched me to go inside the small peasant hut and not
subject myself and my son to shame in front of the entire village, for my
neighbors considered me to be in a state of despondency and insanity. But I
didn’t cease shouting even louder than before: ‘This is my son Nikandr!’”

“Little by little a multitude of people had gathered at the gates to my home. I
asked each and every one of them: ‘Do you know what my son is called?
Nikandr. Yes, princes and princesses, he’s called Nikandr!’ All of them shook
their heads, let their arms drop, and said softly to one another as they were
leaving, “‘He, the poor soul, has gone mad, and it’s no wonder: what shall poverty
not drive one to?’”

“When I had finished announcing so triumphantly to everyone that my son was
called Nikandr, they all moved away from the gates, and I went into the room
rather calmly and handed our child over to the weeping princess.”

“‘What are you crying about?’ I asked. ‘And doing so at a time when we ought to
be thanking God and celebrating?’”

“‘Go settle down, my dear prince. Perhaps that shall be able to remedy our
misfortune. The princess says that things such as these are not done for money.
Go get some sleep.’”

“‘I don’t have to do anything,’ I exclaimed. ‘Even if the priest had given our son
a name that’s even more unusual, there’s no need at this point to change his name.
You’re mistaken, my friend, it’s not the odd name of our son that has brought me
to such rapture, which you consider insanity. But know this: I have found a
treasure!’”
“‘A treasure!’ all of them exclaimed at once: Princess Feklusha, who was struck dumb and looked at me with bewilderment, as if she were considering this contrivance to be yet a new sign of my madness; Marya, who took a seat from fear of falling due to the unusual nature of this incident; Princess Makrusha, who was dying from envy, as it seemed to me. And all three of them repeated about ten times in a row: ‘A treasure? Oh, my!’”

“‘Was it by any chance the old man who was here just a short while ago that helped you, prince?’ Marya asked timidly. ‘Wasn’t he a fortune-teller of some sort or a sorcerer?’”

“‘Let him be a sorcerer or even something more than that; the only thing that matters, however, is that he really did help me to find a treasure!’”

“‘So,’ Marya continued, ‘he’s probably a practitioner of black magic: I noticed that he was reading some thick books with great diligence.’”

“The words practitioner of black magic perturbed me. It now occurred to me just how generously he had paid me for the books. I glanced at Marya gloomily and couldn’t reply to her.”

“Soon Princess Makrusha took her leave of us, but she did so, as I noticed, without her prior sincerity and rather coldly. Oh, envy! What are you doing? Why do you mock the human heart?”

“As soon as our guest, Her Excellency, had left, I hurriedly recounted to my wife and Marya about my godsend, and I showed them the money. We all marveled at either the stupidity or the excessive generosity of the merchant, or at the truly great, but concealed, worth of our books.”

“‘It’s not for nothing,’ Marya said with a sigh. ‘He’s probably a practitioner of black magic.’”

“‘Even if he had been the evil demon himself, even then, if he were to begin to do good things for people, he would change into an angel,’ I said angrily, and I ran off to see my friend, the Yid Yanka. He was extremely glad to learn of the fortunate change in my situation, and he promised to assist me with advice on how to manage my farm, but he absolutely refused to take from me the sum of money that he had loaned me for my wife’s wedding dress and that he had given me in exchange for my cow.”

“‘Yanka!’ I said somewhat heatedly. ‘When I was poor, to the point of destitution, I took from you, without blushing, the gifts that you gave me. Now, when I’m doing well, thanks be to God . . . so don’t offend me by refusing.’”
“Yanka took the money and promised to come visit us for the evening to celebrate the christening of our son. ‘You, prince, shouldn’t worry about a thing! With me being there, there shall be enough of everything!’”

“We were cheerful and merry as we parted company.”

Chapter 18: A Practitioner of Black Magic

“When I had returned home, I was beside myself with joy.”

“‘Well, wife, I’m quits with Yanka. Now you can get dressed up in your rose-colored dress without blushing from shame, and in the white one without turning pale from anger. Everything is ours, and we don’t owe anyone anything! Now we’ll discuss how we ought to manage our farm. I’m thinking of hiring a farmhand and a maid to assist Marya, and she’ll begin to look after our housekeeping and the care of the heir to our estate, while we, in the meantime, shall be working in the field, just as soon as, God willing, spring and summer arrive.’”

“‘Good,’ said my wife, who in her current circumstances didn’t want in any way to forget that she was the native-born Princess Burkalova and the current Princess Chistyakova. ‘Good, my friend, all of this is fine and good, but Mavrusha, the village elder’s daughter, has such a lovely sarafan jumper made out of blue material that it’s impossible not to be seduced by it.’ She lowered her eyes.”

“‘Being seduced is harmful,’ I said very philosophically. ‘If it weren’t for that misfortune, I wouldn’t have trampled down my garden.’”

“After remaining silent for some time, we started talking again about our future wealth.”

“‘We have already rebuilt the house and made the new one more enormous with every passing hour. Our fields are immeasurable, our herds are innumerable, our servants shine in gold and silver, and, finally, we’ll set off in a carriage harnessed to six black horses,’ I said with a smile.”

“‘No, white ones,’ my wife replied demonstratively. ‘It’s much more respectable. I’ll be wearing a white dress and a white hat, so it follows that the horses be white ones.’”

“‘You don’t have any taste at all,’ I said, lifting my nose with the air of importance of a connoisseur. ‘One needs to look for symmetry. And the bald-headed sexton Yakov talks about this very well, and one can believe him more than anybody else. He has been to Moscow and some places not very far from Petersburg itself.’”

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“Impressed by my argument, the princess didn’t know what to say in reply, but she did admit innocently that she didn’t understand very well what the word symmetry meant!”

“‘You should have said something about this a long time ago,’ I piped up. ‘I’ll explain everything to you. You have dark eyes, dark eyebrows, and dark hair, and that’s why the horses should be black! There’s symmetry for you! Do you understand?’"

“Despite this superb example of symmetry and despite the important look that I had on my face, we couldn’t agree at all. Each of us had our own notion of symmetry in our head. The argument became more heated, getting more and more explosive from hour to hour. Finally, things were close to reaching the point where I considered it necessary to lift the ancestral rod, and I wanted to make a symmetry between it and my princess’s backside, when suddenly the door opened, and I saw, to my considerable surprise, that the village elder, three peasant deputies, and five princes, all of them with a gloomy and stately look on their faces, had entered the room.”

“‘Welcome, venerable sirs,’ I said, entreating them to take a seat. I was certain that they had come to congratulate me on my good fortune, and I intended to adopt the highly seigniorial look of a boyar. ‘What say you, dear sirs, that’s new?’"

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “Well, Your Excellency, we heard some news of your recent acquisition of wealth! God grant only that this was done in a lawful manner!”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “I’m very pleased, dear Pamfil Paramonovich! God has blessed me in an unexpected way. Right now, there’s some discordance between my wife and me about how we should arrange our household and our farm. She wants it one way, while I want it another way. You have come by to see me at a good time. You, being such a wise man, and knowing thoroughly the policy for fertilizing the land, plowing, sowing, and reaping grain, can, of course, provide me with some prudent advice.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “Not wishing to sound like a braggart, I must say that I’m one of the top experts in our village on these matters, and I wouldn’t decline the offer to assist you, just as soon as you answer my questions satisfactorily.”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV (with surprise): “Questions? Questions about what?”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “You know, I believe, that I have a directive or instructions from the zemstvo court, in which it’s specifically stated that I have oversight over all matters having to do with, among other things, sorcerers, wizards, and werewolves.”
PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Fine, mister village elder.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “And under these titles there falls, of course, if, with your permission, I may call them that, practitioners of black magic.”

“Suddenly I understood where this matter was headed. Although timidity is a character trait of mine, especially when I’m standing before such a powerful man as the village elder, who had a directive or instructions from the zemstvo court, the feeling of one’s innocence, however, is the sharpest sword for cutting the weeds of slander and malice.”

“‘What more do you have to say, village elder?’ I asked haughtily, remembering that I was no longer the pauper that I had been formerly. The honorific village elder without the catchphrase sir was a blow for Pamfil Paramonovich. Since the first day of his term as village elder, he had not heard a similar insult. Bile flooded his bosom, his eyes began to sparkle, and he was quivering from anger at the affront to his honor.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “So, apparently, I must prove to you, prince, that I am indeed the village elder here, and that I have a special directive or instructions from the zemstvo court. Thus, in the name of that eminent court, I ask you, where did you receive the treasure?”

“The words sorcerer, wizard, practitioner of black magic, and treasure had inspired great fear in me before, and now, when the village elder was conducting an interrogation, one would think that I would have lost consciousness from horror, but just the opposite turned out to be the case. Here’s a new act in the drama of human nature! I decided to be brave, even if this would cost me not only the loss of my life, but also the loss of my great dignity.”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Where did I get the treasure, village elder? What business is that of yours? I’m not asking you where you recently got a ram with two sheep, a young foal, and many other things of this sort, all of which were purchased with someone else’s money, not with your own. But I didn’t ask you that, and I think that neither did any of these highly respected guests, who were gathered in your house at the time.”

“My highly respected guests were stroking their beards from time to time and, it seemed, were pleased with me.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “That’s not the point, Prince Gavriilo Simonovich. Why lose sight of the practitioner of black magic, who is able to fool people? If you had detained him and had made this known to me, then perhaps . . .”
PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “He’s a very honest old man. And if, for some reason, one can call him a practitioner of black magic, is that really due merely to the fact that he bought some of my father-in-law’s books from me? But, in truth, those books have been splendidly black since a long time ago.”

“The conversation was becoming now livelier, now quieter. At times, they threatened me with all of the punishments that had been prepared for wizards and their accomplices. At times, they cajoled me with the kind of rewards that await informers on the great villains in the world. And so I don’t know how this political conversation would have ended, if the Yid Yanka hadn’t come into the room at that moment with his workman, who was loaded down with items of food and drink.”

“‘What’s all of the noise about in this eminent assemblage? Wouldn’t it be better to spend the evening in a more cheerful and merry way than to argue over vacuous things?’”

“‘Of course it would, and we did talk about that a few times,’ said the princes and the other eminent people there, looking with paternalistic tenderness at the bottles arranged upon the table. ‘Well, there you are: Pamfil Paramonovich and His Excellency have been at odds about something the whole time.’”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “To argue over vacuous things? No, Yanka! You don’t understand anything here. If it were a matter of vodka, wine, and other liquors, then perhaps you . . .”

YANKA: “If it’s a matter involving a human being, then I, too, am able to judge, for I, too, possess a heart.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “You’re a Yid, thus you have a heart that is Yiddish!”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “There’s more love for one’s neighbor in his heart, village elder, than there is love for bribes and cavils in yours!”

ALL OF THE PRINCES: “Oh, my God! Something bad is bound to happen!”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “All right, prince, please be so kind as to come with me!”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Where to?”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “To the assembly hut. There we shall settle peacefully our dispute about the practitioner of black magic and his accomplices. I know my post very well, since I have a special directive or instructions from the zemstvo court. This is a matter of such great importance, and I don’t intend to
answer for others. Please be so kind, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, as to come along with me!”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Please be so kind first, village elder, as to go to hell! I intend to spend the night at home and, at that, to spend it cheerfully and merrily.”

“A terrible revolt had been launched. The village elder was beside himself with anger. The guests tried to incline now him, now me, toward a truce, if not yet toward a peace. Marya and Princess Fekla Sidorovna were weeping and sobbing, the child was howling. The peasant deputies, by order of the village elder, were proceeding to seize me, while I was threatening them and endeavoring, albeit in vain, to pull my hilt-less broadsword out of its scabbard. In a word, such a terrible wail, cry, noise, and bawling took place, the likes of which probably had not been heard since the creation of the world.”

“The Yid Yanka, who had been standing there silently, with his arms crossed, during all of this time, decided at last to take action. He got the crowd to move apart and asked them modestly to listen, in silence, to what he had to say. They yielded to his persuasion, and he began to speak:

‘Esteemed princes and highly venerable people of our native village! You have frequently listened to the Yid Yanka for an hour at a time, as he would exhort you in his tavern not to drink any more, and especially not to drink yourself into debt, and when he would refuse the pledges that you offered to him for a loan. But you beseeched me, I was persuaded, and so I released you into debt. In those cases, I heeded your requests and catered to your pleasure, so now you should do the same for me and heed what I have to say to you. I shall be imploring you to practice peaceableness and meekness! You’re shouting very loudly! It’s fine if you’re unable to restrain yourself. But you must admit that by speaking softly and without ardor you’re able to speak more intelligently, especially when speaking about matters of such importance as the topic of the conversation that occurred in this eminent assemblage: namely, black magic. Help me to shed my ignorance, most highly respected village elder, Pamfil Paramonovich. Explain to me what is a practitioner of black magic?’

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “An evil soothsayer.”

THE YID: “And what is a soothsayer?”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “A sorcerer!”

THE YID: “And what on earth is a sorcerer? And what exactly does he do?”
THE VILLAGE ELDER: “He plays all sorts of dirty tricks on people. He brings droughts and driving rain, he poisons cattle, he turns people into werewolves, and so on and so forth.”

“‘If that is the case, then soothsayers are truly evil people,’ the Yid continued, ‘and they deserve punishment. But let’s see: what did the old traveler do, the one who stopped at the home of Prince Gavriilo Simonovich and stayed there as his guest? Several of the prince’s large, ancient, religious books caught his fancy, and he bought them. I know these books because the late Prince Sidor Arkhipovich Burkalov brought them to me on more than one occasion to try to pawn them, but I didn’t accept them. What evil deed did the old merchant perform here? Whom did he turn into a werewolf? Nothing of the sort happened: he performed a most virtuous act. He repaired the health of the eminent, but deficient, family name of the Chistyakov princes! Thus, most highly respected village elder, Pamfil Paramonovich, and you, too, venerable princes, and all of this noble assemblage! Wouldn’t it be far better if, instead of arguing over that about which we don’t know anything for certain, and, instead of making our throats sore with terrible shouting, wouldn’t it be a hundred times better and more commendable, if we were to start celebrating the baptism of the son of our venerable host?’”

“Without waiting for a reply, he walked up to the table, filled a large goblet with fine wine, and respectfully presented it to Pamfil Paramonovich. The village elder glanced at the goblet, at the Yid, at the entire assemblage, and said, with a slight smile: ‘Truly, Yanka Yankeliovich, you’re a great tempter!’ With these words, he took the goblet, bowed on all sides, and then drank down the wine.”

“‘The princes and all of the fellow members of this eminent assemblage raised a joyous cry, which signaled that an agreement had been reached, and they sealed that agreement by shaking hands. Peace had returned. My holiday continued for a long time. We still talked and argued about sorcerers, werewolves, and practitioners of black magic, but now without an uproar, without an altercation. And, long after midnight, the assemblage broke up and everyone went home, wishing each other a good night.’”

Chapter 19: Knowledge of High Society Life

“My wife and I arranged our household and our farming fairly well. I hired the farmhand Foma and the maid Mavrusha, and I bought a worn-out old horse to replace the one that had dropped dead from starvation. I dismantled the wattle fence that separated my garden from that of my father-in-law, and in this way I saved some money for our household budget, for during the winter months I would no longer need to buy any firewood. I also bought back my field. Our days were spent attending to household and farming matters, and no one would be able to guess how we spent winter evenings, – in reading! So the most prudential idea came to me: to teach my wife to know the customs and habits of
people in high society. ‘But how,’ I thought, ‘would I be able to do this more conveniently than by the reading of good books? Here she shall see that there are princes who don’t at all resemble Prince Gavrilo, and that there are princesses of a different kind than Princess Fekla. In a word, she would come to know that, about which, up until now, she didn’t have the slightest idea.’ Oh, she did indeed come to know it! But quite too much! With this praiseworthy intention in mind, I set off for my father-in-law’s house, unlocked the cabinet, and took out around a hundred small books (the old merchant had taken all of the large ones) and, with an air of importance, I started to examine them. Almost all of them came with colored illustrations. And what could be more charming than that? The first book that fell into my hands was *Women’s Wiles*. ‘This isn’t bad,’ I said to myself, smiling. ‘I need to show Princess Feklusha what kinds of monsters there are who come from her gender, so that she shall be able to beware of them. I’m not afraid of Princess Makrusha, since on many occasions she has clearly demonstrated the chasteness of her temper. Let them be friends. But I shall think a bit about other princesses, both the native-born and the ones who became princesses through marriage, and I shall examine them a bit more carefully.’”

“Continuing to look through the books in my library, I found the following items in a row: *About Bova Korolevich, About Princess Militrisa, About Eruslan Lazarevich, About Bulat the Fine Fellow, About Ivan the Tsarevich and the Gray Wolf*, and others of this same sort. I carried all of these literary gems over to my house and, during my free time in the evenings, I started to read them aloud from time to time and to teach my wife how to know the ways of the world. Although at that time I didn’t yet know how to think very well, I did, however, know how to think almost the same thing as that man who once said: *docendo docemus*. The pleasant wonder experienced by my princess, as she listened to these tales, exhilarated me. I read aloud as well as I could, and always with ardor. Feklusha was saddened, and almost wept, hearing about how a prince or a princess, pursued by an evil wizard, was incessantly being separated from his or her beloved and how they couldn’t enjoy their love without hindrances.”

“‘Oh, how sad this is!’ she would say, groaning. ‘What, my love, would you have done, if at that time, when you were trying to climb over the fence into the bean arbor, an evil wizard had been hindering you?’”

“‘Me?’ was my reply, with a stirring of anger and threatening with my hands. ‘Well, do you really want to know what I would have done with him?’”

“‘Yes, what, my dear prince?’”

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*Docendo discimus* is a Latin proverb that means: “by teaching, we learn.” The proverb is perhaps derived from Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC – 65 AD), who says it in his *Letters to Lucilius* (Book 1, letter 7, section 8): *Hominis dum docent discunt.* (“Men learn while they teach”).
“‘Well, truly,’ I replied, after thinking it over to myself for a moment, ‘I wouldn’t have contrived something properly, but, certainly, I would most likely have done something.’”

“When I would be reading to her about the glorious exploit of some knight, about how, on a dark night, with the utmost danger, he, after breaking his neck, clambers up to the window of his beloved princess, Feklusha wouldn’t dare to take a breath, and she would fix her eyes upon me. But when I would get to the place in the story where the knight, somehow losing his footing, flies downward and falls with a thud, and although he doesn’t injure himself, for he is, after all, a knight, and thus he’s not supposed to injure himself, however, with his fall, he awakens the tsar’s guards, who hurry over and surround the unfortunate fellow, shackle him with chains, and drag him off to prison, it was precisely at this point that Feklusha would utter ‘Oh!’ and a spindle would fall out of her hands. ‘Oh, thank God!’ she would continue, after a few minutes, ‘thank God that our fence wasn’t high and that there weren’t any guards around, except for my father, who, upon returning home after visiting Yanka’s tavern, was sleeping so soundly that a hundred knights could have dropped from the sky and he wouldn’t have awakened.’ ‘But of course,’ I would reply, as usual, with a look of pride on my face, seeing that the natural gifts and the sensitivity of my spouse were improving as a result of our reading sessions together.”

“It was in such a manner of passing the time away that the spring greenery found us. Foma, my new farmhand, and I set out for the field, while the princess worked in the garden along with Marya and Mavrusha. Everything was going splendidly, and when harvest time came, I looked with paternal tenderness upon my brilliant fields and the large ripening garden.”

“‘Oh, dear father of mine!’ I exclaimed through my tears. ‘How just were those parting words of yours! And, truly, what was my field like last summer? Oh, love, love!’”

“At the end of the harvest, when we had harvested all of the grain and collected all of the garden vegetables, I had a memorial service conducted, and I hosted a funeral repast, as a sign of my filial gratitude toward the memory of my good and kind father, now departed.”

“What is there that I can recount further about this uniform way of life of mine at that time? It suffices to mention that two summers and two winters flowed by in this manner. During the summer we were occupied with agricultural work, while during the winter we were occupied with reading. Both the one occupation and the other went off very successfully. My house became filled with all sorts of good things, and Feklusha, right from the very start, developed such a passion for enlightenment, and so willingly turned to it, that in the course of these first two years of our married life she was reading and writing tolerably well. Perhaps only the priest’s daughter was able to outdo my princess in this regard, and not, by the
way, the village elder’s daughter. I witnessed all of this firsthand. My son was already walking a little, and when he would look at me, he would utter, stretching out his little arms toward me with a smile: ‘Prince daddy, daddy prince!’ Oh, how wonderful this was! I would weep from delight and embrace Feklusha, who was teaching him to prattle with such sweet words.”

“One winter evening, when I had just finished reading a most curious scene involving my knight, namely, how he, after overcoming all manner of obstacles and hazards, made it to the bedroom of his friend’s wife, and had pleasantly retired for the night with her there, the princess asked me: ‘Tell me, please, my friend, how is this possible? After all, she’s a married woman!’”

“‘So, what of it?’ ‘Look at what happens out in the world,’ I continued, burning with a restive eagerness to teach her more and more. ‘In the world, if a daughter flees from her parental home, if a son abducts an innocent girl, if a husband seduces another woman, if a wife takes a household friend into her bedchamber, – these are all such mere trifles that people hardly think about them, and even the youngest of girls, understanding a distinguished family, recount all of the subtleties of these incidents with such ease, with such sangfroid that, looking at them, temptation takes the assurance to say: ‘The poor babes! Oh, you bemoan the fact that you yourself aren’t taking the place of those who have been seduced, and you await with impatience the moments and the occasions when you can do the very same audacious thing yourself!’”

“‘But all of these things, I say to you, are mere trifles that people shall forget the very next day. Much more splendid things happen out in the world and they happen not infrequently: namely, wives there poison their husbands, – and slit their throats, – so that they can abandon them for their lovers; husbands there do the same thing to their wives, so that they can unite with their sweethearts; stepmothers there do the same thing to their stepsons, so that they can leave their estate to their children; stepfathers there do the same thing and for the same reasons. A son litigates in court against his father, a brother against his brother, a sister against her sister. They all slander each other, they all publicly blacken each other’s name, deceive each other, harry each other, and God knows what else. If it were not for the fact that they feared corporal punishment, it’s most likely poison or iron chains that would put an end to the perpetration of misdeeds of this kind.’ ‘You are perhaps surprised,’ I said to my wife, ‘asking yourself where is it that I have learned all of this, since the knights didn’t do any of these things in the books that we have read? And it’s no wonder, – they were people of the last century! It’s not unknown to you, my dear, that my grandfather spent the greater part of his life in a city. He recounted all of this in detail to my father. And since I am his nearest living relative, and thus also his heir, that’s why all of this information has reached me without any litigation.’”

“Winter passed, then came spring, then summer, and we labored by the sweat of our brow, thanking God that we had the strength and the means to do it. On one
such day, while I was in the field with my farmhand Foma, I heard a pitiful howl coming from a neighboring cornfield. We ran right over there and what did we see? Prince Akila Varfolomeyevich was mercilessly beating his wife, Princess Varvara Vukolovna. Foma and I set about pulling them apart, but for a long time we weren’t able to succeed. Finally, we somehow managed to separate them. Princess Varvara, freeing herself from the ardent embraces of her husband, started running away from the field, setting right her hair and her dress. And Prince Akila was screaming like a madman: ‘Oh, what a villainess she is! She ought to have died from shame.’

‘In cases such as these, dear prince,’ I replied with conviction, ‘you should console yourself by keeping in mind that, in high society, things happen that are much worse than this. There not infrequently . . .’”

‘To hell with this high society of yours,’ exclaimed Prince Akila. ‘The wives that live there aren’t mine, and so I have no need of them. As far as I’m concerned, they can all go hang themselves. And I’m beating my wife for . . .’”

‘Enough of this, stop, dear prince, calm down and leave all of this for a later time. It . . .’”

‘Me, calm down? No! I’m going to go see her this very minute and I’ll show her . . .’”

“His determination perplexed me. ‘He’ll really make a mess out of this,’ I thought, ‘judging by the stern look that he had on his face. If only I could divert him from committing such a grievous sin, all for a mere trifle, one that people in high society often don’t even think about.’ A very dear idea struck me.”

“Hey, prince!’ I exclaimed cheerfully. ‘Until such time as this tempest in your heart passes, spend the night at my place. You know that now, thanks be to God, I’m no longer the same way that I used to be before. My princess shall prepare a hearty supper for us, and the Yid Yanka is my bosom buddy. We’ll spend the evening merrily, while over there, at your place, your fate is in God’s hands.’”

“Prince Akila Varfolomeyevich was being slightly obstinate, but the recollection of the goodwill that the Yid had shown to me finally overcame his resistance. He accepted my offer, and, so as not to appear ungrateful, he began to harvest the corn in my cornfield with all of his might. As we were drawing close to my home, a bright moon had already risen high into the cloudless sky.”

“When I entered the room, I could see that Marya had made a fire in the stove, and that my son, young Prince Chistyakov, was sitting, with his legs crossed, on the counter and was looking at the fire.”

“Where is the princess?’ I asked.”
“‘Apparently she has absented herself somewhere,’ Marya replied. ‘I’ve just now returned from the vegetable garden, where I was pulling weeds all day long.’”

“After sitting with Prince Akila Varfolomeyevich for about ten minutes, I again asked: ‘Marya, so where is the princess?’”

“‘Really, I don’t know,’ she replied. ‘Should I perhaps go look for her at Princess Makrusha’s? For some time now, she has often been going there to visit her.’”

“‘Go to it!’ I said. ‘But first get us a lamp on the table, then stop by the Yid Yanka’s tavern and tell him that I have a guest. Do you understand? And then go see Princess Makrusha.’ Marya placed a candle on the table and left.”

“After sitting for some time, I accidently saw a folded letter at the base of the icon. I picked it up and took a look at the signature. It sent shivers running down my spine: I recognized the handwriting of my princess. Unable to remain standing on my feet, I sank down onto the bench and, with trembling hands, I unfolded the letter.”

“‘What has happened to you, dear prince?’ asked my guest.”

‘It’s nothing,’ I replied, and I started to read the letter silently to myself:

“‘My Most Excellent Prince and Most Noble Spouse!’”

“‘Your Excellency has told me such a lot of interesting things about life in high society that they have given birth to an overwhelming desire inside me to see it myself, to live in it for a while, and to ascertain, through my own personal experience, the truth of your words. Farewell, most excellent prince, and don’t be saddened. In your magnificent books, you shall find much of the same thing. The Princess Militrisa Kirbityevna abandoned her husband Durandas to follow her dearest, the handsome Markobrun. If that princess was able to do this, then why shouldn’t this princess be able to do the very same thing? And my guide is in no way worse than Markobrun, for he’s likewise a prince, only not the kind of prince like Your Excellency is. After all, Durandas took comfort, having taken the dear Princess Goloshchepa to himself as a lover. Why, then, should Your Excellency not take comfort as well, winning over the heart of some Princess Makrusha, Princess Akulka, Princess Matreshka or some other kind of princess from one of the eminent households of our village? Farewell! A postal coachman, who has fallen in love with me (I’ve been acquainted with him for a long time now), is urging me to leave your chambers sooner than planned, so that Your Excellency shall not descend upon us, laden with sickles and scythes.’”
“‘Your most devoted servant and so on.’”

“‘P.S.: Marya knows nothing about any of this. There’s nothing to question her about.’”

“I fell off the bench and dropped onto the floor like a stone. When I had come to my senses, I saw that I was once again on the bench, being supported by Prince Akila Varfolomeyevich and Marya. From the look in his eyes, I could see that he had read my woesome letter and that he was aware of my shame and vilification!”

“‘Enough of this behaving like a child, prince,’ he said, embracing me with one hand and holding a goblet of wine in the other. ‘Let’s drink to the health of the unknown hero who has played such a nasty trick on you! Evidently, brother, this prince doesn’t do things our way. Vivat!’ With this word, he drained his goblet.”

“‘You inhuman creature!’ I said with a heavy sigh. ‘You’re able to joke at a time like this!’”

“‘No matter,’ he said. ‘In such instances, dear prince, one should console oneself by keeping in mind that in high society even worse things than this have been known to happen. There not infrequently . . .’”

“‘What do I care about high society?’ I cried out painfully.”

“‘Stop, dear prince, enough of that. Calm down and leave all of this for a time.’”

“‘I’ll find calm only in the grave,’ I replied.”

“‘Nonsense, brother! One can find it even here on earth. I’m very grateful to you for bringing me back to my senses. I’ve now forgotten everything and am completely at peace. Princess Varvara knows how to prepare suppers no worse than Fekla Sidorovna, and I, too, have no quarrel with the Yid Yanka. Come on, let’s go, brother, and let’s have you spend the night at my place. Marya shall look after your son here. Over there, we shall see what God has in store for you.’”

“No matter how much he spoke, it was all in vain. A heavy sorrow was lying on my heart. The marrow had frozen in my bones: I could hardly breathe, and I thought that I would asphyxiate. Prince Akila Varfolomeyevich would console me and drink some wine, and then he would again drink some wine and again console me, until he had drunk himself blind.”

“‘Well, if that’s the case, then do as you please. May God be with you. Let Him console you,’ he said rather angrily, and he was about to leave. ‘I was going to go see Princess Varvara Bukolovna. Although, it’s true, she’s guilty, I let her know pretty well how to behave herself. It shall be a long time before she’ll start to do that again.’”
“He left. I lay down on the bed, and it was only around morning that I was able to shed a few tears, and my grief somewhat dissipated. But I was burning up with a high fever. Marya told me that I had been raving all night long. ‘What am I to do, Marya? Perhaps I shall die,’ I replied, and I again sank into unconsciousness.”

“I spent two or three nights in this fevered condition.”

Chapter 20: Farewell, My Native Village!

“In the morning of the third day following my wife’s flight, a beautiful sun arose in a blue sky. I got up from my bed, glanced at my son Nikandr, who was sound asleep, and tears began to flow down my cheeks. ‘Oh, you innocent babe,’ I said to him, ‘you don’t know the sufferings of your father. God grant that you’ll never come to know them, and especially that you’ll never come to experience them directly yourself.’”

“I touched the crown of his head lightly with my left hand, lifted my right hand up into the air, and appealed directly to God: ‘God! Don’t abandon this orphan!’ The baby awoke and extended its arms out to me with a smile. I lay hold of him, lifted him up into the air, and exclaimed: ‘Merciful God! Take him under your roof and protect him. He has no mother!’”

“A sweet feeling of consolation flooded my soul. My thoughts found clarity. It seemed to me that at this moment I had received new blood, a new heart, a whole new being. ‘What!’ I said to myself. ‘Am I surrendering myself up to a shameful despondency that’s unworthy of a man, to a tiresome idleness that’s weakening me, all because my wife was a dissolute woman? After all, has this only happened to me alone? Oh, I shall forget this ungrateful woman, and I shall begin to live for my son!’ That same morning, I set off with Foma for the field, much to the great delight of my entire family. Marya, wild with joy, didn’t know quite what to do.”

“‘Yes,’ she kept repeating, ‘I was certain that God would have mercy on you and that you would again be cheerful like before. Let Princess Fekla Sidorovna roam about the world. She won’t be more comfortable anywhere else than in her own home. She shall repent of this, but it shall be too late. God will judge her and that idler of hers.’”

“‘Let them be, Marya,’ I said with an air of importance. ‘And don’t say another word about them.’”

“IT can’t be said that I rode about my village calmly. It seemed to me that all eyes were scorching me on purpose, which was just and fair on their part. Now I would blush, now I would turn pale, and the only thing that I could do was compel Foma to urge the horse to go faster. On the ride back, I was, to be sure,
calmer, and the next day, even more so. And after about six weeks had passed, although I hadn’t forgotten about Feklusha, I remembered her without that painful feeling that tormented me during the first few days following her flight. I was beginning to believe that, with time, I would be completely consoled. I was paying visits to people, sometimes I myself was receiving people as guests, and I was saying to them: ‘Yes! Time is a wonderful healer for ailments of the soul.’”

“Alas, a bitter calamity was awaiting me! One day, at sunset, I was joyfully walking to the village alongside the cart that was carrying the last sheaves of grain. ‘Thank God,’ I said to myself, ‘that I’m done with the field. Now my household tasks shall begin. That’s much easier work.’ With a smile, I put in order a large bunch of cornflowers that I had gathered as a gift for my son.”

“When I entered the room, I didn’t see anyone there. ‘Perhaps they’re out in the garden,’ I thought, and so I took off to go there. But the only one there was Mavrushka, who was pulling out carrots and turnips. ‘Where are the others?’ I asked. ‘I don’t know. I’ve been here ever since dinner,’ was her reply. Once again, I went inside the room and, with complete indifference, without any kind of evil foreboding, I sat on the bench and watched merrily as Foma was transferring the sheaves of grain from the cart to the barn.”

“At last, Marya came in, and she was all by herself.”

“‘What! You’re home already?’ she asked. ‘But where are those venerable guests?’ And with these words she placed two bottles of wine on the table.”

“‘You’ve lost your mind, Marya!’ I exclaimed petulantly. ‘What guests are you talking about? I haven’t seen anyone here since I came home. Where’s my son?’”

“Marya became speechless.”

“‘Where’s my son!’ I exclaimed angrily. ‘Where did you leave him?’”

“Marya turned pale and said with a trembling voice: ‘He stayed here with the guests while I went to see the Yid.’”

“I turned to stone. At this point, a bitter premonition filled my soul. I sat there on the bench like an immobile statue, directing a terrible look in Marya’s direction. ‘Tell me everything that happened,’ I said to her, gnashing my teeth. And Marya revealed that, not long before, an expensive-looking carriage had appeared in the village, and it went directly to my house. Curiosity led Marya to go out beyond the gates. Two gentlemen came out of the carriage and asked her: ‘Isn’t this the home of Prince Gavrilovo Simonovich Chistyakov?’ ‘Yes, it is!’ ‘Is he at home?’ ‘No, he’s out in the field.’ ‘He’ll not get angry, of course, if we rest for a few minutes at his home, now will he?’ ‘Oh, no! He’s such a good and kind man.’”
“‘They came in and sat down. ‘Isn’t this his son?’ ‘Yes, it is!’ ‘What’s his name?’ ‘Nikandr.’ ‘How old is he?’ ‘Around two and a half.’ ‘Who baptized him?’ ‘Father Onisifor, the priest in our village!’ The guests, it seemed, were pleased with her answers. ‘Come here, little one,’ said the older of the two men, and he gave the boy a spice cake and a trinket. The child was delightfully happy and dared, finally, to sit on the old man’s knees! ‘Do you, old woman, happen to have some good wine in your house?’ the old man asked. ‘No,’ I replied. ‘Prince Gavriilo Simonovich doesn’t stock up on wine, but he does get some from the Yid Yanka, who runs a tavern, in the event that guests show up.’ ‘And is this tavern far from here?’ ‘Rather far! It’s on the other side of the village.’ ‘What are we to do?’ the guest said. ‘You need to take the trouble, old woman, to make a quick trip there, and we shall reward you for your labor.’ ‘I would be glad to do it, but with whom am I to leave the child?’ ‘We’ll watch over him for a while.’”

“In a word: the guests gave Marya some money, she set off for Yanka’s tavern, and, when she came back, she found only me at home, while the carriage with the courteous guests had disappeared, and, together with them, my son Nikandr, was no longer there.”

“‘Everything is clear to me now! They’ve stolen him,’ I cried out in such a voice that Marya began to tremble.”

“‘God is merciful,’ she said, ‘perhaps the guests have left these parts, but the child is wandering around the village somewhere. After all, this used to happen not infrequently even before. May the Mother of God preserve him! Is it really possible, after all, that these guests are cannibals?’”

“I rushed out onto the street. I ran, crying everywhere: ‘Nikandr! My son! Where are you?’ I visited every house, I asked every passerby, young and old. ‘I don’t know’ was the universal reply that I received.”

“Twilight came. Carrying around an entire hell inside my soul and feeling extreme exhaustion, I trudged home, howling and groaning. This is weakness on my part, of course, but every father should imagine himself in my place and he, too, would begin to moan. And, if not, then I would tell him to his face: ‘This isn’t your child, he’s the fruit of the profligacy of your wife. One can deceive a gullible husband, but one can never fool nature.’”

“In this state of mind, I entered the house, and a new misfortune struck me with a new horror: Marya was lying unconscious on the floor. Foma and Mavrusha were weeping, straining to lift her. ‘What’s next?’ I said, taking a step back.”

“Foma replied, ‘When you left to go search for the young prince, Marya was weeping, groaning, and wringing her hands. ‘Oh, what an unfortunate and unhappy woman I am!’ she kept saying over and over again. ‘Perhaps I’m the cause of this loss! But God is merciful; He, of course, shall have pity upon me.’”
‘She still had hope, and she was reciting prayers. But when she heard your groaning and the sound of your voice, she gasped, fell onto the floor, and died.’ This blow warded off the first one, and thus I didn’t lose my mind, although I came very close to doing just that. Placing my hand to Marya’s heart, I could feel that its beating had indeed stopped. ‘Yes! She has died. We need to lift her up,’ I said softly.”

“Even I myself couldn’t understand my feelings. Yes, I had lost my son! An immeasurable loss, but Marya loved me with a mother’s tenderness. Oh, how woeful, how lamentable, that night was for me! What does the loss of an unfaithful wife mean as compared to the loss of a son? Just the thought of the unfaithfulness of the former already provides some sort of consolation! But what could the innocent babe do? Oh, how painful my situation was!”

“On the third day, I lowered Marya’s body into the grave next to my venerable father, Prince Simon. I couldn’t weep. I wandered about during the day like a nocturnal apparition. No matter how much the Yid Yanka tried to console me, I acted poorly and showed little concern for him. Several more days passed in this manner, when one day, while sitting there grieving, I caught sight of several of my books gathered together in a corner beneath the bench. These were the books, with which I had tried to enlighten my princess. That woeful recollection tore me to pieces. ‘You nasty compositions!’ I exclaimed, ‘Well, your author is going to endure the same sufferings in hell that I’m going to treat you with right here and now on earth.’ ‘Mavrusha! Light a fire in the hearth, and make it a bit larger than usual.’ Meanwhile, I bent down and started to pull the books, one by one, out from under the bench and to toss them on the floor. But, – oh, what a miracle! – while I was pestering selected works from my library in this fashion, tearing their pages to pieces and gnawing at some of the books with my teeth, I heard how something beneath my hands had begun to make a clinking sound, and I saw a rather large purse. I untied it, and my eyes were blinded: gold coins had begun to pour down. I stood there for a long time, not moving a single muscle, when, toward the end, I caught sight of a small note among these ten-ruble gold coins, and I read it: ‘Draw some consolation from this, prince! I have taken your son with good intentions!’”

“‘So! This is money provided in exchange for my son?’ I exclaimed in a rage, and I started to spread the gold coins around the room and tromped on them with my feet. This fervent temper tantrum of mine lasted for about a half hour. I cursed the unknown abductor of my son and handed him over to the dominion of whole hordes of demons. I cursed Feklusha, – and, very nearly, even myself, – for our folly. Later, after the usual course of nature had passed, I started to calm down. I cold-bloodedly burned my books, and then, even more cold-bloodedly, I started to gather up the ten-ruble gold coins that I had scattered all over the floor. What was I to do? I needed to console myself somehow. I counted up the gold coins, and they amounted to a hundred rubles or so.”
“It was the middle of the month of September, and I found myself still in the same intolerable situation that I had been in: that is, I was no longer weeping (or at least only rarely), no longer all torn up, no longer stomping my feet, but I didn’t find any pleasure in anything. My heart was like a mirror that had been shattered into a thousand tiny pieces. Although each of these pieces represents part of a single object, all of them taken together constitute an exceedingly hideous picture. ‘No,’ I said to myself, ‘I shall never be at peace here. This ribbon brings to mind my unfaithful Feklusha, this sheaf of cornflowers brings to mind my missing son, this walking stick and these other fancy items remind me of my father and Marya, both of whom are already lying in the grave. No, I shall set off for wherever Divine Providence steers my steps. I would sooner suffer among people who don’t know the reasons for my suffering, I would sooner suffer beneath an unfamiliar sky where I haven’t experienced any joys in life.””

“Upon becoming firmly convinced of the prudence of this idea, I took a pen and a sheet of paper, and I wrote the following letter:

‘My Dearest Friend, Yanka Yankeliovich! I can no longer live in this village, for I am unfortunate and unhappy here. And the thought of the formerly fortunate and happy days that I had spent here makes me feel even more unfortunate and unhappy. I’m going to move away from here, and stay away, perhaps for a long time. I’m not going to say good-bye to you, for I know that you shall start trying to keep me from leaving, and I won’t agree to stay here, not for anything in the world. But this departure shall sadden more than just the two of us. And so, forgive me, Yanka, my magnanimous friend! Two houses of mine remain here, and one of them has some small items of equipment. The field, the gardens, and an adequate supply of grain and so on, – all of this I shall leave to you. If Foma and Mavrusha should wish to serve you as well, that’s fine with me. If they take it into their heads to move away, let them go and bestow a reward upon them. This letter, in other forms that I’m not familiar with, shall be posted throughout the entire village, and even, if the need requires it, before every judge, to serve as a document confirming that I’m leaving all of my property to you, for I’m certain that, when I return, you shall share it with me. I wouldn’t grant such a power of attorney to anyone else in this village but you. You, perhaps, are curious to know where I shall be heading from here? I, myself, truly don’t know. However, I do intend to make my way to the capital. I have some money on me, and it shall be enough to start with. Forgive me, my loyal friend, forgive me, Yanka!

Prince Gavrilovich of the Chistyakov Princely Line.’

“After sealing the letter and making an inscription, I got dressed in my travel attire. I packed my linen and a few items of clothing inside a small satchel, and then I called for Foma.”
“‘My friend,’ I said, ‘today I’m going to visit a chum in a neighboring village, and I shall perhaps spend two or three days there. I need some peace and quiet.’”

“‘Oh, of course,’ said Foma cheerfully. ‘That’s true, Your Excellency! I shall harness the horse and together . . .’”

“‘No! You are to stay here. There’s no shortage of things for you to do here at home, and I shall be going there on foot. Tomorrow morning deliver this letter to the Yid Yanka. See that you don’t forget, – it’s very important.’”

“A thick fog had descended upon the village. I wiped away my tears, turned away from my hometown, and, covering my eyes with my hands, I set off to journey farther away from home.”
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Chapter 21: An Explanation by the Author

During the first part of this work, I promised my readers several times that I would clarify several places in it. And some other places, even without my promise, demand clarification. Although authors, in general, and journalists, in particular, don’t always fulfill the promises that they make, and worry little about that, hearing condemnations and even curses for their broken promises, I’m certain, however, that they do this either due to forgetfulness on their part or because they themselves don’t know how to make clearer what their imagination originally produced in such a dark light. In clarifying one circumstance, they obscure another; in making one idea, one incident, more verisimilar, they imperceptibly cause incredulity in the reader’s mind toward other ideas and incidents. In a word, authors, out of an impulse of goodwill, sometimes find themselves in the same difficult situation as do solicitors when they are unraveling the most contentious case of slander in exchange for money. But seeing as how I, thank God, haven’t yet reached that point, I intend now to set about providing some explanations.

First of all, I think that it shall appear very dubious to some readers that Ivan Efremovich always reconciles so easily with his wife and daughters, taking note of their slight indecencies. I agree that a wonderful occasion opened itself up for me here, in the person of Mister Prostakov, to make a multitude of excellent moral admonitions, to upbraid mercilessly the depravity of morals today, when sons and daughters venture to love someone without the knowledge of their parents, which in olden times, – God forbid! – was unheard of. It’s true, my lords: this would have been very apropos, and I would have done this, perhaps, making up my mind that it’s not a bad idea. And, to be exact, I wouldn’t have lost sight of this fact, if I were writing a comedy or a tragedy. But how could I have dared, when describing the life of a respected elder, to slander him with such a tall tale? He himself wouldn’t have done this. There was such a high degree of kindness and sensitivity of heart in him that he sometimes came close to exhibiting a childish weakness. One and the same idler could have deceived him a thousand times over. He remarked upon the fact that he was intelligent by nature and was sufficiently learned as a result of his reading of books. He would get angry for an instant, but not more. All that one needed to do was to wrinkle one’s eyebrows and make it look like he was a man in dire need of money, and Ivan Efremovich, with an involuntary movement, would have snatched at his purse and given away all that he could, thinking: “With luck, this man is not deceiving me this time!” It was exactly from this prompting of his heart that he thought that just the fatherly look on his face was sufficient, and, in the event of great need, a word or two was enough to show his daughters and his wife the indecency of any of their behavior. He was certain that they understood him well and that they felt the same way that he did, and this certainty calmed him down completely. Besides that, Maremyana Kharitonovna, it seems, made a fairly striking admonition upon the cheeks of Elizaveta, who is such a delicate, such a sensitive creature!

Another doubt that my readers might have entertained is of no less importance. All of them could see that Prince Gavriilo Simonovich was born in a village, was raised in the most impoverished of circumstances, and left his native village, not without some money, it’s true, but twenty years had passed since that time. Is it really possible that from those hundred gold coins he could have managed to save any money, living for such a long period of time without any sort
of external assistance? That’s impossible. Yes, and what’s more, all of my readers didn’t forget, moreover, in what state he was in when, after several months, he appeared in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov. Whence, from what source of prosperity, was he able to give Nikandr fifty gold coins? Besides that, he himself explained that he hadn’t given away all of his money to Nikandr, but merely shared some of it with him. Consequently, there should still have remained in his purse at least the same amount of money as what he gave away to Nikandr.

In response to this query, I must confess that it’s not in my power, right now, to satisfy adequately the desire of my readers. And, in any event, I shall recount the following foreign tale. Although it’s one of a number of Eastern tales, and should, consequently, be a made-up fiction, many veracious people swear to God that it’s a true story.

There once lived in India a Grand Mogul, who was a wise, kind, pious, and just sovereign. His main endeavor was not to allow a single deed that served to the benefit and glory of the fatherland to pass without generously rewarding the person who performed it. This Grand Mogul rewarded the grandees of his court with honors, with promotion in ranks, and with various marks of distinction. He helped merchants with money, with the encouragement of trade, with the addition of tariffs, and so on. He rewarded ploughmen with fine implements for the cultivation of the soil, as well as with strong bulls and fat sheep. Everyone was satisfied, everyone was happy, and they all blessed the name of their beneficent monarch, both in private and in public. Even he, however, – who would have believed this? – had his own failing, and an unforgivable failing it was in such an enlightened sovereign: namely, he didn’t pay any attention to the fakirs in his land. The grandees were puzzled by this failing of his; the merchants looked upon it indifferently; the populace somewhat resented it; and the fakirs were extremely angry about it.

The mutual and reciprocal love between a monarch and his people is something great, sacred, and pleasing for earthly, as well as heavenly, denizens. It’s extremely difficult to shake this love and make it waver, but there are no difficulties that malice and vengeance cannot surmount. And so the fakirs, like ferocious scorpions, crawled across the Indian land, leaving their poison everywhere. But for a long time this poison was ineffective, since no one wanted to listen to their suggestion that the Mogul allegedly didn’t believe in the gods of the fatherland and, therefore, that his piety was only a mask and a sham. Why did the fakirs claim this? Because, during the five or six years of his reign, the Mogul didn’t bestow a single Indian pagoda as a reward, nor did he invite a single fakir to his table. And all of the previous Moguls had been pious rulers who used to do this every day: they would receive entire flocks of these religious pilgrims and converse amicably with these righteous men for a full hour. The fakirs preached this message across cities, villages, fields, and woods, every place where they could find traces of human beings. Before, as I’ve mentioned, no one would listen to them at all. They didn’t get discouraged and continued what was, to their minds, a virtuous mission that was pleasing to God. Later, people started to listen to them, but they didn’t at all want to believe what they were saying. But, finally, they did begin to believe, and turmoil spread across the face of India. This didn’t long remain unknown to the wise monarch. All of the people were awaiting edicts from the Mogul, but he didn’t issue any, and he smiled at the nervous apprehension of his friends. He was kind, good, and intelligent, and thus he merited the good fortune of having them as his friends. What happened next? He waited until entire thousands of fakirs appeared one day on a
vast square in front of his royal palaces, clamoring at the top of their lungs against the Mogul’s godlessness and heralding the imminent demise of all of India. A great multitude of the populace accompanied them, wishing to defend the pious elders in the event that some kind of grievance against them might occur, and being curious to find out how, and by what means, the Mogul might try to satisfy them.

“Go save yourself, Your Majesty!” the Mogul’s grandees were shouting. “Run to the Rai people, to your brother, while we, in the meantime, shall curb the unrest.”

“You are not to advise me in this manner, my friends,” the Mogul replied with firmness and majesty. “We shall go to the fakirs and to the people. A father should know the reason why his children are dissatisfied.”

Upon coming out onto the square, accompanied by his surprised grandees, the Mogul addressed his speech to the fakirs, asking them who was to blame for this assembly. The highest-ranking fakir among them revealed everything to him, and the Mogul replied:

“Fine, my children! I acknowledge the fairness of your demands, and I shall satisfy them! Thirty days from now, all of you shall gather together in the area around the main pagoda. I, along with all of the grandees at my court, shall be there. And, together with you, we shall enjoy a banquet feast, and I shall present all of you with appropriate gifts. But, in the meantime, I shall send messengers to all of the members of the Rai clan who are subject to my scepter, ordering them to send here, by that day, all of the fakirs from their lands.”

The people raised a joyful cry and fell prone on the ground, kissing the dust. The fakirs went down on their knees and bowed before the monarch, and all of them accompanied his procession with blessings as he returned to his palaces.

With what impatience did they await the appointed day! At last, that day finally arrived. The Mogul, accompanied by a populous suite and armed bodyguards, appeared at the designated valley. A great multitude of enormous tables were standing there, filled with items of food and drink. Up to thirty thousand fakirs had gathered together here. All of them were eating, drinking, and exclaiming loudly, wishing the Mogul a long life.

The banquet ended. The Mogul ascended to an elevated throne that had been expressly prepared for this occasion, and he made this appeal: “Humble fakirs! I promised you appropriate gifts beyond satiation. I’m now going to fulfill my promise.” He gave a signal, and enormous tents on both sides of the throne opened up. There, in stacks, lay new clothes that were appropriate for fakirs. By the side of the tents, a great bonfire of firewood was ablaze.

The Mogul continued: “Pious elders! Your garments, as a result of being worn for so long, have turned into tatters, and you more closely resemble beggars than venerable fakirs of the Indian land. Therefore, each one of you shall now approach this bonfire, you shall cast into it all of your clothing, all of it, leaving nothing on your person, and you shall receive here, from these

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6 The Rai, also called the Khambu, were a people indigenous to eastern Nepal.
tents, new clothing.” A deathly paleness suffused the cheeks of each fakir. “Lord!” the head of the fakirs appealed to him, getting down on his knees. “We have condemned ourselves to lives of poverty and humility before our gods, and we cannot violate that oath without some form of punishment! The tatters that we are wearing help us to refrain from evil pride!”

“Fine,” replied the Mogul, “but I also gave my word to dress you in new clothing, and I must fulfill my promise. Supreme fakir! You shall be the first one to approach the fire and cast your tatters into its flames.”

The fakirs looked around at one another in extreme confusion. They would have attempted to try their eloquence once again, but the serious expression on the monarch’s face and, more than that, the fearsome sight of the innumerable throng of bodyguards, stopped them from attempting to do that. There was nothing to be done about it! They approached the fire with trembling feet, cast their sackcloth garments into its flames, and received their new clothes.

When all of them had exchanged their clothing in this manner and were standing there in profound silence, directing their gaze at the bonfire, the Mogul ordered that the fire be extinguished. The attendants, who had been assigned earlier to perform this task, began to tear the ashes asunder, and, in a short period of time, they piled up heaps of money at the foot of the throne, in which more than three million Indian gold coins were counted.

The general surprise, shame, and despondency of the fakirs were indescribable. The Grand Mogul’s brow was ablaze with the rigor of justice.

“You vile hypocrites!” he cried out. “Are these signs of the life of poverty and humility that you swore to our gods that you would lead? Be gone from my sight! You aren’t worthy of the Mogul’s wrath!”

The fakirs bowed their heads submissively and dispersed in various directions. And, for the entire length of the Mogul’s prolonged rule, they never appeared anywhere near the capital ever again. The Mogul distributed the treasure that he had found among his warriors and his people, whose grateful voices rose up to the heavens.

There’s a foreign tale for you. The reader shall conclude from it that, although Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, during his first appearance in our novel, truly did resemble a contemporary fakir, this doesn’t, by any means, demonstrate that he couldn’t have possessed any money. But where, then, did he get the money? Oh, that’s an entirely different matter! It’s one that undoubtedly shall not remain unanswered in due time, although not any time soon.

I don’t know whether or not the reader himself is satisfied with this explanation of mine. But at least I had the sincere desire to try to satisfy his concern, even if only for the time being.

My third explanation shall consist of this: perhaps some of my readers might think that Prince Gavrilo Simonovich is recounting his narrative continuously, without any interruptions, during a fixed period of time, every day in succession, since sometimes it happens in my novel that there are several chapters, one after another, where his life is being described. This is absolutely not
The fourth retort that readers might make to me would be that Mister Prostakov, who is such a kind and good man, one who is so sensitive toward everyone, loving Nikandr with a fatherly tenderness, could regain his temper so quickly and so easily, diminishing himself in an almost tragic way. The fact that he made a bit of noise at his wife, that he gave her a bit of a scolding, this is something that another man could also have done, a man who isn’t as good, as kind, or as beneficent as is Prostakov. One need only recall what a storm there was on Christmas Eve, and the youthfulness and helplessness shown by poor Nikandr. Another man wouldn’t merely have made a bit of noise, but would also have made an attempt at something even bigger. But Mister Prostakov forgot all about it the very next day and didn’t recall it afterwards. In this instance, he himself doesn’t resemble himself!

I myself just now thought about this. And, that’s why, averting this admonition, and turning it away from the good-natured Prostakov, I turn it away from myself as well. Readers shall see a further explanation of this matter in the second chapter. And so let this first chapter serve, therefore, as a foreword to Part II of the novel.

Chapter 22: The Revelation of a Secret

In Part I of this novel, we left the members of the Prostakov family as they were waiting to receive letters from Prince Svetlozarov, but since no letters had arrived, they were listening to Prince Gavrilo Simonovich’s narration of his life story. In such an irresolute situation, quite a large amount of time passed in this manner, until Shrovetide, the last day before the Lenten fast, arrived. Ivan Efremovich seemed unusually preoccupied with something, but no one knew exactly with what. There was no evidence of sadness on his face, but it was showing some shadow of anxiety, pensiveness, and an unresolved issue in his soul. All of the domestic servants noticed this, but none of them dared to ask him about the cause, since they were certain beforehand that they wouldn’t find out anything from him. Even Maremyana Kharitonovna thought this way, and she, too, didn’t ask. Who was the first one to muster the necessary courage to undertake such a tremendous task? One can only guess that it was Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. And one would be quite right!

On the feast of Shrovetide itself, when all of the members of the household were, in turn, coming up to Ivan Efremovich to wish him a happy holiday and then each of them was, in turn, leaving to go take care of their own personal affairs, only Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, as a man who didn’t have any special matters to attend to, remained behind to stay with him. They were sitting
in different corners of the room, glancing at each other, turning aside, again glancing at each other, lowering their eyes and surreptitiously sighing, and again turning aside.

“Truly,” exclaimed Prostakov, “this situation is more painful than being encamped, on a terrible night, opposite an enemy, against whom one must wage battle in the morning, a morning that shall be just as terrible as was the night!

“I’m thinking almost the very same thing,” replied Prince Chistyakov, who threw a significant glance in his friend’s direction.

“And what is it that you’re thinking, prince?” Prostakov asked, sliding his cap onto his forehead and laying his pipe down on the table. “I’m extremely curious to find out what you shall say!”

“This,” replied the prince, “that the entire household has for a long time now been noticing that a certain secret weighs upon your heart! This secret is all the more exasperating for all of them because, as one might well imagine, it’s creating a major difficulty for you!”

“That’s not entirely unfair,” the old man put in. “If my situation isn’t completely troublesome, then, to be sure, it is, I suppose, difficult! Would you be able, prince, to get to the truth?”

“I would hope so.”

“Really?” Prostakov exclaimed, leaping up from his chair. He rushed over to the prince with youthful steps, sat down beside him, and asked him dramatically: “So you understand the cause of my present situation? I’m curious to find out your thoughts and your arguments on this matter!”

“There are two of them,” replied the prince indifferently. “The first is the failure to receive any letters from Prince Svetlozarov. And the second is the lack of any information about the fate of the unfortunate and unhappy Nikandr!”

“No, you didn’t guess it correctly at all!” Prostakov exclaimed, clapping his hands, and on his face was displayed the majesty of a man who was convinced that he, for his part, knew how to be secretive. But at this point an inner voice whispered to him: “Think it through a bit more thoroughly, Ivan Efremovich!” He thought for a moment, he turned a little red, and then suddenly, grabbing hold of Prince Gavriilo Simonovich by the hand, he said under his breath: “You’re not at all right, my dear friend!” Prince Gavriilo Simonovich glanced over at him with that subtle, searching, yet at the same time benevolent, look on his face that, for all of its outward importance, spoke directly to his beloved friend’s heart: “Open yourself up to me!”

Mister Prostakov moved his chair closer yet and said: “As far as the letters that we summoned from Prince Svetlozarov are concerned, I’m prepared to reject them, even forever, if need be! It’s true that it wasn’t entirely unpleasant for me to see my daughter getting married to such a well-born and wealthy man, and especially when he had already succeeded in inclining her heart toward marrying him. But I willingly submit all of that to chance and time. As far as the fate of young Nikandr is concerned, it’s true that by bringing him here, I myself, to some extent, gave
him cause to continue this infantile love of his that has now become no longer infantile. So, my
dear prince, I found out from Elizaveta herself, to my extreme dismay, that this Nikandr is the
one and the same Nikandr who loved her too much for three years at the boarding school, for
which he was expelled from there and I had to take my daughters home. What am I to do?
However, prince, it’s not the situation of this young man, whom I myself made more unfortunate
and unhappy, that so worries me right now!”

“How is that?” the prince objected gloomily. “You don’t concern yourself in the least with the
fact that this unfortunate and unhappy man is perhaps struggling right now with all of the horrors
of poverty and despair?”

“Hush, hush, my dear friend. Don’t get all excited prematurely,” said Prostakov. “You would
offend me bitterly if you were to think that I could be, even for a minute, vicious and unjust.
Listen to what my secret is! Although it’s not an important state secret, it’s rather important to all
of the members of my family. His peace and quiet are as pleasing and dear to me as are the peace
and quiet among his millions of subjects to a great sovereign.”

“When I came back from town the last time, that night was most unbearable for me,” Prostakov
continued. “I shuddered at every gust of wind and thought: ‘that’s the groan of a dying
Nikandr!’ Hardly had dawn arrived, I went out to my study, where Makar, my elderly servant,
had started to make a fire in the fireplace. ‘Makar!’ I said to him, ‘today is a great holiday of the
Lord, but I shall deprive you of the pleasure of spending it with your children and grandchildren:
a trip lies ahead of you!’ Makar winced a little, but as soon as I said that the matter involves
philanthropy, the old man smiled and replied: ‘I’m ready to go with you to the ends of the earth!’
As soon as we had all gathered together, I called for Makar and said loudly: ‘Makar! I want to
send you quite a distance away and at this very hour!’ ‘Oh, sir, as soon as I get this matter . . .’”

“I shuddered,” Prostakov explained, “fearing that he might reveal my secret with a single word.
‘It’s a matter of great necessity!’ I exclaimed almost angrily. ‘Go right now, and I’ll give you a
written order to the elders of my villages. Go to my study and wait for the orders there.’”

“The poor old man went out, saddened, considering himself to have been deceived,” Prostakov
continued. “Maremyana and both of my daughters began reprimanding me for having forgotten
my humanity and for separating a father from his family on such a great holiday out of such
 trifling gains.”

“Oh!’ I thought to myself, ‘it’s precisely correcting your lack of humanity, Maremyana, that I’m
concerned about and that I hope to succeed in that venture.’ This thought exhilarated me, and, in
response to their fervent representations, I smiled. This saddened Elizaveta, displeased Katerina,
and so strongly provoked Maremyana that she counted out to me a thousand things that I chide
her for, and yet they are things that I myself am guilty of committing.”

“Such a person,” I said to them, “is a great expert at making admonitions, but should one act in
accordance with them? Oh, he already leaves that to someone else. This is just like the German
pastor, who used to admonish his parishioners to live in peace with their wives, but as one of
them said: ‘Mr. pastor! You speak very nicely, but why is it that you, Mister Pastor, fight every
day with your wife?’ ‘My dear!’ replied the pastor, ‘I receive an income for delivering sermons to you. But for me to act according to those sermons myself, I would need to receive an income that was at least four times as much!’”

“All of them considered me to be half-crazy,” Prostakov observed, “but I kissed them all good-bye with the tenderness of a spouse and a father, and they saw that they had erred in their thoughts about me.”

“Entering my study, I found Makar to be very sad.”

“‘Makar, don’t grieve,’ I said. ‘It’s true that you’ll need to be parted from your family for several days, but this, after all, is nothing new for you. Do you remember how we used to be in the field during a military campaign?’ The word campaign, like a magic wand, drew a streak of pleasure upon the old man’s face. I noticed this and continued: ‘I want to perform a very good deed, something very pleasing to God. Due to circumstances, I can’t do this myself, and I can’t rely upon just anyone to do it, because it requires strict secrecy. Now, Makar, you choose! Are you to remain home with your family, or do you want to serve me and God?’”

“‘As soon as right now,’ exclaimed Makar, ‘I’m ready, – even if we’re to go overseas. After doing a good deed on Shrovetide, I’ll be able to enjoy myself during the Lenten fast without committing any sins!’”

“‘So listen up!’ I commanded him, ‘Yesterday, while I was away, my wife got angry at Nikandr for something and expelled him from our house. Reasoning properly, I found that it was truly not necessary to have him be a guest in our house any longer, but likewise having him die from starvation would be even worse. I think that he shall, first of all, go to see Ivan, the old priest in town, from whom I first took him. And so, my friend Makar, so as not to lose time, go to town right away. If you find him at the priest’s house, fine. But if not, wait one day, then another, – with any luck, you might find him! Here’s some money and a brief letter for him. May God be with you!’”

“Makar set off and returned five days later with a reply in which the young man ardently thanked me for my concern and assistance, asking me for forgiveness for the sorrow that he has inflicted upon us, and vowing not to see my daughter ever again and refusing her hand in marriage, even if she herself were to offer it.”

“This is good, this is noble on the part of both sides!” said Prince Gavriilo Simonovich.

“Here’s my plan in our discussion about his future fate,” Prostakov continued, “for, I truly confess, I won’t be at peace until I’ve made this young man as fortunate and as happy as possible. My plan, I say, consists in this: to seek, through the agency of my friends in town, one of whom is Afanasy Onisimovich Prichudin, a wealthy and, therefore, a significant merchant, to get Nikandr placed in some judicial position. I shall spare no expense to get this done. He’ll be sagacious and assiduous, and, therefore, by advancing him higher and higher, we, in time, shall help him get to the position of secretary. Oh! How does my plan seem to you?”
“Wonderful!” the prince replied. “I’m certain that, with your help, Nikandr shall soon rise up within the ranks of the judiciary. I can vouch for his honesty and diligence!”

“Listen further,” continued Prostakov. “Since he shall already have succeeded so well in the civil service, we shall find him a respectable bride from a merchant home. By that time, this current foolishness shall have been emptied out of his head. He gets married and . . . Well, what do you think of this little plan of mine?” Prostakov asked with a triumphant smile on his face, and he was extremely surprised to see that the prince had knitted his brow.

“Why are you knitting your brow, prince?” Ivan Efremovich asked cheerlessly, and with a certain chagrin.

“Because I don’t vouch for the fulfillment of the last half of your plan” Chistyakov explained. “Such foolishness, as we find in Nikandr’s heart, shall not soon be emptied out from a heart such as his.”

Both of the old men fell into thinking and became lost in thought, but Prostakov soon cheered up again and said: “Well, we shall see. That’s still a long way off! But the current matter, for which I have need of your help, consists in this: my wife and Katerina badgered me shamelessly to take them to town this week. You know how difficult it is to dissuade them from following through on their intentions without telling them the reason why. And I’m afraid to reveal my secret to them. To leave Elizaveta at home again would appear to be a wonderful idea and, what’s more, for naught. And so, you see, I need to go with them. Judge for yourself: if they were to meet up there in town, either in church or on the street, or at a party, a commotion would again ensue. It would begin with pensiveness, sighs would follow, then groans, and, at that point, tears. And Maremyana would perhaps take it into her head again to conclude everything with slaps in the face. But these incidents are far too unpleasant and painful, especially for a father.”

“That’s equally true for me, too,” said the prince, sighing. “What is it that you require of me?”

“This, my dear friend,” Prostakov replied: “Go to town today. I have a letter prepared for the old priest, in which I introduce you as a common friend and distant relative of ours, Terenty Pafnutyevich Krakalov. He’ll be glad to meet you, and, furthermore, our young friend will be glad to see you again. Well, now do you understand? You can keep Nikandr busy for the whole week, so that he shall not take it into his head to yawn while watching merry-andrews in the town square or to play blind man’s bluff in the home of some noble family. You shall be staying at home, while I’m freed from the insufferable unpleasantness that might occur at any chance meeting with him. As soon as the Lenten fast arrives, everything is permitted. I shall be home by then, and, if you like, you yourself can turn into a merry-andrew or play blind man’s bluff as much as you want. The old priest Ivan knows nothing of what transpired in my house and thinks that Nikandr removed himself from there because he was no longer needed as a tutor.”

Ivan Efremovich’s arrangements seemed very reasonable to Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. For him to remain alone at the house seemed boring; and for him to yawn from all of the vacuous
activities in town seemed even more boring. But what, he thought, could be more pleasant than spending this time alone with Nikandr?

He stocked up on gifts for the priest and Nikandr, and after dinner he left for town under the guise that he would be handling some of Mr. Prostakov’s business affairs for him there. Early the next day Ivan Efremovich, together with all of the members of his family, left for town.

Chapter 23: The Outcast (Nikandr’s Story)

The town’s priest, Father Ivan, upon reading the letter of introduction from Ivan Efremovich, gave Mr. Krakalov a friendly embrace. Nikandr’s expressions of rapture were indescribable. He was sighing, smiling, weeping, and laughing, and, while hanging upon the neck of Gavrilo Simonovich every minute, he was thinking aloud: “What a fortunate and happy man you are! You have seen her, her eyes have sometimes rested upon you, perhaps she has lightly touched your hand with her hand!” He tenderly kissed the hands of the old man, who was moved by his display of emotion.

The holiday gifts sent by Mr. Prostakov inclined Father Ivan even more in favor of his distant relative Krakalov. He had wanted to allot a special room for him, but both friends decisively, in a single voice, rejected that kind offer. Gavrilo Simonovich was thinking: “I need to be with him inseparably, that’s what Mr. Prostakov requested!” Nikandr, meanwhile, was thinking: “Oh, perhaps he shall say at least a word about her!”

On the morning of the following day, Father Ivan came into the room shared by his two guests.

“Terenty Pafnutyevich!” he said, turning to the prince. “I’ve come to apologize to you. Although our town is on the small side, almost all of the neighboring gentry seem to be gathering here this week. And so I, not at all imagining that you, my dear sir, would be coming to visit me, had already given my word yesterday, committing myself to appointments for the entire week. In the morning, I’m usually at church, I have dinner at one person’s home, I have supper at another person’s home. Really, it’s only on Saturday that there won’t be someone coming to spend the evening at my house. I’m really very embarrassed.”

“There’s absolutely no reason for you to feel that way, father,” exclaimed the prince with noticeable pleasure. “I’ve come here not for the feast of Shrovetide, but solely to spend a few leisurely days with my young friend. And I think that he, despite his youthfulness, would agree that it’s better for him to spend time with me than to be somewhere else.”

“Oh, without a doubt!” Nikandr replied. “What’s there for me to search for, while I’m at parties being held at the homes of people with whom I’m not acquainted?”

The priest was glad to hear such a reply and, apologizing once again, he went out with a smile on his face. After dinner, the two guests were the only ones left at home. Nikandr was sitting by the window, while Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was pacing the room with long steps, and both of them were lost in thought. Nikandr was looking at the prince with languid eyes, as if imploring him to say something: “Is she feeling well? Have there been any conversations about me?”
was all in vain! The prince had penetrated deeply into the thoughts of the young man and was racking his brain over how he might be able, at one fell swoop, once and for all, to distance himself from such an attempt on Nikandr’s part, one that would be fruitless. They understood each other’s thoughts, and each of them was dissatisfied, more with himself than with his companion.

Finally, the prince stopped his pacing, took a step forward with one leg and, taking his hands out of his pockets, exclaimed: “So!” With a smile on his face, he walked up to the window, took a seat opposite Nikandr, and said to him with the tenderness of a friend: “It seems, young man, that you have trust in me? And, what’s more, you should have that trust, since I deserve it, due to my tender love for you. Why is it, then, that, up until now, I know nothing about who you are and where you came from?”

“Because,” replied Nikandr gloomily, and with a sigh, “I myself know nothing about that!”

“You must know at least something,” the prince objected. “Sometimes people come to great discoveries launched from the most trifling of details. Can it really be the case that nothing at all like this has ever happened to you?”

“There have been, of course, several adventures. Who hasn’t experienced any of those? But none at all of the kind from which I could have inferred anything about myself and my past!”

“I’m very curious to hear about those adventures that happened with you. What one eye doesn’t see, another eye shall. That’s why each of us has two eyes and two ears. I beg you . . .”

“If you wish, I shall tell you everything that has taken place.”

“Yes, please do! Please do!” the prince exclaimed, and so Nikandr began his life story:

“As I started to understand myself a little, I could see that I was living with only my mother, a very old woman, in a small cabin, likewise very old, in the provincial town of Oryol. She taught me to read, and the parish sexton taught me to write. And, by the time I was ten years of age, I was fairly good in both skills. I used to accost my mother with questions: ‘who was my father?’ ‘what was his first name?’ ‘what was his surname?’ ‘You don’t need to know any of that,’ she would usually reply. But I knew that it was necessary for me to know this, because I kept hearing how children of my age, with an air of importance, used to call each other by their full names, including the patronymic, and they would add the form of address mister to the surname. But I was simply going by the name Nikandr all the time, and this saddened me.”

“Then, one day, as I was sitting with the sexton and practicing my writing, a carriage drove up to our cabin. We were extremely surprised, and even more so, when a man, who looked to us to be middle-aged and appeared to be a merchant, entered our cabin. My mother, apparently, wasn’t acquainted with him. He took her aside, leading her into a special room, and spent about a quarter of an hour with her there. Finally, he came out with a bundle in his hand. My mother’s eyes were tear-stained. ‘Nikandr,’ she said,
‘come here.’ I was trembling at the time, and she led me away to the very same room where she had just been with the stranger. ‘You’re going to leave me now, my dear,’ she continued. ‘Forgive me!’ Letting out a wail, I grasped at her dress and cried: ‘Where am I going, mommy?’ ‘Sweet child,’ the old woman replied. ‘You’re not my son. You had been sent to me here, accompanied by this man, for your upbringing. Now he’s taking you back. Forgive me!’”

A delightful idea lit up Prince Gavrilo Simonovich’s heart, and, suddenly comprehension all of the circumstances, the timing, and the first name itself, he fastened his flaming eyes upon his young friend and asked him in a trembling voice: “Didn’t she say anything more?”

“Oh!” replied Nikandr, “don’t you think that I would have wanted to know better what had happened to me by receiving some further explanation! Under the promise of continuous silence, she did reveal to me that she had once managed to find out from a man, who used to bring her money and bring me linens, that I was the illegitimate son of some high-born gentleman, who didn’t dare to make my existence known, but who didn’t want me to starve to death either. And so that’s why he was having me brought up secretly, under the assumed name of Nikandr only.”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, disheartened, lowered his hands. His eyes turned, involuntarily, to the floor. He heaved a sigh and said, in a long drawn-out manner: “What a shame! Go on, please continue . . .”

And so Nikandr continued his story:

“The unknown man that I had seen earlier came back into the room; took me by the hand, sat me down in his carriage, and then drove me away to the boarding school that you’re already familiar with. I soon became accustomed to my new quarters and stayed there very peacefully and happily for around four years. Our main form-master, Mr. Delavin, was together both the madam’s husband and our teacher. He genuinely knew several artistic skills to a reasonable extent, especially in painting, and I made a lot of progress as a result of training under him. I was already fifteen years old by the time that the young Prostakov damsels first made their appearance at our school. I saw them, and I myself don’t know why, upon my first glance at the elder sister, the ten-year-old Elizaveta, my heart started beating with a heartbeat that was unbeknownst to me before then. Oh! Just the eyes of that sweet little moppet cast a spell over me. With each passing day, my attachment to her intensified, and I tried not to let a single free minute pass when I was not together with her. My zeal doubled. I wanted to show Liza that it wasn’t some unworthy man of no value who was seeking to win her heart. Oh! At that time, it didn’t enter my mind to think about the terrible social difference that existed between a man with neither kith nor kin, without a name or a title, and the daughter of a well-to-do nobleman.”

“It seemed to me that Liza understood my gazes at her, that she guessed the reason for the unusual blush on my cheeks when I lightly touched her hand during dance classes. I took the liberty of squeezing her little hand, and she responded to me in kind. When I was
dancing with Liza, I was lighter than air, but when, due to illness or some other reason, Liza wasn’t there at dance class, or, if she was there, but she wasn’t taking part in the dancing, I was the worst dancer in the world."

“Jealousy arose. Sometimes I intentionally studied with other damsels, especially those who had a prettier face than she did, and those who were wealthier and more resplendent than she was. My young lover would explode from vexation, and she would pay me back in kind. But I could discern in her, with secret joy, that despondency, that constraint, which are the usual signs of the doleful state of one’s heart. This, – who would have thought it? – gave birth to a written correspondence between the two of us. The first time that this happened was when I was walking back from classes on a winter evening and I dared to slip a billet doux into her hand. She glanced over at me with that brief, penetrating look that seemed to say: ‘I knew that you were deceiving me with your coldness. Oh! And I was deceiving you with my feigned indifference!’”

“Thus our correspondence continued for several years. I grew up, and I turned nineteen years old at the time when Elizaveta was fifteen. It was at that time that the sorrowful incident occurred, the one, of course, that you already know about, the one as a result of which I was ordered to leave my position at the school, a position that was so delightful for me! Oh! How glad I was that they didn’t examine my property and that I kept all of her letters. Now I read them continually, comparing Liza-the-moppet with Elizaveta-the-damsel. So, my most venerable friend, in my present situation the reading of these letters constitutes the sole blessing of my days. Not a single mortal woman shall ever fill my heart with her being. I’ve decided to live out the remainder of my life in solitude, and I hope to find, among the most woeful minutes of that life, some that are fairly tolerable. In the most difficult of circumstances, when sorrow and even distress have weighed heavily upon my soul and made life seem odious, I would spread out the letters of my Elizaveta before me, – I say ‘my’ Elizaveta because she gave her heart away to me, – and I would receive some relief, some consolation, some emotional sweetness.”

“You appear to be dissatisfied with what I’m telling you, my magnanimous friend, but set your mind at rest. I assure you with the holiest of assurances: let Elizaveta give her hand away in marriage to another man, let her bear children for him, children who are just as beautiful as she is herself, – I shall always love her, just as I do now. I love not that which constitutes the sensual Elizaveta. No, I love in her a great object, the only one in the world for me, and I shall love that object, with an equal flame, when she shall be the mother of many children from another man, for my love for her is not one that’s only sensual.”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was ablaze with displeasure. “How is it possible,” he thought, “at such an age, to rely so much upon one’s mind, especially upon one’s feelings! Truly, he shall be more unfortunate and unhappy than I was after trampling down my garden!”
“My young friend,” he said, taking Nikandr by the hand, “in order to find pleasure, and constant pleasure, in such feelings, you must be absolutely certain that the object of your love shall correspond to that pleasure.”

“Oh! One would have to be me to understand her heart!” Nikandr exclaimed.

“This is bad, very bad,” said the prince. “Her father, a good, honest, sensitive old man, didn’t deserve such ingratitude!”

“Ingratitude?” Nikandr objected. “Well, heaven shall chastise an ungrateful heart! Didn’t I swear to him that I would never seek an opportunity to see her? Even if she were to offer me her hand in marriage against his wishes, I would never agree to tear to pieces the heart of a father who loves his children and who’s a benevolent elder! I would go to my grave and, letting out my last breath in a sigh of melancholy, sorrow, and suffering, I would say to the supreme judge up on high: ‘Yes, I did love Elizaveta, I loved her with a most sacred love, and I never thought to be her seducer!”

This last word compelled Prince Gavrilo Simonovich to ponder a little. The image of devils, pulling the tongues out of the throats of sinners with red-hot pincers, which was so vividly depicted in the painting at the home of the Falaleevka village elder, Pamfil Paramonovich, distinctly presented itself to his imagination. “Such is the way that this young man views it!” he continued to ponder. “Oh, Ivan Efremovich, my dear friend! If your daughter’s heart is in the same condition as the heart of this youth, then her boarding school education in a provincial town is going to cost you many tears!”

With this, the evening came to an end. They greeted the morning more calmly, but not more contentedly. Nikandr was at least glad that he had found a chance to pour out his soul in words, and he wanted to continue the conversation. But Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, who absolutely didn’t want this, asked him: “Well, my dear friend, what happened to you following your exit from the boarding school?”

Nikandr was a little confused by this challenge, for all of his thoughts and all of his eloquence were strained toward thinking and speaking about Elizaveta. But Prince Gavrilo Simonovich wasn’t inclined toward that at all. And the young man, to console himself, seeing that it was no longer possible to speak only about his beloved, decided to call her to mind at every convenient opportunity and, in this way, to relieve the pain in his heart as much as possible.

He complied with this request, fulfilling his duty, and continued his narrative account:

**Chapter 24: The Painter (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)**

“Having gathered together my linen and the letters from my Elizaveta into a bundle, I went outside. Although the sun had not yet set, it was close to sunset. I had lived in the town of Oryol for around ten years, but I no longer knew it. It was as if I had never been inside it before: with the exception of my mother’s courtyard, my boarding school’s classrooms, and its small garden, everything there was unknown to me. For several hours
I meandered along the streets of the town, gaping at everything from top to bottom. Shining carriages, beautiful horses, richly decked out servants, and voluptuous fine ladies attracted my eyes and aroused a certain amount of surprise, but nothing more. ‘Oh,’ I said to myself, ‘Elizaveta, attired in a simple white dress and girded with a scarlet belt, is a hundred times more lovely than you are, you prideful women, with your resplendent finery!’”

“Wandering around in this fashion and pondering – for once I had started to love, I had started to ponder, – I became attached to a certain small square, where I found the objects surrounding it to be so intriguing that I couldn’t help but stop. On the right side of the square, there towered a brick building, on top of which a painted, wooden two-headed eagle was attached. A multitude of people were entering and exiting this building. Those people who were entering it had a look of anticipation etched upon their face: they kept their hands inside their pockets, swinging them. Those people who were exiting it looked sad: they kept their hands outside their pockets as they got away from there, using one hand to wipe away sweat and the other hand to scratch their head in bewilderment. Right away, as was my habit, I plunged into a round of reasoning and debating. ‘This, of course, is a tsarist palace, where either the tsar himself or his vicar lives,’ I thought to myself. ‘The people who are entering this building are apparently making their appearance in order to bow and scrape before the tsar. And since he is busy or angry, he therefore receives these people poorly, and that’s why they look sad. I recall very well that when Mr. Delavin used to get into a fight with Madame Ulrick, he was not allowed to appear before her in person.’”

“With a smile of pleasure on my face at having solved this formidable problem so easily, I turned my attention to the left side of the square. My astonishment was indescribable. I saw a small, dilapidated cabin with broken windows, and above its doors there was an attached circle on which a two-headed eagle was likewise drawn and a multitude of people were likewise entering the premises. The people entering there were likewise keeping their hands inside their pockets, but the difference here was that, instead of sadness being visible on the faces of those who were exiting, there was joy, and some of them were even hopping up and down from pleasure and cheerfully crying out. At this point, I stopped in bewilderment. No matter how much I thought, no matter how much I reasoned, no matter how much I racked my brains, nothing was helping. Quickly fastening my eyes on the door to this enigmatic little house, I stood there motionless. ‘What in the world is going on here?’ I exclaimed with annoyance. ‘There was an eagle there, and there’s an eagle here: it’s as if this is the same tsarist house, only it’s a smaller version of it. Why, then, is there such a difference seen on the faces of the people who are exiting this house?’”

“I had barely managed to utter these last words when I saw two people leaving this small house. One of them was tall and lean, he had a disheveled look, and he was wearing, as one might have guessed, a green uniform coat. He was holding onto the hilt of his sword and was turning his blood-shot eyes around him in all directions. In front of him, stood a badger-legged, large-headed man of stunted growth, who was wobbly on his feet. Dressed in a coffee-colored frock coat, he was twirling his hat in his hands and making
low bows at every moment. After speaking to each other for a short while, these two men parted company. The man in the uniform coat set off in the direction of the large palace, while the man of stunted growth, with a happy smile on his face, came trudging along toward me and asked: ‘What are you looking at so fixedly, young fellow?’”

“‘I’m scrutinizing two tsarist buildings that I’m surprised at: this large one over here and that small one over there,’ I said with an air of great importance.”

“He likewise fixed his eyes upon me and asked: ‘Well, who are you? And where do you hail from? You’re not by any chance from China now, are you?’”

“I open-heartedly revealed to him my fate: that I had been expelled from the boarding school, where I had learned many subjects, and that, not having either relatives or acquaintances in Oryol, I found myself in a quandary over where I could spend the night.”

“Oh! I can remedy that woe for you for the time being,’ he replied. ‘You’re welcome to spend the night at my place. And if you have learned anything worthwhile, then we shall find a position for you. What, for example, did you learn while you were at the boarding school?’”

“With a blush of modesty, I enumerated the academic subjects for him: ‘French and German, oratory, poetry, mythology, classical antiquity.’ He looked at me and grinned sarcastically. This vexed me a little. ‘Oh, wait a minute! Since you’re such a pedant’ I thought. And with a stirring of vengeance, I said: ‘Logic, ontology, cosmology, psychology, in a word, metaphysics, ethics, political economy, hydraulics, hydrostatics, optics, dioptics, catroptics,’ and, with soaring eloquence, I was already on the verge of enumerating the works of Aristotle, Plato, Kant, Leibnitz, and many others, when I noticed, to my horror, that my dwarf had changed his smile into a look of complete indifference, and that he was softly shaking his large head. With trepidation, I stopped.”

“Following a brief silence, he said: ‘Didn’t you study, my friend, anything better, anything a little more useful, than all of this nonsense?’”

“With a groan, I uttered: ‘No!’ and the word nonsense forced me to wince once again.”

“‘For example: any kinds of art or artistic skills?’ he asked. ‘After all, I have heard that they teach such subjects over there at the boarding school.’”

“Yes,’ I replied drily and sadly, ‘I studied, in addition, music, dancing, fencing, and painting.’”

“What?” he exclaimed, jumping up, his eyes popping out of his head and his jaw dropping, ‘And painting?’”

“Yes,’ I replied, ‘and I paint with all colors hardly any worse than my teacher does.’”
“‘Well,’ said the dwarf, embracing me with vehemence, ‘you’re now fortunate, you have nothing to feel sad about. Consider my house to be your own. You should know, young man, that I myself am a painter, and just about the best painter in town, in spite of some damned miscreants, my competitors. But a man with dignity can’t help but have them, no matter how hard he tries not to. My name is Yermil Fedulovich Khodulkin. Would you like to be my assistant? Your job would be to grind the colors, to paint those pictures that are a little easier to paint, to deliver paintings to the houses of purchasers, and to collect from them the money they need to pay for those paintings.’”

“I accepted his proposal joyfully, and we both set off for his house. On the way there, we started a conversation about the tsarist palaces that had thrown me into such confusion.”

“‘You’re right, my dear friend,’ said Yermil Fedulovich. ‘Although those houses aren’t tsarist palaces, as you thought they were, both of them nonetheless have stately names: the large one is called a government office, and the small one is called a pub. You shall ask, no doubt, what do they do in both of them? And here’s what they do: in the former, that is, the large one, they judge, they reason, they indict or they acquit. In a word, everything that one finds in nature is subject to the judgment of this place: people, cattle, four-legged creatures and feathered creatures, fish, reptiles, fruits, trees. Everything, everything without exception! In the small public house, simple folk gather together during their free time to forget for a minute their everyday woes. And after they have tasted the artificial, man-made gift of the gods, that’s to say, after they have drunk some wine, they do indeed forget these woes for a time!’”

“‘Do you, too, truly have any woes?’ I asked. ‘And have you ever been there, at a pub?’”

“‘How can one not go there. Young man! Live for a little while in this world, and you’ll find out many more things. But this time I was there for a different matter. Did you happen to notice that thin, elderly man who was dressed in a uniform coat and was holding a sword?’”

“‘How could I not notice him!’”

“‘Well, know, then, that I cheered him up at my own expense and provided him with the means of forgetting his everyday woes.’”

“‘You’re a very kind man,’ I said.”

“Perhaps you’re speaking the truth, but you’re again mistaken,’ replied the painter. ‘I have need of that man. In the large tsarist building, a matter is being investigated at my request, and that matter lies in his hands, and he must give it his attention.’”

“‘What?’ I exclaimed timidly. ‘You, therefore, are involved in a lawsuit?’”
“‘Yes, a lawsuit, my dear friend, and a most irreconcilable one at that. And the reason for it is as follows: my neighbor, a commoner and a good friend of mine, although he’s twice as wealthy as I am, managed somehow to obtain a beautiful duck from overseas, along with two ducklings. Since he didn’t have a pond in his yard, and ducks, as we know, love water, he placed a large trough out there. Our cat somehow noticed this, he enticed one of the ducklings, and then he strangled it right in front of the eyes of the entire family. My neighbor, instead of coming to me and consulting with me, as he should have done in a matter of such importance, took it into his head, at the prompting of his wife, to seek revenge. About two and a half years ago, my wife and my daughter from my first marriage were sitting at the fence, hulling green beans. Our neighbor, noticing that my cat was lying low across from the part of the fence that was still standing, and that he was sneaking up on a sparrow, considered this opportunity a favorable one. He grabbed a log, quietly climbed up onto the fence above the heads of my wife and daughter, and, without noticing them, since he was looking fixedly at the cat, he tossed the log with all of his might. This had very unfortunate consequences, as you shall presently hear for yourself. The cat left, but the log, striking against the fence, bounced backward, falling on the leg of a turkey that was strolling by and breaking its leg in two. At that point, bouncing again, the log fell upon two turkey chicks and crushed both of them to death. All of this raised a lot of noise and screaming. Our neighbor, – whether from the strong swing of his arm when he threw the log, or from anger that it didn’t land on the cat, or because he took fright at the outcry from my wife and daughter, – couldn’t keep his balance on the fence and tumbled down into our courtyard, almost falling onto the heads of the two people who were sitting there. Although he didn’t injure them badly, he did manage to knock them down to the ground. My wife and daughter wanted to jump right back up, but they had somehow turned awkwardly and came to rest in a most indecorous position. Our neighbor quickly ran off. All of these misfortunes occurred in my absence. When I arrived home, I found that screaming, crying, tears, and cursing were awaiting me. No matter how much I beseeched them, no matter how much I tried to incline my wife toward peace, there was none. In the morning, I had to summon Mr. Uryvov, whom you saw at the small regal house. We composed a petition, where the maiming of the turkey, the death of her two children, and the terrible dishonor inflicted upon my wife and daughter were clearly described in great detail. We demanded legal redress. Thus, I submitted the petition, and I was assured that my lawsuit would soon end in my favor.’”

“‘What?’ I asked him, ‘so your lawsuit has already lasted two and a half years?’”

“‘A matter of such importance,’ the painter replied, ‘isn’t going to be resolved quickly. There are still some things that need to be considered!’”

“When we entered the bedroom in the house where my host lived, he introduced me as his painting assistant to two women who were sitting there doing some work. One of the women was around forty years old, while the other one was around twenty-five. Both of them, nodding their heads at me, were intensely examining everything about me: my height, my hair, and my clothes. That, in any event, is what I judged from the attentive
looks that they were giving me. It seemed that they approved of Yermil Fedulovich’s choice, and they said in unison: ‘Please be seated!’”

“At this point, a conversation began.”

THE WIFE: “So, is Mr. Uryvov satisfied with the way that you’ve been regaling him?”

THE HUSBAND: “It seems that way. He swears that the lawsuit shall soon come to an end, and shall be decided in our favor.”

THE WIFE: “But it seems to me that one of you is a great rogue. Either this Uryvov, through deception, is dragging us along only so as to finagle something out of us, or you, who are yourself guzzling away our money, are deceiving me!”

THE HUSBAND: “You, my dear wife, are very shameless, to tell you the truth! Really, don’t you see that we have a new person living in our home, my future assistant?”

THE WIFE: “And what need do I have to know that? Even if the town’s mayor were here, I would tell him that I’m not afraid of anyone, and I have the power to say what I feel like saying.”

THE HUSBAND (assuming a dignified air): “You should at least not forget that I’m your husband and the boss in the house . . .”

“He didn’t get the chance to finish speaking. His wife jumped up in a mad frenzy, quickly ran up to him, gave him a slap in the face, and, after sitting down calmly, said to him: ‘Shut up, you scoundrel! I shall prove to you yet again that your seniority in this house is fraudulent.’”

“‘Father, it seems, isn’t to blame,’ his daughter objected in a rather stately way. And, at that very same instant, she received the same gift that her father had just received in his face. Everyone turned silent. ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘now it’s clear to what extent the husband has seniority in this house!’”

“We had supper at twilight, and the hostess led me, with the help of a night lamp, to the attic, where there was a small upper room, whitened with clay. Lying there, on a short and narrow little bed, was a felt mat, two pouches filled with sheep’s wool, and a piece of canvas, the kind out of which bags are made. All of this meant, – a bed! A small table and two small chairs constituted the remainder of the furniture.”

“After placing my small bundle in the corner, I lay down on the bed and, giving myself up to reflection, I said to myself: ‘It’s true that it’s nice here, but it was better at the boarding school: there was a more comfortable bed there, and Elizaveta was there! What’s to be done? I was expelled from there . . .’ I let out a sigh and soon fell fast asleep amidst reflections about the adventures that I had experienced that day.”
Chapter 25: The Advice of a Neighbor (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“Very early the next morning, Yermil Fedulovich came by to see me. I was already dressed, and I was walking about my room and was thinking. ‘What are you thinking about, Mr. Nikandr?’ he asked. After receiving a meaningless reply from me, he sat down and invited me to sit down as well, and then he said: ‘Before we proceed to those labors that shall allow us to receive money and fame for our works of art, you should first be made aware of my way of life and the dispositions of the members of my family. Fyodora Tikhonovna, my wife, was not taken from the non-gentry home of some bourgeois, and she is my second wife. My daughter Darya comes from my first marriage. My main misfortunes are that I’m short, club-footed, and not very strong. And, as luck would have it, my current wife is tall and strong, and she has a dreadful appetite for arguing and fighting. What’s to be done, my friend? Apparently, such is my fate! The longer you live on this earth, the more you learn. I’ve come to you to explain myself, so that you won’t be surprised if you often see incidents such as the one that you saw yesterday. This happens, as if by contract, every day. However, this doesn’t prevent me from working and from making enough money to provide for my own sustenance and for regaling Mr. Uryvov. Oh, that damned lawsuit!’”

“In spite of everything, we were busy with our work. My host truly wasn’t the last of his kind. But since there were more wealthy merchants in town than wealthy noblemen, he painted icons more than portraits or historical paintings, genres in which he was likewise a little less skillful than I was.”

“After spending about a month in his house, I had become accustomed to everything. Fyodora Tikhonovna would scamper about, like a whirlwind, from morning until evening, going from one room to another, waving her arms and flapping the ribbons of her bonnet. She would get angry due to the least little thing and would swear due to the least little thing. If her husband were to get up early, she would scream at him for waking her. If he were to get up late, she would scream at him for being a great lazybones. If he were to cough, sneeze, smile, or knit his brow, – no matter what he might do, his wife would find displeasure in everything that he did and would hurl abuse at him. Even if a flea were to bite her, she would scream at her husband, reproaching him for being the reason why she was bitten. In a word, one could have likened her to Milton’s Satan when he was rushing around hell, trying to find a way out.”

“All of this didn’t prevent us from doing our work. Her husband endured her shouting and her abusive language in a most philosophical manner. He would usually reply to his wife’s cruelest abuse by saying: ‘Yes, yes, darling, but please stop!’”

“One must give them their due: Fyodora Tikhonovna and Darya Yermilovna got along with me differently. They, it seemed, were vying with each other in trying to please me. During breakfast, dinner, and supper, they were always according me endearments and

7 Nikandr is referring here to John Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost* (1667).
the friendliest goodwill. And I even noticed a certain displeasure between them if one of
them preempted the other in anything. They would exert especial zeal when the master
wasn’t at home, and they would try to hide this from each other.”

“In order to astonish Yermil Fedulovich in a pleasant manner and to show him that I
wasn’t a pecuniary painter, I furtively painted a full-length portrait of him. It’s true that
there was a small deception here; namely, I made his head and his mouth a little smaller,
his height a little taller, and his legs a little straighter than they actually were in reality.
And I displayed this painting on the wall while I was waiting for him to arrive home, for
he had gone to see a wealthy merchant with a made-to-order icon of those two saints,
Cosmas and Damian, who are venerated for being above taking money for their good
deeds, saints to whom he directed public prayers every year.”

“It’s impossible to describe Yermil Fedulovich’s joy and surprise when he saw his
portrait and found out that I was the one who had painted it. After looking for a long
time at the painting, and looking in the mirror, he exclaimed: ‘No! Such talents and such
art should not be hidden away and kept under wraps. It’s a sin before God, and it’s
shameful before people! I myself shall paint one that’s a little better than this.’”

“I somewhat doubted the sincerity of the last phrase, but his wife and daughter openly
admitted that he would never in his life succeed in painting anything like that. I showed
them my gratitude with a smile, and they accepted it likewise with a smile and a look of
joy on their faces.”

“In a short amount of time, Yermil Fedulovich had managed to spread word all over town
that there lived in his house a portrait painter, the likes of which had never been seen
before anywhere else in the whole wide world. Everywhere people started calling upon
me. I didn’t balk at this, and a few months later I had become, in my own eyes, a great
man. Noblemen and noblewomen, merchants and the wives of merchants, with their
entire families, wanted to have their portraits painted, and they wanted it to be
exclusively my work, perhaps because, besides myself, there was no one else in town
who was a portrait painter.”

“I spent the subsequent winter and spring in this aura of exultation and glory. I had
accumulated quite a bit of money, and I was happy, as much as I could be happy after
being separated from Elizaveta, seeing the admiration of my host and his family, for I
was dividing in half with them all of the money that I received for the works that I had
painted. And this half nearly meant more than all of the revenue that they were receiving
from their sycophants.”

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8 Cosmas and Damian were two Arab physicians, living in the Greek town of Cyrrhus, who were
reputedly twin brothers and early Christian martyrs. They practiced their profession in the
seaport of Aegeae, then in the Roman province of Syria. Their insistence on not accepting
payment for the services that they rendered led to them being nicknamed “the silverless,” and it
attracted many to the Christian faith that they were proselytizing at the time.
“This is a treasure trove!” the wife would say to her husband. And although she continued, just as before, to run about, to curse, and sometimes to beat poor Yermil, all of us, from force of habit, were not disheartened by this.”

“In the month of May, the evenings were wonderful, and my host and I took it into our heads to go for a stroll and to talk at liberty about the glory that the great painter was acquiring as a result of the quality of his work. We hadn’t managed to traverse all of the streets in town, when we came across our neighbor, Pakhom Trifonovich. Yermil blushed red and wanted to turn around, but just then Pakhom approached him, took him by the hand, and said to him: ‘Well done, neighbor!’ Yermil, in confusion, removed his hat, made a semicircle backwards with his splayed foot, and replied, blushing even more crimson, ‘Thank you!’”

“Explanations, arguments, and reproaches commenced, but the encounter did end with Pakhom leading my Yermil away to his house. ‘I pray thee come, and also thine honor,’ he said, turning toward me. And I set off with them.”

“After we had all sat down, and after Yermil Fedulovich had drunk a glass of the artificial gift of the gods, the merriment became universal. Pakhom proclaimed: ‘My dear Yermil! What are we litigating about? I swear to you, that it’s about mere trifles! Recently I found out that Mr. Uryvov is a great rogue: he was my solicitor, and from time to time he promised that our case would soon be decided, and decided in my favor.’”

“‘What do you mean?’ Yermil exclaimed, his eyes popping out of his head.”

“‘Just what I said,’ Pakhom replied. ‘As soon as I found out about this, I decided, no matter what the cost, to become reconciled with you, without the help of agents of legal justice. And so, my dear friend and neighbor, would you agree, for all of the harm that I have inflicted upon you, to take a ram from me’”

“‘Why not?’ Yermil replied. ‘But won’t your wife say something?’”

“‘You’re a good and kind man,’ Pakhom retorted, ‘but the very worst husband. I admit that my wife gave me a bruising for the villainy that I committed when I killed your cat, the incident from which all of these legal troubles began. You know what? I’ll reveal to you a secret that shall allow you, – from this day forward, – never to have to fear your wife again!’”

“‘Tell me, please,’ Yermil said softly, drawing near to Pakhom. ‘What’s this secret? For me, it’s needed very badly!’”

“‘Give her a proper thrashing very regularly, one, two, three. That’s the whole secret: I know it from experience.’”

“‘That’s fine for you to say, my dear neighbor, because you’re tall, and your wife is a clumsy little cuttlefish. But judge for yourself about me and Fyodora Tikhonovna!’”
“That doesn’t prevent you from trying,’ Pakhom retorted. ‘Whatever can’t get done by force, can get done by cunning. And, indeed, it’s shameful that you, it turns out, are a real peon, slaving away for your wife. At least give it a try!’”

“All right,’ Yermil said with resolve, after draining yet another glass of the gift of the gods. ‘What shall be, shall be! I’m relying upon the power of the Lord!’”

“Thus, after calling on Mr. Uryvov, they announced that they had reconciled, and they requested that everything that needed to be done for this to happen be put into writing, and they no longer remained ungrateful.”

“At twilight, both friends bade farewell to each other. Yermil was dragging a ram by its horn, and I was holding on to its tail, so that it wouldn’t break free. When we arrived home, a cry could be heard from every quarter: ‘What’s the meaning of this? Where did you get a ram?’”

“I reconciled with our neighbor,’ Yermil replied drily. And, from that moment on, they weren’t able to get another word out of him. No matter how furious his wife got, no matter how much she upbraided him, he remained silent and went about his business. And what was his business? He quietly brought in a rolling pin from the kitchen and a large bear-spear from the attic. ‘What’s this? What’s this?’ his wife screamed, but her husband remained silent, placing the one item and the other next to the drawer with his paints.”

“When Fyodora Tikhonovna saw that he was a little tipsy, and as mute as a fish, she contented herself by giving him several slaps to the face and went out of the room to prepare supper.”

“At this point, Yermil Fedulovich placed a chair next to the doors, took the rolling-pin in his hands and clambered onto the chair. I asked him the reason for such a preparation, but he remained silent and didn’t dare to take a breath.”

“After some time had passed, his wife appeared and, standing in the doorway, asked pompously and threateningly: ‘Where’s that scoundrel Yermil?’ – just then a terrible blow by the rolling-pin to the back of her head surprised her. ‘Ah!’ she cried out, falling to the ground and rolling over onto her belly. But Yermoshka, the creator of this scheme, jumped up quickly, and dug his claws into her hair with his left hand, while with his right hand he beat her mercilessly with whatever came to hand, saying over and over again, after each blow: ‘Here you go, you scoundrel, here you go, you lazybones, you thief, you idler, here you go, Yermoshka!’ Despondency was visible on his face.”

“Seeing that Fyodora Tikhonovna had stopped screeching, he calmed down a bit, sat down, with an air of importance, in the corner, and took the bear-spear into his hands. ‘Yermil Fedulovich,’ I exclaimed, ‘what’s the meaning of this?’ ‘Live for a little while in this world,’ he replied, ‘and you shall see more of this!’”
“His wife, seeing that her husband had walked away, jumped up, began to scream, rolled up her sleeves, and rushed off. But she turned to stone when she saw that Yermil Fedulovich was sitting there, displaying the bear-spear as if he were getting ready to plunge it into a bear. No matter how much she dashed about, no matter how much she changed places, all the time the bear-spear was directly opposite her. There was nothing that she could do! She contented herself with scattering his paints and giving Darya Yermilovna several slaps in the face.”

“Almost every day passed in this way. My host had very much kept in mind the exhortation provided by his neighbor: that when it’s not possible to deal with something by means of force, one must resort to cunning. Every day he was thinking up some new stratagem: he would knock his wife down to the ground by means of a rolling-pin, he would beat her, and he would defend himself with a bear-spear.”

“But, alas! Misfortunes consumed his kind heart. I noticed that for him it was more pleasurable and more profitable to be the one who receives the beating than to be the one who delivers it. However, since he had already started to do the latter, he continued to do it. ‘One shouldn’t change the established order of things,’ he would say, sighing heavily.”

“One day, after walloping Fyodora Tikhonovna, he somehow, out of carelessness, accidently pricked her hand with the bear-spear. When he saw the blood, he fell to the ground unconscious. Soon his wife stopped bleeding, but when they lifted up the poor, kind Yermil off the floor, he was dead: he had suffered a fatal heart attack!”

Chapter 26: Two Ghostly Apparitions (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“Three days later, they buried poor Yermil Fedulovich. I was the only one at the gravesite, for his wife and daughter, due to the despair that they felt, couldn’t come out of the house. My sadness was not pretended. I loved my kind host, despite the fact that he was a clubfooted dwarf. What worried me most of all was any thought about the future. What shall I be doing? Where shall I be laying my head? I spent an entire month in this frame of mind. Although the affections of the mother and daughter not only didn’t diminish, but from day to day became greater and more tender, I nonetheless decided to leave, without waiting until such time as they would have shown me the door, even though even I myself didn’t know where I would go. ‘The Lord shall guide the steps of the unfortunate orphan,’ I thought, and one day I began to pack up my belongings. Fyodora Tikhonovna saw me doing this and, rushing over to me with a look of concern and anxiety on her face, she asked: ‘Why do you wish to do this, my dear friend?’”

“‘I wish to leave you,’ I replied. ‘The thought that I’m a burden on you torments me. I would sooner agree to wander around the world without shelter than to cause you any worry!’”
“Wander? Cause us worry?’ she exclaimed. ‘Merciful God up in heaven, save us! To
the contrary, I’m giving you all of the paints and other potions that incline toward
painting, and I hope that you shall stay with us, and not for just a short period of time.’”

“I accepted the offer of my hostess with the requisite gratitude and hardly had she left,
with a smile on her lips, than her portly stepdaughter suddenly appeared.”

“’What’s this I hear, my dear friend: you wished to leave us?’ she said. ’It’s godless to
aggrieve so cruelly people who love you like their own kin!’”

“’I have already changed my mind,’ I replied. ‘And I shall stay here until such time as I
start to bore you.’”

“’That means that you shall stay here forever,’ Darya joined in. She shook my hand with
ardor and left the room very satisfied with herself. And so I decided, for the time being,
to live in this house and to work here. Fyodora Tikhonovna was about to have me move
downstairs, where her departed husband used to go to sleep, but I considered that it
would make more sense for me to stay in the attic. And there, despite her exhortations, is
where I remained.”

“One night, about three weeks afterwards, when it was already late, I was sitting behind a
candle in my large abode, plunged deep in thought. At that time, everything was
presenting itself to my cheerless imagination: all of the most trivial circumstances at the
boarding school and, later, at the home of the recently departed Yermil. All of my soul
was filled with the most woeful images. And I uttered a heavy sigh.”

“My astonishment was considerable when I heard, on the other side of the door in the
attic, that someone was replying to my sigh with a heavy sigh of their own. I got up and
cocked my ear to the door, but there was nothing there. ‘It just seemed to me that I heard
something,’ I said to myself, sitting down and again sighing. Again someone replied to
my sigh with a sigh of their own.”

“’No,’ I thought, leaping up, ‘there’s some kind of mystery going on here. Isn’t this
perhaps the ghost of good Yermil, who has come to seek revenge upon the maleficent
Fyodora?’ A cold shiver spread right through my heart. Trembling all over, I walked
toward the door, I opened it, and I jumped back two steps. Something white, very large,
with long, flowing hair, was standing a short distance from the doors.”

“Although my courage wavered at first, I soon called upon my knowledge of metaphysics
for help. In my mind, I read in a trice the treatise, De possibili et impossibili and,
strengthening myself properly in spirit, I sat down on a chair, having taken in hand, just
in case, the bear-spear. ‘If,’ I thought, ‘the late Yermil Fedulovich could defend himself
successfully against an evil and mad woman with this weapon, then certainly it’s very
possible to use it to defend oneself against a ghost.’”
“The ghost walked through the doors, advanced closer, and quietly came up to me. It extended its hand out to me and said tenderly: ‘What’s such a weapon for, my dear friend?’ I looked at the ghost closely and recognized the tall and portly Darya Yermilovna, dressed in a very thin nightgown. Blushing a little from the exposure of my lack of courage, I placed the bear-spear in the corner and said: ‘Please do sit down, Darya Yermilovna.’”

DARYA YERMILOVNA: “Despite the fact that this is such a quiet and moonlit night, I wasn’t able to fall asleep. One thought after another kept filling my head; my heart was beating so strongly. And so I decided to come by to see you about taking a stroll together. I somehow knew that you weren’t sleeping yet.”

NIKANDR: “Yes, I’ve been sitting here and thinking.”

DARYA YERMILOVNA: “It’s true that you’re very fond of doing that. But confess to me open-heartedly: what is it that you’re always thinking about? Not infrequently, I’ll be speaking with you for a few minutes, and you, it seems, are not listening, and where you need to say ‘Yes,’ you say ‘No.’”

NIKANDR: “Perhaps that’s due to absentmindedness on my part.”

DARYA YERMILOVNA: “Do you happen to know, my dear friend, what people are noticing and saying about this?”

NIKANDR: “What are they saying?”

DARYA YERMILOVNA: “I was at the home of one of my girl friends recently. She knows you a little, and she started a conversation about you, – what do you think, my good friend, that she says about this frequent absentmindedness of yours?”

NIKANDR: “What?”

DARYA YERMILOVNA: “That you’re in love.”

“At this point, Darya became embarrassed and looked down. I didn’t know what to say to her in response: this revelation had astonished me. How could her girlfriend have found out that I was in love with Elizaveta, and that I had been expelled from the boarding school because of that? In a word, my bewilderment was indescribable. But how much more it increased when, a short while later, the chaste Darya Yermilovna asked me, with a stutter: ‘And do you know whom it is that you’re in love with, my dear?’ ‘No,’ I replied, stuttering even more than she had. And I was prepared at that moment, – on behalf of Elizaveta’s good name, a name that was so sweet, so precious to me, – to fall into a faint from shame and sorrow. But having gathered my wits about me, I said rather calmly, ‘With whom?’”
“‘With me,’ she replied. Once again she looked down and examined the fingers of her hands, which were folded on her knees.”

“‘Oh,’ I exclaimed, fixing my eyes stock-still upon her.”

“Oh, my God! With what joy I would have rejected life, if only to have been able to hear Elizaveta say to me the words: ‘I love you!’ But such an admission of love coming from Darya Yermilovna, – no matter how new I was in my knowledge of the ways of the world, I understood, nonetheless, what these words of hers meant, – distressed, angered, and enraged me. It seemed sacrilegious to me for her to request accord from the heart over which Elizaveta ruled.”

“Darya was mistaken. She had taken my confusion for timidity and for the dismay that comes from the unexpectedness of such happiness. She took me tenderly by the hand and said in a languid voice: ‘Why not, my dear Nikandr? There’s no reason to be ashamed of a love that’s honorable and lawful! God blesses a love of this kind. Do you know what? This house and all of the things that are in it belong to me as the heiress after my father’s death. Fyodora Tikhonovna got married to him owning nothing but the shirt on her back; consequently, she has no share in the estate.’ ‘So, my friend,’ she continued (after embracing me, and in a truly amicable way), ‘you and I shall be able to live very happily here. You’re a great artistic virtuoso, so we shall always have money. And to keep my stepmother from bothering us with her screaming, we shall give this witch some good thrashings. Isn’t that true?’”

“Scarcely had she concluded her recondite speech, and was about to embrace me even more tenderly than before, we heard a slight sound and some panting in the attic. ‘Oh, my God!’ Darya said in extreme consternation. ‘It’s, no doubt, my stepmother! What am I to do? It’s too high for me to jump out the window: I would break my legs! But how can we go meet her?’”

“Indeed, we didn’t know how to begin, and yet we had to decide something quite soon. Suddenly the door opened, and Fyodora appeared, dressed in the same skimpy attire as Darya.”

“‘What?’ she said, standing at the threshold. ‘You’re not yet asleep, Nikandr?’”

“She took a step backwards and was struck dumb at seeing her stepdaughter there.”

“‘Bah!’ she exclaimed. ‘What are you doing here? Is this possible? A wench, in the middle of the night, in the room of an unmarried man, dressed in such skimpy attire: oh, you shameless hussy!’”

“‘No more, no less than you yourself!’ Darya replied. ‘Is this possible: a widow, in the middle of the night, in the room of an unmarried man, dressed in such skimpy attire: oh, you shameless hussy!’”
“Oh!’ cried Fyodora, who leapt forward and parried such a strong slap to the face of her stepdaughter that the latter staggered. But she likewise, in turn, exclaimed, ‘Oh!’ and likewise parried such a strong slap to her stepmother’s face that the latter was knocked off her feet. But she jumped back up to her feet right away, and both of them dug their claws into each other’s hair and started to wrestle each other, until such time as they fell to the floor, where, while still wrestling, they continued their duel, reckoning each other’s virtues. In the meantime, a table was knocked over onto the floor, and Epictetus’s clay candlestick holder broke into pieces.9

“Apparently, I’m no longer a lodger here,’ I said to myself. ‘There’s no point in my waiting around until such time as these two female warriors fling themselves upon me, forcing me to receive the kind of torture that Yermil Fedulovich never experienced during his entire lifetime, and the fate of the glorious bard Orpheus10 would befall the glorious painter Nikandr.’”

“Thus, after grabbing the bag filled with my belongings and the bear-spear, I started running. Indeed, I had thought correctly: scarcely had I stepped over the threshold, when both of our heroines exclaimed: ‘Where are you going?’ They quickly jumped up from the floor and rushed toward me, but I had already managed to leave the door ajar, and so, after flinging the door hinge off, I filled it with a woodchip. No matter how much they shouted, then begged, then threatened, I descended the stairs noiselessly, went out to the courtyard, and from there went out onto the street.”

“Well, so what was I to do, in the middle of the night, under the open sky? The sound of the church bell on the belfry at the cemetery next to the town’s earthen wall, a sound from which I learned that it was already an hour past midnight, resolved my perplexity. ‘I shall go,’ I thought ‘and lie down somewhere in the grove, surrounded by graves.’”

“Upon entering the grove, I chose a thick bush next to a tombstone that depicted a young myrtle tree, clef by thunder. I stood there for some time, looking at the tree, then I sighed, put my bag down at the base of the bush, and drew the bear-spear near to me.”

Chapter 27: A Third Ghostly Apparition (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“I had been lying beneath the bush for no more than four hours, when I saw in the distance something white that was moving toward me. ‘My God!’ I thought, ‘apparently it’s my fate to spend this entire night with ghosts. I have somehow managed to get away from two of them. Shall there be something happening with this third one?’ I moved over to the bush itself, pressed the bear-spear close to me, and resolved not to take my eyes off the ghost. It was approaching closer and closer. My heart was trembling more

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9 It was widely believed that the famous Stoic philosopher composed his works by the light of a candlestick.

10 According to legend, the Thracian bard was torn to pieces by Bacchantes who were unable to induce him to respond in kind to their amorous advances toward him.
and more. Finally, after having reached its destination, it sat down next to the tombstone with the myrtle tree depicted on it. At this point, I saw that it was a girl who was still very young. She placed a sizeable bundle at her feet, and she would jump up at the slightest sound, look all around her, sigh, and then sit back down again.”

“This female friend, apparently, was more ardent than Darya Yermilovna had been, and the prospective betrothed fiancé was too cold, since he was forcing himself to wait for so long. I decided to be a witness to this lovers’ scene, but not to interfere at all. What business is it of mine what other people do?”

“The church bell struck two. The young beauty shivered, jumped up, and shouted: ‘My God! It’s already two o’clock, and he’s not here yet!’”

“‘What’s to be done, my friend? Be patient,’ I said to myself. ‘Patience multiplies the value of the pleasure.’”

“Finally, two men appeared. The unknown woman stood up: trembling was noticeable along her entire body, her bosom was heaving, her breathing was labored and intermittent.”

“The two heroes had arrived. One of them appeared to me to be quite frightful. He was wearing a long dark cloak. The other was a bit gentler and was wearing a merchant’s clothing. A conversation started among the three of them.”

MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING: “How long is it, my dear Natalya, that you’ve been out here already?”

NATALYA: “More than an hour.”

MAN IN A CLOAK: “Come on, show us your dowry!”

NATALYA: “Here it is.”

“She handed the bundle over to him. The man in a cloak unfolded it, looked it over, and said: ‘Good! There are diamonds, there are pearls, and there’s money. How much money is there?’”

NATALYA: “I don’t know: I took as much as I could find.”

MAN IN A CLOAK: “Good, we’ll count it later!”

“He again wrapped the bundle up quietly, gave it over to his partner, looked at him fixedly, and then said in a stern voice: ‘Well, brother, it’s two o’clock. Time to go!’”

“‘It’s time,’ replied the other, standing still.”
**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “Well, you get going to the wagon with the bundle, and I’ll take care of her by myself.”

“At the mention of these words, he opened the flap of his cloak and pulled out a very long knife. I grew numb, and poor Natalya let out a screeching sound of terror and fell unconscious at the base of the tombstone.”

“‘So much the better,” exclaimed the man in a cloak, walking up to her.”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING** (*drawing a pistol out of his pocket*): “No, my friend, you won’t kill her! There’s a bullet in this pistol, and I don’t miss!”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “Have you lost your mind? What’s this slip of a girl to you? Only extra troubles. After all, won’t we have to get rid of her sometime?”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “Fine, but I don’t like getting rid of people that way. Let her live. She can pleasantly take care of me for a week. But after that, may God be with her; she can go wherever she damn well chooses. I won’t have any need of her, but maybe someone else shall. In a word, I’ve decided to take her with me.”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “I’m giving you the opportunity to speak your mind, for it’s no use trying to force you to do anything when the discussion is about some village noblewoman, whom you saw in town last summer, and by whom you’ve became captivated because her father, they say, has a lot of money. Do what you wish with her. I won’t get mixed up in your affair, and you shouldn’t get mixed up in mine. But since I’m already entangled in this one, I want to end it the same way as I’m in the habit of ending such things. Habit, as you know, is second nature.”

“At this point, he took a step forward. His partner took aim at him and exclaimed: ‘Listen!’”

“While they were arguing, I was thinking while lying there in the bush: ‘I can see that this won’t be handled without some trouble! If they kill the poor girl, then they’ll toss her aside right here and now, and I might be suspected. If they start slicing each other up, then it shall be even worse than that. Well, what am I to do?’”

“‘Oh!’ I continued thinking. ‘If only I could manage to save this unfortunate creature, if only God would help me do that! How indebted she would feel toward me, how grateful her parents would be! It’s pleasant to do some good deed, but sometimes it’s very difficult to do it!’”

“Such a desire imbued me with an inordinate amount of courage. I pictured myself as a great knight. But knights usually sought dangerous adventures, and very seldom, or not at all, did they think the way that I was thinking when it became necessary to act.”
“At this thought, I crossed myself three times, called upon my guardian angel for assistance, grabbed the bear-spear, leaped up like a madman with a terrible roar, and, without allowing myself to come to my senses, I whacked the guy with the pistol hard on his hands and did the same to the other guy, as a result of which their weapons and the bundle with Natalya’s dowry inside it fell to the ground. Meanwhile, I let out a frightful scream: ‘Aha! We’ve caught you, you ne’er-do-well scamps!’ ‘Guys! Come here, quick! Come here!’”

“The two unknown men started running, while I, stomping my feet and knocking my bear-spear against the tombstones, yelled: ‘Arkhip, Kuzma, Makar! Catch them, catch them, tackle them!’”

“When they had gone into hiding beyond the grove, I hastened to the site of the battle and, fearing that the two runaways, recollecting themselves and not seeing anybody around, might return, I placed Natalya upon my shoulders, I took the bear-spear, the abandoned bundle, and the pistol in my arms, and, after throwing the knife as far away as possible, I set off for a very dense thicket in the grove. As I was making my way through the trees and bushes, trying to part the branches so as not to scratch the face of the rescued female victim whom I was carrying, Natalya regained consciousness and said with a groan: ‘My God! Where are they taking me? Oh! Am I still alive?’”

“Placing her back on her feet, I said to her: ‘Set your mind at rest, sweet damsel, you’re alive. And, what’s more, your innocence has been preserved. Know that in me you have found your rescuer, toward whom you may have brotherly trust and confidence. Have no fear of anything untoward happening to you, but only make sure to remain silent. The villains might well return. In that instance, I wouldn’t be able to manage alone, and both of us would surely perish. Keep silent and give yourself up to my command.’”

“She walked along beside me, holding on to my arm. All of the members of her body were trembling. We reached what seemed to be a safe spot. A branchy spruce tree, surrounded by juniper bushes, became our hiding place. I ordered Natalya to crawl in there, I gave her the bundle and the bear-spear, I crammed in some more brush, and then I myself crawled inside and laid down next to her, embracing my bear-spear with one hand and the pistol with the other.”

“Natalya remained silent, drawing in deep breaths.”

“An hour later I heard, not very far away, the loud voices of our earlier unknown men.”

“‘Natalya!’ I said softly. ‘They’re approaching us here. Don’t dare to breathe.’ She began to shiver and became as still as a stone wall.”

“I became frightened. ‘Are you alive, sweet damsel?’ A weak ‘Oh!’ was her reply.”

“I smartly assumed a defensive position: I laid myself face downwards on the ground, with my head facing toward the place from which I heard voices coming closer and
closer. I lay the bear-spear down on my right side, and I took the pistol, with the hammer cocked, in my hand, and I thought: if Natalya, out of fright, were somehow to give herself away, and they were to set off in search of her, then I, casting aside all reasoning, would shoot the man in the cloak and would deal with the other man with the help of God and of the bear-spear."

“They had arrived at our spruce tree and were speaking loudly and heatedly”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “If he would at least make a sound! Just cough! But there’s nobody and nothing here! Evidently, this rogue has somehow managed to get out of this grove with his find, and with the hefty bundle! The girl is croaking somewhere beneath a grave. Oh, you coward, you coward! You were the first one to run off!”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “Who doesn’t save his own skin? He has told such a multitude of people about us! . . .”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “However, he left here alone, and, as is evident by his voice, he’s a young man!”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “Who is it that thought this up? There could be many of them!”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “Admit it: it would have been better if you hadn’t interfered with me.”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “I shall never admit to that. It’s true that I liked the girl more than I did my merchant’s wife, even in the early days of our union. And I wanted to spend some time having fun. But I swear to you that I would have agreed to cast her aside at the cemetery, to abandon her to the mercy of fate, rather than to see a gullible child killed.”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “You’re not worthy of being included in our circle. Your timidity, your eternal perplexity, your conscience . . .”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “I have proven to you today, and on many earlier occasions, that I’m no coward. And, as a consequence, I’m now suffering inner torments.”

**MAN IN A CLOAK:** “It would be better for us to part company than to suffer with a brainless partner. Farewell, my dear friend, my dear merchant, my dear nobleman, my dear prince, and so on, and so forth.”

**MAN IN MERCHANT’S CLOTHING:** “Farewell, my dear peasant, my dear commoner, my dear foreign merchant, and so on, and so forth.”
“They uttered these words, choking with anger. ‘Oh, if only I had my dagger with me now!’ ‘Oh, if only I had my pistol with me!’ each one of them said, gnashing their teeth, as they set off in different directions.”

“When everything had quieted down, I thrust my head out of the juniper bush and saw, to my great joy, a crimson dawn rising in the eastern sky. ‘Natalya, let’s get out of here!’”

“We crawled out. Natalya took a few steps away from me, fell to her knees, extended her arms up to the sky, and dissolved into tears. By her lips, one could notice that she wanted to say something. Oh, no doubt she was praying, and the great interpreter of the human heart shall, of course, forgive her for the grief that she has caused her parents!”

“After getting back up on her feet, she walked up to me, quickly took hold of my hand, and kissed it with all of the ardor of someone feeling heartfelt gratitude.”

“Stop, Natalya,” I exclaimed, removing my hand from her grip. ‘People find hours of temptation even in virtue itself.’”

NATALYA: “How is it that you know who I am?”

NIKANDR: “No, sweet innocence. I know your name because one of the villains uttered it the first time that I met you, at the tombstone with the myrtle tree.”

NATALYA: “Lead me away from here to go see my father: let me die at his feet!”

NIKANDR: “Fine, but how are we going to be able to do that? A crowd of people are already roaming the streets. What would these people say about you and about me, if they were to see that I’m walking with you so early in the morning and that we’re coming here from out of town? Your paleness, your emotional upset, your sighs, which you are unable to hide, these would give many idle people reason to make conjectures. And conjectures sometimes turn out to be more harmful than fame. Wouldn’t it be better for us to wait until mass has concluded? Then, after waiting for everyone to be gone, we could go to your father freely.”

“She inclined toward following my suggestion. She sat down at the base of the spruce tree, and surrendered herself to silent sorrow.”

“When the mass had concluded, we went to the rear of the parishioners and set off for the home of Natalya’s father, who was a wealthy merchant. When we entered the rooms of the house, we didn’t find anyone in the vestibule. We went into the reception room, and there was nobody there as well. In the drawing room, we saw the elderly merchant sitting there, leaning both of his elbows on the table, while his wife was kneeling in front of the icons, wringing her hands, weeping, and praying.”

“‘Father! Mother!’ exclaimed Natalya, falling to the floor in the middle of the room and extending her arms out to them. The old folks rushed forward to her, embracing their...
prodigal daughter, weeping with joy, and laughing from distress. Natalya wasn’t in any condition to share their rapture with them: she again felt sick, and, upon my advice, she was put to bed. And although I had likewise spent the entire night without sleeping, due to anxiety, now dealing with ghosts, now battling against midnight heroes, I nonetheless managed to control myself, and after telling her parents all that I myself knew, I gave them the bundle. Their gratitude was unfeigned. ‘Request from me all that you wish, young man,’ the merchant exclaimed. ‘Giving you all of my estate wouldn’t be reward enough for your having returned to me my Natalya, our one and only child!’ I asked permission to stay at his home for a few days, until such time as I could find myself a reputable position. He joyfully agreed to permit me to do this, and I was led away to a special room that was beautifully decorated.”

Chapter 28: Searching for a Position (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“I lived at the kind merchant’s home for about a week in repose, as I myself thought at the time, but to put it simply, I lived there in inactivity and idleness. Natalya had completely reconciled with her parents and looked in on me from time to time, acting shy and becoming confused. Her conversations with me were simple, intelligent, and pleasant. Although she hadn’t learned how to reason the way that I had, her observations concerning social behavior were nonetheless more correct than mine. She perceived things wonderfully, not being able to give names to her feelings the way that a scholar might. I was finding it extremely pleasurable to spend time alone with her, which happened almost every morning, and to recount to her my chivalry on that illustrious night. I would shout in a ferocious manner, just as if I were indeed back there again, waving a stick instead of a bear-spear and crawling along the floor, as if I were still in the juniper bush near the spruce tree. In a word, I resembled the very best actor. Natalya would weep, would give me her hand to hold, and would look into my eyes, such that if Elizaveta had not occupied all of my soul, all of my heart, then I, most likely, would have fallen at Natalya’s feet and sworn eternal fidelity to her. But it was already very late for me to do that, and my fidelity to Elizaveta was irrevocable!”

“I found out from the adorable Natalya that her seducer had been brought into their home to meet the family by her own father. The seducer’s name was Semyon Andreyevich, a merchant from some distant province. Although he was no longer so very young, his agility, attractiveness, and endearments were nonetheless enchanting. Natalya hadn’t found a single one of the merchants who visited her father’s home to be like him. From time to time, her heart would affix itself to him, but it all ended in a manner that is well-known to us. I later learned that such incidents are not uncommon: peasant girls, the wives of merchants, the daughters of priests, noblewomen, and even princesses and countesses, all of them would run away from their parents.”

“After I had spent a week there, as I’ve already said, I remembered that it was time for me to seek a government position, one that was proper for someone with my social standing and my capabilities. When I announced my intention to the merchant, I received this in reply: ‘Fine, my friend, may God help you!’ He smiled, and I went out onto the street.”
“Inwardly, I wanted to occupy some position in that large regal building, the one about which the late Yermil Fedulovich had said so many wonderful things. ‘What could be more charming,’ I said to myself, as I was walking down the street, ‘than to be a fellow member of such an eminent court, to which all of nature is subject! And it would only take my approaching it a bit closer for some of its venerable members to discover, by looking at my face, that it would be fitting for me to serve as their colleague there.’ Reasoning in this manner, I arrived at the town square, and I went to stand right in front of the entrance, about ten sazhens away. Eminent members (I was able to recognize them by their uniform coats, all of which, without exception, resembled the uniform coat of Mr. Uryvov) were moving like parts of a wound-up machine: some of them were walking with significant steps from the large building to the small one, while others were walking from the small building to the large one. ‘They, too, of course, must have a lot of everyday woes here,’ I thought, ‘since such a multitude of them are walking about so as to console themselves. And, apparently, nature must be in great disorder, since they are all coming back to bring it, by means of their judgments, into some arrangement. You, too, are pitiful, you grand people!’”

“I stood there for about two hours, yet not one of these grand people asked me, however, what I was standing there for. I came home feeling chagrined by this neglect.”

“‘Well, my friend, did you find a position?’ the merchant asked me.”

“‘For the time being, no, but I shall go look again tomorrow,’ I replied with constraint.”

“‘Please do tell us when you find one,’ said the merchant, smiling as he had done earlier. And his mockery seemed annoying to me. ‘Why is it,’ I thought, ‘that not a single one of these judges of character would speak with me today? Is it really possible that tomorrow they shall likewise be just as haughty? I think not!’”

“I thought not, but it did happen, however. For two whole weeks, I walked to the large, regal building, and the magnificent judges there didn’t honor me with a single word. To my great chagrin, just as soon as I returned to the merchant’s home, my host greeted me with the same question: ‘Well, my dear friend, did you find yourself a position?’”

“‘Wait a minute,’ I said, remaining alone with him, ‘tomorrow I shall put an end to this whole matter. Since it has become clear to me that these prideful judges don’t wish to ask me, perhaps so as not to degrade their office, then decorum requires that I first make a call to them. This I shall do tomorrow: I shall stop someone on the square, while they are going from the small building, – consequently, while they are consoling themselves over their everyday woes, – and I shall speak as eloquently as possible, and this, of course, shall touch even the most severe heart, and they shall propose that I become their confrère.’ Being intoxicated with this idea, I had imperceptibly assumed a prideful look and had spoken in a drawling manner. And when Natalya directed the conversation toward me, accompanying it with a brief, tender glance, I replied drily and curtly. This is what comes from thinking only of how to become a grand person!”
“The next day, at the proper time, I left the house and stood on the town square. After standing there for about an hour, repeating the speech that I was going to give, I caught sight of one of my magnificent judges coming out from the small building. I removed my hat and waited for him to approach me. But how great was my joy when I recognized that it was Mr. Uryvov. Scarcely had he approached me, when I made a deep bow before him, waving my arms, and said with ardor: ‘Most magnificent of all the fellows of the magnificent court of all of nature! Oh, you, who judges and reasons about everything that fills this world! Aren’t you the one who brings the disintegrating parts of all that exists on earth back into harmony? Yes, you tame ferocious lions and blood-thirsty tigers! You prohibit serpents and toads from spreading their deadly poison! You reconcile very grave feuds, such as the one that existed between Yermil Fedulovich and Pakhom Trifonovich over the broken leg of the turkey and the dishonoring of his wife and daughter! . . .’”

“‘These are the ravings of some madman,’ said Mr. Uryvov, with a fierce look on his face.”

“‘I beg you, my dear sir, to hear me out to the end,’ I replied. ‘And you shall be pleased with what I have to say.’ Then I continued: ‘Yes! You’re a magnificent man! Everything demonstrates that your works and your activities are immeasurable and innumerable, to the extent that there isn’t even any time left over for you to think about yourself! This is evident from the grey plumage that clings to your uniform coat, and from these hairs on your person that proudly stick out in various directions. This is evident from the blood-shot eyes that look around everywhere with an air of importance that is proper for your rank and title. In a word: from all of this, one gets a look and an image that resembles Beelzebub flying down from heaven!’”

“At this point, I stopped speaking, feeling very satisfied that I had articulated everything quite impertinently. But Mr. Uryvov was looking at me with great ferocity.”

“‘Tell me, old chum,’ he asked, ‘in what place did you break loose from your chain?’”

“‘I utterly commiserate with you,’ I replied sympathetically, ‘knowing that in this small building you haven’t forgotten life’s everyday woes. I have some money, so let’s go: I shall cheer you up no worse than Yermil Fedulovich used to!’ With these words, I took him by the arm in an amicable way, since he had just waved his walking stick at me, struck me on the back with it, and, – after adding: ‘What an idler!’ – he set off for the large building.”

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11 Beelzebub, a name derived from a Philistine god formerly worshipped in Ekron and later adopted by some Abrahamic religions as a major demon, is associated with the Canaanite god Baal. In theological sources, predominantly Christian, Beelzebub is another name for Satan. He is known in demonology as one of the seven deadly demons and is described as a being capable of flying (he is known as the “Lord of the Flies”).
“I jumped back a sazhen, I cast a sad glance in his direction, and then I said, sighing, ‘Oh, how fierce can people be who are great and well-born! Of course, since they think about all of nature, where there are wild animals and solid stones, their hearts harden toward human beings!’”

“When I arrived home, I related all of this to my host.”

“‘Let’s speak openly and freely, my friend,’ said my host, bringing me to his room. ‘I have noticed in you a sufficient amount of erudition, theoretical knowledge, and, – what is greatest and most valuable of all, – a kind heart and noble thoughts. You don’t know the way of the world, that’s true, but since you haven’t lived with people of various ranks, there’s no way that you could know it. You are without kith or kin; but that’s nothing. The famous name of an ancestor and his great deeds won’t embellish an idle descendant, when these things are understood in the eyes of an intelligent man. However, it’s impossible to live without a rank or title, and even if it were possible, it wouldn’t be suitable: it would be embarrassing for each one of us. As soon as you come into existence, you have already become a member of society. And, in accord with this responsibility, you must toil, you must do what’s within your powers to do to help your society. Thus, my friend, you must acquire a rank and a position. And I have thought up both the one and the other for you.’”

“A ray of pleasure sparkled in my eyes. I pictured in my imagination how he was gently inclining the illustrious judges of human nature to accept me as one of their fellow members. The merchant continued: ‘What I shall now say to you is what I had talked over with my wife earlier, and we both have agreed. I’m already entering old age; besides my daughter, I have no other children. Thus, I wish to adopt you, to give you my name, my estate, and my Natalya. What do you say to that, young man? Although she has fallen prey to deception and has been deluded, this mistake was more the fruit of an overheated imagination than a genuine passion. She has regained her temper, and if she doesn’t yet love you, then most likely she shall soon fall in love with you. And I grant you permission to seek that end and to try to attain it.’”

“Who wouldn’t have been sent into raptures from such a beneficent proposal? But I was astonished by it, as if struck by a peal of thunder, so I just stood there, not moving from the spot and not uttering a single word. This reaction took the merchant by surprise. He asked me the reason for this, and I admitted to him, in embarrassment, that I had been in love with someone else for some time now.”

“‘With whom?’ he exclaimed with great surprise, and I related to him, in detail, all of my adventures up to the time when I was expelled from the boarding school.”

“‘This is all nonsense, a pipe dream, and the kind of folly that your young age can’t justify,’ said the merchant with an air of importance. ‘Why shouldn’t we love someone? But we must choose, as the object of our affections, someone who’s more commensurate with our social standing, our rank, and our moral character. What profit would it be to me, if I were to fall in love with some princess or countess? There have been madmen
who have fallen in love with their sovereigns, but what profit did they receive from it? The consolation of wandering about the world and later dying in an insane asylum! What’s the goal of your love, Nikandr? After all, are you really certain that the father of your lover would never agree to give you his daughter’s hand in marriage? Know that this is exactly what would happen! To abduct her, to seduce her, – God forbid, – you aren’t capable of doing that: your heart would be horrified if you were to house such debauchery inside yourself. But if love were to bring you to such blindness and if you were to find the means to commit these acts of debauchery, – what would you find afterwards: poverty, unhappiness, pangs of conscience. Those are the rewards that follow as a consequence from a mad, torrid love affair! Think properly about this a little, my son, and I shall soon ask for your response. I’m hoping that by then you shall have cleared the fumes of intoxication out of your head.’”

“I thought about it for a day, for two days, for three days, for a week, for two weeks, and for an entire month, yet I still hadn’t changed my earlier thoughts. Every minute, Elizaveta, like a young, enchanting goddess, was scampering about in my soul. In my mind’s eye, I was kissing her sweet image; my heart was filling up with sweet warmth; a pure, sacred fire was blazing inside my entire being; and I was feeling the increase of my love for her with each passing moment, with each new beating of my heart. I didn’t conceal this from the merchant, and he didn’t feign his annoyance at it.”

“‘Well, since this is the case,’ he said to me one day, ‘you, my friend, shall need to leave our home. It’s no wonder, since your passionate fever might attach itself to Natalya. What’s the sense: she shall fall in love with you, but she shall not be loved by you, and a new torment shall thus take up its abode inside our home. So, my son, you shall need to leave.’”

“‘I would gladly do that, beneficent sir,’ I said to him, ‘but I don’t know where I can attach myself. One of the judges of human nature dealt very cruelly with me, and I no longer can hope . . .’”

“‘Don’t worry,’ the merchant replied with a smile. ‘I’ve found a position for you, a fairly good one, on the first try. I have a friend who’s one of the scholars in this town. His job as a teacher is to provide public lessons or deliver speeches about scholarly knowledge of metaphysics, a subject where his level of knowledge is very high, and for that he’s considered one of the eminent people in town. He has long been searching for a secretary to assist him, one who would know orthography, since the person in this position shall be rewriting a composition by Mr. Trismegalos, as this scholar is called, making a clean copy of it.’”

“I joyfully accepted this offer from my venerable host. He wrote an approbative letter on my behalf, took a purse filled with gold out of his chest of drawers, placed it on the table, and said affectionately: ‘Although you shall not be living at my home, always consider me to be your father and your friend. Mr. Trismegalos is a simple and very good-natured man; he shall most likely love you, and, with time, he shall try to take care of you as much as possible. However, he does have his weaknesses, and I should tell you about
them, not as a way to censure this learned gentleman in advance, but so that you, knowing about them, won’t be surprised at them and won’t be disappointed in this kind old man. His main weakness is, specifically, that he is madly in love with metaphysics, with the Church Slavonic language, and with punch. All three of these things occupy him jointly and beyond all measure. He hardly speaks about anything other than metaphysics; he hardly speaks a different language other than Church Slavonic, and he hardly drinks anything other than punch. His public speeches, however, are delivered in normal Russian, since the authorities prescribed that they be done that way. But, to make up for that, he draws consolation, when he’s visiting somewhere as a guest or when he’s sitting at home, by discussing things in Church Slavonic. If you were to speak with him a little bit in this language, he would come to love you as a son. Now is the right time, while people are drinking tea: go see him, you shall most likely find him at home; my helper shall carry your belongings there for you and shall show you where his house is located. Here’s a letter for Mr. Trismegalos and two hundred gold ten-ruble coins: they will stand you in good stead. Farewell, my dear friend!”

“At this point, he embraced me with a hug of parental affection. I, as the son of a good and kind father, wept and likewise embraced him. I bade farewell to his wife and daughter, and left his house accompanied by his helper. I failed to mention that, during my stay at the merchant’s home, his honorable family had fitted me out with linens, footwear, and so on. On the way to Mr. Trismegalos’s house, I went over in my mind all of the church books that I had just managed to read, and I memorized the most stentorian words and expressions found in them. I entered the gates to Mr. Trismegalos’s house with a trembling heart.”

Chapter 29: The Metaphysician (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“When we went into the entrance room, we were met by an old woman in a soiled dress. ‘What can I do for you, gentlemen?’ she asked. I replied that I wanted to see Mr. Trismegalos, for whom I had a letter. She led me to his study. Inside it, very large bookcases were filled with very large books and thick notebooks. By the window, there was a small table covered with a black oilcloth; on that table, there was a large samovar, and at the table two elderly gentlemen with crimson faces were each holding a large glass in their hands. They both directed glaring looks at me, and I lost my nerve, not knowing to which one of them I should hand my letter. One of them was tall, with a supercilious look on his face; the other was short and stocky, with a head that was hardly smaller than that of Yermil Fedulovich, and with a bulbous nose in the shape of an onion, with very wide nostrils.”

“‘Whom are you seeking here, child?’ asked the latter. Suddenly, I guessed that this was Trismegalos himself, and I reverently handed him the letter. He read it, smiled, stuffed his nose with a handful of snuff, tossed his head back, as a result of which he resembled a porpoise, and said: ‘God’s blessing be to thee, child, in the event that thou art as clever in the branches of scholarly knowledge, as my good and venerable friend prophesizes! Thou wilt reside in my house, just as Noah resided in his ark, and no tribulation shall ever bear upon thee. Is thine orthography good?’”

“Whom are you seeking here, child?” asked the latter. Suddenly, I guessed that this was Trismegalos himself, and I reverently handed him the letter. He read it, smiled, stuffed his nose with a handful of snuff, tossed his head back, as a result of which he resembled a porpoise, and said: ‘God’s blessing be to thee, child, in the event that thou art as clever in the branches of scholarly knowledge, as my good and venerable friend prophesizes! Thou wilt reside in my house, just as Noah resided in his ark, and no tribulation shall ever bear upon thee. Is thine orthography good?’”
“I replied with humility: ‘Methinks, my most honorable sir, that I know how to spell no worse than the most well-educated of men.’”

“Trismegalos was thunderstruck with horror. He jumped up, his eyes popping out of his head, and he examined me with awe. His friend, on the other hand, mocked him with such a cruel laugh that the glass of punch fell out of his hands. ‘Well, when Greek meets Greek, then comes the tug of war!’ He continued to laugh boisterously at Trismegalos having met his match.”

“Trismegalos sat down and, with a look of admonition on his face, said to the other gentleman: ‘What are you laughing at, oh, Gorlanius! Isn’t there in our current times, when all that is elegant on earth has perished and when mores and manners have given way to debauchery, isn’t there, I say, some wonder left? Look at this youth who, with such prudence, pontificates in the wisest and most mellifluous of languages. Oh, Gorlanius, Gorlanius! Why are you mocking me?’”

“Upon embracing me, he said: ‘Sit down amongst us, child, and taste of this drink. We take comfort in it.’”

“‘That isn’t so, oh, sir,’ I replied. ‘I’m still too young and not accustomed to the drink that they call punch.’”

“‘Fine,’ he replied. ‘Nonetheless, please do sit with us!’”

“Hence, I sat down with them. The conversation became more cheerful. Gorlanius rather rudely laughed at us upon hearing us use incessantly such Church Slavonic words as **ashche** [if], **obache** [however], **abie** [at once], and so on.”

“Once evening had come, and after Mr. Gorlanius had left, the metaphysician led me up to the dining room on the upper floor, which was worse, it’s true, than the cenacle I had been staying in as a guest at the merchant’s house, but, on the other hand, it was much better than living in the attic at the home of Yermil Fedulovich. The following day, Trismegalos told me about my future appointment, which actually consisted only in rewriting his speeches and making a fair copy of them. And since they were written in normal Russian, this appeared to me to be very easy work. I spent more than two months performing these rewriting tasks. In the afternoons, I would go with Trismegalos to his small garden, where we would have friendly, pleasant conversations. And this gentleman scholar accorded me the utmost indulgence by speaking with me in the simple Russian dialect, and he permitted me to speak with him in the same dialect, adding that until such time as I learned Church Slavonic properly, I shouldn’t abuse that language, just as one shouldn’t touch a sacred object with unclean hands. At eventide, Gorlanius would usually come by to see us or else he would send someone to invite us to go visit him, whither Trismegalos would go with great appetite. Gorlanius’s house was located right next to ours, and the two gardens were adjacent. The internal supports and other architectural features at his house were ten times more expensive than the ones at ours.
Gorlanius’s family consisted of: an adult daughter, Agafya; an adult niece, Anisya (both of them, as much as one could tell at first glance, were rather impudent wenches); a very old man; and an aged, ugly old peasant woman, Solomonida, whom her master nonetheless liked. Mockers leaked the rumor that the age of the niece Anisya was the average, proportionally, between the age of Solomonida and that of Gorlanius, to whom she appeared to be more dear than just a niece. One can now guess what kind of order and decorum must have prevailed within the philologist’s home, for the social standing belonged to Gorlanius, who, with his height, his roar, or his growl, would make others tremble, yet he himself, not infrequently, would tremble at the screeching of Solomonida, who, for the sake of brevity, or out of some special goodwill, was usually called simply Solomon. ‘Solomon!’ he would yell each time we appeared at his house, ‘Prepare the samovar! No, Solomon, Agafya or Anisya can do that. You, Solomon, go to the wine cellarer and give him this note.’

“I didn’t like at all visiting this house as a guest. I went there very often, however, for Trismegalos demanded it: I loved this good, kind, and venerable old man, and I complied with his wishes. His trust in me, and his friendship with me, increased with each passing day. He would read his speeches aloud to me before delivering them at a meeting. He would ask for my opinion, and sometimes for my advice. And what, more than anything else, did honor to the kind heart of this well-educated man was the fact that he accepted the opinions and words of advice that I offered him. With the exception of one incident, his heart was always open to me. Not infrequently, he would sit there, lost in thought, not paying attention to anything, and not even hearing if people were asking him a question. Then he would get up quickly, smile, clap his hands together, and say: ‘Good! Good! That’s the way I shall do it!’”

“I considered such occurrences to have been inspired by metaphysics, and sometimes by the punch.”

“Summer, autumn, and part of the winter were spent in the following fashion. As soon as the evenings started to arrive earlier, so did we start to set off earlier to Gorlanius’s house. There Gorlanius would drink without pause, Trismegalos would sometimes rest, would sometimes walk up to Anisya, calling her a dove more beautiful than the one that had been aboard Noah’s ark, and would sometimes take her by the hand, laugh, flaring out his nostrils, and again walk back over to his glass. Anisya would spin around like a demon, giving the old man a fillip on the nose, from which he not infrequently winced. And he would become embarrassed when she would prattle on about his wig and his eyeglasses, both of which he always wanted to hide. I usually sat at the pianoforte and played arias. Anisya would jump around like a magpie, while Agafya, meek for the moment, would sit beside me and sing, perched like a siskin on a nest egg. And all of this tableau was very pretty to behold.”

“One morning I was summoned to Trismegalos’s study. I entered the room and saw that he was sitting there with an air of importance on his face, and he was smiling, looking at a thick notebook and a slip of paper covered with writing.”
“Sit down, my friend,” he said to me. I sat down, and he proceeded to say: ‘I shall now reveal to you the dearest secret of my heart. Don’t think, as do many unenlightened people, that I have fallen in love only with metaphysics, the Church Slavonic language, and punch. Yes, I do love all three of those things, but not them alone! Alas! In my declining years, in my old age, I have also fallen in love, beyond measure, with the comely Anisiya, the niece of the most wise Gorlanius.’”

“He paused and heaved a deep sigh of relief.”

“‘Why is your heart embarrassed?’ I said. ‘Such an erudite man as yourself would be bestowing a great honor upon this eminent damsel by offering her your heart and your hand in marriage.’”

“‘I do this every day,’ he said, ‘but it’s all in vain: she is more prideful than ever was Nebuchadnezzar,’ Gorlanius repeatedly exhorted her to yield to my wishes, but she, in an effort to postpone this longed-for marriage, had been assigning me some highly demanding tasks. For example, once she said to me: ‘Until you finish your treatise, I shall not enter your nuptial bed!’ ‘Alas, my son Nikandr! I have tried very hard, but all to no purpose. First of all, at her behest, I proved to her indisputably that our soul is located on our forehead, right between the eyes. ‘Fine,’ she replied. And the next day she wrote to me in a letter: ‘Now I want it to be proven that our soul is located in the back of the head.’ Oh, what an evil design upon the honor of metaphysics! Oh, what an act of sacrilege, tantamount to patricide! But what was I to do? I even made an attempt to commit that evil deed, for my love for Anisya had surmounted my love for metaphysics. And here you see the outline of a treatise that’s a hundred seventy and a half pages long, where it’s clearly and indisputably proven that the human soul resides in the back of the head, with this proviso, however, that it has the power to move to the brow. In this way, I redressed my crime, as much as I was able. You, my son, must take upon yourself the task of bringing this outline to that ferocious woman.’”

“‘Listen now to what I have written, wherein you shall suffer this discussion about the soul and the back of the head.’ He took the sheet of paper, sighed again, and then he started to read it aloud:

‘I’m now sending you an outline, in which you shall see how much villainy I, an accursed one, purported to commit, solely out of my love for you, having proven

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12 Nebuchadnezzar II was the second king of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, ruling from the death of his father Nabopolassar in 605 BC to his own death in 562 BC. Historically known as “Nebuchadnezzar the Great,” he is typically regarded as the empire’s greatest king, famous for the military campaigns that he led in the Levant, for his construction projects in his capital, Babylon, and for the important part that he played in Jewish history. Nebuchadnezzar the Great apparently had much to be prideful about.
that our soul is located in the back of the head, and having proven, if you wish, that this fact is irrevocable. Take pity upon me, maiden most elect, and cease postponing our wedding day. You alone have now become for me metaphysics: I see ontology in your eyes, I see pneumatology on your brow, and, on the back of your head, alas, I now see psychology. Don’t be ferocious, like a wild boar or like birds, the backs of whose heads have been damaged and, along with that, so too have their souls and their minds.’”

“Such folly, and, moreover, at such an advanced age, led me to feel compassion for this kindly old man, the venerable Trismegalos. I tried to think up various means to restore him to health, as it were. I spoke to him at length and, it seems, soundly, but in vain: he would sigh, he would turn his eyes upward, and, it seemed that his soul would indeed soon take up a new residence, moving from his forehead to the back of his head, and doing so irreversibly. I decided to flatter his passions, so as to calm him down, if not forever, then at least for a while, and to wait there to see what he would do. I took the letter and the treatise over to Anisya. She accepted them with a laugh and made fun of the old man, abusing him for being a madman. And while she was reading his letter, she nearly choked from laughter.”

“I blushed with shame and annoyance for the good-natured Trismegalos. Anisya appeared to me to be so loathsome, so wanton, that she didn’t deserve to be called the niece, not only of the most wise Gorlanius, but also of the least shepherd. ‘I shall be replying to him tomorrow in written form,’ she said to me. And, at that point, I left.”

‘‘Oh, Trismegalos, Trismegalos!’ I said to myself while walking along the street. ‘How is it that you didn’t consider that it’s difficult for a person, even one who isn’t of your advanced years, to cope with so many loves? It’s no laughing matter! Love of metaphysics, love of the Church Slavonic language, love of punch, and, now, love of Anisya. And all of these loves of yours, I find, are ardent, passionate ones! Oh, unfortunate, unhappy Trismegalos!’”

Chapter 30: A Metaphysical Comedy (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“‘What say you?’ asked Trismegalos, standing at the threshold, waiting impatiently for my return.”

“‘It’s a little better,’ I replied. ‘The charming Anisya, who kissed your epistle with delight, said that she would reply tomorrow.’”

“My old man was beside himself with joy. He embraced me a hundred times over, and I blushed from shame, seeing how merry he was as a result of my deception. For me, it would have been easier to hear his groans than to be looking now at his smiling face, which was occurring as the result of a misrepresentation on my part. The day passed very pleasantly for him, while for me it was quite the contrary. I was upbraiding myself every minute for my deception.”
“Hardly had I awakened the next day, when the clamor and outcry of my host could already be heard throughout the entire house: ‘Hasn’t the epistle from the beautiful Anisya been received yet?’ They answered him ‘No,’ and he fell silent. After breakfast, while he and I were discussing together his most recent treatise, that is, the one about the human soul being located in the back of the head, they suddenly brought him a letter. The scholar’s eyes filled with fire; his hands were shaking while he was unfolding it: he resembled a person suffering from fever all over his body. After he had read the letter, he sat down; a terrible paleness covered his cheeks; his eyes were fastened upon the ceiling.” ‘Oh, just and fair God!’ he said. He gave me the letter he had received, and he sank into a deep silence.”

“The dissolute Anisya thanked Mr. Trismegalos for the treatise and asked him to write for her, yet one final time, as a sign of his true love for her and the eternal constancy of that love, a comedy, the genre of literary work that she loved above all others. Following this test of his love for her, she promised not to doubt his love any longer and to give her hand, and her heart, to him in marriage.”

“‘What is it that I have to create?’ Trismegalos shouted sorrowfully. ‘Is it for me, a famous metaphysician, to use the strengths of my soul on such an insignificant matter as a comedy?’”

“He lamented this request for a long time, the more so since never before in his life had he worked in this genre of literary composition. It would have been much easier for him to write a treatise on the location of the soul in one’s belly or in one’s heels than to write a comedy. Thirty-five or forty years ago, he had read the works of Terence, Plautus, and several other comedic writers, at a time when he had not yet been initiated into the secrets of metaphysics. He became lost in thought and remained silent. For a long time, the inventive powers of his soul suffered cruelly, which was evident by the taut veins on his face and the sweat dripping from his brow. Finally, he called out: ‘Anna! Prepare the samovar!’ ‘Yes, my son!’ he continued, turning to me. ‘I read once that one passion has to be driven out by another passion. I see that I won’t be able to overcome the stubbornness of the chaste Anisya. It’s impossible for me to write a comedy. And so, my beloved son, I wish, – upon doubling or tripling, if that shall prove to be necessary, my love for punch, – and thus to forget my love for Anisya.’”

“‘Oh, no!’ I objected. ‘The doubling of your love for punch might prove to be dangerous! Wouldn’t it be better to try to write a comedy?’”

“We argued for a long time. Finally, I succeeded somehow in convincing him that important people were engaged in such an enterprise. He agreed and began to think of a plan for a comedy. As before, he visited Gorlanius, and was visited by him. Peace and quiet resumed in the house, and I could see how important people, – of whose number, Trismegalos, for example, was one, – could become occupied by such trifles. ‘Just as soon as he finishes the comedy,’ I thought, ‘then I shall try to assign him, – through Anisya, – a tragedy or a poem to write. Let a lesser folly drive out a greater one.’”
“One day, with a merry smile on his face, he explained to me that the plan for a comedy was ready, and he asked me to help him. ‘Since I’m a metaphysician,’ he said, ‘my comedy ought to be metaphysical.’ And so we both set to work. A month passed, and then another, and so on. June arrived, and the comedy was ready: it had been corrected and rewritten in a clean copy.”

“‘Now that stiff-necked woman shall lose her ground,’ said Trismegalos, looking at the notebook with a smile. ‘Who wouldn’t be captivated by the many charms that shine brilliantly in this comedy!’”

“So as to cheer him up, I undertook to read aloud, in its entirety, this immortal work of literature, this metaphysical comedy, a genre that had come to the Russian land at some point in time and that would hardly ever appear in Germany, where there are so many great metaphysicians.”

“The characters in the play were: Wisdom, Stupidity, Love, Hatred, Virtue, Vice, Knowledge, Incivility, Trismegalos, Anisya, and Nikandr.”

“Thus, my name was also included in the cast of characters in this play in order to immortalize it!”

“The content of the play was as follows: Love, in the form of a very old and honorable woman, who wears glasses and coughs every minute, comes by to see the Goddess of Wisdom to complain about the hard-hearted Anisya for not yielding to the love of such a worthy man as Trismegalos. Love declares that the very nasty wenches, Stupidity and Incivility, were the ones who had persuaded Anisya to do this. They themselves had been talked into doing this by the powerful outlaw Vice. Wisdom, horrified by such an unheard-of development, sends Nikandr’s child to summon Anisya to court, and Virtue is commissioned to invite the honorable Trismegalos to attend the court session. All of these characters make their appearance at court. Wisdom adjudicates the case and articulates the decision: Anisya is to marry Trismegalos right away; Stupidity and Incivility are ordered not to appear in any professorial offices for an entire year; and Vice is not to show her face anywhere. Anisya obeys the voice of Wisdom and willingly gives her hand in marriage to her confidant. Vice, Stupidity, and Incivility leave the court in a rude manner, having notified Wisdom that they don’t intend to obey her, and that, more than anything else, they shall start to nest in scholarly offices and give birth there to children and grandchildren. Wisdom shrugs her shoulders, but she does give to the child Nikandr, as a gift that recompenses him for his devotion to Trismegalos, the complete editions of Leibnitz and Kant from his library.”

“After reading several pages from this comedy, about whose refinement one can judge by its contents, I started to get very agitated. My voice was already getting louder, my arms had already started to flail. Trismegalos, who had fastened his eyes upon me with indescribable rapture, was flaring his nostrils majestically when he heard the hoarse voice of Mr. Gorlanius. I hid the manuscript, and the metaphysician was, for the first time, a little discontented by the philologist’s visit.”
“When the usual salutations between the learned friends had concluded, the conversation turned to the topic of love. Since they were no longer concealing things from me, they continued to converse unimpeded. Gorlanius listened with annoyance to Trismegalo’s strong complaints. Finally, after becoming even more formidable as a result of several glasses of a certain drink, he exclaimed: ‘Well, here, my friend, is my hand on it, – in a week Anisya shall be your wife! Today I shall make only some threatening gestures, but tomorrow I shall most decidedly order you to get out of my house with only your shirt on your back. This fate, willy-nilly, shall befall you. You can be sure of that! I’m capable of doing this!’”

“‘Oh!’ Trismegalo replied. ‘Enough with your oratory!’”

“Seeing that I was superfluous here, although they weren’t chasing me out of the room, I set off for the garden and sat down on the sod-covered bench at the gate. Suddenly I heard voices in the neighboring garden that belongs to Gorlanius. I cocked an ear and recognized the voice of the chaste Anisya and that of Antipych. This is the name that they called the son of one of the well-to-do merchants, a young fellow. I had seen him several times in Gorlanius’s house. He was short, lame in his left leg, and covered all over with blemishes. He had very enormous lips and was a great warrior (as I learned later) during fist fights, or, as our two metaphysicians would have put it, during bouts of pugilistic duels.”

“I became a bit curious, so I looked through a slit in the fence and saw the maiden Anisya, sitting on some sod, in the warm embraces of the lame Antipych.”

“‘Now there’s a remedy for love,’ I thought to myself, rejoicing enormously at my discovery. ‘Oh, kind and honorable Trismegalo! Did you deserve such treachery?’ I rushed cold-heartedly into the entrance room and, without saying a word to either one of them, I took Trismegalo and Gorlanius each by the arm. I gave them a sign that they should maintain a strict silence, and I set off, with them in tow, for the garden. I showed them the hole in the fence, and then I myself, at a distance away from them, likewise looked through a hole. The charming couple was sitting there, locked, as before, in each other’s warm embrace. Antipych was saying: ‘It’s true, I would have paid dearly to have that old fool, Trismegalo, finish his comedy sooner. You wouldn’t believe, my dear, what pleasure I’m providing to my friends at the taverns by reading the dissertations of the lovesick wood-goblin about the soul residing in the forehead and about the soul residing in the back of the head! I think that the comedy shall be no less hilarious!’”

“With these words, they fell into another warm embrace. He was stroking her about the neck and placing his thick lips upon her there, when suddenly Gorlanius and Trismegalo each let out a cry. The former cried out: ‘Oh, shameless daughter of mine, ignominious Solomon, unworthy of your mother!’ The latter cried out: ‘Oh, woe is me! I’m a man of many sins, I’m an accursed man!’”
“Gorlanius took to his heals, running for home, so that he, after catching the gammy-legged devil, could demonstrate to him the advantage of being a straight-legged man. The poor metaphysician, meanwhile, fell unconscious. I raised a howl and, with the help of the kitchen cook, I carried him away and laid him in bed. He soon regained consciousness, but the daze from the scholar’s head didn’t leave him. He was incessantly repeating over and over again: ‘Oh, woe is me!’”

“I didn’t leave his bedside all night long. He would wake up every minute or so and shout: ‘Oh, love, love! Oh, my very precious compositions about the soul residing in the brow and in the back of the head, and my most precious comedy! For whom and for what end did I write you? So that a lame monster would read them aloud in taverns and in market places! Oh, woe is me! I’m a man of many sins!’”

Chapter 31: A Kindred Love (Continuation of Nikandr’s Story)

“After several days, Trismegalos’s bodily ailment had passed, but his spiritual ailment hadn’t changed in the least. He was incessantly gloomy, he directed his eyes around him with a look of wildness in them, and when his eyes would meet with mine, he would blush with shame. Boredom and despondency had settled upon our peaceful abode. Mr. Gorlanius not only didn’t look in on us, but he also didn’t write a single line to either one of us. He was ashamed, of course, that having been such a glorious scholar, he was such a poor father. Anisya didn’t go out anywhere, since, as we found out indirectly, Gorlanius, in the initial fervor of his righteous anger, beat her half to death with the eighty-ninth volume of the encyclopedia published by the Paris Academy in Alexandrian text-type. The encyclopedia had never served a more useful purpose than it did now, forcing that dissolute creature to stay at home for at least about a month. Anisya was unable to move a single bodily limb freely, and all of her hair had been pulled out. Gorlanius, of course, had been searching for her soul in the back of her head, in accordance with Trismegalos’s latest treatise. For our part, we likewise didn’t wish to inquire further about anything.”

“Upon arriving at his study one morning, I was greatly surprised. A fire was burning on the stove-bench, and Trismegalos was sitting on a chair, calmly tossing sheets of paper from a notebook, filled with notes, into the stove. Piles of these sheets were lying on the floor beside him. Upon seeing me, he smiled and said: ‘My son! It’s time for me to abandon follies, no matter what kind they might be. Here, I shall provide you with an example, and you shall see that I’m renouncing every kind of love except one. Every love, no matter what it might be directed toward, no matter what its object might be, is an unforgivable folly, if it fails to remain within measure. A man, however, is born into this world in order to be a slave and a plaything in the hands of various stupidities. I loved metaphysics passionately, and I constantly suffered under a delusion; I loved the Church Slavonic language to the point of distraction, and everyone thought that I was ridiculous; I loved Anisya and became disgusted with myself! I loved punch, and it alone didn’t do me any visible harm. And so that’s why I now intend to direct all of my tenderness and vehemence toward it alone. As far as the rest is concerned, it can all go to hell! I detest Anisya spiritually; I won’t speak a word in Church Slavonic; and I don’t wish to think
about metaphysics. My treatises about the soul residing in the forehead and in the back of the head, just like my metaphysical comedy, have long ago been reduced to ashes. And look now: here’s a dissertation on the souls of animals, where it’s proven that they are sometimes more intelligent than human beings, but they’re only mortal; and here’s another, this one is about what the Supreme Being was occupied with before the creation of the world; and this is one, in three volumes, about what He shall be occupied with in future upon the world’s destruction.’”

“Speaking in this manner, he placed one notebook after another into the stove and cold-bloodedly stirred them around with a poker. In the course of half an hour, the labors of forty years had been reduced to ashes.”

“‘It’s wonderful,’ I said to him, ‘that you dealt so firmly with the ungrateful Anisya, who repaid your love with malice. In our discourse on metaphysics and the Church Slavonic language, I shall tell you my opinion: there’s a measure and a time for everything. But as far as punch is concerned, it seems to me that, – not for anything, and not for anyone, – does drinking it increase benevolence. Shall you not have had enough of it and of your present state of intoxication?’”

“‘No, my son. You know what emptiness there is now in my heart: after suddenly casting aside three loves, I need to fill it up with something, or otherwise my balance shall be lost and dire consequences might follow.’”

“There was no way that I could contest what he had said. Every day I would sermonize to him, and every day he would drink, and after two months he no longer resembled himself. Frailty and convulsive attacks had befallen him. He complained of colic, headaches, and asphyxia. I ascribed all of these ailments to over-indulgence in his love for punch, while he ascribed all of them to the lack of that beverage. He tottered around like a shadow. It was noticeable that his former loves were still raging in his heart, and that he was chasing them away only in words, not in action. Walking up to the bookcase, he would involuntarily grab a book that was a little thicker than the others, he would open it up, and he would utter with a smile: ‘Chapter III: de miraculis.’ Suddenly, recalling his promise, he would throw the book down on the floor, trample on it under his feet, and grind his teeth, uttering with rage: ‘Ungrateful metaphysics!’ This is exactly the same way that he would act after stuttering while trying to say something in Church Slavonic or after accidently uttering Anisya’s name.”

“Once, while sitting with me in the morning, he said: ‘My dear friend! I can see that my life is fading and that I, with rapid steps, am hurrying to my grave. I hope that you shall wait patiently until that final minute, one that shall be joyful for me, and that you shall not abandon this unfortunate and unhappy man. And, as a token of my appreciation, this small house of mine, with all that belongs to it, shall be left to you. My library, which has cost me rather dearly and which consists, for the most part, of speculative ravings, I shall leave to you on condition that you sell it to the first madman who shall wish to purchase it, and that you do this during the course of one year following my death. And if, during this time, such a lunatic is not to be found in town, then burn that library. Otherwise, some great misfortunes, similar to my own, might happen with you as well. I lost my
father while I was still in diapers; I lost my mother as well, at age nine; 
Although I don’t have any close relatives, but only distant ones whom I have never even seen, they might, however, try to hinder you from enjoying the peaceful ownership of my property. And that’s why I now wish to arrange everything in a legal manner and write out a last will and testament. I have already sent for a departmental attendant and a priest.”

“In the meantime, while I was assuring him that I wished him the longevity of Methuselah, while he was swearing that he considers every passing day to be a righteous punishment from heaven for these mad loves of his, we heard a loud noise at the door.”

“That, of course, must be the priest with the scribe,” said Trismegalos. ‘But what are they making such a fuss about?’”

“Soon the scribe did indeed come in, but he was not alone, for an entire crowd of men, women, and children of various ages and genders had come barging in with him.”

“Please do sit down, mister scribe,” said Trismegalos. ‘And who are you, honorable gentlemen and gentlewomen? And what have you come here to complain about?’”

“Oh! And so it really is true,” all of them exclaimed in unison. ‘Oh, the poor fellow!’”

“Trismegalos looked at me, and I looked at him, and both of us were unable to guess what this might mean. But soon everything explained itself. An elderly woman, nattily attired, walked up to him, with a mincing look on her face, and said: ‘So, dear uncle, do you no longer recognize even your close relatives? I’m Olimpiada, your niece seven times removed; this is my husband, a doctor; and these are our two daughters. Two boys and one girl remained at home.’”

“Trismegalos exclaimed with anger: ‘I don’t care whether entire hundreds of thousands of boys and girls remained there. I don’t wish to know them, just as I don’t wish to know you and yours, for you haven’t known me!’”

“At this point, the doctor approached Trismegalos, looked at him through a lorgnette, took his hand, felt his pulse, and, shrugging his shoulders, said: ‘It’s a pity, an extreme pity, but there’s nothing to be done about it!’”

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13 Methuselah was a biblical patriarch who was a figure in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He had the longest lifespan of all those given in the Bible, dying at 969 years of age. Methuselah’s name, as a result, has become synonymous with longevity.
“What the hell is going on here?” Trismegalos said in surprise. ‘This, it appears, is a pack of madmen! Whom is it, my lord, that you feel pity for?’

“Look, honorable gentlemen, look at him just in the eyes: see how red and turbid they look, and how wildly they are moving!’ They all looked intently at him and gasped.”

“The doctor wished to continue: ‘By all indications, it can be seen that his soul . . .’”

“‘What? It hasn’t migrated to the back of the head now, has it?’ Trismegalos exclaimed. ‘If you thought this way, then you’re lying, mister doctor. I wrote that to please a certain dissolute wench who wanted it to be true, but I myself have been certain, both before and still now, that our soul resides in the forehead, right between the eyes. Well, what would the doctor say now?’”

“He looked at all of them with an air of majesty, celebrating a victory over the doctor, but he could see that they were all shrugging their shoulders and nodding their heads.”

“At this point, another person, from all appearances he resembled a craftsman, stepped forward, and he said: ‘Well, my dear sirs, apparently there’s nothing more to be done: we shall bid him farewell, if he recognizes anyone, but over there . . .’”

“How am I to recognize you,” Trismegalos said testily, ‘when I have never in all of my born days laid eyes on you? Get out of here right now! You can all go to hell! I have work to do!”

“What?” the craftsman joined in. ‘And you mean to say that you don’t recognize me? Oh, my God! Why, it’s me, Zudilkin, your cousin eight times removed. And this is my wife, Malaniya; and these are my sons, who are already helping me a fair amount in my metalwork trade!”

“With these words, he walked up to Trismegalos, embraced him with a pathetic look on his face, and said: ‘Farewell, my dearest cousin!”’

“At this point, a cry was raised from all sides: ‘Farewell, uncle!’ ‘Farewell, father-in-law!’ ‘Farewell, grandfather!’ All of them thronged to embrace him: some grabbed him by the knees, others by the arms, still others by his clothing. Trimegalos flew into a genuine rage. Choking with anger, at first he was pushing them away, but then he started to thump them pretty well about their heads with his fists and to kick them with his feet. But no matter how much this helped, he nonetheless bellowed: ‘Help! Help! They shall strangle me!”

“At this point, a tall man, who, up until this time, had been standing off to one side, and who, to all appearances, resembled a policeman, stepped forward, with an air of importance, and said: ‘Leave him alone, gentlemen! Stop! You certainly won’t help by doing this!’ Then he walked up to Trismegalos and said politely: ‘My lord! Would you deign to follow me voluntarily, if you have the strength to do so?”’
TRISMEGALOS: “Where to?”

THE POLICEMAN: “Ever since misfortune has befallen you, your grieving relatives have requested that the government provide you with asylum in a certain building, where they shall have you under better supervision than is the case here. Yes, and truly: in the kind of condition that you’re in now, you can spoil everything, and that would be improper, for your estate belongs to your close relatives, who, on account of the care that they have provided you, deserve to inherit all of your property in its entirety.”

TRISMEGALOS: “Well, please disclose to me, for God’s sake, for what misfortune is it that all of you are feeling sorry for me and to what certain building do you wish to take me?”

THE POLICEMAN: “If it’s within your capacity to understand . . .”

TRIMEGALOS: “What is it that isn’t within my capacity to understand?”

THE POLICEMAN: “Then I shall reveal everything to you. The misfortune that has befallen you, the one that your relatives were so saddened by, consists in the fact that you have irretrievably lost your mind, and the ‘certain building’ that your grieving relatives make reference to is an insane asylum. Are you satisfied now?”

“Trismegalos began to tremble. Every muscle in his body was moving. Now the crimson color of anger, now the paleness of horror alternately made their appearance on his cheeks. The policeman took him by the arm and had already led him to the doors, when Trismegalos refused to budge and exclaimed: ‘No, you idlers, I shall show you!’ But his grieving relatives surrounded him, tied his hands and feet, and carried him out onto the street in this guise. They hoisted him up onto a cart, and the policeman set off with him to the insane asylum. Trismegalos was crying out horribly. Passers-by were asking: ‘What’s the meaning of this?’ ‘I’m transporting a madman,’ the policeman would reply. And they, crossing themselves, would say: ‘God save each and every Orthodox believer!’ With tears in my eyes, I accompanied Trismegalos to that unfortunate house of madmen.”

“When I returned home, I found our abode full of his relatives. Some of them were pilfering the tables, others were pilfering the dinnerware, some were breaking down the bookcases, others were making the wineglasses and the dinner glasses clink. In a word: it was a regular Sodom.”

“The doctor, who had just walked up to me with an air of importance, said: ‘Please deign, my dear fellow, to clear out of here! This house belongs to me!’”

“‘Right this very minute,’ I replied, heading off to my cenacle to pack my things.”

Chapter 32: Various Incidents (Conclusion of Nikandr’s Story)
“Kneeling down beside my portmanteau, I pulled some of my items of linen out of it and put them into my bag. And, finally, taking my gold coins in hand, I wanted to count them over again and place them in my pocket, saying with a satisfied look on my face: ‘I thank Providence for having sent me to the house of an honest man. Now I hope to live for a long while without being poor, until such time as I can find a proper position.’”

“‘Oh, you swindler! Oh, you idler!’ a voice rang out above my head. A stealthy hand wrested the money out of my hands and all of it instantly disappeared into thin air.”

“‘What the hell!’ I exclaimed, covering my face with my hands. A shiver ran down my whole body. Calming myself down a little, I stood up, turned around, and saw the doctor, who said very angrily: ‘What’s this, my dear fellow? Aren’t you ashamed to commit theft on such a sad occasion? Is all this really not the same thing, after all, as stealing during a fire or from a church? Thank God that he sent me here at this time, when all that you wanted to do was to hide his money! Oh, if only the locksmith Zudilkin were here! You wouldn’t have been dealt with so easily with him.”

“‘Since we’re on the subject of stealing money,’ I said loosely, for my conscience was clear, ‘then, mister doctor, return my money to me. I earned that money, I earned it not at this house, but at the house of an honorable man whose daughter . . .’”

“‘Whose daughter you wanted to give away in marriage to the gullible and moonstruck old man Trismegalos? Oh, my dear fellow! You have undertaken an honest craft while still being so young! Clear out of here right now, or else I shall be forced to summon the policeman and show him that you’re the reason that Trismegalos has gone insane: that you are a thief and a plunderer. And do you know what shall happen to you at that point? They shall tie you up, put you into irons, and place you in jail. Well, choose one of these two options, and choose it now. I’m a resolute man!’”

“I was gripped by fear. Two words – irons and jail – imparted a lot of strength to his arresting eloquence. I wished to imitate him in his resoluteness, so I lifted the bag onto my shoulders and cleared out of there with rapid strides.”

“Upon leaving the house and passing several streets, I stopped and said to myself: ‘It’s time for me to debate what I’m going to do. There’s no point in thinking about returning to the home of Yermil Fedulovich: Fyodora Tikhonovna and Darya Yermilovna there are worse than chains and jail. I would be ashamed to return to the merchant’s home. That would perhaps appear dubious to him. He would initiate a lawsuit against the doctor. They would, in truth, place me, as the basis for this lawsuit, in jail somewhere. And after adjudicating about the turkey’s broken leg for two and a half years without reaching any decision, the court would drag out my lawsuit for at least twenty-five years. If the merchant were to take pity upon me and were not to begin litigation against me, he would nevertheless order me to leave his house and would start to give me money. He would be offended if I were to refuse to accept it; it would be shameless, it seems to me, if I were to accept it. Wherefore would I avail myself of the kindness of heart of a generous man
without my having deserved it? It would be better for me to leave this town and to seek
other ones. There are people everywhere; consequently, there’s a need for knowledge
everywhere. I shall start teaching music, languages, and painting.”

“Upon debating for a while in this manner, I set off upon the road and started my journey.
I went to villages, towns, and cities.”

“I would end up abandoning each one of them, either because I had aroused displeasure
toward me in someone or else because I myself was displeased. This, however, had its
advantages. Travel teaches a person, most of all, to get to know and understand people,
and, as a result, to become enlightened. During the second year of my itinerant life, I
attached myself to this town, where I had made the acquaintance of the venerable priest
Ivan and was very satisfied living in his house, securing enough money so that I wasn’t a
burden to him. Mister Prostakov found me here in autumn and took me to live at his
home. It never entered my mind that Elizaveta might be his daughter. The other
circumstances, venerable Gavrilo Simonovich, you already know.”

Upon finishing his story, Nikandrsat there for a while, lost in thought.

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich said: “Don’t be sad, Nikandr. Mister Prostakov is a kind man and
loves you. In his reasoning about you, he has good intentions: namely, to find a position for you
and to have it be in the very same town where you studied and where you performed your
gallantry, since he has many acquaintances there who are eminent people and he has some
wealthy merchant with whom he is already carrying on a correspondence about this matter.”

“Oh, how far off the mark you are again!” said Nikandr.

“All the better,” replied the prince, standing up, since Father Ivan had come in and announced
merrily that he would be having guests that day in the evening. The day was a Saturday, on the
eve of Shrovetide. Nikandr took this news with annoyance, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich took it
with indifference, but both of them began to prepare themselves for the reception of the guests.

Leaving them in this pursuit, let us remove ourselves to the in-town residence of Mister
Prostakov and his family. The husband was pacing the room with long strides, holding his hat in
one hand and his walking stick in the other. The look on his face was displaying displeasure.
His wife, with the same disposition, was sitting at a small table, sorting out ribbons and lace.
Katerina was in one corner of the room, Elizaveta was in another corner, and both of them were
yawning.

THE WIFE: “If you turn obstinate, there’s no way that you shall overcome this difficulty!”

THE HUSBAND: “If you’re so certain of this, then why torment yourself with trifles while
trying to overcome them!”

THE WIFE: “But why then, it seems to me, not take his advice? Father Ivan invited us so
politely, so urgently . . .”
THE HUSBAND: “It seems to me that I didn’t rudely refuse to come visit him.”

THE WIFE: “Judge for yourself. There shall be a judge there, a district police inspector, many noblemen, and all of them with their families. Why should we be the only ones sitting at home?”

THE HUSBAND: “Why sit here at home? I gave the district police inspector the opportunity to speak, so we shall go there.”

THE WIFE: “I can’t stand the district police inspector’s wife. She’s so haughty, so arrogant!”

THE HUSBAND: “Take a look at yourself in the mirror and ask her: what would she say about you?”

THE WIFE: “I shall be at Father Ivan’s house without fail!”

THE HUSBAND (leaving): “You shall be, without fail, at the district police inspector’s house! Wife! You’ve known me for a long time now! Do what I order you to do and you shall not regret it! Otherwise . . . so I shall await you at the district police inspector’s house.”

This one time, I shall make a slight digression by inserting here a story, appropriate for this circumstance, that I read a long time ago in some old German book.

There was a certain husband who loved his wife passionately. He provided her with all possible amusements of every sort. And his caresses were tender. What could his wife possibly lack that would keep her from being completely happy and satisfied? Here’s what: her husband was extraordinarily jealous. He was especially jealous of his neighbor, a real seducer of women. When this neighbor would glance outside the window of his house, the husband would right away order that the shutters of his windows be closed. If he heard his neighbor’s voice out on the street, he would instantly lead his wife away to a room at the farthest end of their house. Everyone in the house noticed his jealousy, even though he hid it from all of them, and especially from his wife.

It so happened one day, to his bitter misfortune, that he needed to absent himself from home for three days. He groaned, wailed, and agonized over this, but necessity doesn’t pay any attention to this, and so he obeyed its order. Upon traveling several versts, during which time he was occupied with thoughts of his wife and his neighbor, he suddenly remembered, with horror, that he had failed to order his wife not to receive this neighbor into their house as a guest. “Ivan!” he exclaimed, having turned pale. “Unharness one of the horses right away and gallop home as fast as you can. Tell my wife that under no circumstances is she to accept our neighbor into our house as a guest, no matter how much he might beg her to, no matter how much he might implore her to: no! no!”

Ivan galloped home, and the master was still shouting out behind him, chastising him sternly. When Ivan arrived home, he said to his mistress: “Your
spouse has ordered that you are not, – under any circumstances, by any means, not at all, no matter how much you might wish to do so – to sit on the back of the mastiff Sultan, your large Milanese breed of dog, and to ride him bareback!”

She wondered exceedingly at her husband’s insane behest, and Ivan set off to ride back.

The first day, the wife thought only about what could possibly have been the reason why her husband forbade her to do what she had never even conceived of doing. And, what’s more, what could be the pleasure to be derived in her doing this? These thoughts occupied her until nighttime. The second day passed with her debating: why not do this? Her husband, of course, considers her a child or a doll, whom he wants to compel to obey his will blindly. She was in a state of indecision. On the third day, annoyance took possession of her. She walked from room to room, but their Milanese breed of dog was appearing constantly in her imagination. Finally, around dinnertime, she exclaimed: “Yes! I shall show him that he shouldn’t joke at my expense so stupidly.” With these words, she quickly went out to the courtyard, where Sultan was jumping about on his chain, and she sat down on his back. But the cruel Milanese mastiff, not accustomed, of course, to carrying anyone on his back, flew into a rage, began to growl, darted forward, and the poor mistress started rolling, head over heels, onto the ground like a whirling top. Upon jumping back up onto her feet, she rushed, without enthusiasm, into the front room and looked at herself in the mirror. And, – alas! – a hefty horn had swollen up on her forehead, and her right eye had adorned itself with a purple blotch. There were several scratches on her arms from the paws of the unfaithful Sultan. She broke out into bitter tears, right at the very same moment that a wagon arrived at the door in the courtyard, and her passionate husband, who had flown into the room, extended his arms out to her, and, with the trepidation of a lover, stopped, seeing the horn on her forehead, the tears in her eyes, the blue spot beneath her right eye, and the blood on her arms.

“What’s the meaning of this, my dearest?” he exclaimed.

“You should have been able to foresee this,” his wife replied in a rage. “You wanted to see me in this situation. You hard-hearted man, you cruel fiend, you monster! Would you have taken it into your head to have me sit on the back of that Milanese breed of dog, if you hadn’t sent Ivan here to forbid me to do that?”

“The gentleman looked threateningly at Ivan, but the latter, leading his master to another room with a mysterious look on his face, said: “My dear sir! It’s true that I forbade her, in your name, to do this, and that, without this prohibition, she truly wouldn’t have taken it into her head to do it. But this circumstance should reveal everything to you. If I had forbidden her to allow your neighbor to enter your home, then instead of her constantly thinking, as she now did, about riding on Sultan’s back, she would have allowed the neighbor to enter your house, and the constant occupation of her mind would have been to have a chat with him. She didn’t restrain herself, she did ride on Sultan’s back, and she received a small horn on her forehead and a blue spot beneath her right eye. Believe me, she likewise wouldn’t have restrained herself, and she would have allowed your neighbor to enter your house as a guest. And what would have been the consequences?”
“It might have been that, by this time, you would have had two horns, and very large ones at that, and several black spots upon all of the hours of your life.”

The gentleman was astounded by the veracity and the wisdom of Ivan’s scenario. He embraced his wise servant and, people say, he cast his jealousy away forever.

This story, by the way, may be applied to our two Prostakovs very well. If the husband hadn’t so strictly forbidden his wife to go to Father Ivan’s house, she wouldn’t have desired to do that so hungrily.

After spending some time in indecision, Madame Prostakova at last jumped up. “Get dressed, my daughters! We’re going to go see Father Ivan. Let your father fly into a rage as much as he likes! We endure a score of his caprices a day, so why not have him endure one of ours once a year.” Hence the preening commenced, it continued swimmingly, and it concluded around eight o’clock: the most apt time to go to a social event in the evening.

By the time that they entered the priest’s reception room, all of the local social elite had already gathered there: the judge was sitting in the place of honor, smoking his pipe; the district police inspector was holding a glass of wine in his hands, checking to make sure that this was a salutary drink, and then drinking it down. The judge’s wife was waving a fan in front of her face, trying to twirl the middle finger of her right hand as much as possible so as to make the turquoise in her ring, bestrewn with roses, more conspicuous. The wife of the district police inspector was whispering into her ear: “Truly, why should this Mrs. Prostakov look so ugly! It costs a lot to make a dress that will fit her, but the dress itself isn’t worth a quarter of a kopeck. And her daughters: one of them is a fidgety doll, while the other one is a wooden statue.”

The priest received Mrs. Prostakov and her daughters excellently. When everyone had been seated, they started a conversation about the following day, Clean Monday, the first day of Lent, when suddenly Prince Gavrilo Simonovich and Nikandr come out of a side room. Nikandr saw Elizaveta, and she saw him: both of them blushed crimson. Nikandr became unsteady on his feet; Elizaveta’s eyes closed shut. All of the guests were thrown into a state of confusion when Mrs. Prostakov cried out: “Oh! We’ve been betrayed! Oh! Something shall come of this!”

She leapt up, grabbing both of her daughters by the hand, and wanting to leave with them, when suddenly Ivan Efremovich quickly ran into the room with all of the signs of anger and indignation written on his face. He wished to say something, but his wife, crying out: “It’s my fault, I’m very much to blame, my dear,” disarmed him. He had to be content with making his bows to the guests and to his host, and then leaving quickly. His family followed after him. Elizaveta was being supported beneath each arm by her mother and her sister. At the very same moment, the prince led Nikandr away to his room.

“What a strange man this Ivan Efremovich is,” said Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, “and it wasn’t for nothing that he sent me here! How is it possible that he’s unable to control his wife’s conduct?” Suddenly Princess Fekla Sidorovna came to his mind; he started to flush red and then he fell silent.
Chapter 33: Two Speeches

The guests couldn’t cease to marvel at such a strange incident. The modest Prostakov had entered the room with a heavy heart: his “frenzied” (as they usually called her) wife had become as meek as a lamb; Elizaveta was hardly alive; the young painter was in a state that was no better; and the elderly guest, just newly arrived, was tremendously saddened. “There is, of course, some secret going on here,” they all exclaimed in unison as they turned their attention to the priest, seeking explanations from him. But he swore that he himself knew nothing more than the others did: that the elderly guest is called Mr. Krakalov, and the young painter is called Nikandr.

All of the guests were racking their brains for the longest time, trying to surmise what was going on, and, in that way, to shine amidst the people at this eminent gathering, thus meriting the title of the foremost artificer. But what one guest would utter, another would refute, and the matter reached the point, initially, of a minor dispute, but soon it turned into a formal altercation, and later into vituperation. Already, from various sides, resonant, charming words could be heard: “An intelligent bull is able to judge like that!” “A wise turkey is able to talk like that!” “A ram would sooner surmise what’s going on here!” “A bitch, bitten by a snake, screeches with less fervor!” “Such ideas find room in a head that resembles a wine cask, or in one that is loaded down with slander, distemper, gossip, and amorous intrigues!” “Oh! What is this? Aha, you’ve guessed it!” “How? What? Prove it!” “And it’s so clear!”

God only knows how this might have turned out. It’s doubtful that a bloody battle would have been avoided, if there hadn’t happened to be a judge there who, witnessing such a disturbance of nature, laid his pipe down on the table and placed his glass down right next to it, stood up from his seat, with an air of importance, occupied a place in the middle of the room, and then said:

“My most venerable gentlemen and gentlewomen! It’s not unknown to you that, for several years now, I’ve been serving as a judge in this illustrious town, and that I sometimes handle cases that are no less tangled than this one is! And so, listen to me. I shall explain everything to you. Although, it’s true, I don’t know for certain what transpired, but I do know that reasonable surmises are sometimes more correct than obvious ones. This Nikandr has been living for some time now in the Prostakov home, and he was esteemed so much by all of the members of the household, it was as if he were the master’s own son. And so, doesn’t this show that he was indeed his son, but his illegitimate son? Not only does Nikandr not know this, but no one else in the house knows this either. And so, is it any wonder that he would fall in love with Elizaveta, and that she would fall in love with him? Of course not, it would be very easy for this to happen! Well, and so they fell in love! Prostakov saw this and didn’t know what to do about it. Although Nikandr is an illegitimate son, he nonetheless is their son, and Elizaveta is his sister. A love such as this is horrible. And so Prostakov banished him from their house, without ceasing at all to try to help him. One’s own blood always speaks openly! But in order to restore his daughter to health, after a love affair such as this, and so as not to provide his wife with any suspicion, he prohibited Elizaveta and Nikandr from seeing each other. And since they didn’t know, just as all of you
beforehand didn’t know, the real reason for this prohibition, this is why they saw each other today. How could he not help but feel angry?”

“Wonderful! That’s it exactly! Nothing could be more correct!” they all shouted in unison. “But what about this Mister Krakalov?”

“This one,” replied the judge, who was feeling pompous by the general approval that his surmise had received, “this Mister Krakalov is none other than the brother of Nikandr’s honorable mother, and that’s why he’s living in the Prostakov home and showing off his intelligence there. I have heard from honorable people that neither Prostakov’s wife nor his children dare to say a word to him.”

“That’s so, that’s it exactly,” resounded from all sides, and the judge continued: “But so that, henceforth, similar disturbances and beatings won’t be able to take place at our renowned gatherings, and so that a durable peace and quiet shall settle upon a solid foundation, I wish to designate that, tomorrow, this troubled Nikandr, as the instigator of quarrels and invectives, leave our town. Otherwise, in three days’ time he shall be banished with dishonor by the police.”

“Wonderful idea! Excellent!” the guests stated, and the district police inspector, patting his cheeks, added: “And I shall not allow him to enter our district.”

The judge announced all of this to Nikandr and left for the assembly with a triumphant look on his face.

Nikandr was extremely bewildered.

“Whither shall I start wandering now?” he said with a heavy sigh and a shrug of his shoulders.

“Wherever the hand of Providence shall lead you,” said Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. “You must admit that it would be much more tolerable to leave this town by order of an insane judge than it was to leave the Prostakov home by order of an offended mother. Remain here, while I go fetch someone nearby.” He threw on his fur coat and left the room.

There was a disturbance at the Prostakov in-city home, although it wasn’t as formidable as the one that took place at the priest’s home. It was, nonetheless, a disturbance, and it was necessary to rein it in. Mister Prostakov was not a judge, but, on the other hand, he was kind and intelligent, so he managed to become reconciled with all of his family members without delivering such a beautiful and recondite speech as the one that the judge had just delivered.

However, once all of them had calmed down a bit, he didn’t go without saying to his wife and daughters: “Please learn, my dear ones, from today’s mishap, which, although it was very insignificant, in and of itself, nonetheless did inflict upon us several unpleasant hours. Please learn how many stupid and harmful things are done by those wives and daughters who, while not understanding at all the intentions of their husbands and fathers, attempt to find their way into their secrets, reach wrong conclusions, delude themselves, and act according to their own whims. Why does this happen? It happens due to one’s confidence in one’s own mind, in one’s own worthiness, and in one’s own preeminence. But the mind of the greater part of women is most
mediocre in comparison with the mind of a man. Their imaginary worthiness consists in head spinning; their preeminence consists in perpetually wrongheaded sensitivity. And what results from this? That which should result from it: anxieties, nuisances, complaints, tears, wailing, – in a word, torment! Is this really pleasant for them? I think not, and, in fact, I’m even certain that it isn’t. But they are so frivolous, so fidgety, and they are this way to such an extent that they are, I dare say, demented. They agree to suffer eternally so long as they can say, triumphantly, to an equally insane girlfriend of theirs: ‘My husband wanted me to do something his way, but, no, I insisted on having my way, and that’s the way I did it!’ Well, is a minute of such boasting, which humiliates even the most well-born personage, worth the purchase of her loss of peace and quiet for the entire day? I’m not saying that all women are this way. Oh, no! There are women, although not very many of them, who are truly intelligent, worthy, and superior. But take note: for what do they themselves purvey all of this? You shall see: their intelligence is for the preservation of order, quiet, and household economy; their worthiness is for the purity of mores, the pleasantness of manners, the tenderness and sensitivity of all their actions, – in a word, it’s for the sweet assuredness that they feel in the purity of their conscience. Their superiority is for the love, sincerity, and fidelity that they have toward their husband and for the sound education of their children. If you, too, my dear ones, would be the same as women such as these, then even if fate had cast you down into the most squalid of conditions, even in a small peasant hut, where you spend your nights sleeping on straw, in the eyes of an honorable and kind man you would appear to be intelligent, worthy, and superior women. With tears in his eyes, he would beseech the heavens to alter your destiny, if it were not in his power for him to do so himself!"

Prostakov’s speech came to an end. His wife and daughters flung themselves into his warm embrace. Their sighs, which were not heavy, their tears, which were not sorrowful, let Prostakov know that a minute of deviation from the right path was merely a minute, and that the thoughts of his wife and daughters didn’t contain any desire in the least to renew their earlier wish to seek out and love the one whom their husband and father had forbidden them to seek out and love.

Makar, who had just entered the room, announced that a certain gentleman wished to see him. “Ask him to please come in,” said Prostakov. But the servant added that the guest wished to speak with him in private. Prostakov left the room, and how greatly surprised he was to find that it was Prince Gavril Simonovich! “What is it?” he asked, and the prince requested from him the indulgence to designate a place where the two of them could have a brief chat together. Prostakov led him into his room and locked the door. At this point, Gavril Simonovich made known to him what Nikandr’s current state of affairs was. “If you get it into your head to oppose this,” he said, “then you shall ruin the whole thing. There shall begin to be surmisings, rumors, and judgments. And some kind of nonsense, woven by idle people, shall be given in lieu of the God’s honest truth. One needs to fear fools, and especially wicked fools, more than serpents. This creeping reptile, after it has been provoked, or when it fears losing its life, bites, even without that provocation. But a fool, especially one who considers himself noble, he himself is the one who attacks. There’s no need for him, when he’s following the object of his hatred, to pester strangers and to insult them. Oh! He shall still display vanity, if he succeeds in putting on airs before someone in his prime! And why is that? It’s all because he’s a fool!”
Prince Gavrilov Simonovich’s arguments seemed forceful to Ivan Efremovich. He sat down and started to write a letter to Afanasy Onisimovich Prichudin, an Oryol merchant, asking him to receive . . . At this point, Mister Prostakov stopped.

“Listen, my dear friend,” he said. “We are sending Nikandr off to town to furnish him with a position in the civil service. But he, after all, has too small a name for that, just Nikandr. We won’t be able to do anything for him with that small a name. Isn’t it true that we need to provide him with a surname, and, what’s more, we need to change his first name, since the incident for which they expelled him from the boarding school hasn’t been eradicated from everyone’s memory yet, and it might bring some minor trouble down upon him.”

THE PRINCE: “I myself am of the same mind, and I just wanted to mention that. But what shall we call him?”

PROSTAKOV: “Let me think for a minute! You, after all, thought up a wonderful name for yourself when Prince Svetlozarov arrived at my house.”

They both became lost in thought, fixing their eyes upon the ceiling. A few minutes later, the prince joyfully struck the palm of his hand and said: “What more do we need to think about? My father had a rather pleasant first name and patronymic. And, as a surname, we can give him the name of the village where I was born.”

“Good! Good! Well then, what shall it be?”

“Simon Gavrilovich Falaleev!”

“Oh, okay,” said Prostakov, and, after thinking about it a little, he returned to writing his letter to the merchant Prichudin. When he had finished writing it and had sealed it, he then took a considerable amount of money out of his pocket and, upon giving the letter and the money to the prince, he said: “My dear friend! I trust that you shall deliver all of this to Nikandr himself. He’s so young and inexperienced! You shall introduce him to the merchant Afanasy Onisimovich and you shall set up his housekeeping. Only, please, don’t tarry. It shall be very boring for me, being deprived of your company and of Nikandr’s.”

“In any case, I plan to conduct him there, and then return to you as soon as possible afterwards.”

They bade farewell to each other. The following day, Ivan Efremovich set off for the countryside. Concerning the reason for his sudden departure, the larger part of the illustrious denizens of the town maintained that he couldn’t endure the shame, seeing that the love of his illegitimate son for his own sister had been revealed. “So that’s it!” these good and kind people were saying. “If he hadn’t dissembled so much, if he hadn’t been such a hypocrite, then there wouldn’t have been so much ado made about this incident. What does it matter what happens to whom?”

The prince spent the time before noon that day hiring a wagon, provisioning it, packing it, and performing other such activities that pertained to preparing for a long journey. Nikandr did
whatever the prince ordered him to do, but he did the greater part of it inside out and back to front, such that the old man was obliged to say to him: “Remain seated right there, and don’t move!”

At their parting, the venerable Father Ivan, upon embracing Nikandr with a touching display of compassion, said to him: “Farewell, my son! You have to move away from here. Your name has been blackened in this place and, – what shall be even sadder for you, – so has the name of your benefactor.” At this point, the good shepherd of the most worthless of sheep recounted everything that the judge, basing himself upon surmises, had implied in his speech and everything that the gathering of highly eminent people had believed. Nikandr was weeping, but the priest continued: “Whoever you might have been, I don’t wish to know the names of your father and mother. I don’t need to know your surname, regardless of whether it’s a noble one or an insignificant one. For a grey-haired old man like me, it’s enough when he’s certain that you possess a gentle nature, a pure heart, and noble principles. Each time, my dear friend, when fortune turns its back on you, come find shelter beneath my humble roof. Even if everyone were to come to hate you, my heart shall always remain a fatherly heart for you. I don’t think that you could ever succumb to any abominable vice. And the errors of youth shouldn’t bestrew the aged cheeks of an elderly man with blushes! Only the most supreme wisdom is free from that!”

“Ceaseless love,” exclaimed Nikandr, throwing himself into the priest’s warm embrace, “shall preserve me from all of vice’s attacks. Forgive me! Farewell!”

Upon leaving town, Nikandr rose to his feet in the cart and fixed his eyes upon the town where, so he thought, Elizaveta was still living. From time to time, the cupolas of the churches and the roofs of the houses would grow dark and disappear. And soon everything disappeared from sight.

Nikandr covered his face with a kerchief and sat down by the side of Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, who was silently looking in the opposite direction. And he thought to himself: “Oh, God, most fair and just! To what end have I come to this pass: to see her for months on end, to drink in the indescribable bliss of being by her side, and then to be fated to part company with her evermore? Forever? . . .” he uttered with a moan. And then he laid face down in the cart, weeping bitter tears.

Chapter 34: Letters

Upon arriving at the appointed town, the prince and Nikandr found, on their first day there, that the merchant Afanasy Onisimovich was a good-natured old-timer; on their second day there, they found him to be an intelligent and wise fellow; and, on the third day there, they found him to be a pensive soul who wasn’t a great friend of conversation. He received Nikandr with fatherly endearment and entreated him not to worry about anything, not to concern himself with anything, for he would be taking care of everything himself. “Ever since I lost my daughter,” he said, turning toward the prince, “I’ve been loving powerless and helpless people as if they were members of my very own family. I have no one with me at home now, absolutely no one, Mister Krakalov. An ungrateful daughter has left my home: let this young Simon serve as a son to me in her stead!”
Within three weeks Nikandr was appointed to a position, and, with a trembling heart, he entered the inner sanctum where Mister Uryvov had been serving. And, within another three weeks, oh, heavens above, he had become his superior! He quickly became accustomed to his position and fulfilled his duties assiduously. The grand people whom he had known previously now showed up a little less frequently to visit him, and, for a variety of reasons, he resolved not to pursue any considerable friendship with any of them, endeavoring, as much as possible, to curry favor with those people in the higher ranks, his chiefs, and to gain the good will of the most splendiferous among his colleagues as a result of his conduct and his knowledge. Afanasy Onisimovich and Gavrilo Simonovich approved of his intention, requesting that he not alter it. And it was in vain that Mr. Uryvov, along with members of his fraternity, would propose to Nikandr that he accompany them on their visit to the house of consolation. “No, thank you,” Nikandr would reply to their invitations, “if I were to be afflicted by any sorrow at this time, that wouldn’t be the place for me to find consolation in my sorrow.”

On the basis of such replies, they usually considered him to be half-mad; he knew this, but he worried very little about it.

One fine morning, while Nikandr was at the office, and the merchant Prichudin was at the market, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich received a letter in the mail. Unsealing the envelope, he was quite surprised to find inside it a note from Ivan Efremovich, addressed to Nikandr, but written in a handwriting that was not at all that of Prostakov.

“From Mr. Prostakov to Prince Gavrilo Simonovich.

You, my dear friend, are much happier than I am right now, or at least you’re more tranquil than I am. And I don’t know what to do! Several days following my arrival home from town, I received a letter from Prince Svetlozarov, requesting that I give my consent to his heart’s desire to become the husband of my Katerina and become my son-in-law! My wife and I turned this request over in our minds, mulling it over, and, in the end, we decided to accede to Prince Svetlozarov’s proposal, which seemed advantageous to us and to our daughter, the more so since her heart already long before had approved it. Upon sending the prince our reply, I was visited by him, and he seemed to me to be much better than he had been previously. His vociferous brand of joviality had turned into a tranquil, gentle one. His words displayed a fair amount of intelligence and heartfelt kindness. After spending several days at our home, he left for his father’s home to request his formal consent. Although he’s already advanced enough in years that he could have arranged this himself by means of his own actions, he didn’t, however, do this, and that’s a good sign! This circumstance increased his worthiness in our eyes.”

“Following his departure, one of my neighbors, a man, it’s true, who’s elderly, but kind and reasonably endowed, offered his hand in marriage to Elizaveta. I, at once, gave my consent, and although Maremyana objected strongly, arguing that her daughter would lead a meager existence living in Mr. Sozontov’s home, for he has children from his first marriage, – a widowed daughter who’s older than Elizaveta, and a daughter-in-law with
three children of her own, – but my arguments, however, were quite convincing, too, so she soon gave her consent as well. But Elizaveta . . . The devil himself became implanted inside this wench! We had no sooner told her about this new development, – and my God! – whence came these shouts, these tears, and these fainting spells! She became obstinate and said firmly that she would rather wish to be living in a nunnery than to get married. No matter what we said, no matter how much we pleaded with her, no matter how much we threatened her, her reply was always one and the same. She would kiss our hands and say: “I’m your daughter, don’t bring me to ruin!” And then she would leave. What were we to do? Looking at all of the jumping about that Katerina was doing while preparing for her wedding, we would smile. Glancing at the perpetual mist before Elizaveta’s eyes, we would sigh sorrowfully.”

“Please be so kind, I implore you, to tell me your opinion on both of these situations. My wife and I have absolutely no idea what we should do. It seems to me that it wouldn’t be a bad idea if I were to write a letter to the elderly Svetlozarov and ask him about his son’s intentions. And I would have done precisely that, but I didn’t think to take down his address. Forgive me! My friendship with you is immutable. Although Nikandr inflicted upon me no shortage of bitter hours, I nonetheless continue to love him just as before. He’s not the one who is at fault here! Tell him this and embrace him for me. How is he faring with his duties at the office? Wishing you all of the best in your ministerings as Nikandr’s caretaker and in the development of his God-given talents, I remain . . . and so forth.

_Ivan Prostakov._”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich thought for a moment properly and then wrote in reply that to advise hastily in such situations means to advise poorly. And, therefore, Ivan Efremovich should wait for about two weeks for a proper response from him. Then, while sitting there leisurely, Gavrilo Simonovich twirled in his hands the packet addressed to Nikandr. “What might Ivan Efremovich have written to him?” the prince thought. “If he’s notifying him about Sozontov’s matchmaking in regard to Elizaveta, then this is imprudent, and there’s no need for him to write at all.” Suddenly the thought arose inside him: “Is this letter not perhaps from Maremyana Kharitonovna? That’s it, exactly! She, apparently, has reconciled herself with him in her heart and sent him an assurance of that. Yes, and the inscription, it appears, was written by a female hand!”

This idea seemed to him to be accurate, and when Nikandr returned home, he said to him with a smile: “Mr. Prostakov bows to you, sending his regards, while his wife, in order to assure us that she’s no longer angry at you, has sent you this here letter!”

Nikandr blushed, turning crimson all over, tore open the letter, and began to tremble. From the middle of the pages, he took out a small slip of paper, fastened his eyes upon it intently, clasped it
to his heart, then to his lips, and burst into tears. “Oh, Creator!” he exclaimed, glancing up at the heavens, “Have I truly deserved this happiness?”

“What has happened to you, Mr. Falaleev?” asked Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. “What is it that Maremyana writes to you?”

Nikandr silently handed over to him the slip of paper, and the prince turned pale, seeing a miniature portrait of Elizaveta on it. His face flared up with indignation. “Deceived father!” he exclaimed. “You’re so good natured, but your daughter is deceiving you! What is it that she writes to you? Hand that letter over to me!”

Nikandr had been reading it, at times turning pale, at times turning crimson. A terrible struggle in his heart between hope and despair could be seen reflected in every muscle of his face. Having read the letter, he put it down on the table, leaned his elbows on the table, clutching his head with both hands, and remained motionless. The prince grabbed the letter and read the following:

“Nikandr! The sole darling of my heart and soul! A fierce storm is gathering above my head. Some neighbor of ours has asked my parents for my hand in marriage. They gave this neighbor their consent and have been tormenting me every minute with their admonishments, which I can’t ever abide! Thus, my dear, your Elizaveta shall never become the bride of another, even if he were some sort of king. No manner of threats would make me vacillate in my resolve even for a single minute. If I can’t be yours . . . oh! this is too great a sacrifice for one’s destiny. To what end are such misfortunes augmented, misfortunes that a tender mortal being cannot bear? Thus, Nikandr, thus, priceless friend of mine!

Elizaveta shall abide by her promise and remain faithful to you even to her dying day! Take comfort in my resoluteness as much as you can! I’m sending you my portrait and some of my work. When we ourselves are unable to be together, this at least shall replace your loss to some extent. A hundred times I have set out to paint your portrait as well. In my mind’s eye, I gathered together all of your features, all of the nuances in your face. I took my brush and set down to work, but my eyes kept filling up with tears, and the brush fell out of my hands. What am I to do? I simply can’t do it! I’m able to depict my supreme enemy, but it’s impossible for me to depict my dearest friend, from whom I’m now parted. At the mere recollection of that loss, my heart starts to ache and to throb, my hands start to tremble, and my breathing becomes labored. Forgive me! With all of my love, with all of the fire in my soul, I remain your dearest friend, your Elizaveta.”

“P.S.: You, perhaps, are curious to find out how it is that I managed to send you a letter? This was truly difficult for me to do. You’re aware of my father’s habit, when he’s busy writing many letters, how he usually summons me and has me seal up the letters he has completed and to address them for him, while he begins to write another letter. It was upon this habit of his that I based all of my hope: I prepared a letter to you, but I didn’t have the courage to insert it into the parcel. I would shudder at each and every movement that father made. I would turn pale and would be at a loss to know what to do!
Nevertheless, I finally mustered the courage and brought myself to do it. ‘Let him see,’ I thought, ‘that my love is not mere childishness and let him cease tormenting me, trying to persuade me to get married to another.’ It’s in this way that you have this letter in your hands, and that you shall henceforth have other letters from me, if that proves possible. Oh! I mustn’t expect the same from you: I don’t know any way for us to do that.”

“It shall likewise be incomprehensible to you how it is that I know that you’re there together with Prince Gavrilo Simonovich? Oh! it took me a while to succeed in figuring that out. I waited several weeks until kind Makar was sent to town. I approached him with the difficult request that he ask around in town about you and your whereabouts. When he returned home, he told me that he had discovered that you had set off with the prince on the day of our departure. And that’s how I guessed that you had both gone together.”

Nikandr remained in the same position that he had been in previously. Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, who was shredding Elizaveta’s letter and her portrait into tiny pieces, was speaking to Nikandr: “This girl has indeed lost her mind. However much I might have loved Princess Fekla Sidorovna, I never would have undertaken such a reckless course of action!”

But, at that very moment, his conscience said to him: “Really, isn’t trampling down your garden the very same thing? Really, isn’t surrendering yourself to indolence, isn’t losing your field, and with it the daily subsistence that it provides, any less insane than Elizaveta writing a love letter to a man whose wife she can never hope to become, and complaining to him about that misfortune? Oh! None of this would have happened if she hadn’t hoped. Hope accompanies the unfortunate and the unhappy to the edge of the grave.”

He stacked the scraps of paper into a small pile and turned silent, at which point Nikandr lifted his head and asked disconnectedly: “Where is her portrait? And where is her letter?”

“Here are both the one and the other,” the prince replied, pointing at the small pile of paper scraps.

Nikandr raised a howl. He was gasping from torment and reproving Gavrilo Simonovich severely. He was wringing his hands and smiting his forehead with his fists in despair.

“Young man!” the prince exclaimed sternly. “How long shall you remain an infant? People forgive human weaknesses, but they never forgive tomfoolery. There are various forms of human weaknesses and of tomfoolery, depending on one’s age and one’s situation, and they go so far as to include what’s now called insanity. A wealthy old man who falls in love with a young girl commits an act of tomfoolery, but that act is pardonable, for he alone must suffer the consequences. But a young pauper who dares to lift his eyes and gaze upon the daughter of a wealthy man, after having been received into the family by her father with all manner of geniality, draws forth a strong admonition from everyone. If the object of one’s love and
affection doesn’t respond to his advances, he’s called a madman, but if she does respond to them, then many people, even an entire family, shall tolerate this: the father is called a fool; the mother is called a careless woman; the daughter is called a dissolute wench; and the lover is called a most dishonorable man who deserves all manner of contempt. And thus, Nikandr, if your passion is blinding you to such an extent that you would agree to endure such offensive thoughts with indifference, then is it possible that you would wish that the names of your benefactor and of Elizaveta herself would suffer so cruelly?”

“Never!” Nikandr exclaimed, and a noble resoluteness began to gleam in his eyes. “Her peace of mind is more precious to me than is life itself. Let me be the one who shall suffer torment! Write back to Mr. Prostakov, Prince, and tell him that I’m firmly resolved never to utter Elizaveta’s name ever again!”

The prince embraced him, and tranquility, to all appearances, had been restored.

Chapter 35: The Reply

While our friends were busy whiling away their time in the town, each occupying himself with his own pursuits, Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov, back in their home village, were in a state of great confusion and bustling about. Prince Svetlozarov had arrived and had given Ivan Efremovich a letter from his father in which it was written that the old prince would consider it an honor and a pleasure to become related by intermarrying with such a venerable family, for he had heard a lot about the prudence of Mr. Prostakov, the household economy and frugality of his wife, and the erudition of their daughters. Although, it’s true, the old prince observed, that his dear son might have been able to find, judging from the gentility of his lineage and from his wealth, a more respectable bride, he was sure, nonetheless, that this union, which was constituted by the heart, would be much stronger than one based upon calculations of profit and the antiquity of family names. The letter ended with him giving his parental blessing to the marriage.

Mr. Prostakov was satisfied with this letter, Mrs. Prostakov was even more satisfied with it, and Katerina was like a madwoman, out of her mind from joy with it. In her imagination, she was already picturing to herself the brilliant carriages, the opulent decorations, the magnificence that would soon be surrounding Her Highness, the Princess Katerina Svetlozarova. She genuinely began to look at others very little, walking with majestic strides and with her nose lifted high in the air, just as her betrothed had taught her, assuring her that all of the aristocratic ladies in the capital acted exactly the same way. Instead of saying, as she used to do previously, “Mother, isn’t it time for us to set the table? Father has already returned home from the threshing floor,” she would now say: “Ma chère maman, I make so bold as to think that it is already time to place the couverts on the table for five personnes. Mon cher papa deigned to return from his voyage, during which time he deigned to examine some business establishments concerning grain husbandry.”

Ivan Efremovich noticed this new tomfoolery on the part of a member of his family, and yet he remained silent. “Why, after all, shouldn’t she speak in this manner?” he thought. “If this pleases her future husband, she must imitate this manner of speaking and thus ingratiate herself,
putting herself in his good graces so as to gain his favor. We must patiently endure this whimsy and tomfoolery.” Mrs. Maremyana Kharitonovna, gazing at Katerina’s majestic gait and hearing her drawling voice, couldn’t cease marveling at her daughter’s new manner of speaking and walking. “Now that’s how you should be speaking and walking, Elizaveta,” she would say to her elder daughter. But Elizaveta would usually reply meekly and tolerantly: “Mother! Such a compulsion is onerous to me.”

In a word: Ivan Efremovich gave in to the persistent blandishments of his wife as well as the requests of the prince and Katerina. And, without waiting for a definitive reply from his friend, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, he gave his full consent to the marriage and gave his blessing to the two young lovebirds. The wedding ceremony was scheduled for Low Week, the week after Easter.

What a commotion arose in the household! What a convergence of merchants with silk materials, cambric, haberdashery items, and so on, and so forth. Everybody was busy with something: some were cutting out the material, others were cutting out the material again, reshaping it, some were sewing the material, and so on, and so forth. Three weeks had been spent in such an atmosphere of hustle and bustle, when Ivan Efremovich received a letter from Gavrilo Simonovich, which he was very happy to receive. He left to go to his study, where, donning his glasses and tearing open the envelope, he said to himself: “Let’s see what it is that he shall have to say? I have no doubt that he shall approve of my intentions and of my resoluteness.”

“My dear friend, Ivan Efremovich!

You and I are both old men, and we are meeting together to speak about a rather important topic. And that’s why I wish to speak with thee [using the more familiar second person singular form], and not with you thou [using the more formal second person plural form]: that’s to say, with thine head and heart, and not with your nobleness and wealth. My thoughts are sincere and candid, they are like those that are presented before God’s divine judgment. Take a look at the things that I have to say to you and think about them in conformity with the merit of your years and with the dignity of your position as a father. Your letter can be divided into two parts. You wish to give away the hands of your daughters in marriage. That’s a commendable intention! You wish to see Elizaveta get married to Mr. Sozontov? You’re right. She doesn’t wish to get married to him, at least not right now, correct? She’s right! You wish your daughter every happiness, you wish to return to her, as soon as possible, the tranquility that she has lost, and to restore peace and quiet in your home, don’t you? You do well to wish these things! She asks her heart whether it can love, – as it should, of course, so that she can be happy, – the man whom you are suggesting to her? And she receives from her heart the reply: never! And so she rejects his hand in marriage. She does well to reject him! Thus, my friend, perhaps this reply of never might someday turn into the reply: at a distant date. But as long as never is the reply, this meek, tender, and sensitive heart shouldn’t be forced to marry him. That would be the same thing as a murderer saying, as he is plunging a dagger into your chest: ‘My good and kind man! Step into that other world! It’s so much
better there, people say, than it is in this cruel world of ours!'

If a damsel, while standing at the sacred altar, with a pale face, lackluster eyes, and a trembling voice, were to say: ‘So be it! I shall love my husband!’ – would we really think from these words, spoken under compulsion, albeit pronounced in a sanctuary, that her being, her essence would change? That her love for one person would turn into hatred, and that her indifference to another person would turn into love? No! That would be a miracle. A damsel whose heart is not yet occupied by anyone, – and this only happens some of the time, and it happens out of necessity, – might get married to a person who is, for her, neither one thing nor another. Yes, sir, it’s similar to how a tree can turn into stone, but a stone can never turn into a tree. And if a damsel, therefore, doesn’t wish to become someone’s wife because she loves another, then it would be best, and it would be most sensible, to grant it all some time. If I had been one of those ancient knights-errant, who wandered in search of chivalrous adventures, then I would have placed on my shield the motto: ‘Time heals all wounds.’

All that I have written here means that I’m advising you to leave Elizaveta to the mercy of fate itself. Nikandr has sworn a sacred oath not to utter a single word about her, but he hasn’t yet resolved not to think about her. This is enough, however, coming from such a passionate young man.

For now, this is enough about Elizaveta, and I hope that you shall listen to the advice of your friend. Now I shall speak about Katerina, but I don’t know whether you shall accept my reasons, which shall consist in the following.

In your letter, I noticed a certain secretiveness, which was a little offensive for your friend. You appear undecided whether to give your consent to the prince or to refuse him, and everything indicates that you’re much more in agreement with the former option. I shall show you your letter, where you shall see that your hand was shaking when you were trying to show me that the prince’s letter hadn’t touched your heart. I forgive you this lie, and the conscience of my good friend can’t hide the fact that this was truly a lie. There’s no reason for me to write a lot here, since I hope to be back with you before the wedding day arrives. Thank God that it’s now Lent! Listen! Perhaps Prince Svetlozarov has now become an honest man. Time can cure all sorts of things, but the truth of the matter is that for several years he was one of the most dishonorable men and cruel monsters of the Russian land. Don’t wonder at my words. I have known him for around twenty years; he knows me as well, and both of us know each other on a first-name basis. You’re surprised, good-natured old man, and wonder wherefore did I, who was going by one name, ask to be given a different name? I would never have revealed this secret, if this dissolute man hadn’t stretched out his demands so far and hadn’t started to woo that daughter of yours, seeking to gain her favor. Loving you, I wish to show my love to your entire family. We shall see, however: time changes everything. A young good-for-nothing, when he reaches his mature years, can become a respectable man, but
this change must be ascertained and proven, it must be evident. As far as your idea, – about writing to his father and seeking his consent, – is concerned: please, don’t trouble yourself! His father was dispatched to Lake Baikal when his son was not yet nineteen years old, and now, I think, one would not be able to track down his grave. In conclusion, I pray thee not to mention my name to him and not to give your consent to the marriage. I myself shall soon be back, and I shall explain to you then that which seems dark in your letter.

Your friend, Prince Chistyakov.

P.S.: I’m inexcusably guilty. I very nearly forgot! That shifting, swirling creature that calls itself Prince Svetlozarov isn’t a prince at all, and isn’t a Svetlozarov at all. ‘How’s that?’ ‘What’s that you say?’ ‘Who is he then?’ you might well ask. Verily, I don’t know what he is right now, but I absolutely do know that he was the most dissolute of those noblemen who purveyed the honor of being monsters.”

Ivan Efremovich was astounded by this letter. Each and every father, – each and every kind and gentle father, it goes without saying – who would have put himself in Mr. Prostakov’s place would easily have seen how this old man had turned pale and how his heart had turned to stone. Closing his eyes and laying his head down upon the table, he found himself in an anguished state of mind for some time. “No,” he said to himself. “This Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov is some strange kind of man! He takes comfort in creating enigmas for me and in tormenting me. But who, in truth, shall tell me who this Mr. Svetlozarov actually is? No matter how much I think upon this question, everything that’s coming out of my head right now is wrapped in darkness. What a difficult undertaking it is to raise daughters and to give their hands away in marriage in the manner that one would like, without suffering thousands of torments and tribulations! Which prince am I now to believe? Chistyakov is, it seems, kind and honest; Svetlozarov is tender and touching! Why didn’t the former forewarn me at the time when the latter made his initial appearance in my home? It’s true, however, that he never could have imagined that this visit would last more than a few hours! But why did he remain silent afterwards? Ah! He didn’t remain silent, I now recall, no, not at all: he told me a lot, although I couldn’t understand all of what he was saying at the time. What am I to do now?”

He wracked his brain mercilessly, but came up empty. One plan contradicted another one. A splendid contrivance would suddenly collapse from a spoken word or even a look that previously seemed insignificant. “My God! How a man must be careful!” Prostakov said to himself. “And especially the kind of man upon whose mind depend the honor, tranquility, and joys of life of those creatures who call him their father!” At this point, he recalled the expression used by Prince Gavriilo Simonovich, who, at the time when his wife was in labor during the birth of their child and he had nothing to contribute to their livelihood, had said: “Lord! Why does every man strive to produce a creature that is similar to himself, and why is it the rare man who thinks beforehand about how he shall support the future existence of that creature?” “It’s true,” Prostakov continued, “that I didn’t have to fear that I would starve my children to death, but
didn’t I do something that is much worse by not being able to raise them and educate them the way that I should have? Why didn’t I keep them at home? Is it really the case that I couldn’t have taught them at home all that they, in their position, needed to learn? So what if they weren’t able to speak foreign languages? There’s no point in them doing that, anyway. I’ve noticed that this infectious plague has been transmitted to us from foreigners, and from those among us who love all things foreign. I have also noticed that this plague has become so widely spread, from its beginnings in palaces, that it has now reached the cabins of our most impoverished noblemen. What was the cause of this? Why did all of our ancestors speak their native tongue, even though they knew other languages? And why were there many grand people who loved virtue, not merely in words, but also tried to perform virtuous acts in practice? The first among those Russians who started to speak in a foreign language at a meeting of his fellow compatriots, without any need to, proved to them either his pomposity or his egoism. Both the one and the other merit a cruel punishment. Oh! How I was inexcusably to blame for agreeing with my wife’s idea and sending our daughters to the boarding school in town! My daughters wouldn’t have learned how to speak French, and, it’s true, they wouldn’t have been able to read such classic works of literature as *Alzira, Andromache*, and *Henriada* in the original French. But they also wouldn’t have been able to read *Tereziia Filosofka* [Theresa the Philosopher], *Orleanskaia devstvennitsa* [The Virgin from Orleans], *Dshcher’ udvol’svtiiia* [The Daughter of Pleasure], and other highly dissolute works of literature that bring shame upon our age and upon our people. They wouldn’t have been able to play the piano nicely, but they also wouldn’t have had any need to portray, in mournful tones, the feelings of a soul that has become exhausted from domestic woes."

**Chapter 36: A Turnabout in This Matter**

While Mr. Prostakov was in the midst of thinking about continuing his arguments in order to have something to base his decision upon, Maremyana Kharitonovna rushed into his study and said: “What have you been doing in here up until now? This is inexcusable! Prince Viktor Apollonovich is singing a lovely aria, and I must admit that at my father’s theatre even the best singers didn’t sing as well as this. Come and listen!”

“May Satan himself take that singer and all of his notes!” Prostakov exclaimed. “Why are you interrupting me and preventing me from thinking?”

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14 Prostakov is refering here to three works written by famous French authors during the period of the Enlightenment: Voltaire’s tragedy, *Alzire, ou Les Americains* (1736), Racine’s tragedy, *Andromaque* (1667), and Voltaire’s epic poem *La Henriade* (1723).

15 Prostakov is refering here, by way of contrast, to three French works of erotic literature that, in his opinion, should never have been published and should not be read by impressionable young readers in Russia: Jean-Baptiste de Boyer’s *Therese philosophe* (1748), an anonymous parody of Voltaire’s *La Pucelle d’Orleans* (1735), and a French translation of an anonymous British novel titled *A Daughter of Pleasure*. 
Maremyana was extremely dumbfounded. First, she designated her husband (in her thoughts, to be sure, not aloud) a madman, then a killjoy, and, after that, a most intolerable and obnoxious old man who had outlived his years.

THE WIFE: “You haven’t, by any chance, happened to receive a nice little letter from His Excellency, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, now have you? This letter, as was noticeable, occupied you so much, Ivan Efremovich, that you forgot all about your future son-in-law and your daughter.”

THE HUSBAND: “If you call Prince Svetlozarov our son-in-law before he gets married to our daughter, I shall get angrier at you than I have ever been at any time in my entire life. I have a good reason for this. Yes, this letter is from Gavrilo Simonovich! But I would give away half of my estate to have had this letter arrive here two weeks earlier than it did: that is to say, to have had it arrive at a time when I hadn’t yet given my consent to the marriage. Sit down, mother, and listen! This matter concerns your daughter!”

He read the letter aloud to her. There was much in it that Maremyana didn’t understand, but what she did understand made her face become suffused with paleness.

“How did this happen?” she asked with a moan. “Is it possible that Viktor Apollonovich . . .?”

“We shall see,” her husband replied. “When an opportune moment presents itself, I shall pose to him two or three questions, to which I shall then demand an answer. I shall look at him right in the eyes intently, and I won’t fail to find out. If I see that his innocence is imprinted upon the look in his eyes, and all over his face, then, oh, then I shall show Gavrilo Simonovich the door, and he can go wherever he likes. I can’t tolerate people who tell lies and keep secrets. This kind of behavior, if I’m not mistaken, shows signs of criminality.”

Maremyana Kharitonovna agreed to the plan that he had proposed. She loved Katerina in a motherly way, and thus she was horrified at the prospect of making her unhappy. But how was she not to believe Prince Viktor Apollonovich? In her mind, everything pointed to the conclusion that Gavrilo Simonovich was a slanderer and an astute deceiver, and that he had many reasons to hide from Svetlozarov.

She was impatiently looking forward to the moment when such an intriguing explanation would begin. For the thousandth time, Ivan Efremovich tried to concoct a scheme that would resolve the conundrum in which he found himself, but it was all to no avail. Thirty years of country life had made him extremely slow-witted in such instances. Lying down to sleep at night, he swore that he would get an explanation from the prince the very first thing in the morning; in the morning, he promised to do this in the evening; and so on. He resembled the debtor who says to his unaccommodating moneylenders: “Come back tomorrow, come back the day after tomorrow,” and so on. His good and kind heart was writhing in pain, and a week and a half passed in this manner.

During this time period, Ivan Efremovich, while passing through the reception room in his house one evening, happened to glance inadvertently at the flames glowing in the fireplace. On the
eaves stood an alabaster statue of Hercules smiting a hundred-headed hydra. “Bah!” exclaimed Prostakov, stopping for a moment. “If this bold fellow can battle a hundred-headed serpent single-handedly, and vanquish that foe, then why can’t I talk things over with Prince Viktor Apollonovich, having my wife, my children, and the letter from Gavrilo Simonovich by my side? We shall see, perhaps something might develop?” Armed with this noble resoluteness, he entered the dining room, burying his hands into the pockets of his sleeveless jacket with an air of importance, and sitting down on the sofa. And then he said: “I seem to remember, prince . . .”

“He has arrived! He has arrived!” rang out from all sides. Ivan Efremovich, leaping up from the sofa, asked: “Who?”

“Terenty Pafnutyevich Krakalov,” replied Makar, entering the room with a joyful look on his face. Prostakov rejoiced, feeling incredibly glad that his friend had arrived. “Everything shall be better now,” he said to himself. “Well, now we’ll see what happens!” Mr. Krakalov entered the room. All of the family members, in turn, embraced him, except for Elizaveta, who was able to read from the look in his eyes that he knew the secret of her letter to Nikandr. She became embarrassed and moved over to the side. Prince Gavriilo, a good, kind, and forbearing man, didn’t wish to afflict her with a new misfortune. He embraced Elizaveta, saying to her, “In my absence, you’ve become more filled out and look better: isn’t that the case?”

Elizaveta, who perceived a falsehood in his words, blushed red and didn’t utter a word in reply.

Everyone calmed down. Prince Svetlozarov cast significant looks in the direction of Prince Gavriilo Simonovich.

“Well,” said Prostakov, “You shall forgive us, Viktor Apollonovich, if my friend and kinsman interrupted our conversation. We can continue it now. Tell me, please, I think that your father is already quite elderly and, what’s more, quite weak?”

PRINCE SVETLOZAROV: “Indisputably! If it weren’t for my love for your worthy daughter, I would be at his home right now, without leaving his bedside for an instant. For he is so weak, so weak, such that every day we must fear . . .”

Prince Chistyakov, who understood his friend’s intentions, cast a significant glance in his direction and then asked Svetlozarov: “In which governorate does your father deign to reside?”

PRINCE SVETLOZAROV: “In the Irkust governorate, Mr. Krakalov. Very far away.”

PROSTAKOV: “Did you happen to serve in the military?”

PRINCE SVETLOZAROV: “Oh, yes, indeed. Frequently I even took part in battles! I have preserved three hats that were shot through with bullets!”
PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “I heard that you fought in some death-or-surrender battles, where it wasn’t only your hats that received wounds! Do you recall Tverskaia Street in Moscow and the night of November 18, 1730 . . .?”

PRINCE SVETLOZAROV (quickly): “How is that? What . . .?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Would you happen to recollect the name of a certain unfortunate and unhappy woman, who was called Fekla Sidorovna Chistyakova?”

PRINCE SVETLOZAROV (leaping up): “What’s the meaning of this? Who are you?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov! What have you to say about that?”

Viktor Apollonovich became suffused with paleness. “Servants, fetch the carriage! I’ve taken refuge in a house of brigands, tramps, and impostors.”

“Imposters?” said Prince Chistyakov, in a tone of voice that no one there not only had ever heard from him before, but also had never expected to hear from him. His eyes were ablaze with rage and retribution.

“Oh, my God! What’s the meaning of all this? What shall come of this?” Ivan Efremovich, his wife, and their children cried out in unison.

Prince Svetlozarov disappeared as quickly as lightning and galloped away. Displeasure was written all over the faces of the entire family, and everyone was looking at Prince Gavrilo with eyes that he understood to be saying to him: “You’re a strange man, Chistyakov! We took you into our home and accepted you, we gave you shelter and asylum, we gave you clothes to wear and shoes to walk in. And instead of showing us any gratitude, you only make trouble here and produce unpleasant scenes, in this, our very own home!”

“I understand what you’re thinking,” the prince said, turning to the family. “You’re unable to conceal your desire to learn about me and Prince Viktor Apollonovich in greater detail. I haven’t yet managed to do that, and if you’re feeling any doubt about the probity of my intentions, you’re mistaken! I swear to you that you should be thanking your lucky stars and thanking heaven for its wisdom, if this Prince Viktor never returns to your home ever again! ‘Why is that?’ you might ask. Thus, I’m obliged to answer that question of yours, and I shall do that when you’ve calmed down and when you’re in a better condition to listen to me. For the time being, however, I give you the following advice: write back to Prince Svetlozarov and have him entreat his father to come visit you here in person, for the matter we’re talking about deserves that. If he evades doing that for reasons of his father’s ill health, or of his father being too busy, or uses some other excuse, then suggest that the son take you to visit his father at the latter’s home. We shall see how he responds to that request.”

The day passed gloomily. It can’t be said that everyone was satisfied with Gavrilo Simonovich’s words of advice. All you have to do once is experience and detect doubt in a person’s honesty,
and suspiciousness about the kindness of his heart, and then you shall not soon start to look at him with that calm view that alone makes conversations between two old timers entertaining.

As he was leaving to go to his bedroom, Mr. Prostakov said: “Okay, prince, I shall give some thought to your words of advice.” Maremyana was extremely peevish, and Katerina, – oh, how could she be expected to be happy, when she was being deprived, perhaps forevermore, of the lovely title of princess, when she was being deprived of the magnificence, the eminence, and the delight of flaunting all of this in front of her sister, introducing balls, theatre performances, and masquerades in her very own home!

The following day, Ivan Efremovich sent a letter to Prince Svetlozarov in town, in accordance with Gavrilo Simonovich’s opinion on the matter. In the meantime, he asked the latter to explain himself more fully to him and to reveal openheartedly how it is that he’s acquainted with Viktor Apollonovich, and, moreover, why he’s acquainted with such a bad side of his character?

“I never intended to conceal myself in the actions that I have taken,” Gavrilo Simonovich explained. “But you already know the reason why I haven’t completely revealed myself hitherto: first of all, there wasn’t a convenient time for me to do that; secondly, I thought that, having been a dissolute young man, I might be able to become an honest man at a mature age; and, thirdly, I wanted, for the time being, to remain an outsider in this matter, and to leave it to your own mind to observe that a fiancé, such as this one, who begins to appeal to your daughter by his brilliant appearance, his boasting, his chansonnettes, his capers, his fluency in French, and other such foolish concerns, should be banished from your home straight away. I rejoiced when I saw your desire to do precisely that, and the fact that you refused even to see each other seemed to me to bespeak your consent for doing this. But what is one to do! This took a completely different turn, and Svetlozarov remained here for a long time in order to infect all that surrounds him with his poison. I couldn’t have imagined that he would wish to marry Katerina, and that you would give him her hand in marriage. But this is exactly what happened! “What’s one to do?” I thought. “If he was pleasing to her, then why shouldn’t it be so: perhaps he’s by now a sensible person.” I continued to entertain such thoughts, until such time as I found out from your letter that Prince Svetlozarov had received his father’s consent to the marriage. “Bah!” I said to myself, “So is he still the same ne’er-do-well that he was formerly? No, he shouldn’t become the son-in-law of such a good and kind person! I know full well that his father departed this world a long time ago.”

“We shall see what he says,” Ivan Efremovich replied, shrugging his shoulders. “My God! How easy it is to be mistaken and how, with the purist intention of doing someone a good deed, one can bring to ruin someone who is near and dear to one’s heart! Oh, Svetlozarov! If you’re truly such as Prince Gavrilo Simonovich says you are, then it would have been better if there had been funerals being held in my house during the time when your carriage was broken down, and so I would have had a good reason to refuse you shelter!”

Toward evening of that same day, Prince Chistyakov resumed the narration of his life story, beginning with the following words:

Chapter 37: An Error in Signs
“I had come to a halt in the narrative account of my life story at the point where I was leaving my native village. My sadness was immeasurable. To lose, in such a short period of time, one’s wife and son, and to leave one’s birthplace, is very painful. If this were to happen to a great professor or to the greatest of poets, then the former wouldn’t find enough sensible ideas to console him, while the latter wouldn’t find enough words to describe the wound to his heart. To console an unfortunate and unhappy person is very easy, but to find consolation in misfortunes and in unhappiness is a rather difficult matter.”

“My intention was to make my way to Moscow. ‘Being in the capital,’ I would say to myself, ‘isn’t like being in Falaleevka: there must be a whole different world there, the people there must all be noble and honorable, and thus learned. Wives there, I suppose, don’t run away from their husbands, and no one steals someone else’s children. Oh, in the capital, life is beautiful!’”

“After having spent up to about fifteen days on the road, I passed through several villages and entered a pretty good-sized town. My God, how surprised I was! What tall buildings, what fine clothes, what a magnificent church! Compared to this, what significance does the village elder’s house have? Or Princess Chistyakova’s wedding dress? Or the church where I got married and, soon thereafter, buried my father-in-law? Isn’t this perhaps Moscow? My heart began to beat pleasantly. I really did think that I had reached that magnificent capital, where all of the people are learned scholars, and are, consequently, very intelligent, conscientious, affable, and gracious.”

“Reasoning in this manner, I arrived at a small square, and since it was now the dinner hour, I sat down in the corner at a public house. Pulling a piece of bread, an onion, and a beetroot with butter out of my pocket, I began eating. Strolling in front of me was an elderly man, dressed in a green jacket with yellow cuffs, and wearing on his head a hat that resembled a mushroom. He was holding a long walking stick in his hands. He cast a glance in my direction, looking fixedly at me, and then, finally, he approached me.”

“Tell me, my dear sir,” I asked, “what’s the name of this city?”

ELDERLY MAN: “Fatezh, the chief district town of the Kursk governorate. It’s quite renowned for its turnips and carrots, and even more renowned for the fact that many of its lower middle-class inhabitants entered military service, as soldiers, it’s true, but afterwards they came out as generals.”

CHISTYAKOV: “This does true honor to them and to the place of their birth. But what exactly do you do, my dear sir? Right now, it seems, is a time of peace, so why are you so frightfully armed with that bear-spear?”

ELDERLY MAN: “Oh, you, apparently, don’t understand anything! Things are worse around here during trading days than during a military battle: an awful lot of people gather together on those days. People are shouting, horses are neighing, oxen are bellowing, sheep are bleating! And what can you do here without a weapon? I’m called
a Guardian of the People’s Peace and Quiet, or, simply, an on-duty policeman. My job is to subdue restless people who violate one law or another.”

“At this point, he leaned upon his walking stick, with a happy look on his face, and cast a glance in all directions. But soon the food that I had taken out of my pocket seduced him. ‘Well, then, little peasant, how about sharing that food with me,’ he said as he walked up to me. Perhaps I would have shared the food with him, if he had called me a better name, but ‘little peasant’ made me cruel-hearted. ‘What?’ I thought. ‘Am I, Prince Chistyakov, a native-born prince, nothing other than a little peasant?’ Oh, the shadows cast by my ancestors would become indignant if I were to do what was requested by this ruffian!’ ‘My friend,’ I said haughtily, ‘I would advise you to learn how to recognize people a little better; otherwise, you see, you’re just an old gray-haired man who’s no wiser than the last child in our village. Not a bread crumb for you!’ He set off without saying a word, and I, so as to punish him more for his ignorance, started eating with such chomping and crunching that it could be heard from ten sazhens away. I soon took pity on him, however. ‘Perhaps,’ I thought, ‘he truly is hungry. Why not give him a piece of bread?’ I was just about to start taking my knife out to cut him a piece, when the Guardian of the People’s Peace and Quiet ran up to me and, with the most cold-blooded look on his face, struck me in the back with about a dozen lashes from his whip, repeating over and over again: ‘Don’t chomp! Don’t crunch! Don’t disrupt our peace and quiet! Don’t engage in disorderly conduct!’”

“Leaping up to my feet with a howl, I exclaimed: ‘What are you beating me up for, you merciless man? What have I done to you?’”

“‘I’ve already told you the reason why,’ he replied, stepping off to the side. ‘Oh! So it’s not only in villages that people commit injustices?’ I said, packing up my travel bag, with the intention of leaving this town at once.”

“Having already spent about a week travelling, I was a bit tired and weak. And, since autumn was, at that time, already fast approaching, I decided that I would spend some time in a large village until the frosts began. In pursuit of that plan, I selected a nice hostelry and agreed upon a price with the owner for the billeting charge.”

“Besides himself, who was a rather elderly man, the family of my host, Agafon, consisted of his wife, who was a young peasant woman, and a sturdy peasant lad, who served as a hired hand. Agafon had been married twice already, but he had no children from those two marriages. When he married his third wife, however, God blessed their union. His young bride had cleverly remonstrated with him that the reason for the infecundity of his first two wives was their fatigue, their exhaustion, for although he was wealthy, he forced them to do all of the manual labor. ‘And, for that reason,’ she would say to him, ‘if you want God to bless you with heirs, then you must hire the farmhand Kuzma, who worked for my mother for several years. He’s very hard-working and so diligent that you’ll be able to rely on him for everything, just as if it were you yourself who was doing the work!’ Agafon was persuaded; he hired Kuzma, and, in the eighth month of their marriage, Agafon’s wife became pregnant. And, as a result, her husband couldn’t get his
fill of admiring her, and his wife ruled the roost in all things. She would walk up to the mirror, straighten out her silk kerchief, and smile, for she truly was rather good-looking. She would sing songs, cavort, and frolic about.”

“After five days, I was completely rested, but the slush outside continued, so I decided to remain at the hostelry for some more time.”

“One evening, after finishing my supper, I set off to go sleep in the room where guests ordinarily went to sleep. Around midnight, a frightful noise arose in the house: people were running around, horses were neighing. There was so much general confusion that I came out to take a look and see what was going on. I found a multitude of servants in the outer entrance hall, so I asked them: who has arrived? ‘Prince Svetlozarov and his wife,’ someone answered me.”

“He didn’t manage to finish saying everything that he had intended to say, when a young boyar appeared, stepping forth with an air of importance as he led a young woman on his arm. I fastened my eyes upon them and stood motionless, having recognized, in Svetlozarov’s princess, my own princess, Fekla Sidorovna. ‘Heavens!’ I exclaimed, unable to restrain myself. The servants, at the bidding of the gentleman, grabbed me by the arms and led me out beyond the gates in triumph, and then he tossed me into the mud. With a tattered heart, I jumped up and rushed over to the gates of the house, laughter being the sole response that I received. Standing there for half an hour or so, I felt cold, weak, and drenching wet. And, seeing as how I didn’t have the strength to do anything, I went to seek out lodging in another house. It was a good thing that I was carrying my money on my person. It was a gloomy night, with a rain shower pouring down. The night that I spent while my wife was giving birth to our child and my father-in-law was dying, was blissful in comparison to this night. At that time, I had a faithful wife whom I loved, but we didn’t have any money, and I was suffering. Now there’s money, but there’s also a perfidious and criminal wife! How great must my suffering be? Everywhere places were locked and chocked. ‘Well,’ I said to myself in my mental confusion, ‘when the time for you to die has been appointed, then you must go ahead and die.’ And with that I left the village, raving deliriously as I wandered about, up to my knees in mud.”

“After several hours had passed, I could hardly drag my feet forward and, while crossing a narrow little bridge over a moat, I stumbled and fell, landing upside down in the moat. As luck would have it, the moat was not very deep. However, I had badly injured my leg and my head. I had no sooner caught my breath, when I heard a frightful voice from below the bridge: ‘Who goes there? Who the hell is out there on this kind of night?’”

“‘A poor traveler,’ I replied. ‘No one in the village would let me in to spend the night, so I walked further on.’”

“‘An identical misfortune seems to have befallen the both of us,’ the stranger said. ‘They wouldn’t let me in either, and so I decided to spend the night beneath this bridge. Lie down and go to sleep. It’s wet down here, that’s true, but, on the other hand, there’s not
any rain falling down upon us from above. You haven’t, by any chance, left home due to a miserly father, now have you?’”

“‘No,’ I replied. ‘The infidelity of a wife and the loss of a son are what forced me to move away from my birthplace.’”

“‘Oh, that’s a sufficient reason for feeling unfortunate and being unhappy!’”

“We fell asleep, and dawn had already broken when we awoke. We both were bedraggled in a merciless way: the mud had made us resemble brigands. My comrade was a young man, tall in stature, and sturdy of build. Every feature of his face displayed a spiritual pride to every person who might have attempted to inflict even the slightest violence upon him. Along the road, he told me that his father was a wealthy priest in the town of Fatezh, the place where I had been beaten up for disturbing the peace and quiet there. The father’s miserliness and inordinate cruelty became intolerable for his magnanimous son. Since he never received from his father even a single kopeck to spend at his pleasure, the son ran up debts in his father’s bank account and was cruelly punished for that. In the end, he grew sick and tired of living in complete poverty and of being humiliated in front of the other young debauchees in town, his acquaintances. Thus he decided to provide himself, once and for all, with his father’s property, to leave home, and to live at some remove from him, in freedom. He went through a whole round of studies and, judging by his talents and successes, he might well have become a respectable man someday, but the pernicious impetuosity of his disposition and an immoderacy in his words and actions incurred frequent drubbings that, instead of leading him to reformation, reduced him to despair. The father wished to see him in his proper place, engaged in activities that suited his abilities, but young Silvester didn’t think of anything else other than how to be a famous warrior.”

“As we were walking along, he said to me: ‘You now know about me and my intentions. I would likewise like to know about you and your adventures, which must have been diverting. I’m just kidding! It seems to me that you must be no more than around twenty-five years old, and yet you have already managed to lose a wife and a son!’”

“‘With great pleasure,’ I replied to his request, ‘but this isn’t the place to do that. Let’s first find a place to rest somewhere in the countryside, and there you shall get to hear my story.’”

SYLVESTER: “And where are you making your way to?”

CHRISTYAKOV: “To Moscow, I think.”

SYLVESTER: “Bravo! Nothing could be better than that! I, too, am going there. What could be better than the city of Moscow? So many charming things have been said about her that one can’t help but be captivated, if one hasn’t seen her before! Only when you’re there, they say, it would be a good idea to have some money with you, – and, well, just in case, you should also have some smarts about you, if you have any smarts to speak of, of
course, but if you don’t have any, well, then there’s hardly any need for them, – if you only have some money with you, then you can have all that you want to have and you can be whatever you wish to be.”

“I glanced at him in a kindly way and involuntarily reached my hand into my pocket.”

“It was around noontime when we caught sight of a small village in the distance, about a verst away. Hearing a slight noise behind us, we glanced back. About a hundred sazhens away, a carriage, harnessed to three horses, was galloping down the road, and about six horsemen were flanking it on either side. My new friend stared at them intently, his face changed its expression, and he said, wiping the sweat from his brow: ‘So! These are some damned bodyguards from Fatezh. I recognize them by their attire and their halberds. Well, farewell, old chap. For the time being, you and I must part company.’ With these words, he darted off into a nearby forest and disappeared instantly. I was extremely surprised by this action of his. Is it really possible that his father, if my friend was telling me the actual truth, would be following his son so far from home? And would he be doing it so shamefully and with the sort of weaponry that a brigand would use?”

“The carriage stopped and so did the entire detachment. ‘Halt!’ exclaimed a splotchy-skinned old man, climbing down out of the carriage. He walked up to me, and his knights dismounted from their horses and surrounded me. I started to tremble.”

“‘What manner of man are you?’ asked the newly arrived hero.”

CHISTYAKOV: “I’m going to Moscow from the village of . . .”

OLD MAN: “No one is hindering you from walking even to St. Petersburg, if you’d like, but, all the same, you look like someone I know, and I need to know exactly who you are.”

CHISTYAKOV: “But allow me, honorable boyar, to inquire: who are you? You, who are acting so angrily and so autocratically toward me?”

OLD MAN: “Although I’m not obliged to satisfy the curiosity of each and every drifter that I encounter, but since your father is an honorable man, and since he’s closely connected with the judge, the chief of police, and the assessor, please be good enough to obey our orders and don’t resist. I have heard that you’re a considerable daredevil.”

“At this point, throwing open the flaps of his overcoat, the old man pulled a sheet of paper out of one pocket and his eyeglasses out of the other, and, after placing them on his nose, he started reading from the paper with an air of importance that rivaled that of any sexton.”

“Warrant to Chancellor Zastoikin”
“You, Chancellor Zastoikin, are to proceed immediately, and at a gallop, from Fatezh, along the route to Moscow, because, as has been rumored, thither has run away Silvester, the son of the priest Avksenty, after stealing from his father a not inconsiderable sum of money. According to the sketch provided by the helpful priest Avksenty, he, Silvester, in terms of distinctive marks, looks like this: he’s tall, he has a somewhat dark complexion and dark eyes, and the hair on his head is likewise dark. After you have caught him, Silvester, that is, you are likewise to take him immediately with you, Zastoikin, at a gallop, back to Fatezh. If he, Silvester, should start to resist arrest and to place unbecoming subterfuges and denials in your way, then his, Silvester’s, hands should be tied behind his back. And if he, Silvester, should not quiet down as a result of these measures, but should begin to try to delay his journey back by being even more recalcitrant, then you should tie his, Silvester’s, feet together as well, and, after placing him in the carriage, drive him back, without any further ado, and at a gallop, to Fatezh. Upon your arrival there, you are obliged to report undeviatingly and extensively about everything that transpired.”

“‘What say you to that, my honorable sir?’ Zastoikin asked, with a sly look on his face.”

CHISTYAKOV: “I’m very glad that you didn’t catch the real Silvester. He, it’s true, was just with me this very minute, but taking a look at you, he knew right away who you were, and he darted off into this forest.”

CHANCELLOR ZASTOIKIN: “Oh, no! You shall not deceive me by weaving cunning tricks. How is that? Do the distinctive marks spelled out above not combine to resemble you exactly?”

CHISTYAKOV: “Not at all. Look at me: I’m of average height, my face is not darkly complexioned, but has simply become sunburned as a result of my being on the road for a rather long period of time; my eyes are blue, and my hair is chestnut-colored.”

CHANCELLOR ZASTOIKIN: “What’s he saying?” (to the members of his detachment). “Take a look at his hair! What could be darker than that?”

MEMBERS OF THE DETACHMENT: “Nothing of the kind! Absolutely not! It looks just like mud!”

“Mr. Zastoikin glanced down at his warrant again and read aloud: ‘If he, Silvester, should start to resist arrest and to place unbecoming subterfuges and denials in your way, then his, Silvester’s, hands should be tied behind his back.’”

“‘Well, guys, go ahead and carry out the warrant!’ he added. And, in an instant, they bound my hands in such a way that I was unable to move even a single finger.”

“‘My God!’ I cried out, ‘Am I really forbidden to say anything in my defense?’”
“‘Not in the least,’ he replied. ‘Not a word is said in the warrant about lips and tongue, and so you can use them to your heart’s content.’ ‘Guys! Search his pockets: perhaps he has some malicious intent in mind. It wouldn’t surprise me if a weapon were to be found on his person! The whole Fatezh district knows that common thieves have frequently turned into very terrible brigands.’ First, they took a purse with some money in it out of my pocket. ‘Oh! he stocked up a considerable amount of money here. He must have needed to hide it and make it look like his savings.’ They opened up my purse and found inside it the small knife that I used to cut my bread.”

“‘Well, there you go!’ exclaimed Zastoikin. ‘Haven’t I been telling you that he has some malicious intent in mind? Look, what a nice little knife he has here!’ ‘Harness up the horses, Ivan,’ he said to one of the dragoons. ‘Be careful that you don’t lose any of the money or the knife we found on him: these are important pieces of evidence.’”

“At first, I watched all of this with vacant eyes, but, in the end, having witnessed their predatoriness at close range, I was driven to the point of frenzy and exclaimed: ‘You’re all brigands and deserve the gallows! Really, is this the way that justice is served? Oh, you shall not get off without some punishment!’”

“Mr. Zastoikin, without uttering a word to me in response, again glanced down at his warrant: ‘… And if he, Silvester, should not quiet down as a result of these measures, but should begin to try to delay his journey back by being even more recalcitrant, then you should tie his, Silvester’s, feet as well.’”

“He asked the members of his detachment: ‘Honorable Sirs, tell me, in good conscience, has he, Silvester, indeed quieted down? Doesn’t he persist even more?’”

“‘He persists even more, he persists even more!’ the members of his detachment shouted, tying up my feet. They threw me into the carriage and galloped off. We were on the road for about three days. Mr. Zastoikin didn’t skip a single tavern en route. He regaled his entire detachment with food and drink, and he paid for it all, to my great misfortune, out of my purse. I, meanwhile, was fed bread and water. ‘Is it really prescribed that way in the warrant?’ I asked, entreating him to give me something a little more substantial to eat and drink than bread and water. ‘There is nothing written about this in the warrant, but such is the custom here. With mortification of the flesh, the soul resigns itself. And your soul, as you see, is so irrepressible.’”

“We arrived in Fatezh late in the evening. I was led to a jail cell, where they untied my arms and legs, and they laid me down upon a straw bed.”

“‘Sleep tight,’ said Zastoikin. ‘Tomorrow some gentlemen from the assessor’s office shall be visiting you.’”

**Chapter 38: The Court and a Reprisal**

“‘At first, I thought that my annoyance at the injustice that was bound to be perpetrated by the judges wouldn’t allow me to sleep all night long. But the fatigue that I was
experiencing after so many restless days, and the fact that my conscience was clear, produced just the opposite effect, and I slept through until very late in the morning, as I could tell from looking out the small window of my cabin.”

“Some time later that day, I was visited by an important man who was accompanied by Zastoikin. ‘Get up from your bed and answer these questions with as much accuracy and truth as possible, for this gentleman here is His Honor, the assessor!’”

THE ASSESSOR: “Well then, Mr. Silvester, I think that you have had a fair amount of fun at the expense of others! Is stealing around twenty thousand rubles from your father, – and then having such a small amount of it remaining afterwards that it’s not worth the trouble of counting it, – is that your idea of a joke?!

CHISTYAKOV: “Oh, my God! Do the dead really rise from the grave? Is that possible? And, what’s more, my father didn’t have a fraction of that amount of money, not a hundredth part of it!”

THE ASSESSOR: “What empty words you blabber! He himself says that you stole nearly a third of his assets. Do you know that your father not only doesn’t wish to forgive you, but doesn’t even agree to see you. He declared in writing that if you don’t enlist in the military and don’t mend your profligate ways there, then this is a clear sign that there’s no way in the world to reform you. And, therefore, he shall exclude you from receiving any inheritance. Well, then, do you wish to enter military service?”

CHISTYAKOV: “Absolutely not, my dear sir! My father bestowed his blessing upon me on his deathbed, and that’s sufficient for me. I have no need for another father. And may whoever shall separate me from my inheritance use this inheritance peacefully and without disturbance, for I’ve forsaken my native village of my own free will, and I’m making my way to Moscow to seek my fortune in the world and to find happiness.”

“The gentleman assessor was greatly surprised at my words.”

“Have you perhaps gone mad out of fear,’ he asked me, ‘since you’re uttering such utter nonsense?’”

“Not in the least, venerable sir,’ I replied. ‘I don’t feel that any changes have taken place inside me, except that I have become greatly emaciated as a result of lengthy fasting. It was clear, during the time when Mr. Zastoikin was placing me in custody, that his vision was blurred and, as a result, he found that certain facial features of mine resembled the distinguishing marks of Sylvester that are described in the warrant. If you would deign to move me into the light of day, you would easily become convinced that Mr. Zastoikin was mistaken. And, what’s more, would I have the audacity to dare to poke fun at such a distinguished person as Your Honor?’”

“Oh, of course! Let’s go!”
"I was led into a special reception room on the upper floor, where I was ordered, upon washing myself up and cleaning off my clothes properly, to enter the courtroom. When I had completed these two preliminary tasks, I appeared in court for my hearing, where there were three judges, and a secretary sitting at a special little desk. First off, the secretary was ordered to read the warrant as audibly as possible, halting at every point. The judges glanced over at me at the mention of every distinguishing physical mark on my body, and then, shrugging their shoulders, they glanced over at one another."

"'Everything has been explained! This isn’t Sylvester,’ the three judges said in unison. ‘However, we must send for the priest Avksenty. Let him confirm this finding in person.’"

"Avksenty, a gray-haired, but burly and stout, old man, entered the hearing room, bowing from the waist."

"'What say you, old boy?’ exclaimed the judges. ‘Is this your son, Sylvester?’ The priest raised his head, threw a glance in my direction, and then, looking down again, said with a sigh: ‘Ah, no! He doesn’t look like him at all. You could tell just from my son’s face that he was a complete thief and a brigand!’ ‘Woe is me!’ he said, bending forward and bowing lower than usual, and then he left."

"The judges, after falling somewhat silent for a while, asked me: ‘Well, who are you then? And where is your residence permit?’"

"This question disconcerted me quite a bit, but I quickly recovered, and, bringing to mind the many adventures out of those wonderful books with which I had enlightened my princess, I said: ‘Dear sirs, I’m a townsman of modest means from the Simbirsk governorate, born in the rural settlement called Fomkin. Having leave to engage unhindered in commerce everywhere and seeing that it wouldn’t work out well for me to remain in my home village, I sold some of the better things that I possessed and bought some merchandise. Then I hit the road, thinking that I would make my way to Moscow, but some damned brigands in this governorate here attacked me, stealing everything that I owned, even a bank note that I had purchased. But I did succeed in hiding my money so well that they didn’t discover it. Mr. Zastoikin, however, did find it later, and now I have absolutely nothing left. Thus, I implore you, highly respected sirs, to render me some merciful justice by issuing me a new residence permit and ordering that my money be returned to me!’"

"'And how much money, by your calculation, did you have?’ one of the judges asked hastily."

"'More than a hundred ten-ruble coins and two dozen ruble notes, not counting small change.’"
“At this point, everyone fastened their eyes upon Zastoikin, who was standing off to the
side, trembling with his entire body and making some kind of incomprehensible signs
with his hand and eyes.”

“‘And what’s your name?’”

“‘Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov,’ I replied, fearing to add the delightful word ‘prince’
just yet.”

“At this point, they ordered us to leave, saying that they would adjudicate what the laws
state. We sat in silence in the anteroom for about an hour. Zastoikin was unusually glum
and sighed, while I was pondering where I should go after receiving my passport and my
money back. Speaking with the satisfaction that comes from having received a just
vengeance, I said to my comrade: ‘So, honorable sir, didn’t I tell you that you were
mistaken? If you hadn’t laid your hands on me, and especially if you hadn’t tied me up
like a common brigand or, at the very least, if you had fed me something a little better to
eat during our trip here, then I would give you something in return out of a sense of
gratitude. But now, no thank you! You won’t get anything from me!’”

“‘If you, mister townsman of modest means,’ he replied, ‘had told me, in good
conscience, about your money and about the very noble intention that you had set for
yourself, then you would have received half of what remained from the travel expenses, or
at least more than the four ten-ruble coins that I showed you were on hand. But now you
shall not receive anything.’”

“‘We shall see about that! Why is this so? How can this be?’”

“‘You shall see, and soon enough!’ At this point, he was summoned to the court’s
hearing room.”

“I could feel cold shivers running all over my skin. ‘How can it be?’ I thought to myself,
‘that I shall not receive what, according to all of the laws, rightfully belongs to me, and
that I had received as compensation for the loss of my son? No, this can’t be! Do you,
Mr. Zastoikin, wish to give me a fright? But, no brother, you haven’t come upon such a
fool!’ Inwardly, I consoled myself by imagining the look of embarrassment and sadness
that would appear on Zastoikin’s face when he would have to return my money to me.
‘Oh!’ I said to myself, ‘so as to punish this worthless crook some more, I shall begin,
while he’s counting out the money, to jingle the coins as loudly as possible!’ At this
point, I, too, was summoned to the court’s hearing room. My travel bag was lying on the
special little desk there. Alongside my bag were three of my shirts, and there were two
silk handkerchiefs there alongside my purse, and atop the purse were four ten-ruble coins,
two twenty-five-kopeck silver coins, and several twenty-five-kopeck coins, ten-kopeck
coins, and five-kopeck coins.”

“The judges, who had taken their seats with an air of importance some time earlier, gave a
sign to the secretary, who had stood up and was now holding a sheet of paper in his
hands, and he read the following verdict aloud: ‘After sufficient discussion, it has been
determined that: 1) Gavrilo Simonov, the son of Chistyakov, a Simbirsk townsman of
modest means, born in the village of Fomkin, be issued a new passport, to replace the one
that was stolen from him by brigands, a passport, according to which, he, Chistyakov,
shall be empowered to reside without hindrance in all of the locations where he might
wish to live.’”

“At these words, one of the judges stood up for a moment and handed me the sheet of
paper. ‘This is your residence permit,’ he said to me. I took it from him, bowed, and the
reading of the court’s findings continued: ‘2) But since he, Chistyakov, was travelling
along the road in a dissimilar way, and was doing so in a dissimilar location, Zastoikin
might well have been mistaken, taking the chestnut-colored hair and blue eyes for dark
hair and dark eyes. And, moreover, having found a weapon in his possession, what we
would call a knife, he might well have taken it with him as evidence to be used at a just
and proper interrogation.’ ‘ 3) Due to the circumstances that we have explained, the travel
there and back, as well as the cost of meals and other travel expenses incurred by
members of the military detachment, ought to be charged to the account of the guilty
party, that is to say, to him, Chistyakov, and it ought to be collected forthwith. And, in
accordance with the findings of the inquiry: all of the expenses that originated in
assembling this commission, according to the logbook given to Zastoikin, amount to
eleven rubles and twenty kopecks; to provide compensation for these expenses, his,
Chistyakov’s, estate should be confiscated and then sold at public auction, and, to be
exact: the amount of money that he has on hand consists of: four ten-ruble gold coins,
each worth two rubles and forty kopecks; added together, this amounts to nine rubles and
sixty kopecks; three shirts, worth thirty-seven kopecks, or one ruble and eleven kopecks,
each; two silk handkerchiefs, fifty-two kopecks, or one ruble and four kopecks, each; a
leather bag worth forty kopecks, and a knife worth two kopecks cash; the sum total
amounts to eleven rubles and seventeen kopecks cash. And, as it has been discerned
from this inquiry, Chistyakov is lacking two kopecks in cash for payment of these
expenses to the government, since small amounts of silver are not accepted. Moreover,
he is not familiar with silver exchange, such that we would do well to collect from him,
Chistyakov, the aforementioned sum of money, but since Chancellor Zastoikin has given
us in person here the explanation that he is obliged shortly to move a deficient amount of
money out of his capital stock as current coin, as well as pay money for an assessment of
the property of the townsman of modest means Chistyakov: both the small amounts of
silver and the rest of it should be given over to his, Zastoikin’s, ownership. And the
townsman of modest means Chistyakov should be released from government
incarceration. And, inasmuch as Chistyakov has shown that he didn’t offer any
resistance, for which it would have behooved the members of the military crew to tie his
hands, and then his feet, in accordance with the warrant, Zastoikin maintains a strong
disavowal of everything that he has been accused of having committed. There are no
witnesses, since the six members of the military detachment, who had been repeatedly
convicted of drunkenness, theft, and other acts of dissoluteness in the past, couldn’t be
accepted as witnesses: this case must be brought before the court of God and settled by
means of celestial justice.’”
“I stood there motionless, like a wooden statue, and wiped the sweat that was pouring down from my brow in torrents. The judges and the secretary rose to their feet and left the court’s hearing room proudly, without saying a single word to me, and each one of them took from the table one ten-ruble gold coin apiece. Accursed Zastoikin, with a smile on his face, placed my belongings into his bag, and then proceeded to lift it up to his shoulders, jingling silver coins in his hand.”

“‘What’s this, brother?’ he said to me. ‘Didn’t I speak the truth? Farewell! I was just going to go drink to your health. Masses shall soon be ending.’”

“‘Well, I’m in a fine fix now!’ I said to myself, leaving the sanctuary of Fatezh justice and standing outside the court building. ‘What am I to do now? Where am I to go? I’m nearly naked and barefoot, starving and emaciated!’ ‘So,’ I exclaimed, glancing at the church that stood opposite me, and noticing that its door was open, – ‘I no longer have anyone else here on earth to whom I can betake myself, except to you, merciful creature! Now you alone remain my protector! You shall not forsake this unfortunate and unhappy man! You won’t allow him to perish!’ Absorbed in thoughts such as these, I entered the church, with tears in my eyes. I saw there, kneeling down before the icon, the priest Avksenty, the priest on whose account I was now suffering. He was praying with the utmost tenderness and affection, and I distinctly heard these words coming from his lips: ‘Lord! You bestow wealth upon a man only so that he shall become charitable toward his indigent brethren. I beseech Your kindness and ask that You multiply my riches, and, what’s more, that I taste the sweetness of performing charitable acts!’”

“‘Oh, virtuous elder!’ I exclaimed. ‘God bless you and favor you with His grace! How fortunate and happy you must be, having found, at the bottom of your heart, the bliss, the sweetness, that flow from acts of charity.’”

“Without thinking at all, and without waiting until he had exited the church, I ran off. I was shown where I could find lodging, and I entered a boarding house with a joyful thought in my head: now I shall calm down and compose myself beneath this humble roof and within the bowels of meekness and charity.”

Chapter 39: Talking and Doing

“When I entered the vestibule of the boarding house, I was on the lookout for anyone leaving, but I only heard a woman’s voice coming from the room to my right, which, judging from the smell that was emanating out of it, I took to be the kitchen. The woman was beating a cat horribly for having stolen a kidney, and was beating a young boy who was bemoaning this loss, wailing in a deep bass voice. Without waiting for the completion of this poor animal’s trial, for the memory of my own trial was still fresh in my mind and in my stomach, I opened the door to the room to my left. I went in and saw that no one was there. I went into another room, and my delight was indescribable! A small table was set for a meal. Two decanters stood upon it, one with white vodka, the other with green vodka; one plate was filled with pies, while another was filled with a
magnificent ham; there was caviar there, there was sausage there, there was an entire
smoked chicken there.”

“‘Oh, benefactor of humankind! Oh, most benevolent of mortals! Oh, Father Avksenty!’
I exclaimed, extending my arms out to the table, which was so enticing. Then, without
raising any objections, I drank down a large glass of vodka and began trying to prove my
boldness over the ham, the sausage, and the smoked chicken. When I had eaten and
drank my fill, so that my appetite was sated, I repaid my stomach by fasting for some
time. Then I saw that our host was headed home. ‘There he goes,’ I exclaimed. ‘Oh,
how happy this amiable man shall be, when he sees what kindness he has rendered to
me!’ At this point, I went out into the reception room to meet our host and to express my
joy at the good deed that he had rendered me, without him even having known it.”

“Our host entered, holding a large walking stick with a gold knob in one hand and a hat in
the other. Seeing me, he asked with surprise: ‘What are you doing here, my friend?’”

“‘My benefactor!’ I exclaimed with delight. ‘You’re kind to such a degree that even in
my absence you’re helping an impoverished man! Please know that I’m that unfortunate
and unhappy man, whom the local administrators of justice mistook for your fugitive son
Silvester, expropriating from me everything that I owned, such that I don’t have even a
single kopeck left to my name. I was in despair until such time as I heard your prayers in
church, prayers that revealed to me your charitable soul. At that moment, consolation
penetrated my heart.’ ‘No,’ I thought to myself, ‘a supreme kindness shall not forsake
those who have been forsaken by the world.’ ‘And so I set off for your boarding house.
Rejoice and make merry, you virtuous man. Come forth and see what you have done.’”

“I took hold of his arm with alacrity and led him into that room where I had exerted such
bravery upon the breakfast. The priest, seeing this, blushed a scarlet shade of red. I
ascribed this reaction to the modesty that reveals itself when the good deeds of a humble
man are brought to light, and so I said to him: ‘It doesn’t matter, my father, don’t blush!
Here’s to your health.’”

“At this point, I quickly grabbed a glass and a decanter, filled the glass with vodka, and,
without waiting for any expression of gratitude, drank it all down.”

“‘Oh, you miscreant!’ exclaimed the priest, putting on an entirely different face than the
one that he had worn during the prayer in church that I had overheard. He rushed at me,
crying out, ‘You accursed man! Who are you? And what are you doing here?’”

“‘I’m the very same one who . . .’”

“‘No! Many brigands and robbers have made their appearance in Fatezh, and yet the
district police inspector sees nothing!’”

“‘Father Avksenty, just think for a moment: I didn’t have a kopeck’s worth of money, and
I was starving. About the former issue, ask the highly respected judges who
interrogated me, and about the latter issue, ask the sausage, the caviar, and the pies that were all . . .”

“‘You thief and brigand!’ exclaimed the priest. At that moment a woman, who looked to be around forty years old, came running in, jingling keys.”

“‘What’s going on here? What is this?’ she asked.”

“‘You deceptress! You good-for-nothing! You infidel!’ the priest cried out at her. ‘How could you have let in this tramp, who has eaten up all of my breakfast? And, in half an hour, the judges and assessors shall be here at my house?’”

“‘Oh, my God!’ exclaimed the housekeeper. ‘Why, I shall break every bone in his body! How did he manage to steal into here?’”

“‘I shall be right back,’ cried the priest. ‘I’m going to go see the district police inspector about having this miscreant ignominiously kicked out of town and punished for willful larceny!’ Then he left quickly.”

“‘And I,’ shouted the housekeeper, ‘before you kick him out of town, am going to take revenge on him for all of the ham and sausage that he has eaten. I shall right away break his arms with a poker so that they shall no longer be quite so long!’ And, with these words, she rushed off to the kitchen.”

“‘This is a considerable amount of revenge,’ I said to myself in extreme confusion. ‘I must now rely upon expressions of tender emotion,’ I thought to myself. ‘It’s a misfortune, yes, indeed, it is!’ Prompted by instinct, I rushed after the cook and locked the door behind her.”

“Soon there could be heard the sound of a hard blow being made by a poker against the door. ‘It’s nothing,’ I thought to myself. ‘You shall succeed in breaking down the door, but I shall be long gone by then.’ After that, I started to thrust the pies, the remaining ham, and the smoked chicken into my pockets. And since I was performing all of these heroic feats far too hurriedly, and, moreover, since I was half drunk, I, unfortunately, knocked over the table, and everything that was sitting on it fell onto the floor. The table drawer, incidentally, popped out, and so, too, did a small box that had been sitting inside it, a box made out of mahogany that closely resembled the kind of boxes that our Excellencies in Falaleevka make for the storage and safekeeping of old official documents. ‘By the way,’ I thought to myself, ‘today they issued me a new passport, and here chance is sending me a reliquary for its preservation, but in any case it might really and truly perish en route.’ And thus, having tucked into my shirt an item that was completely unnecessary for the priest, but that would prove highly necessary for me, I opened the window and was on the brink of crawling out, when I caught sight of a supplicant, who was very moved, walking with a detachment headed toward the town’s gates. I closed the window gently and waited until everyone had ascended to the courtyard. Then I quickly opened the window again, jumped down onto the street, and
broke into a run, fleeing for dear life. Having fortified my bodily forces at breakfast, I was able to run, without stopping to rest, for several versts. Although the frosts were already considerable, I decided, nonetheless, not to travel during the day, but at night instead. ‘Since Avksenty had sent out such a frightful detachment of police to go retrieve his son,’ I said to myself, ‘he most likely won’t be suspecting me. If they do manage to capture me, I shall not have even a quarter-kopeck of cash on me at the time, so I wouldn’t have to worry about being deprived of the last of my loose-fitting peasant garments.’”

“In the mornings, I would usually stop at one of the poorest peasant huts in a village, eat a meal there, and then sleep until evening. If there happened to be a forest near the village, I would leave earlier, but never earlier than twilight. December came. The nights were luminous. I couldn’t be at ease until I had crossed the borders of the Orlov governorate and entered into the Tula governorate.”

“‘What did I live on?’ you might ask. Hold on: I shall tell you everything openly, as befits a man who is honest and sincere.”

“Having fled Fatezh without, so to speak, a backward glance, I hadn’t, up until that time, given any thought to anything other than how to get as far away as possible from Fatezh while my food supplies, which I had stolen from Avksenty’s boarding house, lasted. When they were all used up, and I, after reflecting upon it for a while, started to speculate about how I would manage to reach Moscow, I mechanically took out from under my shirt the small mahogany box used for storing documents in order to place my passport inside it. At this point, an inadvertent discovery struck me dumb: the box was very heavy, a fact that I, amidst all of the tumult that had arisen while I was trying to flee from the priest Avksenty, hadn’t at all noticed. Upon my opening the box, however, horror took the place of surprise: I found inside it up to two hundred gold coins. What was I to do? Wouldn’t every honest man call me a common thief if I were to keep them? And I was, by nature, disgusted by this despicable vice of theft more than by any other vice. To give this money back, however, would mean delivering myself into the hands of the justice officials in Fatezh, whom, even if they were to order that I be hanged, neither my conscience, nor anyone else’s for that matter, would ever call unjust. One can find a certain amount of consolation in innocent suffering, but to suffer on account of one’s merits is extremely woeful.”

“It was while my soul was immersed in this sad disposition that I happened to turn my despondent eyes upon the accursed mahogany box and saw that there was a folded piece of paper at its bottom. I took hold of the piece of paper, unfolded it, and found the following missive inside:

“*My dear friend, Judas Isakharovich [Judas Iscariot]!*

You repay me poorly for the services that I have rendered you as a friend. And, in mercantile circles, such behavior isn’t appropriate. As a gift, you send me two hundred gold coins for an action that is worth even more than four hundred such
coins. Wasn’t I the one who informed you that a young merry-maker, the son of a nobleman, had need of some money and would pledge to you, for eight thousand rubles, the final quarter of his inheritance, which is worth at least five times that much? I myself wouldn’t have let such a favorable opportunity pass me by, but, unfortunately, all of my money was split up: some of it was tied up with peasants, some of it was tied up with merchants, some of it was tied up with judges, and so on. I sent this young merry-maker over to meet you, and you bought a wonderful gentry estate from him for a song. I say precisely ‘bought,’ because you couldn’t have expected to redeem it from debt. You judge for yourself! And yet you show your appreciation by giving me only two hundred gold coins. Fie, for shame, you child of Israel!

But we will drop this matter for now. I think that Jews have at least a small scintilla of conscience, and that’s the reason why you shall send me yet another two hundred gold coins. After all, this money isn’t really for me, but for your own personal use, because this incident won’t be the last one. I have in mind still several more youngsters whose gentry estates I can transfer into your hands, if only you shall agree to divide up the money with me properly.

Avksenty.”

“‘Oh!’ I exclaimed angrily. ‘Since you’re such a scoundrel as this, I don’t regret that the Jewish gold coins fell into my hands. Having obtained them in such a nefarious way, you weren’t worthy of making use of them. Our conscientious fathers, grandfathers, and forefathers spoke the truth: ‘Things gained in a dishonest way never bring lasting benefit.’”

“This is how I judged the matter at the time, but now, reasoning a little more fairly, I think that my conduct wasn’t in any way excusable. I don’t, however, hide my moral weaknesses from you.”

“After I had sewn most of the gold coins into the lining of my coat, leaving some of them out for ordinary expenses, I set off on my further travels. Having crossed the border into the Tula governorate just as the sun was setting, I entered a small village and, having looked around, as usual, at all of the homes, I knocked on the door at the very poorest home, a half-collapsed peasant hut. I was allowed to enter, and seeing that my landlady was a very elderly woman, and that she was living there alone, I decided to spend some time resting there. The elderly woman, seeing that, while I was making this offer, I was unintentionally jingling coins in my leather purse, joyfully agreed to have me as her boarder, for as long a time as I would like.”

Chapter 40: What Will Chance not Change?

Mr. Prostakov was very pleased with Prince Gavrilo Simonovich’s stories, and the Lenten fast had come to an end. Spring met the good family amidst its quiet enjoyment of a simple, tranquil life. If the fumes of intoxication had not completely left Katerina’s head, if Elizaveta sometimes
became lost in thought, if both of these conditions would sometimes fog up Ivan Efremovich’s view of things, this would only last for a minute. He would quickly cheer up, becoming merry as before, and the entire family would become animated with this feeling of good cheer.

They often received letters from Nikandr, in which he would inform them of the continuation of the friendship extended toward him by the kind merchant and of the benevolence shown toward him by his superiors at work. He was ascending in rank and hoped soon to become an officer. Prichudin promised to set a rich table for all of Nikandr’s superiors at work and, most importantly, to lend them money. Needless to say, Ivan Efremovich and Gavrilo Simonovich conducted a correspondence between themselves that the other members of the household knew nothing about.

The month of May arrived. The gardens and the forests became covered with a lovely verdure. The flowers gave off a fragrance; the fields rippled, just like waves on the surface of the sea. All of nature had been revived, sparkling with the loveliness of a young bride advancing to the altar with her groom. How could one not rejoice? How could one not feel cheerful? How could one not be filled with the sweet bliss that animated the kind, noble hearts of the members of our rustic, bucolic family?

They were in sympathy with all of nature and they were happy! But did this happiness last for long? Alas! What meaning does human happiness have on this earth, where everything is so impermanent, so changeable, so momentary? Isn’t this merely a cloud of smoke, a shadow, a daydream? On what does one base happiness, – on wealth? Happiness is like a grain of sand that a tempestuous wave at sea now tosses upon the shore, now drags back again into the abyss! Is happiness to be found in laurels? They are like the young blossom, the blade of grass that blooms wonderfully upon the rising of the sun and that each and every passerby admires. But let a squall begin to blow, and where are the scarlet leaves? Where is the emerald verdure? Is happiness to be found in requited love? Oh, how deceptive, how false is this human happiness! Every love is similar to a child’s toy! In a word, no matter on what one bases this dreamy feeling, this human happiness, one shall always be deceived. All turns out as God wills it: vanity of vanities.

This brief digression on human happiness appertains to the following incident.

One fine evening, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich set off to go for a stroll alone in the fields, since Ivan Efremovich was busy working out a plan and a budget for constructing a new distillery. The amount of time that the prince normally allotted for a perusal of the fields in the evening had already passed, and yet the prince was nowhere to be seen. Evening passed, and night arrived, but he was still missing. Ivan Efremovich became worried, asking constantly whether anyone had seen the prince, but no one could answer anything other than “No!”

The whole family was in an unusual state of anxiety. Ivan Efremovich sent out all of his people, some on foot and others on horseback, to search for the prince. Twelve o’clock midnight struck on all of the clocks. Everyone gave a start and then exclaimed: “Oh! How late it is, and he’s still not back yet!”
“Go to bed,” Prostakov said, pacing back and forth in the room with his long steps, and rubbing his brow with his hand. Remaining alone in the room, he glanced first out one window, then out of another, but he didn’t see anyone outside. The servants, one after another, were returning from their search, and the response from each and every one of them was the same: “No!” Ivan Efremovich spent the entire night in this fashion; first he would sit down, then he would get up, then he would sit down again, but all night long he couldn’t manage to calm down for a minute.

“Where could he have disappeared to?” he speculated. “If he had simply lost his way, then each and every peasant could have shown him the road to get back here! If he had wanted to leave my home, where would he have found a better refuge than here? But he wouldn’t have done that, without first making known to me the reasons why he was leaving and without first bidding farewell to those of us who have come to love him as one of our own. Yes, and he would have taken some of his possessions along with him, but everything is intact and in its rightful place! If brigands had assaulted him, what would they have found on his person? A frock coat, a hat, a walking stick. No, that would have been a waste of their time and energy. Brigands don’t attack people such as the prince. It’s more likely that he got lost: he’s unfamiliar with the environs, it’s night time, there’s no one out in the fields, and he’s not steady on his feet. But look here: the sun has just risen. All of the peasants shall soon be coming out, some to get to work, others to tend to their trade. He, most likely, shall come back soon.”

Having settled upon this idea, he calmed down and patiently awaited the return of Gavrilo Simonovich. And, when his wife and children entered and asked him, “What have you heard?” he informed them, with a look of assurance, of his theory about what likely happened, and everyone proceeded to tend to their usual occupations.

A loud noise in the courtyard interrupted them. Of course, the prince has arrived! And the people rejoiced. Prostakov rushed to the window and stopped there with extreme surprise. “Whatever could this mean?” he said in a low voice. “What is it, my dear?” his wife asked, getting up from her lace frame. She walked up to the window and likewise looked dumbfounded, seeing a police officer, who had just got out of his carriage, and the four men who made up his detachment. The stone cold silence of Mr. and Mrs. Prostakov continued right up until the time that the police officer arrived at their door.

“I deign to inquire, would you happen to be the master of the house?” the police officer asked in a rather polite manner, judging by his rank.

PROSTAKOV: “Quite so. What can I do for you?”

POLICE OFFICER: “Is some prince taking cover in your home, a prince who . . .”

PROSTAKOV: “No, dear Sire, I pray you stop. A prince is indeed living in my home, but he’s not at all taking cover. He’s an honest man, and he walks everywhere directly and openly.”

POLICE OFFICER (ironically): “Others shall have to be the ones to judge of his honesty. Please produce him here: I have an injunction from the government to take him with me.”
PROSTAKOV: “I don’t know the intentions of the government; however, I would comply with them, if I could. But the prince, who has been living here in my home, left to take a stroll last evening and, up to now, he hasn’t been back here yet.”

POLICE OFFICER (with a strong motion): “Oh, my God! How long is this man going to escape out of my hands? Twenty times have I considered him captured, but each time he slips away, just as he shall now slip away yet again!”

PROSTAKOV: “For God’s sake, tell me, why are you searching for him?”

POLICE OFFICER: “I’m extremely sorry to hear that, in your speculation about this man, you were deceived. He’s a frightful brigand, and he has a large gang of outlaws. He’s a robber, he’s an arsonist, – in a word, he’s a man who, for a long time now, has deserved to be executed. But fate smiles upon him: he insinuates himself into various households under numerous guises. Now he’s a great gentleman, then he’s a poor beggar; now he’s a gambler, then he’s whatever you like! And to what end? In order to scrutinize everything, to find out people’s mores and manners, and then, afterwards, to deceive a gullible landowner in an inhumane way. It’s a pity, a great pity, that he guessed, or that one of his spies let him know, that his stay at your house had become public knowledge, no matter how much he concealed his real name from you.”

Ivan Efremovich, his wife, and his daughters had all been standing there as if they were dumbfounded, unable to move even a single limb of their body. Afterwards, they looked at one another, not saying a single word, and trembling, their cheeks covered with paleness.

“God have mercy!” Prostakov said, at last, with a moan, glancing up at the heavens and lifting his arms. “To what end has my compassionate heart been deceived so often? To what end has my vision been so purblind, so short-sighted, that it can’t distinguish a wily villain from a pitiable man? Could I have ever thought that he was a charlatan? I opened up my soul to him; everything that I did was done with his consent. I called him my friend and I swear that, after my wife and family, I’ve loved him more than I’ve loved any other person. Oh, how painful it is, how sore one feels, when trying to do good, to have him turn into a monster!”

Such were the grievances of Ivan Efremovich. He walked along the reception room with uneven steps, wringing his hands and shedding bitter tears.

“Well, what are we to do now, mister police officer?” he continued. “As you can see, he’s not here, and, no doubt, he won’t be coming back here!”

“I have no doubt about that,” replied the police officer. “For him, it wouldn’t be flattering to meet up with me. Evidently, I shall need to search for him for still another month or two. He’s so agile, it’s as if Satan were sitting inside him and functioning within.”

Maremyana crossed herself, adding: “The power of the cross is with us!”

“I must seal up all of his possessions and submit them to the proper place,” said the police officer.
“Please do what you know needs to be done. I shall show you this villain’s lodging,” replied Prostakov, and he led the guests out to the garden cottage. There they found the linen that Ivan Efremovich had given to Chistyakov as a gift, and the old rags that their guest had been wearing when he first appeared at their door. The police officer lifted up the old rags, and looked inside the pockets, but he found nothing inside them, except for some mud. “Where should we take this trash?” he asked, angrily tossing the tatters onto the floor. The sound of metal that rang out caused the expression on his face to change. He once again lifted up the old rags, examined them, re-examined them, felt them, and, finally, exclaimed merrily: “Well, look here! Hand me a knife!”

When he unstitched the seam of the armpit and tore it open, some gold coins poured out. Upon recounting the number of gold coins that were in the prince’s possession, they found that there was a bit more than fifty of them altogether. Prostakov stared at them and couldn’t believe his eyes.

“This, evidently, was the prince laying in a supply of money just in case of an emergency,” said the police officer, putting the money away. “Now you have nothing to worry about. First of all, I apologize for having troubled you. And, secondly, if this rogue shows up . . . But how would he dare do that! Farewell.” He left the house, got into his carriage, and galloped away.

Mr. Prostakov spent the day in a deep depression. So, too, did the members of his family: they were all sighing, crying, and saying, “Oh! Who could have thought?”

Three days later, Ivan Efremovich received a letter.

“Dear Sir!

By now, of course, you’re no longer surprised as to why I was so uneasy when I heard the name of that villain being pronounced. Oh, I’ve had my fill of hearing that name! Horror shall shake your bones, when you learn of all of the criminal acts that he has committed. But let’s leave aside, for now, this name, which is so odious to me, – and, I would think, to you as well, – and let’s turn our attention to what this monster has interrupted with his slanders. You understand what I’m saying, Ivan Efremovich! Shall I be allowed to present myself at your home with the same rank that I held previously? Just one word from you is sufficient, and I shall be at your feet and at the feet of your worthy daughter.

Svetlozarov”

Prostakov read the letter aloud, and then asked: “What say you?”

Katerina blushed as red as a flame and lowered her eyes, whereas Maremyana exclaimed: “Don’t you think so? And why not? After all, the whole thing would have gone wonderfully. And, by now, you would have seen your daughter become a princess, if only that detestable freak of nature, Gavrito Simonovich, hadn’t ruined everything. Now I understand everything. He was
afraid that you, having given your daughter a lot of money in her dowry, wouldn’t leave him any money to finance his thievery! Oh, what a worthless man! Oh, what an accursed man!”

“Is she right or wrong?” said Prostakov. “But it shall all be as God wills! Since all of you are in agreement, I don’t wish to be the one who opposes this union!”

He took out a scrap of paper and wrote the following on it: “Please do us the honor! What you were before, such you shall be for us now! My eyes have been opened. The mask has fallen from the face of the monster, and he shall no longer deceive me. We are all looking forward eagerly to seeing you.”

The resplendent prince arrived the very next day, and everything surrounding him bespoke wealth and splendor: the carriage, the coach, the livery, and so on, and so forth.

Explanations and negotiations began, conjectures began, and the visit concluded with Prince Svetlozarov appearing in the eyes of the entire household to be an intelligent, well-educated, pleasant person who would most likely provide lasting happiness for his wife. While Prince Chistyakov, on the other hand, appeared to be such a fiend, such a scoundrel, that he should long ago have been chopped up into pieces, hanged, broken on a wheel, and jointed the way a chicken is before it’s cooked.

“Well, Ivan Efremovich, what do you say now?” Maremyana proudly repeated over and over again, behaving with false modesty. “Didn’t I tell you, as soon as that worthless Prince Chistyakov first made his appearance here, that we ought not to receive him? I could tell at first sight that he was a brigand, and a most frightful one at that! Oh, what do you say now? Do you see now that a husband should listen to his wife as well?”

“I, too, noticed this and tried to point it out to father,” said Katerina affectedly, “but he didn’t deign to listen to me.”

Prince Svetlozarov recompensed one of them with a tender glance in her direction, and the other with a respectful tilt of his head. But Prostakov, emitting a sigh, shrugged his shoulders and said: “Even a wise man can stumble and do a number of stupid things! Now even I myself can see, of course, that all of his stories were a deception, a trick, and a sly deception. Thank God that nothing worse came of this!”

Prince Svetlozarov remained behind at their home for several days as a guest, so that the bride and groom, as Maremyana remarked, could become better acquainted. The wedding was scheduled to take place right before the Filippov fast was observed. Up until then, Prince Viktor Apollonovich would spend his time staying now in some of his nearby villages, now at the home of his future father-in-law.

It was proposed to Mr. Sozontov, who had continued to court Elizaveta, that he wait until after Katerina was married, since to give a daughter’s hand away in marriage to a prince is no laughing matter, and suddenly having to celebrate two weddings is difficult.
It might perhaps seem odd to the reader that Prostakov, who had earlier decided, in that instance, not to force Elizaveta to get married, was now talking so freely about giving his daughter’s hand away in marriage to Mr. Sozontov? Here are the words he spoke this time: “It’s true that I didn’t wish to force her to get married against her will, but that was solely out of respect to Gavrilo Simonovich. But since he has turned out to be a thief, a brigand, an arsonist, and, in general, a great scoundrel, it would be dishonorable to follow his advice. To spite this ne’er-do-well, I shall now do the complete opposite of what he had advised me to do. Elizaveta may do as she pleases and may get married to Sozontov! Up until now, I’ve been lenient and quiet, I’ve loved sensitivity, and I’ve followed its covenant, but almost always and everywhere I’ve been deceived. And so now I shall make myself hard-grained, unbending, and even inexorable, and I hope that my heart shall suffer less as a result. Katerina shall become a princess around the time of the Filippov fast [November 28 through January 6], and after the christening of her first-born child, her sister Elizaveta shall either be lying in a grave or married to Sozontov.”

Poor Elizaveta was weeping and holding her tongue. She was thinking, debating, undertaking one plan today and another plan tomorrow, but upon closer inspection the same thing turned out each time: you must suffer when your fate is so unfortunate! “My God,” she would say to herself, “what fault is it of mine that Prince Gavrilo Simonovich has turned out to be unworthy of our friendship and our trust? Is it possible that a daughter must perish out of her father’s hatred toward a deceiver? How cruel people can be sometimes and demand that others receive and accept painful blows from them! Is this in accordance with the law of a meek and gentle heaven that has rained down upon all of creation?” “Oh, the heart says: ‘No!’ and trembles! Cold-blooded reason remarks: ‘It shouldn’t be this way; however, it is!’”

What is a person to do? Has one really been born into this world in order to suffer?
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Whereas in Mr. Prostakov’s country home there was turmoil taking place, although it was, admittedly, a pleasant sort of turmoil since it was owing to the preparations that were being made for the wedding, in Oryol, in the town house of the venerable Afanasy Prichudin, there ruled absolute silence, peace, and contentment. There were no raptures of noisy joy, there were none of those sparkling looks of satisfaction on people’s faces, none of those cheeks glowing from the effervescence of one’s blood. Instead, a gentle, peaceful smile wrinkled the old man’s brow, and Nikandr, – or, as Afanasy called him, Simon, – observing this constant state of peace and quiet, which is the reward for purity of soul, took this impression into his heart and received it in a tolerant way. From time to time, Elizaveta’s image would become erased in his mind, and when he would try to call her up to memory, he would say to himself, with a sigh: “What am I to do? Wherefore am I being brought to ruin by my love for her, and wherefore am I torturing myself? No, as much as possible, I must try to destroy this pernicious feeling inside me!”

The attentive Afanasy, who was observing his charge closely, noticed this change in Nikandr and rejoiced over it, for the secret of young Simon was partly known to him. He once said to him, with a smile: “I congratulate you, young man. The fumes of intoxication are noticeably leaving your head. You’re becoming more cheerful. That’s good! You had left it to me to be concerned about your well-being. But I require of you only that you be industrious at work and that you conduct yourself honorably. Oh, you’re demonstrating quite enough industry and honor. Who doesn’t wish to jump quickly from cliffs to the Temple of Glory? But it’s better to crawl there. Although, in this manner, you shall never reach the interior of that alluring temple, you shall also, however, never have your cliffs break off beneath your feet and find yourself falling head first into the abyss!”

Nikandr replied: “I shall try, my benefactor, to meet your wishes. However much that personal motivation may demand of me, that much, or even more, shall be demanded of me by that gentle look of happiness that rests continuously upon your face. It’s the fruit of leading a wise, virtuous life, and to darken that look on your face would be extreme ingratitude on my part.”

“Oh, my son!” said the old man. “Your views on life are still so lacking in lived experience! How do you know that I wouldn’t shed bitter tears in private, bewailing my own madness, which to another person would, no doubt, have cost him countless large tears and much suffering! Thus, my friend, my conscience torments me cruelly, and if anything provides me with some consolation, it’s the mere thought that I had wished to do a good deed, even though I ended up doing what turned out to be an evil deed, and one that is irreparable.”

“Wherefore do you surrender yourself so much to sadness?” exclaimed Nikandr, with the look of importance on his face that a professor of moral philosophy might well be wearing. “Read all of the rights and laws, and you shall see that even the most grievous of crimes do away with punishments, because the culprit who committed those crimes didn’t at all wish to commit them. One’s destiny alone – is an evil fate . . .”

“Oh, Simon, Simon!” the old man retorted. “Suppose that I wish to shoot and kill a hawk that’s sitting on a bush with a dove in its claws. I shoot the arrow, and I accidentally kill a man who
was sleeping beneath that bush. The laws absolve me of any guilt, acquitting me and sparing me any corporal punishment, for there wasn’t, in fact, any malicious intent on my part. But what laws would prohibit the hearts of a wife, of children, of a father and mother, from suffering grievously for the loss of a mother, father, and son? Who would stop their howling? Who would restrain their sobbing? Who, upon turning me to stone, would say: ‘Look, this is your own doing. Don’t worry at all, however, and remain happy, just as you were before, for the laws have exonerated you?’

Nikandr sensed the justice of his words, and he fell silent. Although he would have liked to have known his benefactor’s secret, so that he could find some ways of justifying himself before his own conscience, modesty kept him from embarking upon such an imprudent act, one that might have aggrieved such a virtuous man as this one. “I shall behave in such a way,” Nikandr said to himself, “that the memory of that inadvertent crime shall come to his mind as seldom as possible. To do that, I shall double my vigilance, not letting even a single convenient opportunity slip by me, where I might provide him with some possible enjoyments.”

The old man noticed this altruistic effort on the part of his young friend, and his heart adhered onto him with fatherly tenderness.

Several days later, Nikandr was taking his leave of Prichudin before setting off for his workplace. Suddenly a new incident took both of them aback, filling them with both joy and bewilderment. Mr. Krakalov opened the doors and threw himself into their warm embraces. After all of the embraces and greetings had been completed, Afanasy asked: “Tell me, please, Terenty Pafnutyevich, to what may we ascribe your sudden appearance here? And in such a strange form? Your clothes are all wrinkled and soiled, your hair is scraggly, your beard is pointing in four different directions, your cheeks are pale, and you resemble, overall, a convict who has just been released from jail.”

“I have just been in a place that was not much better than penal servitude. God, however, helped me to break loose and escape. I ran all night long, and by morning I had made it to your place. I’m hoping that Afanasy Onisimovich won’t refuse to provide me with some time to calm down and recuperate, and that he shall then help me pay for a trip to Ivan Efremovich’s village. I would think that my good friend must be extremely worried, after having been deprived of my company in such an odd, yet wondrous, way.”

“What way was that?” the two friends exclaimed with great concern.

“I shall tell you all about that later, when the time comes,” Mr. Krakalov replied. “And you shall find out what an insufferable trick was played on me by a certain ne’er-do-well: namely, the newly betrothed Prince Svetlozarov. But, right now, I need some peace and quiet. I was running all night long, without glancing back, just like the biblical Lot, when he was fleeing from a celestial flame that was burning the sinful city of Sodom down to the ground. I would think that my Sodom would merit at least an earthly flame.”

Mr. Krakalov left for Nikandr’s bedroom to get some rest, the young man set off for his workplace, and the merchant went to his office.
An entire week passed in great merriment, for Nikandr had been promoted to the officer rank of cornet.

After the initial hubbub, which is unavoidable in such instances, had subsided, everything in the Prichudin household returned to normal. And although he asked Mr. Krakalov on a couple of occasions about the reason for his sudden departure from the Prostakov household, Terenty Pafnutyevich managed to excuse himself in one way or another from answering that question. So as to appease the alarmed family, he promised to answer that question upon his return from Prostakov’s village, where he wanted to go the very next day. Afanasy Onisimovich was satisfied with this promise. The morning of the following day arrived, and it was determined, on the basis of the advice that he was receiving from his triumvirate of friends, that Mr. Krakalov would depart towards evening time. Around noon time he was completely ready to go, and Afanasy handed him a letter to deliver to Ivan Efremovich and some money for him to use on the trip. Suddenly a letter addressed to Terenty Pafnutyevich was brought in. He took it and left for his room.

“Well!” said the prince, upon unsealing the letter and glancing at the signature. “This is from Nikandr. Let’s take a look!”

“Dear Sir!

Your frightful surprise, when you read the enclosed letter addressed to me from Mr. Prostakov, shall be no less than mine. It astounded me and filled me with horror, such that I now feel like someone who has lost his mind. Take whatever measures you see fit and act as you know best.

I can’t see you right now, because I’m leaving to go have dinner at the home of the merchant Aristarkh. I shall be back home toward evening. I remain your devoted servant, and so on.

Nikandr”

“It’s clear that something new has come up,” said the prince as he folded up the letter. “Surely they haven’t married off Elizaveta, have they? So much the better! If it’s impossible to do without tomfooleries, then we need to put an end to them as soon as possible. What does Ivan Efremovich have to say?”

“My dear friend Nikandr!

I’m as favorably disposed toward you as I was before, although we can’t see each other. I shall try to help you in everything, as would a father, but I shall demand from you, in return, filial obedience. You’re still so young, so lacking in experience, that you can easily be deceived, and instead of a strong hatred for abominable vice, you shall feel an inclination toward it, for villainy never goes around with an open countenance, but travels eternally behind some deceptive mask. Believe me, my friend, when I tell you
that I, too, at my advanced age, can be deceived in this manner. Think, then, what can happen to someone young like you? It pains me to have to acknowledge my stupidities, but what’s to be done? Let others, seeing these stupidities of mine, reform themselves. You know how much I loved the man who is known in our home by the name of Prince Chistyakov. What wouldn’t I have done for him? What wouldn’t I have sacrificed for his sake? But what came of it? What do you think: who is this Chistyakov? – he’s a villain outcast from heaven, a fiend rejoicing in the calamities that flow from his footsteps, a monster, at the very sight of whom one must tremble from fear and dread, just like at the sight of a basilisk. In a word, this prince is none other than a known brigand, who takes upon himself various forms and names. Avenging justice pursues him everywhere. Although he’s so cunning that he’s been able, up to this time, to avoid capture, he shall some day fail to escape horrible punishment. One month ago, he, – evidently upon finding out about the measures soon to be taken by the government, – ran away from my house one evening, and early the next morning a band of government officials arrived to take him away. They searched for him everywhere, but it was all in vain. Now, if that scoundrel were to make his appearance in the home of the kind-hearted Afanasy Onisimovich, make sure that you deliver him up right away into the hands of the police and show this letter to Mr. Prichudin. Farewell! I remain your humble servant with all of my earlier love for you, and so on.”

Who could describe the state that Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was in upon reading this letter! His hair stood on end, his vertiginous eyes filled with blood, anger appeared in the form of black and blue spots on his cheeks. He turned his eyes up to heaven above and wished to say something, but his lips were quivering. He gnashed his teeth, and his whole body started to tremble. His nature couldn’t endure such painful agony for long: he began to groan and fell to the floor.

He remained in that horrible condition for almost a quarter of an hour; then he pulled himself together, got up from the floor, and sat down on a chair. With the letter in hand, he said: “Lord God! Our Creator! Could I ever have imagined that anyone would entertain such thoughts about me? And now I learn that it’s Prostakov who does this, and that he writes about it. Oh, you unfortunate and deceived old man! Your distrustfulness, your empty-headedness, and your frivolity at this stage of your life deserve a cruel punishment! May you be punished, may you be punished in earnest. Observing your stupidity, others shall straighten out and mend their ways. I’m taking my heart away from you forever. May you fall into that abyss whither that fiend of yours, that Prince Svetlozarov, is drawing you. My arm, the arm of a faithful friend, of an experienced friend, shall no longer support you. Oh, you shall begin to groan, just as I did now! But you won’t be at peace with yourself, for the thundering voice of conscience shall say to you: ‘You’re at fault, and you deserve this punishment.’ Meanwhile, I, who not only doesn’t hide away from people, as you say I do, but also doesn’t hide away from you yourself, am a tester of human hearts. I turn my eyes toward you, and I say: ‘Penetrate my soul, and put it to the test!’ My heart and mind may well have been deluded and may well have lapsed into misconduct, but never, – oh, never! – has my heart ever wished, by means of villainy, to sate its passions, nor has my mind ever contrived the means to do that. I’m a wise and charitable human being! You yourself are the most faithful witness of the paths of human life!”
Having said all of this, the prince calmed down quite a bit, and his facial features gradually regained their previous look. Upon reflection, he said: “I must set my good-hearted host and Nikandr free from their delusions right away. Although it was out of good intentions that I took a different name, it’s, nonetheless, a false name. Let Afanasy find out what my real name is, even though it’s a slandered one.”

Prichudin greeted him with an invitation to join him for breakfast, but the prince, taking his host by the arm, said to him mysteriously: “I must speak with you briefly, and right away.”

“In that case,” the merchant replied, “let’s go to my prayer room. No one would dare enter it without my special order.”

They went inside the room, sat down, and the prince began his account:

“I swear to you, Afanasy Onisimovich, by the invisible and incomprehensible Being in heaven above, by these icons of the great men who have pleased Him, that I’m speaking the truth to you. One strange adventure, about which you shall be able to find out in due time, led me last autumn to the southern part of the Kursk governorate, where I, being both barefoot and naked, attached myself to the home of Mr. Prostakov. He accepted me into that home, as might be expected from a kind-hearted and sensitive old man. I had been living there happily for some time, when suddenly, – of course, heaven judged that I must be punished, – a man named Prince Viktor Svetlozarov appeared at this home. I had known this name for about twenty years now, just the same as mine has been known to him. I had good cause to ask Mr. Prostakov to change my name and surname, and he gave me the name by which you currently know me.”

“I soon noticed that Prince Viktor was trying to seduce Prostakov’s younger daughter, who, by the ardor of her constitution, her empty-headedness, and her vain pride, had begun to show him signs of compatibility. This saddened me, and so I communicated this conjecture of mine to her father. The result was that this conjecture turned out to be the truth. Prostakov, however, whether out of pity for his daughter or from flippancy and vanity as well, gave his consent to the prince’s request for his daughter’s hand in marriage, but only upon condition of him furnishing written consent from his father. That consent was furnished: the old prince agreed gladly. But as I found out from the son himself, his father had been sent into exile more than twenty years ago due to his intolerable idleness. There, in exile, as I informed Prostakov, his father’s decayed bones had, no doubt, already long ago been reduced to ashes. This was valid, so I was compelled to reveal my real name. And, at that point, my merely casting a gaze in his direction was enough to chase that evil spirit out of my friend’s home. But, after some time had passed, while I was walking in the fields one evening, I was kidnapped by some scoundrels, who were acting on behalf of that imposter Svetlozarov. I was brought to some woods, and I was thrown into a dungeon there, where I was forced to stay for about a month, until I succeeded in escaping and arriving at your home.”
The scoundrel, meanwhile, had slandered me in the eyes of Prostakov, whom the fiendish brigand had fenced in, and he reported my capture to your young ward, so that he would deliver me into the hands of the justice officials.”

At this point, Gavrilo Simonovich halted his account. Mr. Prichudin, who had remained silent, now asked him:

“How is it that this prince knows you? And why is he pursuing you?”

“Because he knows that he had once seduced my wife and carried her away,” Prince Chistyakov replied, “and he fears that I, by telling Prostakov both about this one particular episode and about other circumstances that are no less degrading for Svetlozarov, might prevent him from marrying Katerina. Yet I did tell Prostakov, as much as I could.”

“And besides that,” Prichudin added, “Prostakov is so cowardly! But what is your real name?”

“Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov!”

Prichudin jumped up quickly from his chair, started to tremble, fastened his frightful eyes on the prince, and for a long time couldn’t utter a sound. Finally, he asked in a quaking voice: “Where is your birthplace?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “In the village of Falaleevka, at the far end of the governorate.”

PRICHUDIN: “What’s the name of your fugitive wife?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Fekla.”

PRICHUDIN: “Do you recall the elderly merchant who bought . . .”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “My father-in-law’s books? And did so at such a dear price?”

PRICHUDIN: “Did you have any children?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “One son, named Nikandr, who was stolen from me.”

At this point, Prichudin jumped back with a howl, grasped his gray hair with both of his hands, and, with another howl, tore at his hair. The prince rose toward him with a spring in his step and wished to restrain him, but the bemoaning old man exclaimed: “Punish me, kill me, annihilate me! I’m the kidnapper who abducted your son, Nikandr!”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich looked at the sobbing old man and spoke not a word. This silence on both sides persisted for some time, then Gavrilo Simonovich, – who had managed to utter in a choking voice, “Where on earth is he? What have you done with my son?” – burst into bitter tears and collapsed onto the table, clasping his head with his hands.
“Alas, I do not know!” replied Afanasy Onisimovich. He walked up to the prince on trembling legs and embraced him, saying, while still sobbing: “Take some consolation, you unfortunate father! You’re merely unfortunate, but not guilty. Oh, your situation is a blessing, as against that of a guilty criminal whose conscience is killing him here on earth, while there, in eternity, a bitter retributive recompense awaits him.”

About two hours passed in this manner. They wept, they consoled one another, they wiped away their tears and then they wept again, embracing one another.

Chapter 42: A New Prince Chistyakov

The dinner hour had arrived, but neither one of them had been thinking about that. The table was set, but none of the servants dared to announce that to the master. When his daughter was still living with him, even she didn’t dare to do this without his permission. Thus, Prichudin had established that no one was to bother him during that time when he got detached from the earth and ascended to the throne of the eternal, soliciting merciful forgiveness for the sins that he had committed.

“So then,” asked Gavrilo Simonovich, “are you, my dear friend, unaware of where my son has disappeared to? What incident led to your losing him? Fear not, don’t hide the truth from me; I’m accustomed to enduring great misfortunes. It grieved my heart, it very much grieved my heart, when I entered my village cottage and didn’t find my son there! Thus, I looked like a raging madman, but that took place over twenty years ago. My recollection of that day, it’s true, is a bitter one, but it’s nothing to me when compared to what was my initial feeling of loss. The power of God on high is unlimited, and one must resign oneself to that divine power without complaining.”

“Hear me out with my confession,” said Prichudin, and he began the account of his life story:

“My late grandfather was also a Prince Chistyakov, and he lived the early years of his youth in the village of Durnovo, where the crop harvest for the princes was the same as it was in Falaleevka. He was related to your grandfather in the eighteenth degree, which shows the antiquity and affluence of our family’s ancestry. Having grown bored with the uniformity of country life and not having received much, if anything, in the way of an inheritance upon his father’s death, my grandfather decided to quit his birthplace and came to Oryol.”

“Here fortune smiled upon him, directing his steps to the home of the wealthy merchant Prichudin, to whom he offered his services. Although this merchant was wealthy, he didn’t disdain impoverished princes, as is the custom nowadays, and so he took him into his household in the capacity of a yardman. Young Vavila, my grandfather, for his part, didn’t have any aversion to this title. He took to his work thoroughly, and in the course of several years he managed to gain his master’s trust to such an extent that the latter made my grandfather his estate manager. My grandfather had an especial capacity for trade, bringing much profit to the estate, and so his master, seeing my grandfather’s loyalty and honesty, gave his daughter’s hand in marriage to him, a daughter who was his
sole heir. Prince Vavila, to some extent as recompense for his father-in-law’s beneficence, cast away his surname, one that reminded him of His Excellency’s radiant poverty, and took in its stead the surname Prichudin. I, his grandson, having lost my parents, began to manage the large estate rather wisely, and with each passing year my wealth multiplied. I was forty-five years old when my wife passed away, leaving behind only a five-year-old daughter, Nadezhda. I was inconsolable from this loss, the more so since, as the owner of a large estate, I didn’t have a male heir. For me to get married a second time, at age forty-five, would have meant amassing forty-five thousand torments every day. And thus I decided that it would be better to tolerate the disappearance of the surnames Prichudin and Chistyakov, and to give away my property, devoting my wealth to charitable matters that are pleasing to God, than to voluntarily bind myself to suffering, after having led a life of pleasure. Life proceeded in its usual manner for another five years, and then I enrolled my daughter Nadezhda in a boarding school, the best one in the city, for I wanted to see her married to a nobleman. This is what is meant by being born from princely blood! Yes, and besides that, there was nothing more for me to do. Since I was without a wife and without any relatives, with whom could I have left my daughter in the event that I was called away on one of my frequent trips to take care of some business matters of mine as a merchant? She, after all, is not some piece of merchandise that I could freely entrust to a clerk.”

“At one point, I took it into my head to take another look at all of the ancient notes that had been left by my deceased father. I did some rummaging around and found, among other things, a small notebook in which he used to record the alms that he had given to pray for the health of his body and the repose of his soul. I saw here, in the first entry, the name Prince Simon Gavrilovich Chistyakov and, in the second entry, his father, Prince Gavrilo.”

“My heart started to beat rapidly from joy. ‘Here,’ I said to myself, ‘there have remained still some other princes with my surname. They, evidently, are poor people. Why shouldn’t I take away from one of them a young son, why shouldn’t I educate him as he should be educated, why shouldn’t I give him a part of my property, without insulting my daughter, and why shouldn’t I reconstitute, in this way, a noble house? After all, at some point in time they had been wealthy!’”

“Having mulled things over in this fashion, I started to inquire where I might find settlements of the Chistyakov princes. I consulted with Nikon, who was young at the time, but was the most reliable of my clerks. He decided wisely that there was nothing better to do than, starting with my grandfather’s birthplace, go around for several miles in each direction and inquire whether or not there is someone there from among the Chistyakov princes. I heartily agreed, so I equipped Nikon with various instructions and with money, and then I sent him on his way. Three weeks later, he returned, reporting, to my total joy, that in the village of Falaleevka there was, in truth, a prince Gavriilo Chistyakov, the son of the late Prince Simon Chistyakov, whom my father remembered for his good health. ‘Prince Gavriilo recently got married,’ Nikon added, ‘likewise to a princess, and he would soon become a father.’”
“Consequently, you saw me in the role of that merchant who was passing by, the one who bought from you those church books that your father-in-law had owned for a long period of time. I wanted only to make you a small gift, without arousing any suspicion, and so I didn’t give you more money for them, so as not to lure you toward laziness. After I’d left, I decided to have your newborn son partake of my wealth, but until that time to leave some money for the care of his mother. I was disposed toward taking him with your consent, when he turned eight years old, but in the meantime I would help you indiscernibly. But, dear Gavrilo Simonovich, your wife’s elopement (I knew about this because Nikon would covertly inquire about your family members every two months) changed my way of thinking. ‘How can he,’ I said to myself, ‘support his son up to the age of eight, in accord with my proposal? If I were to take the boy now, the father would not be able to restrain himself from seeing his son as frequently as possible, the child would find out that he’s a prince, and, moreover, that he has a wealthy relative who has taken it upon himself to provide him with an education, consequently he shall never leave him.’ This could hinder his moral development, his successes in the branches of scholarly knowledge, and my own intentions.”

“Consequently, I kidnapped him, and I did it in such a way that his father didn’t know where his son was, and the son didn’t understand anything about who he really was. Oh! My magnificent plans were destroyed due to a trifling mishap that was of no real significance.”

“After having provided him with an education in complete obscurity, I then gave him over to one of the local boarding schools.”

Scarcely managing to catch his breath, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich drew near to Prichudin and, with a burning look in his eyes, asked him: “It wasn’t, by any chance, Madam Delaven’s boarding school, now was it?”

Prichudin was surprised both by the change that had come over the prince’s face and by the question that he asked.

“Why do you suspect that?” he asked with a strong movement of his head.

“Because,” replied the prince, “I know a certain young man who is called Nikandr. Without him knowing anything about himself, he attended the boarding school that you mentioned, and his tuition there was paid by an anonymous benefactor. And he was expelled from there due to a single kiss that he gave to a damsela named Miss Prostakova.”

“Oh, my God! Oh, my God!” exclaimed Prichudin. “It’s him, it’s my Nikandr who is your son! That very circumstance is what caused us to part!”

Prince Gavrilo Simonovich was standing there silently, glancing up at the heavens, and tears of tender emotion were streaming down his face! “I thank you, merciful God, our creator,” he said with the quiet rapture of a man who had found a lost treasure, and he threw himself into the arms of Afanasy Onisimovich for a warm embrace.
“Do you know him? Have you heard of him? Where is he, where?”

“Behold, my kind-hearted old man,” said the prince, “how unfathomable are the ways of Providence! Young Simon, your pupil, is Nikandr, my son!”

A joyful perplexity was expressed in all of the features of Afanasy Onisimovich’s face. He looked rapturously at the prince, extending his arms out to him, and then he suddenly stepped back. Mistrustfulness overlaid his eyes, and he said: “No, I’m not worthy of receiving such well-being so suddenly! You wish to deceive me nicely, Gavrilo Simonovich!”

But the latter replied: “I never deceive an honorable man. Here’s a letter that I received today from the office. As you can see, young Simon signs his name here as Nikandr, and Mr. Prostakov in his letter calls him by that same name. This means that both of us set foot in his house under these names, but circumstances compelled us to change them. By the way, Nikandr would be able to relate to us all of the circumstances of his childhood life.”

“All of this is very plausible,” replied Prichudin, “but, without this being completely certified, we mustn’t give ourselves up to immeasurable joy, for, God help us, if the benefactor Hope were to deceive us in this matter, as my daughter Nadezhda, named after Hope, deceived me when she ran away from this house, from these parental embraces, with some fiend, because an honorable man, who falls in love with her, could demand this openly. Oh, then it shall be bitter, prince, to bear the deception of one’s heart! I would prefer to find out everything correctly, exactly. And if everything turns out to be the way that I expect it to be, then we can give ourselves up to all of the gaiety of my younger years. I’m sending right away for Nikon, who is working as a clerk at my linen factory, two versts outside of town. I haven’t lost my former trust in Nikon, but I can’t see him. Ever since Nikandr was expelled from the boarding school, I haven’t been to visit the factory, and he hasn’t been to visit me in my house. He alone can resolve this matter, better than all of the rest of us could, for he used to visit Nikandr, both at the nanny’s house and at the boarding school, always posing as a visitor from far away, so that he would deflect the idea that Nikandr’s parents or his relatives were living in this town.”

Afanasy immediately stepped out, sent for the wagon that had been prepared for Prince Gavrilo and that was already harnessed, so as to bring Nikon here as soon as possible. And he dispatched a second vehicle, a carriage, to search for Nikandr in all of the homes where, in his opinion, it was more likely to find him. When he returned to the bedroom, the prince said: “I have just recalled one circumstance from Nikandr’s life. Is it true that, through Nikon, you put it in the nanny’s head that he’s the illegitimate son of some prominent nobleman?”

“Yes,” exclaimed Afanasy joyfully, “that’s true! Nikon told me that when he used to come here, the nanny would torment him mercilessly with inquiries: ‘Whose child is this?’ ‘Where’s he from?’ ‘Who are his parents?’ ‘Does he have any relatives?’ He didn’t know how to respond to her questions. And so I ordered Nikon to tell her that this child is the illegitimate fruit of a love affair between two prominent personages, both of whom are members of the Moscow nobility. At that point, it was impressed upon her, in the strictest of terms, that she must keep this information secret, if she doesn’t wish to forfeit the promised reward. So what does she go and
do! That very same evening, their closest neighbors, – the sexton, who taught reading and writing, and the seminarian, who taught the basics of calculus, – they both found out about the love child, and finally, even Nikandr himself learned of it. Not only didn’t I get angry over such an egregious instance of indiscretion, but I actually rejoiced over it, since she was bringing me closer to reaching the goal of my plan, which was that Nikandr and his father not know each other ahead of time. To my great regret, I soon learned that my pupil’s father had disappeared without a trace. This circumstance doubled my attention to the latest task. With Nikandr’s departure for the boarding school, I rewarded the old woman with twice as much money as I had promised her. Her neighbors were saying from envy: “Raise and feed a hundred legitimate children, and you’ll not receive as much money as this witch did for raising and feeding just one illegitimate child. God forgive me for saying so!”

While Mr. Prichudin and Prince Chistyakov were conversing in this manner, becoming more and more convinced of the truth of their pronouncements, the sound of a carriage began to thunder in the courtyard.

“That, most likely, is Nikandr,” said Prichudin. “Go into the side room next to the reception hall for a while, prince, and remain silent. I wish to discuss a few things with him first.”

Nikandr entered the house with a troubled look on his face. The letter that he had received in the morning would not leave his thoughts. The merchant gave a sign with his hand, and Nikandr sat down.

“Why is it that you didn’t want to eat dinner with us?” Prichudin asked, “when the friend that we have in common is getting ready to ride off from here to visit yet another friend that we have in common?”

NIKANDR: “I shouldn’t conceal from you, Afanasy Onisimovich, the fact that this morning a letter arrived for me in the mail.”

PRICHUDIN: “I’ve read that letter, just as I’ve read your letter to our guest.”

NIKANDR (taking alarm): “Both of them? And so you know that he is . . .”

PRICHUDIN: “Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov, the most kind-hearted and most honorable person out of all of my relatives! He’s slandered in the eyes of the pusillanimous Ivan Efremovich. Oh, a crafty scoundrel slanders a kind-hearted man, and he does so in the eyes of someone who is himself a wise man! Is it any wonder that Prostakov, being kind-hearted by nature, believes the first impression that’s made, and, without ever leaving the countryside to go anywhere, except to visit the chief town in the district, which is located nearby, he doesn’t know the characteristics of people nowadays at all. The people who were alive thirty years ago were completely different from what people are like nowadays.”

NIKANDR: “I’m glad beyond all measure that you entertain such thoughts about the prince: I myself was all atremble, not believing, but fearing that there would be negative consequences.”
PRICHUDIN: “Let’s drop this topic for now. Tell me, my fine young fellow, what compelled you to change your name? And later you must recount to me all that you know about your youth.”

NIKANDR: “I didn’t change my name at all, beneficent elder of mine. Ivan Efremovich, when he was sending me off to go work in the civil service, was at a loss as to how to do this, since I didn’t have any rank or title, nor even a lineal surname. All that I had was the name Nikandr.”

At this point, the young man, with all of the candor of a kind-hearted, obedient son, revealed all of the events and incidents involving him that had occurred during the early years of his youth. He spoke about his studies, and, when he reached the point in time when he was expelled from the boarding school, he mentioned, even though he blushed at the memory of it, the innocent kiss that he had implanted upon Elizaveta’s lips.

When Iskandr had finished his account and heaved a long, deep sigh, Afanasy was informed that the clerk had arrived. He gave a sign, and Nikon entered, bowed, and stood off to the side, as it’s done with merchants, to await further orders.

“What?” said Nikandr, in a semi-unconscious state. “You?”

“Yes, I’m your father,” the prince replied. And Nikandr threw himself down at his feet, embraced his knees, and started sobbing.

Oh, how happy they were at that moment!

When everyone had somewhat calmed down and had taken their seats, Afanasy Onisimovich said solemnly: “Let evil people hate us at this moment, let them slander us, let them harass us with malignant gossip that we don’t deserve and gossip that we, trusting in God’s grace, shall never deserve. What need have we of their judgments, biased judgments founded upon envy, pride, arrogance, and other such unworthy motives! We shall place our happiness in the goodness of our hearts, in the fulfillment of our duties with respect to God and our fatherland. We won’t dismiss the man in need and have him walk away from our doors dispirited. Nor will
we begin to worry about what the man glittering with stars might think of us. I’m certain that the blessings of the former shall attain to the throne of the fair and just judge, while the vilifications and curses of the latter shall address themselves to his arrogant leader.”

Part of that day, all of that evening, and half of that night passed in joy and merriment for the entire household. The last of the domestic servants felt upon themselves the generosity and the goodwill of the master. Each person had received a gift of some sort, one that was in conformity with that person’s rank, title, and labors. The best merchants in town, and some of the noblemen who were Prichudin’s good friends, were invited to the supper table. In the courtyard, barrels of mead, beer, and wine were on display, and an enormous table was set up for all of the workmen and servants, who had arrived with the guests. Afanasy Onisimovich was telling everyone with great fervor how God had blessed him with joy that day, having returned both a relative whom he had aggrieved, and a young pupil, Prince Nikandr Gavrilovich, who had been lost: “Thus, venerable visitors, this poor young man, who lived in my home under the name Simon Falaleevka, is Prince Chistyakov, a relative of mine, albeit, it’s true, a very distant one, but since that time when my dissolute daughter ran away, he has become, and shall remain, my sole heir. Thus, he is my heir. And this other gentleman, his venerable father, has become, and shall remain, my friend and comrade!”

Flushed with unexpected joy and, in part, with several glasses of fine wine, Afanasy Onisimovich was speaking a lot, and speaking loudly, and when he would turn his attention to one of the guests, he would ask each and every one of them: “And? How do you like it?”

All of the guests expressed their enjoyment, trying heartily to match his joy, some sincerely, others feigningly, since he was wealthy. When a man of wealth wants others to rejoice in his good fortune and happiness, those others must, in one way or another, find a way to rejoice.

The next morning, before Prince Gavrilo and his son had come out of their bedroom, Mr. Prichudin had already donned his festive kaftan, with its silver buttons, and had gone to see Mister Governor. He wasn’t detained in the antechamber, since the servants knew who he was, and so he was admitted into the parlor. But the servants also knew that Mister Mayor, Mister Police Chief, and Mister Justice of the Peace were not admitted. Here, evidently, there was some sort of secret?

Upon explaining the entire matter to His Excellency, Prichudin asked the governor to issue a deed, according to which Falaleev, who had served in a government office, would now be Prince Chistyakov and would be admitted into the chancellery. His Excellency readily gave his consent to everything, and in several days Falaleev was solemnly and triumphantly proclaimed Prince Chistyakov and was assigned to serve as Assistant Secretary of Chancellery Affairs. Prince Gavrilo Chistyakov and Nikandr Chistyakov were filled with appreciation of, – and gratitude toward, – their benefactor.

“I should have done even more than this out of my sense of gratitude to you,” said Prichudin, “since it’s due to me that for several years you were the plaything of an inhospitable fortune, but now you so magnanimously forgive me.”
At Mr. Prichudin’s behest, the necessary modifications and alterations to the house were now started, so that he could assign his new relatives a dwelling that was consistent with their level of dignity.

**Chapter 43: Oh, Money!**

When all of these changes had been properly completed, Prichudin allotted various bedrooms to the princes, both father and son, and added special service. After that, everyone would set off to attend to their work: Nikandr would leave for the chancellery, and the merchant would go to his office, while Gavrilo Simonovich would do whatever it was that he wanted to do. They would spend their after-dinner time together in conversation, or the old men would play chess and reminisce about trivial matters from their younger years.

During one of these after-dinner sessions, Prichudin said: “Wherefore, Prince, won’t you recount to us some of your adventures? They should prove to be rather intriguing.”

“I was just about to suggest the very same thing to you,” he replied, “and so, in my memory, I have placed the various incidents that occurred to me in the order in which they took place. The weather is nice this evening. So let’s retire to the arbor, and, while the summer weather lasts, let’s proclaim it the site where we shall gather together for you to hear the narrative accounts of my past life.”

They set off for the garden, sat down on the benches, and Gavrilo Simonovich recounted to them accounts of his birth and lineage, his successes in love, along with their consequences. In the course of several evenings, he reached the point in his narrative account where he had stopped at the cottage of a kind-hearted old woman who was living in a small village in the Tula governorate, where he decided, with the help of the money that he had stolen from the priest Avksenty, to live lavishly for a while and not to be a burden to anyone.

“After living in this small village for three weeks, I had managed to become acquainted with a fair number of the people who lived there. The peasants respected me as a commoner, and, moreover, as a rather affluent one. I bought, from a huckster who was passing through the village, all sorts of trivial items for several rubles, and I distributed them to the local boys and girls: to some, a compact mirror; to others, a handkerchief; to others still, earrings or rings. The luxuriance and generosity implicit in this gesture won them over to my side, creating a new respect for me, – and favor toward me, – on their part. Whenever I used to enter any cottage whatsoever, a joyful hubbub would arise: some would clean off the bench for me, others would shake the snow off my hat. In a word, everyone, with his or her pleasant concern, was busy trying to put me at ease. I, it’s true, was not ungrateful. ‘Kind-hearted, amicable people,’ I would say to them, ‘you’re satisfied with so little, and you’re happy! I don’t see among you either the prideful village elder or the haughty princes and mercenary judges that I saw in Fatezh and Falaleevka. And you are much happier than the inhabitants of those villages.’”

“With each passing day, I kept delaying the continuation of my journey to Moscow, and when it would cross my mind that I should end my stay here and relinquish my landlady,
I would always become gloomy. The reason for this wasn’t the decrepit old woman herself, but rather the splendid community of people in whose circle I now found myself. ‘What kind of community,’ you shall ask, ‘can be found in a wild, barbarous village, in the cottage of a poor old woman?’ Yes, at that point in time, my upbringing wasn’t providing me with the best kinds of enjoyments for my heart and mind. In keeping with the practice established in olden times in nearly all of the regions of Russia, the young people during winter time, with the permission of the village elder (for policing has existed ever since several families combined together in primeval times), would choose the cottage of some widow or some married woman, provided that there wasn’t any ill repute associated with her, and they would have that cottage serve as the assembly place where the evening work would be done by the young girls in the village, who would come here with their spindles, spinning wheels, needlework, embroidery, and so on.”

“My landlady had been chosen for this honor. Every evening our young beauties would gather at her place: one would spin the yarn, another would do the sewing, a third would embroider in silk. Meanwhile, their resonant singing was resounding along the entire street.”

“Although such merry-making is a very fine thing, it could soon have grown boring, however, if village politics hadn’t devised the means to sustain it. To do this, free and unrestricted entrance was opened up for all of the unmarried fellows in the village. Married women and married men, it’s true, were not forbidden from being there, but far too often those who had this right to attend were sure to have the reputation of being dissolute, and, for that reason, examples of this exception were very rare, and thus it was only young widows and young widowers, even if they had gray beards, who could, without a twinge of conscience, share in this merriment.”

“The girls would get dressed up for these get-togethers (this is what these evening parties are called), as if they were going to church or going to visit the village elder’s wife. And the men, jealous of each other’s attire, would bring with them presents and souvenirs for the young beauties there, while for the hostess they would bring all of the foodstuffs so that she could prepare a nice supper. And while she was occupied exclusively with doing this, the fine young fellows would be making a racket: some of them playing a string instrument, others playing the bagpipes, and still others playing the horn. And those young fellows who were a little stronger in the chest would be singing all manner of songs.”

“At a subsequent time in my life, during my stay in Warsaw, when I was representing a grand personage, a grandee’s first secretary, I attended some of the most magnificent concerts, heard the singing of some of the best singers, both male and female, from Paris, Rome, and Vienna, but I never experienced the same enjoyment there as I did at my landlady’s get-togethers.”

“When everyone had grown tired, – one from blowing into bagpipes, another from singing, – they would then proceed to eating and drinking, all of which was accompanied by merry laughter and joyful noise. During the entire time of my stay in the landlady’s
cottage, I didn’t notice a single languid look, a single heavy sigh, a single woeful imprint on someone’s face. Holiday celebrations of this sort continued uninterrupted all week long, except for Wednesdays, Fridays, and all holidays.”

“One Sunday, after dinner, I stretched myself out on the sleeping bench near the stove, dangling my head down, and I reflected on my past and future life. Suddenly the door opened quickly, and a tall, stout, beautiful girl (amongst the common folk, it’s always clear, according to the headband or headdress that a female is wearing, whether she’s a woman or a girl), wearing a brocade quilted jacket made of fox fur and a silk sarafan jumper, came rushing in. Her black hair was plaited with white beads and her braid with expensive ribbons. Her large dark eyes, illumined by long eyelashes, were sparkling. Only they were sparkling not with the light of a tender feeling, but rather of some kind of wild intoxication, which was for me, at the time, completely incomprehensible. She seemed to be twenty years of age, or a little older than that. I had never seen her hitherto, but my first look at her instilled in me the complete disposition of my soul in her favor.”

“When she entered the hut, – or, better yet, as I said earlier, when she came rushing into the hut, – she stopped in the middle of the room, seeing that my landlady was asleep on a bench. She let out such an awful roar of laughter that I shuddered and moved back, and the old woman awoke. I again thrust my head out as far as my nose, fearing that she might notice me and get mixed up. At this point, a conversation started up between the two women.”

THE OLD WOMAN: “Oh! Is that you, Annushka? Hello, my dear! What has so gladdened your heart that you’ve come to see me here in my hut?”

ANNUSHKA: “How can one not laugh? I was about to think at first that you had already died!”

THE OLD WOMAN: “Thank you for your zeal! Where have you been all this time? It’s been a whole month now that we haven’t seen you at our get-togethers.”

ANNUSHKA: “I shall tell you everything. A month ago, my aunt’s husband from a nearby village sent word, asking me and my uncle Karp to come over because his wife, my aunt, was deathly ill. So we set off, and, what’s more, we’ve arrived . . .” (She weeps).

THE OLD WOMAN: “Why are you weeping, Annushka? It’s better, – and healthier, – to laugh needlessly, than to weep needlessly.”

ANNUSHKA: “Is that right? Well, in that case, I guess I’ll have to laugh all the time. When we arrived, we saw that my aunt was lying in bed, as pale as a corpse, as dry as a wood chip, while her eyes were so merry.” (She laughs loudly.) “After all, as you say, it’s healthier to laugh than to weep.” (She begins to sing.)
THE OLD WOMAN: “You can get your fill of singing later, my dear Annushka, but, right now, tell me what you saw over there and what you did.”

ANNUSHKA: “All right! – my aunt’s husband walked up to my uncle, bowed to him from the waist, and said: ‘Don’t be offended, my dear brother-in-law, that I have troubled you. As you can see, your sister, my wife, is in a very bad way. You’re wealthy, and I’m poor: help me out with a little money so that I can call a fortune-teller. We have a renowned sorceress here who knows how to cure all sorts of illnesses. They even send for her from the city, only she demands that she be paid in advance, and, as it were, on the spot. That’s the custom here among healers from the city.’ My uncle frowned severely and scratched his head. Nonetheless, he took out his purse, and counted out enough money for his brother-in-law to summon the sorceress, who didn’t delay in coming. Oh, what a frightful creature she was! (She guffaws.) When she took up a position, standing at the patient’s bedside, she began to blow air at everyone, to spit on them, and to make faces at them. At first, we were afraid of her, but we grew even more afraid when my aunt joined in and began blowing and spitting at the sorceress and making faces that were worse than the ones the sorceress herself was making. There, now, wasn’t that just marvelous! After performing a multitude of the most astonishing wonders, the sorceress confessed that she didn’t have a better knowledge of such tricks and that the patient, of course, was better at sorcery than she was. Upon summoning everyone to gather in the sitting room, the sorceress asked my aunt’s husband whether he had noticed anything peculiar about his wife’s behavior lately. He replied that there wasn’t anything that didn’t have some basis for it, for she had fallen into the habit of going out at night to visit her neighbor, who a long time ago had heard about a sorcerer, and that he, observing this, sneaked into his inner porch through the gable window, and from there into the hut itself, where he found that the neighbor was teaching her something that seemed strange. The neighbor, getting angry at him, gave him a painful beating. And he, in turn, after waiting for his wife to return home in the morning, gave her such a thrashing that even now she isn’t able to get out of bed. After speaking these words, my uncle grabbed his brother-in-law by the arm and said: ‘I, brother, grew up and lived in Tula for a long time, and for that reason I know more than you do. Let’s go to your wife and try to see whether it’s possible to heal her with my medicine. After all, I myself am a ‘sorcerer’ in such matters, even though I have grown old as a bachelor.’”

“After this, they went to see the patient in her hut, and both of them, seizing her by the hair, dragged her onto the floor and began to cure her so wonderfully that it was funny to watch.”

“My aunt screamed, gnashed her teeth, jerked her legs, and shuddered, but the healing process continued until such time as she quieted down. They put her back in bed and allowed her to rest. Despite their diligent efforts to cure her, my aunt died five days later. She was buried, and my uncle and I returned home.”

THE OLD WOMAN: “God save anyone from associating with sorcerers and sorceresses! Trouble is never far away!”
ANNUSHKA: “Good-bye, grandmother. Tomorrow I’ll be at your place with the spinning wheel. Right now, I really feel like crying, but, as you said, laughing is healthier, so I shall be better off laughing.”

“At this point, she burst out in a loud peal of laughter, then she left. Although I had already travelled to distant lands, far away from Falaleevka, much farther away than those that my uncle had travelled to (he had once visited Oryol), I had never seen, however, a comparable phenomenon. I was embittered a great deal by the beautiful Annushka’s laughter in an instance such as this, when even the most cold-blooded, the most dissolute person, would involuntarily shed tears, and so I didn’t know what to think of her. Don’t forget that the person who is presently speaking with you didn’t differ at all, in terms of his upbringing and education, as well as his way of life, from the inhabitants of the village in which he was spending the night at that time.”

“After Annushka had left, I leaned over to the middle of the sleeping bench and said to the old woman: ‘Grandmother! Isn’t it true that you, who has lived for such a long time in this world, have very rarely seen such beautiful girls act so shamelessly? Is it possible that someone like Annushka would laugh like a rabid dog while recounting the end of life for her own aunt? Oh, if only the dearly departed prince . . .’”

THE OLD WOMAN: “What need have we of princes, dearie? You see, you’re a commoner, and, obviously, you have always associated with nobles. Who cares about them! If you had known what Annushka was like three years ago, then you, most likely, wouldn’t be reproaching her.”

CHISTYAKOV: “You will oblige me, grandmother, when you recount to me, why it is that such a comely girl has become so repulsive.”

THE OLD WOMAN: “Very well, Simonych, I shall recount everything to you, and afterwards you, surely, shall no longer abuse her.”

“At this point, she climbed up onto the stove, sat down opposite me, rubbed her brow, scratched the back of her head, coughed a couple of times, as people sometimes do when they’re preparing to give a public speech, no matter where that might be, and then began in this way:”

“I was born in this here village, got married here, buried my husband here, and I hope that I, too, shall be buried in this village. I’m telling you all of this because I wish to show you that I know all that there is to know here. You might’ve noticed that there are two huts at the end of our village, one opposite the other across the street. They are vacant now, just like old tombs.”

“There was a time when there were people living in those two huts, and they were kind-hearted people. A peasant named Ivan, an elderly widower, lived with his daughter Annushka in the hut on the left side of the street. You’ve seen her, and so there’s nothing more that I need to say about her. On the right side of the
street, there lived the widow Marya, likewise an elderly woman, with her young son Andrei. You didn’t get to see him, so I must say a word or two about him. Three years earlier he had turned twenty-five years old; he was tall, he had a ruddy complexion, he was strong, and he was hardworking.”

“Although Ivan and Marya were the most impoverished peasants in our village, the wealthiest peasants weren’t ashamed to acknowledge, in front of the entire mir, that not a single girl in the village could spin yarn and embroider cloth better than the comely Annushka, and that not a single young fellow in the village could outdo the bold and daring Andrei in the diligence with which he performed his fieldwork and housework. The poverty that they shared in common made it such that their huts became as though common ones. When Ivan would see Andrei in his hut, he would treat him as if he were his biological son. Marya would act the same way with Annushka. As soon as Annushka turned seventeen years of age, and Andrei turned twenty-five, their parents came to an agreement about their children getting married, a pact that they sealed by shaking hands on it, and they set the date for the wedding day.”

“I was already about seventeen years old. In our village at this time, many kind-hearted village elders, and even more unkind-hearted ones, paid social calls at the homes of the inhabitants. During the time when Andrei was being married off to Annushka, the present-day Onisim was already serving here as the village elder. Although he’s old and has children of his own, and thus, to our way of thinking, he must be grouchy and miserly, Onisim enjoyed a good reputation in our entire village at that time: to the old men, he was a brother; to the grown-ups, he was an uncle; and to the young people, he was a father. You, Simonych, are not new here, and you’ve seen how people greet him when he’s walking down the street. Not a single minor clerk is greeted that way! In a word, the village elder Onisim meddled in this affair, and knowing how poor the bride and groom were, he came to visit Ivan and said: ‘You’re a kind-hearted man, Ivan, but a very poor one. Your future son-in-law Andrei is likewise a dear fellow, but likewise very poor. I, perhaps, don’t deserve it, but I’m ten times richer than you are. Here’s my wish. Just as soon as you marry off the children, I shall give them a pair of nags and a cow, several sheep, and what’s needed in the house. If they get rich, they shall give them back, not to me, but to my children. When I’m in my grave, they most likely shall recall Onisim, and they shall say to my children: ‘Onisim was not an evil village elder.’”

16 The mir was a self-governing, cooperative community of peasant households in tsarist Russia, in which people elected their own officials, controlled local forests, fisheries, hunting grounds, and arable lands, and shared possessions and responsibilities. After serfdom was abolished in 1861, the mir was retained as a system of communal land tenure and as an organ of local administration.
“Ivan bowed down to the ground before him out of gratitude for such kind-heartedness, and the wedding date was set. The village elder assigned several peasant women to assist the bride in the preparations for the wedding and arranged to have them dressed up for the occasion. And I was among those women who were assigned to assist the bride. Sunday came, and daylight had hardly shown itself, when we were all on our feet, up and about. The third rooster hadn’t yet managed to crow its song, when a knock could be heard at the doors of Ivan’s hut, and then a voice that said: ‘Guests!’ When we opened the doors, we saw that a man, dressed in a blue municipal kaftan and a red shirt, with a black beard and graying hair, was entering. He rushed forward to embrace timid Ivan, throwing his arms around his neck, and said: ‘What? Don’t you recognize your own brother Karp?’ ‘Oh,’ said Ivan with a cry, and he likewise threw his arms around Karp’s neck in a warm embrace.”

“When everyone had calmed down a bit, Ivan told them about his circumstances, adding that that day was the day when his daughter was getting married to their neighbor Andrei. The uncle looked the bride over, shook his head, smoothed out his mustache, stroked his beard, and then said: ‘Brother Ivan! You know that I’m alone in this world. Having lived more than ten years in Tula, I managed to store up a thing or two, and I decided to spend the remainder of my life with you and your daughter. In Tula, I was considered not the worst commoner, and I shall not be considered such all the more so here. For that reason, I’ve taken it into my head to select as your daughter’s bridegroom a commoner from the local area. He, it’s true, is a bit older than I am, but, on the other hand, he’s intelligent and competent. And so, brother Ivan, cast aside your Andrei and await the bridegroom whom I have selected. Here, to begin with, is the bride’s dowry.’”

“At this point, he pulled out from under his shirt a large leather purse, loosened its strings, and poured out onto the table a whole pile of money, all of it silver. There wasn’t a single copper coin among them! We all gasped, and Ivan couldn’t tear his eyes away from the silver coins. Everyone burst out laughing from joy. Only the bride alone stood there as pale as snow, leaning up against the doorjamb. ‘Uncle,’ she said with tears in her eyes, ‘What good is your silver going to do for us? Up until now, we’ve been happy without it!’ ‘You’re a village idiot,’ her father replied. ‘If we were happy before without silver coins, then we shall now be ten times happier with them!’ ‘Go ahead and do what you want to do,’ said Annushka, ‘but I don’t want either silver or gold: just give me Andrei.’ With these words, she hurried out of there. Her two brothers were laughing at Annushka’s stubbornness; they struck a deal, shaking hands on it, and began to drink heavily. Nobody in the entire village knew anything about this occurrence.”

“Oh, Simonych. You, most likely, would agree that old women have a heart, although it’s not the kind of heart that young girls have, but, all the same, it’s a heart. And right now that heart is bleeding, as I recall what occurred afterwards. Listen further to my story!”
Chapter 44: Does Happiness Come from Having Wealth?

“It was now summertime, and the sun had already risen high up in the sky, when Andrei appeared in Ivan’s courtyard in the midst of a swarm of people. He entered the hut, made a bow in all four directions, and then was struck dumb when he saw Uncle Karp, who was completely unknown to him. At this point, they, – that is, the father of the bride, the uncle, and the betrothed couple, – began a conversation.”

THE FATHER: “Why did you get so dressed up, Andrei?”

ANDREI: “What, father, do you really mean to say that on one’s wedding day one shouldn’t get dressed up a bit more smartly?”

THE UNCLE: “Is today really your wedding day? So why is it that I don’t see a bridegroom?”

ANDREI: “No offence intended to Your Worship, but I’m the bridegroom.”

THE UNCLE: “I don’t believe you and, what’s more, I don’t want to believe you. I know the bridegroom, as well as I know myself, and he should be here shortly.”

ANDREI: “If you don’t believe me, then I have little need for your believing. Where’s the bride?”

IVAN: “Come to your senses, Andrei. This is my own brother Karp, the uncle of the bride, and a Tula commoner!”

“Andrei got all mixed up in the words that he was using and didn’t seem himself. Collecting himself, he wanted to nestle up to Uncle Karp, but Uncle Karp was unapproachable. In the midst of this disarray, the doors swung wide open and in walked a small, gray old man. ‘Here’s Avtonom, here’s Annushka’s bridegroom,’ exclaimed Uncle Karp, embracing the guest. Andrei was standing there, like a birch tree all alone in a field. He hadn’t yet said a single word in response. He sat down on the bench by the doors and looked at the floor fixedly, as if he were searching there for some treasure.”

“I must tell you the truth: the gray-haired bridegroom was dressed even more splendidly than was Uncle Karp. All of this, however, didn't help. When they led the bride up to him, and he began to speak to her, using his urban vocabulary, she told him point-blank: ‘Although you might well be at least two or three times richer than we are, I don’t want to be your wife!’ – ‘This is just childishness on her part,’ said her father, ‘and this childishness shall soon pass. Is there some way that the bridegroom might amuse the bride a little?’ The bridegroom ran off, and soon, together with help from a farm laborer, he dragged in a large trunk, and he
began to pull out some of its contents: never before, in all of one’s born days, had such treasures been seen! All told, there was an enormous number of earrings, rings, beads, cloaks, sarafan jumpers, and kokoshnik headdresses. Uncle Karp, gazing upon this spectacle, grinned, while Annushka’s father was looking at these treasures the way that a hungry wolf looks at a sheep that it has just run down . . . The bride was dragged away to a special cottage, and no matter how much she tried to break free, no matter how much she cried, we dressed her up in the clothes that Avtonom had just given her as a gift, and we brought her before the bridegroom. He took her by the hand and dragged her over to the church. We all walked behind them, while Andrei traipsed over there at a certain remove from us. He was in such a state of stupefaction that everyone considered him drunk.”

“I don’t know how to put this, Simonych. Our priest at the time was a very odd man: it made no difference to him who it was that was standing there in the church: a peasant, a merchant or a nobleman. He often used to say such things that even a clerk from a communal hut could hardly understand, but I understood a thing or two that he said, namely: ‘While you’re standing in prayer, you should, all the same, be praying to God. God doesn’t look at your garments, but looks instead at your diligence. While you’re walking out of a church, that’s when you should remember that you’ve been commanded to obey the village elders, as is the custom in all of the world.’ He would often say . . .”

“But, grandma,” I said to her, turning over to my other side on the sleeping bench, “You promised to tell me about Annushka.”

“All right,” she said, and she continued her story.

“So then, when the wedding began, Father Mikhail asked the bridegroom, as is the custom, whether he wished to marry the bride, and he received a resounding ‘Yes!’ in reply. Then it was the bride’s turn, and she answered with a resounding ‘No!’ Father was astonished, and the members of the bridegroom’s wedding party gasped. As for the bridegroom’s reaction, there’s nothing to be said. No matter how much Uncle Karp threatened the bride with his eyes, no matter how much the others gave signs to her to change her reply, nothing helped. The same question was proposed to her a second time, and the same reply was given. After this, Father Mikhail, despite Uncle Karp’s requests, and despite the bridegroom’s incantations, didn’t start the wedding ceremony. How ashamed we all felt, and especially the bridegroom and Uncle Karp! While walking past Andrei, I noticed that he was still crying, but the tears that he was shedding now didn’t at all resemble the tears that he had shed earlier.”

“I should, of course, tell you how Ivan treated his daughter when he learned about her stubbornness. I have always loved her, so it pains me to speak about her grief and sorrow.”
“After her friends had hidden Annushka away in the closet, and after they had drunk several goblets of wine, they calmed down a bit and decided to wait patiently until the bride-to-be calmed down even more than they had. Three days passed in merriment of the most nuptial kind, and we celebrated the marriage as if, in fact, the matter had been settled. Annushka was the only one who didn’t attend our wedding banquet.”

“On the fourth day of the nuptial festivities, around dinner time, our good and kind village elder came to visit us. Everyone was very glad to see him, and Uncle Karp brought him a goblet of the best wine. He drank it down, then he sat down and said: ‘Congratulate me, my good people, for I have found a treasure trove.’”

SEVERAL PEOPLE: “Ah! Is it a large one? Shall it be able to last for a long period of time?”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “For many people, it shall seem to be nothing of any lasting value, but for me it seems to be a very large treasure trove. And as for whether or not it shall be able to last for a long period of time, that I don’t know for sure. But I think that it shall last for only a very short period of time.”

UNCLE KARP: “Eh! Pafmutych! You’re acting as if you’re a spendthrift! What does your treasure trove consist of: silver? gold? pearls? You know that, in town, I earned a living in the exchange of some of these things, and so I know their value. Show me your treasure trove, perhaps I shall buy something from you.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “It’s not for sale: it’s cherished. And it doesn’t come easily to anyone except me.”

THE BRIDEGROOM: “Come have another goblet of wine to drink, and tell us all about how you found this treasure trove. In my entire life, I’ve never succeeded in finding one.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “I shall tell you all about it even without a goblet of wine. Last Sunday, the Lord’s Day, when all of us were in church and we saw the misfortune of His Grace, the bridegroom, Andrei came round to see me right at twilight and said to me: ‘For a long time now, I haven’t had a father. You be my father and give me your blessing!’ ‘My blessing for you to do what?’ ‘You know that I’m unhappy. A regiment is being quartered in a village not far from here, and the commanding officer is readily accepting freemen to serve under his command. I shall be there tomorrow morning.’ ‘That’s fine, my son, but what about your elderly mother?’ ‘That’s just the point! All that’s left to me is just a new hut and an old mother! Take both of them for yourself. Right now we’re at war with the infidel Moslems; someone, after all, needs to die for the Tsar and the Orthodox Church. Perhaps I shall be killed: if so, arrange a funeral banquet in commemoration of my soul!’”
“I couldn’t listen to the words of this fine fellow without shedding some tears. I went to see his mother, asked her for advice, and got him fitted out with all of the equipment that he would need for his trip, a task that took me two days to complete. And early that morning, taking hold of the hand of the inconsolable old woman in my right hand and of her sobbing son in my left, I led the two of them out of the yard and onto the street. With my finger, I pointed out to him the road that he needed to take, for by that time I was at a loss for words. And then I led the old woman back to her home, where I intended to support her and to keep her in peace and quiet until the day that she dies. Now, you good and kind-hearted people, now you can give me that goblet of wine that you had offered to me, and now you may congratulate me.”

“At this point, the village elder himself grabbed the goblet of wine from the table and drank it down with good cheer. At first, we were all watching him in amazement, but then we raised such a fierce laugh that the walls shook. And Uncle Karp said: ‘Is this your treasure trove, village elder? If so, I’m not envious!’”

“The father and the bridegroom likewise wanted to get involved in this conversation, when a loud noise coming from a small side room caused everyone to rush over there to see what was the matter. How frightened we were when we saw poor Annushka, lying completely motionless there on the floor. We stood over her for a long time, struggling to revive her. Finally, she opened her eyes, looked all of us over fixedly, and then broke out into such a loud laugh that we became even more frightened than before. Her eyes had become like two hot burning coals, while her cheeks, in an instant, had turned from being deathly pale to looking like a poppy flower. ‘What has happened to you, Annushka?’ each one of us asked her in turn. Jumping up from the floor, she replied merrily: ‘Before, you were laughing, while I was weeping, and now I’m the one who’s laughing! Oh, how nice this shall be! He shall take part in battle, he shall be killed, they shall slash him to death, they shall shoot him down, his blood . . .’ At this point she started to tremble, so she sat down gently on the bench. She was looking at all of us with dry eyes, examining her fingers, pinching one hand with the other to the point of drawing blood. And yet I didn’t notice a single sigh escaping from her. The village elder was the first one who started to have tears pouring down from his eyes and streaming down his cheeks. He rushed over to her, took her in his arms, lifted her up off the bench, and asked her: ‘What has happened to you, my sweet girl?’ Instead of providing him with a reply, she burst out laughing, nestled up to him, and said: ‘Where am I?’ At this point, everyone understood clearly that poor Annushka had gone out of her mind.”

“Her father, Uncle Karp, and the bridegroom raised a frightful howl, the kind that occurs when a beloved person is lowered into the grave. ‘It’s now late,’ said the village elder, wiping with a handkerchief the mustache and beard that had been moistened by the tears that had poured from his eyes and streamed down his
cheeks. ‘I, for the time being, shall bring her to my place. Perhaps, God willing, she shall get some help.’”

“The village elder took her away, and we ate dinner the way that we would at a funeral banquet. There were a lot of things for us to eat and drink, but no one wanted to touch anything. Ivan was afraid to glance at his brother Karp; Karp was afraid to glance at the bridegroom; and the latter, – he was afraid to glance at either one of them. But what more is there to say? The bridegroom left the next day, several weeks later good and kind-hearted Marya died, and Ivan, who considered himself to blame for her death, started to feel sad, started to feel sick, and soon afterwards passed away. Karp took Annushka to his place, summoned a multitude of sorcerers, and wasted a lot of money, but there were no signs that any of this was helping: Annushka remained just the same.”

“At this point, the old woman wiped away her tears, climbed down from the stove, and said: ‘All right, you go ahead and sleep, but I’m going to go visit Annushka. She has left here.’

“I tried in vain to roll over on the sleeping bench, but I wasn’t able to sleep a wink. In my mind, the image of the amiable, and yet immoderately unfortunate and unhappy, Annushka kept rushing past me. At twilight, however, I was just starting to drift off to sleep, when once again the door to the hut opened and I could hear my landlady wailing.

“‘What has happened to you?’ I asked.”

“‘Oh, Simonych!’ she said. ‘If only you had seen it! I was sitting with Annushka right up until twilight, listening to her melancholy songs. They had given us a candle because Uncle Karp can’t stand wood chips. Suddenly someone knocked at the door, the door opened, and we could see a tall, hefty fellow in green clothing standing there, and, what’s more, he had a green feather on his hat. We guessed right away that he was a soldier and a huntsman. Annushka fixed her large eyes upon him, just like I did. She turned pale, and I, – may God forgive me my trespass, – was so stupid that, upon recognizing our guest, I cried out: ‘Andrei! Is that you?’ ‘Andrei!’ Annushka said softly, then she stretched out her hand toward him. She wanted to stand up, but again fell back down upon the bench. We all rushed toward her. She breathed a sigh: once, twice, three times. Her eyes closed and, Simonych, Annushka is no longer on this earth. Both the priest and the village elder came at the first summons, and they confirmed that the grave must be prepared by the next day. ‘Oh, my Annushka, my dear, sweet Annushka! Wouldn’t it be more reasonable and more fair, if it were me, a decrepit old woman, who was going to be lowered into the ground, rather than you, my dear, sweet girl!’”

“The old woman was sobbing inconsolably. I was, so to speak, only one step away from seeing that unfortunate and unhappy girl, but I, too, couldn’t refrain from shedding tears.”

“‘What’s going on over there?’ I asked.”
“Judge for yourself! Andrei shall either die soon or likewise go out of his mind; Uncle Karp is acting like a foolhardy person; the village elder is acting like a little child; our good and kind-hearted Father Mikhail alone is providing some solace to everyone, even though he’s doing that through tears. Shall you be coming to the funeral tomorrow?”

“‘God help me!’ I replied. ‘It’s no wonder that once again the whim shall enter someone’s head to give Uncle Karp a good thrashing!’”

“‘Yes, but he, after all, deserves that,’ replied the old woman, and once again she left.”

“Having sufficiently rested and relaxed in this village, I decided to leave it at the crack of dawn. My landlady came home around midnight and, feeling tired out from all of the bustle involved with the funeral, sank into a deep sleep. The next day, at the appointed time, I got up out of bed, I got dressed, I placed some money on the table, and, crossing myself three times, I went out onto the street and started off on my journey, asking God to make Annushka’s true life more blissful than her previous one here on earth had been.”

Chapter 45: A Passion for the Branches of Scholarly Knowledge

“I was already about fifteen versts away from the village when the sun rose that morning, and I firmly resolved not to make any stops that lasted longer than twenty-four hours, so that, in this way, I would reach the renowned capital Moscow sooner. The month of March made my journey easy, and in two weeks’ time I had reached that magnificent capital, about which I had been dreaming even while I was still living in Falaleevka.”

“I stood at the Serpukhovsky Gates for about an hour, gawking in every direction. The people, like the waves of a large river, were swaying to and fro. Now they were entering the city, now they were leaving it, travelling by coaches, carriages, sledges, sleighs, and toboggans, while dandies were travelling in droshkies as well, for in several places a stone pavement was already coming into view. The shouting of people, as well as the clatter and creaking sounds of carriages, made so much noise in my ears that I, not being accustomed to it, couldn’t catch anything that was being said, and everything grew clouded in my eyes. I had long been wanting to get something to eat, but I was afraid to pass through the gates. Seeing, however, that other people, who were not any better attired than I was, were entering the gates cheerfully, I crossed myself and followed their example. I hadn’t managed to take more than a hundred steps along the street, when suddenly an indescribable horror confronted me. ‘Make way! Make way!’ somebody was shouting right behind me. I looked back, and I saw that a carriage drawn by six horses was rapidly galloping toward me. I jumped headlong to the right. ‘Make way!’ was being shouted here as well. The carriage was racing along, headed toward a collision. In complete madness, I flung myself to the left. ‘Make way!’ greeted me there, too. ‘Well, I’m done for,’ I thought to myself. A feeling of total despair came over me. I moved a bit backward and heard a resonant ‘Ah!’ I had scarcely managed to look back, when I saw a young, luxuriantly attired woman, behind whom a gentleman, dressed all in gold braid, was walking. I only wished to apologize to them, telling them that I
didn’t have eyes in the back of my head, and, therefore, that they must forgive me magnanimously for having bumped into the lady, when a tall, strapping gentleman in gold braid came running up to me and so skillfully smacked me on the crown of my head with his fist that I staggered and crashed to the ground. ‘Ah!’ various voices could again be heard to say, but especially the frightful bass ones, which said, ‘Ah, you brigand! But no, you won’t get away with that!’ Two bearded peasants lifted me up off the ground, holding me by my collar, and one of them said to me: ‘Don’t you see, you scoundrel, what you’ve gone and done! You’ve overturned an entire tray of pies and they’ve fallen into the mud! Pay me right now for all of this damage that you’ve caused, or else we shall have to go to the law enforcement agency!’”

“‘What exactly is that, my friend, the law enforcement agency?’ I asked.”

“‘It’s a lovely little place,’ the peasant explained, ‘where they now try to find out where the truth lies in a dispute, and they render due justice to the aggrieved party all at once!’”

“‘Justice?’ I exclaimed, starting to tremble. ‘Oh, all right, my friend, I shall pay for the damage. How great is it?’”

“The peasant began to count the pies.”

“‘You see, there were thirty-three of them in all, and each one of them costs a half-kopeck. Let me see, now, how much would that be?’”

“‘Fifty-six kopecks,’ I replied.”

“‘Oh, oh!’ said the peasant, scratching the back of his head. ‘Evidently, we shall not be able to manage without getting the law enforcement agency involved?’”

“‘So how much shall it be then?’ I exclaimed impatiently, pulling out the leather bag that contained my small change.”

“‘Well, here you see: three times twenty, and that makes eighty kopecks, and for the three pies left over, nine kopecks, because these three pies are very mutilated. The total comes to ninety-five kopecks. Well, go ahead and count it out, but if not, then come with me to the law enforcement agency!’ He took me by the collar, but I, fearing that he might want to count out more rubles, settled accounts by paying him right away, and then I set off to continue my walk, moving with slow steps and clinging close to the wall. The peasant gathered up the pies, blew on them, and then again exclaimed: ‘Right this way! Right this way! Get your fresh hot pies!’”

“Having attached myself to an inn, I rented a nook there and made myself comfortable to live in it for a while, until such time as I could find the paths to glory and happiness. My landlord’s son, a great one at merrymaking, promised to show me Moscow, and everything interesting inside it, the very next day. He kept his word, and for an entire week he guided me through all of the streets, squares, and cathedrals of the capital.
During the first few days there, my amazement increased with every step that we took. As soon as a gentleman in gold braid crossed our paths, I aimed to jump a *sazhen* off to the side, but my guide would take hold of my arm and restrain me, saying: ‘Have no fear, this is just a simple servant, but, as you can see, he tries to look like a wealthy man or a spendthrift. In time, you shall learn to recognize those people who, having squandered their estate, live exclusively by means of gambling. Not infrequently, such people will lie down to sleep at night with an empty stomach, but the next morning they are driving out in a carriage being pulled by a team of four horses, and they have a footman who is shining with gold.’”

“Soon I became acquainted with the streets of Moscow and, sometimes, when I would roam rather far from the inn, I would find my quarters by asking passers-by to show me the way to the street where I was being quartered.”

“During these walks, I would stop every time in front of the doors upon which was fastened a painting that depicted a ship docked at a wharf, a ship from which barrels were being unloaded onto the shore, where an opulently dressed lady was sitting, and a devil was giving her grapes to eat. Every time, I would examine this painting for several minutes. Once, as I was gazing at the painting longer than usual, a merchant with a black beard came outdoors and asked me affectionately: ‘Why are you standing here, yawning, my fine young fellow?’”

“I candidly disclosed to him my surprise that the woman depicted in the painting was, with such a satisfied look on her face, taking grapes from the evil spirit, whom it’s frightful even to think about! The merchant burst out laughing loudly and said: ‘Oh! It appears that you’ve only recently arrived here, otherwise you would have grown rather tired of looking at these evil spirits. There are many of them here in Moscow, and our noble ladies don’t refuse those of them who offer up their services.’”

“The merchant, with some difficulty, was able to rescue me from the perplexity in which I was immersed by recounting to me, in some detail, all about Blackamoors. ‘Since I notice,’ he said, ‘that you don’t have any kind of business here, would you like to come work for me as one of my clerks? To start with, your job would be simple: namely, to pour the wine out of casks and into bottles, and then, after sealing the casks with pitch, to glue labels to the bottles. The food is not bad, and the pay is adequate.’”

“I readily agreed to accept his offer. That very same day I settled my account with the keeper at the hostelry where I had been staying, moved to the cellar of the merchant’s home, purchased a bed with linens and, at the flea market, some fairly good clothes in the mercantile style. And, on the following day, I entered upon the execution of the duties that he had assigned to me, admiring the way that I looked.”

“Time passed rapidly. I performed my duties as best I could, and everyone, that’s to say, my master, his wife, and their female cook, loved me. I tried to be friends with everybody, and I managed to convince all of them that this was the case. Spring arrived. My master, Savva Trifonovich, loved me like I was his own kin. Every time that he
would go to Sparrow Hills\textsuperscript{17} or to Mary’s Grove\textsuperscript{18} with his wife and his buddies, bringing with him a samovar and some pies, he would always bring me along as well. My life was quiet and calm, but it soon changed due to a trifling incident.”

“Once, while I was alone in the cellar, I heard the voice of a passerby shout out: ‘Books for sale! Books for sale!’ The desire to read was one of my inborn desires. I called out to the book vendor and purchased several poems, tragedies, comedies, and philosophical novels from him. After I gave the huckster my money, I received from him, in addition to Feder’s \textit{Logic} and \textit{Metaphysics},\textsuperscript{19} some of Baumeister’s compositions\textsuperscript{20} as well.”

“I spent entire nights reading. I read poems, tragedies, comedies, and operas, but, I must confess, I didn’t find in them either rhyme or reason. Everywhere there was falsehood, fanaticism, an accommodation to the times, and an effort to please the powers that be.”

“‘This nonsense shall not move me,’ I said to myself with an air of importance, as I stowed away all of the poems and theatrical works under my bed, so that the spiders could weave a more durable nest out of them. After I had begun reading the book on metaphysics, I couldn’t help but become captivated, even though I didn’t understand any of it. The further I read, the more ardent became my imagination. But, alas, the more that I tried, with great ardor, to get at the truth, the more it, with great ardor, kept evading me. I was pursuing the truth the way that a passionate lover pursues an intractable beauty, but that wasn’t doing me any good. Studying metaphysical matters, I forgot about physical ones: that’s to say, the need to seal the wine bottles with resin and to attach labels to them. Mister Savva Trifonovich noticed my dereliction of duty and reminded me of it once, then twice, and finally he issued a reprimand.”

“‘What on earth are you doing, Mister Chistyakov? Are you really asleep all the time?’”

“‘Oh, no!’ I replied. ‘An evil spirit tempted me, and I’ve begun to study metaphysics!’”

\textsuperscript{17} Sparrow Hills [Vorobyovy Gory] is a hill on the right bank of the Moscow River and one of the highest points in Moscow, reaching a height of 260 feet above the river level.

\textsuperscript{18} Mary’s Grove [Marina roshcha] is a famous park just outside Moscow that became a popular picnic destination for young people early in the nineteenth century.

\textsuperscript{19} Johann Georg Heinrich Feder (1740-1821) was an 18\textsuperscript{th}-century German philosopher. After studying theology and pedagogy at Erlangen, he served as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Gottingen from 1768 to 1782. His writings were widely read at the time due to their clear and tasteful mode of presentation.

\textsuperscript{20} Friedrich Christian Baumeister (1709-1785) was another 18\textsuperscript{th}-century German philosopher. After studying philosophy in Jena and Wiittenberg, he became director of the Gorlitz gymnasium. His textbooks propagated the metaphysics of the eminent German philosopher Christian Wolff.
“‘Oh, heavens!’ exclaimed the merchant. ‘And, in truth, that most evil of evil spirits has indeed nested inside you! Is it possible that, without knowing anything more than how to read and write, and that only haphazardly, one can wade into such a great branch of scholarly knowledge? If you wish to be happy, and to prolong your life without any major trouble, then, I dare say, cast off metaphysics, and cling with all of your heart to knowledge of the goodness of wines and the art of endearing yourself to others. During the next Lenten fast, I’m going to Petersburg to purchase some wine on the stock market, and I’m going to take you with me. You shall quickly get accustomed to everything and, with time, you shall become a good merchant! Come on, now, think well and truly about business and cast off trivial pursuits!’”

“No matter how sensibly the merchant spoke, there was no way that I could drive out of my head the thought of the adorable branch of philosophy known as metaphysics, with which I was passionately in love, and to which I had sworn eternal fidelity. I was terrified at the thought of betraying such a great branch of scholarly knowledge, one that measures all of the things that exist in nature and all of the things that don’t, one that argues about spirits, about heaven, hell, and other things of such importance.”

“Good and kind-hearted Savva was patient with me; he generously tolerated my indolence for yet another several months. Finally, seeing that I was close to insanity, he said to me one day: ‘Well, Gavrilo Simonov, I see that your illness is incurable. So be it: God’s will be done! I’ve come to love you, and I wanted to arrange for your happiness, but since each person understands happiness in his own way, I shall not take a stand against what you desire. I’ve already made an arrangement with my friend Bibarius, a renowned local metaphysician. For a reasonable charge, he agrees to take you into his household for the next three years, to feed you and keep you, and to instruct you in all of the branches of scholarly knowledge. God be with you!’”

“‘No, my beneficent patron,’ I exclaimed, touched by his generosity. ‘I have enough money that I myself can cover the charges for studying under the highly learned Bibarius.’”

“‘Abandon this obstinacy of yours,’ the merchant replied. ‘Don this clothing that I have prepared for you, and let’s go.’ He had bought me a kaftan coat, some trousers, and a jacket, – in a word, all that was needed for me to present myself as a respectable person in the civil service. While I was getting dressed, he was saying the following to me: ‘If your passion for metaphysics ever grows cold, as all passions usually do, then come to me again, put on your former merchant’s clothing, and become a participant in my transactions and my profits in the wine industry.’”

“‘No,’ I said, ‘that shall never happen! How can it be that a learned man would be decanting wine into bottles and then sealing them? There are much more respectable things for him to do, such as, for example . . .’”

“I straight away seized a bottle of wine, uncorked it in a flash, and then, to Savva Trifonovich’s great surprise, chugged down half of the contents of the bottle at one gulp.”
“‘I can see,’ he said, ‘that you have inside you the capacity to become a learned person!’”

“Bibarius received us in a very friendly manner, and he didn’t know where to have the venerable Savva Trifonovich take a seat. He was already a gray-haired old man, although he was no more than fifty-five years of age. The branches of scholarly knowledge had exhausted his body. Looking at his pale face, his sunken eyes, his whole doddering constitution, one couldn’t help but feel pity for him, and feel a strong abhorrence toward learning and erudition. But I was unshakable in my decision. The conditions of our agreement were concluded, the carts carrying my belongings and my clothing arrived at Mister Bibarius’s home, and I remained in his house, seeing off the honorable Savva with tears in my eyes.”

“‘Don’t weep, my friend,’ the merchant said. ‘We haven’t parted ways for good. At the beginning of each month, I shall be coming to Mister Bibarius’s home with a book. We shall be seeing each other not infrequently.’”

“The following day, the learned scholar set to work on educating me, and he began with the etymology of the Latin language. He was, in truth, a knowledgeable person, and I, a diligent pupil; and, therefore, things went successfully, and both of us were very satisfied with each other. In the mornings, he would cover, – besides the Latin language, – history, geography, and mathematics. Our afternoon time was devoted to drawing and music, which were taught to me by a special teacher, who was a friend of Bibarius. Holidays were devoted to rest and relaxation. I would either go for a stroll or have discussions with guests who were paying a visit to my professor, guests who were also learned people, or else I would, at my leisure, play the flute. By the end of one year, I was sufficiently strong in the Latin language and the other subjects. Bibarius was pleased with my progress, and Savva Trifonovich was even more pleased. Out of gratitude, he doubled Bibarius’s salary, and, therefore, the venerable professor proceeded to the next year with renewed ardor.”

“In Savva’s presence, he opened his lessons with a discussion about how it’s never too late to begin learning, just as it’s never too late to begin mending one’s ways as far as vices are concerned. ‘Many people,’ he said, ‘would begin to get acquainted with the branches of scholarly knowledge in their mature old age, and they would achieve the levels of the great philosophers. The abilities that people possess are divided up separately. Some people discover the greatness and wealth of their genius during their early days. Such was the case with Pindar,21 Tasso,22 Voltaire,23 and some others, who

21 Pindar (518 BC – 438 BC) was a lyric poet from Thebes. Of the nine canonical lyric poets of ancient Greece, Pindar has been considered to be the greatest, by virtue of the beauty of his thoughts, the rich exuberance of his language, and his flood of eloquence. Pindar was the first Greek poet to reflect on the nature of poetry and on the poet’s role in the world.

22 Torquato Tasso (1544-1595) was a sixteenth-century poet whom many consider to be the greatest Italian poet of the late Renaissance period. He is the author of *Gerusalemme liberata*
were already surprising people even then, at a time when they weren’t able to put their
clothes on without getting some outside assistance. Others, to the contrary, such as, for
example, Milton,24 began their creative work during their declining years, in old age,
achieving a temple of glory and receiving laurel wreaths, eternally verdant, even though
their graves are overgrown with grass, and their ashes have been scattered and have
disintegrated. Monuments to great people are erected in the souls of posterity, and they
shall not collapse and crumble before such time as the sun shall grow dim and the prior
dissonance shall once again reign.”

“After delivering such a preamble, Savva Trifonovich withdrew, no doubt fearing that
otherwise he might become tempted not to leave the cellar after developing, just as I had
done, a passion for the branches of scholarly knowledge. Straight away my lessons
began in logic, mathematics, encyclopedia, Roman rights, moral philosophy, and so on,
and so forth. In a word, during the course of the next two years, I grew to become the
most dreadful scholar, who was prepared to accost each and every passerby and torment
him with disputations about the soul, the mind, vital spirits, and other important topics. I
also learned to play the flute rather well. My exultation was indescribable. No matter
where I was going, no matter what I was doing, I was all of the time daydreaming about
various parts of philosophy. The loss of Feklusha didn’t in the least bother me. This had
to happen, of course, so that the equilibrium of the world would be maintained. What is
the point of knowing that the Harmonia praestabilita wouldn’t have fallen apart, if my
son hadn’t been abducted? Even in my dreams, vital spirits would appear to me in
various forms.”

“I must confess that my professor, no matter how learned he was, no matter how good
and kind-hearted he was, was, nonetheless, still a human being, and thus he had his
weaknesses, not to mention a strong propensity for uncorking wine bottles. He likewise
passionately loved his wife, about whom I haven’t said a word thus far, because, in the
course of three years, I didn’t see her even once and didn’t hear him say a single word
about her. I only heard about her from strangers. ‘So was he very jealous?’ you might
ask. Yes, it goes without saying! Another weakness that he possessed, – one that is, it
would seem, incompatible with the mind of a learned man, – is that he was deathly afraid
of devils, ghosts, reveries, and all that sort of thing. He would discuss devils with great
ardor, arguing the possibility not only of their existence, but also of their appearance to

[Jerusalem Delivered] (1569), a poem that provides a largely mythified version of the First
Crusade, in which Christian knights battle Muslims in order to take Jerusalem.

23 The well-known French Enlightenment thinker and philosopher Voltaire [Francois-Marie
Arouet] (1694-1778) was a versatile and prolific writer who produced works in nearly every
literary form, including plays, poems, novels, essays, histories, and scientific expositions. He
began to produce literary works at a young age, soon after receiving his education at the College
Louis-le-Grand (1704-1711).

24 John Milton (1608-1674), the famous English poet, is best known for his epic poem, Paradise
Lost (1667), which was published when he was nearly 60 years old.
people in the form of various animals. ‘For,’ he would add, ‘if a devil (whose name
derives etymologically from the verb forms ‘I am drawing,’ ‘I am outlining,’ that is to
say, ‘I am casting round with nets,’ ‘I am catching’) were to appear in its own proper
form, a human being wouldn’t be able to bear it and would, of course, drop dead.’”

“I marveled mightily that such weaknesses were present in such an intelligent and
sensible old man.”

Chapter 46: Successes in Love and in the Branches of Scholarly Knowledge

“When my course of study had come to an end, and when I, in the eyes of Bibarius, – and
especially in my own eyes, – seemed to have become worthy to step foot in high society,
so as to seek resounding glory there, my teacher one day enjoined me to be prepared to
pass a test. To that end, he convened about a dozen scholarly colleagues, who in such
instances never refuse to answer the call, and he also invited Savva Trifonovich, who
showed up there accompanied by a worker loaded down with paper bags. As to what was
contained inside these paper bags, it’s easy enough for each reader to surmise that for
himself.”

“At this point, each one of the scholars began to ask me questions: some from ontology,
others from pneumatology, others still from natural theology. At first, I was a little
confused, but soon I assumed such a cheerful demeanor and spoke so sharply that I
surprised the testers themselves. ‘Oh! Evidently, you, Mister Bibarius,’ said these most
venerable men, ‘didn’t spend your time in vain on this person, you didn’t waste it. He’s
worthy of commendations and rewards.’”

“Afterwards, the eldest of them stood up, took into his hands a large sheet of paper filled
with notes, and read it aloud, publicly, declaring that Gavrilo, Son of Simon, Chistyakov
had been issued a certificate, under their common signature, attesting to his successes in
the branches of scholarly knowledge, a certificate that should be more flattering for each
person who receives it, than a multitude of patents would be.”

“Everyone, in order of seniority, signed the certificate, and the paper that accompanied it
was handed over to me. I was beside myself with delight.”

“Afterwards began the carousal, – in every sense of that word, – and it continued until
night time, that is, until such time that people were eating, drinking, and shouting so
much that they had all grown hoarse and their tongues didn’t have the strength left to
articulate not only Latin words, but even Russian ones. Good and kind-hearted Bibarius
was second to none in this respect. The next morning, I paid the requisite tribute to my
benefactor, expressing to him my gratitude for the care and concern that he had shown for
me while I was in his charge, and I vowed to remember those things eternally. ‘What I
have done is not sufficient,’ said the old man. ‘I sought, and have found for you, a
position that you shall soon be getting. You know Mister Yastrebov, whose nephews I
once tutored. He’s a well-born nobleman. His secretary is already an old man and is no
longer needed. And that’s the reason why, as soon as he concludes some important
mission in Petersburg, he shall immediately be dismissed, and you shall be assigned to take his place. Don’t be surprised: he promised me that he would do this, and, surely, he shall do it!”

“‘I’m not surprised,’ I exclaimed, ‘at the fact that you still wish to act toward me as a benefactor. I know your good and kind heart, and I’m accustomed to seeing your unremitting acts of kindness! What astounds me is the fact that His Excellency wishes to remove a person who grew old and became obsolete while serving him!’”

“‘This is now in vogue among grandees,’ replied Bibarius, with the look of importance on his face that a man of experience would wear. ‘These days everyone wishes to have a secretary, – a young man who’s dexterous, who knows how to walk, sit, and look as is befitting in society, and who is handsome enough that both male and female guests wouldn’t smile condescendingly when looking at him. This is both reasonable and prudent to expect. What’s the good of having an old man in that position, no matter how knowledgeable and experienced he might be?’”

“I trusted Mister Bibarius’s judgment and calmly awaited the dismissal of the antiquated secretary. You might well ask: is it possible that I spent all of these three years so uniformly, without experiencing any adventure that would merit some mention? Oh, an adventure of no small importance did occur, one that, no matter how pleasant it was at that moment, in and of itself, afterwards, however, immersed me in sadness and lamentation.”

“One fine day, toward evening time, Bibarius came by to see me with a cheerful look on his face, and he addressed me directly and frankly, which seldom happened, since he usually walked in looking dispirited and downcast. He looked at himself in the mirror several times, stroking his cheeks and preening his feathers. I thought to myself: has the scholarly gentleman perhaps lost his mind? Then he walked up to me and asked: ‘How do I look to you, mister student? Isn’t it true that you have considered me a feeble, decrepit, good-for-nothing old man? Ah? Isn’t that so? Know, then, that you’re very much mistaken! Do you want me to tell you the truth? In several months, I shall become a father: my wife announced this news to me just today!’”

“‘Jealousy is a vice,’ I replied, ‘and one must be on one’s guard against it. Sometimes a husband who is too jealous toward his wife, himself becomes the reason why she forgets the rules of decorum and becomes unfaithful.’”
"That’s perhaps true," replied the professor. ‘But it’s one thing to teach lessons in moral philosophy, and quite another to act in accordance with them in reality. Take all of the great people of our fatherland and you shall see that they aren’t without their weaknesses: they write one way, but they act another way. And so, is it any wonder that a professor of metaphysics is jealous, especially if he has well-founded reasons for being so? Thus, my young friend, out of all of the possible evils, I chose the least evil one: that is, after getting married, I locked my wife up, like a prisoner, and up until now I haven’t let her out to go anywhere. It’s pleasant for me to think that, in this regard, I’m a sultan, although I have but one female slave, and not a thousand of them.’"

"An act of kindness,’ I said. ‘But why did you include your wife among the female slaves?’"

"If someone wishes to set his mind completely at rest,’ replied the professor, ‘he, as I see it, should do what I did. The female creatures that we call women have an essence that’s something special! What entices them today shall be an object of loathing tomorrow. What they love in the morning becomes odious toward evening. Out of flippancy alone, out of curiosity, from idleness, or, as they themselves express it, they ‘take it into their heads’ to fall in love with that which formerly they had held in contempt. I based my conjugal life upon this profound truth, and I thank heaven that thus far I haven’t had any reason to repent of doing that. My wife, Nymphodora, doesn’t see anyone, except for me and an elderly female cook. And, in return, she is chaste, honorable, faithful to her husband, and soon she shall make him the father of a little Apollo or a young Muse!’"

"Your kind-heartedness and openness,’ I said, ‘cry out for an antiphon. I must confess before you that I, too, have been rather fortunate and happy in matters of the heart. I shall soon become a father myself, and yet, for all of this good fortune, I’m beholden to a jealous husband!’"

"What? How is that! In what way?’ exclaimed Bibarius.”

"Please be good enough to hear me out,’ I replied. ‘And then you can judge for yourself. Around six months ago, while I was walking along our street, discussing with myself a priori and a posteriori arguments, I heard a low voice emanating from a neighboring gate utter my name: ‘Gavrilo Simonovich!’ I stopped, saw an elderly woman, and asked her what it was that she needed. ‘Do you wish to become a fortunate and happy person?’ the old woman asked me. ‘And do you know how to keep a secret?’ ‘As much as you please,’ I replied, anticipating that this would become an amorous adventure. The conductress took me by the hand, led me into the courtyard that was by the side of our apartment, and brought me into one of the bed chambers. There I found a beautiful woman, about twenty-five years of age, who received me politely.”

"What did she look like in terms of distinctive physical marks?’ asked Bibarius, turning pale. ‘And were those bed chambers adjacent to ours?’"
“‘What’s the matter with you?’ I exclaimed. ‘The color in your face has changed slightly!’”

“‘It’s nothing,’ replied the professor, calming down. ‘I simply have that habit: my jealousy toward my wife has turned into an overall jealousy. I can no longer listen calmly to any account of an amorous adventure without putting myself in the place of the poor husband, father, or brother, who is being deceived and betrayed. It’s nothing, however. Continue, please, and I shall not interrupt you again.’”

“When the usual greetings and salutations had been completed, the beautiful woman apologized for causing me any trouble by summoning me to her bed chamber. I learned that she was unfortunate and unhappy, and so she requested my assistance. ‘I’ve heard,’ she said, ‘that you’re an adept and adroit person, and that you know the way to help someone who is ill-fated. My husband is jealous to such an extent that, ever since the day when we were married, I’ve not been allowed to look at any man in the eyes. He takes comfort in my moaning and groaning, but he doesn’t provide me with any pleasure or gratification, keeping me confined, cooped up under lock and key, like a prisoner in our own house. I’m unable to endure this any longer. I’d like to get divorced from him, and I’m requesting your assistance in accomplishing this.’”

“Before I could offer her any advice, my sensuality said to me: ‘Don’t miss this golden opportunity.’ I yielded obedience to the voice of sensuality and soon became a lucky paramour. Hardly had the initial outbursts of passion subsided, when we heard the sound of a key unlocking the door of the room in which we were located. ‘Oh, my God,’ said my anonymous mistress, ‘it’s my husband! Where can we hide you?’ Straight away, she caught hold of me, pointed with her hand, and, in a trice, I found myself lying beneath the bed. Her husband came into the room, puffing and panting, and then rummaged about, while his wife kept asking him, hundreds of times over, what was it that he needed, but he didn’t utter a single word in reply. When he had left, after locking the door behind him, I, as before, crawled out from under the bed and rewarded his adorable better half with the most tender of caresses. She swore her boundless love for me, forcing me to promise to preserve her secret and in no way to try to find out who exactly she was!”

“About half a year has passed with us enjoying these amatory amusements. Her husband very often came close to catching us in the act, but my sweetheart’s presence of mind never abandoned her. She would hide me, now in the closet, where she kept her black lingerie, now in the corner behind her woman’s coat, now wherever it came to her mind to secrete me away, but the poor old man could never find his sexual rival. The day before yesterday, she doubled my well-being, announcing that the fruit of my tenderness was now inside her womb. And so, Mister Bibarius, I myself shall soon become a father, although they shall not call me by that name!”

“At this point, I embraced the venerable old man with all of the filial tenderness of a son, but he seemed lifeless, as if he were made out of stone. Sweat was pouring down from his brow in a torrent, his knees were shaking, and he wanted to say something, but only a groan came out of his lips, which had turned blue. Without saying a word in reply to my
salutations, he took a key out of the chest of drawers, took me by the arm, and led me to his study, which I had never once visited, for he had never summoned me there before. I didn’t find anything there. The professor unlocked the door to a different room, led me inside it, walked past still two other rooms, and then, pointing to a woman who had just stood up in extreme surprise, he asked: ‘Was it her?”

“Recognizing my anonymous mistress, I almost passed out. She wasn’t in the best of situations: anger at my openness, combined with shame at the sight of her husband, caused her to lose consciousness. I was expecting momentous scenes and was preparing to play my role, as a man who isn’t timid and whom fate has placed on a slippery road should play it, but the matter was handled without the need for any valor on my part. Bibarius walked up to his wife, embraced her affectionately, and then said: ‘Don’t be afraid! I know everything, and I forgive you. I alone am to blame. From this time forward, I swear that I shall forsake my stupid jealousy, I shall toss the key to the doors of our house into a well, and I shall love the fruit of your love for this friend of mine, as if it were my very own flesh and blood.”

“I wasn’t expecting this turn of events, and especially from a learned scholar, for this class of people considers delicacy in their treatment of others to be a vice. But Bibarius was, evidently, above learning, scholarship, and erudition, and he was intelligent. I embraced him with the fervor of a son, and I promised not to visit his tower-chamber any more. We all were reconciled with each other, and, for the first time, all three of us ate supper together.”

“Before long, Mister Yastrebov’s secretary, having straightened out his business matter very successfully, returned from Petersburg, and, therefore, he was soon dismissed, and Bibarius took me to meet the boyar. I was trembling, as if I were running a high fever, as I made my way into the chambers of the grandee’s palace. Julius Caesar didn’t face greater difficulties crossing the Rubicon with his army than I did when stepping across the thresholds of these chambers.25 Mister Yastrebov was a man of about forty-five years of age, tall in stature, sturdy in build, and very haughty in appearance. He nodded his head in Bibarius’s direction, cast his eyes all over me, and asked: ‘Do you agree to stay on in a certain position where you shall be serving me?’ ‘I would consider it the greatest honor to please Your Excellency,’ I replied, bowing low to him. He posed several questions to me, which I answered satisfactorily, and this pleased him. That same day, I bade farewell to my benefactor Bibarius, who was unable to refrain from weeping as we parted, and he promised that he would love, with all of the tenderness of which he was capable, the child who was soon to emanate from his spouse’s womb. But the poor man! Not a month would pass before he would be deprived of life, dying suddenly and unexpectedly, and his worthy spouse, whom I would have rushed over to console, got

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25 Caesar’s momentous decision in early January 49 BC to lead a single legion south over the Rubicon River precipitated a Civil War that led to Caesar becoming dictator for life. The phrase “crossing the Rubicon” has since become an idiom that means one is passing a point of no return (i.e., one is committing oneself irrevocably to a risky or revolutionary course of action).
married, a week following her husband’s death, to some Frenchman, who was handling her late husband’s business matters in his capacity as a solicitor. Some people with malevolent tongues were spreading the rumor that Bibarius’s wife had contributed considerably to her husband’s apoplexy, but, then again, there’s little that evil people won’t say. As was only right and proper, I was shown the door, and I, for my part, cast off this unfaithful woman once and for all.”

“I had been serving Mr. Yastrebov for about half a year, and both of us, it seemed, were satisfied with one another. I tried to please not only him or his wife, but also even the lowliest servant in the household. Little by little, I was making my way into his trust and confidence, and it reached the point where Yastrebov’s haughty look, in my presence, gave way to an indulgent one. I soon became accustomed to my job, writing and rewriting incessantly, and I acquired Mr. Yastrebov’s trust and confidence to such an extent that I became his Mercury in regard to matters of the heart. And, along with that role, I received a commission in the military as a junior officer at the rank of cornet, thus gaining mutual respect from all those who had need for it. Yes! Even the great names in history are not without their weaknesses. We are all descended from Adam!”

“One day, Yastrebov called me into his office and said to me: ‘I have taken a liking to you, Mister Chistyakov, and I wish to make you happy. Only I request that you be truly loyal to me and that you guard my secrets, as behooves a secretary.’ After I had assured him of my boundless love and devotion, he said: ‘So then, I’m wealthy and distinguished, but I’m not able to manage my finances without some outside assistance. Madam Byvalova has taken it into her head to fall in love with me. She’s a well-born lady, long a widow, and esteemed everywhere for the countless family connections that she has with people in high places. This last circumstance has attached me to her with my whole being, excluding my heart, for it belongs to the beautiful Liza, whom I adore, and whom I maintain and support financially, as though she were a dependent. You see, two opposing forces have taken possession of me, not to mention my wife, who up until now has been in love with me to the point of absurdity and who follows my every step. So then, Mister Chistyakov, this circumstance compels me to entrust my secrets to you. Four years ago, my wife, observing that I was splendidly guiding one of her chambermaids, became so angry that she was preparing to file for divorce, and her relatives had a hard time dissuading her from following that course of action. As you can see from this example, my secret needs to be guarded as closely as possible. Although I don’t love my wife, nonetheless, since I have daughters who have come of age, I shouldn’t give myself up to temptation. Here are two letters for you: one goes to Liza, with the notification that I shall be having supper with her at her place; and the other goes to Madam Byvalova, with the notification that I shall be so busy today that there is no way that I can visit her any earlier than tomorrow morning!’”

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26 Mercury, a wily trickster of the Roman pantheon, was patron deity of commerce and travel, as well as of messengers and thieves. He also serves as the guide of souls sent to the underworld. Like his Greek equivalent, Hermes, Mercury is considered the herald of the gods.
No sooner had I left his room than one of the girls summoned me to appear before the mistress of the house. I found her alone, lying on the divan, her body sprinkled with perfume, and her skin cosmetically treated with ceruse and rouge. After reciting to me a preface, in which she explained the hope that she was placing on my wits and my perspicacity, she revealed that around eight days earlier she had seduced a young dragoon officer, who had long been chasing after her. In view of her husband’s marital improprieties, she had decided to make this new pleasure-seeker fortunate and happy. And that’s why she intended, by means of a note that she had prepared, to let him know about this affair.”

“Well,’ she added, ‘can you guard this secret? If so, then you, too, shall be fortunate and happy! Deliver this little epistle to the gentleman officer according to the inscription, and await the appropriate reward.’”

“I didn’t know what I should do. Suddenly there were so many errands to run! To refuse to run this one, after all of the trust and confidence that I had earned, would mean irritating her. So after assuring Her Excellency of my absolute love and devotion, I left her lodgings with the three love letters in hand!”

Chapter 47: The Reward for Candor and Open-Heartedness

“Right here and now, I must show that I didn’t receive an education for nothing,’ I said to myself when I was left alone. ‘It’s impossible to please everyone, especially at the same time. So I must think this over! His Excellency shall be spending the evening at Liza’s and the next morning at Madam Byvalova’s. Thus, right now I should run over to the home of that well-born personage, and then over to the seductress. I must make my denials soon. Although I currently have connections with prominent people in high places, I don’t want to adopt their bad habits, however, and so I shall not start traipsing after anyone.””

“After having become firmly convinced of the correctness of these praiseworthy thoughts, I set off for Her Excellency’s house. Entering the front hallway with a look of pride on my face, since I was the secretary and the envoy of a distinguished lover, I was halted by a servant, who wouldn’t allow me to proceed any farther.”

“You, my friend, don’t know me,’ I exclaimed. ‘Here’s a letter from His Excellency, Mister Yastrebov: I’m his secretary, and, moreover, an officer.’”

“Even if you were to be Mr. Yastrebov himself, you can’t come in here right now. Her Excellency wishes at present to pray, and no one dares to disturb her when she’s at prayer. Please be so kind as to wait: she shall soon call for you.”

“‘She’s praying,’ I thought to myself, taking a seat on the bench. ‘That’s funny! She prays in the evening for the sins that she shall commit that night. Wonderful! This is what it means to settle one’s affairs economically.’”
“I had just finished composing a beautiful speech that I was preparing to give to the beautiful Madam Byvalova, when she rang for me. I was led into her reception room, and I saw before me a woman of about forty years of age who was fastening the clasps of her prayer book. She glanced over at me sweetly, removed her glasses, and asked: ‘Have you come from him?’ ‘Yes, Your Excellency,’ I replied, handing her the letter. She took it from me, let out a sigh, and then began reading it. But it became apparent that she didn’t like very much what she was reading. When she had finished reading the letter, she knitted her brow and then asked me: ‘How old are you?’ ‘Twenty-seven,’ I replied. ‘What salary are you drawing?’ ‘Even I myself don’t, as yet, know that. As much as His Excellency shall wish to allocate.’”

“‘In the event that he decides to reward you in a niggardly fashion, come see me,’ my new patroness said to me. ‘I have taken upon myself the obligation to correct his deficiencies.’”

“Upon thanking Her Excellency for the interest that she was taking in me, I set off, with the other letter in hand, to visit the beautiful Liza. She lived in some fairly nice chambers that were kept very clean. When I entered the drawing room, I caught sight of Liza, who was reclining luxuriously on a satin sofa. When she had finished reading the little epistle that I had brought to her, she asked: ‘Do you work at Mr. Yastrebov’s home?’ ‘Yes, I do,’ I replied. ‘At his home, I fulfill the duties of a secretary.’ ‘Try not to lose that position: His Excellency can be generous, and he likes to reward the people who serve him. His former secretary would have remained in that position, but being old and, moreover, being awkward, he wasn’t able to please the members of the household.’ ‘Madam Yastrebova,’ Liza continued, ‘doesn’t come from that long line of ancient shepherdesses who used to love to sigh and pine to no purpose. No! She declares the triumph of her conqueror, and she herself awaits the opportunity to reward him in a moment of weakness, as she usually expresses it. But seeing as how her entire life consists of such moments, one mocker composed a pretty good epigram that spread around town for two whole days.’”

“‘How is it that you know her so well?’ I asked. ‘I wouldn’t think that you would happen to see each other often!’”

“‘On the contrary,’ replied Liza, ‘she and I are good friends, and we often meet together at theatres, clubs, and masquerades. As a matter of fact, out of a desire to please her, I gave up a gorgeous young officer and occupied myself with her husband instead. I congratulate you in advance, Mister Chistyakov, on the occasion of your appointment to a real occupation, and I advise you not to miss the opportunity to display your merits.’”

“After leaving her home, I couldn’t cease to marvel at Liza’s flippancy. ‘It’s true,’ I said to myself, ‘that the letter that Madam Yastrebova sent to the young dragoon officer was a rather convincing sign of her modesty, but Liza acts badly, however, and, what’s more, acts stupidly, when she makes a public announcement about this, and especially when she makes it to strangers.’”
“The following day, in the morning, when I entered Yastrebov’s office with papers for him to sign, he seemed to me to be happy and satisfied with himself. ‘You made a very favorable impression on Liza, who likes you very much, Mister Chistyakov, and she beseeched me not to abandon you in your time of need. I gave her my word of honor that I wouldn’t, and I shall keep my word. As a first step in that direction, here is your salary for the past six months and for the next six months in advance.’”

“Stashing the money away in my pocket, I made a deep bow to him, and, filled with grateful zeal and devotion toward the person of His Excellency, I said with ardor: ‘Sir! I have come to feel a sincere devotion to you, and I have tried to exhibit that dedication at all times. I would be truly fortunate and happy if your good name were not to suffer on my account. I understand well what honor means, especially in a prominent family. You are good-humored and amiable by nature, and you look around yourself with tranquil eyes. Others, meanwhile, are slandering you, mocking you, abusing your trust and confidence. Here, Dear Sir, is proof of the justice of my words! Read this sheet of paper and take the necessary measures!’”

“At this point, I handed him the letter that his wife had written to the young dragoon officer. He read it attentively, looked at me intently, and then burst out laughing so uproariously that I feared that he would burst his sides. He ordered that his wife be summoned, and when she appeared, he kept right on roaring with laughter. I didn’t understand what this could mean and how he could rejoice so much upon reading a love letter that his wife had written to a young officer. ‘What’s wrong with you, my friend?’ his wife asked merrily, as she was likewise laughing, not yet knowing the reason for her husband’s mirth.”

“‘I’m surprised, My Lady,’ replied her husband, ‘that you, as someone who has daughters of a marriageable age, are yourself so inexperienced! One would have thought that this simpleton, this foster child of Bibarius, would have been capable of dealing with matters that require deftness and subtlety, and that he would have been more accustomed to them. Well, now you have gone ahead and punished yourself for your unpardonable sluggishness. Did you ever think that this tender love letter, upon which you probably spent so much time racking your brain while composing it, would be read by your husband, instead of by a handsome young dragoon officer? Here you are! Off you go with somebody else! Go ahead and take him!’”

“His spouse’s astonishment, just like mine, was indescribable. Her skin was covered with a scarlet color. Taking the letter, she left the room, glancing back at me with an extremely vexed look on her face. Having turned pale, I was standing there, trembling all over my body.”

“‘You see how stupid you are, mister student! What good are your branches of scholarly knowledge, when they don’t make you any more intelligent, and rather than incurring patronage, they instead incur wrath and persecution? You deserve a more severe punishment, but I forgive you. You yourself can surmise, however, that after what has
happened, there’s no place for you in my home. May God be with you! Leave my house this very minute, and don’t you ever show yourself in my presence again.”

“Since he could see that I, due to my extreme astonishment, was unable to move from the spot, he gave a sign to two of his stalwart footmen, who proceeded to grab me by the scruff of my neck and drag me out of his office, then through the reception room, and then, finally, out of the courtyard and beyond the gates, where they gave me a shove in the neck and left me out on the street.”

“‘Well, there’s the reward that you get for your diligence and your devotion!’ I said to myself as I walked along the street. ‘Evidently, people have completely changed, or else the things that are written in books are nothing but cock-and-bull stories! Even now I sometimes still pine for Feklusha, yet Mister Yastrebov nearly died laughing when he was reading about the routine infidelity of his wife. What can one expect from children? What would such a mother say to a daughter of hers who is beginning to give way to debauchery? What would a son think about the entire female sex, seeing his own elderly mother on the road to disgrace and vilification?’ At this point, I read with feeling a verse rhyme out of the works of Horace,27 where the poet says:

Damnosa quid non imminuit dies?
Aetas parentum, pejor avis, tulit
Nos nequiores mox daturos
Progniem vitiosiorem.

[What does destructive time not destroy?
The age of our parents, worse than that of our grandsires,
Has brought us forth more impious still,
And we shall produce a more vicious progeny]

“I directed my steps toward Madam Byvalova’s house.”

“The doorman informed me that she had left to attend mass, and from there she would be going to visit friends, and from there she would be going to attend vespers, after that she would be going to the theatre, then going to a supper, – in a word, they assured me that there was no way that I would be able to see her that day. Thus, I set off to do some gallivanting: I went to the Kremlin, I visited several churches there, and, when noonday time arrived, I started thinking about which pub I should go to for dinner. Walking up to one pub, I was stopped by a man whose appearance, it seemed to me, was familiar. He was standing there, leaning against a corner of the building, and his eyes were fixed on the ground. His face was pale, the look on his face was gloomy, and he was dressed in rags. This was the picture of a beggar who was ashamed of the condition that he was living in.”

27 Quintus Horatius Flaccus (65 BC – 8 BC), known in the English-speaking world as Horace, was the leading Roman lyric poet during the time of Caesar Augustus (also known as Octavian), who ruled from 27 BC to 14 AD.
“‘Who would ever have thought,’ I said to myself, ‘that this pauper would be the very same Khvostikov, who for two years was visiting his former teacher Bibarius so frequently! But that Khvostikov was so plump and cheerful, whereas this one . . .’”

“I approached him more closely and embraced this old acquaintance of mine with heartfelt sympathy. When our initial greetings and salutations had concluded, he said to me: ‘So, my dear Chistyakov, as you can see, fate has turned its back on me angrily. Now I’m in such an awful position that I might as well go drown myself. My wife is sitting at home with a babe suckling at her breast, and she is without a crust of bread to eat. They’re waiting for me to return home, but what can I give them to cheer them up? I myself am mere skin and bones, naked and barefoot!’”

“‘This is awful,’ I said to him, ‘and all the more so, since I myself lost my position just today, due solely to stupidity. I do have a sufficient amount of money, however, and so I shall divide it up with you, and then we shall see what happens!’ Khvostikov’s delight was beyond measure; he couldn’t stop thanking me. After we had purchased all that was needed for supper, we set off, with satisfied looks on our faces, for his apartment, where he invited me to live with him for a while, until such time as I could find a decent position. On our way there, he told me the following story:”

“The first stupidity that I committed, one that deserves punishment, was that I got married soon after leaving school, without bothering to think how I would feed my wife and the future children I would have with her. Marya, the daughter of the sexton at whose house I was being quartered, was the temptress who seduced me. During the first year of our married life together, my father-in-law and mother-in-law both died, and our son was born. You know that in the world it’s a custom that without money one can’t do anything. A person is born, he’s christened, he grows up, he gets married, he produces offspring, and he dies; and, during his lifetime, money is needed all the time for everything. And since I had little money when our son was born, in the course of one year we were reduced to poverty. When I was serving in some position, however, we were at least able, somehow or other, to squeeze by. But for the past month, ever since I lost my job at the place where I had lately been employed, I’m surprised that I haven’t as yet died of starvation.”

“The reason why I lost my job was stupid candor and open-heartedness on my part, as well as my loyalty on behalf of a grandee! You’re aware that I served in the chancellery of Count Dubinin, an honorable nobleman, who was reputed to be a clever person. I worshipped the man and devoted myself to his benefit with all of my heart, trying to please him as much as possible. But this prideful grandee looked down upon me with that majestic look that said: ‘You’re a lowly worm; crawl around in the dust and dirt, and consider yourself lucky that I, out of disdain, don’t wish to squish you!’ For a long time, I sought out ways to call his gracious attention to me, when I found, at last, what I was wishing for. I noticed that the count didn’t know the rules, not only of Russian eloquence, but even of
Russian orthography. ‘Wait a minute,’ I thought to myself. ‘At the first opportunity, I shall reveal to him the great connoisseur, in matters involving both eloquence and orthography, that lies hidden inside me. In this way, I shall gain, first his surprise, and then his love and affection as well. He and the people around him shall be surprised at these merits of mine, and, then, against their will, they shall begin to love me.’ I soon found that wonderful opportunity. The count, who was hurrying off to go somewhere, handed me a letter, saying: ‘Seal this up, and send it to the address inscribed.’ When I was left alone by myself, I read the letter and I found, to my great joy, that there were in it some incessant mistakes against properties of the language, against grammar and orthography. Thinking things over properly for a moment, I began to make corrections: I cast slurs, I blackened reputations, and thus I wrote a letter befitting a count, a letter in which not a single living word, not a single word with vital power, remained. Having completed such a glorious feat, I placed the letter down on his desk and calmly set off for home, thinking about how pleasantly surprised the count would be when he found out that there was such a great sage amongst the personnel who worked at his chancellery.”

“The following day, as soon as I made my appearance at the chancellery, the count asked: ‘Has the letter been sent?’ ‘By no means, Your Excellency. Here it is! Wouldn’t you like to read through it one more time? You had a fair amount of mistakes in it, and I corrected them for you. Now, I think, it shall read quite a bit better!’”

“You can well imagine the menacing, as well as scornful, look that appeared on Count Dubinin’s face when he glanced over at me. I was seized by horror, I was trembling all over, but the crime had already been committed. ‘You have taken it into your head to teach me?’ the count said to me in a low and long-drawn-out voice. ‘I’m not in need of any teacher!’ With these words, he pinched the letter containing my corrections between his fingers and ripped it to pieces. He cast a glance in my direction, looking me straight in the eyes, and then, turning aside, he growled: ‘Get out of my sight, you wild beast, and don’t show yourself here ever again!’”

“So that, dear friend, is my tale. I have sworn, in future, not to correct the mistakes of well-born people, so that I won’t have to repent of it afterwards.”

“By the time he had finished telling me his story, we had arrived at his apartment, or, better to say, his burrow, where I found a young woman and her infant child. She was rather good-looking, despite the beggarly clothing that she was wearing. She welcomed me affectionately, especially when Khvostikov explained that I was now their benefactor. The day passed merrily, and I slept soundly through the night on a bed of felted cloth.”

“In the morning, I set off to see the venerable Madam Byvalova, but she was locked up inside her prayer room. I came by a second time, and then a third time, but now she was at mass, now she was at vespers. ‘This is a rare woman here,’ I said to myself,
‘apparently, she’s no more than forty or forty-five years old, and yet the only thing that she thinks about is sanctity. That’s praiseworthy, and one can’t get angry at the fact that they won’t allow me to enter. At some point in time, I shall get to see this good and kind-hearted lady, who offered to help me out during my time of need.”

“I spent about three weeks in this state of expectation, and I had almost begun to lose my patience.”

Chapter 48: A Ghost

“At last, the happy day had arrived: I was granted admission into Madam Byvalova’s home. She was sitting on a sofa, in front of a lectern, upon which a large church book and some sheet music were lying. She began her speech: ‘You’re perhaps surprised that I didn’t grant you admission to see me for such a long period of time. I know that you have been removed from your position, and I have surmised that you have come to see me in hopes of receiving patronage from me. That’s why, before I could promise you anything, I wished to ascertain whether you would be worthy of my patronage. That’s to say, do you possess the virtues that I find necessary: patience and demureness. Since you have turned out to be in harmony with my expectations, I’m inclined in your favor in regard to this request for patronage. Do you wish to serve as my secretary? Your job would be to carry on my correspondence for me, a matter where you must preserve a necessary demureness. And, in your free hours, you must read spiritual books to me aloud, a matter where patience is needed. I shall cover all of your expenses, and I shall provide, in addition, a decent salary for you. Do you accept this offer?’”

“What was there to balk at here? That same day, I moved into her house and out of Khvostikov’s. And the first two months or so that I spent there went very well. How could I not like Madam Byvalova’s house, which was one of the best houses in the city of Moscow? Although there were many servants of both sexes, the majordomo, an experienced hand, maintained such order in the house that it was as if this whole multitude of people constituted one big family.”

“Our correspondence was not extensive, and so it wasn’t difficult for me to handle her epistolary matters, but the reading of saints’ lives was a bit burdensome. At ten o’clock in the evening, everything in the house would quiet down. I would go with the mistress to the prayer room, she would sit down by my side behind the lectern, and the reading of saints’ lives would commence, continuing sometimes past midnight. Her Excellency would sigh, would weep from tender emotion, and would say to me: ‘Oh, when the love of one person for another person happens to be the reason for some important events, then what is it that a spiritual kind of love can give rise to?’ Raptures of this sort hindered her from noticing that my mouth was getting parched and my tongue was being impeded. However, since she always treated me affectionately, since the financial support that I received from her was good, since the salary that she paid me was always delivered promptly, and, moreover, since she showered me with gifts, I continued to serve my mistress fervently, and I didn’t grumble. And, what’s more, she had warned me beforehand that I would have need of patience.”
“Yet another month of my life in this house had passed by, when Her Excellency fell ill and didn’t leave her bedroom. And that’s why writing letters, just like reading saints’ lives, came to a halt, and I had some time to rest and relax. Once, at midnight, I awoke with surprise. Something fervent was clenching me in its warm embrace, showering me with passionate kisses. In reply to my question, ‘Who is this?’ someone whispered in my ear, so softly that it was with difficulty that I could hear what was being said: ‘Keep quiet, dear friend, and avail yourself of this conquest. If you’re modest, then your happiness shall be constant. Never ask me about anything. This is the last time that I shall be speaking with you.’ The female stranger fell silent, but on the other hand she never ceased rendering onto me her tender caresses. I cast aside all further inquiries. Two hours later the female stranger left, and I fell into a very pleasant sleep.”

“The following day, I scrutinized closely all of the women in the house, but I wasn’t able to guess who was the female stranger. One woman was too stout, another was too tall, and so on, and so forth. It couldn’t have been an outsider, however. One day passed, then another, then a week. My lady’s illness didn’t diminish, and the female stranger continued to visit my monastic cell regularly. To please her, I remained silent and didn’t waste any of our time together in empty conversation. A month later, not to my great joy, however, the lady of the house came out of her bedroom, and our daily rounds started up again. Although the female stranger was now coming to visit me less frequently, she was, all the same, coming to visit me, and her caresses weren’t cooling down at all.”

“A year passed of my being blissfully happy in this house, and I couldn’t have wished for anything better. A hostile demon-tempter incited me, however, and I developed a desire to see who my anonymous lover was. No matter how hard I tried to temper my curiosity, imagining that, in this way, I would be able to diminish her bashfulness, I didn’t succeed. For the devil is powerful: he overpowered my prudence, and so I decided to employ the same method that Apuleius’s Psyche28 did when she wished to see her tender spouse.”

“One night, when I had returned to my bedroom upon completing a reading of the lives of the saints, during which time my sole listener had emitted many sighs and had frequently lifted her teary eyes up toward the heavens, I lit the secret lantern that I had prepared ahead of time and placed it beneath my bed. And then, with a quivering heart, I awaited the arrival of my mysterious goddess. And she wasn’t long in arriving. When the moment had come, – the moment that was favorable for revealing the identity of this secret lover, – I lowered my hand beneath the bed, pulled out the lantern, and discovered, – oh, my heavens! . . .”

“‘Ah!’ I exclaimed. ‘Ah!’ exclaimed Madam Byvalova.”

28 Chistyakov is referring here to The Most Pleasant and Delectable Tale of the Marriage of Cupid and Psyche, written in the 2nd century AD by the Platonist prose writer, philosopher, and rhetorician Lucius Apuleius (124 – 170 AD). In this tale, Psyche visits a bedroom where, in the darkness, she can’t see the unknown person with whom she is having sex, a lover whose visits she looks forward to, although she is forbidden to look upon him.
“At this point, I could clearly see my foolishness, but now it was much too late. As the saying goes: a spilled glass is never full. Her Excellency screamed and then quickly hid behind a hanging painting. I stood there for a long time like a madman, but upon examining the painting, I found behind it a secret door that led to a small corridor or dressing room. Left all alone in brutal despair, cursing my pernicious curiosity and my prying eyes, I got dressed, hid inside my pocket the money that I had, and the things that my mistress had given to me as gifts, and sat down in an armchair, having decided to await the conclusion of this tearful comedy.”

“At daybreak, I heard the rumble of a carriage and the sound of whips in the courtyard. When all of this noise had quieted down, the majordomo entered my room, respectfully handed me a letter, and then stood off to the side, awaiting a reply from me. I unsealed the letter and read it!”

“Pusillanimous One!

Perhaps I didn’t show you my weakness sufficiently, so that you have now decided to make me the laughing stock of the entire household? Were you really so dissatisfied with me? Did you really need to do this to me? Please admit that you didn’t. Please admit that it was simply flippancy and boastfulness on your part that wrested out of your hands the good fortune and happiness that awaited you. I had fallen deeply in love with you and had wished to make you fortunate and happy, if you were to be amenable to those states of well-being. I didn’t find it necessary to coerce you, since, as a result of having a large fortune and a prominent name, there’s no reason for me to deprive myself of any pleasures and enjoyments. Do you see what prosperity and good fortune you have deprived yourself of as a result of your lack of restraint? All of that is now lost to you, and lost irreversibly! I’m leaving to visit my villages in Ukraine. And you, I think, shall likewise not consider it pleasant to remain in my house. My majordomo shall give you two thousand rubles as recompense for your labors. Judge for yourself how fortunate and how happy you might have been, if you had been less curious and had not poked around so much.”

“My first thought upon reading the letter was to request from the majordomo the money that Madam Byvalova had promised me. But he made excuses, submitting that he could muster no more than a thousand rubles, which amount I would receive only upon giving him a voucher for two thousand rubles. I readily fulfilled his request, I received the money, and I left with the aim of never returning again. Suddenly being wealthy, I rented a respectable apartment and hired a servant. I occupied myself with reading, taking strolls, and attending theatre performances. I soon developed a passion for this lattermost form of entertainment: I attended almost every new theatre performance and even toyed with the idea of becoming a writer of stage comedies myself. Theatre has always seemed to me to be an excellent institution, one that had the right to almost more respect than did several specialized schools of higher education. It’s true that not infrequently the role of
a noble character, such as Alexander the Great,\textsuperscript{29} or Titus Flavius Vespasian,\textsuperscript{30} or Marcus Aurelius,\textsuperscript{31} is performed by an actor who’s a ne’er-do-well, a lecher, or a rogue. But what’s all that to me? The only thing that matters is whether he acted well in that role. What do I care that a damsel, who is representing innocence, is ready to mount the scaffold, if only she doesn’t defile her purity through contact with a powerful tyrant, when she is, in actuality, a dissolve wenches who is searching for aged satyrs, – His Highnesses, – so as to diminish their golden radiance? If she is a goddess in the theatre, that’s enough for me: let her be, at home, whatever it is that she wishes to be. The larger part of our well-educated people condemn actors for their domestic life, and, in some countries, the justice system was so unjust and so cruel that they deprived actors of the honor of entombment.”

“Thus was I reasoning, at my leisure, when it was announced in the newspapers that, on such-and-such a date, a drama, in which the actress Fiona, newly arrived from Petersburg, would be playing the lead role, was to be performed for the first time. If I had known beforehand the content of that play, then, most likely, I wouldn’t have gone to see it. But I didn’t know the content, so off I flew to the theatre. There was a great crowd of people there. The impatience to see Fiona that they all felt was beyond measure, and no sooner did she make her appearance than a thunderstorm of clapping resounded throughout the parterre. I was looking intently, opening my eyes as wide as I possibly could, and the more intently that I looked, the more convinced I became that the actress Fiona was none other than the most venerable Princess Fekla Sidorovna Chistyakova. Everything about her, – her height, her bearing, her voice – everything revealed to my eyes who it really was! It’s true that she had become very alluring. But, then again, time can work wonders! Perhaps she, too, had studied under the tutelage of some female professor, just as I had done under the tutelage of Bibarius? Various feelings were being set in motion inside me: love, hate, regret, anger, sensuality, vengeance, – all of these feelings were, by turns, taking hold of my heart. When the performance had come to an end, and the most prominent people in the world of theatre were rushing to the stage in order to shower the new actress with congratulations and to

\textsuperscript{29} Alexander III of Macedon (356 BC – 323 BC), commonly known as Alexander the Great, was a king of the ancient Greek kingdom of Macedon. He succeeded his father Philip to the throne in 336 BC, at the age of 20, and spent most of his ruling years conducting a lengthy military campaign throughout Western Asia and Egypt.

\textsuperscript{30} Titus Flavius Vespasianus (9 AD – 79 AD) was a Roman emperor who reigned from 69 AD to 79 AD. The fourth, and final, emperor who reigned during the Year of the Four Emperors, he founded the Flavian dynasty that ruled the Empire for 27 years. His fiscal reforms and consolidation of the empire generated stability and a vast Roman building program.

\textsuperscript{31} Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (121 AD – 180 AD) was a Roman emperor and a Stoic philosopher. He was the last of the rulers known as the Five Good Emperors, and the last emperor of the Pax Romana, an age of relative peace and stability for the Roman Empire, lasting from 27 BC to 180 AD.
encourage her with amenities, I set off for the exit, hoping to find out where my princess was being lodged and then to give some thought to what I should decide to do. Although she was already more than twenty-five years old, with the help of artifice, and especially on stage, when seen in the dim light of candles, she looked lovely! Yes, and what woman, in such cases, wouldn’t resort to the help of a little artifice?”

“The expensive carriage belonging to Prince Latron drove up to the theatre. He was a very prominent man, as well as a dandy and a womanizer, who loved to chase after actresses, dancers, and, in general, all manner of nymphs of pleasure and merriment. Feklusha, bestrewn with diamonds and pearls, came out of the theatre, followed by His Lordship’s haïdus32 and footmen. She took a seat in the carriage, and it set off. I rushed off to chase after them, with all of the strength that I had left, trying not to let them out of sight for a moment. The carriage stopped at a magnificent house on Tverskaia Street. The theatre goddess got down from the carriage and disappeared into the house.”

“I spent almost that whole night without getting any sleep, debating what I should do about my wife. I knew quite well from rumors that Prince Latron was a famous man, so I concluded that he wasn’t the one who had abducted my princess. I was troubled by various fervors: I crossed over from love to hate, and a desire for vengeance was boiling over in my heart. With that intention in mind, I exchanged the respectable apartment that I was renting for a room at a tavern on Tverskaia Street, so that I could more easily fulfill the plan that I had come up with. One day passed after another, and soon they amounted to a month, and I was suffering, since my wife and I couldn’t see each other. It would have been a hundred times better not to see the unfaithful one than to be witness to her roistering. Watching her in the theatre, I almost didn’t recognize her. Is this woman the Feklusha who had come out in her printed cloth dress to see me in the garden? Or the Feklusha who had wriggled about beneath the rocker? No! This was a prominent woman, brought up in luxury and comfort. The haughty look on her face, the manners, the gait, – all of this indicated that she possessed a profound knowledge of the mores and manners of the present day and a confidence in her own pre-eminence and amiability.”

“Winter arrived. In the evening, I would sit all alone in my room and, without any thoughts in my head, I would watch the smoke that was coming out of my pipe. The events of my past life were appearing to me in the order in which they had occurred; wistfulness had taken possession of me, when the voices of two people in a small side room distracted me. They were tavern acquaintances of mine, and they were trying to agree amongst themselves whether to call me over to their table to drink tea with them. And, in truth, one of them soon did get up from the table and made the offer, and I didn’t refuse it. The acquaintance who invited me over to their table was a young man, twenty-five to thirty years of age, pleasant-looking, rather sharp-witted and knowledgeable about worldly matters, and things of that sort. His comrade, just like me, was around thirty-five

32 A haïduk was a type of irregular infantryman found in Central and parts of Southeast Europe from the late 16th century to the mid-19th century. They had reputations ranging from bandits to freedom fighters, depending on the time, place, and identity of their enemies, as well as the historical context. Chistyakov seems here to consider them to be domestic servants.
years old, gloomy, sullen, and unsociable. This, however, didn’t keep us from being cheerful and merry. Having drunk a glass of punch, we became more outspoken than usual, and one of these high-spirited pals asked me: ‘Please tell me, my friend, would you happen to have in your village of Falaleevka, in the Oryol governorate, a relative called Prince Chistyakov?’ At first, this question threw me into confusion and embarrassment, but I quickly regained my composure and replied cheerfully: ‘You surprise me when you say that there’s a prince that has the same surname as me. I’m the son of a commoner from Serpukhov, who was very impoverished, and for my education, to the extent that I received one, I’m indebted to the kindness of strangers.’

‘I’m very glad,’ this unknown pal said to me, ‘to hear that you don’t come from a family of princes, one of whom I once regaled pretty well. Listen to the tale that I have to tell: it’s a short one, and you shall not find it boring. I have a good intention, which I shall now communicate to you: I think that you would not refuse to help an honest man who’s engaged in a beneficent enterprise. I can assure you that you won’t regret it, for the profit shall be divided in halves.’

‘He began his tale in the following manner.’

Chapter 49: A Tripartite Union

“My father, Mister Golovorezov, was a wealthy nobleman, who owned an estate and a manor house not far from the glorious city of Kursk. My education was, by the standards of that area, the very best. When I was seventeen years old, I could read and write in Russian, and I could upbraid someone in French no worse than any Frenchman could. My father loved two things in the extreme: hunting with hounds and me. He hated my mother and my sister, for he considered the latter to be the pledge of his wife’s love for someone else. Although all of the neighbors tried to disabuse him of this, as they put it, ‘prejudice,’ my father nonetheless found reasons not to believe them. My main physical exercise was to go hunting with my father.’

“In my leisure time, I would chase after the female house-serfs and, upon gathering the servants together, I would order them to beat each other up. And I couldn’t get my fill of feasting my eyes upon them, seeing the blood that was flowing from their teeth and noses, and the hair that was flying off their heads in tufts. My father was surprised at the acuity of this entertaining pastime that I had contrived, and he assured me that, in the course of time, I would become a great man. Whenever my mother interceded on someone’s behalf, my father would cast a look of contempt in her direction and would make me spit in her eyes, which I did with great proficiency.’

“Our business affairs were going rather well, but one injudicious step on my father’s part ruined everything.”
“Once, while he was returning home from a hunting trip, on which I had accompanied him, he paid a call on Vulcan, our local serf blacksmith. Since my father was at that time in higher spirits than were appropriate, he started joking in a very indecent manner with Vulcan’s wife, a comely, dark-browed woman, who was a veritable Venus.33 The blacksmith became very angry, and soon things reached the point where the peasant grabbed his hammer and threatened to smash my father in the head with it. At that point, I advised my father to put off any reprisals against Vulcan until the next morning. But when, by the way, does a native-born Russian nobleman ever follow anyone’s advice, no matter how reasonable that advice might be? In accord with my father’s orders, the blacksmith was seized, his arms and legs were bound, and he was hoisted onto the anvil. And my father had the pleasure of taking revenge upon him in the cruelest and most shameful manner imaginable. I returned home, and no matter how much I bid the huntsmen to keep silent about this mischief, the damned fellows shot their mouths off. Everyone in the household found out about it, and my father hadn’t yet managed to return home in the morning from the smithy, when a police squad, newly arrived from Kursk, arrested him, and some time later, as we heard, he was sent away to go hunting beyond Lake Baikal.”

“Having become a full-fledged gentleman, with control over my actions, I now wished to become the sole master of the estate. And thus, upon consulting with a sensible scribe, I set off for the city and submitted a petition, in which I explained, as much as I was able, that I alone had the right to my father’s inheritance.”

“My court case lasted around half a year. I had spent a fourth part of the estate, now on dinners, now on gifts, when the case came out in my favor. My sister was completely banned from the estate, and it was said of my mother that I was obligated to feed and support her until the time of her death.”

“Returning to the village in triumph, I announced the decision of the court. The poor fellows who labored on our estate sighed, my mother sobbed, and my sister fell to her knees. But I was manly, as a nobleman should be: I threw my sister out on her ear, telling her that a certain prince from Moscow had come to Kursk, a prince who hires pretty girls to work in his service, and I had my mother lodged in a stockyard.”

“For two years, I lived a life that was downright aristocratic. Every day I would host banquets, I would organize festive games, complete with scenes of public merrymaking, with lots of singing and dancing, and I would hold innumerable gatherings of friends. But to make up for that, every week I would issue promissory notes, although I didn’t worry about that in the least. One of my friends assured me that in Moscow and Petersburg all of the prominent people

33 Venus, a Roman goddess whose functions encompassed love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity, and victory, was revered in Greco-Roman mythology as the embodiment of love and sexuality (she is usually depicted nude in paintings).
were doing this. Soon, however, everything took a different turn. Unaccommodating creditors, having grown weary of my refusals to pay them, took me to court, which at that time was already indulgent toward them. My entire estate was inventoried and sold at public auction. I moved out of the village with two servants and several hundred rubles. I was embarrassed to show up in Kursk, so I left to go seek my fortune in Oryol. But, just as had been the case in Kursk, I thought to myself, if not my name, then no doubt my father’s name, is well known there as a result of the incident with the blacksmith, which was being talked about everywhere. So I thought it best to assume the dandyish name of Prince Svetlozarov.”

“I was received splendidly in the best of homes. I had no scruples when it came to talking about my wealth and about the eminence and power of my closest relatives. And I did all of this with the intention of seducing some wealthy merchant into giving me his daughter’s hand in marriage. These are the only means available for improving the meager circumstances of a nobleman who has squandered his assets.”

“Among many other homes, I was very often well received in the home of Mister Perevertov, a wealthy tax farmer. He was a tall, gray-haired old man, who had a head the size of a pumpkin. But, at the same time, he was a millionaire, and that’s why he was received everywhere with great honor. He had only one daughter, an antiquated bride-to-be, and it was upon her that I turned all of my attention, while it was upon her father that I rendered all manner of services and favors.”

“Although old Perevertov was very miserly in regard to others, he didn’t spare any expense when it came to funding his own entertainments. This habit of his was very strange. Due to the fact that he was born into a low estate, however, he didn’t cast off his vile habits in his old age. He continued to pay an allowance to support three kept women: a merchant’s daughter, a peasant woman, and a wench who served as a chambermaid. The maintenance expenses that he incurred for them cost him dearly. Goddesses of this lower order require expenditures from their wealthy and elderly lovers that are no cheaper than those of well-born mistresses.”

“One day old Perevertov summoned me to his office in secret. I thought that perhaps he, having found out that I had been pleasing to his very stupid daughter, had been charmed by my radiance and that he would begin to suggest to me that I get married to her. But he promptly disabused me of that misconception when he provided me with the following explanation: ‘Dear Prince! You, perhaps, are surprised at my taste in women and wonder why I’m not seeking love from amongst these stylish ladies and their mannered daughters? Here’s the reason why: I can’t stand gaunt, pale, and fidgety dolls who, already at age fifteen, have their imagination turning gray on them, tired out by some theory about seeking pleasure and gratification in love. I only like women who have simple tastes, and women who are well endowed bodily. I have no interest in spiritual matters, in
the human mind or heart! Know this, dear prince, I have my eye on a beautiful peasant girl, although she passes for a princess. Around two hundred versets from here, there is a village named Falaleevka, which is filled with impoverished princes. The wife of one of these impoverished princes is no more than twenty years of age; she has a ruddy complexion, and is a plump, healthy creature. There’s nothing I wouldn’t spare to get her into my village seraglio. Wouldn’t you take it upon yourself, my dear friend, to bring her there for me? For it’s difficult for me, at my advanced age, to seduce a wife in full view of her husband. I would spare no expense, and I would give you a letter to the local village elder, who is deeply in debt to me and who would spare no effort to help you.’”

“After thinking this proposition over for a moment, I readily agreed. ‘It’s precisely now that I need to play up to this old satyr and please him,’ I thought to myself. And within a few days I departed, accompanied by one of my servants, having stocked up on gold ringlets, earrings, kerchiefs, taffeta fabric in various colors, and other allurements so beloved by village beauties. I aimed to arrive in Falaleevka at midnight. When the village elder had finished reading the note that I had handed him, a note that said, among other things, that he was to receive one hundred rubles for assisting me in my enterprise, he didn’t know how best to receive me. I wished to remain unknown to everyone in the village, so that’s why he led me to a small upstairs room for the night, locked the carriage inside the barn, and put the horses in the stable. And when he found out the next day what our enterprise was all about, he left silently. A half hour later, he entered my room with the young girl whom I had earlier been about to take for Princess Chistyakova, and he said to me: ‘Here to see you, most radiant prince, is Princess Makrida Ugorelova, a close friend of Fekla Sidorovna, the woman who so captivated you.’ I shed a few tears in front of Makrusha, revealing to her how I was burning with the flame of love for her beautiful girl friend. I don’t know whether it was my tears, or the ring that she was wearing on her finger and the kerchief that she was wearing on her neck, but suddenly she was persuaded, and she vowed that I would soon be receiving what I so ardently desired.”

“And, in truth, on the third day following this meeting, Princess Makrusha came to see me, accompanied by Princess Feklusha, and, under some pretext, the two of us were left alone. Although I’m a native-born nobleman, Fekla seemed comely to me, and the thought of possessing her became the prevailing one for me. Perhaps, you, Mister Chistyakov, don’t know how easy it is to attract a rural beauty. I suddenly kissed her hands and fell down on my knees before her, vowing my eternal love for her. She, the poor thing, had never seen this type of elegant behavior before from her husband, who was a country bumpkin. And, in less than an hour, laughing and weeping, she had become mine. Her awkwardness caught my fancy, and so I decided, after handing over to the village elder the hundred rubles that I had promised him, to spend some time with her, enjoying ourselves completely, until such time as I could persuade her to run off with me, for at that time she wasn’t yet convinced to do that. Five days later, she came by to see me, carrying a small bundle with her, and she said: ‘Let’s go! I’m
now sure that there’s nothing sinful in taking this action: my husband explained to me that other people are doing even worse things than this.’ At that very moment, I galloped away and soon arrived at the village, where Mister Perevertov had his dacha, which he had named ‘Pathos.’”

“The old man was delighted, but the young peasant girl, on the other hand, was deathly afraid, having found out that I was but her temporary lover, while he would be her permanent one. For several days, she refused to make him happy, but after receiving gifts from her beloved, after listening to my eloquent appeals, and after seeing the examples provided by the merchant’s daughter and her lady’s companion, her doubts were lifted. And thus Perevertov one morning handed over to me an expensive diamond ring, saying: ‘Here you go, prince, this is for your efforts!’”

“I considered this to be a propitious occasion, and so I announced, with great ardor, my passion for his daughter and asked for his parental permission to marry her. He opened his eyes up wide, and I didn’t at all find in those eyes the response that I was wishing for. ‘What?’ he exclaimed. ‘Do you dare to extend your lustful desires that far? This is extremely foolhardy on your part! Are you really unaware of the fact that my daughter is the sole heiress of my vast estate, one that I assembled by means of unremitting efforts on my part for some fifty-odd years? Many wealthy people who occupy high ranks in the government bureaucracy have long been seeking her hand in marriage. But I’m in no hurry. She hasn’t yet turned thirty years of age, and a bride with a dowry of a million rubles could find prominent young bridegrooms when she is fifty years of age. I beseech you, prince, not to quarrel with me and to leave my house immediately, never to show your face around here again.’ He turned around and left. I ordered the horses to be harnessed, and I galloped away from that ungrateful man, cursing him and all of his millions of rubles.”

“For nearly five years after that, I led a nomadic existence. I traveled through a multitude of cities, towns, and villages; I experienced both good fortune and misfortune, both happiness and unhappiness, and, during the course of my stay in Moscow, I became friends with this venerable fellow here, who, just like me, had been struggling with fate. He had abandoned a very miserly father, a priest in the town of Fatezh, and had set off to seek his fortune in the world.”

“I suddenly recalled Sylvester, Father Avksenty, and the justice officials in Fatezh, and so I got a bit confused, as things got slightly jumbled together, but I soon regained my composure, and I asked: ‘What happened next, my venerable friend?’”

“Well,” he continued, “you shall soon find out. After living in Moscow for a while, I unexpectedly caught sight of my Feklusha at the theatre and, in an instant, my passion was renewed, not so much for her, as much as for the sparkling diamonds that she was wearing. I soon learned that she was a kept woman, a mistress who was being financially supported by Prince Latron, a prominent
Polish nobleman, who, as a result of being already middle-aged, was so jealous that it was impossible to imagine. He wouldn’t let his prisoner out to go anywhere without him, and she would have to travel to the theatre in his carriage, accompanied by a group of servants. Despite these precautions, however, I did manage to see her alone after the performance. She recognized me, and she was pleasantly surprised to see me. And, with tears in her eyes, she told me that she would be ready to give herself, along with her entire estate, which was considerable, up to me, but that she didn’t know how to go about doing that, and she was afraid of her keeper, the old moneybags, who was very powerful. ‘No, it’s nothing, my beautiful Feklusha,’ I replied. ‘I shall look into it, and, no doubt, I shall find a way to abduct you and thus release you from the clutches of that wild beast.’ No matter how much my friend, Sylvester, and I thought it over, however, we couldn’t come up with any possible way that just the two of us could deal with this situation and get the better of Prince Latron. One person would be needed for continually sitting at the coachboxes; another person would be needed for standing at the rope ladder, since all of the doors to the house would be locked and bolted; and a third person would be needed for being in her bedroom and being ready to give us a sign as to what would be a little easier and a little more beneficial in bringing about her abduction. And so, my dear friend, do you agree to become a third member of our union? And, bear in mind, you wouldn’t go unrewarded! We would divide the property up into four equal parts: one part of the property would go to Feklusha, the same way that a dowry goes to a bride, while each of the other three parts of the property would go to each one of us. I would gallop off to Petersburg, while each one of you could go wherever you wish, and could do whatever you’d like.’

‘How could anyone fail to be seduced by such a delightful proposition!’ I exclaimed joyfully, although my heart had gone numb with fear, and the thought of vengeance was being agitated with every drop of blood that percolated inside it. We shook each other’s hand and, to make our union stronger, we drank two bottles of wine, and then we parted company.’

‘Lying in bed that night, I ruminated on how best to take revenge upon this trickster and the unfaithful woman who was his partner in crime. A very dear thought befell me, and I fell into a deep, pleasant sleep. The dreams I had that night reflected my exultation.’

‘The next morning, while each of my two comrades was busy undertaking his specific task, – one of them was preparing the carriage, while the other one was getting the rope ladder ready, – I rushed over to Prince Latron’s house. His servant told me that I couldn’t see him that day, for he was busy dealing with important matters.’

‘That shall not stop me,’ I said. ‘Go and announce me right away. The matter on which I’ve come is not a request concerning me. I’ve come for his own benefit. If he doesn’t hear me out now, then, by this time tomorrow, he shall be suffering and he shall be regretting it terribly.’"
“The servant looked me in the eyes with a surprised look on his face, then he left the room and, several minutes later, he led me into the grandee’s office.”

Chapter 50: Vengeance

“Inside the office, I saw a portly, outsized man that was well along in years. He was sitting at his desk, which was covered with papers, and an open book was lying in front of him. I made a bow in his direction and stood there silently.”

“What say you, my friend?” he asked.

“After I had finished explaining to him that I needed to speak with him in private, and after the servant, upon his command, had left the room, I proceeded to tell him in great detail about the evil intentions of the ne’er-do-well Svetlozarov and the unfaithful Feklusha. His Lordship burst into flame out of anger, jumped up from his seat, and started shouting: ‘Oh, I know how to seek revenge for an offense to my honor! Didn’t I raise this ungrateful creature up from the ashes and place her upon a radiant path? Didn’t I shower her with blessings? Oh, this very minute she shall get a taste of the full weight of my vengeance! She shall perish, the way that an insect would perish, beneath my feet.’”

“He wanted to go, but I made so bold as to stop him, and I said, bowing deeply: ‘Forgive me, most gracious sir, for my impudence: I would advise you to wait a bit. You should first make sure that I’m not a slanderer and that I’m not weaving fairy tales with evil intent. And, furthermore, it’s not enough for you to punish this villainess: you must see to it that this ne’er-do-well, who isn’t afraid to cause you such grief and to raise his unworthy eyes and gaze upon the object of passion of such an eminent person as yourself, suffers a more grievous punishment. Thus, I would advise you not only not to pretend that you are discontented, but to act even more benevolently than usual. And instead of locking and bolting the doors to your palace, you should equip her bedroom with a special passageway so that we wouldn’t be exposed to the dangers of climbing up the stairs.’”

“The prince thought for a moment and then looked at me with an expressive look on his face.”

“I understand that look on your face, Most Merciful Majesty,’ I exclaimed. ‘Does my suggestion seem questionable to you? But who would prohibit you from placing on secret guard duty whole dozens of servants who would see everything, while they themselves would remain invisible?’”

“This explanation calmed him down, and he promised that, if my words turned out to be true, and if he were to become convinced of the infidelity of the person whom he loved, then he wouldn’t fail to reward me accordingly.”

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“I left this house feeling very happy. Not any feeling of jealousy toward Feklusha, not any in the least, remained in my heart. When I arrived at the pub, I didn’t find any of my accomplices there, and so I waited for them with a pleasant feeling of indifference. I must confess that vengeance is a vice, but the human heart has a very strong affinity for it. How can a person not grieve, when the sole object of his love and devotion, a creature for whose pleasure and enjoyment one would spare no pains, and one would sacrifice one’s own health, changes so shamefully and abandons herself to another person, one who hasn’t done anything comparable for her? I started reasoning in accord with the rules of logic, and I proved incontestably to myself that what I was doing was wonderful. Nasty people ought to be punished, both for their own reformation and for the sake of providing an example for others.”

“Toward dinnertime, my comrades had gathered at the pub. They were very happy as a result of the success that they had in putting into motion the initial steps of their undertaking. Sylvester had prepared a sturdy cart, harnessed to three horses, and Prince Svetlozarov had prepared a good rope ladder. So as to be more high-spirited, we set to finishing off a bottle of wine, and, at our leisure, to discussing what each one of us would be doing with our share of the easy money that we would soon be receiving from wealthy Fiona.”

“‘I plan to abandon my prodigal lifestyle,’ said Sylvester. ‘I’m going to buy a nice little hamlet and learn how to till the soil. I have grown sick of giving myself up to constant dangers and of sacrificing my freedom, and perhaps even my life, over trifles!’”

“‘And I plan to do something completely different,’ said Prince Svetlozarov. ‘Living in Petersburg, I’m going to try to find an appropriate place for me to work, and Fiona will work in the theatre. My dexterity and vitality, combined with her charm and attractiveness, shall in no time, I hope, set me up for a prominent place in the world. I know many people who have followed this same path, and they turned out to be fortunate, happy, successful people!’”

“‘That’s not bad either,’ Sylvester noted. ‘But what about you, Mister Chistyakov? What do you plan to do with your share of the money?’”

“I replied that there would be enough time for me to think about that later, when I shall have placed the money in my pocket. Near the end of our dinner, the pub boy who was waiting on our table brought into our room a young girl, who asked: ‘Where might I find Prince Viktor Apollonovich?’”

“‘And what is it that you need from him, honey?’ the prince asked. ‘You’re looking at him’”

“Instead of giving him a reply, she handed him a little epistle that, as soon as he had read it, made him as mad as a rabid dog. He jumped up, laughed, and looked at everyone with sparkling eyes. After that, he sat down at the table, wrote several words on the little epistle, and, while handing the young lass his reply, along with several rubles, he said to
her: ‘Go, darling, and take this to your beautiful mistress. Only be sure to be unassuming.’”

“When the young ambassadress had gone, the faux prince drank down a glass of wine and then exclaimed: ‘These are sacrificial offerings of gratitude for the happiness that protects love! Follow me, friends, courage!’”

“‘Have you happened to lose your mind, friend?’ Sylvester asked. ‘What kind of reason is there for your immeasurable joy?’”

“‘Here, read this,’ his fellow prince exclaimed. ‘And marvel at the paths that Providence takes!’”

“Sylvester read aloud:”

“I don’t know, my dearest one, whether it’s me, whether it’s you, or whether it’s the both of us, that was born under a lucky star. Don’t trouble yourself any longer about trying to find the means to effect my escape; don’t become engrossed in thoughts about the dangers involved in that enterprise, for they have passed. And today I can still calm myself down in your sweet embraces! Here’s what has occurred: this morning, contrary to his usual habit, His Excellency summoned me to his room and, sitting me down beside him, he said affectionately: ‘Dear Fiona! I feel that up until now I have been treating you unfairly and cruelly. My experience, when it comes to knowing women, made me distrustful of your constancy, and I used violent, forceful measures to preserve your virtue. But now that I see that you’re the phoenix of the female sex, I must change my behavior this very minute. The beautiful bedrooms on the lower floor, to which an absolutely new and unique entrance has been made, shall now serve as your living quarters. You may receive visitors there, and you yourself may leave there to go see girlfriends, whenever you take it into your head to do so. You shall have your own equipage and special service; in a word, you shall have everything that can make the life of a young woman pleasant and enjoyable.’”

“Shedding tears of joy, I rushed over to throw my arms around his neck in an embrace, and I presented the face of gratitude so skilfully that he was surprised by it and looked at me with a wild expression on his face. Since I hadn’t expected such a reaction to my tenderness, I was a bit dumbfounded. But his face quickly resumed its earlier expression, and he said: ‘Fine, my dear, you may thank me afterwards, but right now I’m weighed down with business matters. You shall be eating dinner in your new rooms.’”

“So this is how things now stand, my dear friend. I’m writing this to you from the same room where I shall be awaiting you at midnight. I won’t start packing my bags before nightfall, for I fear that may raise some suspicion. Good-bye for now. I’m awaiting, with indescribable impatience, that longed-for hour when we shall be reunited.”
“Well, so what say you, gentlemen? Aren’t I a lucky man?’ Prince Svetlozarov asked challengingly, standing there with his hand on his hip.”

“Yes, of course, of course,’ we replied unanimously.”

“Indeed,’ he continued, ‘if I had been a little better educated and more learned, then, in this instance, I would have written a superb comedy. Yes, Mister Chistyakov, I seem to remember that you had talked about how you had studied somewhere, and rather successfully! Come on now, brother, do me a favor and write us a comedy. This theme, truly, deserves one!”

“If you please, I could write you a glorious tragicomedy, and I could begin working on it just as soon as we conclude our current business!’ I replied.”

“Why a tragicomedy? I hope that nothing untoward shall happen to us!”

“Have you perhaps forgotten about the prince?’ I asked. ‘Imagine the position that he shall be in tomorrow! The clown shall lose the mistress that he adores and so many of the valuables that he owns, and both of these things shall happen at one and the same time?”

“It’s true that I would pay dearly if only to be able to see what he would do!”

“But if you’re not able to witness this,’ I pointed out, ‘you can at least hear of it!’”

“Perhaps, with luck!”

“They began to pack the cart by themselves, for I had informed them that circumstances wouldn’t allow me to leave Moscow at the present time.”

“The time that they had longed for had arrived. Sylvester took his seat in the coachbox and drove the carriage out of the courtyard, while the prince and I set off on foot behind him. Our covered wagon stopped at a spot that was a hundred paces from the prince’s house, and we walked up to the gates, found Feklusha’s worthy little female messenger, who glanced over at us, and, with the help of the light coming from the lantern, recognized us, smiled at us, and opened the door for us. And in we went. After climbing up around a dozen steps, we turned onto a corridor. At this point, I said to the prince: ‘Brother, you go on alone, while I stay back here and stand guard. You never know what might happen. As soon as I notice anything, I’ll let you know right away. The two of you together, meanwhile, can be taking away the things that are most needed. When everything is ready, tell me, and I’ll help the two of you carry it all away.’ He was satisfied with my conjecture, and he set off down the corridor. About ten minutes later, I walked up to Feklusha’s entrance hall, locked the door, and let out a terrible scream: ‘Come here, quick! Thieves! Brigands! They’re beating us! They’re stabbing us!’ I heard a sonorous voice say: ‘Oh!’ The prince pushed against the doors, but I held on
tight and continued to scream. In a minute, around twenty servants, armed with weapons, came running in, and soon, so, too, did the prince himself, every feature of his face aflame with rage and fury.”

“Upon opening the doors, we went inside. The criminals, much like convicts who have been condemned to death, were standing there with deathly pale faces. Feklusha, upon seeing me, again cried out, and then she fainted.”

“‘You unfaithful, ungrateful woman!’ said the prince, who gave a sign, and, in an instant, their arms and legs were tied up with rope.”

“Alas! I was witness to a cruel administration of corporal punishment. Feklusha was undressed, left wearing only a shirt . . . But to what end should I describe for you the cruelty of the punishment that she received? It was commensurate with the act that she had committed. I was moved by her suffering, and I somewhat regretted the act of vengeance that I had committed against her. When her punishment had come to an end, she was, by order of the prince, lifted up, barefoot and wearing only a chemise, and tossed out into the snow. And then the gates were closed and locked behind her. I was petrified, suffering empathetically over her cruel fate, but there was no longer anything that I could do! ‘This is the reward that you get for being a debauched woman,’ I thought to myself, trying to harden my heart, but it trembled nonetheless, and I was nearly brought to tears.”

“Then it was His Excellency’s turn. Oh, they dealt with him in an incredibly cruel way! His entire body was turned into one large open wound. ‘This,’ said Latron, ‘is the way that I punish those scoundrels who dare to dishonor me! Take this criminal down to the cellar and order my family doctor to pay him a visit.’”

“When the servants had carried Svetlozarov away, for he not only couldn’t walk, but could hardly even breathe, the prince, turning to me, said: ‘You, my friend, are to come see me tomorrow after dinner. I shall be free at that time, and I shall try to reward you for your loyalty and your devotion!’”

“I bowed down to him deeply and left. Lying in bed at the inn where I was staying, I couldn’t get to sleep for a long time: the events of the preceding night were disturbing me. ‘What difference is there between Latron and Yastrebov?’ I asked myself. ‘One of them laughs when he learns of his wife’s betrayal, while the other one bathes his lover’s infidelity in blood. The former threw me out of his house disgracefully on account of my diligence, while the latter wishes to reward me. This is how differently the grand people repay the little people for the services that they render.’”

“I awoke around the time for mass, and I debated the question: ‘in what way would His Excellency reward me? If it were by means of money or of gifts, then either the one or the other would be sufficient, in light of the munificence that was being shown to me by the god-fearing Madam Byvalova. The best thing that he could do would be to hire me to serve in his chancellery. He’s such a prominent figure that I would soon be able to
compile enough money to allow me to achieve my fortune and my happiness. How was I to know? Perhaps he would hire me? I’m educated and learned enough, and I’ve also spent quite a lot of time circulating among people who live in upper-class households, so I wouldn’t cause him any embarrassment. I would only have to hint to him about this, and he would probably agree to do it. And, after serving him for a year or two, I would become his secretary! And that’s no laughing matter!”

“In the evening, I set off on my way. I strutted down the road with such an air of importance, all puffed up and haughty, like a man who, in a short period of time, has gone from being a village innkeeper to being a tax farmer. It grieved me extremely that none of my acquaintances happened to run into me, so that I might have the chance to say to one of them: ‘Do you know whom I’m going to go see? Prince Latron! He told me to come visit him this very evening!’"

“Scarcely had I stepped foot inside the gates to his house, when two enormous servants grabbed hold of me under my arms and led me up the stairs. I smiled readily and thought to myself: ‘This is what it means to please a prominent nobleman! Did I ever think that I would deserve such an honor back when I was living in Falaleevka? It would never have even entered my mind! Is this a custom that’s followed in the capital? It’s true that Yastrebov acted unfairly toward me; but, after all, not all of the people in the world are Yastrebovs, and Prince Latron is clear proof of that.’ When they had succeeded, by the end of this parade, in leading me to His Excellency’s office, I could see that he was pale and gloomy, and, it seemed to me, he was not himself. His pensiveness was so great that he didn’t even notice our arrival, until his servants announced loudly: ‘Here he is!’ At that point, the gentleman glanced over at me with bloodshot eyes and remained silent. I, upon bowing deeply to him, said: ‘My most kind Sir! Yesterday I had the great good fortune of receiving an order to appear before Your Lordship.’”

“‘Well, you treacherous ne’er-do-well,’ he said, ‘you’ve arrived just at the right time. I shall show you my gratitude for the service that you have rendered me, as a result of which I have lost the lovely Fiona, without whom my life is a burden for me! Carry out the order that I have given you.’”

“His servants seized me by the collar and dragged me away. I was trembling, as if I were suffering from a fever: my teeth were chattering, my lips were quivering, I was moaning and groaning, and I couldn’t utter a single word. I imagined vividly the pain and suffering that Svetlozarov must have experienced. Leading me through a number of courtyards, his servants brought me to a small cellar that was illuminated by a small lamp.”

“‘Here’s your bed,’ said one of the men who had conducted me to the cellar, pointing to a small mattress on the floor that was covered with some gristly canvas.”

“When I was left alone by myself, I fell upon the bed in a state of madness and gave myself up to despair.”
Chapter 51: Despair

“I remained in that same solitary state until morning arrived. Thoughts were swirling around inside my head, like foggy clouds, like a lacerating whirlwind. I tried to revive some of the beautiful treatises that I had read during the time of my studies under Bibarius’s tutelage: “Mundus hic est quam optimus; virtus nullo dominatu premitus,” [This world is best when virtue is not oppressed by any power], etc. etc. But they only irritated me even more.”

“Around noontime, an elderly man who looked like a butler, judging by his rosy cheeks and his fat belly, came to see me. He placed some rye bread and a bottle of water on a small table. ‘What’s this?’ I asked. ‘Your food and drink,’ he replied. He left and locked the door behind him. ‘Oh, the cruelty! Oh, the inhumanity!’ I thought to myself. ‘Is this possible only because the wealthy and powerful can arbitrarily take freedom away from one who’s born free? Isn’t this to mock the laws and to use the right of might, which is the same thing as the right of the brigand? No, I won’t debase myself by being submissive and obedient to a tyrant. And so I shall reject his meager gift. I would rather die from starvation than forget that I’m a native-born prince and an educated, learned man!’”

“I turned my face away from the table and remained obstinate until evening came. But, at that point, I began to feel tempted. I glanced over at the bread and involuntarily started eating it assiduously, washing it down with water.”

“I spent around two weeks in this manner, living like a prisoner in solitary confinement. The butler visited me twice each day. He would bring me bread and water, adjust the lamp, and then leave silently, despite my assaulting him with questions. At this point, a sweet idea came to my mind. ‘Why have I been playing the fool up until now?’ I said to myself. ‘The butler, it’s true, is thick-set and pot-bellied, while I have become emaciated from my long period of observing a fast. He, however, is more than fifty years old, while I’m not yet thirty. What would prevent me from flinging myself at him when he comes here at evening time, tying him to this pillar, and saving myself by escaping from here? This is, without fail, what I shall do. Murderers and brigands intensify their crime when they flee from imprisonment, but why shouldn’t I do this, since I’m innocent of any wrongdoing and have been placed in captivity through coercion?’”

“I untied a proper length of rope from the underside of the bed and hid it, waiting for the butler with a palpitating heart, as if I were preparing to commit a robbery. He appeared in the cellar, placed the bread and water on the small table, and had just reached the lamp, when I rushed at him like a wild, primitive beast, and knocked him off his feet. ‘Oh!’ he exclaimed. ‘Please have mercy on me!’ ‘If you make even the slightest sound,’ I told him, ‘I shall smother you to death right here and now. But if you remain quiet, then this is how things shall go: I shall tie you loosely to this pillar, and then I shall leave. At that time, someone shall come at your first shout for help. You shall be free, without having to suffer through two weeks of imprisonment and without having to fast for even a single
hour! Well, what do you say to that? Make your choice right now, without any dawdling!"

"What do you mean, ‘dawdling?’ he said, gasping for breath. ‘I made my choice long ago: go ahead and tie me up to the pillar! Do you find it a laughing matter to starve oneself on bread and water?’ I went ahead and tied him to the pillar and, taking advantage of the evening darkness, I rushed off to escape. I hadn’t yet succeeded in reaching the gates, when the plaintive voice of my prisoner rang out: ‘Help me! Oh, please help me!’"

"God will help you,’ I said, and I started running to my inn faster than before. When I reached the door to the room that I had been occupying, I examined the lock and was happy to find that everything was intact. I unlocked the door, went inside, and found that everything was in its right place. ‘Thank God,’ I said to myself. ‘Not all inns have landlords that are so honest. Now I need to order myself a nice supper, so as to reward my stomach’s loss and repay it with interest.’ Thus, after eating a tasty meal and drinking a glass or two of wine, I lay down in bed in a pleasant state of mind, fell fast asleep, and didn’t awaken until the sun had already risen and the peal of church bells could be heard ringing out everywhere.”

“I thought it wise to settle my accounts with the landlord right away, to pack up my things, and to get out of the inn, for I was certain that Prince Latron could have found out from Svetlozarov where it was that I was staying and could once again abduct me and put me into a dungeon. To that end, I summoned the landlord and told him to give me my bill, from which I saw that I owed him nearly fifty rubles for my food and lodging, my maid service, and my beverage service. Although this was an extremely expensive stay, I didn’t want to start any arguments unnecessarily, so I decided to agree to pay the bill and went to get the money out of my suitcase. But, – alas! – apparently an evil fate had decided to play all manner of dirty tricks on me at the very inception of my journey! I groped about in all of the corners of my suitcase, but nowhere could I find the purse in which I had put my money. My knees began to shake, beads of sweat came out onto my brow, and I was shivering the way that a scoundrel does when his death sentence is being read out to him.”

"What has happened to you, Mister Chistyakov?’ my landlord asked me.”

"Something for which you shall get to taste some Moscow justice!’ I replied with all of the ferocity of a tigress that has lost her cubs. ‘Where has the money gone that was inside my suitcase? And there was quite a lot of it there.’”

"Who was it that had the key to your doors?’ he asked with sang-froid.”

"I did, no doubt about it!’”

"Was your door locked?”
“Of course it was!”

“Was everything in its proper place when you entered the room?”

“It seemed that way yesterday, but today it’s completely different.”

“Why didn’t you tell me about this yesterday? I run an inn, which is like an ocean: there is a constant alternation between high tide and low tide, between rising and ebbing tidewaters. Yesterday evening and this morning around fifty people exited my inn, and just as many new people entered it.”

“But couldn’t one have given some thought,’ I exclaimed, having lost my patience, ‘to the possibility that, in this ocean of people, one would find thieves and crooks? What are you a landlord for, if you’re not on the lookout for such things? Or are you perhaps dividing things up with some rogues and holding on to some counterfeit keys?’”

“Honorable sir!’ said the landlord, bowing in my direction, ‘if you don’t pay me the money owed to me, and, most of all, if you start to be obstinate and disturb the proper order here, our peace and quiet, I shall summon the district police inspector, and then you can speak with him about rogues and counterfeit keys! Please wait here!’ With these words, he left.”

“What am I going to do now?’ I thought. ‘I have been robbed, I have nothing left, except some linen, some clothes, and the small amount of money that I had in my pocket during my captivity. Wouldn’t it be better for me to clear out of here with what little I have left before they put me in jail?’”

“With these words, I hurriedly packed into my suitcase everything that I had left, I exited the inn through the back porch, and I rushed off to make my escape. Much later I learned that my landlord wasn’t even thinking of going to look for any justice official, but was merely looking to see what I would do. When he saw that I was fleeing, he nearly split his sides from laughing, and he sent several of his employees to stand out in the street, stamp their feet, and shout: ‘Stop him! Stop him!’ Hearing this, I would, like a scared hare, break into a run in the opposite direction.”

“I roamed the streets of Moscow until twilight, and I still hadn’t given any thought to where I would find lodging for the night. That’s how scattered my thoughts were. I was in such distress that I would look every passerby in the face with greedy eyes so that when I found in one of them a thief, a robber, or a murderer, I would extend my hand out to him and say: ‘Brother! I’m your comrade! Together we shall start to take revenge upon those fiends, those monsters, who call themselves honorable people!’”

“Seeing everywhere meek faces, tender looks, and friendly smiles on people’s faces, I would say to myself: ‘No, you won’t deceive me, you crocodiles! You’re smiling, but your teeth and your claws are horrifying. I need a friend whose glances would be gloomy, whose eyes would be bloody, and whose cheeks would be pale and gaunt. I
need a friend whose looks would make one’s hair stand on end. In him, I would get to know a creature who, like me, is unfortunate and unhappy, and I would throw myself into his warm embrace.”

“My head was beginning to spin, everything was going dark before my eyes, and I suddenly fell unconscious, face down in the snow.”

“When I regained consciousness, I felt like I was riding in a carriage. I was quite struck by this. ‘How did I wind up here?’ I thought to myself, ‘for I remember clearly that I had fallen in the snow.’ Feeling around me, I found that my suitcase was beside me. Was it possible that Providence wanted to reward me for the misfortunes that I had innocently endured? Evidently, that was the case! A quarter of an hour later, the carriage entered a vast courtyard, in the middle of which towered a rather nice house.”

“Upon getting out of the carriage, with the assistance of two servants who were waiting upon me very diligently, I entered a large hall, and, out of timidity and embarrassment, I didn’t dare to turn or look around. Everything indicated that the gentleman who owned the house was a wealthy and prominent man. The thought occurred to me that I might perhaps have fallen once again into the hands of Prince Latron, who had ordered that I be taken to one of his other homes, where I would be tormented for escaping. I turned pale and started shaking. At this point, a man, who was a little over forty years old, dressed in fine clothing, with a diamond ring on his finger and gold buckles on his shoes, came up to me.”

“Don’t be afraid, young man,’ he said to me in a friendly voice. ‘This house belongs to a man who doesn’t like it when even a single teardrop falls to the floor in one of his rooms or when even a single sigh is dispersed into the air that he’s breathing.’”

“Your Excellency!’ I replied, calming down, ‘I don’t have the honor of knowing the owner of this house, but I did become a little confused at the recollection of a certain man who once offended me very deeply.’”

“Thank heaven,’ said the stranger, ‘that you happened to wind up at the home of Mister Dobroslavov. Nobody leaves his house saddened or aggrieved, and he, of course, shall not cease trying to help you as far as is possible.’”

“I would be very much beholden to Your Excellency,’ I replied, bowing deeply, ‘if you, most kind sir, were to put in a good word for me with Mister Dobroslavov and were to plead on my behalf for his protection and his patronage!’”

“His Excellency promised to do this for me, and I continued bowing to him, when suddenly the door opened noisily and in walked a man with a gentle look on his face and a majestic bearing in his stature. My Excellency rushed over to him and removed his expensive fur coat. And I saw two shining stars on Dobroslavov’s chest.”
“He glanced over at me with a kind look on his face. I bowed to him so deeply that I nearly dug my nose into the floor. Dobroslavov nodded his head with a smile and walked farther, while right behind him walked my prominent stranger, who handed Dobroslavov’s fur coat over to one of the footmen. In extreme bewilderment, I asked the latter: who is the gentleman that set off behind Dobroslavov? ‘That is Olympius, His Excellency’s valet,’ the footman replied. ‘And he’s likewise a serf who works on his lord’s estate, just the same as we are!’”

“I became a little embarrassed at showing my ignorance. But how could I have thought that a servant would strut around, wearing such dandyish clothing, adorned with gold and diamonds? Mister Dobroslavov, now he, of course, was an exemplary nobleman!”

“A quarter of an hour later, Olympius came in and announced that His Excellency was too busy to be able to take up my case today, and so he would wait until tomorrow morning to do that. In the meantime, they conducted me to a small bed chamber upstairs, which was rather tidily cleaned up, they served me a tasty supper, and I fell asleep, praising the kindness of Providence and the munificence of His Excellency.”

Chapter 52: An Exemplary Person

“Upon awakening the next morning, I fell to thinking about my future fate. Just then, Olympius came by to see me and said: ‘Our gentleman is an exemplary person! He’s wealthy and prominent, and he has many powerful friends. But he uses all of these weapons for nothing other than philanthropic activities. He has two days each week that are allocated to gathering together at his house people who are in need of assistance. Retired soldiers who lack pensions, defenseless widows and orphans, impoverished girls, who, lacking a dowry, can’t find husbands, – all of these people come to see the philanthropist Dobroslavov, and they receive comfort and joy from him. He tries to perform his acts of kindness in secret, hoping that the merciful heavens above shall repay him on our common Judgment Day. Yesterday you experienced personally a test of his charity! Towards evening time, while driving around leisurely in his carriage, he happened to spot you lying there in the snow. He felt compassion, and took pity on you, just as the Biblical Zacchaeus34 had once done. He alighted from the carriage, he ordered that you be seated inside it, and then he himself walked home on foot.’”

“‘Oh, if only there were more people such as this in the world,’ I exclaimed. ‘Then the world would truly be not such a wicked place! But while you might meet with one person who is kind and honorable, there are thousands of hard-hearted rogues out there who would rob you of your money, would dispirit you in your soul, would suck out all of your life blood, and, afterwards, would boast that they hadn’t eaten you all up, bones and all!’”

34 In the Bible, Zacchaeus (whose name means “pure, innocent”) was the chief tax-collector at Jericho. He is known primarily for the faith that he showed in climbing a sycamore tree to see Jesus. He is also known for his generosity in giving away half of all that he possessed.
“At around ten o’clock, I was summoned to Dobroslavov’s office. He listened patiently to my life story, in which I presented evidence of my successes in the various branches of scholarly knowledge, of the good turns that I had rendered to Yastrebov and Latron, and of the rewards that I had been given for rendering those good turns.”

“Dobroslavov shrugged his shoulders and then said, gently and meekly:

‘What’s to be done, my friend? In your situation, you should take patience as your motto and wait until an opportunity presents itself to change your circumstances. To grumble about prominent and powerful people means that you are throwing stones at the choppy waters of an agitated lake. Shall you pacify those waters by doing that?’

‘As soon as you received an education and became so learned,’ he continued, ‘you were capable of occupying the government post that I intend to offer to you now. Although I’m a human being, and thus susceptible to various human weaknesses and vices, as a result of the lofty charitable impulses that have been instilled in me, I find a sweet joy in my heart when I provide whatever assistance I can to those people who come running to me with requests to satisfy their needs. Would you want to occupy a position as a kind of secretary to me? Your job would consist in examining these requests for assistance, of maintaining a register of them, and of determining whether the assistance that is being requested is truly worth providing. For not infrequently depravity dresses itself up in the guise of helpless virtue, it receives assistance, and then it uses that assistance for the corruption of others. One must know how to provide assistance. Otherwise, in lieu of a philanthropist, there emerges a corrupter of mores and manners, an accomplice in crime with some ne’er-do-wells. I know of one grandee, a nobleman who achieved prominence through the good turns that were rendered by his ancestors and through their inordinate wealth. He wanted to gain a reputation as a charitable person, and so he ordered that on all of the holidays that were celebrated at his house, – that is, births, name days, weddings, funerals, and so on, – bags filled with copper coins would be distributed along the streets and a few of these coins would be handed out to all of the people who stretched out their hands. It seems that this practice, in and of itself, is a charitable one that pleases God and is thus worthy of praise and imitation. But what are the consequences of such a practice? A noble poverty is brief and diffident, like a virginal girl. It doesn’t raise a hue and cry over alms, it doesn’t throw itself at the feet of a passerby and let loose a piercing scream. Instead, a noble poverty just stands there, with downcast eyes, and leaves it to the testing look of a kind person, – by his pale cheeks, his deep sighs, his bashfulness, – to judge whether or not it has need of assistance.’

‘My wealthy man didn’t think this way. A crowd of destitute vagrants of both sexes and of various ages, with a howl, encircled his heaps of money. All of them received some money, but those that were more dexterous and shameless at once received two or three times as much as others did. From there, they rushed over
to the taverns and got drunk, committing excesses, and, after squandering money on drink all night, they went out onto the streets to rob passers-by of their money.’

‘I don’t want this to happen. And so, my friend, I would be glad if you were to agree to stay at my house and to work for me there. You would be tracking down unfortunate souls, crushed by fate, who sigh in secret and keep quiet. Bring such souls to me. Provide them the opportunity to delight in their fate and to share with me the sweetness of philanthropy. Oh, the blessing of a sufferer who has been consoled and comforted is like fragrant incense burning before the throne of lofty charity! Just as clean water washes the body, this blessing shall wash your soul, and, likening it, as they used to do in the olden days, to the supreme cherub, it shall make one worthy to stand near the altar of the celestial lamb.’

“Tears fell from the eyes of this virtuous man. He wiped them away with a smile, and I, rushing forward to fall at his feet with tears in my eyes, kissed my benefactor’s right hand with emotion. I assumed my new government post, which was such pleasant service, and within a month’s time I was swimming in pleasure. Oh, what sweet duty it is to serve as a comforter and consoler of an unfortunate and unhappy person! For this job, the only thing that I could have wished for was wealth, the only things that I could have wished for were the scepter and the diadem!”

“The morning was devoted to selecting requests to honor and to considering their merits. I used the time after dinner to examine and certify the petitioners. No matter where I appeared, I was greeted everywhere with groans, howls, and oaths attesting to the poverty of these people, and I was accompanied everywhere by assurances of their eternal gratitude. I looked upon all of this, however, with a searching look, and not infrequently I refused their petitions. I was, to wit, the one who was entrusted to do this, for His Excellency absolutely trusted me in all things. However, for all of my perspicacity (no matter how much of this quality there actually had been in me, I eventually managed to exhaust all of it without a trace), it happened once that I made a blunder, and a rather serious one at that. A young girl, accompanied by an elderly woman, came up to me with an entreaty. The description that she provided of her misfortunes was so striking, the tears that she shed over the loss of her mother and brother were so touching, every movement of her face, as she spoke, was so convincing, that I believed her completely. And so the young beauty and the elderly woman who accompanied her received a rather significant amount of assistance, although I didn’t think to inquire about their life.”

“About two weeks after this, I was summoned to Dobroslavov’s office, where I got to see the sternness and indignation that was evident in the expression on his face. I was struck by his being in such an uncommon mood, and so I asked him timidly about the reason why he was upset.”

“‘You yourself are the reason for my discontent,’ he replied. ‘Did you indeed inquire about the kind of life that the elderly woman and the young girl had been leading, and even about its current state? The same two people on whose behalf I have, of late, been pleading so much?’”

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“No, I must confess that I didn’t; but their outward appearance, their tears . . .”

“Deception and pretense were at play here! Hear me out! Listen to what has resulted from this. For some time now, a gang of vagrants has made its appearance in Moscow, a gang that has stirred anxiety among members of the police force and that has committed crimes and offences against the inhabitants of the city. For a long time, we were unable to discover the tracks that led to their hiding place, but recently we found them. The elderly woman and her daughter, both of whom you recommended highly to me, had other identities: the former was the gang’s landlady, while the latter was the mistress of the gang’s leader. With the help of the money that I gave them, they hurried over to bribe the guards at a dungeon, so that, after they had set free the dear friends of theirs who were being held prisoner there, they could flee the city for a while, at least until some time had passed. But they didn’t succeed in this venture: they were captured. And if you wish to assure yourself of the truth of this account, go on the first trading day to the square, where you shall see the just deserts that they received.”

“My God!” I exclaimed, turning pale and stepping back while trembling.

“My friend,’ Dobroslavov continued, ‘I don’t want to imitate those others, who, in my place, would most likely have fired you from your position for having committed a comparable mistake. I demand only that in future you be more discerning, and that you not consider as virtuous the person who bears only the appearance of virtue. They say that a crocodile, when crawling into some bushes, imitates the sound made by a crying baby. An inexperienced person approaches the source of the crying, searches the bushes, and ends up being the pitiful prey of that horrible monster.’”

“I swore anew to remember his admonitions and to act in accordance with them. My year of service passed: I was very pleased with Dobroslavov, and he with me.”

“It’s time for me to mention another adventure of mine, one that had a profound impact on me, or, better to say, one on which I had a profound impact. During the first few months of my service at Dobroslavov’s house, while visiting the city’s theatres and other forms of public assembly, I made the acquaintance of a young Frenchman named Lucien. He was young, handsome, affectionate, gentle, and kind. And I became friends with him wholeheartedly. He was born in Moscow, and that’s the reason why he didn’t resemble a Frenchman at all. Shortly thereafter, he introduced me to his mother, a lovely woman who ran a boarding school, where young maidens from good homes were brought up and educated. The old woman became very fond of me, and all three of us spent our evenings together pleasantly. Meanwhile, a history teacher moved away, and I was offered his room, which I gladly accepted, calculating that I could occupy two rooms and receive rent from both of them, which wouldn’t be a bad thing. In this way, I would occupy myself with attending to Mr. Dobroslavov’s business matters in the morning and, after dinner, I would spend about three hours giving lessons and then leaving to go certify the petitioners who were submitting requests for financial assistance. I didn’t notify His Excellency about this new job of mine, fearing that he might forbid me from working at
it. Avarice was to blame for this, and, moreover, vanity, since it was flattering for me to think that I was able to handle two jobs at once. ‘If it’s not completely incorrect to say,’ I thought to myself, ‘that a servant cannot serve two different masters, then, I suppose, this doesn’t apply to all masters. For here, in my case, for instance, I’m serving two masters, and both of them are satisfied with the service that I’m rendering.’”

“One evening, Lucien’s mother led me to her bedroom, sat me down on her bed, and started talking to me while sighing: ‘I hope, my venerable friend, that you shall grant the wishes of a mother who loves her child, and if you do refuse to help her, then, I suppose, I can rely on you to preserve the secret that she is entrusting to your heart. You yourself might become a father some day, and then you shall be able to judge what one’s love for an only son means.’”

“This prelude astonished me. My imagination started to blaze up. I recalled so vividly what had happened to my Nikandr, as if I had lost him just yesterday, and I swore to help the madam in her undertakings, no matter what the cost. Lucien’s mother continued:

‘You’ve noticed in my boarding school, I think, the maiden Maria, who is so modest, so gentle, and so beautiful in both her face and her soul? But, along with that, she’s so bashful that she turns bright red every time that any man comes close to her. She’s not able to hear the word ‘love’ without starting to tremble, although she herself is the fruit of a passionate love affair, that’s to say: she’s the illegitimate daughter of a certain prominent gentleman and a certain princess, who would sooner agree to bestow upon her lover a daughter than to get married to him, and, in that way, by distressing her relatives, defame herself forever. ‘I would willingly unite my fate with yours,’ she would say to her lover during their moments of passionate rapture, ‘but judge for yourself: your forefather, who first gained fame in the Russian chronicles, lived during the times of Peter the Great, while mine was a native-born prince, who descended directly from Rurik.35 And he was a boyar who was already considered a close friend of the crown at the court of Tsar Ivan the Terrible.’

‘Against such pieces of evidence, it was impossible for the lover to stand his ground. He patiently awaited his goddess’s assent, and when she gave birth to Maria, they placed her in my care, making me responsible for her upbringing and education. The mother and father have sometimes put some not inconsiderable sums of money into a foreign bank in their daughter’s name, such that her dowry now extends up to a hundred thousand rubles. Judge for yourself, my kind friend, what a bride she would make! I long ago arranged for her to marry my son, who,

35 According to the 12th-century Primary Chronicle, Rurik was a Varangian chieftain of the people of Rus’ who, in the year 862, was invited to reign in Novgorod, which he did until his death in 879. He is considered to be the founder of the Rurik dynasty, which went on to rule Kievan Rus’ and its principalities, and then the Tsardom of Russia, until the death of Tsar Fyodor I in 1598. Tsar Vasily IV, who reigned until 1610, was the last Rurikid monarch of Russia.
as you yourself would agree, is worthy of her. But, – oh, cruel prejudices! – her
mother, who is currently married to Prince Dereviashkii, a very well-known, but
senile, old man, who traces his family lineage back to Prince Kii, and she doesn’t
want to hear that her daughter has been betrothed to anybody other than a cavalry
guard officer from a prominent family: she’s very partial to this social class! Now
you understand my plan a little. No other option remains open to me than to
incline the beautiful Maria to love my son. And there, evidently, the
circumstances shall assume a new aspect. A guard officer won’t take her as his
bride, she shall be my son’s bride, and you shall receive sufficient remuneration
for your assistance in this matter.

‘You, perhaps, can guess what it is that I wish to ask of you? Listen to me! I, as
his mother, can’t undertake to assist my son without arousing suspicion: the
praises of a mother are dubious. Entrusting someone with a secret is dangerous.
I’m surrounded by young maidens, by their chambermaids, and by other swine
who seldom leave my side. It would be much more opportune if you were to be
the one who would undertake to assist him in this matter, you, an outsider, to
whom nobody pays any particular attention, and, moreover, who’s a tutor! So
what do you say to that suggestion? Do you agree to help me? My gratitude
would be commensurate with the service that you would render.’

“Thus spoke the eloquent madam, and I fell to thinking about how I should respond to
her offer, one that was so flattering. I requested that I be granted several hours to
consider this offer, and I promised to bring her a response the very next day at this same
hour.”

“Lying in bed in my room that evening, I reasoned thusly: ‘Lucien is my friend, and his
mother loves me very much: why, then, shouldn’t I be of service to them? Despite her
rank, Maria’s mother, Her Radiance, is a quarrelsome woman who doesn’t deserve a kind
word. It’s apparent that, in her declining years, she is as frivolous as a spoiled child. I’ve
already been serving two boyars zealously, but I’ve been poorly compensated by them.
Now I shall try to do the opposite with them, and we shall see what happens!’”

“The next morning, I wrote a little epistle addressed to Maria, in which I depicted, in very
lively colors and in the most luxuriant, captivating form, sweet Lucien’s love for her.
How many delights, how much enjoyment, and how much bliss await her in the warm
embraces of this fine young man! I had planned to insert this little epistle into her
notebook while she was being examined during her lesson, and that’s why I advised her
to provide me, on the following day, in the same manner, with a sincere response to this
epistle.”

“I carried out my plan successfully, achieving what I had intended, and madam was
beside herself with joy from what she had heard from me. ‘You were born to become a
great man,’ she noted, and I smiled, smoothing out my side-whiskers. I readily agree that
a deed, such as the one that I was carrying out in regard to Maria, was unpardonable and
was deserving of all manner of censure. But I had decided that I would reveal to you the whole truth about myself, without hiding any of my flaws.”

“The next day, the beautiful Maria, with her eyes cast down, her cheeks glowing, and her bosom quivering, handed me her notebook, in which I found, and skillfully removed, her little epistle. And when I had returned to the landlady’s office, both of us read the following:

‘My heart cannot endure secretiveness and pretense. So Lucien loves me? You have provided me with some unexpected and delightful news! I myself have loved him passionately for a long time now, but I was afraid to reveal the impulses of my heart. As soon as you decide to take part in this relationship, I shall no longer hide myself away, and I can tell you sincerely that, as soon as you find the opportunity, I shall fling myself into the warm embraces of my beloved with all of the flame of passion that is burning inside me!’

“Pushing her eyeglasses onto her forehead, the headmistress at the boarding school gazed at me with a look of amazement on her face, while I laughed aloud, at the top of my lungs.”

“‘This is what comes from being open-hearted, from being frank!’ I said. ‘This is what comes from being brought up and educated in your boarding school!’”

“‘Don’t joke about the upbringing and education provided in my boarding school,’ the madam said. ‘I can assure you that they’re not, in the least, inferior to what is provided in any Parisian institute whatsoever.’”

“After our meeting, which satisfied the both of us, the correspondence continued. I soon compelled Lucien to write on his own behalf, that’s to say, to rewrite what I had composed for him. One can’t depict the rapture of youthful innocence that Maria experienced when she read the inscription written in the handwriting of her most dearly beloved. Four months had not yet passed when the perspicacious mother noticed, and reported to me, that Maria was wearing beneath her heart the pledge of love and happiness: in a word, she was pregnant with Lucien’s child. ‘Now we must give some thought,’ said the madam, ‘to how best to bring an end to this matter, one that had commenced so successfully. I’m already taking this task upon myself, Mister Chistyakov, and so I shall not trouble you any further! You may rest assured that you shall receive the denouement and the recompense that you are owed for your fine efforts. I would likewise advise you not to wile away your time, amusing yourself with learning and instruction: if you were to dedicate all of your energies to the good turns that you are rendering for Dobroslavov, you wouldn’t be forsaken.’”

“Such a sudden and instantaneous break seemed odd to me. But I soon calmed down, picturing to myself how the recompense that I would be receiving, after this comedy had come to an end, would be sufficient for me to live comfortably, without having to draw a salary for my tutoring. With all of my heart and soul, I stuck to rendering the good turns
that benefitted Dobroslavov, emending my job performance and, from time to time, visiting madam at her home, where I was received affectionately. And my life flowed as smoothly as a gentle, clear stream does in a flowering valley. I was a bit angered, it’s true, by the incident involving the beautiful female petitioner that I mentioned to you shortly before this episode with Lucien and Maria. But seeing as how my benefactor had forgotten all about that earlier episode, I worried very little about it myself. I looked upon the whole world with indifference. At that point in time, internal revolts were raging in Poland, a war was taking place in Turkey, and famine was occurring in Sweden. But I, sighing over the disasters afflicting a suffering humankind, was saying: ‘We ourselves are to blame! Why do people wish to have more significance than they should? Why do they wish to be happier than they possibly can be? To behave like a madman, and to torment oneself over that, – this is the lot of the poor creature that a human being is. Blessed is the person who, like me, has found a peaceful refuge, who lives his life being content with little, and who doesn’t aspire to possess that which extends beyond the sphere of the possible.’”

**Chapter 53: The Tsarina of the Night**

“One morning, while I was sitting in my room and rummaging through some papers, I was extremely astounded to hear a mixed cry, resembling that of a woman, that sounded as if it was coming from Dobroslavov’s office. Since this had never happened before, I became worried and rushed over there. Who could describe my confusion at seeing such a picture! Dobroslavov was sitting in his armchair, and his head, which he had covered with his hands, was lying on the desk. Maria was on her knees in front of him, clasping his legs in an embrace, sobbing, and saying: ‘Take pity on me, my father!’ Lying next to her, in a small cradle, was an infant, who was crying loudly. And, in a corner of the room, with her eyes downcast, stood Lucien’s mother, the doleful madam.”

“Scarcely had I managed to take in, at a glance, all of these various things, which I was so strongly struck by, when madam looked over at me, with rage in her eyes, then came running up to me, grabbed me by the hand, and, extending it toward Dobroslavov, cried out: ‘Here, kind sir, is the scoundrel, the fiend, who led this inexperienced maiden into temptation. With his diabolical words of advice, he’s the one who thrust her into the warm embraces of the passionate Lucien. Here are some pieces of evidence that testify to his perfidy! Read them, kind sir, and you shall become convinced of my innocence and the innocence of my son. This crafty rogue is alone to blame for everything. I only found his wretched letters, by means of which he corrupted Maria, when the calamity was already irreversible!’”

“At this point, with a look of offended innocence on her face, Lucien’s mother handed over to Dobroslavov the letters that I had written to Maria, which, one might say, she herself had dictated to me or, at least, she had read all of them before I gave them back to Maria. This news staggered me. I stood there like someone who was rooted to the ground. First, I cast a glance over at the madam, and then at Dobroslavov. I felt as if I had gotten lost in my own skin!”

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“Finally, His Excellency got up from his desk, glanced over at me, without anger, it’s true, but after having gone red in the face and with eyes that were burning from indignation.”

“‘I’m too busy right now to deal with you about this matter,’ he said to me. ‘Go to your room and wait there until I summon you!’”

“‘Kind sir,’ I exclaimed, getting genuinely angry. ‘Please be so kind as to listen to what I have to say before you start making accusations against me!’”

“‘Leave me in peace,’ he said, and then he turned away. I left with a heavy heart, one filled with vexation and anger at the perfidious madam and at the gullible Dobroslavov. We didn’t see each other for two weeks, and he was seldom at home, as the boy who worked as my servant informed me. My desk, however, continued, as before, to serve as my workplace, and I patiently awaited the moment of either our reconciliation or the complete severance of our union.”

“On one occasion, I was reading some book, and I stopped at the following striking passage: ‘He who would dare to dream that he knows the human heart is a madman. Its twists and turns are kept secret: its movements, its passions, the disgust that it arouses. Not as inconstant is the wind that is carried along the heavenly brow. Not as changeable is the unsteady lap of the sea. How fickle and inconstant are human hearts! We don’t understand our own personal desires, often we don’t even divine what they are, so how can we possibly comprehend the desires of others?’”

“I had hardly finished reading these words, and had only just begun to put them in some logical order, when Dobroslavov suddenly came by to see me. He sat down, with a look of importance on his face, and began to speak: ‘So, Mister Chistyakov! You have caused me some displeasure. Whether you’re the guilty party here or not, the displeasure, all the same, remains. This matter is all settled. Maria is already the wife of Lucien, who, through my efforts, has been provided with an appropriate job. I have forgotten everything, I have forgiven everyone, and before we get down to working on our usual matters, I would like to know what part you played in this intrigue?’”

“‘Kind sir!’ I exclaimed. ‘If madam had disclosed to me that Maria is your daughter, then, I swear, I wouldn’t have become involved in this matter! But I didn’t at all imagine that this was indeed the case!’”

“At this point, I told him, with complete candor, about everything as it actually happened. When I had finished my story, Dobroslavov said: ‘I see that you’re not guilty of having taken part in the discussion about me, and I’m satisfied with the explanation that you have provided. But, as far as the matter itself is concerned, you’re guilty of a lot of things! However, to prove to you that I have even more trust in you now than I did before, I shall reveal to you my plan for arranging for your well-being and prosperity. You should know that, here in Moscow, there is a Society of Philanthropists of the World. The good deeds that are performed by this society issue forth in secret, and its
members, as well as the location where its meetings are held, are not disclosed. The members themselves don’t know each other, since they wear half-masks during their meetings. A new member joins this order by entering, as his name in the log, the name of the star that’s standing vertically above him at that moment. Would you like to have some understanding of the lofty, enigmatic wisdom that permeates the heavens and that illuminates the secret movements of elevated spirits? Would you like to find out the designs of European courts, the intentions of boyars, the entire movement of the sublunary world? Would you like to become, – together with me and one of my friends, who’s the main leader and enlightener of this secret society, – a luminary of the world, a friend of humanity, and a sovereign? Or, to put it more simply, would you like to become, as the mob of common folk call these grand people, a Mason?’”

“I was sitting there, having fastened my gaze upon Dobroslavov. Such a strange, wonderful proposition, as this one was, amazed me. My heart began to tremble with a pleasant trembling, and blood was rapidly agitating in my breast. After expressing to him my most tender gratitude for the lofty opinion that he held of me, I told him that I would give myself up, with all of the submissiveness and obedience of a child, to his guidance in this matter.”

“‘Good,’ he said. ‘A secret presentiment suggested to me that our spirits shared a fraternal bond even before non-existence had come to life, and that nature had felt the beating of my pulse. From now on, I shall call you not otherwise than my brother, and you shall call me by that very same appellation as well. Some time ago, I proposed to the members of this association that we accept a new brother, one whose mind, whose vigilance, and, especially, whose modesty, I had witnessed during the course of the past year. All of them ratified my proposal unanimously. And so all that you have to do is appear at our next meeting, – we shall be meeting together in the evening, – and we shall make your acceptance into the society official at that time.’”

“I thanked my benefactor once again, and we both parted, feeling satisfied with one another. My head was spinning, my imagination was ablaze. All day long I resembled someone who was suffering from a fever. ‘How am I going to be able to do this? Am I going to be able to understand the activities of the heavens and of the spirits that pervade them? Am I going to be able to listen to their conversations and admire them in a manner that is, no doubt, most delightful? Oh, how unpardonably do people commit a sin, when they make fun of sacred metaphysics, and especially of her most wise daughter, pneumatology! If I were to attain soon that sublimity of spirit that Dobroslavov assures me that I shall attain, then I would be able to prove to those wild, impetuous ignoramuses that they are cruelly deceiving themselves. I would be able to destroy the doubts that hold the world captive. I would be able to lift the impenetrable veil and reveal the heavenly inhabitants who dwell beyond it!’”

“I reasoned in this manner, as if in a fit of temper, having forgotten that Dobroslavov had requested of me, most of all, that I observe taciturnity. But man is a weak creature! Besides, how can one help but get carried away when preparing to penetrate the depths of the heavens and to see such a rarity as spirits? In olden times, they used to appear to
people a bit more often, whereas nowadays it’s as if they have disappeared without a
trace.”

“The day passed with me daydreaming in this manner. Twilight arrived, and
Dobroslavov, accompanied by Olympius, came by to get me. They blindfolded me, led
me out of the house, sat me down in a carriage, and then we set off. My benefactor
exhorted me not to be afraid, and so I was sufficiently bright and cheerful. After an hour,
our carriage came to a halt, and we got out. They led me for a long period of time, and
then, finally, Dobroslavov said: ‘Stay here for the time being.’ They had taken off a band
from my mask and, – oh, horrors! – I could see a spacious room, whose walls were
covered with a heavy black cloth, on which white images of birds, quadrupeds, reptiles,
fishes, and insects were embroidered. In the middle of the room stood a large table, on
which candles were arranged, and behind which sat, in silence, around fifty men, whose
heads were lowered and who were dressed in black robes, upon which were depicted, in
fiery colors, various mysterious signs, for example: constellations, planets, spirits that
were soaring and spirits that were crawling, good spirits and evil spirits.”

“The preeminent man amongst them stood up, mounted the rostrum, bowed very deeply
three times in the direction of the assembly, and then said: ‘Venerable, Highly Venerable,
Enlightened, and Highly Enlightened brethren! May I be permitted to speak about the
acceptance of a worthy fellow member into our society?’”

“At this point, everyone stood up, they likewise bowed deeply in his direction three
times, and then they said: ‘Speak, our Most Highly Enlightened mentor and brother!’

“He began to speak loudly, waving his arms. He spoke in such a bombastic way, in such
a complicated way, that I couldn’t understand a single word that he was saying. What
was he doing this for? He made reference to celestial harmony, to the conjugal
harmonization of the stars, to Jehovah’s high-flown plan that outlines the creation of
man. This speech lasted for about an hour, and I became down-hearted that I couldn’t
understand anything that he was saying. ‘Of course, I’m, as yet, still unworthy to
comprehend the language of true wisdom,’ I thought, and so I stopped listening. My
heart began to ache.”

“Finally, the orator concluded his speech with a question: ‘Do you agree, my brethren?’
Instead of providing a favorable response, they began, with all of their might, to slap with
their hands against the aprons, made out of kidskin, that they were wearing. Then the
person who had delivered this speech walked up to a telescope, pointed it up at the stars,
and looked through it for a long time. Finally, he inscribed something in a large book
that was lying open on the table, and then he proclaimed loudly: ‘Capricorn shall be the
name of this infant who is seeking enlightenment!’ At this point, some people left to go
inside a different room, while others started singing a song, during the course of which
they covered me with a robe, they placed a hat on my head, and they began to
congratulate me. From all sides rang out: ‘I congratulate you, venerable Capricorn! You
have set foot upon the radiant path to truth. You have taken onto yourself the light of
reason, which flows out of heavenly mansions. Why, we shall soon be able to call you 
lad, and then brother!"

“I had only just finished bowing in all directions, not knowing what to call whom.”

“Well, the person who was in charge left the room, and all of us followed him. I saw a 
very enormous hall that was magnificently illuminated. Its walls were covered with rose-
colored velvet. Beautiful paintings in magnificent frames were hanging on the walls. In 
one of them, Adam is depicted in Eve’s loving embrace, when they were still in a blissful 
state of innocence. In another painting, a delighted wise man is gazing, with eyes 
inflamed with passion, at the female charms of a young beauty who is bathing in a 
stream. In a third one, Solomon is encircled by a multitude of maidens of indescribable 
beauty. One of them is fumigating his clothes, another is sprinkling him with a fragrance 
from the East, a third is plaiting his hair with gold and pearls. All of the other paintings 
had similar content. The hall was encircled by divans that were upholstered in crimson 
satin. In the middle of the hall stood a large table that was piled high with victuals and 
beverages.”

“When everyone had settled down, had taken a seat, and had sufficiently eaten and drunk 
their fill of one and the other form of refreshment, cheerful conversations started up, and 
joy began to shine in the eyes of each member. For the only things that were visible with 
each member were their eyes, nose, mouth, and chin. The upper, and more noble, part of 
their head was covered by the half-masks that they had donned earlier. One member 
spoke about the female charms of a woman, now deceased, who had been satisfied with 
her life; another preferred the love of a beautiful maiden; a third argued that, without 
wine, even the most passionate of embraces shall seem ice-cold. All of them were 
talking, all of them were joking around, without any taunts, however, and without any 
caustic remarks, but instead directly, in a brotherly fashion, and that’s why their 
cheerfulness was not feigned. I sat there alone, remaining silent, not knowing how and to 
whom I should start speaking.”

“The person that was sitting next to me asked me: ‘Why are you remaining silent, 
venerable brother Capricorn? Or aren’t you taking a liking to our entertainment? I 
swear, such entertainment ought always to be the kind preferred by a wise man! Ask our 
Most Highly Enlightened One, he shall bear this out!’”

“‘I’m remaining silent not because I don’t like it here, but because, not knowing 
anybody, I don’t dare to speak.’”

“‘What?’ my neighbor said. ‘It would be worth your while just to glance at the back of 
each member, so that you can find out what his name is. Written there, in fiery words, is 
the name of the star or planet beneath which he was registered in the Book of Most 
Eternal Wisdom. I’m named Scorpio. There sits Taurus, who, evidently, is a prominent 
landowner, for he always appears wearing diamonds, and he speaks with an air of 
importance, drawling out his vowel sounds. Here’s Canis Major, or Sirius, and, judging 
by the words that he uses, he must be a great scrivener, since all of his long-winded
speeches are filled with bureaucratic twists and turns designed to obstruct justice and to elicit bribes! There’s Aries, he’s, as one can see, a merchant. There’s Aquarius, who is, apparently, an epic poet. Only he doesn’t live up to his name: he’s afraid of water, as if it were poison, and so he imbibes only wine. It would be better to call him Pour the Wine. But, as regards myself, I bear the venerable title of actor at the local theatre, and I humbly beg you to come see me perform there. You must be an honorable man, if you favored us by sitting here with us this evening, and, what's more, with an introduction by one of our Highly Enlightened Ones.”

“‘Fine,’ I replied, ‘but how am I going to be able to recognize you by sight, if I can’t see what you look like, and if I don’t know your name?’”

“‘That’s no problem,’ he replied, ‘all that you need to do is to come to the stage. After the performance, the theatrical gods and goddesses, as well as the admirers who adore them, gather there. Simply make the Masonic sign so that I shall guess that it’s you.’”

“‘What kind of sign is that?’ I asked impatiently.”

“‘Touch the thumb of your left hand to the index finger of your right hand,’ he replied. ‘Then trace a circle on your forehead and scratch the back of your head, then I shall guess in a flash that you’re a fellow member of this sanctuary.’”

“During supper, Brother Scorpio told me the names of all of his fellow members, and his guesses as to the status of each and every one of them in society. In one of the halls, I found an entire cattle yard of the earthly, of the heavenly, and of the nether regions. Indeed, here there were Lions, Tigers, Bears, both large and small, Snakes, Scorpions, Crabs, Geese, Swans, and so on, and so forth.”

“When we had been sufficiently sated with all manner of earthly blessings, the Highly Enlightened One struck the table three times with a gavel, and a profound silence descended upon the hall. It continued that way for about two or three minutes, after which time everyone, raising their voices, sang the following song:”

‘Rejoice, brothers, over having completed the journey
And over having heeded the musical voice;
Take a look at where wisdom resides!”’

“So as not to have any impediments on the path,
The laws of this sacred truth
Are given to you by Geometry.” (2)

“The wise creator of the entire universe,
In souls astonished in a brotherly way,
Leads us to a joyful Eden.”

“So that life shall see us there in blessing,
He himself has had the kindness to provide us
With a shining star as our leader.’ (2)

“At the conclusion of this sweet-sounding speech, all of us took a seat on the divans. An enormous, invisible harmony was instantly disseminated amongst us. The hall’s hidden doors opened up quickly, and in flew a choir of young, beautiful nymphs, dressed in Greek style, wearing light white clothing, with full, half-naked breasts and with garlands of flowers atop their heads. The flame of passion spread throughout my breast, my eyes filled with a sweet moisture, and lust, with a savage wildness, turned its attention from one object to another. These beautiful nymphs began a captivating dance. They would whirl, they would embrace one another, they would converge together, and then they would again scamper away. Every movement of theirs was a fire, a wind. If one of them was displaying a supple, shapely figure, another one of them was shining with a fascinating whiteness; if one was giving a rapid glance that penetrated everything, another was giving a languorous, tender, imploring look. In a word, no matter what facial feature, what look, what slightest body movement one of them might display, a new charm, a new languor, a new delight would appear. I made an attempt to think that I had reached Mohammed’s Eden and that I would be surrounded forever by the heavenly, virginal beauties known in Islam as *houri*, who regale and delight the righteous souls who have reached paradise. Or that I had sat through an evening at table and, with the help of several goblets of wine, I had become so enlightened that I had attained the bliss of seeing heavenly beings and of being intoxicated by the sweetness of their glances. My entire constitution turned rapturous: every breath that I took was like the mild fire of a young May sun that warms the blossoming rose without growing tired of the tender heart with her scorching heat.”

“The clocks on the walls of the hall struck twelve and, in an instant, everything became still: the music stopped, and the dancing as well. All of the maidens were standing there in a profound silence that continued for several seconds. Then the Most Highly Enlightened One got up from his divan and asked loudly: ‘Which of these beautiful women do you select to serve as the tsarina of this night?’

“‘Let the beautiful Licorisa serve as the tsarina, let her sweeten you up with her love,’ resounded the voices of some of our venerable brethren, and, at the very same moment, out from under the floor there arose a throne that sparkled due to a carving that represented Cupid in various positions. To its right, on a special small table, there stood a porcelain urn, while to its left there was a myrtle diadem. The Most Highly Enlightened One got up from his seat, walked over to one of the nymphs, led her up to the throne, placed a crown upon her head, and then, upon kissing her rosy cheek, sat back

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36 In Islamic religious belief, women with beautiful eyes (they are known as *houri*) are described as being the reward in Paradise for those faithful Muslim believers who die as martyrs while fighting in battle to defend their faith.

37 Cupid, the son of Venus, was the god of love. He is usually represented as a winged cherubic boy with bow and arrow, who was identified with the Greek Eros.
down on his divan. This beautiful young girl took a harp, lay her white fingers upon the
strings, – everyone fell silent, – and her clean, clear voice rang out in accompaniment to
the sonorous strings of the harp.”

‘Blessed is he who, in this life, knows how to live,
He preserves his love for what is beautiful!
His nature does not cool,
Although his blood does grow cold.’

‘He who loves is young beneath his gray hairs;
Wine heats up that cold blood of his.
In the warm embraces of a young nymph,
Her love shall give him bliss!’

“My greedy, grasping glances were devouring this inimitable female singer. Love, like
the fire of a lightning bolt, staggered my heart, which started to flare up. She alone
seemed to me to be worthy of my warm embraces, while all of the others were merely
commonplace charmers. The mere sound of her voice lifted me up to the heavens, and I
drank in the delight of enjoyment from her rosy lips. But the thought that she would be
in the warm embraces of another, of a decrepit old man, plunged me into thoughts of
glacial freezing. I was petrified: my heart turned to stone. Involuntarily, I averted my
eyes and let out a groan. I didn’t understand what could have suddenly so inflamed my
heart toward Licorisa, whom I didn’t know. But I could probably put it down to the fact
that she had made so many of my colleagues from this society happy. This was due
either to the charm of the solemnity with which the activities took place or to the great
splendor of the objects that surrounded us, to the novelty of the clothes that the maidens
were wearing, to the sweetness of the feeling of harmony that we were experiencing, and,
finally, to the intoxication from the wine that we had drunk while at table. Probably all
of these things, combined together, had made me into an admirer of Licorisa. And so I
swore that I would make every effort to become fortunate and happy.”

“The singing had come to an end. The brethren stood up and approached the throne. The
goddess made each one of us draw lots out of an urn, lots on which were written
women’s names, both Greek ones and Roman ones. It came to be my turn. With
trepidation and nearly unwillingness, I lowered my hand down into the urn, I took out a
lot, and I read aloud: ‘Lavinia.’ And, in an instant, I was taken by the hand by a girl with
downcast eyes, reddened cheeks, and a fluttering in her breast. She led me away and sat
me down on a divan. From bashfulness, she didn’t dare to raise her eyes, and I, moved
by my love for Licorisa and by jealousy, was sitting there with my back turned toward
her, when suddenly I saw with horror that the walls of the hall were wavering and the
candles in the chandeliers were gradually dying out. The divans began to move and, in
an instant, I found myself inside a small, clean, secluded room, in the corner of which a
lamp was burning. Everything fell silent.”

Chapter 54: A Godsend
“Lavinia was displeased by my prolonged silence and my insensitivity. She squeezed me in ardent embraces with tenderness and even delight, she covered me with passionate kisses, yet I didn’t even look at her! Growing tired of her futile efforts, she said to me, with annoyance: ‘Have you turned into marble, venerable Capricorn?’ The sound of her voice brought me somewhat back to my senses. I looked over at her intently and began to tremble. My anonymous charmer, noticing this, said with a smile: ‘Are you really so new to these treatments, venerable brother, that you tremble when you’re left alone in a room with a woman? If so, then it’s all to no purpose: we’re not at all awful!’”

“‘Princess Fekla Sidorovna!’ I said, pushing her away with one hand and taking her mask off with the other. ‘Ah!’ she exclaimed, turning pale and falling unconscious onto the divan.”

“Besides indignation and annoyance, I didn’t feel anything toward her at this moment, and I didn’t in the least attempt to bring her back to consciousness. ‘You despicable woman!’ I said to her. ‘You deserve a worse punishment than this. You poisoned my days with grief and sorrow. You forced me to lead a nomadic life, and to be in constant danger of being deprived of safe harbor. Oh, human vice! How awful are your traces! It’s worthwhile to look at you, Fekla Sidorovna, from a safe distance: you come flying in with the speed of the wind, and you squeeze an unfortunate, sacrificial victim in your awful embraces!’”

“When my Lavinia had regained consciousness, she said to me with heroic firmness: ‘Prince! We’re not going to fill up these hours with reproaches: what has passed is past, it’s irretrievable! Anger and vexation are out of place here. I’m sure that, in the course of the past five or six years of our separation, you, too, haven’t been without sin. I’m not offering you my warm embraces, for you shall not find any pleasure or comfort in them, and I’m accustomed to seeing happy, satisfied admirers at my breast. However, this doesn’t prevent us from being friends and from providing one another with benefits. Let me arrange for you to be with one of my girl friends, and you shall be satisfied in short order. I myself sometimes serve as the Tsarina of the Night.’”

“This train of reasoning on the part of the princess was, of course, the fruit of her deep-rooted shamelessness, but, contrary to expectations, it did, however, cheer me up. If she had wept, if she had fallen at my feet, repenting of her sins, asking for forgiveness and reconciliation, and so on, then my love for her might have resumed and might have been renewed, if not completely in my heart, then, probably, at least in my imagination. Jealousy would have started to torment and worry me, and I, of course, would have been unhappy again. But since my philosophizing spouse was so indifferent to what she had done to me, her serenity overflowed into me, and thus I looked upon her as I would an acquaintance of long standing, whom I hadn’t seen for a long time.”

“‘You do a fair amount of philosophizing,’ I said to her, ‘and, now that I’ve been enlightened, it’s clear to me that you perhaps completed your studies in some well-endowed school?’”
“‘You could say that,’ she replied, smiling.”

“But when I told her about the loss of our son, Feklusha broke out in tears. Even a debauched mother is, all the same, a mother, and so she can love a child even though she can’t stand his father.”

“We spent the entire night together, jabbering away, and I told her candidly about my amorous adventures. By doing this, I wanted to sting Feklusha, and to show her that, if she can entice human hearts, then I, for my part, am not the worst seducer in the world either. Such is the human heart!”

“But, what was even stranger, Feklusha, after hearing about these adventures of mine, blushed red, and although she smiled, she couldn’t, however, hide her annoyance. I repeat again: such is the human heart! At this point, I admitted to her that I had a strong passion for Licorisa. Lavinia broke out laughing.”

“‘Did you happen to know,’ she said, ‘that Licorisa is the lover of the Most Highly Enlightened One? He’s old and decrepit, and he can no longer take pleasure in lovemaking. He can at least take comfort in the knowledge that others are being deprived of Licorisa’s maidenly embraces.’”

“‘Licorisa is a good friend of mine,’ she said, ‘and, not infrequently, when she is crying at my breast, she confesses to me that the old Most Highly Enlightened One is extremely unbearable for her. She would, with all of her tenderness, gladly plunge into the warm embraces of another, but her unfortunate fate doesn’t allow her to do that.’”

“‘Why is that?’ I asked. ‘Isn’t it the drawing of lots that determines the choice of the beauty who will serve as the Tsarina of the Night?’”

“‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘the girlfriends for all of the assembled brethren are selected by the drawing of lots, but, in accordance with the statutes of the society, the Tsarina of the Night who is appointed for the Most Highly Enlightened One is selected by general agreement. Since all of the members of the society know of his passion for Licorisa, they select her most often of all. And if another member wishes to have this beautiful girl for himself, and they select a different tsarina, then the old man turns her down and cedes this honor to another member, and he appoints Licorisa for himself. Since he’s the head of this society, and its lawgiver, everyone submits to his will.’”

“‘But how did you wind up here?’ I asked her. ‘And are you free to leave?’”

“‘We wind up in this society by chance, just as you did, but we no longer enjoy the freedom that you men do. We can only stroll in the garden adjacent to this house, which is enclosed by a tall fence. However, as soon as one of us grows bored in the society, she can ask to be allowed to leave, and they shall release her, with the obligation that she not reveal any of the secrets and the location of the house. But how is it possible to grow bored with such a heavenly life? They say that, during the whole time that this order has
existed, there has been only one such case, and that was because someone from the
brotherhood, a distinguished man who had been seduced by the beauty of his goddess, the
same way that you were seduced by the female charms of Licorisa, didn’t want to see her
become the object of pleasure for other men, and so he persuaded them to approve her
release, which she subsequently received without any difficulty."

“We spent the night engaged in these conversations, and in conversations similar to them,
when suddenly the muffled sound of a church bell rang out across the rooms.”

“That means that morning has broken,” said Lavinia, ‘and the brethren must prepare for
the departure to their homes for the discharge of their duties until the next Saturday. The
meeting of members occurs once a week. Put on your mask, kind prince, and farewell!
You can count on me to follow through on what we discussed about Licorisa. She shall
soon reward your passion. And if, on top of that, you were to start taking a look at my
actions in a not indifferent way, then I can assure you that you would be very well
satisfied!'”

“After I had left the room to go to the hall, I caught sight, in the dim light of a small
lamp, of a large part of the brethren. Dobroslavov walked up to me, took me by the arm,
and led me out. In the entrance hall, they blindfolded me, and then we drove home,
where Mister Dobroslavov and I fell asleep, and we didn’t wake up until midday. He,
too, of course, had stayed awake all night long. So we didn’t see each other all day
long.”

“The next morning, he summoned me to his office and said the following to me:”

‘My dear brother and friend! In order for you to function well in your new
position, you must know the goal and the predetermined purpose of the society of
which you have recently become a fellow member. This world, notwithstanding
its very best construction on the part of the Great Creator, has become so
corrupted and perverted by frail, mortal people that it requires, without fail, the
efforts of a wise man, so that events would follow a prescribed order. How many
honest and kind families are there that have been deprived of life due to cold and
hunger? How many senseless scoundrels are there that sparkle with gold and fat
cheeks, whose soul has become so thin, so featureless, that it resembles the soul
of a devil more than the soul of a deity? So then, is it noble, is it in agreement
with the rules of Supreme Wisdom, to construct an equilibrium, that’s to say, to
take away part of the property from a wealthy madman and give it to a wise man
who is indigent? To force the former to come to his senses and experience the
vanity of earthly possessions, and to provide the latter with the means necessary
to spread the world of his mind in the widest possible circle! But wealthy
madmen are proud and stubborn. Representations of the truth don’t trouble them,
for they have become steeped in delusions. In order to ignite the spark of the
deity, which has been extinguished within them, there are no other means
available to do this than to rouse them from their sleep by means of flattery,
sensual gratifications, and secret enlightenment.’
‘For this great theme, the Exalted Designer of our society and I have selected you, dear friend. Yesterday, at our meeting, you saw our brothers Taurus and Polar Goose. The former is a count, while the latter is a factory owner. Both of them are crazy madmen, like idols, but, what’s more, they are malevolent and capricious, like marmosets. In coordination with our effort, you shall enter into service at first for Polar Goose, and you shall assist us in whatever is demanded by the task of bringing benefit to the world. Afterwards, you shall set about to serve Taurus. Just as soon as you shall have succeeded in the one and the other of these two tasks, the reward that shall be given to you shall be commensurate with the difficulties that you shall encounter, and you shall lead the remainder of your life in prosperity and contentment’!

“I was tempted by such an offer, which, perhaps, I would have declined, if the image of sweet Licorisa hadn’t been pursuing me everywhere I went, both in dream and in reality. I reassured Dobroslavov that I would comply with all of his plans, and we parted on good terms, with him embracing me several times. I enjoyed myself in advance, thinking about how I would be the restorer of a balance in nature and a helper of some grand people in fulfilling a task that would bring benefit to the whole world. Oh, how splendid that would be! This thought touched my soul as deeply as Licorisa’s female charms moved my heart.”

“Towards evening time, I set off for the theatre to catch a glimpse of our venerable brother Scorpio, near the end of the play in which he was performing, but this time they were staging a German comedy by a renowned author, and it was being staged in German. All of the spectators were drowning in tears, and the sighs that they emitted were drowning out the words being spoken by the actors.”

“‘What is it that you find in this comedy to be so sad that you must weep so much?’ I asked one old man who was sitting next to me.”

“‘Oh,’ he replied with a heavy sigh, ‘how is it possible to remain indifferent, when one looks at the spectators in the audience and sees that the greater part of them are weeping bitterly? By the way, I myself don’t understand a single word in German!’”

“‘Sensitivity is always a laudatory virtue,’ I said, and, turning to another neighbor, I asked him, ‘Tell me, please, what are the contents of this mournful comedy, if you so happen to understand the language!’”

‘How can I not understand it, sire? Although I was born in Poland, all the same I’m descended from the noble house of the Von Volf-Kalb-Gauvs in Lower Saxony, and that’s why, just as I have preserved my native tongue, so, too, have I preserved the dignity of a German: that’s to say, his nobility, his sensitivity, and his customary presence of mind. Do you know why it is, in Russia, that the greater part of the harness makers, sausage makers, and chimney sweeps are all Germans? It’s precisely because they straighten out leather belts with inimitable
nobility, they stuff their sausage into casings with tender sensitivity, and they clamber up to the roofs of houses to clean chimneys with heroic courage!"

"I agree with all that you have said," I replied, "but I would like to know the contents of this comedy. Please be so kind as to tell me that."

"Certainly. Here goes. A certain noble German baron, who is no more than fifty years old, gets married, following the custom of all of the barons in the Holy Roman Empire, to a fifteen-year-old girl, and, contrary to all of these customs, he cohabitates with her, strictly speaking, and he produces, by means of his baronial personage, two children. He loves his wife, in the way that is proper and decent for a noble German, that’s to say, with sensitivity and presence of mind. He drinks beer, he smokes tobacco, he hunts with dogs in the fields, and so on, as is the custom among barons."

"The young baroness doesn’t like this kind of life. She stealthily makes the acquaintance of some rake, who was, most likely, a Frenchman, and, abandoning her husband and their two children, she runs off with him, without any plan or purpose, the two them going wherever their legs may carry them. Although such incidents occur not infrequently in the homes of distinguished barons, and although a noble German should have looked upon this incident with his characteristic presence of mind, things turn out quite differently with our baron. Oh, the poor, pitiful man! He gives way to despondency, he abandons his amusements, he stops hunting rabbits, he sweats off beer and tobacco, – and alas! – in the course of time he does still more! No matter how much his servant tries to persuade him to eat something, so that he doesn’t die from starvation, – suggesting heavenly food dishes, such as, for example, celery salad, fried potato, even butter, sausage, and Dutch cheese, – but it’s all in vain: nothing helps!"

"At this point, Von Vol’f-Kal’b-Gauzen folded his arms on his chest in the shape of a cross, glanced up at the sky mournfully, and then burst into tears, muttering through his teeth: ‘What else are we to expect from an unfortunate and unhappy man whom even sandwiches no longer entice!’"

"Such sorrow prevented him from noticing that I had stood up and left the theater. On my way home, I couldn’t admire sufficiently enough the crazy boasting and arrogance of this German windbag. Subsequently, I’ve come to learn that many of these arrogant madmen, not finding a crust of bread in their homeland, come to Russia, not infrequently with just a knapsack to their name, and dressed all in rags. And soon, with the help of immigrants, much like these, they manage, just like them, through low-down tricks, flattery, and all sorts of other base means, to obtain advantageous places for themselves in society. And afterwards, proudly and shamelessly, they show their disdain for native Russians, whom they come to despise and whom they proceed to crowd out. I learned at that time that we Russians, in our civic education, are still lagging very far behind other countries, because you shall not find anywhere else such examples, besides those that we have here in Russia."
Chapter 55: A Grand Undertaking

“The next morning Olympius came by to see me. He sat down amicably and said to me:”

‘I’ve come to see you on orders from Mister Dobroslavov, and I shall speak with you about what it is that he has charged me to do. Know that I’m likewise a member of the Society of Enlighteners, and that my name there is the venerable brother Dolphin. Among our brethren there, have you noticed Polar Goose, who out in society is called Kuroumov, and who’s a very wealthy tax farmer? Not only is he not stingy, like the others are, but he squanders his wealth so rapidly on his male and female friends, whom he loves passionately, that his estate shall soon go up in smoke. And so it would have been unpardonable on the part of the Society of Enlighteners to stand by and watch indifferently the insane use that is being made of his estate, this God-given gift that comes from up on high and that is meant to be used for good deeds, for charitable institutions, and, in general, for providing relief to a poverty-stricken humankind. In order for us to put into action the great design that is intended for our order, and to do so in conformity with its purpose, we are selecting you, dear brother. You shall serve as a sacred instrument of the Divine, and just as there, up on high in heaven, you shall receive a brilliant crown, down here on earth you shall receive worldly blessings! For this to happen, you shall become Kuroumov’s valet, and you shall receive from Dobroslavov full instructions, acting according to which, you shall doubtlessly bring about success in our lofty undertaking. One of this rich man’s lovers is a dear friend of mine, and with her help you shall be received into his home under the name of a close relative of hers. It goes without saying that the fact that you yourself are a member of this same society must be kept secret.’

‘God, who supports good intentions, won’t deny us His assistance as well. Let’s go see the beautiful Liza.’

““What?” I exclaimed. ‘Is it possible that this is the very same Liza, who once belonged to Mister Yastrebov?’”

““It’s she herself,” said Olympius. ‘Since I’m her first real friend here in Moscow, I’m the one who is assuming responsibility for looking after her well-being. A prominent boyar once thought that, by itself, the splendor of the carriage in which she was coming to see him, – a splendor that prompted boastful stories about the grandeur of his ancestors, and his own personal grandeur, – was sufficient to entice a comely girl! Liza could see that she would have to suffer the torments of hunger, sitting on the satin divans, looking at herself in the magnificent mirrors, or that she would have to seek a different lover. I took it upon myself to find ways to improve her fate, and she soon became an object of adoration for Kuroumov, who knows how to love as only a wealthy tax farmer should.”’
“We reached Liza’s living quarters, and she received Olympius as a tender-hearted friend. She also remembered me, and, laughingly, she asked: ‘What? You’re no longer staying at Yastrebov’s?’”

“‘It’s a bad thing,’ I replied, ‘to serve those who don’t know honor!’”

“‘And those,’ Liza joined in, ‘who pay for services rendered with tales about the victories that their ancestors won and the spoils that they received from their enemy.’”

“When she learned what our intentions were, she fully approved of them, and she told me to stay at her place, for Kuroumov had sent word that he would be eating supper there with her. After dinner, Olympius left, and I kept myself occupied by telling fortunes on divination cards with Liza.”

“‘Your intention, my dear friend, is very commendable,’ she said at one point. ‘If it’s at all possible, however, you need to stop this madman from continuing to commit his foolish actions. But if he’s prominent or wealthy, and, consequently, more stubborn than a malevolent woman, you shall need to convert his vices into virtues, turning them over to the good side. If a river must unavoidably overflow its banks, then let that river flow amidst the fields, and, fertilizing the earth with silt, it shall deliver a rich harvest, rather than have it carry off the hut of the poor tiller of the soil and thus make his entire family unfortunate and unhappy.’”

“‘Right you are, beautiful Liza,’ I replied. ‘Perhaps our intention, if we were to analyze it according to the rules of moral philosophy, isn’t completely in agreement with honor. But so be it! Formerly, I tried with all of my might not to deviate from the paths of honor, but I was always deceived, oppressed, and broken. Nowadays, I set out at random. I shall not start looking at my actions too rigorously. Instead I shall simply have a look around and ask myself: wouldn’t it be best for me to leave?’”

“‘I assure you that it would be best,’ Liza exclaimed, and we heard the clatter of a carriage at the entrance. ‘It’s Kuroumov! Stand in the corner, my friend, and be prudent.’”

“Several minutes later, an enormous man, less than fifty years of age, burst through the doors. His belly resembled a barrel; his crimson cheeks and chin were wobbling to and fro, like jelly. He stretched out his hand to the beauty and hissed, baring his teeth: ‘Hello!’ Here I saw that it was more difficult for him to utter a word than it was for Sisyphus to roll a stone up a mountain in the precipices of Tartarus.”

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38 Chistyakov is alluding here to the Myth of Sisyphus, the figure from Greek mythology who, as king of Corinth, became infamous for his general trickery and especially for twice cheating death. He ultimately got his comeuppance when Zeus dealt him the eternal punishment of forever rolling an immense boulder up a hill in the depths of Hades, only to have it roll back down each time it neared the top, repeating this action for all eternity.
“Liza patted him tenderly on the cheek, and then she said: ‘My darling friend! I have heard you say, not infrequently, that you have need of a valet who would be able to make some improvements to your secretarial position. Here is my cousin, who has had success in his study of many of the branches of scholarly knowledge. He has just recently left a position, working for a prominent gentleman who didn’t pay him a salary, and I beseech you to hire him to work for you. I can vouch for his loyalty and his meticulousness, just as I can vouch for my very own.’”

“Kuroumov turned his lackluster eyes toward me and said: ‘I have no need for a valet, and I have never spoken to you about that. The person who is presently serving for me as a valet is skillful, and I’m satisfied with him.’”

“‘What? Can you be so blind?’ said Liza angrily. ‘Have you really not noticed that your current valet shows signs of affection towards me, and that he wants to take your place in my heart, replacing you with him himself?’”

“‘Oh, I don’t believe that!’ Kuroumov objected. ‘He’s already so advanced in years that . . .’”

“‘You don’t believe me? Oh, I’m an unfortunate and unhappy woman! Is this the reward that I get for the immeasurable love that I have shown for you? Know, you blind man, that your current valet is at once a steward and a confidant, who has already confided to me the sexual passion that he feels for me! Falling to his knees before me, he implored me to give my consent to an affair with him, after which he promised me that he would rent another house, and that he would maintain me there much more luxuriantly than the ugly skinflint, as he called you, ever did.’”

“Liza shed bitter tears. I stood there, marveling at her skillful acting ability. Kuroumov now turned pale, and now turned red, mechanically wiping off the sweat that had poured down, thick and fast, upon his mustache and beard. Finally, he said, with great anger: ‘What? An ugly skinflint? Maintain a female beauty better than I ever did? No, you ne’er-do-well, you shall not succeed! Get out of my house right this very minute! . . . Take comfort, Liza, in the knowledge that you shall not be forgotten, and that you shall not remain unavenged!’”

“With these words, he placed a diamond ring on Liza’s finger and, turning toward me, he continued: ‘You shall stay at my place, and I hope that you shall be as satisfied with me, as your cousin Liza has been. We shall go take our revenge, and then, afterwards, I shall be back here.’”

“Liza accompanied us to the carriage, putting on a sad face and imploring Kuroumov not to forget his promise to visit her that same evening. ‘I shall not forget, my darling,’ he said to her. And, with a loud grunt, he took a seat in the carriage, while I took one beside him. He moaned during the entire ride, and his moaning resembled the creaking of an old tree, shaking strongly from a whirlwind.”
“After we had arrived in the courtyard, and Kuroumov had been helped out of the carriage, he shouted out threateningly: ‘Bring me that ne’er-do-well Savkin!’ When Savkin appeared, I saw before me an elderly little man with a gray beard and a bald patch. He was no more than two arshins, plus a smattering, tall, gaunt, weak-sighted, slightly hunchbacked, and snub-nosed. How was it possible to consider him capable of falling in love, and especially with a woman like Liza? However, Kuroumov considered him a handsome young man and a fine fellow. ‘How dared you,’ he exclaimed, ‘you vile son of a bitch, reveal your love for such an important personage, one with whom I myself am in love, and, what’s more, to call me an ugly skinflint?’”

“Poor Savkin grew numb, opening his eyes wide and trembling, and not knowing how to reply to his master, for he understood absolutely nothing. Kuroumov, who considered his valet’s reaction to be an admission of his guilt, flew into a rage, raising his right hand, which weighed over thirty pounds, and waving it threateningly at Savkin, aiming to bring it down upon his head. But this smaller version of the legendary old wizard, Kashchei the Deathless, jumped aside just in time, and the corpulent tax farmer, who had stretched forward, was sent sprawling to the ground.”

“Savkin was staggered by this new horror and wanted to flee, but the stewards and the footmen, who thought at first that the valet had committed a felony, caught him and brought him to Kuroumov, who, meanwhile, was getting to his feet, with the help of three men, and saying: ‘Lord have mercy! This scoundrel shall be the death of me yet! I see his crime clearly now! Throw this unseemly ruffian out on his ear, toss him out of the courtyard and then lock the gates. And throw his house pets out through the fence!’”

“The orders of wealthy people are obeyed quickly. A portion of the workers began to pinch poor Savkin and strike him in the back of the head, while another portion of them rushed off to seize his belongings and, not sparing anything, began to toss his things through the fence and out onto the street. Poor Savkin couldn’t do anything to oppose them. He walked on, turning his eyes up to the heavens, and said: ‘The Lord shall render onto thee, oh, Kuroumov, as you have rendered onto your slave Savkin!’” Five minutes later, everything had been completed: the master ordered that the rooms of his former steward and confidant be assigned over to me, and, upon taking his seat in the carriage, Kuroumov said: ‘Well, Gavrilo Simonovich! I’m now going to go see Liza, and I shall eat supper there with her. You, meanwhile, examine your new living quarters and transport over there whatever belongings you might have from your service under your previous master!’”

“He drove out of the courtyard. I was shown my two future rooms, both of which were rather decently furnished. After putting everything in order, I rushed off to

39 Kashchei, who is often given the epithet “the Immortal” or “the Deathless,” is an archetypal male antagonist in Russian folklore. The most common feature of tales involving Kashchei is a spell that prevents him from being killed. He hides his soul inside nested objects in order to protect it. Usually he takes the role of a malevolent rival father figure who competes for, or entraps, a male hero’s love interest.
Dobroslavov’s house, and I told him and Olympius about my successes, sending both of them into raptures with my account. ‘Don’t be afraid, my friend,’ said the former. ‘As soon as the completion of this undertaking matches up with its initiation, you shall be rewarded abundantly!’ After this, for the better part of an hour, he gave me instructions on how to proceed, and then he gave me leave to go, rewarding me with a purse filled with gold coins, so as to boost my spirits. And he ordered me to hurry back to see him in three days, just as soon as Kuroumov drives out of his courtyard, so that we can set off together for the weekly meeting of the Society of Enlighteners. I bade him farewell, and two servants began to drag my property away.”

“The next day I entered into my new position, which, as Kuroumov himself had put it, consisted in maintaining his correspondence with his female beauties, first of all, with Liza, and then with Masha, then with Grusha, and so on. And, afterwards, to look over the work that was done by the stewards and to verify their expenditures.”

“Along with being a wealthy tax farmer, who made money from collecting duties on alcohol, Mister Kuroumov also owned large factories that manufactured domestic wares that he shipped overseas. From the outside, his house resembled a palace, while inside it was worse than a shed. The entrance hall in this house was a spacious room whose walls were covered with knouts and bunches of rods used for whipping. For Kuroumov had heard that, among other things, prominent people differ from common people by the way they punish cruelly, for insignificant offenses, those people who serve them, and often they do this when those people are not even guilty of any offense at all. They do this simply on a whim, so that the paupers won’t forget that they have a master to serve. ‘We are our master’s people!’ say the peasants of many lords, with such a look on their face and such a tone of voice, as if they wished to convey the following sentiment: in this life, we are condemned to do nothing other than to suffer! Mister Kuroumov wished to demonstrate that he was a landowner, albeit a recent one, and thus moans and groans were to be heard in his house. The hall in this house was a richly painted room with gilded cornices, but to make up for it, instead of a chandelier, a sack of smoked meats hung from the ceiling, and instead of a girandole, beetroots with various kinds of caviar stood on a table. All of the rooms were decorated in a similar way. In some rooms, there were tubs of lard; in others, there were piles of uncooked beef and raw hides. And, in the bedroom, where a brocade bed was shining, there stood a tub of tar oil, a substance that emitted smoke in about ten different places when burning in the small lampions. One of the foreign doctors convinced Kuroumov that he was susceptible to apoplexy, and that he, most likely, would die, if a certain proportion of tar oil wasn’t burning constantly in the small lampions inside his bedroom.”

“Keeping Dobroslavov’s final admonition firmly in mind, I didn’t intend to chase out of my master’s head the foolish ideas that had taken possession of him. I wanted only to change their direction, as I saw them. I knew that it was an impossible task to make him into a sensible man, for he was spoiled by good fortune, if one can call by this name the wealth that he had inherited and the advantages that he had received through that wealth. I spent my first day in his employ examining the entire house and all of the people who were living in it. Then, coming to the conclusion that to act quickly means to act badly, I
decided not to set about fulfilling my plan before I had found out properly Kuroumov’s manner of living, his way of thinking, his passions, and, – if there were any, – his virtues. And, meanwhile, so as not to lose any time, I needed to make every effort to win the beautiful Licorisa over to the idea of complying with this. ‘It seems to me,’ I said to myself, ‘that Feklusha is bound to contribute to our enterprise. After all, I forgave her so magnanimously! She reassured me! What is there to worry about?’”

“The next day, toward evening time, just as soon as my master Kuroumov had driven off to recommend Polar Goose, I rushed over to Dobroslavov’s house, took a seat, together with him and Olympius, in his carriage, and off we galloped. Now my eyes were no longer blindfolded. Along the way, I told them, in our discussion of Kuroumov, what I had noticed and what I intended to do.”

Chapter 56: Prince Golkondsky

“When we entered the hall, dressed in our grand attire, we found that several of our colleagues were already there. Among them, I noticed Polar Goose and little Scorpio, who, upon seeing me, came running up to me with noticeable pleasure, grabbed me by the arm, and said, with a friendly reproach: ‘How come, my dear Capricorn, you didn’t keep your word? Every time that I looked with wide-open eyes, I didn’t see anyone giving the Masonic signs. So, not seeing anyone doing it, I started to do it myself, scratching the back of my head mercilessly, but it was all for naught.’”

“‘There’s a very good reason for this, my dear Scorpio,’ I replied. ‘A few days ago, I was appointed to a mission at the court of a powerful lord. This circumstance, however, won’t prevent me from attending the weekly meetings of the Society of Enlighteners every Saturday. As soon as I successfully complete my important mission, I shall, without fail, visit you, and I shall try to establish a friendship with you.’”

“‘I don’t understand you at all,’ said Scorpio.”

“‘What’s to be done!’ I replied with an air of importance. ‘This means that you haven’t yet been enlightened, and that your gaze can’t, as mine can, tear the veil off of eternity and contemplate elevated spirits!’”

“Scorpio stepped back reverently. The arrival of the Most Highly Enlightened One having been announced, all of the members sat down at their places, and when he walked into the hall, the brethren, having risen to their feet, began singing a song:

‘It flashed, it flashed, the three-fold world!  
With its rays of light, it drove away the darkness of the night!  
There are no obstacles to the sanctuary:  
Be nourished, mine eyes, with the truth!  
By the light of the tripartite rays,  
Get to know the rite of all of nature!’
“During this singing, the Most Highly Enlightened One, walking ahead of seven lighted lamps and accompanied by censers that were burning fragrant incense, led a procession to his seat. When he arrived there, he raised his arms up toward heaven and prayed silently. Then he began to speak, softly at first, but then loudly, and, later on, with arder: ‘Oh, grand solitary female, you who copulated with the twin brother who reigns jointly with you, and you who revolves with all of the numbers up to ten! You are incomprehensible for those of us who live in the sublunary world; you are invisible, inscrutable for us! But the contemplations of your wise friends penetrate to your essence. Your depths, like those of a fiery ocean, are filled with grandiloquent fruits from the tree of life. For your wise friends, these depths are opened! These friends penetrate the impenetrable, and they see how you, with a thundering hand, after taking onto your fingers the compass for measuring the earth, and after securing one end of the earth in your fingers, you make the world rotate and then you rule over it.’”

“At this point, noticing that, for all of the attention that I was paying to what he was saying, I once again couldn’t understand anything, I stopped listening. And the only things that I allowed to occupy my imagination were Licorisa and her female charms. No matter how much the Most Highly Enlightened One shouted, no matter how impassioned he became, I looked upon him calmly, thinking: ‘Oh, shall a moment of pleasure come upon me any time soon? Pleasure that is much greater than that found in contemplating the pleasures that are to be had in the depths of eternity!’”

“His speech came to an end. I had been waiting with impatience for the moment when we would set foot in Eden, as had been promised in the preceding song. But to spite my impatience, the enlightened brethren once again dragged things out in a cheerless and depressing way:

‘Move away from here, hard-hearted one,
Before whom tears are shed in vain;
Run away from here, miserly, uncharitable one,
Help is given here to one’s neighbors!’

“When the singing, which resembled more the plaintive howling of starving wolves, had ended, everyone stood up, and I caught sight of my Polar Goose dragging himself over to a small table, upon which lay an emended copy of the Book of Life, and then inserting into it a signed statement. At this point, his example was followed, in order, by Taurus, Aries, Leo, and many other of the most excellent animal creatures. As far as I and humble Scorpio were concerned, we were standing at some distance away and were watching the members who were crowding into the hall. After entering the mansion of ‘spiritual joy’ (this is what the brethren called the room with velvet wallpaper) and sitting down at table, I asked Scorpio: ‘To what end were the enlightened brethren crowding around the book and what were they inscribing in it?’”

“‘What?’ he asked with surprise. ‘Where were you while our Grand Abbot was delivering the most excellent speech in the whole wide world?’”

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“I must confess,” I said, ‘that I wasn’t very far away; however, I wasn’t in that gloomy, dismal hall itself. My thoughts were roaming around in a place that was much more pleasant, and I would be very much obliged if you would reveal to me the reason why our brothers were crowding around the book and inscribing something in it!’

“Scorpio agreed to do so, and, during supper, he told me the following:

‘The Most Highly Enlightened One, upon revealing very clearly the harmony of spirits and the sympathy of souls, by means of which they, after having been imprisoned inside human bodies, can now see one another and can converse with one another, – although one of them is in Moscow, and the other is in Philadelphia; one of them is in hell, and the other is in heaven, – demonstrated that, with the help of this harmony of the spirits, he was able to observe one unfortunate and unhappy family, which consisted of a father, a most wise elder; his wife, a most virtuous woman; two sons, who were as brave as Mars and as majestic as Apollo; and two daughters, who were as lovely as Venus and as chaste as Diana.’

“The father and his family lived at first in Moscow on the income provided by a vast estate. But when a strong desire to travel arose amongst all of them, they set off for St. Petersburg, boarding a ship and setting sail on the ocean. For a long time, the sailing went well. At length, however, a terrible storm arose. For four months, the ship was carried along by the waves, threatening to be destroyed, which is exactly what ensued when it crashed upon some unknown shores. The old man laid hold of one of the ship’s planks, the old woman quickly followed suit after him, and so, too, did their son, grabbing yet another plank, as did their daughter after him. For thirteen days they were carried along by the foaming waves, until they were tossed onto a shore. They, undoubtedly, would have perished amidst the waves, if they hadn’t linked chains together, from which it should have been concluded that they were Masons. There, on the shore, they encountered several hundred wild cannibals, who bound them up, hand and foot, and led them into captivity at the place where the Mississippi River comes crashing down with a roar from the terrifying cliffs high above. The fate of the family was a most pitiful one. Cannibals are so miserly that they won’t give you anything without you first giving them some money, and that’s why the honorable captives were eating grass and roots the same way that Nebuchadnezzar had once done. But that sovereign was a highly arrogant man and a sinner, such that it followed that he should have been punished. But why should these virtuous people have to suffer?’

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40 Scorpio appears to be referring here to the Falls of Saint Anthony, located at the northeastern edge of downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota, the only natural waterfall on the Mississippi River.
“Scorpio told this story in such a cheerless voice that I broke out laughing loudly. The Highly Enlightened Ones, who were arguing fervently about which pleasures are more proper for the soul to enjoy while it’s on its way out of the body, didn’t notice my laughter.”

“‘What are you laughing at, brother?’ asked Scorpio.”

“‘At the miraculous nature of your narrative,’ I replied. ‘Read all of the journeys that have been undertaken around, along, and across the world, and nowhere shall you find any place that resembles the one that you have just described! And how is it that the Most Highly Enlightened One knows all about this place?’”

“‘By means of the harmony of spirits,’ he replied. ‘Last night was a starlit night. In order to find out what’s the fate of the world, the Grand Abbot gazed upon the celestial Dragon. His eyes inadvertently turned to the West, and he saw an elder at the source of the Mississippi River, so he entered into a conversation with him, and he found out everything.’”

“‘But how did he do that?’”

“‘How?’ ‘Do you dare to entertain any doubts? Either he’s someone who’s able to penetrate into the future, observe the abyss of the heavens, and comprehend eternal secrets, or else he wouldn’t be able to see across the ocean, the mountains, and the forests. So, my dear Capricorn, this did indeed happen! His Highly Enlightened One, entering into conversation with the captives, found out that these evil savages didn’t wish to release them from captivity without first receiving a ransom of five thousand rubles. But since that same amount of money would be needed for their passage, the devout husband made this proposal to those who were gathered there: wouldn’t the enlightened brethren agree to pay this sum of money? He spoke in such a captivating manner that the brethren, – Taurus, Polar Goose, and Western Cancer, – straight away agreed to pay fifteen thousand rubles, which funds would be provided to His Highly Enlightened One tomorrow, and he, in keeping with the feeling of sympathy that had been inspired in him, shall forward them on to the proper quarter.’”

“Listening to these utter absurdities, I couldn’t restrain myself and couldn’t keep from breaking out into laughter again. When the open table had ended, and when, as usual, the young beauties had made their appearance and the dancing had begun, I noticed that my Feklusha was casting gloomy looks in my direction. But, on the other hand, Licorisa was surpassing herself. Her ease, her affability, and the flame of passion in every feature of her face made her a goddess this evening. She didn’t conceal from me the fact that she was furtively casting glances in my direction. I was in raptures, and when, towards the end of the evening, the Most Highly Enlightened One asked, whom they were selecting to serve as the Tsarina of the Night, I was the first one to exclaim: ‘Licorisa!’ From all sides resounded the exclamation ‘Licorisa!’ And so she took her seat upon the throne. Upon approaching the urn and, with extreme agitation, drawing my lot, I took a look at it and, with a groan, announced the name ‘Philomela.’ So then, I thought, I’m being
deprived of the chance to meet with Feklusha, and, at the same time, with Licorisa as well. Shortly thereafter, my Lavinia was passed on to Scorpio, and my hopes were renewed. I walked up to him and said to him affectionately: ‘Dear brother! My female friend is as beautiful as a day in May, as fresh as a young rose! Wouldn’t you like for me to cede her to you, and for you, in return, to give me Lavinia?’ ‘Gladly,’ he replied. We exchanged our female escorts, and Lavinia and I took our seats on the divans. I quickly found myself in a secluded bedchamber.”

“‘What has happened, my dear princess?’ I asked, impatiently untying my mask. ‘What successes have you had?’”

“I don’t know what to tell you, my friend. Something happened that I didn’t expect. Licorisa is either a half-crazed woman or a great deceiver! When I revealed to her your passion for her female charms, she smiled, shook her head, burst into tears, and then asked: ‘What is his financial condition?’ ‘I can’t say anything definitively about that,’ I replied. ‘I have heard only that he’s a renowned person!’ ‘And is he wealthy?’ ‘Again, I don’t know; however, I hope so!’ At this point, she revealed to me, in confidence, that she is descended from a reigning house of Tibetan princes; that she lost both of her parents in her youth; that some scoundrel robbed her of her entire estate, an inordinately large one; and that she swore an oath not to give herself up in love to anyone, with the possible exception of such a prince, who, with the help of weapons or of gold, could return her purloined estate back to her. Now judge for yourself, as you know so well how to do!’”

“‘What is there to spend time thinking about here?’ I exclaimed. ‘Since she’s such a distinguished princess, and wasn’t ashamed to serve as a priestess in this temple, then what would prevent me from being a most radiant prince or a sovereign prince myself?’”

“Lavinia signaled her approval of my idea with a laugh, and we both caught the sound of a light footstep. My breathing stopped, my heart began to tremble, and my blood began to blaze. The doors opened quietly, and in walked Licorisa, and, along with her, a multitude of her female charms. A white dressing gown was wound around her lily-like figure. Her cheeks were burning with the blush of bashfulness. She lowered her eyes and remained silent. The breast of the sweet beauty was mildly agitated.”

“Instantaneously, I fell to my knees and proclaimed in a highly theatrical voice: ‘Beautiful, adorable princess! Accept this declaration of ardent love on the part of a sovereign prince, who, in the dust at your feet, beseeches you to requite his love! I would be the happiest of all of the serf owners in the world if you were to favor me with a gracious look!’”

“When I had finished declaiming such a beautiful speech to her, I seized her hand with ardor, covering it with passionate kisses, and I said to her over and over again: ‘Forgive me, my dearest princess, for the impertinence of daring to raise my eyes and gaze upon you with a look that reveals my love for you. Oh, how my aged father and my many
loyal subjects shall rejoice when they learn that I’m elevating such a goddess to the throne!”

“Rise, prince,” she said in a tender voice, filled with sweetness. ‘It would be more appropriate for you to be lying at my breast, than to be kneeling at my feet. Such a deserving man as you can expect his love to be requited even by a princess herself.”

“I flung myself into her warm embraces and clasped her to my heart.”

“When we took our seats on the divan, I didn’t see Lavinia there any longer. She, evidently, had left me alone to look after my own well-being.”

“Tell me, princess, what causes you to be unhappy?” I asked. ‘Your girlfriend told me that scoundrels had deprived you of your estate, had robbed you? Oh, only give me their names and in several weeks my father’s enormous army of soldiers shall appear there to defend your rights!”

“Oh!” said Licorisa with a heavy sigh. ‘Shall I really be to blame for such dreadful bloodshed! I’m horrified at the very thought of it, and I would wish, kind prince, that this matter could be settled without recourse to such violent means! The tyrant who drove me off my estate agrees to let me have it all back for several thousand rubles.”

“That’s splendid!” I exclaimed with the greatest air of importance. ‘Tomorrow I shall write back to my father, and, shortly thereafter, I shall receive from him piles of gold, which I shall place at your disposal.’”

“And where is your father’s estate located?’ she asked.”

“I became a little mixed up here, but soon recovered and replied: ‘My father’s capital is Golkonda in India. There’s gold there, and entire mountains of diamonds! There’s . . .’”

“Well, you know, I have heard that India is very far away.’”

“That’s a different India. There are, after all, many of them! The India that’s under my father’s dominion isn’t far from the Caspian Sea, and so a letter addressed to him reaches there in three weeks, and, in good weather, even less time than that.”

“Although the princess, from time to time, became more tender, and I was telling lies that, with each passing hour, were becoming more and more shameless, things ended when the sound of the morning church bell found us in some disagreement. The princess wanted some assurance of my love, that’s to say, she demanded some gold. But where was I to get any? I’m not, after all, an alchemist! No matter how much I implored the inexorable Licorisa, she swore that she wouldn’t make me her happy possessor until such time as she received a letter of reply from my father, one with an enclosure of some gold coins in it. As she said this, she tore herself away from my embraces.”
“Donning my mask, I sighed. ‘Cruel woman! Did I really think that a paltry metal coin would have more of an effect on your heart than the celebrated title of Prince Golkondsky?’”

Chapter 57: Successes in Enlightenment

“Not having achieved any success in love, I wished to achieve at least some success in carrying out my assignments for the Society of Enlighteners. To that end, placing all of Dobroslavov’s admonitions in their proper order in my mind, I went into Kuroumov’s room one day, and I said to him:”

‘Kind sir! Don’t be surprised if I speak truthfully to you. You love Liza, my cousin, and she adores you. And that’s why her cousin can’t help but love you with the purist of loves and can’t help but endeavor to be of some use to you. Recently I read in some foreign newspapers that a Parisian tax farmer, who possessed much less capital and intelligence than you do, surprised all of his fellow countrymen with the subtlety of his ideas, the greatness of his imagination, and the noble use to which he put his wealth. His house, which one might call a palace, glitters with gold, expensive paintings, prints, engravings, and rarities of all kinds. His library is highly selective. The most prominent grandees consider it a stroke of good fortune to dine at his house, to spend an evening at a concert on his estate, and, in general, to chat with him for a while. Isn’t it a pity that you, a person with so much intelligence and so much enlightenment, don’t concern yourself in the least with making your name known to the outside world, so that they would print accounts about you in the newspapers, and translate those accounts into all of the foreign languages in the world, and so that in all of the capitals of the world people would be talking about your inimitable virtues, such as, for example: your good taste, your hospitality, and your charity toward indigent brethren?’

“Kourokov was delighted with my eloquence. First he became thoughtful, then he conducted a lengthy conversation with me about how to go about attaining the grand goal that I was advocating. I convinced him, first of all, to drag out all of the tubs of lard, the piles of uncooked beef and raw hides, the tar, and the other items that had been serving as furniture in his house. And I took upon myself the responsibility of searching for new furniture, in the best taste, for him, as well as for a first-rate library and for paintings made by the most famous masters. Kourokov agreed to all of these suggestions joyfully, cursing his former valet Savkin, who was so inane that during his entire lifetime he hadn’t read anything in the newspapers, except items about trading and contracts, and he couldn’t make any sense at all out of paintings.”

“That very same day everything was dragged out of the house and put into sheds. And when the new wise man Kourokov had driven off to spend the evening at Liza’s place, where he hoped to cheer her up with an expensive necklace and news about her cousin’s sagacity and diligence, I rushed over to Dobroslavov’s house and told him everything, sending him into raptures with my account. He assigned Olympius to assist me, and the
two of us, in the course of an hour at the flea market, collected such a large number of various pieces of furniture, books, and early paintings, that we could hardly fit all of them onto the dozen wagons that we used to haul it back to our master’s house. It was impossible to imagine his delight when he first set eyes on these items, with their precious shades of taste and great wisdom. I was astounded in equal measure when I set my eyes upon him and didn’t see any mustache or beard, but instead a cleanly shaven face and hair that had been cut and groomed in the latest style."

“‘Oh, heavens!’ I exclaimed. ‘To which divine being are you beholden for such a fortunate transformation? Of course, any beneficent genius following in the footsteps of grand people . . .’”

“‘This genius,’ Kuroumov said with the smile of a Silenus41 ‘is a person of medium height, with dark, sparkling eyes, and with full, rosy cheeks. In a word, it’s your cousin, Liza, who has brought about this transformation. While playing and joking around, she cut my hair and shaved my beard. By the way, I’m glad that she did! Now even I myself can’t understand how, in my former, ugly appearance, I could have looked appealing to girls. But, most of all, how could I have attended meetings in the presence of most highly enlightened people? Know this, my friend, that I’m a member of that social class that penetrates the secrets of the future and that contemplates the spirits! It’s true that I haven’t yet attained that degree of perfection and that I bear the humble name of venerable brother Polar Goose, but I shall soon be ordained as an enlightened brother, and then I shall be able to see the spirits and to converse with them!’”

“I showed feigned surprise at, and reverence toward, such a great personage, and I provided numerous examples, acting as if I had read about them somewhere, of how some of the great enlighteners of the world were able to call forth spirits, and so on. Polar Goose was indescribably delighted, and was telling me, in advance, what it was that he would be discussing with the spirits.”

“The pieces of furniture, the paintings, the engravings, and the books, – all of these things were included in a list of inordinately expensive items that were purchased for him. I would tell him the names of artists, engravers, and authors who had never existed in this world. And, what’s more, I myself didn’t know at that time the name of a single one of the world’s greatest artists.”

“So as not to to bore you to tears with similar accounts of all of the utter stupidities that Kuroumov gave himself up to, as a result of the transformational project that we had instigated collectively, I shall say only that, in the course of a little more than two months, we extorted up to half a million rubles from him, now on ransom money on behalf of people who were taken captive or thrown into prisons, now on assistance to

41 Silenus, a deity of the forest (and the foster father and a loyal follower of the god Dionysus), was a god of strong contradictions. On the one hand, he was associated with musical creativity, ecstatic dance, and drunken joy. On the other hand, he was a wise prophet and the bearer of a terrible wisdom about existence, going so far as to claim that “not to be born is best of all.”
noble families that were leading nomadic lives in Kamchatka, in the Ural Mountains, on the banks of the Enisei River, and so on. Seldom did one of our meetings go by, where the Most Highly Enlightened One didn’t speak with great vitality about something earlier that our humble brother Capricorn had already inclined Kuroumov toward liking. It was to our great common misfortune that this tax farmer, who had given himself up to idleness, laziness, and utter sensuality, had left in charge of his affairs stewards who, in keeping with the established order of things, worried more about themselves than about the well-being of their master. Careless mistakes of some significance were routinely committed. Kuroumov’s estate was seized to obtain payment for money owed, and his house, including the library, as well as his paintings, were sold at public auction. At the auction, he watched with amazement as no one marveled at our rare books and paintings, all of which had cost so much for us to purchase, and which were now being sold for a song. I was present at this disgraceful and deplorable event, witnessing it first hand. Initially, Kuroumov was standing there motionless, watching frenetically as the auctioneer shouted out the amounts of the bids that were being made. Kuroumov’s eyes were turning sternly from side to side. From the gnashing of his teeth alone, it was evident that he wasn’t a coward. Later on, he would, not infrequently, smack himself on the forehead and crack his knuckles.”

“When the auction was over, and everything was finished, the new owner, the highest bidder, unceremoniously showed him the door. I don’t know what tomfoolery, or, better to say, what madness, so possessed me at that moment, that I suddenly forgot all of the admonitions that my wise mentor Dobroslavov had given me. I was filled with arrogance, boasting about my great exploits, or, more correctly, my great idling. And so I took Kuroumov aside and said to him, smiling craftily and clicking my heels forcefully, ‘Forgive me, most venerable Polar Goose! Do you happen to recall your sophisticated brother Capricorn? Know that I’m he himself!’ Kuroumov looked at me, at first with puzzlement, and then with rage.”

“‘What?’ he exclaimed. ‘So I was used as a toy, as a weapon of deception? Oh, you won’t get away with this, you scoundrel!’ He threatened me with his walking stick and came out onto the street rather hale and hearty. Where did all of these energies spring from in a man who formerly couldn’t descend the stairs and sit down in a carriage without the assistance of several male servants? I laughed at him as he was departing, following him with my eyes and crying out: ‘Bon voyage, Polar Goose!’”

“After committing this tomfoolery, I came back to my senses. I was dissatisfied with myself and decided not to mention anything about this incident to Dobroslavov, fearing a rebuke. I arrived at his house and occupied my former government post. Our Master, the Highly Enlightened One, and Olympius heaped praises upon me, counted out a significant sum of money with which to reward me, and then allowed me to rest a while, until the time came for me to go to work again. To my heightened chagrin, Kuroumov was simple to the point of childishness. He would tell the tale of his misfortune and unhappiness, and the reason why he suffered this fate, to all of his acquaintances, and even to people with whom he was not acquainted. And one scoffer hired a poet, who composed a very caustic satire, in which he presented Polar Goose as a bird that had

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been an entirely plucked of its feathers, and that’s why, instead of being able to soar up to
the stars and contemplate the spirits, he must humbly travel on foot, hanging his head
down, and walking in mud up to his knees.”

“Kuroumov read this satire and swore his irreconcilable hatred for us. My colleagues in
enlightenment learned of this incident by means of their spies, and they, for their part,
began to discuss the means of somehow shortening the tongue of the plucked Goose.”

“In the meantime, the weekly meetings continued, just as before. Licorisa would visit my
bed chamber, but she was still just as inexorable as before. She was awaiting a reply
from Tsar Golkondsky, my sovereign father. I attributed the blame for the silence either
to inclement weather, or to the unreliability of the postal service, or to the robbers who
could have robbed the envoy who was carrying the money in transit, murdered him,
drowned him, et cetera.”

“She, apparently, agreed with my attributions, caressing me, like a sister, and promising
to grant me her eternal love and faithfulness, just as soon as I return to her the family’s
purloined estate! I was getting lost in schemes designed to deceive her and thus to attain
my goal.”
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Chapter 58: Remedies for Hypochondria

After Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov had brought his life story up to the point in time when he had accomplished such a celebrated feat of enlightenment upon Polar Goose, the merchant Prichudin set off for another city to attend to some business matters involving commerce. Thus the prince, who remained behind with his son Nikandr, postponed the continuation of the narrative account of his past life until such time as his friend returned home.

Harsh autumn had arrived, and the October winds had begun to make noise. Leaves were falling off trees thick and fast. Leaden storm clouds were being carried along the horizon of Oryol and were suggestive of twilight having descended upon the brow of nature. Nature’s despondency, — despite the fortunate and happy position that our heroes were in, — was imperceptibly inducing a certain pensiveness that could be seen by the expressions on their faces. Prince Gavrilo would recall the days that had passed, whereas his son would recall his unforgettable Elizaveta, who, the more she occupied his heart, the more inseparably she filled his soul, the more brilliantly the youthful, maidenly charms of the adored object of his affection appeared to his fervid imagination. His obsession with her reached the point where nature, the source of all human joys, the mother-consoler of the sad and the pitiful, the draft of eternal wisdom, by means of whose scrutiny the weeper is comforted, the sorrowful mourner is assuaged, and the most unbelieving atheist, with humble reverence, raises his eyes up to the starry heights, — and bows down before them in worship, — this selfsame nature, I say, appeared to be groaning beneath the burden and was constantly standing still until evening’s resurrection would come.

This disposition of Nikandr’s melancholic soul didn’t, however, prevent him from noticing that his father, not only day after day, but hour after hour, was becoming more sullen, more unsociable, more, so to speak, unapproachable. Prince Gavrilo abandoned all of his exterior tidiness. His frock-coat wouldn’t be cleaned for an entire week at a time, his hair, for the same period of time, wouldn’t be combed. His eyes were dull and lackluster, his cheeks were pale and hollow. After eating supper as early as possible, he would lock himself up inside his study and not reappear until his son returned home from work to eat his supper. And, by that time, he looked like a corpse that had arisen from the grave.

Such incomprehensible behavior aggrieved Nikandr’s tender heart. He had noticed full well that his father was not in perfect health, but there was no way that he could get him to reveal the source of his illness. To ask the prince himself directly about this seemed to him to be an indiscreetness that might arouse his indignation. Nikandr was so tender and scrupulous. During the week, while Mister Prichudin was away, Elizaveta occupied his thoughts less than at any other time since he had first caught sight of her. It’s true that he loved her as much as before, perhaps even more so, but the thought that she was living under the roof of her parents, in the warm embrace of her family, whose members were trying to provide her with every possible distraction, if not even every possible amusement, — oh, how could one compare her situation with that of an old man, whose youth and bachelor years had been spent in the stormy, agitated sea of this world? He’s an orphan in a populous land, — and, up until now, only compassionate fellow sufferers have been his kin. If, from the very cradle, Nikandr had been brought up right in front of his father’s eyes, then perhaps he wouldn’t have been so susceptible to that timidity and
shyness that have hindered him from revealing his doubts and fears to his father. But now he loves the prince with all of his childlike tenderness, and yet now he also reveres him, as he would revere a stranger or a wise man, for his innumerable worldly experiences. Regardless of whether this is a good thing or a bad one, everyone can see here the consequences of a domestic and extraneous upbringing.

However, Nikandr, without deciding whether he himself would put his father to the test, found, apparently, a means of discovering the source of his illness, and, as a result, of finding the remedies for curing it: namely, he wrote down on a piece of paper the distinguishing physical marks on the prince’s face, his actions, his movements, his food, his drink, etc. and, without mentioning his name, he submitted this information to all of the most prominent, the most well-educated doctors in the city of Oryol, most of all, to all of those who were being extolled by improvident heirs, graveyard priests, and pharmacists, to whom they were providing generous amounts of daily bread. But, alas, – none of the Russian, German, Gallic, and British Aesculapiuses, each one of them separately, – could agree about the reason for the illness and about the remedies for its cure. What some of them were affirming, others were denying with a curse. And so Nikandr had to put to the test the latter means of discovering the source of his father’s illness: that is, to call together a medical council and listen to what each one of them had to say in the presence of all of their colleagues.

Not daring to do this at the house where he was living, Nikandr ordered a gourmet dinner, one that included a number of various delicacies, to be held for them at the best of the local eating-houses. All of the doctors accepted his invitation without question and convened at the eating-house, each and every one of them being pleased with the affectionate treatment that they were receiving from the host and with the taste of the refreshments that he was providing for them. The Russian doctor found the meat pie to be quite good and the cabbage soup to be very tasty. The German enjoyed the sandwich, the ham, and the frankfurters. The Frenchman preferred the soup and the sauces, whereas the Englishman devoured the roast beef and the beefsteak.

The beverages were likewise selected in conformity with the food dish that each one of them enjoyed the most.

When the dinner was over, and all of the guests, each in his own way, were in the best of spirits, Nikandr opened the meeting with a flowery speech, in which, while explaining the patient’s condition in a very verbose manner, he asked the doctors for their advice and their assistance. The physicians, after giving a little thought to the matter, adjudged that it would be best to allow their youngest colleague to speak first, and thus the following dispute took place:

**THE RUSSIAN**: “In my opinion, gentlemen, this patient is acting capriciously. In spite of his caprices, we should break down his door and, against his will, pour a glass of some good punch down his throat. If that doesn’t help, then pour yet another glass of punch down his throat. And if, even with this, there’s no luck, then try a third glass. I guarantee that the medicine shall take effect.”

**THE FRENCHMAN**: “Oh, my God! How can you treat a patient in such a violent manner? Truly, this treatment is considered proper only by Russian gentlemen! Punch? This would be
like poison for a man who is suffering from hypochondria! I’m of a completely different opinion! All indications make it evident that his blood has thickened: his phlegm has become heated. And so it’s absolutely essential that the one thing and the other be broken up. And, for that, there’s no better medicine than to search for a young, comely, healthy, dexterous girl. This is the universal medicine for hypochondria. Well, it just so happens that I have my eye on just such a medicinal treasure. The niece, or, as some others, who say spiteful things, would call her, the love child, born to the woman who ran a local boarding school for noble maidens, is very capable of performing this function. Oh, Rosa Innosans! – that’s her name, – she’s the phoenix of the female sex! She’s full-bodied and ruddy-complexioned, like a Russian townswoman; she’s stately, like a German baroness; she’s tender, like an English miss; and she’s dexterous, resourceful, and charming, like a French actress. At the boarding school, she gives the young maidens lessons on behavior, and her successes there are boundless. I have cured so many hypochondriacs of this terrible illness with the help of her God-given talents! So there you have it, gentlemen! I would hand my soul over to all of the devils of this enormous world of ours, if in one week she weren’t able to put our patient back up on his feet again, such that he would be laughing and dancing. And if he were not entirely able to stop locking himself inside his study, then, at the very least, there’s no doubt, he wouldn’t be doing that so that he could spend his time sitting there, meditating and looking downcast. All the same, this remedy shall cost you very little. Some sort of small diamond ring, a pearl necklace, an Indian shawl, and other such knick-knacks won’t amount to much.”

THE GERMAN (laughing out loud): “No, no, not at all! That’s what’s called being a physician in vogue. I think that you would like to cure young maidens, and old widows as well, of hypochondria by means of this same universal medicine! The pharmacists whose drugstores don’t carry any medications of this kind won’t be very grateful to you. The only ones who have arrogated to themselves the privilege of providing such a health benefit are French tutors and the headmasters at male boarding schools. Listen to me! Jena, Leipzig, and Gottingen know rather well who Doctor Grabshaufel is and what he’s like. My name, – my name alone, – is enough to inspire an opinion about me that I deserve! So then, this patient is suffering from hypochondria, if you shall permit me to say so, not due to any thickening of the blood (turning toward the Frenchman), but rather from a bilious attack and an inflammation of cerebral and hematic fibers. (Turning toward Nikandr) You say that the patient frequently becomes pensive?”

NIKANDR: “Yes, that’s right!”

THE GERMAN: “Does he sometimes roll his eyes over to the side, without he himself moving from the spot?”

NIKANDR: “Yes, that sometimes happens!”

THE GERMAN: “Does it happen that he opens his mouth, as if he wishes to say something, and then he suddenly stops, falls silent, and a dissatisfied look comes across his face?”

NIKANDR: “Yes, as I recall, several times that did indeed happen.”
THE GERMAN: “That’s enough, – I maintain that there’s nothing in the world better than the following remedy. Since the patient is locking himself up in his room and isn’t allowing anyone to come see him, you must lock him in from outside the room and not allow him to come out for an entire week. Don’t give him anything to eat or drink. But you may allow him, in a side room, to have some carousals, to play some symphonies, to sing some songs, to waltz around the room, and to do other such things of this kind. When it becomes noticeable that his bile, as a result of his fasting, has returned to its original condition, and the patient doesn’t have the strength to be able to get up out of bed, then you may begin to administer some further medications, not any of the French ones, however, but only the German ones: namely, give him some beer to drink, and some salad, butter, and cheese to eat. And, from time to time, allow him to smoke a pipe full of tobacco. This regimen shall take effect and provide astonishing results! I know this from experience. What say you, highly distinguished Doctor Todborug?”

THE ENGLISHMAN: “I would say that if Doctor Grabshaufel had reasoned in this manner in England, they would have locked him up inside an insane asylum for several days, prior to locking up our patient, who, truth be told, is likewise not far removed from being deemed insane. The Russian doctor formed an opinion about this case rather crudely, the Frenchman formed an opinion about it in a superbly stupid way, and you, a German, formed an opinion about it in a totally crazy way. No, in England, this isn’t the way that we cure patients who are suffering from this illness! My advice is this: load a pistol with two bullets, and, when the patient comes out of his room, give him the pistol and say to him: ‘You poor, wretched fellow! You’re a burden to yourself and to others. Leave this world, if it has become loathsome to you. To all appearances, it’s obvious that you think that drowning yourself would be a slow death, cutting your own throat would be a disgusting death, and hanging yourself would be an ignoble death. Here’s a pistol! The quickest, most noble, and most majestic way to die is to shoot yourself in the head, and the greater part of our best and wisest men in Great Britain have died in this fashion. In return, everyone considers them to be members of a grand and singular race of people. Your glass of punch, Mister Russian, which is, per se, the best drink in the world, isn’t worth a damn in this instance. Your mamzelle, Monsieur Frenchman, doesn’t deserve to be hanged. Your salad and your beer, Herr German, are more appropriate for cattle, which, in all fairness, is what you yourself are. A pistol, and a pistol alone, is the universal remedy for curing hypochondria.”

THE GERMAN: “They speak the truth, those people who say that if all of the rabid Englishmen were to be locked inside houses and forged into iron, then the whole of England would be turned into one big insane asylum, and all of the iron in Siberia and Sweden wouldn’t be sufficient for making the chains to restrain the inmates in that insane asylum.”

THE RUSSIAN: “I willingly renounce my earlier opinion concerning the patient, but there’s no way that I shall renounce my opinion about punch. And I hope that our dear friend, and presently our host, won’t now abandon the idea of prescribing the most meticulous recipe for that libation.”

THE FRENCHMAN: “As far as I’m concerned, they can do whatever they want, but Mamzelle Rosa, – she’s an inestimable remedy for the thickening of blood and of other vital juices.”
THE ENGLISHMAN: “Both of you are doing the right thing by being compliant, but as far as Doctor Grabshaufel is concerned, he, as far as I know, is a true German: that’s to say, he’s as stupid as a ram, as wicked as a marmorset, and as stubborn as a Ukrainian bull.”

THE GERMAN: “Truly. Doctor Todborug paints his portrait fairly well. I swear, I have more brains in my wig than he has in his head.”

THE ENGLISHMAN: “It’s so unpardonable, and even shameless, to keep such a treasure in the dark. Let your wig go enlighten the Russian people!”

With these words, the Englishman tore the wig off the German’s head, tossed it out the window, and then calmly and quietly sat back down on his seat. “Oh!” resounded from every corner of the eating-house. Doctor Grabshaufel leaped up furiously, like a rabid dog, grabbed a bottle of beer, and, with all of his might, threw it at his enemy, who, having avoided being struck by the projectile, walked up to the valiant doctor, seized him by the ears, for there was not a single strand of natural hair remaining atop his head, and dragged him over to the window, preparing to throw him out onto the street, after his wig. “Mein Gott, Jesus, Maria!” shouted the German, without ceasing, however, to dig his heels in as hard as he could and to flail his arms and legs at whatever he could. God only knows how all of this would have ended if the Russian physician, with assistance from the terrified owner of the eating-house and from Nikandr, hadn’t rushed over to separate these two contestants in a contest of knowledge and strength. As regards the Frenchman, he was laughing at the top of his lungs, saying: “I swear, by all of the former, present-day, and future physicians alike, that punch seldom does this, but the incomparable Rosa Innosans has never been the cause of some of the bloody exploits that a salad, a sandwich, and two pistols have prompted! Vivat Rosa, and all of the female doctors like her who have cured patients of their hypochondria.”

They managed to separate the two duelists. The Englishman straightened out his tousled hair, donned his hat, and, taking Nikandr by the hand, said: “Farewell! Don’t forget to use the medicine that I prescribed for you, and all day today you shall feel calm and tranquil.” With these words, he left. Poor Doctor Grabshaufel, standing in front of the mirror and putting back atop his head the wig that had been retrieved from the street, was busy wiping off the blood that was flowing from his lacerated ears.

“The shameless atheist!” he said with rage. “To prescribe such medications! Isn’t he a cruel, blood-sucking oppressor, a soul-destroying murderer! If I were the sovereign, I would order that such physicians be hanged, be broken upon the wheel, and be quartered. No, he shall not get away with this scot-free! I already have a nearly completed essay, 387 pages long “in folio,” in which it’s indisputably proven that the English method of medical treatment is absolute murder, deserving of capital punishment, both in this life and in the next. Today’s incident shall provide me with enough material to augment my essay by at least 200 pages.”

While leaving the eating-house, Doctor Grabshaufel terribly cursed Todborug, all of England, and the entire universe, anywhere that people endure such blood-thirsty physicians. The Russian doctor left the eating-house, shaking his head. And the Frenchman left, singing a song loudly and gaily.
Thus, Nikandr lost any hope of helping his poor father. He left it up to the three remaining
doctors to decide what kind of medical treatment should be given to his father: namely, God, his
father’s bodily physique, and time. Scarcely had he finished settling accounts with the owner of
the eating-house and was making ready to leave, when a servant from their house came running
in. The paleness of his face, the wandering look in his eyes, and the trembling throughout his
entire body led Nikandr likewise to shudder.

“What is it?” he exclaimed, directing his eyes fixedly on the servant.

“Prince!” replied the latter, “rely upon God’s assistance, – and don’t take fright. Things are not
entirely well at home! More than anything else, be firm and don’t be afraid. Great is the power
and the kindness of the Lord!”

“Speak up, speak up!”

“Your father, – the venerable Prince Gavrilo Simonovich . . .”

“Make haste, make haste.”

“Irretrievably, irrevocably, for ever and ever . . .”

“Has he died?” Nikandr exclaimed with despair.

“No, Your Highness,” the servant caught him up. “Thank Almighty God and all of the holy
martyrs, your father is healthy, just as before, but only he’s somewhat . . .”

“Don’t torment me, tell me everything, I’m ready to listen, if only it’s true that he’s still alive . .”

“Alive and well, but only, – he has, irretrievably, irrevocably, forever and ever, lost his mind!”

Nikandr, who was astounded, as if he had been struck by a clap of thunder, began to tremble,
started shaking, and, in an instant, fell to the floor unconscious.

Chapter 59: Story-Tellers

After several minutes, Nikandr regained consciousness, and he saw that he was encircled by the
owner of the eating-house, the owner’s wife, and their children. The servant rubbed Nikandr’s
temples so diligently with vinegar that it nearly flayed his skin off. Among the several
bystanders, Nikandr recognized Golyakov, the son of a rather prosperous country gentleman.
The latter walked up to Nikandr, out of an impulse of friendly commiseration, and said: “Dear
prince! Wouldn’t it be better for you to go home than to subject yourself to the unpleasantness of
becoming an object of conversation among scatter-brains, who shall weave some sort of stupid
tall tale at your expense?”

“Never,” objected Nikandr, “shall I ever step foot across the threshold of that house, where my
unfortunate and unhappy father is suffering!”
When everyone had calmed down a little, and Nikandr remained alone with Mister Golyakov and his servant, the two friends set about questioning the latter, asking him why he believed so emphatically that Nikandr’s father had lost his mind?

The servant replied:

‘One can’t think otherwise! As soon as His Highness began locking himself up inside his room, and began leading such a solitary life, all of the male and female servants, – as is their wont, from the first to the last of them, – began to make surmises about him, to suspect him, to spy on him, to eavesdrop on him, and, in this way, to get to the reason why the prince had changed so drastically. The head steward began to keep an eye on him and noticed that your father is sometimes sitting behind a candle in his room after midnight. This discovery was made through a keyhole. Not infrequently, our laundress has heard him mutter something, then he bangs the table with his fists and stamps the floor with his feet.’

‘As everyone can guess, such discoveries couldn’t have remained, – and, what’s more, ought not to have remained, – without some appropriate remarks having been made, and, after that, without some appropriate conclusions having been reached. Some people guessed that your father, of course, was, in his day, a great sinner, and now he’s cleansing his soul by means of fasting and prayer. Other people asserted that he more closely resembles a sorcerer who is practicing his black magic at night: the noise that occurs in his room from the stamping of his feet is an appeal to evil spirits, with whom he converses, and their consequent arrival upon the scene. I must confess that even I myself was somewhat of this opinion, especially when one could sometimes hear words that were very clearly and distinctly pronounced: evil spirit, devil, etc. All of the members of the household were afraid to approach the sorcerer’s refuge too closely. Soon, however, we were led out of our delusion. Everyone knows that, in this city, there’s an old Gypsy woman who has become famous for her sorcery and fortune-telling. We sent some deputies over to her place on the sly, and she, after questioning them thoroughly about the mode of life of His Highness, your father, and after examining everything in detail, thought for a moment, read fortunes for a moment, and then, finally, said resolutely: ‘No! Your gentleman is not a sorcerer. First of all: people of that sort always conduct their business in secret, being careful that no one approaches too closely to their refuge. Their main exercise takes place in a primeval forest or in an open field, but, if there is nothing else, in attics. Secondly: every fortune-teller, practitioner of black magic, or sorcerer can’t work later than twelve o’clock midnight. Thirdly: there’s no need for him to be an interlocutor with devils, for he, being wealthy, can find good friends and can circulate among people. And since Prince Gavrilo Simonovich acts completely differently than this, for he lives in his former study and does strange things, almost right up until dinner time, then we must conclude, – yes, I’m afraid that’s the way it is, – that he, poor man, has lost his mind.’

In this way, the most wise orator concluded his narrative. Despite all of the stupidity of these explanations, Nikandr was plunged into a dreadful thought. But several seconds later his young
friend Golyakov, instead of commiserating, let loose such an awful laugh that Nikandr and his servant winced, and the former couldn’t refrain from reprimanding his friend for his action, which was not in keeping either with their good will towards one another or even with standards of decorum.

“Have patience,” Golyakov retorted, “you, too, shall likewise laugh. Be more hopeful! Your father is as healthy as he was before. I can vouch for it with my life that he has the very same illness that some time ago drove my older brother to desperation. Listen to this brief account of an adventure that I had, and I can assure you that you shall calm down completely.”

“Not long before you were thrown out of the boarding school, – please forgive my informal, direct way of speaking, as is common between two friends, – I arrived in the country to stay for a while at my father’s house and visit with him, until such time as a government post could be found where I could serve. I found that my elder brother Yakov was already there. He had been turned out of the specialized school that he was attending in Moscow, and so he was living at home with the very same hope that I had of finding a government position. My brother was a learned man, the most terrible of all possible metaphysicians, the most obstinate of philosophers, and the most fervent and quick-tempered of poets, and, moreover, he was a tragic poet, which is the most dangerous kind of poet of all. To our great misfortune, our father didn’t know anything at all in the various branches of scholarly knowledge, other than how to sign his name, after a fashion, at the bottom of letters that were written by the full-time sexton in our village. My mother knew even less than my father did. Judge for yourself how surprised they must have been when my brother Yakov spoke to them about the mysteries of metaphysics and poetry, and when he explained to them what aphorisms, categories, iambics, and anapests are! When a person who doesn’t understand some topic at all has to listen to someone else speak about that topic for a long period of time, it will seem boring to him, especially if he is at liberty not to listen. My father, who had put up with his eldest son’s metaphysical attacks for a long time, finally told him, straight out, not only that he had never studied such nonsense, and wouldn’t ever be studying it in future, but also that he would advise his son to abandon all of this tomfoolery. Yakov, – as is proper for a learned man, – called him, speaking plainly and without beating around the bush, a simpleton and a silly goose. He called his mother a turkey-cock; and his sisters, – bustards, etc. The old man got mad and cursed those who had advised him to send his son to such a pretentious specialized school.”

“In order to take revenge upon his father, and to display even more graphically the magnificence of his talents, Yakov formed a most daring plan: namely, to compose a tragedy, and, moreover, the kind of tragedy that hadn’t yet existed in the world, that wouldn’t ever exist in future, and that shouldn’t exist at all.”

“Once, when we had been left alone together, he said the following to me:”

‘So, brother, I want to immortalize my name, and in this way render a service to my family, to my place of birth, to my fatherland, to the age we live in, and to the whole universe. The plan for my tragedy is ready. It’s taken from the life of Ivan
the Terrible, and it shall consist of twenty acts or more. I don’t like either Greek or Roman or French tragedians. It’s as if all of their tragedies are without any spirit or soul, – they lack taste, they lack feeling. I like some of the German tragedians, and even more so the English tragedians. In their plays, nature is everywhere, and, moreover, what kind of nature is it, for heaven’s sake? Natura naturans, and not naturata.’

‘There shall be as many as ten thousand characters in my tragedy. Why should I constrain myself needlessly? The first act shall contain the life of the tsar, from the day of his birth to the year when he came of age, when he himself would by now enter into the administration of the provinces. For greater accuracy, and for the purpose of eliciting sentimental tears from the members of the audience, I shall not fail to present, at the beginning of the play, scenes that depict how, during the tsar’s infancy, the prideful councilors, the rulers of the kingdom, offended the crowned child in every way possible. He weeps, he begs for mercy, – what could be more touching than that? Further along in the play, the ubiquitous fire in Moscow shall unfold, a fire from which two thirds of the city, including palaces and cathedrals, burns down to the ground, while one of the tsar’s kinswomen, a great sorceress, flies through the air, together with her daughter, and the two of them blow on the fire, fanning the flames. Truly now, isn’t all of this completely à la Shakespeare? Witches flying through the air! – Oh, how strikingly dramatic all of this shall be! Subsequently, the audience shall be presented with the execution of these two witches, the slaughter of the boyars, various internal revolts, plagues, famine, the tsar’s siege and subsequent capture of Kazan and Astrakhan, and the eradication of the members of the Novgorodian nobility and clergy. And all of this majestic spectacle shall conclude with the death of the tsar and the assassination of his son. All of this shall be animated; the mores and manners, the customs of the age, shall be observed. Entire armies shall join in battle, and blood shall flow like rivers, screams and groans shall rise up to the sky; wolves and crows shall be devouring the corpses of those who were killed in battle or who perished from famine or from plague. In decorous places, jesters and buffoons shall make their appearance. In a word, I want my tragedy to serve as a mirror that reflects the entire world. If it doesn’t produce the desired impression, that’s to say, one of pity and horror, as Aristotle proposes,42 then woe to our fatherland and to our age! In that instance, I would clearly see that all of the members of the audience resemble the ignoramus that my father is.’

“Thus reasoned my eloquent brother Yakov, who set off to work with tireless energy on his project, whereas I set off to visit my relative, who lived in a remote village. After about two weeks, the entire household had been horrified. One needs to know that my brother lived in a peculiar little house located in a garden. Right at the stroke of midnight, such a racket, such strange sounds, would begin to be heard at his house, as if house sprites from all over the world had selected it as their county seat. One could hear,

42 In his Poetics [1453b] [1], Aristotle writes that in a tragedy the playwright ought to arouse in the audience feelings of pity and horror.
from time to time, a groan, a sigh, and a morbid wail. The chairs in the house would move, the windows would make a ringing sound, the tables would creak, and so on. In a word, nobody dared to approach the house. The next morning, Yakov’s father would ask him, what was the reason for the unusual sounds coming from his rooms? ‘I don’t know; I didn’t hear anything.’ would be his son’s reply. A second night, and then a third, and a fourth, passed in the very same way. The entire household was plunged into a gloomy despondency, and my father, although he was an elderly man and not a learned one, nonetheless decided, for the sake of a resumption of peace and quiet in the house, to try to see whether he could get the days of his brave youth to return. Having become firmly convinced that they indeed could, and keeping his idea as secret as possible, he assembled an advisory council that consisted of six of the strongest and bravest of his house serfs. At the meeting of this advisory council, it was decided that, during the night, they, armed with weapons and the power of the cross, would go wage battle against the house sprites, for they thought that such sounds couldn’t have been made by just a single one of them. As soon as the clock struck eleven o’clock at night, the time when the evil spirits usually began their activities, my courageous father, at the head of his army, took the field of battle against their foe, not forgetting to place two lighted candles in front of the icon of Saint George the Victorious.\footnote{Saint George the Victorious was a Roman soldier (a member of the Praetorian Guard for the Roman Emperor Diocletian) who died in 303 AD. Sentenced to death for refusing to recant his Christian faith, he became a Great Martyr for the Eastern Orthodox Church and a highly revered saint in both the Western and Eastern Christian churches (he is, for example, the patron saint for Moscow, England, Georgia, and Ethiopia). The legend of “Saint George and the Dragon” tells the story of Saint George slaying a dragon and thus saving the life of a princess who was going to be sacrificed to that dragon, an event that was commemorated in numerous medieval icons as well as, more recently (beginning in 2006), gold and silver coins minted by the Central Bank of Moscow.} One of the warriors was carrying a large lantern.”

“Constantly protecting themselves, with one hand upon the cross and the other hand holding on to a sabre or a rusty old spear that had been put into action three hundred years ago against the Tatars, the warriors entered the corridor that was the first entrance to my brother’s rooms. They were surprised to see that there was a small, lighted lamp hanging in the opposite corner of the room, and there was an armchair, on which some kind of scarecrow, dressed in rags and tatters, was sitting. The scarecrow’s head was lying on the arm of the chair, and, for that reason, it wasn’t possible to see the scarecrow’s face clearly and to identify it. Our brave lads were dumbfounded; a shiver ran through their veins. ‘Arkhip,’ my father whispered, ‘go a little closer to take a look and see who’s there. You have a spear, so you can reach it from a distance!’ ‘Save me, mother of God,’ Arkhip replied. ‘I’m not sick of living my life! How can yours truly crawl into the mouth of an evil spirit? It would be more reasonable, sir, for you to do it; you’re a gentleman. And, what’s more, your sabre was cleaned recently, whereas with my spear one wouldn’t be able to handle a dog, let alone a devil!’ At this point, each of them crossed himself. For a long time, they were unable to decide what to do, and so they just stood there in silence. The midnight stillness was exercising dominion over the
house, when suddenly, at some distance from them, a weak, worn-out voice could be heard to say: ‘For pity’s sake, spare me!’ – ‘No, show no favor, show no mercy!’”

“A horrible howl resounded throughout the room, accompanied by a terrible crackling sound, as if the entire house had collapsed, and, in an instant, the side doors opened noisily, the scarecrow, with dagger drawn, ran out of the room quickly and headed toward someone who was sitting in the armchair, stabbing him several times. Then, clenching the dagger between his teeth and gasping for breath from the fury that he was feeling, he stamped his feet.”

“The heroes, turning to stone, were petrified. While one ghost was dealing quite cruelly with another one, the men just stood there motionless, as if they were dead. Their lips had turned blue, and a terrible paleness covered their cheeks. They didn’t dare to look at one another. Trouble gives birth to yet more trouble, as the saying goes. And so it was with these heroes. Arkhip, the most courageous of all the courageous warriors who took part in local fist fights and tavern duels, the son upon whom his father relied for support, steadfast as a stone wall, began to tremble, then to sway to and fro, and he would have fallen to the floor, if his spear hadn’t supported him. But he had banged his spear against the floor so hard that he aroused the attention of the ghost, who glanced back at him. Bloody were the looks that he cast in Arkhip’s direction: a thick, black beard hung down to his waist, a hat that looked like a sugar loaf adorned his head. For several seconds the ghost scrutinized the newcomers, and then suddenly he exclaimed:

‘A hellish betrayal! What do I see right in front of me! May all of you perish in suffering, in severe torment!’

“With these words, the ghost rushed toward the discoverers of spirits. ‘May God be resurrected and may His enemies be squandered!’ my father was scarcely able to whisper through his quivering lips, and then the first of his warriors took flight. All of the others followed suit, in proportion to their level of courage: one would go quickly, another would go even more quickly. All of them managed to clear out of there safe and sound, however, escaping before the evil spirit could punish them for their curiosity.”

“I didn’t know anything about this incident at the time, for I arrived home at daybreak, when the night was ending, and after the knights had already demonstrated their courage.”

“Around dinner time, when I went to present myself to my father, I found him unusually sullen. That he was upset was evident in every feature of his face.”

“‘My son,’ he said to me, inviting me to take a seat, ‘I’m very unfortunate and very unhappy!’ At this point, he told me very candidly about the reasons for, – and the consequences of, – the midnight warfare that had occurred the night before, and he added: ‘So! I now have reason to fear that your brother Yakov, through his cursed branches of scholarly knowledge, has gotten to know the evil spirits and has handed his soul over to them. Only how can he sleep in a place like that, where there are so many
horrors committed? And he won’t stop for a moment to think about it! Oh, I truly am an ill-starred man!”

“Father,’ I said jokingly, which surprised the old man quite a lot, ‘you deign to destroy yourself to no purpose! Your son has never entered into such unions with evil spirits, but rather he’s working on the glorification of himself, of his family, of his fatherland, of his age, and of the entire universe. In a word: he is occupying himself with a tragedy.’”

“The old man opened his eyes wide.”

“‘But what kind of person is this, my friend?’ he asked me impetuously. ‘Surely he’s not a product of the devil’s womb, now is he?’”

“I described for him at length the dignity of this elevated work, as well as some of the other characteristics that are associated with it. My father sighed at every word that I spoke, raising his eyes up to the icon of the Mother of God, the Joy of All Who Sorrow,44 and, finally, he said: ‘So! Now I understand what all of the misfortune and unhappiness are all about. He, the poor soul, is either a sleepwalker or a complete lunatic. He must be given some help as soon as possible.’”

“Having strictly instructed me not to reveal to anyone the contents of our conversation, he ordered that the horses be harnessed, and then he galloped over to the nearest small town. Despite the prohibition that my father had imposed upon me, I felt like talking things over with my brother and warning him, but no matter how many times I knocked at the doors of his little house, it was all in vain. Evidently, he was at that very moment composing the most ferocious of monologues. Our father returned home toward evening time, and he returned with a medico. When everyone had finished their supper, my father, exhorting his former co-warriors not to be timid, told them about the new plan that he intended to put into action, for the person who was up to mischief was none other than his son, who knows absolutely nothing about devils, although he does often say things and write things that are filled with wickedly idiotic devilry.”

“When the appointed hour had arrived, all of us set off together for the tragedian’s house, equipping ourselves, this time, with a sufficient quantity of rope, rather than with a sabre and a spear. After Arkhip had entered the corridor, he, – the brave Arkhip, – was no longer afraid of anything. Along with a different servant this time, he concealed himself near the doors, out of which the scarecrow should be appearing. The scarecrow didn’t keep them waiting for very long. Soon such a mixture of noise and droning arose that one truly could have thought that my brother had either constructed a lair for devils or

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44 In Eastern Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Christianity, the “Joy of All Who Sorrow” is a title given to the Theotokos (Mary, the Mother of Jesus), who is depicted in this type of icon as standing beneath her Son, who is up in heaven as a king, and she is surrounded by people and angels. Her role in bringing hope and salvation into the world (thus becoming “joy for all who sorrow”) is celebrated here.
else had gone out of his mind. Shortly thereafter, the doors opened wide, and the scarecrow rushed out, throwing himself upon the same person who had been the object of his fury just the day before. But the scarecrow hadn’t managed to take five steps before Arkhip and his comrade seized him from behind. The other warriors, who had come running up, knocked him off his feet, snatched the dagger out of his hands, and bound his hands and feet with rope. My brother looked like a raving lunatic. At this point, we approached him and saw that the versifier was wearing an old-fashioned masquerade outfit. Atope his head there was a paper hat that resembled the crowns that were previously worn by the tsars. When my brother had been relieved of these decorations, – as well as of his false beard and mustache, – the medico set about applying to him the instruments of medical treatment, or, better yet, the instruments of torture. No matter how much poor Yakov pleaded with the medico to have mercy on him, no matter how much he swore that he would no longer write, not only such horrible tragedies, but also such terrible tearful dramas and tearful comedies, it was all in vain. His father was implacable. They bled Yakov, they shaved the back of his head, and they applied a Spanish fly to him. Father also ordered two of the servants not to leave his bedside, until such time as his wound would heal and the hair on the back of his head would grow back.”

“That very same night, a new tragedy that he had written, and all of the other literary works that he had written before then, not excepting even two theatrical pieces, – one of them German, the other English, – were committed to the flames. I was made to translate the titles of all of the works in my brother’s entire library, and at the slightest doubt my father would toss the book into the fire, as he kept repeating: ‘Be gone, evil spirit!’”

“His scarecrow, which represented some kind of noble captive, was hacked all to pieces. My brother soon made a complete recovery, he forgot all about his tragedy and all about his glorification of the fatherland, of the age, and of the universe. ‘If your father is suffering from this terrible illness, then it shall be easy to cure him, because he’s wiser and more experienced than my brother Yakov. Let’s go visit him and take a look.’”

Our two friends set off for the house where Gavrilo Simonovich was staying and, fortunately for them, they found him at home, where he was just sitting down at the supper table. He received the guests affectionately and invited them to join him at table.

Nikandr and his comrade were somewhat surprised to find that the patient was cheerful and talkative, joking pleasantly with his guests. When the meal had ended, and his son alluded to the recent change in his behavior, – behavior that had so worried the entire household, especially him, – the old man smiled and said: “My friend! You’re still a novice in the world, and thus you don’t yet know that there are people in the world who have the impertinence to allow themselves to enter the domain of authorial fame, and they aren’t yet doing the kind of literary work that merits it! So, Nikandr, I wanted to, – and still want to, – become an author!”

“Good heavens!” his son exclaimed sadly. “I would never have thought that you, with your intelligence, could have become so . . .”
“Stupid, is what you wish to say?” the prince caught him up. “Quiet down a bit, my friend! To become a story-teller is by no means such a stupid aspiration, only one must know how to get started in this profession.”

“Merciful God up in heaven above!” Nikandr said even more sadly. “Were it a novel, a comedy or something else that’s a little easier that you would be writing, but a tragedy! I swear that writing a tragedy has driven even young people out of their minds. Just ask my comrade here.”

“No matter how much Gavrilo Simonovich was attempting to maintain an air of importance, he couldn’t restrain himself from laughing.

“My friends,” he said, “now I, too, shall, for my part, reveal to you my secret. Yes! The thought came to me that I should devote my leisure time to reflecting upon my past life, and that I, for my own greater personal satisfaction, as well as for the benefit that it could perhaps bring to society, should become a story-teller. The only thing that remained to be done was to select a genre of writing by means of which I could bring glory to the name of the Chistyakov line of princes. All of the power of a work of literature resides in that. It’s always necessary, before dipping one’s pen into the inkwell, that one think long and hard about whether he knows well the subject about which he wishes to write: shall the literary work be pleasurable and profitable for those people who shall read it? does the story-teller possess sufficient strength to see the literary work through to its completion? If this isn't the case, then the story-teller won’t be bringing profit to anyone, except to ink merchants, to factory owners who manufacture paper, and to makers of black shoe polish. For there can be no harm in a literary work that posseses at least some amount of profit for the reader.”

“Basing myself on these truths, I began to reflect upon these two questions: what am I most capable of and talented at? and what should I undertake to write about?”

“After careful consideration . . .”

At that very same moment a courier drove up and demanded that Nikandr report immediately to the governor.

“I shall be back right away,” Nikandr said to his father and to their guest Golyakov, and then he hurried off.
“After careful consideration,” Prince Gavrilo Simonovich continued, “I came across, first of all, the epic poem as the most suitable genre of works of human genius. In my mind, I ran through all of the epic poets, finding in them some unbounded talents, inexhaustible imagination, soaring passion, and so on. But, at the same time, I found so much nonsense, so many absurdities, and absolutely nothing that would bring profit to our earthly world. For example: has anyone ever become a better person or a better citizen upon reading, in *The Iliad*, how Achilles, although not wanting to hand Agamemnon over to his concubine as a prisoner, calls the tsar of tsars a drunkard and a son of a bitch? Or upon reading, in *The Odyssey*, the description of the bedroom of the enchantress Circes, where the author enumerates, it seems, all of the hairpins that this powerful fornicatress used for pinning up her hair and thus better displaying her female charms? And it’s well known that Homer is considered, amongst us Russians, as the father of epic poetry writing, and thus everyone has taken him, – and continues today to take him, – as a model of writing.”

“Consequently, leaving the epic alone, I descended to the tragedy. I don’t wish to speak at all about the ancients. I never found in them what my heart was seeking, and I don’t understand how the latest writers, who have come to know human nature, the branches of scholarly knowledge, and the arts, can be so carried away by the ancients and so admire them! And, what’s more, the mere fact that each one of them has written such a pile of tragedies (if the philologists are telling us the truth) seems enough to prove that they were writing a tragedy in just two sittings. Now what good can there be in that?”

“And so let’s now turn our attention to the new writers of tragedies. French tragedies have seemed to me to be narrow, shallow boats, on which scarecrow versions of Achilles, Agamemnons, Hectors, Alexanders, and Caesars, dressed in the type of embroidered *kaftans* worn by chamberlains, with *catelaines* on their braids and seventeenth-century wigs on their heads, are floating down a burbling stream. English tragedies, and the German copies made from them, resemble, for the most part, a large valley whose view one can’t entirely take in. There rivers foam and streams seethe, by their side is a marsh, where frogs croak and serpents hiss. Beautiful flowers, – roses, lilies, and carnations, – grow there, entangled with nettles and burdock plants. Claps of thunder roar, bolts of lightning rend the sky, illuminating the swords of warriors and the blood shed by them. Meanwhile, jesters in jangling caps are leaping in front of them, jingling snaps. One must do them justice, however. England and Germany can boast of several truly worthy tragedians, who have completely surpassed the ancients and the moderns of all ages and of all nations, and who can serve as worthy models.”

“Finding that it wasn’t within my power not only to surpass the English and German tragedians, but even to compare with them, I didn’t wish to be ranked lower than them, so I breathed a sigh of relief and descended to the comedies.”

“I don’t think that the origins or beginnings of this genre of literary work can be ascribed to a desire to reform the mores and manners of people. It would be more well-founded to say that we are indebted to this genre for our low opinion of human beings, for our malice toward them, and for our hatred of them. Someone who has something personally against
another person wouldn’t dare to reveal the qualities that disturb him. He would represent
his adversary under a false name, without forgetting to color his portrait in such a way
that everyone could easily guess who it is that he’s talking about. But initially they
would disregard such a courtesy. I have found that this genre of literary work, when
written for the stage, flooded the entire universe, for the source of its origins is common
to people everywhere. Although there have been enough incidents in my life that could
have been the grounds for a comedy that would have turned out none too badly, even a
tearful comedy, a genre in which some Germans distinguish themselves so much, I have
left both Thalia and Melpomene alone, for I feel a certain repugnance at writing
anything that is at all alluring or tempting. Indeed, morality today has debased itself to
such an extent, and taste has become so corrupted in our fatherland, that none of our so-called ‘best people’ would watch for a second time a comedy in which there are so few
smutty double entendres, seductive situations, and, in general, every possible kind of
moral baseness. If anyone, out of pity for his fellow countryman, were truly to undertake
writing a real comedy, one that would seek to reform our native mores and manners,
rather than corrupt them, his actors would be whistled off the stage at the play’s first
performance. It’s worthwhile to take a look around you a dozen or so times at the theatre
and watch attentively what the young girls in the audience, – both the semi-betrothed and
the fully-betrothed girls, – are doing! Having blushed beet red from the boiling of her
blood, hardly able to take a breath of air due to the ardor that she is feeling, with half-
opened lips, with eyes moist from exhaustion, she is watching as a young soldier or a
court playboy makes a declaration of love to a young girl, without the knowledge of her
father or mother, without any intention of marrying her (for the valet-de-chambre shall
already have announced this to his dear Lizette), after which he shall drive her away with
him, – drive, drive, and, at last, bring her to a place that he has visited earlier with other
young girls. It shall reach the point where the parents are sighing, are weeping and
moaning, are cursing, and so on. What do our young male and female spectators do
then? At that point, they occupy themselves with eating oranges, drinking lemonade,
telling stories, and interpreting earlier scenes that captivated them, and they shall wait
impatiently while young madmen clap their hands and stomp their feet. This signal
indicates that things have again reached the point of corruption and depravity. Female
beauties cease to converse, – and they watch, unable to take a breath. That is a truthful
depiction of a comedy today.”

“And that’s the reason why, after casting away all of these ravings and fantasies, I took it
into my head to describe my own personal life. In it, you shall find quite a number of
comedies, tragedies, and tearful dramas. I won’t be to blame if some blockheads won't
be able to profit from my example. My fits of frenzy, which so frightened Nikandr and
the entire household, were the result of my repentance, my regret, my dissatisfaction with
self, and some other passions that were aroused in me during the examination of the
course of my past life.”

45 Thalia, the Greek muse of comedy, is one of the three sister goddesses (they’re known as the
three graces) who are the givers of charm and beauty in Greek mythology. Terpsichore,
meanwhile, is the Greek muse of dancing and lyric poetry. She is traditionally portrayed as the
mother of the Sirens
The clock struck twelve o’clock midnight. The guest bid his host farewell, and then he left. And Prince Gavrilo, lying down to sleep, said to himself: “Something important, evidently, has detained my son.”

Chapter 60: The Wedding Didn’t Take Place

The next morning, the prince asked his servant, “When did Nikandr arrive home last night?” Instead of a reply, the prince was given a note, in which he read the following lines: “I’m leaving at midnight on an assignment from the governor. I didn’t want to trouble you with a leave-taking. I hope to return soon.”

The prince was a bit worried. “Why wouldn’t he write more clearly about where exactly he was going?” he said to himself. “And for what purpose? Shall he be away for a long time? Is my Nikandr really a typical son?”

The tea and breakfast that he was served seemed tasteless to the prince. He got dressed hastily and hurried off to go have a talk with the governor. “There is absolutely nothing for you to worry about,” His Excellency said, upon hearing the prince’s qualms. “Your son has been sent on this assignment expressly for the purpose of giving him an opportunity to distinguish himself and to draw the attention of the higher authorities. Where has he been sent? And for what purpose? – I’m not at liberty to say, until such time as the matter has been concluded. It’s a rather important matter, and it requires secrecy for the time being.”

Although the prince was not entirely satisfied with the governor’s reply, there was nothing he could do about it. And so he decided to devote his hours of solitude to describing his past life, abandoning his earlier practice of locking himself up inside his room, as he used to do, and thus incurring the suspicion of his domestic servants and his neighbors.

Since there is, for the time being, nothing interesting going on at the Prichudin household, let us be borne away to the village of les Messieurs et Madames Prostakovyy. Perhaps we shall see something noteworthy happening there.

The month of November had arrived. Prince Svetlozarov, like the May wind, was in the air at the Prostakov home. Katerina had blossomed, like a full red rose. A smile rested upon the aged lips of Ivan Efremovich. Cheerful Maremyana Kharitonovna was busy running about, bustling and fussing, examining everything, ordering everything, re-ordering everything, – without anger or swearing, however. Only Elizaveta was indifferent to everything. A look of gloomy tranquillity could be seen in her eyes. The general joyfulness of the household, it seemed, didn’t affect her at all. She was an orphan in the embraces of her father and mother; she felt as though she was alien, even unknown, throughout the entire house. She spent the greater part of each day sitting in her bedroom, wearing out the seats of chairs as she sat behind a book or a loom, as she engaged in reading, weaving, and other similar activities.

The wedding day arrived. Everyone in the household got up very early that morning. Everywhere there resounded the sound of noise and knocks at the door. Some were shouting out commands, others were carrying out those commands, – everyone had some matter to attend to.
Wedding invitations had been sent out ahead of time. When everyone had gathered in the entrance hall, Ivan Efremovich asked Katerina: “Why is it that you’re not dressed appropriately? It shall soon be eight o’clock; it’s an hour’s drive to the nearest church. Go on now. I’ve ordered the carriage to be harnessed.”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Maremyana with an air of importance. “What do you want us to do, my dear? Do you really wish for us to put ourselves to shame forever? Marrying our daughter off after mass! That’s proper and decent only for peasants and merchants, whereas a noble maiden should get married at midnight! Remember how the female commissioner, the female counselor, and other female officials got married!”

Prince Svetlozarov and Katerina were of the same opinion, but nothing could persuade the master of the house to change his mind. He, like Zeno of Elea and Crates of Thebes, stood firm in his intentions and plans. “I want my daughter, before she makes vows of constant love and faithfulness to her husband, to make supplications to the Almighty, asking Him to provide a merciful outlook in her future condition. Katerina! Go get dressed! We need to be on time for mass.”

She was obliged to obey her father. Mother and daughter began to get dressed, and Prince Viktor ordered his carriage to be harnessed as well.

The invited male and female guests had arrived, and, after some minor arguments concerning the bride’s attire, everyone was ready. The carriages were brought forward, the father of the bride, with an icon, gave his blessing to the betrotheds, and the groom offered his arm to his bride. They started out for the church, when suddenly, out in the courtyard, an uproar and the clatter of horse hooves could be heard. Everyone rushed over to the windows, expecting to see one of the wedding guests arriving, but they were greatly astonished to see an unusual change in the face of Prince Viktor. He began to tremble all over. His hand let go of Katerina’s hand. What he saw took his breath away. If some of the frightened observers had not supported him, he would have fallen to the floor.

While everyone was bustling about and making a fuss, not knowing what to do, the doors of the sitting room opened quickly, and in walked a young man in a full-dress uniform, accompanied by another young man, who was weighed down by iron chains. A detachment of six men followed behind them.

“Nikandr!” exclaimed Elizaveta, stretching her arms out toward the young man who had just entered the sitting room, yet without moving from the spot. “Nikandr!” said Prostakov, taking a

46 Zeno of Elea was a pre-Socratic Greek philosopher who belonged to the Eleatic School founded by Parmenides. He is known for his paradoxes, which Bertrand Russell characterized as “immeasurably subtle and profound.” Crates of Thebes was a Greek Cynic philosopher who gave away his money to live a life of poverty on the streets of Athens. He is remembered for being the teacher of Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism.
step backwards. “Nikandr!” Maremyana uttered, biting her tongue and letting her hands drop to her side as a sign that she was losing heart.

Yes, indeed! It was Nikandr himself. He walked up to Prostakov courteously and said: “I beg you to forgive me for the disturbance that I’ve caused you! It’s, however, a life-saving disturbance that shall benefit your entire household.”

At this point, the prisoner that had been led into the room took a step forward and, extending his hand out to Prince Svetlozarov, who had turned to stone and was rooted to the spot, he said to him: “Friend! I grew tired of the life that we were leading. Everything has been revealed to the authorities, to whom fate had exposed me. The only thing missing is your corroboration. Follow my example!”

Nikandr gave a signal, and, in an instant, chains came crashing down upon Prince Svetlozarov’s arms. A detachment of Guards surrounded the two friends and dragged them off, leading them down the stairs. Nikandr said to Prostakov: “I’m carrying out the government’s injunction. Your home has been delivered from the hands of a scoundrel, whom you had wished to make your son-in-law. He also alienated you from an intelligent, kind, and good man, Prince Chistyakov, a man who truly did love you. Yes, that’s true! He has been offended and hurt by you, yet he doesn’t harbor either any anger or any ill will toward you, nor does he harbor any desire to seek vengeance on you. His feelings are above such base impulses of the heart. Don’t think that I, as his son and his friend, am speaking out of bias or partiality. No, not at all! During the time of my stay in your home, when I was alienated from all of nature, I found in him a benefactor and a sage. I’m leaving your home with the pleasant hope that you shall cultivate the same lofty feelings for my father that he cultivated earlier for you, feelings that he’s always worthy of!”

At this point, Nikandr exchanged bows with Prostakov, left the sitting room, took a seat in the wagon, and galloped away. The situation, for each of the family members, was indescribable. Katerina, as the main character, was terribly upset and confused; Prostakov, who had fastened his gaze upon the door through which they had just dragged the betrothed son-in-law away, and through which Nikandr had vanished earlier, stood there motionless; Maremyana, casting glances now at her husband, now at her daughter, was whispering: “Oh, holy Mother of God! What has happened to Prince Viktor? What was it that they said: that Nikandr is Prince Gavrilo Simonovich’s son?”

Elizaveta was standing there frozen, as if she had turned to stone. She hadn’t heard even half of the words that Nikandr had spoken, so staggered was her whole being as a result of his sudden appearance at their home: her eyes were roaming, her head was spinning, her knees were giving way beneath her. Finally, tears began to flow down her face like a torrent. She let out a moan, covering her face with her hands, and she withdrew to her bedroom, where she fell, face down, on her bed. It seemed that, at that time, her fear when facing her father, her bashfulness when facing her mother, the guests, and the domestic servants, – all of this, for Elizaveta, was now forgotten. It was Nikandr, who was leaving, that alone occupied all of her thoughts, all of her feelings.

Ivan Efremovich, as should have been the case for a man, and, what’s more, for a husband and for a father, was the first one to return to his senses, and, sitting down on the sofa, he said: “Good
God! Say what you shall, but ever since princes started making their appearance in my household, I have become unfortunate and unhappy! One prince drives out another one, one prince slanders another one. Earlier, the police were searching for Chistyakov, as if he were a thief and a robber, but they don’t succeed in finding him. Now the younger Chistyakov has acted the same way vis-a-vis Svetlozarov. This is starting to look like it’s a serious matter! One of them is a scoundrel. We need to find out the truth and learn which one of these two princes it is. I shall not allow people to make fun of me so shamefully, – to make fun of an old man.”

“And a nobleman by birth,” Maremyana chimed in, after regaining the use of her senses. “Oh, if they had tried to act this way in the home of my late father, who hosted balls and theatre performances.”

“May the devil take all of these theatres of yours!” her husband exclaimed irascibly. “And in what way is the comedy that has only just now been played upon us a bad thing? It would be worthwhile to perform the sounds made by halberds being banged on the floor and by chains crashing down on the arms of a captive. Whatever the case may be, I must get to the bottom of this matter and find out where the truth lies, for otherwise I shall go out of my mind. Tomorrow I’m traveling to Oryol, and I shall see there what it is that we shall start thinking and what we shall start doing!”

What a change had come over the Prostakov household! Some of the guests had driven away, others had been calmed down enough to stay for dinner, so that the food that had been prepared gratis wouldn’t go to waste. It was pitiful to look at Katerina, who was throwing the wedding apparel together into a pile on the floor with such a sad look on her face. Out of shame and sadness, she had refused dinner, had laid down on her bed and cried from vexation. The day passed in a very boring manner, especially since everyone had expected to spend the day cheerfully and pleasantly, and they had prepared themselves for enjoying such merriment. By the time nightfall had arrived, the guests had all departed and gone their separate ways, – each to tell their household servants, as well as outsiders, what wonders had taken place at the Prostakov home. On the following day, Ivan Efremovich set out on the road to seek out the truth.

After five days on the road, our traveler, who was extremely confused and embarrassed, passed through the gates of Oryol. At that point in time, he debated where he should stop for the night. To drive to Prichudin’s house, as he had been accustomed to doing in the past, he now considered to be improper, for it was safe to assume that surely the old man had already been aware for a long time now, having heard it from Nikandr, of Prostakov’s suspicions concerning Prince Gavrilo Simonovich. And, what’s more, meeting up with Nikandr at Prichudin’s home would be extraordinarily distressing for him. So he stopped for the night at an eating-house instead.

After sitting in the common hall of the eating-house for about an hour, he saw that everyone was rushing over to the windows. So he followed suit, placing his head by one of the windows and glancing out at the street, but in an instant he was rushing away from the window with great urgency, as if he had just seen some monster outside. He very nearly knocked three other curious onlookers off their feet.
And there truly was a sufficient reason for the horror that he felt! No sooner had Prostakov placed his head by the window, as I just mentioned, than he saw a convoy of prisoners, accompanied by guards with drawn cutlasses, and in the middle of that convoy was Prince Svetlozarov and his comrade, the two of them chained together. They resembled two night-time ghostly apparitions! Where was the prince’s former dexterity, his pleasantness, and his cheerfulness? Alas! An open flaw is afraid to take a good look at itself.

When the prisoners had been taken away, the curious bystanders left the windows that they had been standing at or else rushed over to the doors. Ivan Efremovich, meanwhile, sat motionless on his chair. In his imagination, the prisoners’ chains presented themselves to him incessantly, and the sound of their clanging resounded in his ears. Only toward dinner time, when a sufficient number of people had gathered at the eating-house, did he somewhat recover from the shock. It goes without saying that, among the various matters that are usually being discussed around the dinner tables at eating-houses, the topic of the convicts in the stocks was not quickly forgotten. One commentator, who distinguished himself above all of the rest, was an undersized, pot-bellied, uncombed man in a civilian overcoat. During the conversation, he kept interrupting all of the other speakers, and he was able to combine together three important skills: he was able to eat, to drink, and to speak incessantly. His right hand, like the kind of pendulum that’s found in clocks, kept moving from the plate to his mouth, while the left hand was busy wiping away the sweat dripping from his scarlet face. When dinner had ended, Ivan Efremovich, not without good reason, thought that the pot-bellied rhetorician would satisfy his curiosity, better than the other people who were sitting there. That’s why, after inviting this man to have a drink of coffee with him, Prostakov asked him: “Who were those criminals that they had seen shortly before?” and “What fate had befallen them?”

“Since it pleases Your Worship to know the exact truth,” the man with a paunch belly replied, “I, your most humble servant, shall endeavor to expound it for you in a brief extract. I occupy the civil service post of chief clerk at the county court, for whose sake I know everything. This is who the two aforementioned convicts in the stocks are: one of them, the slightly taller one, is the son of an Orthodox priest, while the other one, according to documents, turned out to be a nobleman by birth, just like Your Excellency. Both of them, after squandering all of their money, embarked upon a series of illegal activities. They wore disguises and bore false names. Now they would appear as merchants, now as noblemen, princes, counts, and so on, depending on the circumstances. At various times, they were thieves, robbers, and arsonists. They would abduct daughters from their fathers, and wives from their husbands, and they would do so all for the sake of profit. Not far from town, in a dense forest, their lair was discovered, a place where they were supporting about twenty of their comrades in crime and a large number of girls that they had kidnapped. This den of thieves of theirs has now been detected, and, after those who had been taken captive through deception are set free, these thieves shall be shipped beyond Lake Baikal to play their loathsome, godless tricks in exile there.”

“What’s the strangest, and the funniest, thing of all is that these rogues, especially the ones who are of gentry breeding, like Your Honor, sometimes set off on some strange ventures. If they happened to notice that some pater familias was a stupid blockhead, while the mother was haughty and conceited, they would make their appearance in magnificent attire and splendid form, they would offer themselves up as potential bridegrooms, they would receive parental consent to take their daughter’s hand in marriage, and then they would take the new wives
to their lair, where they would divide up the dowry amongst themselves, and, after that, lock the
wives away in underground burrows. Not long ago, one of them, a nobleman-impostor, having
sniffed out that in a distant village in our province there lives a wealthy, but incredibly stupid,
little old man, – what’s his surname now? Durakov [Fool]? No, that’s not it! Filin [Idiot]? No,
that’s not it either!”

“It doesn’t matter what his surname is!” exclaimed Prostaskov, scratching the back of his head.

“Yes, yes, I remember it now!” the man with a paunch belly continued. “His name is Prostofilin
[Simpleton]. The swindler drove up to Prostofilin’s house, turned his wife’s head, – she’s an
absolute monkey, – and his daughter’s head, – she’s a real scapegrace, – and soon he was
announced as their daughter’s bridegroom. But, unfortunately for him, living in Prostofilin’s
house at this time was a certain small-time prince, who knew about this rogue and informed the
old fogey about him. Our daredevil, seeing that his cunning tricks were not succeeding, caught
his enemy outside the village one day, and, what’s more, took him captive in his lair. A short
time later, he dressed his comrades up as hussars and dragoons, and God knows what else. They
arrived at a gallop at the Prostofilin home and began to sweep through the entire house,
searching everywhere for the person who, at that very same time, was being held captive in one
of their underground burrows. They slandered him, claiming that he was a thief and a robber, the
very things that, in truth, they themselves were. And stupid Prostofilin believed all of this
charade, returning his word of honor to the honorable bridegroom and wishing only to marry off
his daughter, when suddenly one of our own lads, a bold one, as I myself would have been in his
place, and the son of that princeling, about whom, you may recall, I gave Your Honor a report . . .

“Enough!” Prostakov exclaimed, wiping away the sweat from his brow. “I’ve had enough! Here
you go, – this is for you, for your troubles!”

He gave him a silver ruble, and the man with a paunch belly, taking the tip with a most
reverential bow, left the common hall, hunched over and muttering: “As a result of Your Honor’s
munificence, I shall go enjoy myself and, with the help of some friends of mine, I shall have a
little fun at Prostofilin’s expense. What a freak! No, they wouldn’t have tricked me the way that
they did him! Not a chance!”

Ivan Efremovich remained in a very sad mood. Shame, vexation, and repentance agitated his
soul. “Where shall I turn now?” he asked himself sorrowfully. “How shall I ever be able to look
my daughter in the eye, a daughter whom I nearly plunged into the abyss as a result of my
empty- headedness and thoughtlessness? What shall I say to my wife, her gullible, vainglorious
mother, when I myself was a party to her stupidities? I had a true friend, one who rejoiced in my
successes with all of his heart, and I lost him due to my faint-heartedness. Who shall console me!
Who shall give me advice, when my entire household is moaning?”

Thus did Ivan Efremovich bemoan his fate. He spent three days at that eating-house, unable to
decide whether or not he should meet with Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, for he had concluded that,
with the destruction of the den of thieves, the prince would be released from captivity and would,
without fail, rejoin Prichudin as a guest in his home. Prostakov had often meant to stop by to see
Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, to fall into his warm embrace, and to say: “Forgive me! I was
deceived by a scoundrel!” He took his hat and cane, walked out onto the street, and again returned back. Shame wouldn’t allow him to fulfill his intention.

Consequently, toward evening time on the fourth day, he made up his mind to drive back home to his village. He took a seat in the covered wagon and set off. The road was safe, and nothing unusual happened to him up to the first settlement that they reached, at which point he was halfway home. A harsh night arrived, snow and rain were pouring down from the sky upon him, and so Ivan Efremovich decided to take a rest break, and to give his servants, as well as his horses, a hiatus as well, at a peasant hut.

Chapter 61: Some People Die, Others Infringe upon Another’s Life

When Mister Prostakov had warmed up a bit, and was looking pensively at the smoke spiraling up out of his pipe, he heard the voice of his host coming from the entrance hall, a voice that was sounding rather rude and crude: “There’s no room here, my dear! Go look further on.” “Have pity on me,” replied a weak, raspy female voice. “I’m exhausted from the severe cold! Everywhere in this village people are fast asleep.”

It was a well-known fact that Ivan Efremovich had a good, kind, and compassionate heart. He grabbed the candle off the table, rushed into the entrance hall, and saw a woman who was in almost the very same condition that Prince Gavriilo Simonovich had been in when he first appeared at Prostakov’s doorstep.

“Come here,” he said to her, and the unknown woman entered the room, threw herself down at his feet, and said, in a voice that was gasping for breath: “Be magnanimous, kind sir! Please allow an unfortunate and unhappy soul to spend the night in a corner of this hut. The owner won’t allow me to enter because he doesn’t wish to inconvenience you.”

“What inconvenience would that be?” Prostakov exclaimed, lifting her up to her feet. “Sit down and rest!”

The unknown woman was shapely. Her pale face didn’t hinder others from noticing that she, at one time, had possessed female charms. Her dress, despite its untidiness, was not the kind worn by peasant women. Looking her over, Ivan Efremovich asked: “Who are you? And how can a rather benevolent man, and a man of sufficient means, be of service to you?”

“I’m an unfortunate and unhappy woman,” she replied, “and that’s the only characterization that I deserve. I have neither rank, nor title, nor social status. Perhaps you’re aware of the fact that in this province a society of depraved people has been discovered, people who have no shame, no religious faith, and no conscience. I’m one of the ill-starred victims of delusion and seduction that these depraved people held in confinement. The authorities, having frustrated that godless throng of people and destroyed them, have given us our freedom. But what does freedom mean, when spiritual serenity has been lost and civic life has been forfeited?”

Ivan Efremovich was deeply moved by the words spoken by this unfortunate and unhappy woman. It struck him vividly that he himself had nearly caused his own daughter to fall into the kind of dire poverty that youth and inexperience had loaded upon this unknown woman. His
heart softened, and he suddenly decided to provide her with refuge in his own home.

“It seems to me,” he said, “that you’ve had a decent upbringing and education. Poverty and the years have made you understand that a person who strays from the observance of rules that are valued by society and by religious faith shall stray from happiness and shall hasten his or her own ruin. I shall provide you a place in my home, where you’ll be able to occupy yourself with whatever you wish. I have two adult daughters, and I hope that they shall find in you an experienced and well-meaning advisor and friend. It goes without saying that they must not know the source of your misfortune. What’s your name?”

“Kharitina!”

“That’s enough! I don’t need to know your surname.”

Following this conversation, lodging for the night was arranged for Kharitina, and in the morning Ivan Efremovich set off on the continuation of his trip home, renting from a peasant a wagon for the female guest he was now taking home to live with him and his family. When they had reached the end of their journey, and the husband had introduced his female guest to his family, Elizaveta looked at her with commiseration and said: “You are unfortunate and unhappy, – I shall consider you my sister.” Katerina, on the contrary, hardly noticed her, and Maremyana, who glanced over at her husband, merely shrugged her shoulders. After Kharitina had been led to the cozy little room where she would now be staying, and after Prostakov had given his daughters instructions to give her some of their spare linen and clothing, Maremyana, who now remained alone with her husband, asked him: “What, my dear, did you see and hear?”

“I saw everything with my own two eyes and became convinced of my stupidity. Prince Svetlozarov is a monster who has been punished appropriately. Let’s leave him be. From this time forward, may this awful name have been uttered here for the final time!”

“But where,” his wife continued, “did you dig up all of this riff-raff from? First, it’s Nikandr, then, it’s Kharitina, and God only knows who it shall be next! We got rid of one of them, so now you need to add yet another!”

“She’s unfortunate and unhappy,” said her husband, “and that’s sufficient cause for each one of us to hasten to help her.”

About a month passed after these adventures had taken place, and the family, little by little, had begun to forget about them. The husband and wife were both rather cheerful, and Katerina sometimes even made jokes about her ill-starred marriage, assuring everyone that her bridegroom hadn’t left the slightest impression on her heart. Everyone in the household had grown accustomed to Kharitina. Ivan Efremovich found her to be intelligent, well brought up, and well educated, while Maremyana found her to be a hard-working girl, who knew how to sew, how to embroider, and so on. The daughters likewise liked her, mainly for her gentle disposition and the tenderness of her feelings. Everything, it seemed, was foretelling that this rural family would enjoy a prolonged period of tranquility and a peaceful, pleasant life for a long time to come, when an unexpected misfortune suddenly plunged the family into an abyss of
weeping, and was the harbinger of many other misfortunes that were soon to follow in its wake.

About ten days before the feast of Christmas, Ivan Efremovich, as was his wont, set off for town to purchase some holiday gifts. Whether it was due to his advanced years or because of carelessness on his part, he had caught a slight cold while he was there. On top of this, he committed two very important missteps. In the countryside, he would frequently catch a cold, but he would always recover from it successfully, escaping any danger that his condition might worsen, but, being in town, he took the advice of some of his friends and summoned a physician, a Neapolitan by birth, to treat his illness. His other misstep was that he hadn’t taken his illness seriously enough. Thus, he decided to bring the physician home with him, so as not to sadden his family. To everyone’s sorrow, he was in an extremely bad condition by the time that he arrived home. Maremyana, Elizaveta, Katerina, and their new female guest didn’t leave the side of the good-natured old man as he lay dying on his sick bed. Some would moan, some would sigh, others would weep. Only the physician, Signore Mortifioro, who had an air of importance about him, was calm, having become accustomed to similar occurrences. “Sire!” he would say to Prostakov. “Thank the merciful heavens above that it’s I, and not someone else, who was summoned here to treat your illness. My colleagues in town are real profiteers, and they don’t understand a thing about the science of medical treatment. I studied in Ravenna, and I can tell you, without boasting, that I graduated from there with excellent, successful results. God bestowed his blessing upon me for that. It seldom happens that someone who has fallen into my hands complains about me. My artistry as a physician shackles the tongue of each and every detractor who would abuse me. I have traveled all over Europe, and I know how to treat, – and how to heal, – every single patient that I get. To an Englishman, I give the same dosage of medications that I would give to a horse; to a Frenchman, the same dosage that I would give to a goat; to a German, the same dosage that I would give to an ox; and to a Russian, the same dosage that I would give to an African Negro. One must give the same dosage of effective medications to a hundred-year-old Russian old-timer that one would give to a forty-year-old Englishman or German, to a thirty-year-old Frenchman, or to a twenty-year-old Italian. All of the members of the final four ethnic groups that I have mentioned arrive at their greatest strength and force at the above-mentioned age, whereas the members of the first ethnic group that I mentioned never lose their strength and force.”

On the strength of his rules, which were based upon a deep understanding of social mores and manners, and of the way of life of all of the different nationalities in the world, Mister Mortifioro started working so heartily on Mister Prostakov that, by the beginning of the fifth day of the patient’s illness, the physician had to ask for a priest and for a sheet of paper for the preparation of the patient’s last will and testament. Both the priest and the sheet of paper were brought to the patient’s room toward nightfall. Ivan Efremovich wrote out his last will and testament, made his final confession, and, as befits a good Christian, took his final communion. After he had done all of these things, his conscience was clear, and he said to his family members, who were weeping as they were gathered around his deathbed,

“My friends! The end is near for this old man, this father, husband, and friend of yours! He has always endeavored to speak the truth to you, and he is prepared, all the more so, to speak it now, at the moment of his parting from this earthly world. Maremyana! I thank you for your love and faithfulness. You have been a good wife, and if you were to
refrain from being vainglorious and prideful in the selection of bridegrooms for your daughters, you would be a good mother. I entrust to your heart the well-being of our children, of all of the people who have been obedient servants to me, and of our Kharitina. If the spirits of the deceased have a conception of earthly matters, it would be sweet for me to see how my wife, my first real friend, is fulfilling my wishes and, having mercy on those who are unfortunate and unhappy, how she is becoming like a heavenly creature. I give my parental blessing to my son! Send a courier to Prince Gavrilo Simonovich and his son Nikandr in Oryol. Tell the former how I was suffering on my deathbed, as I recalled how I had made such an egregious mistake and had been indignant at him, who was an innocent man. Ask both of them for their forgiveness. Each and every one of you, just before your demise, shall find out how pleasant it is to pass away, not leaving any creditors behind here on earth. Help Kharitina as much as you can. Rejoice, o blessed, kind souls, for you shall be forgiven! Let a teardrop from a grateful stranger sprinkle my grave. This shall be like incense before the throne of the celestial judge. My daughters! Obey your mother! Male and female servants alike, obey your mistress! Such is God’s covenant, and such is the tsar’s covenant. Embrace me! Forgive me! Farewell!”

With these words, his head bent forward and downward. His eyelids closed. His breathing stopped. He had passed away: he was no more. The walls of the house filled with universal weeping. A wail and some moans, – this time they were unfeigned, – resounded in every corner of the entire village. Young and old, men and women alike, thronged to the deathbed where the congealed body of Ivan Efremovich was lying. They kissed the beneficent hands of their benefactor, and they blessed the memory of their virtuous master. Not a single member of the family knew what to do; the thoughts of each and every one of them were in such disarray. Their nearest neighbors were the ones who had to make all of the arrangements for the rite of interment. They dressed the deceased in his full-dress uniform, the one with the wounded flap, and they lowered him, well and properly, into the dark, gloomy grave at the end of the garden, where the leafy lime tree, which was the same age as Ivan Efremovich, used to shield him from the torrid midday sun when he would lie on the green turf with a book in his hands and a pipe filled with tobacco in his mouth. This spot had been selected at his request. In accord with a request made by the teary-eyed Elizaveta, the holiday gifts that the deceased had recently purchased were distributed at her father’s grave among the male and female peasants.

A feeling of emptiness exercised dominion in the soul of each of the family members throughout all of winter, but, with the arrival of spring, all of them, on the advice of their well-wishing neighbors, started to find a bit of consolation. Elizaveta planted some wild rose bushes, violets, and forget-me-nots on her father’s grave, and she would go there to pine over the losses in her life. Maremyana and Katerina occupied themselves, as before, with their usual activities, and it seemed that a lasting atmosphere of peace and contentment had established itself at the Prostakov home. But, alas, how inconstant are the minds and thoughts of human beings! And a venerable old man from the ancient world, who stands on the edge of the grave, is not able to say: “I think and I act in a certain way, and I shall always think and act that way!”

To the great misfortune of the remaining members of the Prostakov family, a young count named Firsov, who had been brought up and educated together with Ivan Efremovich’s son at a military
academy, came to their home to offer his consolations. He had been turned out of the Guards, where, in accordance with a rule instituted a long time ago, an officer who has squandered two thirds of his family’s estate had to enter early retirement and had to renounce his legal right to the remaining part of his property. He had enjoyed a brief stay in the fair city of Mtsensk, but seeing as how the urban brides there, even the most splendid among them, didn’t attract his attention very much, His Excellency, whose own star had dimmed a bit, turned his attention to rural brides. He had heard a lot of good things said about Prostakov’s dowry chests, and so, finding a favorable opportunity, our count, along with one of his relatives, made his appearance at the Prostakov home, where, well stocked with all sorts of tricks that he had picked up during his time in the Guards, he offered his services to Maremyana Kharitonovna.

And he was, truly, a genuine tempter and seducer of women. Young, handsome, sparkling, garrulous, humorous, – in a word, he was Prince Svetlozarov squared. And Katerina, in this instance, simply couldn’t resist! Apparently, fate had arranged for her to marry His Highness. Declarations of love soon began, according to protocol; all sides, it seemed, were hastening to come to the quickest possible resolution of the matter. Maremyana, however, not so much from any lesson that she might have been taught by her daughter’s first bridegroom, as much as from the advice that had been proffered to her by Elizaveta and Kharitina, wished to inquire thoroughly about His Highness’s background. To that end, Maremyana wrote, as best she could, letters to three of her long-standing girl friends, who, back when they were still single, used to attend the theatre performances and masquerades hosted by her late father. She considered them conscientious women who also possessed good taste. And that’s why she asked them to give her any news and advice that may be needed, especially as they were now living either in the city of Mtsensk itself or in one of its neighboring towns or villages.

After some time had passed, she received replies that consisted of the greatest possible praise of the young count. One of her girl friends wrote that he was terribly intelligent, that his spoken French was unparalleled, and that he could sing and dance, – in a word, that he was the life and soul of the party, as far as local social life was concerned. Another girlfriend informed her that he owned a house in Mtsensk that was furnished in the latest style, that he had a carriage, horses, footmen, musicians, and so on, and so forth. These were all firsts in the city.

How could Katerina help but be tempted and seduced by these alluring descriptions of her prospective bridegroom? And the same could even be said of Maremyana, who, while reading one of these letters, said to her daughter, with a tender smile: “This is exactly how things were at the home of your deceased grandfather!”

Consequently, was there anything more to think about here? Certainly not! And so they thought very little more about anything. Before long, Katerina became a radiant Her Excellency, and her love-struck spouse took her, along with the whole Prostakov family, into the city, – to show off the magnificence and all of the gaiety of their life there. Elizaveta shed tears at the grave of her good and kind father. She vowed, in his memory, never to deviate from the innocence of her temperament and the purity of her heart. Recollecting her soul’s favorite person, she vowed to preserve her eternal love for, and faithfulness toward, Nikandr, even if not merely His Highness, but even His Grace himself, were to offer her their hands in marriage.
Prince Gavrilo Simonovich and Nikandr were surprised, as well as saddened, when they heard the news about the incidents that had taken place in the Prostakov household. They mourned the death of their friend, that good and kind old man, and, heaving sighs of sadness, they said: “Katerina’s marriage doesn’t bode well! And Elizaveta shall now be living in a noisy house in the city and shall be circulating in a social circle that mocks morality. Oh! What damage a bad example can sometimes inflict, even upon the purest and most chaste of hearts!”

Thus, leaving aside for now les Mesdames Prostakovy, the young count and his new countess, and all of the other enthusiasts who were searching for sensational amusements in life, let’s turn our attention to our modest, good, and kind friends: Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, his son Nikandr, and Afanasy Onisimovich Prichudin. Having occupied ourselves now with matchmaking, now with death, now with marriage, in one family, we have long ago abandoned another, quite different, family. But, to make up for that, we shall now occupy ourselves a little longer with that other family.

Chapter 62: The Height of Enlightenment

To the delight of all those who knew him, Mister Prichudin, having concluded his attention to business matters, returned home. The passage of time each day was arranged the same way that it had been before he left on his trip, and that’s why, on the first free evening, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich returned to the narrative account of his past life, continuing his life story with the following words:

“You saw, in the most recent installment of my life story, what condition I was in, relative to my enlightenment, to my love for Licorisa, and to my property. Having spent a sufficient amount of time in the home of Mister Dobroslavov, and while continuing to attend meetings in the Palaces of Wisdom, I was visited one day by my master and mentor, who said to me in a friendly manner: ‘My friend! You have now rested sufficiently following the famous exploit that you perpetrated upon Polar Goose! Man is born to be active, to stay busy. It’s time for you to get down to work on another animal, one who’s a bit more enormous in size than your previous one was. Have you noticed Celestial Taurus? Don’t be afraid! Despite his enormous size, he’s no more intelligent than was Polar Goose. You have long known that he’s Count Takalov, a wealthy, elderly man, who, with the help of our enlightenment efforts, has fallen passionately in love with philanthropy, although, at the same time, he doesn’t understand at all the art of doing charitable work. This poor man needs some assistance, and you, my dear friend, have been selected to be the one who shall render him that assistance. Olympius shall explain the plan of action to you.’”

“Having said this, he shook my hand in a friendly fashion and withdrew, but Olympius entered right after him and said: ‘I congratulate you, venerable brother, on such grand successes! Not everyone is able to become enlightened so swiftly! They wouldn’t entrust so many important matters to just anyone. Work hard, my friend, and you shall become a man! Now you should join the staff serving Count Takalov. Nothing is more likely to help you succeed in this venture than making his wife grow fond of you. He obeys her as readily, and fears her as intensely, as a young child might feel towards its mommy. She’s
empty-headed, amorous, and impudent, but, at the same time, so pious, that every day she attends three masses, accompanied there by a seventeen-year-old girl, named Efrosiniya, who is an exact replica of Takalov’s wife, in terms of both her disposition and the way that her face looks. People call this girl the wife’s ward or charge, if not her pet, in prejudgment of those slanderers who tell all sorts of tall tales about her birth. Thus, what you need to do initially is this: run after her, following her closely, as she goes from one church to another, make as many bows to her as possible, and sigh with tears in your eyes. And then we shall see! I shall point her out to you in advance.”

“Thus, after talking for a while about this new appointment of mine, we set off together for Count Takalov’s house, and we stopped our carriage at some remove from the entrance. As soon as the church bells began to peal, our countess made her appearance, riding in a carriage harnessed to six horses. We hurried after her carriage, and since, at that time, it wasn’t fashionable to gallop down the city streets like a madman, we drove at an easy pace, but without letting her drop out of sight. When we arrived at the church, I found a place to stand that was not far away from where the countess was standing, and I turned somersaults, trying so immoderately to be noticed by her. I also emitted such sighs, and I struck myself so painfully on the chest, that the noise that I was making to attract her attention could be heard throughout the entire church. And so Olympius had to whisper to me that I needed to reduce the level of my fervor a little, or else I would expose myself to the danger of being thrown out of the church in disgrace as a tempter and a seducer of women. I heeded his prudent advice and calmed down a bit.”

“My warfare activities commenced that day, and from that day forward they continued for about two weeks, during which time I laid the foundation for the attainment of my goal. And that achievement occurred in a rather curious way. Once, while I, having forgotten the admonition of Olympius, was acting the part of a devout pilgrim with the greatest ardor, and my howling was resounding throughout the church, the countess was compelled to glance back at me, and there was a look of some surprise on her face. Her footman, who misunderstood his lady’s gesture, walked up to me and said: ‘My good man! If you’re accustomed to praying in such a noisy manner, then would you please be so kind as to do that beyond the railing or at least on the church porch, for this behavior disturbs other people, and it makes you more closely resemble a blasphemer than an Orthodox believer! It would be best if you were to leave!’”

“‘Support your praying with acts of charity, my guardian angel,’ I said, in lieu of a reply, and, falling to the floor head over heels, I struck my forehead against the floor three times and sighed deeply, defending myself against him by making the sign of the cross.”

“‘Oh, oh!’ said the footman, taking me by the arm, ‘in that case, I shall lead you outside myself, my friend, since you’re so stubborn!’ With these words, he began to drag me away, but I, articulating my words meekly, dug my heels in pretty strongly: ‘Good Lord!’ I said, ‘attend to thine loyal servant!’ Inside the cathedral, a genuine temptation had taken place, and the countess, calling the footman, said to him, with an air of importance:
‘Leave him be! He’s not disturbing anyone!’ Pray, my friend,” she continued, turning her attention to me. ‘God won’t disparage a heart that is meek and grief-stricken.’”

“I took advantage of her suggestion and started to pray with great enthusiasm. Some of the people there thought that I was a great sinner who was publicly confessing his sins and repenting of them; a second group of people thought that I was a swindler who wore various disguises; and, finally, a third group of people thought that I was a madman who had broken loose from his chains and escaped from the madhouse. Everyone there could see that the second group of people were more quick-witted than either of the other two groups.”

“At the conclusion of the church service, the countess called me over and inquired: ‘Tell me, my friend, what are you praying so fervently for?’”

“‘Your Most Kind Majesty!’ I replied, with downcast eyes, ‘I’m imploring the Lord to give me a position in the civil service under the same gentleman for whom I had been, up until now, the secretary!’”

“‘Moscow is a vast city, and there’s a sufficient number of different positions here,’ she said.”

“‘But, Your Most Kind Majesty,’ I replied, ‘where can I find a position that is in accord with my ideas? I wish to enter the home of a meek, wise, pious Christian. Although many names have been suggested to me, I have found that their owners are blasphemers, hypocrites, and depraved people, and rare is the person among them who attends a divine service at least once a month, although almost every house in Moscow has a church or a chapel located nearby.’”

“‘I like your way of thinking,’ said the countess. ‘My husband has a position that opened up just recently. I shall have a talk with him. Be here tomorrow. If he likes you and hires you, you shall be more of a friend to him than a mere subordinate who is working under him. His previous secretary was a generous man, only he was stubborn and undeservedly arrogant. I hope that you shall be wiser than he was.’”

“With these words, we parted. I didn’t forget to make a low bow, not just to her, but also to her beloved Afrosia. When, upon returning home, I rendered to Dobroslavov and Olympius an account of what had transpired at the church, they both embraced me, praising me for my efficiency.”

“The next day, I didn’t fail to hurry over to the church, and I was so swift in getting there that, when the countess arrived, I was already kneeling in front of the icon of the Our Lady of the Burning Bush, which she had donated to the church as a gift. When I caught sight of her arriving, I rose to my feet and bowed to her venerably.”
‘Give thanks to All-Generous Providence,’ she said. ‘My husband is accepting you into his staff. He’s an honest, devout, and charitable man. Come to our house today at evening time and report to me.’

“It goes without saying that, after receiving this news, I prayed to heaven without pretense for successful cooperation in the project that we were intending to launch. Appearing in Her Excellency’s chamber at the appointed hour, I was received graciously. She introduced me to her husband, exalting him with high praise, and I moved into their house that very same day. I was led to my room, and the very first thing that I was assigned to do was to compose a petition addressed to Prince Latron, in which I had to argue eloquently that His Excellency had been unjustly stripped of his title of City Administrator. I labored long and hard over that petition, composing it to the sweat of my brow, and, afterwards, I was satisfied with what I had created. And Takalov was even more satisfied with it. Although the petition didn’t have any effect, I was generously rewarded for having written it.”

“In the course of working for him for about six months, I was constantly discussing charity and mercy with him, and in this way I influenced the imagination of my count, making him much more inclined toward philanthropy. He came to see virtues of this kind, – even in his sleep – in a highly favorable light. When he would give a ruble to some officer who had been maimed in battle or to some wench who had lost her nose due to excessive sexual intemperance in her life (these were charitable acts that he performed indiscriminately), I would compose a laudatory ode in his honor, then I would hand an imprint of it over to a periodical press, and I would receive monetary rewards and literary praise. When it seemed to Mister Dobroslavov that we had sufficiently driven Takalov crazy, the Most Highly Enlightened One announced at the first general meeting, with all possible splendor and magnificence, that we would be favored that evening, – albeit from afar, – to see celestial spirits and to hear them speak.”

“Such a promise filled the inner being of each member with various impulses: horror, rapture, curiosity. Almost all of the members, in their imaginations, shuddered at the mere mention of spirits. I myself didn’t know at that time what to think. Was our abbot really and truly powerful enough that he could be given the honor of arranging for us a rendezvous with spirits? Where did such power come from? Why were the other members not attaining that same level of enlightenment? I was lost in thought, meditating on these questions, as I awaited the commencement of this miraculous event.”

“Towards midnight, we were led into a special room, one that I had never been inside before. In the middle of this room towered an altar, above which hung a small lamp that

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47 The Burning Bush, which was originally encountered by Moses while he was on Mount Sinai, was used in Orthodox iconography as a metaphor for the Virgin Mary, who gave birth to a child while still retaining her virginity.
barely illuminated the walls. On the altar, aromatic resins and herbs were burning, emitting a fragrant smoke. When we had all crammed ourselves into the room, surrounding the altar in a semi-circle, the Most Highly Enlightened One fell to his knees and, lifting his arms skyward, he pontificated in a suppliant voice: ‘The origin of wisdom, the source of enlightenment, the spark that ignites all manner of understanding, – the great Unity! Be so kind as to heed the supplications of your faithful worshipers and send down to them a single one of the seven spirits that stand before your throne, and proclaim your will to them! Let us have the honor of seeing this spirit face to face, or, if we don’t deserve that honor today, then let us hear his words, and let us assure ourselves that thou art God, thou alone, and that there is no God other than thou! Command them, and the archangels, – Gabriel, Selaphiel, Barachiel, Michael, Raphael, Uriel, and Jegudiel, – shall appear before us.’”

“He fell silent, listening attentively, and then suddenly, filled with rapture, he exclaimed: ‘Heed my word! Can you hear the gentle flight of heaven’s herald? Prostrate yourself before God, kiss the ground, and worship God!’ He stretched himself out in front of the sacrificial altar; all of us followed suit, and soon we heard the following words: ‘Venerate God! I am Raphael, who stands before the throne of the everlasting God! I bring you peace and kindness! Wait, there is little time left. The Sovereign of heaven wishes you to venerate Him, and to become like Him, by practicing charity toward your indigent brethren. Each one of you must detach yourself from your wretched excesses and please God by donating your abundance to charitable institutions! When your hearts shall have opened themselves up wide to my suggestions, thou shall behold me, but today thou shall not behold me!’”

“The voice fell silent. We had been like crazed people, until such time as the words of the abbot brought us back to our senses. ‘Stand up,’ he said. ‘Each and every one of you enlightened brothers must nominate someone, out of the Book of Life, in whose name you wish to make your donation, so that you can behold the spirits and you can become like God.’”

“At this point, everyone rushed over toward the wondrous book, and my friend Taurus subscribed to pay twenty-five thousand rubles, the amount of money that I had brought over to the Most Highly Enlightened One. The count didn’t suspect at all that I was among those who belonged to the group of celestial animals. No matter how well disposed one might have been towards the imagination of our Taurus, either a natural inclination, or else a habit, or else some kind of bad advice had gained strength inside him. Three days following this general meeting, Count Takalov became unusually sullen, sighing, withdrawing from the company of others, muttering things under his breath, and cracking the knuckles of his fingers. This behavior troubled me a bit. My premonition told me: ‘Watch out! Find out the reason for such sadness on his part, and wise up!’ I walked into his study and threw myself down at his feet, saying in a most compassionate voice: ‘Your Excellency! Forgive me for daring to take the liberty of disturbing you! My unbounded diligence is the reason why I’m doing this! Your embarrassment is staggering my soul. Open up your heart and reveal to me what’s the cause of your sorrow. Perhaps I
might be so fortunate as to help alleviate that sorrow for you!’"

‘‘My friend!’ he replied, lifting me up to my feet. ‘I just now wanted to send for you. I need to have you write for me a declaration to be sent to the authorities. The basis for the declaration is the following: here, in this city, there is a horde of scoundrels who are dangerous, all the more so, because their enterprises bear the names of virtues. They call themselves enlighteners of the world, and, by various means, they swindle money out of gullible people. Blushing from shame, I must confess that I, too, in my old age, was so stupid as to enter into their gang and allowed myself to be made a fool of. They swindled so much money out of me! And, just four days ago, you and I sent off twenty-five thousand rubles to the main rogue.’’

“At this point, having related to me by what means the Highly Enlightened Ones had obtained this money, something that I myself knew no less than he did, he added: ‘Write, my friend, a declaration that explains how all of these heart-rending abominations occurred. Then I shall hand it in to the authorities. And I hope that the justice officials won’t fail to take this matter under consideration!’”

“I was quite surprised at what the count intended to do. So, too, was Dobroslavov, to whom I didn’t fail to recount, that very same evening, everything that I had just learned. ‘Oh, that crazy old fool!’ exclaimed the Highly Enlightened One. ‘So he thinks that he shall reveal the secrets that he swore to keep sacred? We must enlighten him otherwise, as soon as possible!’ Thanking me for my diligence, he let me go, and then he drove off to go confer with the Most Highly Enlightened One.”

“At the first meeting that took place following this incident, I likewise saw Celestial Taurus. The abbot was sitting there with an air of importance, as was evident by the look on his face. Finally, after completing the usual prayers, he said: ‘These are debauched times! This is an unfortunate age! We are ill-starred inhabitants of the earth! Brotherly love has been removed from this world! Sacred vows no longer protect us! Honor and conscience have been banished! Isn’t this a portent of the fatal decline of the celestial machinery and the complete annihilation of the earth? So, my enlightened friends and brethren, this is how things stand. By conversing with celestial inhabitants and tearing away the veil to reveal eternity, I have come to know that one of you, through greed for money, faint-heartedness, and empty-headedness, wants to forget the oaths that he took and to expose his brethren to the views of the unenlightened!’ At this point, the entire society began to make noise. A general murmur resounded throughout the room, and several members appealed to the Grand Enlightener: ‘Reveal to us the name of the ill-starred, impertinent mortal who’s guilty of doing this! Vengeance shall rain down upon his head!’”

“‘Heaven shall reveal his identity to you!’ said one of the enlighteners, and, – oh, wonder of wonders! – the walls of the room began to waver. A horrible clap of thunder resounded, the candles were extinguished, and a strong, harsh voice articulated clearly: ‘Taurus is the name of the criminal!’”

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“Everybody’s hair stood on end, and poor Taurus, who had fallen to his knees, uttered, with quivering lips: ‘I’m guilty, ill-starred fool that I am! I shall try, henceforth, to make amends for my guilt by doubling the amount of aid that I donate to the society.’ Hardly had he finished saying this, when the doors opened with a crackling sound. We jumped to our feet, expecting to see an entire regiment of spirits running to go punish the criminal Taurus, but we were embarrassed in no small measure, – I was especially embarrassed, – when we saw Kuroumov entering the room with a terrifying retinue of mustachioed dragoons carrying very lengthy halberds. Several of the dragoons were carrying lighted torches. Kuroumov was shouting as loudly as he could: ‘Here’s the horde of thieves and robbers! This is where they commit all of their heart-rending pagan sorcery! Most of all, we need to catch that damned Capricorn! He’s the vilest swindler and deceiver of them all!’”

“It would be superfluous, it seems to me, to tell you that, at the very same moment when he first appeared, we rushed headlong from the place where we were standing and tried to hide from him. That’s how clean the consciences of the enlighteners of the world were. Chairs were falling, and we were falling over chairs, the general level of noise had increased, and a clamor had been raised, – in a word, an entire hell had installed itself. Well, how could it be otherwise in a house of spirits? We were crowded together at the doors; the people behind me were giving me fairly painful punches in the back, forcing me to be more agile, and I returned the favor, in kind, to the people who were standing in front of me. After managing to get out of the room I was in, and upon entering another room, then a third room, and finally a fourth one, I set out to seek an exit out of this den of thieves, trembling in each joint of my body. I ascended from one staircase to another; when I reached a door that was locked, I would break down the door, and I would incessantly curse enlightenment, which acquaints one with justice. Thank God that I, while continuing to love Licorisa, wanted nonetheless to appeal to her passion for gold, which is why, after counting out two hundred gold coins, I took them with me as a deposit on those countless riches that I was waiting to receive from my sovereign father, the tsar of India. I could foresee very clearly that there was no point now in returning to Dobroslavov’s home. The vindictive Kuroumov knew him very well. ‘I have had enough of enlightenment!’ I thought to myself. ‘It’s high time for me to cast aside watching spirits, before I become a spirit myself!’”

Chapter 63: Contemplating Spirits in an Attic

“Having spent about an hour on such night-time wandering, – stopping every moment, listening to the racket that was being made by my own two feet, and hardly taking a breath, – I found myself in a vast room, poorly illuminated by a round window. I walked up to that window, peeped through it, and soon guessed that I was situated in the attic of the House of Enlightenment.”

“Laden with dark despondency about my future fate, I leaned my elbows on the window sill and reflected upon my past life: ‘My God!’ I thought to myself, ‘How many passions can suddenly agitate our human hearts! Is temporary ownership of property worth the
cost of contriving such vile deceptions for their acquisition? And, what’s more, is idle curiosity to see what’s invisible worth the cost of throwing away all of one’s gold for the opportunity to witness such a rarity? Oh, vanity of vanities! Thus, I, – Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, – set out to become a deceptive cheat and a fraud? Yes, that’s so! My conscience tells me that, if I myself wasn’t a complete rogue, then, at the very least, I diligently helped another person to commit his roguish tricks! And isn’t that really all the same thing? No! Never did I expect this from a pupil of Bibarius-the-Most-Wise! Something has happened to my Princess Fekla Sidorovna. What shall become of her? What shall become of the beautiful Licorisa, the Tibetan princess? Alas! What shall become of Prince Golkondsky?"

“Bewailing my bitter fate in this fashion, and not seeing anything appealing that lay ahead of me in the future, I couldn’t help but sigh deeply, when suddenly I heard a light tread upon the staircase that leads up to the attic. I began to tremble and became petrified, but, thank God, I quickly came to my senses and rushed over to a corner of the room, where, luckily, I found a pile of old bast matting, and I buried myself as deeply as possible in that pile. Only my eyes and mouth weren’t covered by the matting. Less than a minute later, there appeared in the attic, – oh, horror! I came to resemble a man who, recalling that he had once walked along a narrow, thin plank that lies high above an immense abyss, feels all of his muscles shuddering. Thus, I saw that some completely unearthly creature had made its appearance in the attic. Its face, which combined within itself all possible charms, beamed in the light of the full moon. Long strands of hair, coiffed in careless ringlets, were scattered across its shoulders and chest. A light robe in the Greek style was the only piece of clothing that was covering its body. On its chest hung a mysterious baldric, which glowed with a golden flame; in one hand, it held a blooming myrtle branch and, in the other, a staff bedecked with jewels. Light sandals, interwoven with ribbons, served as its footwear. Every movement that it made was overflowing with fragrance. After walking up to the window, it halted.”

“‘This unfortunate and unhappy creature has perished,’ I said to myself, as my whole body was trembling and I was gritting my teeth. This was, without a doubt, one of the spirits that had arrived here to help out the Most Highly Enlightened One and his venerable brethren! Oh! How could I, who still operated in the realm of darkness and ignorance, entertain any doubts about the existence of spirits? And how could I have the audacity to call them the products of knavish tricks? Oh, how accursed I am! Aren’t I seeing a spirit right now, with my very own eyes? Apparently, the great summoner, thanks to his fondness for me, has already penetrated my impious blasphemies, which are so offensive to God, and has sent this fine herald to serve as his avenger!’”

“Reasoning in this sorrowful fashion, I entrusted my sinful soul to God’s mercy, and I awaited my demise, narrowing my eyes. But suddenly a new occurrence forced me to open my eyes quickly. A terrifying noise, a mixture of a shout, along with some kind of din and howl, resounded from the middle of the staircase. I began to tremble anew, but this didn’t hinder me from noticing that the celestial herald had likewise begun to tremble and had uttered, albeit quietly, but sufficiently clearly and distinctly: ‘Oh, my God! What shall become of me?’”
“A new appearance, – a new horror! – was, with great effort, dragging some sort of scarecrow up to the attic. Two large horns embellished its dark, somber head. The fingers on its hands and the toes on its feet were armed with terrifying claws. A long tail was hanging majestically from behind it, but already a strapping dragoon, who caught hold of it, had likewise made his appearance, along with several of his comrades, and he fell upon the evil spirit, which is what I suspected the scarecrow to have been. At this point, a brutal battle ensued, undertaken in the light that was cast by the many lanterns and torches that the other dragoons had brought with them.”

“The evil spirit truly was a knight of no small importance. With inimitable artistry, he was waving his arms, gesticulating energetically, and the battle, perhaps, would have soon come to an end, if he had been waging battle with ordinary people, and not with police dragoons, each of whom was sometimes no worse than Satan as a combatant. And, what’s more, the stubborn dragoon who was holding on to the devil’s tail rushed at him so powerfully, while trying to dodge a slap in the face administered by the devil, that the tail broke off, and both rivals fell unceremoniously to the floor. The entire detachment of dragoons rushed at the devil, shouting terrible things at him, then they tied his hands and feet, and dragged him down the stairs. His hellish howling could be heard for a long time afterwards.”

“As far as my charming white spirit was concerned, he had evaded the need to engage in battle with the custodians of peace and quiet! The first time that the devil, followed by his pursuers, appeared, he exclaimed ‘Oh,’ then he sighed; his knees started to shake; and then they gave way beneath him, and he sank to the floor unconscious. He, of course, would have attracted the attention of the many-eyed police arguses, if this devil had been less obstinate; or else the whole thing would have ended with him alone being taken captive. And, what’s more, the strictest form of justice requires that evil be punished and that virtue be rewarded, regardless of whether it’s committed by a spirit or by a human being.”

“A profound silence descended upon the scene. The moon ceased to illuminate our attic. The darkness, gloom, and silence were only intensifying my feeling of horror! It’s no joke to be all alone in an attic, – at night, with a spirit nearby, although this spirit, it’s true, wasn’t evil. (He had already begun to lose the whiteness of his face, and soon it would fade away completely.) What was I to think? What was I to do? At this point, I thought: was it really only the very wise Solomon who would have been decisive enough to know what to do? And he had his magic ring to help him!”

“After spending a sufficient amount of time in this intolerable situation, I noticed that it was beginning to turn gray in the attic, from which I guessed that dawn was breaking.

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48 In medieval mystical traditions, Solomon is believed to have received a supernatural ring from the Archangel Michael. Using the power of the ring, Solomon summons a full register of demons and takes authority over them by discerning their association (famine, disease, etc.) and trammeling them through the invocation of angels and magical powers.
This gladdened my heart, for, when I was living in Falaleevka, I already knew that, at this time of day, the spirits, whether they are good ones or evil ones, lose their power. I protected myself against any evil spirit by making the sign of the cross, and then I stood up. And, in truth, it was already light outside, so I decided to go up to see my neighbor. He had regained consciousness, and, upon opening his eyes, he said to me gently, with a sigh: ‘My God! Where am I? And where’s my brother?’”

“Who could describe my surprise! I couldn’t believe my eyes, or trust my senses. I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I wasn’t dreaming. Finally, I assured myself that this was indeed really happening, and, running up to the spirit, I exclaimed: ‘Is this possible? Is this really you, beautiful Licorisa? What happiness is afforded me by this opportunity to see the Tibetan queen! And to have it happen in such a mysterious situation as this!’”

“Prince Golkondsky,’ said Licorisa, ‘I hope that you shall honor my request and save me and my brother! Oh, you weren’t indifferent to me, and you assured me . . .’

“‘And I assure you now,’ I caught her up, ‘that I’m ready to do all that it lies within my power to do. But, alas, those accursed dragoons played a pretty good trick on me. Please know, my dear Licorisa, that they have demoted me from the ranks of princes, – and I’m now nothing more than poor Capricorn. This, however, doesn’t prevent me from loving you as much as I did before, and from serving you the way that a loyal subject should.’”

“‘Oh!’ said Licorisa, ‘your candor ought to beget trust in me. Please know that I was deceiving you! – and I’m no longer, as Licorisa, the sister of the actor, Khvostikov, who, in this social estate of deceivers, cheats, and frauds, bore the name of Scorpio.’”

“‘Heavens above!’ I exclaimed. ‘So you’re my friend’s sister!’ At this point, I embraced the beautiful maiden. When we had talked enough about the nighttime incident and about the common horror that we had experienced, Licorisa related to me the following story:

‘You should know that our family’s poverty is hereditary. When I was still in my infancy, I lost my parents, and I was indebted to the charitable contributions that we received from some of our relatives for my upbringing and education. My brother was sent off to a secondary school, whereas I was taken away to live with an elderly aunt, who had at one time distinguished herself in the local theatre, and who lived off the fruits of her industrious younger years. I seemed to her to be worthy of being in her charge, and she, for her part, wanted to see in me a second version of herself. She didn’t spare any expense, being confident that, with time, I would repay her. And, in truth, by the time that I turned fifteen years old, I was already rather adept at playing musical instruments, singing, and dancing, as well as casting such glances and making such bodily movements that were sufficient for setting ablaze the iciest of hearts. It goes without saying that I wasn’t without male admirers, and my auntie didn’t make them pine for me, and languish after me, for long. The first admirer that heavenly fate determined should be allowed to put his arm around my maidenly waist was an elderly grandee, a man of great
mind, but one who was lecherous to such an extent that he was prepared to sacrifice everything for a female beauty, provided that he would be allowed to take pleasure in her female charms. It’s also true that my auntie sold him the rudiments of my youth at a rather dear price. From that time to my nineteenth birthday, I led a life, the recollection of which involuntarily brings a blush to my cheeks. Auntie didn’t miss a single opportunity to have me pay back the financial losses that were incurred as a result of my ladylike upbringing and education. Although I didn’t lack for anything, I did have to expect to receive the very smallest amount of anything from her hands, and this circumstance made my life, in the end, unpleasant. At this point in time, my poor brother didn’t have even a single crust of bread to eat, whereas I was wallowing in abundance, and yet I was unable to help him out. I was delivering thousands of rubles into the hands of my aunt, but I couldn’t give my own brother even a kopeck. I myself didn’t own anything, except my feminine charms, and, what’s more, other men had them at their disposal.’

‘It was around this time that our aunt’s penury, her dire need, and her words of advice forced my brother to undertake a desperate, reckless, and awful venture, one that would make him the object of popular rumors and gossip, praise and verbal abuse, applause and whistling, in a word, – he became an actor! This venture did, however, correct his financial condition. His wife, my dearest sister-in-law, likewise came to her senses and listened to reason. Some close girlfriends of hers awakened her to the realization that it’s not always helpful to prize one’s feminine charms too much. ‘Youth only happens once,’ they would say to her, ‘she who doesn’t know how to make use of it resembles a miser, who, lying on piles of gold, dies from starvation.’ My sister-in-law was, in this instance, very sharp- witted, and my brother wasn’t very obstinate, and thus the matter ran its customary course. She became acquainted with Mister Dobroslavov, who doesn’t detest so much physical pleasures, as metaphysical ones, and, shortly thereafter, she acquainted her husband with him as well. The Highly Enlightened brethren had long wanted to have an adroit man in their retinue, and so my brother appeared before them and showed himself to be capable of serving as that kind of man. He soon became a participant in the mysteries of high wisdom, and when he had come to know, in some detail, the cohesiveness and the goal of this institution, he suggested that I, too, should become an enlightener, a female one.’

‘The more favorably inclined I became toward his representations, the more my dependency on my aunt seemed to me to be slavery, and I wanted to be able to make love voluntarily, of my own free will and choosing. The Most Highly Enlightened One and Mister Dobroslavov looked me over and found me to be a worthy priestess of that deity to whom they had assigned me, and I, after having quietly gathered together all of my belongings, moved to the Palace of Wisdom, worrying very little about the opinion that my aunt and her friends might have of me, and about the judgment that they might make about me.’
‘At this point, I spent two years in complete pleasure and amusement, which would have been noticeable, if the Most Highly Enlightened One hadn’t been so jealous. But that which we aren’t allowed to do manifestly, we do secretively. My brother undertook to make a profit and get rich at my expense, the same way that my aunt had done. I, too, in the end, liked to combine the pleasant with the profitable, and that’s why the Tibetan Princess appeared. Now you know who Licorisa is.’

“Such candor wasn’t very pleasant for the venerable brother of Capricorn to hear. Where did his sweet daydreams about Licorisa’s innocence disappear to? They took flight, like the fog, and I now saw in her a highly experienced seductress, – a worthy branch of her highly learned aunt’s family tree. What’s to be done! She’s now an unfortunate soul, suffering misfortune and unhappiness, and one ought to help the unfortunate and the unhappy, even if they are depraved and wanton.”

“‘But what was that all about yesterday?’ I asked her after a period of some silence. ‘What was the meaning of your masquerade yesterday? And the masquerade of that evil spirit whose tail was torn off by the police dragoons?’”

“‘You spoke the truth,’ she replied, ‘when you said that this was one big masquerade. The Most Highly Enlightened One had found out that some of the other brothers, who had wasted all of their money, and who, up until now, hadn’t had the honor of seeing the promised spirits and of piercing the veil of eternity, had begun to grumble. Prudence required that this desire of theirs be satisfied in some measure. My brother and I were appointed to do this. He had to appear in the guise of an evil spirit and demand the soul of Celestial Taurus, since he had been found to be faint-hearted and didn’t honor the mysteries of high wisdom. I was left to vanquish the demon, assuring everyone that Taurus, as a sign of his repentance and reformation, would pay twice as much money. The whole comedy had been arranged splendidly, when damned Polar Goose showed up with his retinue and ruined everything.’”

“At this point, beautiful Licorisa concluded her narrative. Although her account, as I observed earlier, didn’t please me in all respects, I did look upon her, nevertheless, as a victim of temptation and poverty. Oh, what does necessity not drive us to do! I decided to help the girl and somehow get her out of this house. But where to? I myself didn’t have a safe haven!”

“In an instant, a wondrous and miraculous change took place inside me. My previously wild and crazy brand of love suddenly flew away, and in its place was born some kind of special feeling of compassion, which was saying to me: ‘You’re a man, – help this girl out!’ My heart became disposed toward her as if she were my sister, and I, kissing her in a brotherly fashion, said to her: ‘Take comfort, my dear girl! As long as Gavrilo Simonovich has a crust of bread, you won’t die of starvation!’ At this point, as a token of my gratitude toward her for showing such uncommon, heartfelt candor, I, too, for my part, told her the story of my adventures, without hiding anything.”
“The dinner hour had passed, and I needed to think of a way for us to escape from this prison that we were in. What came to mind was my honorable benefactor, the owner of a wine cellar, who had paid Bibarius to teach me all manner of wisdoms. I used to rely upon him, the way that one relies upon a father. The whole difficulty consisted in this: how was I going to get myself and my dear girl friend out of this place, which the vigilant eyes of the police were probably guarding around the clock?"

“After untying the wings of my new lovable spirit, I threw off the robe with the sign of Capricorn on it, and, remaining in my usual attire, I set off to find an exit out of this labyrinth, frightened at every step of encountering one of the police minotaurs and leaving my beautiful Ariadne behind in sorrow, boredom, and impatience. In this instance, I acted far more conscientiously than had Theseus, whom ancient Greece praises and boasts about so much. That mythical king, being beloved and having been made a benefactor by his female lover, abandons his unfortunate and unhappy Ariadne on a deserted island, whereas I, out of brotherly love for Licorisa, wished to oblige this beauty and deliver her from the claws of justice officials, which, one would think, had been fairly well sharpened.”

Chapter 64: Advice Given in a Wine Cellar

“Descending the staircase as quietly as possible, hardly catching my breath, I would sneak from one room to another, fearing that I would fall into a trap. What devastation there was everywhere! Where had all of the magnificent paintings gone, the ones that had entertained the glances of the enlightened viewers? Where were all of the icon lamps? Everything had disappeared! It was as if there had been an earthquake in this house. Whatever had been impossible to carry away, that, at the very least, had been damaged. How awful justice can be! Here and there, it’s true, some masks and rags from hieroglyphic robes were lying around.”

“Fortunately, my fear proved to be unfounded. Not seeing anyone anywhere, I came out onto the courtyard and, with what strength that I had left inside me, I rushed over to the wine cellar of the beneficent Savva Trifonovich. Finding him to be at home, I disclosed to him the whole truth, relating to him the critical situation that my girlfriend and I were presently in. When I had concluded my account, good and kind Savva, with a look of pity on his face, made the sign of the cross upon himself and said: ‘God is with us! Can there be any sense in those branches of scholarly knowledge, when they acquaint us with evil, unclean spirits! Goodness gracious, forgive me for having handed you over to Bibarius! Could we ever have imagined that you would one day allow yourself to become a member of the impious, ungodly Masons! Oh, my friend, you obviously

49 In Greek mythology, Ariadne, the daughter of Pasiphae and King Minos of Crete, falls in love with the Athenian hero, Theseus. With a thread of glittering jewels, she helps him to escape the Labyrinth after he slays the minotaur (a beast that is half bull and half man) that Minos kept in the Labyrinth.
crawled down into the devil’s throat! Thank God almighty that I saved you just in the nick of time, – and now we need to purify your soul by means of penitence!

“After delivering this sermon to me, Savva submitted to my entreaty, agreeing to provide my female friend and myself with refuge, until such time as the storm abated. That’s why, after he had supplied me with some female clothing and a little bit of food, I headed back to the Palace of Wisdom, so that, with the approach of night time, Licorisa and I would be able to leave our attic and move into Savva Trifonovich’s house. In the meantime, I promised myself to ascertain what had become of my colleagues, whom the police had taken captive.”

“Licorisa thanked me tenderly for my participation in the effort to shape her destiny. When we saw that our attic had become shrouded in darkness, I took her by the hand and led her downstairs. Both of us managed to reach the wine cellar safe and sound. Savva had kept his word: we were completely out of danger and felt quite content. But what had become of Feklusha and the other enlighteners? – that remained completely unknown to us.”

“Fate, however, was invisibly looking after us and taking care of our lot. One evening, while we, by the light of a night lamp, were chatting with Savva Trifonovich over a bottle of wine, I described for him, in a very vivid and animated way, some of my adventures. Licorisa and Savva’s wife listened greedily to what I had to say, fixing their eyes upon me, when suddenly the doors flew open and we were startled, – surprised as well as gladdened, – to see Khvostikov standing there. Seeing that Licorisa was here, he was no less astounded than we were. After the first few exclamations of delight and some warm embraces were exchanged, he said to me: ‘Gavrilo Simonovich! I need to discuss something important with you, and it needs to be done in private.’”

“‘There’s no need for us to do that in private,’ I replied. ‘I have nothing to hide from my kind host and hostess. That’s the way things stand, venerable brother Scorpio! In my person, you see before you your humble brother Capricorn. I had the honor, during the most recent night of enlightenment about two months ago, to witness how you, with your inimitable bravery, waged a battle in the attic with a stubborn dragoon. Oh, if only that damned tail hadn’t broken off, it would have been so easy for you to make short work of him. It’s a shame that beautiful Licorisa, who was at that time severely confused and horrified, wasn’t able to witness the heroic exploits of her militant brother!’”

“When I had first started to speak, Khvostikov had faltered very noticeably, his eyes had opened wide, and he couldn’t utter a single word. Finally, he burst out laughing, and, embracing me anew, he said: ‘I’m greatly surprised that, at the time, I wasn’t able to recognize you by your voice! But what you say is true, – who would ever have thought that Capricorn would be an old acquaintance of mine?’”

“After this, he handed me a letter, and all that it took was for me to glance at the inscription to recognize right away that the handwriting belonged to my chaste wife, Princess Fekla Sidorovna. Here are the contents of that letter:
“Evidently, fate has created me to be used incessantly as her plaything, the way that the wind plays with a blade of grass in a field. I wasn’t so fortunate that I could evade the justice officials, like you did, on that infamous night when the spirits were summoned. After they caught me, they dragged me away. I was insensate, and when I did recover my senses, I found myself inside a dark room that was hardly illuminated. For three days and three nights my only nourishment was bread and water; a bundle of hay served as my bed; the walls of the room were decorated with spider webs; and, instead of music, the noise made by the fluttering of bats resounded throughout the room. Oh, how can one compare a dwelling like this with a Temple of Enlightenment!”

“On the fourth day of my confinement, the guard announced that I would be the next in line to be brought before the judge. He added, moreover: ‘His Grace is a past master at eliciting the truth. He shall worm out of you what it was that you did secretly and what impious acts of irreverence that you might have committed! You’re still young, my dear, and so, out of my Christian love for you, I would advise you to confess everything to him right away, without waiting for the torture chamber!’”

“At the mere mention of the word ‘torture,’ the blood froze in my veins, and I started to tremble. They had to drag me forcibly in front of the stern judge, near whose office door a frightening sentry was standing guard. I glanced at him, exclaimed ‘Oh!’ and then completely lost consciousness. I had recognized in him Prince Latron, that very same worshiper of mine, to whom you, obligingly, revealed the minor act of infidelity that I had committed against him, an indiscretion for which I was severely punished.”

“When I had regained consciousness, I found myself lying on an expensive divan, which was encircled by a group of women. My thoughts were all disordered; my head was spinning. I couldn’t utter a single word. Only groans were swirling around in my bosom.”

“A half hour later, Prince Latron himself entered the room, and all of the women who had been standing around me left my side. With a mighty effort, I lifted myself up from the sofa and fell at his feet. Tarrying a little, and fastening his frightening gaze upon me, he lifted me up off the floor, seated me down upon the sofa, and then, taking a seat beside me, he said: ‘Listen to me carefully, Fiona. I’m going to be speaking about a subject that’s rather important to you. I have loved you passionately. You were unfaithful to me, and you were suitably punished. Now you have fallen in with a gang of deceivers, cheats, and frauds, and you have to be punished once again. I’m the Supreme Court judge in this case! If you pledge that you shall forget all of your former ties and that you won’t seek any new ones, then I shall forgive you and pardon you. You shall, as before, belong to me, and you shall, as before, live in contentment and bliss!’”
‘I think, my dear prince, that if you had been in the same position that I was then, you, too, wouldn’t have had any qualms about renouncing your Feklusha and giving her up! How can one joke about tortures, and, moreover, how can a woman do that? Thus, after throwing myself down at his feet a second time, I vowed to love him faithfully and to love him more than I had before. After that, I remained in his palatial chambers, which shone with all manner of magnificence and splendor. But wishing to repay you for the love that you showed me previously, and for the leniency with which you received me in the House of Enlightenment, and, at the same time, how well you received Khvostikov, who, time and again, caressed me so tenderly in that very same place, I shed a wellspring of tears before my worshipper, and I told him in a languorous voice: ‘Most kind Sir! If I am to be so fortunate as to be favored with being in your good graces, then allow me to bring forth an entreaty on behalf of my close friends and relatives. Two of my relatives were likewise to be found in that society in which I circulated: my natural brother, Chistyakov, and my cousin, Khvostikov. If they weren’t able to evade the hands of stern justice, like I did, then, for the sake of your love for me, set them free. Their gratitude, and mine, shall be boundless!’ Glancing over at me with indifference, he said: ‘Fine! I shall look into it!’ With these words, he left. The next day, he came to see me, and – oh, joy! – Khvostikov had come with him. ‘My dear boy!’ I exclaimed, embracing him, so that he wouldn’t detect my ruse. Poor Khvostikov just stood there, as pale as death, and trembled throughout every part of his body. ‘What’s this, my boy?’ I exclaimed. ‘Aren’t you going to thank His Grace for the huge favor that he is granting you?’ Khvostikov threw himself, with all of his might, at the feet of his judge, collapsing there in a pile on the floor, waved his arm, like a true actor, and opened his mouth wide, seeming as if he was attempting to utter something, but his tongue had turned to stone. And, posing as this sorry sight, he didn’t at all resemble that courageous demon that had so stubbornly endured the siege that was undertaken by the police detectives. And, of course, he wouldn’t have yielded to them so quickly on that occasion, if his majestic tail hadn’t broken off! Here, at that moment, he was a true scorpion, a meek, humble reptile that was crawling, and groveling, before the prince.’

“At this point, I interrupted my reading of Feklusha’s letter to add these comments directed at Khvostikov, who had begun to turn red from embarrassment: ‘Isn’t it true, Mister Scorpio, that the beautiful Lavinia knows how to draw portraits pretty well? I must confess, however, that, from this picture, it’s not possible to see that manly courage of yours that I had expected to see after your initial heroic feat in the attic! And that’s the truth! You were an actor, and as much as you presented the diabolical hero in the attic superbly, just as superbly did you depict the terrestrial heroes on stage! But seeing as how, in the Palaces of Wisdom, you were the meek and humble Scorpio, why, then, in the palaces of a noble grandee, weren’t you a meek and humble criminal?’”

“‘I think,’ he replied, ‘that I’ve always been more courageous than you. Since you were so deathly afraid of me in the attic, what would you have done now, being in full view of everyone while standing in front of the judge at court? Just one word from him is as
weighty, for a righteous man, as at least a hundred words from the angriest of demons is for a sinner! Judge for yourself, what would it be for a man who isn’t righteous?’”

“‘I heartily agree with you,’ I said, and then I went back to reading aloud Feklusha’s letter:’”

‘Prince Latron said to Khvostikov: ‘Get on your feet, you rake. I forgive you, and pardon you, for the sake of your beautiful cousin! You owe her your life. Be grateful to her. But so as to prove to her my love for her even more, I shall try to make you happy, just as I did for that rake, Feklusha’s natural brother, Chistyakov. From this moment forward, you shall have nothing to fear from any searches conducted by justice officials, no matter whether that official is wearing a full-dress uniform or a skirt! Report to me in Warsaw, whither I’m departing tomorrow, and I shall secure for you a government post there.’ With these parting words, he left the room. I related to Khvostikov, in detail, what I knew, and I was about to take it into my head that day to rehearse those excellent scenes that we would perform at night in the House of Wisdom. But Khvostikov, in this instance, turned out to be baser and meaner than Scorpio himself. He was all snow and ice, treating me very coldly. I made use of Prince Latron’s absence to write this letter to you, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, for I, who had become free, was easily able to discover your place of residence. As someone who is sincerely devoted to you, I would advise you not to disregard the promise that His Grace has made, and to come visit us in Warsaw. When I get there, I shall try to use all of the strengths of my body and soul to make you as contented as possible!’

“When I had finished reading aloud this eloquent and intricate letter from Feklusha, all of us looked at one another for a long time without uttering a single word. Finally, the following conversation sprang up amongst us in the wine cellar:’”

CHISTYAKOV: “That dissipated, indecent woman! Ever since she first came out of her house to weed the cabbage plants, she has remained the same, right up to the present time. Judge for yourself, Savva Trifonovich, the shamelessness of this creature! Hardly had she succeeded in becoming the concubine of a distinguished and powerful satyr, when she already begins giving orders and taking charge of the fate of others, as if she were some kind of princess or countess, who, after overcoming some long-standing difficulties, had finally secured the honor of being the lover, the maitresse, of her sovereign. She begins to look at her spouse with disdain and promises to award ranks and voevodships to those soulless insects, who, despite the nobility of their breed, the renowned exploits of their great forebears, the shiny kaftans, glittering with gold, precious stones, and diamond buttons, that they wear, not only weren’t ashamed, but actually considered it an honor to boast publicly if they were to succeed in picking up the fan of a minion of this sort, in fastening the buckle on her shoe, on receiving a flick on the nose from her, and so on . . .”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR (laughing): “Although Gavril Simonovich speaks sensibly, he must admit that personality plays a part here, and that’s why, although his
fervor is excusable, as soon as a man speaks in the heat of passion, his words must be weighed and measured, to see whether his thoughts are fair and just.”

KVOSTIKOV (to the owner of the wine cellar): “Your reasoning is superb, although it takes place . . .”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “In a wine cellar, you wish to say? I can assure you that sometimes, not only in a wine cellar, but even in a peasant’s modest hut, people discuss things more correctly than public officials do in Senates, Parliaments, and Councils of State! Don’t think for a moment, Gavrilo Simonovich, that I, in saying this to you, am devoid of feelings of shame as well as of honor! Absolutely not! Although I, as a man, don’t always preserve these feelings, at least I do love, with all of my heart, those people who try their utmost to do precisely that. But would you permit me to pose a few questions to you?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I’m ready and willing to answer them!”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “A poor man owned part of a small tract of land. He planted a very young sapling, a future apple tree, on it. It’s the only tree that he has, so he devotes all of his efforts to getting it to grow, but this isn’t enough. He’s so captivated by this young sapling that he wants to see it become a beautiful, slender tree, — tall and narrow, — so that, with time, he’d be able to relax in the shade beneath its leaves and eat its fruits.”

KVOSTIKOV (with an air of importance): “This is either an allegory or a parable!”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “As far as I’m concerned, it’s all the same to me, whatever you choose to call it. Whether it was due to poor soil and the purity of the sap that nourishes the young tree, whether it was due to storms and intense heat from the sun, whether it was due to negligence on the part of the owner himself, — the sapling, which had already begun to blossom and which had promised to provide beautiful fruit, only keeps getting more and more bowed, and before long it has completely bent over the fence and into the garden belonging to the poor man’s wealthy and powerful next-door neighbor.”

KVOSTIKOV: “Oh, I get it! What happens next?”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “The poor landowner is saddened, he laments his fate, and he strives somehow to renew his rights to the tree, but it’s all in vain. A rich man lets it be known that not only shall his poor neighbor no longer be having the right to part of the fruit, but, if he were to continue his obstinacy, then he would be severely punished and would lose his right to what remains of the small tract of land.”

KVOSTIKOV: “I can guess what happens next.”
OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “It remained for the poor landowner to have patience and to bear it! In the end, the rich man, whether it was due to the admonitions of his wife, his children, or his friends, – it’s all the same, – simply summons him and tells him: ‘I’ve taken such a liking to the fruits from your apple tree, that I shall not give you even a single one of them. However, so that your efforts won’t be completely in vain, here’s another apple tree of mine, one from which I shall allow you to gather up its fruit each year.’ What do you think that the poor beggar did?”

KVOSTIKOV: “Undoubtedly he accepted the rich man’s offer with joyful gratitude!”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “Nothing of the sort! He proudly turned it down. Wasn’t this poor man being stupid?”

KVOSTIKOV (leaping to his feet): “Stupid? He’s completely crazy! He’s a real ass!”

CHISTYAKOV: “Yes, he is! However, Savva Trifonovich . . .”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “However, Gavril Simonovich! What’s really going on here is that your dissipated wife wants to do you a favor on account of her past instances of dissipation. I can conclude from this that they, too, these dissipations of hers, are going to come in handy for something. You wish to turn down the favor that she wants to do for you? This would be fine, if she, on this basis, had promised you that she would become, henceforth, an honest and honorable woman. But she’s not even thinking of doing that. Indeed, she’ll probably never even think, henceforth, of doing that.”

CHISTYAKOV: “That goes without saying!”

OWNER OF THE WINE CELLAR: “Well, what’s holding things up? If you’d been from the ranks of those brainless rakes who are usually looking to make their way up in the world in such ways, I wouldn’t have meddled in this matter. But I have considered you, from the very start, to be a sensible person, upon whom fortune has looked distrustfully, from under her brow. And that’s why I took you under my wing and handed you over to the dearly departed Bibarius for edification in the branches of scholarly knowledge, at a time when I could already see that the tiresome, boring poison of erudition had attached itself to you. And that’s why, – I repeat, – I would strongly advise you now, after crossing yourself with both hands and saying a prayer to the icon of Saint Nicholas the Wonderworker, that you set off for Poland. Since you have no money, I shall supply you with some. If you ever become wealthy, you can pay me back then. A person can acquire a lot of money when he uses his head. But if you were out of your mind, and you had hundreds of thousands of rubles, I wouldn’t entrust a single kopeck to you. For more often than not, crazy rich men, when they’re not careful and they squander away the estate acquired by their parents, die from starvation.”
“Thus did Savva Trifonovich sermonize didactically, and the captivated Khvostikov exclaimed: ‘Superb! Savva Trifonovich, you reason so soundly or argumentatively, you present such arguments as . . .’”

“‘But how are such arguments presented? And who is it that presents them?’ asked the owner of the wine cellar. ‘Right now, I really don’t recall, but it was, I would suppose, just such a man as I am, and not a superbly clever one at that!’”

“‘What good is it doing us to be spending such a large amount of time talking about all of this?’ I exclaimed merrily. ‘I agree to go to Poland! As soon as we shall have mended our ways a little, let’s go seek our fortune and find happiness in the vast sea of this world, without worrying ourselves about whence, – from what source, – that sea springs. Isn’t it true that gold, even when it’s encased in mud and dirt, is still gold? And even when it’s extracted from black and gray stones? Wasn’t I truly stupid for having set out yet again to pursue moral philosophy, which had acted tyrannically towards me so many times? And, moreover, I had already sworn an oath once before, abandoning the superstitious nonsense of conscience, that I would try to see whether I might not be more fortunate and happier if I were to turn off the road of moral philosophy a little. We shall rent a comfortable little wagon and set off for Poland. I, as the main instrument for the attainment of our future good fortune and happiness, shall sit in the middle; the beautiful Licorisa shall sit to my right, and her cousin, the venerable Khvostikov, shall sit to my left. I have heard it said somewhere that people who have committed themselves to only a single evil spirit were attaining good fortune and happiness, at least in this world. Can it really be the case that I was born under such an unfavorable constellation that, while marching in a procession toward the temple of glory, good fortune, and happiness, accompanied, on my right, by good and kind spirits, and, on my left, by evil and malevolent ones, I shall not succeed in this undertaking of ours?”

“We all burst out laughing. I shook the hand of the good and kind Savva Trifonovich. I embraced Khvostikov and kissed the reddened cheek of Licorisa. She glanced at me with a look that was languorous and gentle, yet that was, at the same time, searching and all-pervasive. At this point, I gave my word of honor to my conscience that I would love her as a tender sister, even if all of the gods and goddesses in the universe were to assign me to serve as a confidant in matters involving love and wealth.”

“Alas! How soon did I forget the oath that I had sworn! How soon did this dear, sweet sister of mine become my dear, sweet lover . . . But we shall speak more of that later on in my narrative account.”

**Chapter 65: Our Travelers Are on Their Way**

“In short order, the beneficent Savva Trifonovich equipped us for the journey in a manner befitting people who were preparing to have the honor soon of performing the roles of the brother and the cousin of a highly distinguished Polish nobleman’s concubine. Truly an important assignment! We hired the drayman Nikita, a balding, toothless old man, but,
all the same, a merry chatterbox. He himself would joke about the misfortunes that had befallen him.”

“One morning, on a beautiful summer’s day, Savva Trifonovich accompanied us to the city gates, where he embraced each and every one of us amicably, and then he went back home. None of us could keep from crying. I stood in the covered wagon and watched for a long time, with gloomy eyes, how Moscow was continually concealing herself, seeking to escape notice. Looking at her lofty, sublime towers, at God’s temples, I bowed down to her as a token of my affection for her at our parting. I drew a deep breath of air, and then I took my seat in the covered wagon. All of the incidents that had befallen me in Moscow now came to mind. Where is that invisible being that I saw? Where is Dobroslavov? Where are Polar Goose and Celestial Taurus? Alas! How many reversals from evil to good, and from good to evil, have I endured? I drew a second deep breath of air, one that was deeper and heavier than the first. My comrades heard this and they did likewise. My charming female fellow passenger noticed that my eyes had not yet dried, and a shining tear hung down from her eyelash. I gently took her hand, and squeezed it tenderly, and she responded in kind. How, after this, could I not have become absorbed in a sweet reverie, which didn’t, however, continue for long. Suddenly hearing a wild, hoarse, yet terribly resounding voice beside me, all three of us quickly lifted our heads and recognized with amazement that our Nikita, brandishing a whip, was puffing himself up with all of his might in order to sing a song more loudly. Turning around to face us, and baring his gums, for he had no teeth left in his mouth, he asked: ‘What? How’s that? Oh, if only you had heard me sing back in the good old days! How much better I used to sing then!’”

“‘Even now you sing rather well,’ I replied. ‘But we are too busy right now to hear you sing. Thus, wouldn’t it be better if . . .’”

“‘If I were to cease singing, you mean to say?’ he exclaimed. ‘Yes, I shall, but what is it that you’re doing right now that makes you too busy to hear me sing?’”

“‘We’re discussing something!’ Khvostikov replied, with an air of importance that a young pedant might assume. And Nikita said to him: ‘If you truly are discussing something, then, I suppose, you’re not being entirely successful at it. For as long a period of time as someone like me has been travelling around the world, spending time not only in Moscow and Petersburg, but also in Leipzig, Berlin, and the Romanian city of Yassy, not to mention a whole number of small, trifling towns, nowhere have I noticed that anyone who wants to enjoy good fortune and to live happily likes to discuss things. We, at this point in our life, get down to finding ourselves a profession, since it’s already too late for us to be discussing things. Really, that’s the way it is! I myself started discussing things rather late in life, and that’s why, in my old age, I now drag these poor bones of mine along during the intense heat of summer, as well during the intense cold of winter, in a rain storm as well as in a snow storm. What am I to do, my good sirs! As proof that what I’m telling you is true, listen to this short tale of mine.’”
‘The balding old man who is sitting here with you right now in the coachbox wasn’t always just plain old Nikita. There was a time when people, both great and small, both wealthy and semi-wealthy, called him Nikita Perfilyevich, and when guests, as they were throwing their beaver fur hats down in a pile, would bow low to me. I wasn’t the worst merchant in this small town, and the trading that I was engaged in did involve horses. Bargaining and haggling over prices, it’s true, isn’t very important work, but I did, nonetheless, live in a decent house, I ate and drank my fill, and I treated my wife and children decently. And I didn’t climb out of a red shirt and a blue kaftan with a splendid sash. Was it possible that I would have given any thought at that time to something gloomy, as I do nowadays?’

‘As luck would have it, one of my fellow countrymen, who was in the same position as I was, embarked upon some kind of scheme involving farming leases, the devil only knows what it entailed. At first, we made fun of this bold venture of his, but after about two years’ time, contrary to our expectations, he had built himself a stone house, he had acquired some shops, and he had hired some former prisoners to work there as countermen. And the only thing that he had to do was to exercise and to practice skills for the various leisure-time hobbies that he was now engaging in. He would go visit neighbors, and he would receive them as guests in his home. And thus he became a blood brother to the police captain, to the local judge, and even to the mayor, a man who was highly intractable and sullen. All of these local people would extend their hands out to him, with a smile on their face, and they would ask him about the health of his wife, of his children, and of all of the members of his household. Who wouldn’t have been attracted by such a fortuitous and rapid change in a person? Two personages began to whisper incessantly in my ear: ‘Cast aside horse trading, and take up farming leases and contracts instead. There’s a war going on right now, and a lot of fodder and provisions are needed abroad. You own around a hundred gaunt horses. Right now people are paying a lot of money for horses in a quick sale done in a hurry. In one summer, with God’s help, you could become richer than our haughty, but highly successful, fellow countryman.’

‘Who could resist the alluring suggestions that were being made to me by such powerful advisors, that’s to say, the evil spirit of my tempter and my dearest spouse? Although at that time I was still known as Nikita Perfilyevich, all the same, I was Nikita, and, consequently, a vulnerable human being.’

‘I took upon myself responsibility for a contract, I hired some workers, and I set out for the place where our appointment was to take place. But since I didn’t know well and truly the whereabouts of those local destinations, and their distance away from where I was living, nor did I know that by no means would I be receiving the sale price in full, and, moreover, that I would have to give one person a gift, and a second person, a drink. And that a third person would be the one taking the horses; in a word, since I was, in this instance, a fool in all respects, the costs for transporting the horses for less than half the distance to our destination were a real burden for me. “‘Can I change my mind?’” “‘Sorry, it’s
too late!’” No matter how much I implored them, no matter how much I begged them, not to trample me underfoot, it was all in vain! Before long, they handed the delivery over to some other people, at my expense, and my estate was confiscated and sold, in payment for a debt that was found wanting. I rushed around, like a man possessed, first to one person, then to another, then to a third, – all over nothing. One of them laughed out loud at me, while another swore at me with foul language. When I had been in a position to give gifts, I had been an amiable friend, a buddy, I had been Nikita Perfilyevich; people had bowed down to me deferentially, they had shaken my hand in a friendly fashion. But now, since I myself have become naked, like a tambourine, although they still bow low to me, it’s as if I have become a crab, they don’t even allow themselves to look at me. One person was such a rude, obnoxious boor, – he was of German ancestry, it’s true, – that when I hinted to him, ever so slightly, however, that he had several times consumed so much alcohol that he had become dead drunk, he turned very nasty, seizing me firmly by the collar, turning my back to him, and then giving me, – in return for my inaccurate information, – a very accurate slap with his hand to the back of my head and a very firm kick to my buttocks with his foot. Thus he kicked me out of there, adding: “‘Be quiet, you bearded beast! Don’t you know that I’m a dragoon captain!’”

‘What was I to do when I was up against a dragoon captain? I left, sighing and cursing, from the bottom of my heart, the advice that I had received from the evil spirit and from my dearest spouse.’

‘All that remained out of all of my property was only one wife, two sons, two daughters, three old nags, one dog, and two cats. Laugh as much as you’d like. Arriving home, I said to my wife: “Well, my little dove! You and I have taken a wrong turn and have made a mess of things! Please be so kind as to change from wearing a jacket to wearing a sarafan!”’

‘Although, it’s true, we were sad at that time, yet, little by little, we calmed down. I likewise changed from wearing a blue jacket to wearing a dark gray one, and I began, upon saying a prayer to God, to work as a drayman. God gave His blessing to me. I married my two girls off to honest and decent commoners, and I married my two sons off to well-to-do brides. And each of them is now working for me, making deliveries with a fairly nice troika.’

‘Every time that we part company, I get from them a firm promise not to get involved in financial turnovers, if they don’t wish to be turned over themselves as working capital and to receive slaps to the back of their heads and kicks to their buttocks.’

“In this way, Nikita concluded his intricate and complex narrative, which truly did help to alleviate our sadness somewhat. We had been on the road for about two weeks already, traveling through several different cities, towns, villages, and hamlets. And one fine day, toward evening time, we stopped to eat supper and to spend the night in a small village
that was one day’s drive away from Kiev, which, at that time in our history, belonged to
Poland.”

Chapter 66: The Continuation of Our Journey

“I think that it would not be superfluous here for me to explain at some length that, for
some time now, I had been happy in my love for Licorisa. My girl friend’s brother was
looking at me askance, with a scowl on his face, but we pretended that we weren’t
noticing any of this. Up until this time, he was, – or at least he seemed to be, –
indifferent. But, as bad luck would have it, this particular evening, which had been set
aside for some peace and quiet after our travel efforts, we, – Licorisa and I, – took it into
our heads to take a stroll down a nearby copse, which bordered directly on the entire
forest. While we were in the midst of a thicket, amusing ourselves by collecting
mushrooms, a terrible storm suddenly darkened the sky. Rain started pouring down, thick
and fast, upon our heads, and we had to spend the entire night beneath the branches of a
spruce tree.”

“A beautiful morning arrived, and we came out of our shelter, but we didn’t know which
way to direct our steps.”

“Looking around to our right and to our left, we weren’t able to come up with anything
better to try than to walk randomly until we come across the first footpath. We did
manage to reach what we had wanted, but we did it doubly: that’s to say, we came across
two narrow footpaths lying side by side.”

“‘Thank God!’ Licorisa exclaimed joyfully. ‘One of these footpaths shall probably lead
to the village where we’re staying.’”

“‘No doubt!’ I exclaimed, ‘and it’s probably the one on the right!’”

“‘Oh, no,’ she said. ‘It’s no doubt the one on the left!’”

“‘And why do you think that?’ I asked fervently.”

“‘Because, think back for a minute! When we were searching for mushrooms, what side
were we leaning toward?’”

“‘As I recall, more toward the left!’”

“‘Exactly!’”

“‘Thus, on the way back, the left has become the right. Consequently, we must go to the
left.’”

“It seemed to me that her reasoning was sufficiently convincing. So I agreed with her. I
set off to the left, embracing her with my left arm and deflecting tree branches with my
right arm, so that they wouldn’t scratch the tender little face, the full bosom, and the
delicate white arms and hands of my female traveling companion. Enjoying the density
of the place and delighting in the verdure of the grass, the woody boughs of the trees, and
the singing of the birds, we were becoming enraptured in a certain sweet ecstasy of love,
stopping continually to embrace each other. And thus I can’t say for certain whether it
was the slowness of our pace or the long duration of our way back that was the reason
why, as we came out onto a forest glade, the sun was already standing high in the sky.
We could see the village in the distance, we joyfully embraced for the final time, and we
set off running. But who could describe our discomfiture when we realized, from all the
signs, that the village we saw was not the same one where we had stopped for the night.”

“‘Gavrilo Simonovich,’ said Licorisa, who had turned pale, ‘we, of course, have lost our
way! What shall become of us?’”

“‘We shall see,’ I replied, ‘perhaps you’re mistaken.’”

“At this point, I caught sight of a peasant walking by, whom I asked, after stopping him:
‘Please stop, my friend! Is this the place where a wagon drawn by three horses stopped
for the night yesterday?’”

THE PEASANT: “No one stopped here.” (He wants to continue walking.)

CHISTYAKOV: “Wait a minute! Where’s the place where that wagon did stop? Is it
ahead of us or behind us?”

THE PEASANT: “Whoever was riding in that wagon would know that better than I do!”

“He left. And Licorisa sighed.”

“‘What are you sighing for, ahead of time?’ I asked her. ‘Let’s enter the village. We’ll
find out something there. It’s a shame that I don’t have any money at all on my person,
not even a kopeck. I left all of my money in my suitcase. That was careless on my part!
Then again, who would have known ahead of time what would happen to us! I think,
Licorisa, that you should bolster your strength. It’s no laughing matter to spend a whole
night outdoors, in the damp air, and to cover so many versts on foot on a dewy morning,
dressed only in a light dress and shoes!’”

“Licorisa again sighed deeply, letting her head hang down upon her white bosom. Her
cheeks were deathly pale. Whither had her desire for passionate embraces, fervent kisses,
and tender caresses disappeared? We would sometimes glance at one another, but no
longer with those blazing looks that signified sexual love and physical pleasure. Here’s
what love without money means! It’s a tender, beautiful flower. As long as people take
care of that flower and cherish it, as long as a life-giving rain and a nourishing dew give
its stalks water to drink, it shall shine like a precious stone. But deprive it of this
nourishment, and it shall waste away, it shall fade and completely wither.”
“Wait a minute, my nice, kind girlfriend! I have encountered similar circumstances in the past, and not just once, and I, as you can see, have remained, up until now, alive and well. The peasants who live here are eating their dinner right about now. I shall go and try to get at least something from them for us to eat. Their table, of course, can’t compare with the table at the House of Enlightenment, but what is one to do?’ I then set off for the house near which we had been sitting.”

“When I entered the peasant hut, I found the master of the house, apparently, sitting at the dinner table: a burly, red-haired peasant. Beside him sat his wife, and then about five or six children. The master was cleaning off the cabbage soup as noisily as I had cleaned off the bread with butter back in Fatezh, for which offense I was punished by that town’s local custodian of peace and order.”

CHISTYAKOV: “Venerable master of this home! Would you happen to have anything for me and my wife, who is waiting outside, to eat for dinner?”

MASTER OF THE HOUSE: “How could there not be anything! I have some good cabbage soup made with pork, some boiled mutton, and some roasted piglet. Mistress of the house, get a move on!”

CHISTYAKOV: “That’s enough, more than enough! We don’t need much food, we’re passers-by! But right now we don’t happen to have any money on our person.”

MASTER OF THE HOUSE (wiping his mustache): “Ha, ha, my lord! That’s a rather bad state of affairs to be in! We’re not terribly happy to have such people as guests in our home! Mistress of the house, don’t trouble yourself!”

“I no longer dared to approach Licorisa. She was sitting on a bench, pressing her eyes with both hands. I was guessing, from the movement of her bosom, that she was quietly weeping. The poor thing! It was my own foolhardiness that had brought both of us to this predicament.”

“I went inside another peasant hut, and I received the same response. I went inside a third hut, and it was again the same response, but this time with interest, that’s to say: it’s a refusal accompanied by taunts. Inside a fourth hut, it’s even worse, that’s to say: there are taunts, as well as other forms of verbal abuse. Inside a fifth hut, there’s even more of the same thing, namely: to all of the earlier pleasantries in the receptions that I had received, menacing threats were now added. In a word, I made the rounds of the entire village, and everywhere I went I received essentially the same cold reception: in some places, a bit more, in other places, a bit less.”

“Feeling depressed, my head hanging low, I was walking back slowly to my Licorisa, not knowing what I should tell her, when I caught sight of some dust being kicked up on the road. Shortly thereafter, I observed a trio of horses pulling a troika. ‘Sweet helpmate of mine! That, it seems, is our wagon! Take heart!’” A covered wagon was approaching,
and I could already see clearly that it was Nikita, against the bald crown of whose head
the rays of the midday sun were striking, making it look like a large ball.”

“‘I’m afraid,’ said Licorisa, taking a deep breath, ‘that my brother might be angry at me
for having spent the night . . .’”

“‘Let him be angry, let him burst at the seams with anger! Why do you need to worry
about that? You’re not a ten-year-old girl, and you’re not living under his supervision.
Why did your venerable brother not deign to get angry at you when you were living at the
home of the gentlemen enlighteners? Besides, rest assured that I’ve assumed
responsibility, once and for all, to protect you from every male bully, whoever he may
happen to be.’”

“The covered wagon drove up to where we were standing, and Nikita recognized us right
away. He halted the horses, jumped down from the coach box, and said, opening his
mouth wide with a grin: ‘Well, if it isn’t our revelers, back from their stroll! Where did
you two suddenly disappear to? It’s no laughing matter to spend a whole night outdoors,
especially on such a stormy night. Here I was in the coach house, beneath the covered
wagon, and I couldn’t tear my eyes off of it. But these two, they were somewhere out in
the fields, oh, me, oh, my!’”

“At this point, Khvostikov, with a sullen look on his face, walked up to us. It was
noticeable, however, that Bacchus had already left his mark on him.”

KHVOSTIKOV: “That’s no concern of yours, Nikita. Mind your own business! And so,
madam, where were you during all of this time? Who gave you the right to roam around
at night, and, moreover, to do so with a man who is both a stranger and an outsider!”

CHISTYAKOV (taking offense): “An outsider, my dear sir?”

KHVOSTIKOV (without looking at me): “I demand a response from you, Licorisa!”

LICORISA (weeping): “Little brother of mine! . . .”

CHISTYAKOV (with an air of importance): “Mister Khvostikov! You can see that the
poor girl has been weakened from travel and from hunger. She needs to get some rest
and relaxation, and she needs to bolster her strength. And there shall be enough time
once we get there there for us to satisfy your curiosity. Please note: to satisfy your
curiosity, but by no means to satisfy anything more than that!”

“He gave me a meaningful look, and then he walked off ahead of us to select a more
advantageous roadside inn. Nikita led the horses after him, whereas Licorisa and I set off
for the covered wagon. She was still crying.”
CHISTYAKOV: “I beseech you not to be distressed in vain. If he begins to interrogate you again, I shall play such a trick on him that his desire to disturb further such a nice, such a tender person, as my girlfriend is, shall disappear.”

“At mention of the word ‘girlfriend,’ she turned her dark eyes toward me and smiled. She smiled the way that a sunset smiles, when the last golden rays of the sun still remain in the firmament. One instant passes, and there are not any of those rays left, and darkness covers the horizon. In the same way, Licorisa’s blush hid itself in an instant.”

“After Nikita had driven our wagon into the courtyard, we came to a halt. Khvostikov, upon walking up to his sister, said to her in a stern voice: ‘Make ready for us to eat dinner! That’s your task!’”

CHISTYAKOV (upon walking up to him): “That’s not at all her task, but is instead the task of the proprietress. Let your sister lie down. When dinner is ready, we shall wake her up and go eat with her, – and at that time you’ll be able to question her to your heart’s content. Go lie down for a little while, Licorisa! And we, meanwhile, shall go drink some shots of vodka to chase away our fatigue, and we shall talk for a bit about this, that, and the other.”

“There was nothing to be done. Pulling out the vodka, we went over to the gates, sat down on a bench, and refreshed ourselves for a while by drinking shots of vodka and eating some hearty hors d’oeuvres. In the meantime, Nikita, who was dealing with his horses, came outside with a wooden cup filled with cabbage soup, an entire loaf of bread, some kvass, and a flask of wine, and he began to discharge his duties with great zeal, even though he didn’t have any teeth. When he had drained half of the contents of the flask, and had thus become a little more cheerful than usual, and when he heard our talk about the night before, he asked, goggle-eyed, and with a chunk of bread not yet brought the remaining few inches needed to reach his mouth: ‘Tell me, gentlemen! Where do thunder and lightning come from?’”

KHVOSTIKOV (with an air of importance): “Where does thunder come from! What a ridiculous question for you to ask! It comes from storm clouds.”

NIKITA: “And what about lightning?”

KHVOSTIKOV: “It likewise comes from storm clouds!”

NIKITA: “But how can that be? Both thunder and lightning, – they all come from storm clouds! It certainly would be better if only the one or the other of them were evil! Otherwise, we must fear them both! Something is not quite right here. What I’ve heard is that thunder comes from the prophet Elijah, whose horses, unlike mine, are quite daring, and whose covered wagon is in much better working order than mine is. And his wagon rides fast and wild across the sky, my dear fellow, as it taps for a while and thus amuses itself.”
KHVOSTIKOV: “Ha, ha, ha! Elijah, his horses, a covered wagon?”

NIKITA: “Well what of it? But wouldn’t that be better, I dare say? The thunder comes from a storm cloud, the lightning comes from a storm cloud! So where does the storm cloud itself come from?”

KHVOSTIKOV: “It goes without saying: it comes from the clouds.”

NIKITA: “But isn’t a cloud, after all, the same thing as a storm cloud?”

KHVOSTIKOV: “Not at all! A storm cloud is a very large cloud. But a cloud, itself, is a little storm cloud!”

“At this point, I burst out laughing loudly.”

KHVOSTIKOV: “Would you please be good enough to tell us what it is that you’re rejoicing at?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I’m surprised that Nikita doesn’t believe you and doesn’t understand the interpretations of such a highly educated physicist!”

KHVOSTIKOV (he drinks a shot of vodka): “I’m rejoicing at finding in you a listener who is slightly more quick-witted than Nikita!”

CHISTYAKOV: “You do me too great an honor, my lord! I’m not accustomed to learning at the feet of such wise teachers.”

KHVOSTIKOV: “It seems, then, that I, too, am not an illiterate person!”

CHISTYAKOV: “You have just now proven that by means of your interpretations of thunder, lightning, and storm clouds.”

KHVOSTIKOV: “I beseech you to interpret them better than I do!” (he drinks another shot of vodka).

CHISTYAKOV: “I’m not accustomed to interpreting in front of such interpreters as you.”

KHVOSTIKOV (turning his face towards Chistyakov): “What kinds of interpreters, for example, do you have in mind?”

CHISTYAKOV: “Luminaries of Wisdom!”

KHVOSTIKOV (giving Chistyakov a flick on the nose): “Oh, you poor thing! Ha, ha, ha!” (he turns his back on him).
“I became very angry. And, what’s more, I asked myself: what is such a stupid joke good for? Thus, without wasting any time, I gave him such a firm flick on the crown of his head that he banged his nose against the table at which he was sitting. I added: ‘Oh, Scorpio, you poor thing! Ha, ha, ha!’”

“He became fiercely savage, in the full meaning of that word. He leapt up to his feet and, making use of the innate advantage that someone who is standing has over someone who is sitting, he seized hold of my toupée with both hands and kept tugging at it, repeating over and over again: ‘Damned Capricorn! I’m going to break your horn off!’”

“I raised myself up slightly, grabbed him by both ears, and tugged at them so forcefully that blood appeared on both of them. After this, I abandoned his wounded body parts, considering them as not being capable of joining the battle, and I instead grabbed his hair braid with one hand, while with the other hand I squeezed him so tightly against my body that he let out a groan. But he, nonetheless, didn’t leave off working bravely on my toupée. Blood was falling in drops from his ears, whereas tears were falling in drops from my eyes!”

“Nikita tried as he might to get us to stop, appealing to our conscience by repeating over and over again: ‘Gentlemen, put a stop to this! What fervent dogs you are! Calm down! What good can come of this! What devils you are! Well, to be sure, this is bad! What utter devils! Are you listening to me? Well, may the wood-goblin himself take you, such swindlers that you are! What utter scallywags! Tufts of hair are flying off! Do you, Gavriilo Simonovich, wish to be just as bald as I am? And do you, Mister Khvostikov, wish to be just as dock-tailed as my piebald gelding is? To be sure, your tail, too, is hanging by a thread. Well, what good is it trying to explain oneself to freaks of nature such as these two? Let me go finish eating my cabbage soup and, for an aperitif, let me go finish drinking what remains in my precious flask of wine.’”

“At this point, I gathered up all of my strength in order that, as they say, I could finish off this great battle with one blow. I tore off a tuft of his hair, grabbed it with both of my hands, lifted it up into the air, shook it, and then I bent down, preparing to throw it on the ground. But since his hands had ossified upon my toupée, I started rolling down behind the tuft of hair, the small table started rolling down behind us, and Nikita’s cup of cabbage soup, his dear flask, and his other gear started rolling down behind that. At this point, Nikita raised a howl: ‘Come here, come here, help me for the love of Christ! Thieves, Robbers! Come here, come here! They’ll kill me! They’ll beat me to death! What ferocious wild beasts they are!’”

“In an instant, a great number of people came running up. Some of them were trying to pull us apart, some were laughing, some were just standing there quietly. Nikita, in the meantime, was gathering up the glass from his shattered flask in one hand and was stroking the back of his head with the other, as he kept repeating over and over again: ‘May you not see any peace and quiet for as long as you live! Look at what you’ve gone and done, you scoundrels!’”
“They pulled us apart. We stood there and began trying to justify ourselves. Some of the bystanders were trying to comb the hair out of my long-suffering toupée, while others were trying to comb out Khvostikov’s braid and to wash the blood from his ears. Khvostikov and I were both sitting on the bench, looking ferociously at one another with sidelong glances. Suddenly, as luck would have it, tender Licorisa, who had been awakened by all of the noise and shouting, and who had heard about the fight, and considered it to be a continuation of our earlier conversation with Khvostikov, tearful Licorisa came out and, covering her eyes with an apron, stood at some distance away from us. Catching sight of her before the others did, for she was standing closest to me, I said to her: ‘What are you doing here, Licorisa! Go back to the peasant hut!’”

“My rival turned around quickly, saw her, jumped up from the bench, and, raising his arms into the air, he rushed over to her, adding: ‘I shall show you, you debauched woman!’”

“Hardly had he drawn level with me, when I likewise jumped up from the bench, and I struck him so felicitously in the back that he flew headlong across the threshold and landed face downwards in the mud by the side of the drinking pool. I ran up to him and, pressing down on his back with my knee, I said to him: ‘Lie down here, your evil frog, damned little Scorpion!’”

“When I arrived at the courtyard, I found that tearful Licorisa was still there. I took her by the hand and, leading her into the peasant hut, I said to her: ‘Take comfort in the fact that we shall be dining alone this evening. Your brother doesn’t deserve not only to eat, but even to look upon God’s world! He’s beneath all that. Do you love me?’”

“She fastened her gaze upon me, a gaze in which something strange was being expressed: some kind of timidity and bewilderment. ‘You need to be asking me about this?’ she said. ‘Are you really beginning to fall out of love with me already?’”

“‘So we shall leave your stupid brother behind here,’ I interrupted her, ‘and we shall set off alone for Warsaw. You and I shall be inseparable and, for that reason, our hearts shall be inseparable. Is it really possible that you shall enjoy this? You, who constitutes the one and only delight in my life (Licorisa fell into my warm embrace), the one and only blessing in my life, the one that I have been so energetically and so vainly searching for? Is it really possible that during the continuation of our trip to Warsaw you shall enjoy witnessing perhaps five or more scenes of this kind? Up until today, your brother had been calm and quiet, but judge for yourself: if he flew into a rage merely because he suspected you of being in love with me, what would happen now that our mutual and reciprocal love for one another has become obvious to him? Make up your mind and decide, Licorisa!’”

“‘I swore an oath to love you, and I’m prepared to follow you wherever your hand shall lead me!’”
“I summoned the master of the house and Nikita. We came out under the awning, we took out all of Khvostikov’s belongings, which the master of the house had been holding as collateral, we harnessed the horses, and we took our seats in the wagon, mine being side by side, hand in hand, with Licorisa. And thus we left the village, where Khvostikov, as I had found out from a worker even before we left, reposed for a long time in a deep sleep, defeated more by vodka than by our bloody battle.”

“Who could depict the delights of love, by means of which Licorisa and I were animated! We rode in the wagon for the remainder of the day and, stopping for the night in a settlement, we sank into a sweet and deep sleep. I had no sooner opened my eyes than the sun’s rays began to scorch my face. I was luxuriating in pleasant drowsiness, daydreaming about my present and future happiness. Suddenly Nikita’s hoarse voice rang out as he broke out in song!”

Chapter 67: A Foreign Prince from Overseas

“‘How is it, Nikita,’ I asked our driver, ‘that you’re not ashamed that all you ever do is disturb people, not allowing them, with that howling of yours, to get any sleep! Which songs are you singing now?’”

“‘I beg you not to be angry with me, my benefactor,’ he replied. ‘I thought that your sweetheart wasn’t sleeping either, and that the two of you, in your leisure time, had begun to engage in an impious activity that’s repulsive to God!’”

“Which activity is that, for example?’ I asked him.”

“‘Discourse!’ he replied.

“‘And why would discourse be considered an impious activity that is repulsive to God?’ I asked him.”

“‘It’s the most unsuitable and worthless of activities! Do you, in truth, really think, Gavrilo Simonovich, that I’m completely illiterate? You go read all ten of the commandments; nowhere is it said there: ‘don’t discuss stealing!’ ‘don’t discuss murdering a person!’ It simply stands there, all by itself: ‘don’t steal,’ ‘don’t commit murder.’ It’s true, as it seems to my foolish mind, that it wouldn’t have been such a bad thing yesterday evening for you to have done a little more reflection, precisely in this way: ‘I’m very young, the girl is likewise very young, and she is also good-looking. The devil is very strong, and he tempts monks, so why wouldn’t he attempt to tempt me as well!’”

“‘You, Nikita, don’t show your erudition in a very opportune way. Please stop!’”

“‘All right,’ he replied, chasing flies off from his bald spot. ‘I only wanted to add that yesterday, toward evening time, I didn’t notice that you were chasing after anything to discuss, and today it’s already too late for you to try to do that!’”
“I was in agreement with the wise Nikita’s opinion, and so we all continued on our trip quietly and calmly. The days passed peacefully and merrily. Our life, speaking in poetic terms, flowed like a clear stream that was rushing along the silvery sand between flowery banks.”

“After traveling about fifty versts and passing through Kiev, subsequently entering into the very core of Poland, Licorisa asked me again whether we could rest for a little while in the first village that we come to. Never before in her life had she travelled any farther than to Sparrow Hills, to Mary’s Grove, and to other scenic locales in the environs of Moscow. I yielded readily to her request, and although Nikita rather strikingly calculated the financial losses that he would be suffering from the unnecessary down time caused by a stop, as soon as I assured him that I would be paying for the feeding of his passengers, and of his horses, out of my own pocket, and, moreover, that I would be giving him two tall glasses of wine every day gratis, he smiled and gave his complete consent to a stop. Toward noontime, we drove into a fairly nice village, which was distinguished from the other villages surrounding it by having two chapels that contained icons that had appeared miraculously. Outside the village, at a considerable distance away, stood a low-lying house that was enclosed within a tall fence. I rented the best of the upstairs rooms in that house, which were small, but very light and airy, at the best of the traveler’s inns, and I lodged in it with my lovely girl friend. We made ourselves comfortable, planning to settle down there until such time as we would grow bored with these quarters. Our days would be devoted to taking some strolls, reading some books, and having some conversations, and the nights would be devoted to peace and quiet, and to rest. ‘There’s no place that we need to hurry off to,’ I said to Licorisa. ‘It’s never too late to search for good fortune and happiness, just as it’s never too late to become enlightened!’”

“On the following day of our stay there, we saw at dinner time that all of the inhabitants of this village were doing a lot of running around. We soon learned that the reason for this was the burial ceremony to be held in honor of Pan Zlatnitsky, a wealthy Little Russian landowner. I wouldn’t have paid any special attention to this event, if one of the noblemen who was accompanying the casket as a poll bearer hadn’t suddenly come to an abrupt halt on account of something that occurred in the house where I was staying. For this nobleman didn’t have time to follow the deceased all the way to Kiev itself. We conversed during our communal meal, and the nobleman said to me: ‘My lord! I can see that you’re an enlightened man, and that’s the reason why I have the honor of asking whether you would like to hear a short story that I have written about the deceased. In our part of the country, there are so few people who are worthy of listening to anything sensible, that each and every one of us considers it a stroke of good fortune to meet an educated person.’”

“Licorisa and I gladly accepted the obliging nobleman’s kind offer. He took out of his pocket a scroll of paper that had some handwriting on it, he cleared his throat, and then he began to read aloud the following:”
“Every sensible person who sees someone who is susceptible to some vice is bound to feel sorry that he suffers this misfortune. Only a prideful man, it seems, doesn’t deserve this pity, for his folly is completely voluntary. Pride can be divided into two different kinds: arrogance and haughtiness. We can call ‘arrogant’ the person who, having distinguished himself by his capabilities and having acquired some measure of fame within his circle of acquaintances, boasts openly of his achievements and his fame, and tries to obscure the merits and achievements of others, while we can call ‘haughty’ the person who, never having done anything good or kind during his entire life, struts around in front of others, boasting either of the extent of his prosperity or the gentility of his genealogy.”

“Not long before our time, there lived in Ukraine a certain Pan Zlatnitsky, a wealthy landowner. His family derived directly from the line of Little Russian military commanders known as hetmans, and he considered the most recent of them to be among his close relatives. He was already an old man, but he didn’t have any rank, for, despite all of the exhortations of his relatives and his friends, there was no way that he wanted to enter into government service. ‘To what end should I serve,’ he would say, ‘when there’s no hope of my finishing a period of service at the Cossack Hetmanate?’ Every day he would consign to oblivion Bogdan Khmelnitsky, the first Little Russian hetman to subordinate himself to the Russian scepter.”

“He would spend the greater part of each day in a special room that was adorned with images of the ancient hetmans and their wives. He would sit down at a table in the middle of the room and look at these portraits, then he would peruse a pile of old official documents and amuse himself with this occupation until such time as he felt an appetite to eat something. Then, coming out of the room (and breathing heavily), he would say: ‘Oh, how happy I am that, up until now, I haven’t offended the memory of my highly imperious ancestors by commingling with mean and base people who are seeking ranks in the civil service! What good are ranks to me, when, by my lineage alone, I’m more noble than any nobleman?’ Civil servants, if one of them needed to give Pan Zlatnitsky something, or to receive something from him, had to beware, most of all, of approaching him too closely, for he was afraid that their breathing might get mixed in with his own. ‘This is the same way,’ he used to say over and over again, ‘that both Turkish sultans and Little Russian hetmans have always acted!’ Out of the entire neighborhood, it was only Pan Prilutsky alone, whom, although with extreme difficulty, Pan Zlatnitsky deemed worthy of being received in his Chamber of State. That’s what he called the room with portraits of hetmans hanging on the walls. No one, not even the servants, dared, however, to take a peek inside that room. Pan Zlatnitsky’s only daughter, Evdokia, – who was as meek, pleasant, and courteous, as her father was wild and crazy, – was hired to remove the spider webs and to sweep the dust from these portraits.”

“But Pan Prilutsky, for his part, was no less strange. Although he didn’t glory in the antiquity of his genealogy, for that genealogy wasn’t so very ancient, but, on
the other hand, he didn’t find anyone who could compare with him when it came
to his accomplishments as a civil servant. He despised Pan Zlatnitsky with all of
his heart and soul, but he did, nonetheless, visit him from time to time. Whenever
he spoke about him, he didn’t miss a single opportunity to make fun of his
haughtiness, which was straight out crazy. And since he himself was a truly
deserving person who held the rank of major, everyone would have found him to
be not merely reasonable and tolerable, but also even kind and amiable, if only he
would have reminded people a little more rarely about his merits and
achievements than he did. He had a son named Aleksei, who had served in the
army with distinction, and who was, everyone who met him would assure you,
just as pleasant a person in his entire being, – heart, mind, and body – as his father
was, by contrast, the complete opposite.”

“One day, while Pan Zlatnitsky was preparing for dinner, and reducing the
number of old parchments that were piled up high in his Chamber of State, he
heard, just outside its doors, a terrible noise and cry, and, shortly thereafter, the
door quickly opened, and Pan Prilutsky burst into the room, gasping for breath.”

PAN PRILUTSKY: “Hello, venerable neighbor! Was it a long time ago that
such a grandeeship was established in your house, whereby even an old and
deserving major isn’t allowed to enter unannounced when he comes by to see
you? Your ne’er-do-well servants very nearly took it into their heads to stop me!
Allow me to sit down!” (He sits down.)

PAN ZLATNITSKY (recovering from his utter astonishment): “Is it in a dream
that I’m watching this terrible new procedure play itself out? What’s going on
here? You enter unannounced when you come by to see me? In the presence of
my distinguished ancestors? Pan Prilutsky! Help lead me out of a terrible
quandary: have I lost my mind, or have you lost yours?”

PAN PRILUTSKY: “Let me think about that one for a moment, and let me
examine you! So, I swear on my honor that you’re half-mad! What ‘presence of
your ancestors’ are you talking about? I don’t see anything except the mugs of
several male and female people wearing strange attire! I don’t give a damn about
them! Spit on them, old chap! And don’t play the fool! Sit down here beside me,
and I shall tell you a story that shall please you! After all, I didn’t come here to
anger you. I know how to distinguish a foe from a friend. When, as would often
happen, right before a battle . . .”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “If you wish for me to speak with you, then let’s leave this
sacred chamber. The shadows of my ancestors won’t forgive me for the dishonor
that I’m inflicting upon their memory by speaking with a man such as yourself.”

PAN PRILUTSKY: “Was I listening to you attentively enough? With what kind
of man? In the presence of these portraits, which have been sullied by the village
house-painter, this distinguished major, who wasn’t afraid to stand in front of an enemy formation, doesn’t dare to speak?”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “What importance can our ranks have in comparison with the dignity of one’s genealogy? I’m entitled to a hetmanate! Oh, Hetman Khmelnitsky!”

PAN PRILUTSKY: “The right to a hetmanate? You old windbag! Who’s been preventing you from enjoying one? Who is it that admitted that this high honor had been passed over to other homes? When you turned eighteen, you should have appeared on the field of battle, girded with the sword of your ancestors. You shouldn’t have been troubling yourself about your genealogy and your repose. You should have been sacrificing both the one and the other for the good of the fatherland. And then a grateful monarch, seeing your merits and achievements, would, no doubt, have singled you out principally, before all of the others, even if their achievements were equal to yours, but their genealogy was lower. But where were you instead? No farther away than a perimeter of ten verst around your home village! To what end? To try to catch wolves and foxes! What did you do? You ate, you drank, you slept, and you did other banal things of that sort. And yet you still regret the fact that the hetmanate has lost its scepter? If you had served in the field in the hetman’s armed forces for forty years, as I did, then you would probably have become a major, as I did, but perhaps . . .”

“Not waiting for the conclusion of this philosophical speech about being a major that was sure to follow, Pan Zlatnitsky covered his ears with his hands and uttered, in a voice choking with anger, ‘Me? Become a major? Oh, great ancestors of mine!’ And he quickly ran out of the Chamber of State.”

“At first, Pan Prilutsky was about to become thoughtful and admit to himself that he had perhaps acted in too military and martial a manner. Every outsider, if he were to condemn Pan Zlatnitsky, wouldn’t necessarily praise Pan Prilutsky. But the latter, who knew the reason why he had paid Pan Zlatnitsky this visit in the first case, – a reason that shall soon be revealed to you, – was somewhat to be excused.”

“Sitting in his armchair opposite the portraits, Pan Prilutsky was speaking to himself: ‘I served in the army for forty years, I deserved the rank of major as a result of my military service, and now, in my old age, I must bear shame, – and from whom? From a grandson of the hetman who lacks any rank at all! I myself am a natural-born nobleman, a major!’”

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50 Bohdan Khmelnitsky (1595-1657) was a Ukrainian military commander and Hetman of the Zaporozhian Host, which was at that time under the suzerainty of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He’s famous for leading an uprising against the Commonwealth and its magnates in 1648-1654 that resulted in the creation of an independent Ukrainian Cossack state.
“Hardly had he finished these mutterings of his, when a servant appeared and said to him: ‘The master of the house has ordered me to announce to you that you are to leave him in peace immediately: otherwise . . .’”

“‘Otherwise what?’ the major roared, raising his cane, ‘otherwise, I shall break some of your bones, the next time you so far as utter even just one word! Go tell your master, – a hetman’s grandson and an important person, even though he’s without any rank, – that I’m expecting a deputation from him that’s a little better than the one provided by envoys such as yourself and all of those who are like you!’ The servant rushed out of there headlong, glad that he would soon be done with his ambassadorial mission. Kind and friendly Evdokia, following close behind the servant, entered the room and, while shuddering all over, announced, in the name of her father, the very same thing that the first envoy had just announced. The old man looked at her long and hard, then he said, in the friendliest of voices: ‘It’s a shame, beautiful, kind maiden, that I’m not able to fulfill your request! I drove here from five versts away, and I did that strictly for your sake. I must, without fail, conclude my conversation with your father. And that’s when we shall suddenly see whether I shall start visiting your home even more frequently than before, or else I shall not be visiting it at all any longer! Make sure to tell your father about this conversation that you and I are now having!’”

“Evdokia, who was not without her own secret presentiments, quickly withdrew, and then returned shortly thereafter, announcing to the major that her father had forgotten all of their tiffs and disagreements, and that he was prepared to spend even an entire day with him, only not in the Chamber of State.”

“The major, marveling inwardly at this madness, readily agreed, and, taking Evdokia by the arm, he left the room. The two men soon reconciled, and all three of them, – Pan Zlatnitsky, Pan Prilutsky, and Evdokia, – finished their dinner together. And when the servants had all withdrawn, Pan Prilutsky, holding back Evdokia, who likewise was intending to withdraw, said to her father: ‘Venerable neighbor! You must agree that the recollection of the achievements of our ancestors in the past is only good when we respond to them in kind. My great-grandfather, during the time of the Battle of Poltava, was only a cornet, but he knew how to distinguish himself, and our great monarch rewarded him with an estate. My grandfather died as a lieutenant, my father died as a captain, and I’m now living at the rank of major. Isn’t this splendid? Won’t it be better, when my son shall no longer be a colonel and shall have provided the means for his own son to become a general, on the basis of him having been the son of a hetman, than for him to die in complete obscurity? I can see that you wish to reply to me by means of a question! Hold on! When the war ended, my son, Aleksei, returned home as a captain! How is that right?’”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “There’s a lot of honor in that rank! It goes without saying that the people with his genealogy must be very pleased!”
PAN PRILUTSKY: “Oh, oh! So once again you’re going to brag about your genealogy? Well, stop for a moment! I’m going to speak to you plainly and directly, the way a major speaks, that is: without beating around the bush! This captain, my son, happened to see your daughter in church; she caught his fancy, and he, apparently, caught hers. A comely maiden can’t find a brave fellow to be offensive. In a word, I’ve come here to try to arrange a match for my son with your daughter! Now give me an answer!”

“Oh, just and fair God, and the saints in heaven who please Him!” exclaimed Pan Zlatnitsky, who had turned pale and started trembling. ‘What has my fatherland come to, when even such impertinence as this should go unpunished! If, a hundred and fifty years ago, a similar marriage proposal had been made by a similar man to one of my ancestors, it would, without fail, have been rewarded with an abusive and defamatory death. But nowadays, – oh, heavens above! It goes unpunished! Oh, Khmelnitsky! My daughter is no more than twenty years of age, and by her genealogy, – who, besides a German prince, would have the temerity to offer himself to her as a bridegroom, and even that wouldn’t be without its dangers! Even Polish princes wouldn’t do such a thing, knowing who I am, and who she is! I have reached the end of my days, – I must pass away!”

“In that case, die all the more quickly, you old madman,” Pan Prilutsky exclaimed, jumping up from his seat. ‘At the very least, you shall be delivering your daughter, and all of your neighbors, from one of the world’s supreme madmen! It was stupid of me to decide, on my son’s behalf, to visit such a wild madcap as you, the only one of its kind in the entire neighborhood! Only I feel badly for his poor daughter! He shall force her to marry someone else!”

“Servants! Come here quick!” exclaimed Pan Zlatnitsky angrily. But Pan Prilutsky, pulling his sabre out of its sheath, replied: ‘Whoever dares to come nearer to this old, distinguished major shall probably not return with his ears and nose intact!” He departed without any hindrance, for the servants had long known that he liked to keep his word as a major. He sat down in his droshky and drove off, cursing the haughtiness of those people who pride themselves on their genealogy. Pan Zlatnitsky, from anger that wasn’t satisfied by vengeance, fell to the floor unconscious. Evdokia, meanwhile, was shedding bitter tears. After this incident, no one in the household dared to utter Pan Prilutsky’s name to themselves. Evdokia was forbidden not only to go to church, but also to leave their household’s garden. What was her poor heart to do?”

“In the meantime, Pan Prilutsky, upon his arrival home, told his son Aleksei about the success of his matchmaking mission. He consigned to perdition all of those people, without exception, who glory so madly in the achievements of their ancestors. He concluded his speech with a pledge never again to set foot in the house of a descendant of a hetman.”
“It’s very easy for you, father, to fulfill your promise, but what about me? My heart, with all of its feelings, is stuck upon sweet Evdokia. I knew her when I was still nothing, but now, when I have returned to your house, full of hope, I have to be deprived of all of this! This is unspeakably painful!”

THE FATHER: “A waste of time is what this is, brother! In my youth, I was in love with at least a dozen different girls. I courted them, but with none of them did a wedding take place. I married your mother without feeling for her absolutely anything that could be called sexual passion. Little by little, however, I came to love her, and I continued to love her constantly to the very grave. I was always happy with her, whereas only very rarely did any of the former beauties that I knew not make their husbands extremely unhappy. Wait a minute, brother! I have my eyes on an exceedingly dear bride for you, and you shall surely be very pleased with her, namely, – Khavronia.”

THE SON: “Oh, father! Why, she’s a one-eyed witch!”

THE FATHER: “All the less shall she be likely to be peering at comely male guests, even if she were to do so with only one eye. But she would instead be looking more at her husband!”

THE SON: “Her face is pock-marked, like a cucumber!”

THE FATHER: “She’ll be looking at herself in the mirror less often!”

THE SON: “She’s lame and pigeon-toed!”

THE FATHER: “She’ll be leaping into the air less often!”

THE SON: “She has the figure and the gait of a bear!”

THE FATHER: “She’ll not be running after other men!”

THE SON: “For all that, she is, it appears, ill-tempered as well!”

THE FATHER: “Now this is where you have really sinned against her, for slander is a great sin. I’m currently living out my sixth decade, and I haven’t seen six beautiful women who were also kind and good. On the contrary, women who aren’t all that comely try, if they’re one-eyed, to keep their soulful eyes intact; if they have a pock-marked face, they try to have their heart be clean and plain; if they’re lame and pigeon-toed, they try not to let their innocence grow weak and unsteady, limping around and wobbling from side to side. Take female beauties, – all that they’re occupied with and all that they pursue is vanity: they’re always bustling and fussing. They see clearly that entire dozens of nimble toadies chase after them. If one of these toadies were to lag behind, then all of the rest of his
rivals would stop as well, and, consequently, all that remains is for the female beauty to choose the toady that she prefers."

**THE SON**: “I believe that you’re right, in general, but you would probably not say the same thing about the kind and beautiful Evdokia, would you now?”

**THE FATHER**: “Of course, I wouldn’t! But what’s to be done, when she is, unfortunately, the hetman’s great granddaughter!”

**THE SON**: “Isn’t it possible for us to make use of some deception here?”

**THE FATHER**: “Even soldiers are beaten for engaging in deceptions. What must they do with a military officer who’s a deceiver? At the very least, they must hang him! Thus, with God’s help, let’s begin to think about the venerable Khavronia!”

“With these words, the father left his son in extreme bewilderment. He gave some thought to the question, he made some conjectures, and, finally, he apparently reached a decision. He exclaimed: ‘That’s it, that’s certainly it!’ The old man began to visit Khavronia’s father more frequently, giving him indirect hints about the reason for these visits. From time to time, Pan Prilutsky was received there more affectionately and more amicably than at other times. And the prospective bride was impatiently awaiting the day when she would get to see her bridegroom, who was undoubtedly an absolutely fine fellow. In Pan Prilutsky’s house, there wasn’t a single word spoken that mentioned Evdokia.”

“But soon the entire neighborhood was astounded by a bit of news, one that was unprecedented in these parts, from which everyone very nearly went crazy. A reliable rumor had spread that some sovereign prince from overseas, named Nord-Vest-Ziud-Ost [North-West-South-East], had arrived in Ukraine and had landed in a small village not far away that belonged to Pan Prilutsky.”

“The Pan went crazy, as did others, and he smiled pleasantly, saying: ‘Evidently, the descendants of hetmans, – descendants who lack any ranks, – have fallen so out of fashion nowadays that His Highness, a sovereign prince from overseas, would prefer my small village over Pan Zlatnitsky’s large and wealthy village. Evidently, he knows how to give priority to personal achievements, and not to hereditary ones! I must thank His Highness for granting me such a huge favor!’”

“He had already ordered that his war horse be saddled, that his full-dress uniform, the one with new galloons, be cleaned, and that his Damascene sabre and various medicaments be readied, so that he could appear before the eyes of the prince in an appropriate manner, when he suddenly froze on the spot: he received word that this sovereign prince from overseas, named Nord-Vest-Ziud-Ost, had come to Ukraine with the express intention of courting Pan Zlatnitsky’s daughter, Evdokia, and seeking her hand in marriage. Who could describe his
astonishment? He looked upon the impending events with a fixed stare. Finally, with arms crossed, he uttered dejectedly: ‘Evidently, there are other madmen in this world besides Pan Zlatnitsky! Is this really possible? No! Not only shall I not favor this prince with a visit, but I shall also write immediately to the village elder, informing him that he is not to serve a single chicken, either to the prince himself or to any member of his suite, before he has paid in advance four times the actual price for one of them!’ Having said this, he spit on the ground angrily and then set off for his room.”

“Now I must provide, in turn, an account of Pan Zlatnitsky’s surprise, joy, and delight, when this piece of news reached his ears. He was walking about in his Chamber of State, taking long strides and glancing merrily at the depictions of his ancestors hanging on the walls, when he said: ‘Finally, there’s going to be a holiday celebration on our street! Oh, how I did a good thing when I rejected the stupid little major’s proposition! How much better it is to have, as your son-in-law, a prince, whose name is so odd and abstruse that there’s no way to articulate it all at once. But what need is there for me to learn how to do that? As long as my daughter knows how to do it, there’s no longer any need for me to do anything more than just say that my son-in-law is, simply, – a foreign prince from overseas!’”

“While this reasoning was taking place, the entire household was in a state of alarm upon hearing the clatter of horse hooves, as well as the sound of trumpets and kettle drums, and upon seeing a rather large number of military troops arriving at a gallop. At first, the members of the household considered these men to be robbers, but they soon realized, to everyone’s delight, that a special envoy of the prince had arrived and that he was requesting of this descendant of the highly esteemed hetmans a gracious audience. By order of the latter, the prince’s envoy was led by the hand to the reception room, and within a few minutes Pan Zlatnitsky emerged from his Chamber of State.”

“At this point, the envoy, bowing more deeply than just to the waist, said to him: ‘Majestic descendant of the hetmans! My sovereign prince, Nord-Vest-Ziud-Ost, wishes you and your daughter peace and good health! I, – his high counselor, – have been instructed to inform you, in brief, the reason for his arrival here! Having heard a lot about the merits and virtues of your dearest, most precious daughter, he asks your permission to marry her, something that his own sovereign father has already granted him. But since a war is currently being waged against some neighboring inhabitants, his brave son’s presence is imperative, for he’s in command of the cavalry and the navy. And that’s the reason why, provided that you, a highly venerable descendant of the hetmans, would be so kind as to give your consent to this marriage, this matter must be brought to a close as soon as possible, so that his father shall not grow to miss him as a result of his being away for such a long period of time.’”
PAN ZLATNITSKY: “I thank Prince Nord-Mord-Bes-Pes [North-Snout-Demon-Cur] for the honor that he’s kind enough to bestow upon me.”

THE ENVOY: “Nord-Vest-Ziud-Ost! You shall notice, from the name that he bears, how many ancient kings were his ancestors. Don’t take this amiss, but he’s a little bit capricious about this fact. The daughters of so many kings have been offered to him to take as his bride. But after considering their genealogy, he found that their royal houses were much younger than his own.”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “Knowing where Prince Nord comes from and gaining other information about him, perhaps I shall find that my genealogy is older than that of many kings? After all, his kingdom is overseas, isn’t it?”

THE ENVOY: “His kingdom, it’s true, does lie beyond the sea. But he has a vast navy, in which people who are traveling about, such as soldiers as well as merchant marines, are able to do some reconnoitering and to report it to the sovereign!”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “Didn’t you say that they’re waging a war against some neighboring inhabitants?”

THE ENVOY: “Yes, a very bloody war, and nearly every day some new skirmish takes place!”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “Who are these people that are your neighbors?”

THE ENVOY: “Very worthless people! Some of them are fierce, others are sly and cunning, while still others are cowards who run away from us just as soon as we appear.”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “All of this is very fine and good, and so I give my complete consent to the marriage. You may announce this to your prince, His Serene Highness. When shall I get to see him?”

THE ENVOY: “There’s no way that can be done before he returns from the church after the wedding. Have you, – a renowned descendant of hetmans, – really forgotten that crowned heads of state throughout all of Europe get married, for the most part, through their envoys?”

PAN ZLATNITSKY: “That’s true! I seem to have heard something of the sort!”

THE ENVOY: “My prince’s father had so wanted to send me to stand in for his son at the wedding ceremony, but there was no way that he could be persuaded to do that. And he had wanted to have the pleasure, and the honor, of seeing you in person, but he shall have to wait until such time as he’s able to do that honorably.”
Therefore, he earnestly recommends that you, for your part, don’t tarry, since he has given you his noble word.”

**PAN ZLATNITSKY:** “The wedding is in three days!”

“The envoy withdrew, observing the same formalities that he had displayed earlier, whereas Pan Zlatnitsky, drunk with the rapture of vainglorious joy, summoned his daughter, embraced her, and then said to her: ‘Thank God, – and thank me, – that you shall soon become a princess!’ Evdokia gave him a satisfied look, one that her father reckoned was a sign of the excessive submissiveness that she usually displayed whenever she obeyed his will. The other members of their household, especially the mommies and nannies, couldn’t cease to be surprised that she was going to get married so willingly to a Moslem infidel from overseas, for she had loved Aleksei ever since they were young children, something that was far better known to the two of them than to anyone else.”

“Magnificent preparations for the wedding had begun. Pan Zlatnitsky spared no expense. On the eve of the wedding, he sent out special messengers to all of the members of the local nobility, inviting them to attend the wedding banquet. And so as to taunt Pan Prilutsky even further, he invited him as well. At first, Pan Prilutsky was dead set against attending, but his son Aleksei’s arguments finally persuaded him to go. He said: ‘If you don’t attend, then no one shall think that you refused his invitation, and everyone shall think that you weren’t invited! And, moreover, we shall get to see this foreign prince from overseas. This is, after all, a marvel!’ The old man gave him his word that he would attend.”

“Scarcely had the wedding day arrived, when Pan Zlatnitsky’s home and courtyards were filled to overflowing with male guests, female guests, their offspring, and members of the household. The bride, dressed up as magnificently as possible, accepted congratulations as a soon-to-be princess. Soon they saw the prince’s envoy, accompanied by an extensive retinue. When the bride had taken her seat in the carriage to be driven to the church, many curious onlookers wished to accompany her there. The envoy firmly opposed that idea, however, declaring that anticipatory curiosity would be extremely harmful and would provoke the prince’s ire. Moreover, he himself, – as a close advisor to the prince and his envoy, – had enough laws to abide by in maintaining the prince’s honor. Pan Zlatnitsky, smiling at the envoy’s words, said: ‘The customs of every land, – their mores and manners, – must be respected, especially when one is dealing with crowned personages!’ He signaled to the driver, and the carriage containing the bride set off. The envoy, with his detachment of soldiers, surrounded the carriage, and they galloped away. The wedding guests, meanwhile, returned to their rooms, each of them amusing themselves as they pleased.”

“The church was located at the other end of the village, about a *verst* away from the manor house. And that’s the reason why people didn’t have to wait long for the return of the newlyweds. They made their appearance, and Pan Zlatnitsky
ordered the house serfs to fire their rifles into the air in their honor. This multi-gun salute was answered in kind from the direction of the prince’s retinue. When everyone had entered the banquet hall, the master of the house seated his guests in two long rows, one on each side, while he stood at the doors to his Chamber of State, so that he would have the pleasure of personally leading the prince into it and then introducing him to his ancestors.”

“It was only natural that the glances from people, both big and small, were turned swiftly at Their Highnesses, but the discomfiture that many people felt was indescribable. Uniformly, Pan Zlatnitsky, upon extending his arms to embrace his son-in-law, stepped back with noticeable horror, and, wiping the sweat from his face with one hand and clearing his half-closed eyes with the other, he said with a sigh: ‘An evil spirit, of course, is amusing himself at my expense, for I’ve gone crazy and am beside myself! But he shall not get away with this! And I shall not permit the devil to make fun of a descendant of Little Russian hetmans! Right now, a hundred masses are being ordered to banish the evil spirit! Or, perhaps, it’s from an excess of feelings of joy that I’ve gone crazy, and I’m beside myself, without any help on the part of a devil, and perhaps I’m imagining something that is entirely different.’”

“At this point, he turned to his son-in-law and asked: ‘Tell me: is your father a noble landowner from overseas?’”

**THE SON-IN-LAW:** “Although he’s not a landowner, he is, however, a proprietor, who’s venerated in his parts of the world!”

**PAN ZLATNITSKY:** “Do you have a sea in your possession?”

**THE SON-IN-LAW:** “We do have a small one, that’s true! It would be more appropriate to call it a lake!”

**PAN ZLATNITSKY:** “Military and merchant ships do travel upon it, however, don’t they?”

**THE SON-IN-LAW:** “Yes, they do, that’s true, – although they’re not really ships, but pretty much vessels!”

**PAN ZLATNITSKY:** “And do you have a strong Guards cohort?”

**THE SON-IN-LAW:** “Not a very strong one, it’s true, but seldom does an enemy of ours leave feeling safe and sound!”

**PAN ZLATNITSKY:** “I’ve heard your envoy say that your enemies are fierce, sly, and cunning, and, in some measure, cowardly?”
THE SON-IN-LAW: “That’s absolutely true! In our parts, enemies that are fiercer than wolves, slyer and more cunning than foxes, and more cowardly than a hare are nowhere to be found.”

PAN ZLATNITSKY (with hidden ferocity): “I see! Your navy doesn’t happen to be of the same poor quality now, does it?”

THE SON-IN-LAW: “It consists of half a dozen well-equipped boats, on which, when we’re traveling upon our small sea, we capture pike, perch, and carp, and sometimes even lordly sheatfish are taken prisoner.”

PAN ZLATNITSKY (choking with anger): “And so, the foreign prince from overseas, Nord-Bes . . .”

THE SON-IN-LAW: “At the altar today, during the wedding ceremony, I changed my name, and so your son-in-law is now your highly devoted servant and the son of your former friend, Pan Prilutsky!”

“No!’ Pan Zlatnitsky began to thunder. ‘It’s not the devil that’s guilty of deception, and the one who is guilty ought to be punished!’” With these words, he rushed over to his armory, and the wedding guests, who didn’t know whether they should be laughing or fleeing, quickly decided to do the former. That’s the reason why, when they knocked at the doors of Pan Zlatnitsky’s armory, they found that the doors were locked. They decided that, with their combined forces, they wouldn’t allow the enemy, for the time being, to make his sortie. At that point, Pan Prilutsky hurriedly approached the newlyweds and grasped them by their arms, leading them away and tossing them, so to speak, into the carriage, then ordering them to gallop off headlong to their home village. He himself, meanwhile, leapt onto his horse and, together with the foreign prince’s high counselor and his retinue, he set off after the newlyweds. When they had left the village behind them, and it had passed out of view, they started to proceed more slowly and more quietly. And Pan Prilutsky said to the prince’s high counselor: ‘Tell me, for the love of God, what does all of this mean? Although I’m an elderly, distinguished major, and although I’ve been God knows where and have seen a lot of the devil knows what, I can’t, however, explain this present comedy.’”

“I shall explain it to you,’ said the prince’s high counselor. ‘Please be so kind as to listen to me. You know that the regiment, in which your son is serving, is located no farther than ten versts from here. I’m likewise serving in that regiment, and I’m the same rank as your son. We’re good friends and comrades in arms. And you know that when romantic escapades occur, military people come to each other’s aid much more readily than civilians do. Your son revealed to me his longtime love for Evdokia, and, along with that, his failure in match making, which happened because of her father’s foolish prejudice. Right away, a plan was drawn up. Aleksei was to be called a foreign prince from overseas, I was to be
called an envoy, and our retinue was to be composed partly of a company of my Cossacks, partly of some house serfs. That’s why we chose your remote estate to serve as our capital. You yourself are witness to the fact that our enterprise has been crowned with success! I hope that we shall be able to drink a toast to these ambassadorial transactions when we celebrate the wedding of my good friend, and, what’s more, I hope that the contributions that were made by the Cossacks shall not be forgotten.”

“In the course of this narrative account given by the prince’s high counselor, the bridal carriage, which was carrying the newlyweds, and the bodyguards, who were riding in the accompanying retinue and who were assigned to protect them, had reached Pan Prilutsky’s estate and were entering the courtyard. The heroic knights dismounted from their steeds, and mister envoy, who was assisting the happy young couple in disembarking from the carriage, said to Evdokia: ‘I’m certain, madam, that you’re not regretting the loss of your most radiant title: Your Highness!’

“When everyone had gathered together in the banquet rooms, Pan Prilutsky, after embracing his daughter-in-law with the tenderness of a father, then turned to his son and said: ‘Mister captain! You’re a complete rake and scapegrace who has disgraced your father, an elderly, distinguished major. Is this the way that you thought he would want to celebrate the wedding of his one and only son, a captain? Living here is not the same as living in Moscow or Petersburg, where people not infrequently get married and then suddenly die, and no one thinks anything about it. People here like order and orderliness in all things! But tell me now: what am I to do? How am I to receive my dear and kind daughter-in-law? Who shall be escorting her to the marital bed for the bedding ceremony? Who shall be lifting her up out of the bed the following morning? Besides the chambermaids, there’s no one else here at home! Do you really wish to make the sign of the cross over them, and rechristen them as ladies-in-waiting: as Statsdames and Fräuleins? Well, go ahead and tell me. And I’m not making up any of this. It’s shameful, and nothing less than that!’”

“‘Father!’ said the son, ‘we can easily assuage this grief of yours, and we can do that promptly. Let my dear, kind wife go to the bedroom of my deceased mother for the bedding ceremony. And who shall escort her there and who shall lift her out of the marital bed the following morning? – that’s for me to worry about. My cavalry detachment shall be departing soon for the field on a deployment, where we shall come across quite a few cowardly enemy combatants, whom we shall take prisoner. Our infantry troops shall be positioned in a nearby forest, where there are hazel grouse and black grouse, bustards and snipes, and all sorts of aerial inhabitants. Our navy shall be taking to sea, and, most likely, shall not return without bringing back some considerable catches of fish. My friend, the envoy, shall be departing with his cohort of Guards for the thoroughfare, going to the home of my father-in-law. And, like it or not, he shall be in command of all of the wedding guests assembled in our courtyard, and they shall not be long in
abandoning my father-in-law, and, most likely, they shall not be obstinate. You, father, out of your love for me, shall most likely occupy yourself with a crew of poultry overseers, both common chickens and turkey-cocks, ducks, geese, and so on, and you shall especially concern yourself with putting in order the wine cellar, which you can then show off to your friends! I can see that all of you are in agreement with my suggestion! Right now, it’s still noontime, and towards evening there are many things that we can get done. But so as not to tarry, I shall show you an example of our activities.”

“He took his embarrassed spouse by the hand and led her to his deceased mother’s bedroom.”

“Pan Prilutsky, who had lost sight of his son, threw up his hands joyfully and said, with a look of delight: ‘Isn’t it true, mister envoy, that, with time, my son might become a good colonel? That would be such a good thing! First, we shall provide for our appetite and our thirst, and then each one of us can get down to his own particular business at hand.’”

“No sooner was this said than it was done. In the meantime, since the cavalrymen, the infantry troops, and the sailors in the navy of the foreign prince from overseas, as well as his envoy, were all fervently occupied with their particular business at hand, let’s turn our attention to the home of the highly regarded descendant of the hetmans. We left Pan Zlatnitsky in his armory, which his frightened guests were keeping under lock and key.”

“When he had guessed, – for during his entire lifetime he had always guessed, and had never thought – that he was sufficiently supplied with both the anger and the weaponry he needed for taking revenge upon the betrothed foreign prince from overseas and upon his own daughter, whom he likewise suspected of being a participant in the disastrous conspiracy, just like Pan Prilutsky was, he knocked at the doors, pounding at them with all of his might. Seeing that they were locked, he flew into a rage, and, uttering a black curse, he began to hack an exit for himself through the doors with his sabre. The wedding guests could see that things would turn out very badly, so they tried to hightail it out of there. There was an awful bustle! The noise, the shouting, and the exclaiming on the part of the women were indescribable! Somehow, however, all of them finally managed to take a seat in their carriages, and, settling down, each one of them set off for home, driving in whatever direction was necessary to get there. Pan Zlatnitsky did manage, in the end, to cut a hole through the doors and exit his armory. When he came out and didn’t see anyone there, he collapsed on the floor unconscious, exhausted from all of the physical exertion. At that point, only the servants dared to come any closer to him. First of all, they took away his weapon, hiding it as far away from him as possible, and, after that, they picked him up off the floor, took him in their arms, and put him to bed.”
“The envoy for, – and the friend of, – the foreign prince from overseas was standing on the high road with his cohort of Guards. To those of the wedding guests who hadn’t aligned with him, he announced Pan Prilutsky’s request, and all of them turned in the direction of his village, for no one was afraid of finding there as many horrors as they had found in the home of the renowned descendant of the hetmans. Toward evening time, Pan Prilutsky saw himself surrounded by a large gathering of people. He was happy, and all of them were happy as well. Several days passed in a state of merriment, as the wedding was being noisily celebrated. Evdokia was the first to start making requests of her husband and her father-in-law, asking them to see whether there wasn’t some way of her reconciling with her father. Many of their neighbors joined in this cause, and a solemn ambassadorial deputation was sent to Pan Zlatnitsky. They were laboring in vain! He was lying on his deathbed, surrounded by the images of his ancestors. Hardly had he caught sight of the former envoy from the foreign prince from overseas than he remembered himself and began to groan, muttering indistinctly some curse, and then he passed away. Hearing of his death, Evdokia began to sob, her husband sighed deeply, from the bottom of his heart, and the old, distinguished major uttered loudly: ‘May his memory live on forever! But if he had died several years earlier, all of us would have been happy!’”

“We thanked the Little Russian nobleman, from the bottom of our hearts, for reading his story to us! He bade us farewell, and he set off for his estate. And we, having already spent two days in this village, decided to set off on our further journey. Having been left alone to ourselves, we saw to it that our time was spent in a philosophical fashion!”

“In the morning, I would usually take Licorisa away from the village and show her some of the most picturesque places nearby that had been scattered about by nature. And I would explain to her the wise movements and laws of nature, that darling, that favorite, which is so beloved by the great and wise Divine Being. It did not cross my mind to consider that I had suffered many misfortunes in life as a result of an excess of enthusiasm for enlightening others. I enlightened Princess Fekla, – and she deserted me; I enlightened Yastrebov, – and I was thrown out of his home with dishonor; I enlightened Kuroumov, – and I nearly got into some serious trouble. But, I thought to myself, Licorisa doesn’t resemble any of these people, and that calmed me down. And, what’s more, I’m no longer a prince from Falaleevka, and I shall never interest anyone in an absurd kind of enlightenment, such as the one that I used to teach before. Not infrequently, Licorisa and I would walk up to the Sylvan House, – that’s what the peasants called the master’s manor house out in the country, – and we would walk all around it, but we wouldn’t see a single live creature; we wouldn’t hear even the slightest rustle. Through a crack in the fence, one could see a vast courtyard, overgrown with nettles and burdock. Wild chamomile was growing out of the cracks in the walls of the house, and broom shrubs were growing on the roof. Everywhere it was quiet, it was empty!”

“Evidently,’ I said to my traveling companion, ‘this house has long been uninhabited! What a shame! – it’s located in such a beautiful spot!’”

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"It seemed to me that my happiness was constant, and that fate had stopped playing with me, the way that the wind plays with a blade of grass in a field. Standing beside me was a lovely girl friend, who was full of love and tenderness. We were both enjoying blooming health, and although we didn’t have all that much money, we did have, on the other hand, countless hopes and dreams. We need only to show up in Warsaw, and we shall be raking in the dough. By all appearances, what is there that I lack? But, alas, an awful lot! What exactly? Listen to what I have to say!"

"For some time now, during our sojourn in the countryside, I had been noticing, – to my great perplexity and, at the same time, to my great sadness, – that, with every passing hour, my tender Licorisa was becoming more pensive, more doleful, and more inattentive to my endearments. To see that the object of my affection was in such a state of mind couldn’t help but touch my heart. Sitting beside me and leaning her sad head on my bosom, she wasn’t hearing the words that I was saying, she wasn’t paying attention to the apprehensions and complaints that I was voicing. And, not infrequently, when I would accost her too ardently with questions, she would remove her hand from my clasp, and walk away. I would also walk away, with a lacerated heart, in a different direction. ‘What could this mean?’ I would think to myself, and I would lose myself in conjectures.”

"Between two hearts that haven’t been created to glory in their cruelty, such a constraint couldn’t continue for long. One morning, soon after the sun had risen, we were sitting in a delightful copse on the banks of a clear stream. At some distance away from us, a peasant was fishing in a small pond, while, on the other side of us, a shepherd was blowing his horn as he herded some cows, sheep, and goats. Playful swallows were circling above us, whirling and spinning about as they chirped loudly and teased a country lad, who, fascinated by their boldness, had stopped collecting snails and had started chasing after these birds. Languid Licorisa couldn’t help but be touched by the beauties of nature in the countryside during the hours of a cloudless morning. These pictures were completely new for a girl who had been raised and educated in a magnificent capital city. And as this newly found appreciation of nature’s beauty grew, so did her sensitivity increase, and – together with that, – her gloomy despondency. She mechanically picked several wildflowers from the field and placed them in her apron, and then she started, just as mechanically, to assemble them into a bouquet, incessantly changing her earlier arrangement. If I hadn’t seen the movement of her tender little fingers and the swaying of her bosom, I would have said: ‘This is the image of sorrow and grief, erected out of marble, that stands above the grave of the object of someone’s affection, the grave of someone that person adores.’”

"In order to cheer her up a little, or at least to dispel some of her gloomy despondency, I took out of my pocket the flute that I always used to carry with me during our strolls, so that I would more closely resemble an Arcadian shepherd singing the praises of his beloved’s charms. I began to whistle the music from some aria. Licorisa glanced over at me, and a tear fell on the bouquet of flowers, which she threw into the stream with
indignation, and she turned away from me, covering her eyes with the pinafore that she was wearing."

"'What sort of devilry is this?' I asked, laying my flute down on the grass and rushing over to Licorisa. 'Tell me, please, why has such a sudden and intense change come over you? Can it be that you no longer love me any more and that you find me to be a burden? Can it be that you doubt my reciprocal love for you? You're mistaken if you feel that way, my dearest! I'm still the same as I was! My heart is filled with love for you. My thoughts are always occupied with the charms of my girl friend!'"

**LICORISA (sighing):** "Your girl friend? Evidently, I must forever despair of being something more than that for you!"

**CHISTYAKOV:** "I don't understand at all what you're saying! How could you be anything more than that for me?"

**LICORISA:** "There was an unfortunate and unhappy time in my life, and when I recall it, I'm horrified. It was an accursed time, when I, without feeling the least bit of attraction to anyone, pleased a lot of people, making them feel satisfied. I extended my cold, criminal embraces to my admirers, to those who worshipped me. I was depraved and living in comfort! Now my ardent, passionate embraces are wide open, I'm just as depraved as I was before, – but where is my former tranquility, serenity, and comfort? Or, at the very least, my former lack of sensitivity toward my situation? Alas! My heart is being torn apart! I feel as if the thread of my life shall soon molder, and that I shall wither away, just like this fresh, little forget-me-not that I plucked with my hand this morning shall wither away by noontime today!"

**CHISTYAKOV (to himself):** "Something is being concealed from me here! Either she has lost her mind, or else she wishes to have me lose mine. I can't think of what to do!"

*(Aloud)*: "Beautiful Licorisa! You know that I, under the tutelage of the most-wise Bibarius, learned all manner of ruses, and, subsequently, under the tutelage of the highly enlightened Dobroslavov, I put my art of deception to the test by giving it some practical, experiential application. But, as far as guessing the meaning of riddles, enigmas, or mysteries is concerned, that wasn't included in the curriculum for our course on enlightenment, and I'm a true layman, a complete ignoramus, in such matters. I heartily beseech you, therefore, to explain yourself to me a little more simply!"

**LICORISA:** "I feel unfortunate and unhappy when you don't understand me. I see very clearly that, up until now, you haven't been acquainted with my heart, that it's been alien to you, and, as a result, I've been feeling even more unfortunate and unhappy!"

**CHISTYAKOV:** "Speak more clearly, – I humbly beseech you, – more clearly!"

**LICORISA:** "If some ice is so deeply embedded in a cellar that there's no way that the sun's rays can penetrate to it, then how can we expect the weak light provided by a chip of burning kindling wood to melt it?"
CHISTYAKOV: “The comparison that you make is a splendid one, but nothing is made any more understandable by it, and that’s why I beseech you . . .”

LICORISA (rapidly): “And I shall fulfill your request, no matter what it might cost me! My friend! So it’s like this: right now, I’m happier and I feel more fortunate than ever. I feel safe and sound, for I fall asleep at night and I awake in the morning in your warm embrace. But who, – what celestial inhabitant, – shall assure me that your warm embrace shall not, over time, become ice-cold? Who shall reassure Licorisa’s poor, suffering heart that her friend, – her one and only friend and guide on this earth, – shall always remain her friend? That other female beauties shall not blot the image of the tender, ardent, teary-eyed Licorisa out of his heart?”

CHISTYAKOV (with ardor): “My eternal, solemn oath to God shall do that! It’s due to You, oh, Lord, that the majestic sky above is illuminated by the golden rays of the great luminary; it’s due to You that the beautiful earth is crowned with flowers and branchy trees; it’s due to You that nature is wise. You are the great Almighty, the Creator of all that exists in this universe. I swear to You that I shall love eternally, constantly, my tender, kind, good, incomparable Licorisa!”

LICORISA (flinging herself into my warm embrace): “Swear this very same oath before the altar and before the priest or deacon who officiates there, and, instead of calling me just a girl friend, give me the appellation that I need: your spouse!”

CHISTYAKOV (in some kind of stupor): “What are you saying, Licorisa?”

LICORISA: “What are you so surprised at? If your love for me truly is as constant as you assure me that it is, if our hearts could be separated, – and our union could be abrogated, – only by death alone, if you find in me, and I find in you, the one and only thing that attaches each one of us to life, then why shoudn’t you make me happy and make me feel fortunate by giving me the sacred appellation of being your spouse, so that I would be able to say, without blushing from shame, before each and every person: ‘He’s mine! Heaven above sent him down to me here on earth, the church has approved the choice that my heart has made and it has given its blessing to my union with him!’ Well, then, let it be so! Let me, an unfortunate and unhappy woman, be condemned to bemoaning my abusive fate! Let me become the object of disdain for people of both genders and of all ages! Let my female peers be ashamed of associating with me! Let mothers single me out to their daughters as an example of vice and as an object of people’s censure and of God’s wrath! Let all of this be so! I agree to all of it! But, my dear friend, what are our future children guilty of, when they haven’t seen the light of day, when they haven’t once taken a deep breath of air? How are they to blame that their hard-hearted father had already destined them to a contemptible life, one full of calamities, oppressions, and all manner of afflictions?”
CHISTYAKOV (following a lengthy silence): “Well, my tender Licorisa, calm down and hear me out! Could you really have forgotten that I’m already married and that my wife’s still alive?”

LICORISA: “Alive? And you can utter that word without trembling, without feeling ashamed, without experiencing any pangs of conscience? She’s alive? She’s alive for you? Oh, no, she isn’t! She has long been dead for you! I don’t know, – and I don’t wish to know, – all of the many paths that she has traveled in her life. But, at the very least, I do know that there’s no way that I can ever forget that she was the first one who tried, by all means possible, to introduce me to you, to cast you into my ardent embraces, – she took comfort in that, she craved that, – and, despite the fact that I already had some experience in such matters, I, being guided by chance, fulfilled her wish. And, from an unfortunate, unhappy, and unfeeling woman, I became an unfortunate and unhappy woman who could feel the pain of her misfortune. Is she indeed alive?”

CHISTYAKOV (somewhat moved): “My dearest! Beneficent heaven has provided you with as many gifts of mind, as she has gifts of heart. My life belongs to you. Dispose of it as you see fit. But there are occurrences that a person can’t change, or, to put it better, that a person ought not to change. The laws concerning marriage are not unknown to you.”

LICORISA (with animation): “Laws? What are laws promulgated for? Not, surely, so that some autocrat, – albeit, however, a beneficent, kind, and meek one, – can sign a death sentence, even though he does this with deep sorrow, believing that it’s necessary for the good of his other subjects? But whom shall you hurt or offend if you select me as your wife? Who shall be unhappy as a result of this marriage? You don’t have a father, a mother, or any children, and your wife, – I feel ashamed at the mere recollection of her name and title. She was a mother, – and yet she didn’t have any qualms about giving up her first-born child! Is she able, – and does she have the right, – to do this? Shall a woman such as this wish to call me to account for breaching her matrimonial rights, when she herself is the one who desires to do that, who seeks to do that, and who laughs while she’s doing that, trampling under foot the most sacred laws of marital cohabitation?”

CHISTYAKOV: “You speak beautifully, madam, but circumstances such as these require some discussion!”

LICORISA (bitterly): “I see! No longer do they say to Licorisa: ‘You, Licorisa, are dear, kind, and tender!’ They honor her now by calling her madam. And who is it that does this? Enough – I see now! The poor, worshipful adorant, Licorisa, who is madly in love with Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov, doesn’t deserve to become his bride!”

CHISTYAKOV (heatedly): “The complete opposite is true, dear madam! Prince Gavrilo Simonovich isn’t so reckless and foolhardy that he would dare to exchange caresses with another woman while being the lawfully wedded spouse of a lovely Tibetan princess! Some scoundrels likewise brought my father, the sovereign King Golkondsky, to rack and ruin, and he became impoverished when his supply of gold grew scarce, a
commodity without which the Tibetan princess, – that worshipful adorant who’s madly in love with me, – can’t manage!”

“Licorisa fixed her wide eyes upon me. Her cheeks had grown even more pale than before; her lips were the color of hyacinth. She stood there for several seconds completely motionless, just before convulsive tremors started to set her limbs in motion. Finally, she raised her beautiful hands into the air and struck herself in her lily-white bosom. She began to moan and to sob, bowing her head down in the direction of the grass on the riverbank!”

“I invoke here the findings of those scholars who are knowledgeable about the workings of the human heart! It’s possible for one to resist a woman’s requests, her endearments, and her tender charms, but to resist her tears, the tears of a loving and beloved female personage, – that’s beyond the strength of us mere male mortals. I think that our primogenitor Eve couldn’t have succeeded in coercing Adam into tasting the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil otherwise than by shedding several of her magical tears on his bosom! Oh, our forefather! How unjust are those who reproach you for having been weak!”

“With a feeling of love, tenderness, and repentance in my heart, and with a flame in my bosom, I threw myself down at the feet of my adored lover and embraced her knees.”

“‘Licorisa!’ I exclaimed, shedding tears, just as she had done. ‘I give thanks to God Almighty, that it didn’t enter your mind to make me a scoundrel, a murderer, a robber, an arsonist, and a poisoner! I was ready to become all of those things, if only I hadn’t met you, my lovely one, and hadn’t seen the especially distressed look on your face! So I swear that I shall become your spouse! But seeing as how, among educated people, no passion can excuse a crime, so we, too, are obliged to conform with decrees and resolutions. Upon our arrival in Warsaw, I shall begin occupying a position in the service of Prince Latron. I shall enter into this new position, displaying my love for him, and when an opportune moment presents itself, I shall reveal everything to him. Being in his good graces, I shall request a divorce from my princess, and there’s no doubt in my mind that I shall receive it. And at that point, having nothing to fear, I shall solemnly and triumphantly declare you to be my spouse, and name you Princess Chistyakova!’”

“Licorisa, as if she were awakening from a dream, lifted me up from the floor with a gentle, tender, and sweet sigh, and clasped me to her heart. And it seemed to me that a new life, a new delight, and a new bliss had spread in her eyes, on her cheeks, on her lips, and all over her entire being!”

“Leaving the grove, we returned to our lodgings. When the initial rapture had passed, when Licorisa’s tears had dried up, and when I was able, somewhat separately from her, to consider what my feelings were, my conscience seemed to be saying to me: ‘You, Gavriilo Simonovich, are almost a vulgar fool, and the venerable Licorisa is almost a pretty cunning rogue!’”
“Before I proceed to a further description of my past life, I should, in connection with some incidents, make mention here of Pakhom. According to the legend told by the peasants in the village, this Pakhom appeared here a month before our arrival. He was already an old man, with a large hump on his back. A soiled black handkerchief covered half of his face, for, according to the tales that he told, having once been a handsome young fellow, he lost an eye and several teeth during the fighting, – between furriers and iron workers on one side and seminarians from the Moscow Academy on the other, – that took place at the Neglinnaya River in Moscow. Pakhom provided wondrous accounts of that memorable battle, which would have been even bloodier than it was, if the police dragoons, God knows why, hadn’t intervened with their whips. Both sides returned to their boundaries, loaded down with some of the rich spoils of war: namely, the seminarians returned with tufts of hair from the beards of merchants, while those on the opposite side returned with braids worn by their opponents, with Latin primers, and with theological dissertations. Pakhom used to walk with a wooden leg, for he once lost use of his right leg and limped on his left one. Pakhom lived on the labors of his own hands: namely, he would sit beneath the windows of peasant homes and strum tunes on his bandura, and, in this way, he would soften even the most insensitive of hearts. To the sound of his bandura, he would sing all manner of songs: rural and urban, peaceful and martial, pious and amorous alike. And, in this way, pleasing old men and men in their prime, as well as old women, married women, and young maidens, he would receive expressions of benevolence and charity from all of them. Every holiday, Pakhom would appear with his bandura at the gates to the house of the village elder, he would play some music and dance to it, until such time as the peasant men and women who had gathered there would be so seduced by his performance that they would start to imitate him. His wooden leg and his limping, it’s true, made it somewhat difficult for him to dance, but he didn’t get discouraged and become downhearted. In fact, his daring and boldness pleased the residents of the village, who found the entertainment to be wonderful. They agreed unanimously to let him take possession of a semi-collapsed, small peasant hut, whose last owner had died from the frequent appearances that were made there by her late husband, whom she tormented, each and every day, from dusk until dawn. He, for his part, found consolation, from dawn until dusk, in the local tavern. Thus, switching incessantly from consolation to torment and from torment to consolation, – he, in the end, found consolation, forever and ever, in death. This small peasant hut stood in a pasture, and no one dared to approach it at night, out of fear of seeing the combined appearance of the husband and wife. But the cheerful pauper, – this is what all of the inhabitants of the village usually called Pakhom, – was not cowardly, so he rested peacefully each night at this modest estate of his, one that he hadn’t inherited, but had nonetheless acquired.

Learning about him and his way of life, I found some consolation, seeing the feats of head-over-heels tumbling that were performed by this semi-human being, and I couldn’t help but shed a warm tear of gratitude to our merciful God for the many gifts that He has given me. ‘How,’ I thought, ‘dare I grumble sometimes about Your foresight, oh, just Creator! I have eyes, hands, and legs that are whole, I’m entirely hale and hearty, and yet I have at times been dissatisfied and I have wept from faint-heartedness. Meanwhile, this cripple sings and dances!’”
“However, despite the deformed and distorted leaps that he performed, I would often notice that a dark, somber fog would sometimes spread in his remaining eye, and a heavy sigh would escape from his bosom, which was covered with rags. This would become especially noticeable when he was playing his bandura right in front of me, and when tender Licorisa, embracing me with her lily-white hands, was imprinting a passionate kiss on my cheek. He would walk away from us and, – as much as it was possible for me to judge from the way his body was moving, – he would wipe away some tears. ‘Perhaps,’ I would say to Licorisa, ‘he, too, was once in love, and he lost the object of his affection. A person who is wasting away from thirst can’t look calmly and quietly at someone else who is drinking clean, fresh water. A person who is luckless in love, or who was luckless in love, can’t look indifferently upon those people who are happily in love.’ Be that as it may, we came to love this cheerful pauper, and I always listened with pleasure to his chatter, in which I found quite a bit of intelligence and wit. It seemed that, when he forgot himself, he would give up his buffoonery and begin to speak soundly and substantially. But, suddenly remembering himself, he would begin to play the kind of humorous song that our itinerant minstrels were famous for, and he would sing them in a husky, raspy voice. Nikita found especial amusement in joining Pakhom in the singing, and it would turn out to be a splendid concert, one that not infrequently caused the courtyard dogs to attach their howling to this singing as well.”

“The time had come for us to set off on our journey again. On the eve of our departure, at the setting of the sun, I took my girl friend to the Sylvan House in order to bid farewell to the lovely beauty of the local countryside, a beauty that, amidst all of the noise and din in the capital, it’s impossible to enjoy there. After making the rounds of all of the shrubbery, all of the grassy knolls, and all of the wellsprings, we sat down on the roots of a spreading cherry tree, opposite the iron gates of a fence. A certain sweet reverie enshrouded us, so to speak, with its hazy wings. We remained in this pensive state for a rather long period of time, watching as the silvery moon made its majestic appearance in the blue sky. We were getting ready to stand up and leave to go back to the village, when an unexpected occurrence halted us. Two men, who were pretty well armed, came out of a thicket in the forest. Licorisa, taking them for robbers, was terrified, but I calmed her down and told her to remain silent. The unknown men walked up to the iron gates, and one of them began to whistle loudly three times in a row. Soon a similar whistle could be heard coming from the courtyard. One of the strangers ran hurriedly into the forest and soon returned, leading with him two horses, both of which were weighed down heavily with some load. At that moment we heard the sound of keys jingling and the creak of gates being unlocked and then opened. I must confess that I had need of some reassurance and some emboldening at that point, for nothing was more likely than that this house was serving as a den of thieves. What were we to do but rely upon the will of God?”

“A tall man, dressed in a dark frock coat, came out from behind the gates. He must have been an elderly man, for when he removed his hat, the moon started to shine on his bald spot, which was no smaller than Nikita’s.”
“A conversation started:”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “Hello, guys! How’s the count doing?”

**THE FIRST STRANGER:** “Fine, thank God! How about yours?”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “The same as before! Have you heard anything regarding him?”

**THE SECOND STRANGER:** “Nothing at all! He seems to have vanished! What about the child?”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “He’s alive and well! It’s too bad that I have such a lean helper: he gets sick a lot, and I have to make the rounds of the entire house at night by myself. Well, go ahead and set the provisions down in the courtyard. And may God be with you! But we’re the ones who’ll have to haul it down to the rooms all by ourselves.”

“The strangers led their horses to the courtyard, set the loads down, and, – adding ‘We’ll be back again on Saturday,’ – they left. The man with the bald spot closed and locked the gates from inside the courtyard and said to himself: ‘Now I have to go make the rounds!’”

“Scarcely had he taken two steps, when, out from behind a corner, there appeared, – we were both extremely surprised to see him, – Pakhom, the cheerful pauper, who was in full costume, that’s to say, in his customary rags and tatters, and with his bandura slung behind his shoulders. The two of them stopped and scrutinized one another attentively.”

**PAKHOM:** “Please allow me to ask you, kind sir: did you just happen to come out of this house?”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “What’s it to you? Who are you?”

**PAKHOM:** “Judging from my external appearance, you would be right to conclude that I’m nothing more than a pauper. Not a simple pauper, however, and not one who’s without gifts and talents. I don’t like to trade in God’s name, but I do mollify people’s hearts by means of my art, for, to tell you the truth, I both play my musical instrument and sing delightfully!”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “May God bless you! May God bless you! The people in this house don’t much like such merry-making.”

**PAKHOM:** “And who is it, if you’ll permit me to ask, that lives there?”

**THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT:** “That doesn’t concern you, – no matter who you might be!”
PAKHOM: “Ah! I see. You question my artistry. And I, – for the sake of the honor of my name, – should right now convince you of the opposite.”

THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT: “Go ahead, go right ahead, – don’t worry!”

PAKHOM (taking out his clarinet): “I beseech you to listen.” (He begins to play several fantasies.)

THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT: “This is the sound made by either a swindler or a spy, or else by a rabid dog! Would you please quiet down?”

PAKHOM: “Listen more, and talk less!” (He plays.)

CHISTYAKOV (quietly to Licorisa). “This Pakhom, – he’s not the simple Pakhom whom we know, – the cheerful pauper!”

LICORISA (likewise quietly to Chistyakov): “I’m extremely surprised! He plays beautifully, – he could have entertained people in the capital, not merely those who go out drinking in rural taverns.”

THE MAN WITH THE BALD SPOT (angrily): “If you don’t stop this noise right now, I’ll chase you out of here with a cudgel.”

PAKHOM: “Really! In that case, I shall become like Orpheus, whose music attracts the branches of trees to himself!”

“At this point in time, a window in the house opened, and some female figure, attired all in white, appeared in front of the iron gate. The moonlight was illuminating her. Seeing this, the man with the bald spot became genuinely angry. He ran up to Pakhom, snatched the clarinet out of his hands, and dealt two or three blows to the large hump on his back, as a result of which the musical instrument, – and weapon, – disintegrated. Even a worm has a heart. So how could Pakhom not have one? This being the case, one can guess that he, in turn, became genuinely angry. He straightened himself up, and then he whacked his foe so soundly on the head that the latter suddenly flew head over heels.”

“Oh!” he exclaimed, half-rising to his feet. ‘You’ll pay dearly for your impudence! How dare you strike the major domo for a noble gentleman? You, who’s a mere pauper? Just you wait! Servants! Come here!”

“At this point, he rushed over to the gates and began to unlock it. Licorisa and I were trembling, worried about the fate of poor Pakhom, who would, most likely, catch it pretty severely. But Pakhom sat down on the grass and began to potter around with something next to his wooden leg. And then suddenly he took this item into his hand, stood up, and rushed off, running faster than a deer.”
“What wonders are these?’ I said. ‘He didn’t have the use of one leg, and he limped on the other leg!’”

“Some secret is going on here,’ said Licorisa, getting back on her feet. ‘How can we find out what it is?’”

“We must find out,’ I said to her, ‘perhaps we’ve been ordained by Providence to serve as the weapons that shall help to make some unfortunate and unhappy people happy.’”

“We hurried off to the village, discussing between ourselves what all of this might mean: ‘who’s Pakhom? who’s the man with the bald spot? who’s the unknown woman in white attire that’s standing beyond the iron railing?’”

Chapter 69: A Penitent Woman and a Repentant Man

“For the greater part of the night, we couldn’t close our eyes and go to sleep, for our curiosity was tormenting us so much, especially in the case of Licorisa, who, in keeping with the tenderness that is innate in the members of her gender, was taking part in the discussion by speaking in Pakhom’s favor. ‘How is it possible,’ she kept asking over and over again, ‘that an authentic pauper could be so intelligent and could play the clarinet so superbly? Most likely, he’s a man of noble birth, but he’s merely unfortunate and unhappy. And, perhaps, he’s unhappy due to love! Oh, how wretched he must be! But how is it that he could be cured of his crippled leg in an instant? Was his clarinet actually a magical talisman that had such secret power in the hands of the man with the bald spot? Or was he, up until now, merely pretending to be lame and one-legged? Perhaps he’s not even one-eyed?’ ‘Everything is possible,’ I replied, and the next morning I set off to visit the pauper, with the idea of getting the truth out of him, at any cost.”

“Evidently, poor Pakhom had spent the night alone, and that’s why there was no reason for him to pamper himself the next morning by luxuriating in bed for a good long while. His small peasant hut was all locked up. I inquired of the young boys who were playing nearby where Pakhom might have gone. They directed me to a nearby grove, and I guessed that he might have needed to go to the Sylvan House. Indeed, a short while later I caught sight of him. He was dressed in his usual attire, sitting beneath a tree, with his eyes cast down upon the ground, and he was sighing constantly. Scarcely had I walked up to him, wishing to begin a conversation, when I heard off to my right a loud noise and the sound of various voices. Turning my head, I witnessed a strange scene, which might have been able to serve as a fine model for a painter. In a small clearing, not far away from where a pair of carriages were standing unattended, two men were fighting a duel. One of them, judging by the cloak and hat that he was wearing, appeared to me to be a Spaniard. The other duelist, judging by the long-skirted kaftan with slit sleeves that he was wearing, as well as by the sabre that he was holding in his hand, appeared to be a Pole. There were yet two other men who were standing there beside them. One of them, undoubtedly, must have been a Frenchman, for he, instead of taking part in the battle, was behaving affectedly in the strangest manner, waving his arms and performing various leaps into the
air. In a word, he was thoroughly imitating all of the bodily movements that were being made by the two duelists, saying over and over again: ‘Bravo, gentlemen, bravo! Courage! Well and truly done, – do it yet again, and again!’ The other man was, without any possible doubt, a German, which one could conclude by his enormous hulk, including an exceedingly enormous nose, one that was embellished with purple veins, by his large pipe, which he smoked while leaning against a tree, and by an even larger pigtail, which was tightly attached to the back of his head. A tearful young woman, who would have been rather pretty, if she had been a bit taller and if her stomach had been a bit smaller, was kneeling at his feet. She was embracing the German’s knees, saying to him over and over again: ‘Father! Forgive me!’ But the German, for his part, while calmly dislodging the ashes from his pipe by tapping it against the tree, was shouting to the coachman of the carriage that was standing beside him: ‘Ivan! Fill another pipe for me and bring me a bottle of beer!’"

“Pakhom, it seems, hadn’t noticed either one of these exploits, nor did he notice that I had shown up at the grove.”

“‘What’s going on here, mister bandura player?’ I asked. ‘Really, don’t you see what’s happening right here beside you? We must stop these two warriors! We’re living right now in a time of peace.’”

“Pakhom, lifting up his eyes, looked the combatants over, and then he said, smiling: ‘I shall test the strength of music; perhaps it just might bring these two turkey cocks to their senses!’”

“With these words, he stood up, took his bandura in hand, and hobbled over to where the two knights were standing. Without saying a word, he began to play a cheerful little ditty on his bandura, singing and hopping about. The German took the pipe out of his mouth and looked at him with some surprise. The Spaniard and the Pole ceased fighting their duel, and, lowering their lethal weapons, they looked at one another in dismay, as if they were asking with their eyes: ‘What devil appeared here just in time to stop us?’” As for the Frenchman, he nearly split his sides laughing. ‘This truly is an authentic bard from Fingal’s cave, one who is worthy of extolling in song the exploits of his heroes!”51 At this point, he began to laugh loudly again.”

“Taking advantage of this fortuitous stoppage of the duel, I walked up to these dumbfounded men and said to them: ‘Gentlemen cavaliers! I entreat you, in the name of all of the saints in heaven and for the sake of honor, to postpone this warfare until a

51 This cave, a cavern on the island of Staffa in the Hebrides archipelago located off the coast of Scotland, was discovered in 1772 by naturalist Sir Joseph Banks while he was on a natural history expedition to Iceland. It was named after Fingal, the hero of an epic poem by the 18th-century Scots poet-historian James Macpherson. Composer Felix Mendelssohn, who visited the cave during a trip to Scotland in 1829, immortalized the cave, as well as the legendary poet who was said to live inside it, in his concert overture, The Hebrides Overture (1830), also known as Fingal’s Cave.
future time. Wouldn’t it be better to live in peace and to enjoy the gifts of nature than to engage in cutthroat daredevilry such as this!”

THE SPANIARD: “All of the saints in heaven? I would be considered a monster in my fatherland if I were to disobey such a pledge! (Inserting his sword back into its sheath.) All of the saints in heaven? I swear by Saint Yakov Kompostelsky that I would deserve to undergo all of the tortures of the Holy Inquisition if I were not to obey your admonition!”

THE POLE (twisting his mustache into curly rings): “You were speaking about honor? Who knows honor better than a Pole? Let me shake your hand, Pan Spaniard. And to what end would we want to spill each other’s blood out of our veins? It would be better if we were to pour two bottles of wine into those veins at a tavern in some nearby settlement!” (They embraced.)

THE GERMAN: “Something was mentioned about gifts of nature? I must confess that I’m an ardent lover of them! What, really, is the good of getting all sliced up? How much better it would be for us to be sitting at a table on which there are dishes with ham, sausages, frankfurters, cheese, and a tankard of beer. If the Lord God were to deign to add to this by conferring a pipe of tobacco, then I would see the heavens open and angels playing the organ.”

THE FRENCHMAN: “I, least of all people, have any desire not to agree to peace. As soon as peace is reached, I shall be all yours, most respectable Mister Shafkopf! And, at the same time, so, too, shall my Louisa.”

THE GERMAN: “The devil take the both of you! It’s enough to make you go out and hang yourself on the first aspen tree that you come upon!”

“The Frenchman embraced him amicably, and then he embraced Louisa even more amicably. After such a turn of events, she calmed down, and they all set off for our village, being preceded in this endeavor by Pakhom, who was playing the most ringing of marches. Both carriages followed after them.”

“After we had all taken a seat at table in my room, where, upon orders from Mister Shafkopf, a most substantial breakfast meal had been quickly arranged, and after we had all eaten our fill of the savory gifts of nature, and, consequently, had cheered up a bit, I proposed the following to our company: ‘Gentlemen! While my wife (I deemed it best to call Licorisa by this appellation) and the venerable Miss Louisa are bustling about in the kitchen, preparing our meal, I thought that it wouldn’t be a bad idea for us to establish amongst ourselves a mutual confidence in one another. And, in this way, to explain, for those who don’t know the whole story, just what today’s adventure signifies?’”

“They all readily agreed. And since the pauper Pakhom was, in some sense, the restorer of peace and quiet, he, too, was allowed to listen to the narrative accounts of our past lives, but only at a certain remove from us, at the request of the Spaniard and the Pole.”
“In my fatherland,”’ said the latter, ‘even at the Sejm, jesters and minstrels are
allowed to attend sessions of the general assembly, and if they happen to notice
that a Marshal of State and some Grand Counselors are being pensive, as a result
of paying a lot of attention to some issue, these jesters and minstrels have the right
to jingle small bells, to swat fly-swatters, and to blow soap bubbles. This is why
the gentlemen attending these sessions of Parliament cheer up, their thoughts are
revived, and they are able to make very wise decisions!’”

“As we had agreed upon, the Spaniard was the next one to speak, and he began his
narrative account in the following manner:”

“There’s not much for me to relate to you. My father, Ambrosy, wasn’t the worst
commoner to come from the town of Olmedo. My mother, Agnesa, was more
chaste than chastity itself. She was covered, from her head to her toes, with
crosses, both large and small, with icons, and with relics that her confessor, Father
Antonio, a Benedictine monk, used to provide her with. My mother’s rosary
beads weighed half a pood. No matter what sin she might have committed, she
always appealed to some saint for help. An exemplary piety of this kind was
passed on to me by inheritance. I was permitted to do anything that I wanted: to
curse, to fight, to steal, – as long as all of this was done with God’s help!”

“When my mother had free time off from her domestic responsibilities, she would
lock herself inside her prayer room with good, kind Father Antonio. And she
would confess her sins, and repent of them, doing this with such zeal that her
moans could be heard in another room. Sometimes she would even cry out, so
severely had her confessor exhorted her. Circumstances such as these drove my
father to feel pity for this poor sinner, the more so when, after two hours of
confession and penitence, she would come out of her prayer room to see us,
looking pale, languid, weakened, and relaxed, such that she could hardly stand on
her own two feet. When my father would walk up to her with a look of
consolation on his face, she would exclaim, ‘Akh!’ cross herself, and go read
prayers that had been compiled for the express purpose of driving away devils.”

“In the end, such a monotonous life grew boring for my father. He wanted to
become his wife’s confessor himself, and, by virtue of this intention, he got his
hands on the keys to the chapel well in advance. One day, when the sounds of
deep breathing that were coming from the repentant sinner were louder than
usual, my father appeared before her in an instant. ‘Oh, heavens!’ exclaimed my
mother, and she fainted, despite the fact that, as a result of that movement, she
had got herself into a position that didn’t look very pious. But, on the other hand,
the holy father didn’t lose his presence of mind. He stood up, for my father’s
sudden appearance on the scene had thrown him to his knees, he put himself back
in order, straightening out his attire, and then he said, in a long, drawn-out way:
‘What? Is this a Spaniard that I see? But this is impossible! This must be a most
vile heretic, or, what’s worse, Satan himself, who’s taking comfort in the madness
of pious activities! Do you really mean to say that you don’t know what’s one of the main crimes committed against the rules of our holy faith? You deserve to be consumed by fire as a burnt sacrifice!”

“I don’t know why my father didn’t heed the reasonable words spoken by this saintly monk. Instead, he flew into a demonic rage, and, despite the fact that Father Antonio was a terrifying personage, he lifted up my mother’s rosary beads, which were lying there on the floor, and proceeded to christen him with whatever fell to hand. The monk likewise sharpened his claws, but, being stout, and, what’s more, being hampered by his garb, he inflicted little injury upon his enemy. The battle continued until such time as the monk, who had totally lost his strength and had become all tangled up in his cassock, toppled over and collapsed onto the floor with a loud thud and some grunting. My mother, who had regained consciousness after her fainting spell, opened her eyes, and, seeing that her confessor was covered all over with crimson stains and that blood was streaming from his forehead, she jumped up to her feet, let out a scream, and, before my father could manage to heave the vindictive rosary beads at her, she came running up to him, seized hold of his mustache, and, gnashing her teeth, proceeded to tear at it with all of her might. This was how one ought to have acted with someone who infringed upon pious pursuits and who insulted those worthy personages who serve as guides for our soul, showing us the way to celestial bliss. But, then again, I was young at that time; consequently, I was as much inexperienced as I was impertinent. I, accursed lad that I was, standing there at the opened doors to the prayer room and seeing this uneven battle taking place inside it, exclaimed: ‘Father! Please go ahead and deal with mother, while I contend with the monk!’ At this point, I rushed over, as fast as I could, to where Father Antonio was standing. I got him further tangled up in his cassock, the way that a spider entangles a fly in its web, and then I began to pull and tug at it, tearing it to pieces. My captive closed his eyes and hissed: ‘Oh! For goodness sake! Have mercy on me!’ I stopped what I was doing, and I saw that my father was settling accounts with his better half with no less fortitude and manliness than I was doing with the monk. My mother was likewise all beaten up, from head to toe, and she, too, wailed plaintively beneath the blows that were being delivered with her rosary beads. Seeing that our enemies were no longer resisting our attack, we softened a bit and granted the monk the freedom to leave, – an option that he at once availed himself of, – and my father dragged his wife out of the house, threw her out onto the street, and then locked the doors to our house.”

“From all sides, it seemed, the matter had been settled, and was at an end. But there were consequences, however, and, what’s more, some surprising ones. Praise be given to the heavens above for restraining and subduing arrogant opposition to monastic rules!”

“Scarcely had nighttime arrived, when my father and I were already moaning in some dark and gloomy dungeons of the Holy Inquisition. Our daily food ration was a slice of stale bread, our daily drink was a glass of stale-tasting standing
water. This was the manner in which they had been pacifying us for more than a year, and it very nearly made saints out of us by force. Finally, a kind and gracious decision was issued:

1) “For the insolent disturbance of a penitent prayer session; for the unexpected reduction of this prayer session into a seductive situation; for the mutilation of the religious personage, Father Antonio; for the laceration of his life-saving chasuble; for the sacrilegious, abusive treatment of rosary beads, an offense for which it’s not necessary to punish a lay person, let alone a woman; for these and other blasphemous acts, the criminal Ambrosy is consigned, – in order to save his soul, as well as his body, and to serve as a lesson to others, – to a cruel punishment: to be burned alive at the stake. But he can save himself. And the always merciful Church leaves open some sure, and quick, means for him to be able to do that: namely, he would have to give one half of his estate to his chaste wife, Agnesa, who was so cruelly offended by him, and give the other half to a monastery of his own choosing, for the merciful Church would let him do as he wished in this regard. And, upon making these attempts at repentance, he would have to renounce this pernicious secular world and join a monastic order in a monastery of his own choosing. The merciful Church is pleased to be able to do this. Otherwise, – God’s anathema upon him!”

2) “His son, Alonzo, who was convicted of similarly sacrilegious acts, is to be given the same punishment. But the merciful Church is willing to mollify its righteous anger toward him. If he’s sincerely repentant, and if he asks for, and receives, forgiveness from the two people who were offended by him, – his chaste mother, Agnesa, and the most honorable monk, Father Antonio, – then we shall forgive him his trespass. Otherwise, – God’s anathema upon him!”

“My father and I discussed our options. He quickly decided to have his head shaved, in accord with the sacred rite of tonsure, and to take monastic vows, while I received, as had been agreed upon, a conditional pardon. From that time forward, my mother’s life was one of unparalleled sanctity. Pious Father Antonio hardly ever came out of his prayer room any longer. He loved me as if I were his very own son. Soon his sanctity completely sanctified me. The only thing that I would do was pray, and I couldn’t refrain from weeping tears of emotion, when I heard my mother’s and her confessor’s deep and heavy breathing.”

“With each passing day, I was becoming more and more divinely inspired, and I began to lock myself inside my room and to moan and groan the way that my mother did. Blasphemers, of which there were many in Spain, called my holy raptures rabid rage. Oh, debauchery! Oh, wickedness! Superb beyond measure!”

“Half a year later, when I had begun to save my soul in solitude, God rewarded my patience. In my dreams, I would see, not infrequently, angels who would have conversations with me. I was still not yet worthy of the grace that would allow me to see them in waking reality. One night, a heavenly herald appeared to
me. Although, it’s true, he didn’t look as charming as some of the heralds depicted by the Italian masters in their portraits, nonetheless, no two people ever resemble each other completely, just as is true for two angels. I noticed that my heavenly herald was truly not a demon, deducing this from the fact that he didn’t have any horns, the clutches of a cockerel, and a shaggy tail, all of which are the distinguishing traits of a demon. ‘Heed my words, Alonzo,’ the angel would say to me, ‘and don’t forget that you committed a mortal sin when you deeply offended and injured a holy personage, Father Antonio. You shall not save your poor soul from the flames of purgatory until you first go to Rome on foot and touch your forehead to the shoe of His Holiness, the Pope, God’s representative on earth. And, after that, you must make the rounds of all of the monasteries where there are Roman saints.’ I awoke from my dream, thinking and pondering, which I continued to do for the next several weeks. Repentance was tormenting my soul! ‘How could you, accursed sinner that you are,’ I would say to myself, ‘how could you have tried to commit such a loathsome, impious act as raising your accursed fists and striking the precious brow of Father Antonio, who, day and night, was trying to console your penitent mother? Olé! Bravo to my transgression!’”

“Having decided to leave my parental home, where everything reminded me of the mortal sin that I had committed, I received the blessing of my mother and of her confessor, and I set off on my journey, with me promising to inform them at every place where I might be feeling a shortage of funds, and with them assuring me that they would never forsake me.”

“In the course of five years, I made the rounds of monasteries in Spain, France, Hungary, and Bohemia. Out of a feeling of especial zeal, I took it into my head to visit Catholic churches located in such barbarian, and barbaric, countries as, for example, Turkey, Russia, and Poland. In this way, after having visited everywhere that I had planned to visit, I had just made it through Poland, with my friend Pan Klopovitsky, when Mister Shafkopf overtook us . .”

“Thus did the pious Spaniard conclude the narrative account of his past life.”

Chapter 70: A Life Story

“‘Now it’s my turn,’ said the Pole.”

“It was a mistake for Don Alonzo to be overly modest, when he said that the narrative account of his past life would be of little importance. It’s no laughing matter, is it, that he makes mention in it of such things as shrines and the appearance of angels? There shall not be as many marvels of this kind mentioned in the narrative account of my past life. There was, in my case, it’s true, an appearance, but it was only the appearance of a very sinful man, and a very carnal one at that, rather than of angels. I’m descended from a generation of Polish gentry that preceded the so-called ‘tenant nobles,’ that’s to say, those who didn’t
own any land, but instead rented it. My father was a true Polish nobleman. He was proud, like an Englishman; brave, like a Russian; courteous, like a Frenchman; and noble, like a . . . (“Like a German, it goes without saying!” Shafskopf inserted in a long, drawn-out manner”).

“Both my father and I served in the Guards detachment of Prince Kepkovsky. This was a very amazing man, who was about sixty years of age. Pride, or, to be more exact, haughtiness, a loud cheerfulness, and a bestial brutality toward poor peasants, – these constituted His Excellency’s distinguishing character traits. He loved to go hunting with hounds and to go hunting for women. His house, which, in all fairness, one could call a royal palace, was continuously filled with all manner of people, horses, and dogs. In order to demonstrate just how powerful and wealthy he was, it shall be sufficient to say a few words about him here. During a hunt, if he were to come across some old woman, he would see this as a bad omen: he would make her climb up a nearby tree and make the crying sound of a cuckoo bird. The unlucky woman would obey the landowner’s will, he would fire pistol shots at her, and then, laughing at the top of his lungs, he would shout: ‘How do you like that? I shot an ominous cuckoo bird at one go!’ Likewise, not infrequently Prince Kepkovsky, upon the advice of my father, who distinguished himself by his kindness and charity, would order that the beards of three or four Yids be tied together and then he would make them dance to the sound of a hunting horn and the swash of whips, which were used to inspire them to dance.”

“After taking all of these actions, he would usually remain innocent of any criminal offense. But it did happen sometimes that our king, having grown tired of receiving an uninterrupted flow of complaints against our prince, would summon him to the Royal Palace for an explanation: this grandee wanted to display his grandeur. He would order that the entire street, – from his home in Warsaw to the Royal Palace in Krakow, – be strewn with sugar, which had been pounded, and thus reduced to minute particles, so that in the midst of summer it would seem like winter. He would sit in an expensive sleigh that was harnessed to eight bears. Other parts of his triumphant entry would be in keeping with this motif, and he wouldn’t stand up until such time as the king appeared on the porch to receive his guest! As everyone can guess, he and the king parted company as friends. The prince died soon thereafter, however. It’s unclear whether the reason for his sudden death was palace intrigues at the royal court, or whether it was strictly due to his subjects, who were offended by his intemperate love for their wives and daughters. In any event, neither his son, who was his heir, nor his daughter, the young widow Marianna, nor even the king himself, thought about investigating the possible reasons for his death. All of them unanimously ascribed his death to apoplexy, and that was the end of it. Young Prince Stanislav came into his own and started to assert himself. And very soon we saw his father in him to a large degree.”
“Amongst the many heroic deeds that he performed soon after his father’s death, not the least of them may be considered the abduction of my sister, Marysia, who, at the appointed time, became a mother. How could a Polish shliakhtich\textsuperscript{52} like my father not be offended by such indecency and obscenity? He bowed low to the king, making a humble petition to the sovereign, who, by the power invested in him, ordered the prince to return Marysia to the warm embrace of her father, \textit{if she herself desired this}. Although this stipulation didn’t presage certain success, how could a Polish \textit{shliakhtich} doubt that it would? He set off on the chestnut mount that had earlier served his own father, galloping through a thunderstorm, which left its traces on his cheeks, eyebrows, eyes, and mustache. But presumptuousness had deceived him a little. There was no way that my sister wished to move out of the palace and back into her earlier abode. Nor, having earlier been the wife of a sultan, did she wish to become the wife of someone who was simply a Polish \textit{shliakhtich}. The usual weakness of women! My father became angry, in the manner that a true \textit{shliakhtich} would, threatening her, and, – in the heat of his venting his anger on her, and in keeping with the power and authority that God has bestowed upon parents over their children, – he left the imprint made by the rings on his right hand upon his daughter’s cheek. There was no way that my sister, who likewise had \textit{shliakhtich} blood flowing in her veins, was going to endure this offense with indifference. She majestically spat in our father’s eyes and proceeded to withdraw, adding, as she walked away: ‘Thank God, you old fool, that you’re my father! Otherwise, you would have received much worse from me!’”

“Could a Polish \textit{shliakhtich} endure such disgrace? Of course not! And that’s precisely the reason why my father didn’t endure it! Shortly thereafter, he passed away. And he left me as the absolute sovereign of his name and of his chestnut steed, for, following the dissolution of his friendship with Prince Kepkovsky, this is what his property mainly consisted of.”

“In keeping with the congenital stirring of my \textit{shliakhtich} heart, I began to think up ways to wreak vengeance on the prince for having inflicted dishonor upon the Klopovitsky name. After rather extensive reflection, I couldn’t think up anything more clever to do than to leave my sister indisputably in charge of the prince, and thus to pay him back via such retaliation: giving him tit for tat. A Polish \textit{shliakhtich} is always brave in such matters! Despite the fact that the beautiful Princess Marianna at the time was having an almost open love affair with a Russian hussar colonel, I decided to launch an attack upon her. To that end, I enrolled as one of the menials serving the princess. I spared no effort in my campaign to win her heart: I didn’t exclude making use of either tender glances, or languid sighs, or the double entendres that lovers use between themselves. Finally, I succeeded! Marianna began to reply in kind to my romantic advances. And I was delighted.”

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Shliakhtich} is the Polish word used to designate a gentleman, a person of noble birth.
“In order to show me the reciprocating love and tenderness that she had toward me all the more perceptibly, the beautiful widow would sometimes pluck the hat off my head and, with wonderful endearment, slap her fan against my shaven head. Not infrequently, I would also receive fairly substantial flicks of her fingers upon my nose. And thus my love for her was flaring up with each passing moment. One day, through the page who served the princess, I received a note that ordered me to appear at midnight at the summer house in the garden near the pond, in which stood a marble statue of Cupid. Who could describe my delight? Right up until the appointed hour, I kept myself busy cleaning myself up, curling my mustache, washing myself with eau de parfum, which previously one could still obtain from a Jewess vendor. I couldn’t get my fill of looking at myself in the mirror: how handsome I seemed to look to myself at that time!”

“When the clock on the castle’s tower struck midnight, I, with a sweet trembling of my heart, entered the sacred summer house, where I was to carry out the sacrifice of my goddess and thus take my revenge upon her. The moon was shining in the window, and, with its help, I could see that something white was stirring on the davenport. With the greatest of haste, I tore off, so to speak, the jerkin that I was wearing and, bursting from an upsurge of passion, I rushed over to my beauty, clasped her tightly to my zealous heart, and imprinted an ardent kiss upon her lips.”

“I wanted to recoil with horror, however, when I felt a mustache on the lips of my goddess. But I was being so tightly squeezed by iron hands, that I could hardly take a breath.”

“‘What the devil is going on here?’ resounded a voice that was not only not female, but also not Polish either. A frightful punch to my forehead accompanied this expression of consternation. Millions of stars began to glitter in front of my eyes. I hadn’t succeeded in coming round when I suddenly received yet another punch, this one more staggering than the previous one. And someone had tugged so strongly at the left side of my mustache that it flew off, nearly taking my lip along with it. I started rolling on the floor, and I had already stopped counting all of the punches and kicks with which I had been rewarded for the ardent love that I had tried to show. These punches and kicks were innumerable. I deemed that it was none other than a house-sprite that was tormenting me, and, what’s more, a most ferocious one at that!”

“Shortly thereafter, we heard some noise, the doors suddenly flew off their hinges, and, with a terrifying laugh, in walked Prince Kepkovsky, his gentle sister Marianna, my sister Marysia, and several servants carrying candles. Standing above me was a Russian colonel, dressed only in a shirt, who looked around at everything calmly and quietly, and then asked Marianna: ‘Explain to me, madam, what’s the meaning of the scene that you have just arranged for me?’”
“‘It’s nothing,’ she replied, continuing to laugh like a madwoman. ‘It was only a joke, through which I wanted to test your loyalty, your courage, and your manliness! Now I’m satisfied. This was just a little surprise for you!’”

“Having said this, she took my sister by the hand and exited the summer house with her, most probably out of a sense of decency and decorum, so as not to see the gentleman colonel standing there in the presence of all of his concealed merits and virtues.”

“‘Pan Klopovitsky!’ the young prince said to me. ‘After all of this, you can easily judge for yourself that there is no longer any place for you in my palace! I’m sorry!’”

“For me, it’s true, there was nothing further to do there. Soon thereafter, I left, and I found a position with Count Ponyatovsky, serving him in the capacity of his groom. For the most stimulating of reasons, he set off for the Russian court, and as soon as he had to return to Poland, he left me behind in Saint Petersburg. For several years, I sought my fortune in that northern capital, but it was all in vain. By chance, I made the acquaintance of Don Alonzo, who wanted to go visit Poland. We agreed, and off we went, until such time as this French gentleman and this German gentleman here overtook us . . .”

“‘Is that the end of your narrative account?’ exclaimed the Frenchman with impatience. ‘Even though Mister Shafkopf is already beginning to close his bright eyes for need of sleep, that doesn’t hinder me from satisfying your curiosity. And he can always listen to my story later!’”

“‘As for me,’ the German replied, ‘it would be fine with me if I were never to hear not only about your stupid pranks, but even about you yourself and your life!’” He stretched himself out on the bench, yawned, and then started snoring. Everyone turned to look at him with a smile on their face, and then the Frenchman began his narrative account:

“Even though harsh people wouldn’t praise me for everything that I’ve done in my life, I am, – as any Frenchman should be, – candid and sincere, and so I say everything openly. Héloise, a comely, dark-browed girl, was the laundress at the Saint Denis monastery. The prior at the monastery, a forty-year-old man named Abelard, was considered a paragon of eloquence and piety. As a man, however, he wasn’t without his weaknesses. When he first saw Héloise, he recalled that his name was Abelard, and, reading the ancient novel about the famous lover who was his namesake, he took it into his head to write a new novel about a new Abelard. With Héloise’s help, he began to compose it, and the consequence of

53 The original Héloise and Abelard are one of the most celebrated couples of all time, known for their love affair and for the tragedy that separated them. Héloise d’Argenteuil (1101-1164) was a French nun, philosopher, writer, and scholar who gained renown as a “woman of letters” and a philosopher of love and friendship, eventually became a high-ranking abbess in the Catholic
the fervent practice sessions that they devoted to this well-intentioned project was my birth. When I had attained the age at which young people come to understand the difference between the two sexes, my father, as perfectly as he could, began trying to educate me, – in both flesh and spirit, – as to how, with time, I, too, could add to the ecclesiastical realm. You need to know that he was by no means poverty-stricken, nor was he leading a miserable existence. And who is poor in a monastery anyway? Nonetheless, nothing proves more stubborn than nature. Feeling an irresistible attraction to the members of the fair sex, I tried to excel only in those skills that would please them the most. I tried to jabber away as much, and as freely, as I could, to play several musical instruments, to sing, to dance, and to fight duels with swords. My father, who had assured himself that I wasn’t a great lover of philosophy and theology, let me pursue my inclination to satisfy my amorous desires, and he took some consolation, remaining content to pay for them with his money. I began my rakish exploits with the wives and the wenches of the servants who worked at the monastery. And even before I had turned twenty years of age, I was already reputed to be the terrible creator of those horns that had appeared on the brows of cuckolded fathers and husbands. The horns, evidently, were inherently evil, for these men became angry with me for pulling such a prank on them. Relying on the power of my ‘uncle,’ for, in keeping with the usual order of things at the monastery, that is how I called the prior, I had nothing to fear. There is, however, nothing constant in the world. Uncle suddenly passed away, and I was slowly but surely turned out of the monastery. I say slowly because two servants, after tying my hands with rope, led me through the entire monastery, and several other outrageously godless people whipped me on my back, shoulders, and legs with belts. While they were leading me out the gate with such exultation, they increased their affectionate methods to such a degree that they left me on the street barely alive.”

“Fortunately, they didn’t take it into their heads to clean out my pockets, in which there was enough money, for the time being, for me to get by. I put myself in order and changed my clothes, which had been torn to pieces by the avengers, and I set out for Paris, hoping to start obtaining a subsistence there by teaching people how to play musical instruments and how to fight duels with swords. But since I didn’t possess any appropriate recommendations in order to enter the homes of members of the nobility, and since my skills in music and dueling were valued little in middling homes, I started teaching history, geography, and even poetry, – in a word, all of those branches of scholarly learning that I didn’t understand in the least, – in the latter kind of homes, the middling ones. Things were going successfully, but, to my misfortune, almost everywhere that I went I would run

Church. Peter Abelard (1079-1142) was a pre-eminent philosopher and theologian who became famous as a poet and musician. They became lovers, and she gave birth to a son. They even married secretly, but they were not destined to live together. Adelard was castrated, Héloïse became a nun, and they corresponded throughout their remaining years via letters, hers sent to him from the various convents that she directed, his from the Abby of St. Denis in Paris, where he served as a monk.
into learned pedants in these homes, tutors who would declare to the master and the mistress of the house that my knowledge of these topics was not beneficial or profitable for the students whom I was teaching, and I would be banished in disgrace.”

“While I was serving in one of these middling homes, teaching a geography lesson, to wit, about Russia, a middle-aged man who was sitting there, – an English lord, as I learned shortly afterwards, – was listening to me attentively, and then, finally, he asked: ‘Tell me, please, do you happen to know the status of tsarist Russia well? I’ve heard that there are many curiosities there, and I intend to go there to see for myself. Nowadays everything, and everywhere, is so ordinary and commonplace!’”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Oh! The darkness there is a marvel to behold! The people resemble bears, and the only things that you can see on their faces are their noses and their ears. Nothing else is visible! Their language sounds like the barking of dogs that are so big and strong that the Russians ride on their backs, especially when they’re out hunting. A dog performs the duties of two posts: it carries the rider and it catches the hare or the wolf that is being hunted. Before their weddings, young lads and young maidens walk about naked, and they love to roll around in the snow, just as chickens love to roll around in the dust during the summertime!”

THE ENGLISH LORD: “The things that you’re relating to me truly are marvels! Is it worth going there to take a look!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “As far as mores and manners are concerned, they are even stranger. The person whose face has become the most overgrown with hair is the one who’s the most highly venerated. People are chosen to serve in government posts on the basis of the length of their beards. Judge for yourself: what a broom the Grand Chancellor must have!”

THE ENGLISH LORD: “There’s something here that I can’t understand! You’re not, by any chance, telling lies now, are you?”

THE FRENCHMAN: “God forbid! You, therefore, shall probably likewise not believe me when I tell you that in Russia husbands have the right to beat, to maim, and even to do God knows what to their wives, and to do all of this with impunity?”

THE ENGLISH LORD: “Oh! That final custom of theirs is a beauty! It should be required that it be put into practice throughout the whole wide world!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Their main form of entertainment at home is getting drunk. Meanwhile, their wives are safely sitting in confinement under lock and key!”
THE ENGLISH LORD: “That’s very good! That’s similar to the English taste!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Their main public form of entertainment is as follows: they gather together at a square or in a field, they stand in two rows of an equal number of people, and then one side challenges the other side to a fistfight.”

THE ENGLISH LORD: “Go on! Tell me more!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “At first, the combat starts off rather lightly and gently. Fists strike an opponent’s sides, his belly, and his back. Then they reach his head, with all of its appendages: that’s to say, his eyes, ears, snout, nose, and teeth. Hair comes flying off in tufts, teeth whistle in the air, and blood flows in torrents.”

THE ENGLISH LORD (having leaped up from his seat): “Bravo! I must go see this beautiful land for myself, and if you, mister tutor, don’t have anything better to do here than to spoil children, then let’s go together and perfect ourselves in the grand science of fisticuffs. It’s now summertime: the journey there would be merry. I shall pay for all of the expenses! And, what’s more, I have heard it said that people of your sort have found good fortune and happiness there.”

“I readily accepted his offer. We set off, and in a short period of time we arrived in Petersburg, where we stayed overnight at an eating-house. The next day, my English lord took with him a purse containing his gold coins and set off with me to take a look at some Russian wonders. He stopped on the Nevsky embankment, and spent some time watching all of the passers-by attentively. One pedestrian, who was walking towards us from a distance away, a sturdy-looking man, thrilled my English lord. He rolled up his sleeves and, when this Russian pedestrian drew level with us, the former smacked him so hard in the belly with his foot that the peasant, who hadn’t at all expected such a greeting, was knocked to the ground, spread-eagled on his back. After getting back up on his feet, he cast a ferocious glance in the direction of my English lord, ran up to him, and struck him so soundly on the side of his head that the Englishman staggered. And, if I hadn’t been there to help support his weight, he would have landed on the ground. A strong competition, accompanied by swearing and abusive language, ensued. The Russian peasant’s nose, which had already been broken, was bleeding profusely, while my English lord had suffered two black eyes. A Russian cap and an English hat were floating down the Neva River. Finally, they were intertwined, grappling with one another. For a long time, they were doubled over, then they straightened up, then they were bent over and bowed again. And then the Russian peasant hooked him so adroitly under the leg that my English lord went flying headlong down to the ground. When he got back up on his feet again, he started grappling with the Russian peasant all over again and, once again, he received the same beating as before. The third time this occurred, my English lord wasn’t any luckier. At this point, looking the bearded peasant over from head to toe, he
turned to me and said: ‘It’s a pity that he’s not an Englishman!’ After this, he took several gold coins out of his pocket and gave them to the Russian peasant. The latter, not understanding at all what this meant, took a step backwards. My English lord, after having tossed his gold coins at him, and, after having descended from the embankment down to the waterfront, said to me: ‘I’ve seen the greatest rarity ever! Farewell, monsieur! I’m going to Kronstadt, and, from there, directly to London.’”

“He took a seat in a rowboat and set off with two oarsmen. I followed him with my eyes and watched him with indescribable astonishment. And when he faded from view, I took a deep breath and said to myself: ‘Well, so how do you like that! Here you are in a foreign land, not knowing anyone, not having any money, not having any letters of recommendation! Oh, you damned islander! Look at what you’ve gone and done to me!’”

“There’s no point in my describing for you the long-suffering life, spent in poverty and misfortunes, that I have lived. Although I’m a Frenchman, and although I’m a child of the monastery, there have been many troubles that I’ve had to endure. And I’ve often fallen into a pensive mood, searching to find some ways, as it were, to make my situation better.”

“I’ve been, by turns, a hairdresser, a barber, an abbot, a footman at an inn, a shopkeeper, a marquis that was forced to leave his fatherland due to some misadventures, a dog trainer, a mentor at some fashionable boarding schools, – and everywhere that I’ve worked, I’ve been a failure! I’ve changed cities, towns, and villages, and everywhere that I’ve gone, I’ve poked my nose into other people’s business, and I’ve found that one and the same thing happened everywhere: either I myself decided to move away or else I was driven out forcibly by others. Finally, at long last, my lucky star began to shine on me: I became a bartender at a German Club.”

“After having served in this capacity for some time, I singled out two female personages, for it seemed that they, in turn, had singled me out. I started to serve them in a special way, and we soon became acquainted. One day, while they were enjoying a serving of mulled wine in a special little room, the nose of the elder of the two women, whom I took to be a mother or an aunt, had become so crimson, – as crimson as Mister Shafkopf’s nose is at present, – that I walked up to her and asked: ‘Honorable lady! This, of course, must be your beautiful daughter?’”

THE MAIDEN: “No! I merely work as a housekeeper and overseer in their home!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “And who, then, might you be, my dear maiden?”

THE MAIDEN: “Luisa Shafskopf.”
THE FRENCHMAN: “What an expressive, what a harmonic sobriquet you have! Shafskopf! I swear, by heaven and hell, that in France there aren’t such beautiful maidens with such a pleasant name.”

THE MAIDEN: “And you must certainly be a Frenchman?”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Yes, madam. I’m a distinguished French nobleman, but, being surrounded by enemies at the royal court, I have had to leave the court, and my fatherland, for a time! What title does your highly respected father hold?”

THE MAIDEN: “He’s a butcher!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Oh, heavens! What sonorous surnames you have in your family! Shafskopf and Butcher! Does he happen to be here right now, by any chance?”

THE MAIDEN: “Yes, he does: he’s right over there at the corner, smoking tobacco, drinking beer, and discussing politics!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “What a sizeable physiology he has! How majestically his nostrils swell up! With what an air of importance he keeps his underwear up! How solemnly his plump pigtail turns round in all directions whenever he turns his head! I would love to, – oh, oh, how I would love to, – make the acquaintance of such a great man and call him my friend! Oh, righteous God up in heaven, what happiness that would be!”

THE MAIDEN: “Why not? He readily accepts new apprentices! Even though you’re a Frenchman . . .”

“‘But not a Russian, however!’ the overseer chimed in, glancing at me with eyes that were scarcely wandering beneath eyelashes that were stuck together. ‘I can vouch for that.’”

“We parted like old acquaintances. Shortly thereafter, at the suggestion of my guardian angel, I quit my job at the club and appeared at the Shafskopf home, where I was accepted as one of a number of apprentices hoping to learn the artistry of this famous butcher. He maintained that steering a ship during a storm, – or governing an unruly nation during a revolt, – was much easier than chopping up pork with the proper delicacy and much easier than stuffing sausage casings with the necessary subtlety!”

“‘That’s not exactly true, my friend,’ said a guest who happened to be at the house that day. ‘Sewing boots and shoes is likewise an activity of no small importance!’”
“‘That’s true, too,’ replied my host.”

“Before long, we – that’s to say, Louisa and I, – noticed that our love for one another wasn’t fruitless. We, however, became stronger in that mutual love. Louisa’s father attributed the portliness of her bust to her excessive consumption of sausages, and he advised her to consume them with moderation. He could have found out the real reason for this portliness at any moment, and we realized that at some point her pregnancy was due to come out in the open. And that’s the reason why I persuaded her to leave with me. And so we both ran off down the road to Warsaw, not without some supplies, but, it goes without saying, they didn’t consist only of sausages.”

“On that same small clearing where you saw a duel taking place, I came upon Don Alonzo and Pan Klopovitsky. We liked that place, and I arranged for us to eat breakfast there together with them. Louisa was on the point of preparing that meal for us, when suddenly Shafskopf caught up with us, and, in a very angry tone of voice, he challenged me to a duel. Knowing his skill in this craft, I readily yielded to his challenge, and I took up my position, when he suddenly remembered that, in his haste, he had forgotten to take any weapon with him. And the only thing that he had brought with him, to pass the time, was a pipe for smoking. We were both confused and embarrassed when Don Alonzo offered Shafskopf the use of his sword, and, at the same time, Pan Klopovitsky offered me the use of his sabre. Each of these men, having begun to sing the praises of their own respective weapons, touched upon the antiquity and nobility of their respective fatherlands, and it’s out of this jingoism that the brutal battle, which you were witnesses to, – and terminators of, – arose . . .”

“When the Frenchman had concluded the narrative account of his life story, Licorisa and Louisa came in to see us. The latter, awakening her father, announced that dinner was ready and that it was set up in the kitchen garden beneath the birch tree. ‘To the right of the table,’ she said to her father tenderly, ‘grow some beautiful heads of lettuce, and to the left of it, grow some fresh cucumbers.’ Shafskopf, enticed by this description, smiled, patted his daughter on her belly, and then went outside. All of us followed after him, even Pakhom, who had found some room at a distance away from us on the ridge. When everyone had eaten their fill, and when rubies started to play anew on Shafskopf’s cheeks, he said to us: ‘Listen to me as attentively as possible: I’m going to tell you about all of the events that have taken place in my life’.”

“My father, Johann Shafskopf, was the grandson of the distinguished Bartholomew Shafskopf, who used to make sausages that were so tasty that one German prince wanted to bestow upon him the title of General-Sausage Maker. But one day this prince ate such a large quantity of these sausages, and ate them so heartily, that he very nearly burst, and so he decided to postpone this fine honor that he had intended to bestow upon my father. My grandfather, Kaspar Shafskopf, who was likewise a renowned sausage maker, had to leave his fatherland and migrate to Russia due to certain circumstances: namely, the fact
that my grandmother, Charlotta, had run off somewhere with a certain chimney-
sweep. My father was likewise a sausage-maker, and he’s distinguished in history
for being the first person to found a German Club in Petersburg. When I had
grown up and could already make sausages smartly, my father died, and I became
a real sausage-maker. And soon thereafter, I got married to the daughter of a
certain German, who was likewise a sausage-maker. We now have an adult son
who is already a sausage-maker, and that daughter, the one whom I had intended
to marry off to kind Fritz, my apprentice, and the one who had taken it into her
head to make that worthless Frenchman the father of her child. I would have been
inconsolable if we wouldn’t have been able to have a son who would preserve,
within our distinguished family of Shafskopfs, the superb art of making sausages!
That’s all that I have to say here!”

CHISTYAKOV: “There’s not much that’s said here about your life! The only thing that
we’ve heard is ‘Shafskopf,’ ‘male sausage-maker,’ and ‘female sausage-maker!’ You’re
very sparing with words!”

THE GERMAN: “At least I’m fair and just, as is fitting and proper for a good German!
These gentlemen here (pointing at the Spaniard and the Pole) aren’t as candid as I am. Is
it possible to believe that a person could remain alive, living on only bread and water for
two whole days and nights? Oh, heavens no! Alonzo says that he and his father
experienced this in the course of an entire year! No, I can’t believe that!”

THE SPANIARD: “What’s much more surprising to me is the fact that your highly
respected grandfather was content, upon the flight of his wife, likewise to flee to Russia! A
Spaniard would never have left his homeland behind without first exacting a bloody
revenge!”

THE GERMAN: “Is it possible that he might have gone to become a monk, just as his
father had done? But we don’t have any monasteries!”

THE FRENCHMAN: “Bravo! I’m ready to bet that if you hadn’t become a sausage-
maker, then you would probably have become a distinguished Councilor of Justice!”

THE POLE: “Evidently, only my life story is not subject to doubt!”

THE SPANIARD: “Not in the least! I was the first one not to understand how it’s
possible for a man, whose eyes are healthy, not to be able to tell the difference, on a
moonlit night, between a man and a woman, and instead of tenderly kissing the lovely lips
of a beautiful woman, to be kissing the mustachioed lips of a colonel!!”

THE POLE: “I was in ecstasy, I was burning with the heat of sexual passion, – so it
wasn’t difficult for me to be deceived. But if an entire regiment of angels were to have
appeared, exhorting me to travel around the world for having thrashed some . . .”
THE SPANIARD: “What? You’re comparing pious matters that are pleasing to God with . . .”

CHISTYAKOV: “Quiet down, gentlemen, quiet down! No matter how many miracles you might have told us about, I could inform you about such a marvel of nature that you would gasp. All of it, however, would be true. I was an eyewitness to how a certain one-eyed, one-legged, lame man, as a result of receiving three or four blows to his back, was suddenly cured of all of these physical defects and started to run as fast as a deer.”

THE SPANIARD: “That truly is a marvel of nature! He’s not, by any chance, a Catholic, now is he?”

THE OTHERS: “What he did was incredible, no matter who he might be!”

SHAFSKOPF: “What was so incredible? The fact that he ran like a deer? God have mercy! Walking is a really difficult thing to do, and here he up and ran!”

THE PAUPER: “I shall demonstrate for you, kind sirs, the truth of Gavrilo Simonovich’s words. Wait here for me for a few minutes.”

“He got up and left the room.”

Chapter 71: Who in Tarnation Is This Pauper?

“Upon Pakhom’s departure, Don Alonzo took my side in this discussion about the marvel of nature that I had witnessed, defending my claim that such a marvel, – and even a greater marvel, – was indeed possible. The Frenchman manifestly took issue with this claim, the Pole somewhat doubted it, and the German, while not adhering to any set opinion concerning the one-legged man’s sudden cure, couldn’t understand how a man, a noble creature, could run like this, an action that, strictly speaking, is granted only to animals. At this point in our discussion, a young man, whose identity was unknown to us, entered the room. Dressed in a black kaftan, he was handsome, stately, and statuesque. The shadow of some secret sadness hovered over his face. The look on his face and his appearance showed that he was a member of the nobility who was dissatisfied with his fate. Without any evasiveness, he took a seat next to us, and he surprised us by uttering the following words: ‘Kind sirs! It would be very unfair of me, if I, after having received your trust and having heard about the most important incidents in the life of each and every one of you, were to start holding back information about myself. No! This I shall not do, all the more so because, having done you a small favor, I hope to receive, in return, some help on your part.’”

THE SPANIARD: “You did us a favor? Did you really know us at one point in time? And did you make cash contributions to save our souls from the fire of purgatory?”

THE POLE: “That doesn’t matter to a wealthy man! Except sometimes he did have to put in a good word when the honor of the Republic of Poland was suffering.”
CHISTYAKOV: “Neither the one, nor the other! He saved us from an internecine battle!”

“All eyes were fixed upon him distrustfully, but the young stranger announced that he himself was the erstwhile lame pauper. It was at this point that the gasps, the questions, and the signs of surprise all arose. It was especially our women, and the Frenchman, who exhibited a keen curiosity to know more about this man, and everyone promised to help, only insofar as that would be possible.”

“All right,’ he said, ‘I shall satisfy your curiosity.’”

“I can’t either boast about my lineage or be ashamed of it. My father, a wealthy, distinguished nobleman, having grown tired of the daily quarrels that he was having with his wife, a woman who, I can say without any flattery, was a veritable devil, took it into his head to divorce her. A considerable factor for taking this action was the fact that her younger daughter had been born during the three-year time period when he was away from home, the same time period when a son of his was born to Anyuta, their beautiful maid. You are looking at this son of his right in front of you at this very moment. When the divorce had been finalized, my father offered his hand in marriage to my mother, but she, contrary to the expectations held by all of the residents of the town, announced that she loved in him the man, and not the master. And that’s the reason why she didn’t wish to damage his honor by agreeing to marry him.”

“A noble heart such as hers was worthy of recompense. My father, putting aside the idea of marriage, supported the fruit of his love by means of charity: namely, he deposited fifty thousand rubles into a Moscow bank under the name Liubimov, – that’s what he named me. The period of my youth passed in the usual way. My mother passed away, and shortly thereafter my father as well became ill. He didn’t wish to offend the children of his former wife, so before his death he divided up his estate among them, leaving me to finish my upbringing and education under the direction of Count Dubinin, his best friend, and a man to whom my father had served as a benefactor when the count was still just an insignificant nobleman of no consequence.”

“He was a prideful, arrogant, and peculiar man!” I exclaimed.

“Oh, my God!” said Liubimov.

“Do you know him?”

“One of my friends had the honor of serving under him and was rewarded handsomely for his candor. Continue telling us your life story!”

“Out of Count Dubinin’s entire household, and out of his entire family, I didn’t find a sensible person, with the single exception of his kind, innocent, and
sensitive daughter, Sofia. Who could describe the flame of love that I felt toward her? Could her tender heart not help but answer me in kind?"

“Oh, my God, what happiness we enjoyed! But, alas, how short-lived that happiness was! On beautiful summer nights, while strolling down the tree-lined paths in the count’s vast garden, holding each other tightly in our arms, and stopping at every step to plant a passionate kiss upon each other’s lips, we were savoring heavenly delights. But, oh, – how fatal those kisses proved to be for us! Sofia was eighteen years old, and I was twenty, so how careful could we be expected to be on such occasions? On one of these late-night strolls, she was more tender than usual, and I was more passionate. And our innocence took flight.”

“‘What shall we do?’ whispered Sofia, sighing.”

“‘We shall see,’ I replied, likewise with a sigh.”

“We, however, no matter how young we were, tried in vain to hide our secret, – and it, perhaps, might have remained a secret forever, for Sofia had vowed not to marry anyone, except me, – but she noticed with horror that her face was, from time to time, becoming paler, and that her slender, lily-white waist was becoming more portly. The countess, or, better to say, Her Ladyship, the master’s mistress, noticed this as well, and she mentioned this to Sofia, but where was the young mother-to-be to go for help with such trivialities.”

“After this, turmoil arose in the household. Five different doctors were summoned to examine the patient and to certify her illness. The German doctor was the first one to come: he put on his glasses and drew his chair up so close to the patient’s face that his crane-like nose nearly made contact with it. She had dropsy, – and in order not to lose the young countess, he needed to drain some water right away. At this point, he, with an air of importance, pulled out of his pocket a set of drawing instruments, untied them, and began to choose some straight and curved knives.”

“‘For goodness sake!’ exclaimed the Russia doctor, ‘what are you planning to do?’”

“Sofia, frightened at the sight of these instruments, was benumbed. She fell onto her knees and, turning her arms in the direction of her parents, she exclaimed: ‘Father! Mother! Have mercy on me. This isn’t at all the illness that I have!’”

“‘Then what illness do you have? Tell us!’”

“‘I love someone passionately, and I’m passionately loved by him, – the fruit of this love is the reason why I’m feeling ill.’”
“There was a general silence. Sofia fell into a dead faint.”

“No one took the trouble to provide the unfortunate girl with the appropriate medical help that she needed. The Russian doctor, as a quick-witted person, took a vial of alcohol out of his pocket and placed it under Sofia’s nose. Little by little, she came around and began to sob.”

“‘Father!’ she said, ‘my beloved is a worthy man! Join our hands in marriage, – and we shall all be happy!’”

“‘Who is this monster?’ Count Dubinin asked.”

“‘If he is, as you say, a monster, then he’s the meekest and the dearest of monsters. He’s your charge, your pupil, – Liubimov!’”

“‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed the count with rage, raising his arms up in the air.”

“‘And why not?’ said the Russian doctor reassuringly and amicably.”

“‘You don’t know what a debt of honor is, doctor, and you’re advising me to agree to call my son a . . .’”

“‘But, count, is it really more in conformity with a debt of honor to see your grandson as being different from all of those children who are called . . .’”

“‘May God’s anger smite me! Before I live to see that state of affairs, the dishonorable mother shall perish and her child shall rot in her womb! I want . . .’”

“Everyone gasped. Poor Sofia took a deep breath, and instead of the expected second fainting spell, as a result of her aggravated sensibility, it was despair that overcame her. She stood up slowly, and with majesty, – bitterness flashed in her eyes like a piece of burning coal, – she uttered: ‘Go ahead and punish me, you infanticidal murderer! You didn’t feel the stirring inside my heart, which was committed to you with childlike obedience, so now go ahead and experience its bitterness! I was born to love boundlessly, or to hate just as immeasurably. You say that Liubimov is unworthy of my hand in marriage? Is that because I’m a countess? To whom is our entire household obliged for its dignity, its count-like nobility, its splendor, – if not his father, our honorable benefactor? Of what importance were our insignificant ancestors until a beneficial hand raised us out of their ashes?’”

“‘Enough!’ exclaimed the count. ‘That’s the last straw!’” He gave a sign: they seized the unfortunate and unhappy countess, and they dragged her away. Her wailing resounded through the rooms of the house.”
“I knew nothing about any of this, and I was wandering around in the garden, when the doctor ran up to me, briefly explained everything, and then exclaimed: ‘Run from here, you unfortunate and unhappy young man! Run from here without glancing back at your house, if you don’t wish to experience a greater disgrace than the one that Adam and Eve suffered, when they were expelled from Eden by means of a cherub’s fiery sword.’ Although, it’s true, you wouldn’t be expelled by a cherub, and not by means of a fiery sword, you would, nonetheless, be expelled, and expelled without any mercy!”

“‘My friend!’ he continued, ‘If you had been poor, I would have offered you a considerable sum of money, for I have the funds. But you yourself are wealthy, and so tomorrow morning you could withdraw as much money as you like from the interest accrued in your checking account. I wouldn’t advise you to withdraw any more money than that, however, for they might take a look there. My house, it’s true, is fairly large, and you would be able to have a good rest there, but I’m not asking you to do that. They might call on me before they go to the bank. And you know that counts have esteem for doctors at those times when they find in them the phrenitide [encephalitis] that comes from an excess of haughtiness, and from an inordinate amount of enthusiasm for the reverence of morbi comitiales [epilepsy]. What is there that violence can’t do? They would hide you in such a way that a hundred Rolands55 wouldn’t be able to get you released from captivity. At that point, go ahead and complain as much as you’d like about injustice! So then, God be with you! Here’s a purse filled with silver for you: this should suffice for food and lodging for you for a few days and nights. And tomorrow, after you get the money, flee from Moscow: run from here without looking back, and don’t come back here again anytime soon!’”

“He took me by the hand and led me out of the garden. On parting, he began to laugh and added: ‘This is how things go when the human species reproduces indiscriminately, without parsing the various breeds! That’s for sure! How can a stalwart fellow, a simple, insignificant man, who doesn’t come from the nobility, not help but examine who the woman is from whom he wishes to create a reproduction of himself? Does her dress have a long train, or does it only reach her knees? Does she wear a fourreau [sheath dress] or a zipun [peasant robe]? Is her head decorated in diamonds or in beads? Does she wear dresses that expose her bosom or conceal it? Does she know how to play the harp or how to harvest wheat? One needs to be discriminating. If His Highness, a most radiant count, produces an offspring from an impoverished noblewoman, a domestic maid, or a

54 In Genesis 3:24, which contains the Biblical account of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise, God is said to have stationed a cherub – along with a whirling sword of flame – on the east side of the Garden of Eden to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

55 This appears to be a reference to The Song of Roland [La Chanson de Roland], an 11th-century chanson de geste celebrating the exploits of the Frankish military leader Roland at the Battle of Roncevaux in 778, during the reign of Charlemagne.
portly peasant woman, – oh, that’s a different matter entirely! That child shall be exceedingly worthy and, with time, shall be at least half a nobleman. But if an impoverished, albeit worthy, man, who sometimes, – by means of his mind, his talent, or his industriousness, – provides his master, the landowner, with crosses and stars, were to dare to raise looks of love and direct them at his daughter, – oh, he’s an accursed man! How could one expect anything worthwhile from someone like this?”

“He departed, leaving me in a state of extreme anxiety, anguish, and sadness. How could I possibly leave Sofia? Especially in such a condition? But what was I to do? It was completely impossible for me to help her. To contemplate doing that would mean bringing myself to ruin and making her fate even more unbearable! Thus, following the advice of the genial doctor, I stocked up on money, and in three days I was far away from the capital. My journey around the world continued for five years, and the torment in my heart accompanied me everywhere that I went. I took part in bloody battles and in grueling military campaigns, I suffered hunger and cold, I walked through snowstorms and swamps, – and yet I remained alive, for an obscure impulse in my heart kept saying to me: ‘She’s alive!’”

“Being attracted to this impulse, I left military service and returned to Moscow. A hundred times I walked up to the house of Count Dubinin, – and a hundred times I avoided knocking at the door. I would think up ways of going inside, and shuddered at the mere imagining of what misfortunes awaited me. But, oh, the power of love, – and especially marital love! Despite all human rights and laws, I was Sofia’s spouse as far as the rights of omnipotent nature were concerned.”

“Battling with myself, I decided to climb over the garden fence and to keep watch there until such time as I caught sight of Sofia. This is precisely what I did do. However, I didn’t see her that night. I did the same thing the following night, as well as the night after that, and my impatience was reaching its limit. Finally, oh, heavens! On the fourth night I could see that the summerhouse in the garden was slightly illuminated. Trembling slightly, I approached the window and, – heavenly powers above! – I saw my Sofia, but in such a condition! She was standing with her back toward me, her hair, which was let down, was twined all over with roses. She was looking in a mirror: her face, by turns, was whitening and reddening. ‘Is it really possible,’ – I said to myself, – ‘that even my Sofia is just an ordinary woman? But, evidently, such is the covenant of Providence!’ In a state of frenzy, I opened the doors of the summerhouse, and I burst inside, which is why the candle standing on the table was extinguished, then I fell at the feet of my lover, embraced her knees, and exclaimed: ‘My lovely one! At last, I get to see you!’”

SHE (bursting into laughter): “What is this? Where has such delight come from? Your voice has completely changed!”
LIUBIMOV *(in extreme amazement)*: “What? You’re laughing? After such a long separation? Oh, just and righteous God in heaven!”

SHE *(jumping back)*: “Who are you?”

LIUBIMOV *(jumping to his feet)*: “What? Don’t you recognize your Liubimov?”

SHE: “Ah, yes, the unfortunate and unhappy one! And you’ve dared to come here and draw near to me. But love is a grand thing, and I do wish to help you. Has my voice really changed so much during the past five years? You see standing before you, – and you shall recognize me to be, – Dunyasha, Sofia’s maidservant. Right now, an elderly count is passionately in love with me, and this is where our trysts take place. He shall be coming here soon, and you shall perish if you stay here for long!”

“But where then is Sofia? Why is it that I haven’t been seeing her here for so many nights?”

“It’s very easy for me to answer that question! Right now, she’s more than five hundred *versts* away from here, staying in one of the count’s villages, the name of which I don’t remember, located close to Kiev from the direction of Poland. She’s been held there as a prisoner ever since the day that you fled from here. She’s being kept under watch by the three guards who are the most devoted and loyal to the count.”

“The house or castle is located in the forest, half a *verst* outside of the village, so that’s why you can find it easily. It’s considered uninhabited, for the food that’s brought to it there comes not from a nearby village, but from a distant one, and this delivery of foodstuffs is conducted with great secrecy. They warm up the food and they heat the rooms by means of braziers. Get over there as soon as possible: the count won’t be long in . . .”

“There was nothing more for me to wait for. I bid farewell to the flushed Dunyasha and ran out onto the street. Without reflecting at all upon this new revelation, I set off to search for the place where Sofia was imprisoned and, thanks to Dunyasha’s description of it, I soon found it. But, in order not to be recognized ahead of time by any of the count’s spies, I donned the clothing of a pauper. Oh, my Sofia! How much my heart has suffered during all of the time of your stay in this village!”

“Now, gentlemen, I need to ask for your help! There are three men in the castle, and there are six of us here. Is it really possible that we won’t get the better of them? May fear of punishment embolden them to courage, and may love and honor do the same for us!”
“All of us readily accepted his proposition. The German and the Spaniard, it’s true, were slightly opposed to the idea at first. The former, – from laziness; the latter, – from pangs of conscience. Soon, however, we all agreed to help our love-struck comrade, hoping to avoid bloodshed at all costs.”

“That very night was destined to be one of extraordinary occurrences.”
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Chapter 72: Night Owls

“The remainder of that memorable day was spent making preparations for the night-time bloodshed that lay ahead of us. Each and every one of us stocked up on weapons, and around midnight we all embarked on our crusade, marching to the castle. Pan Klopovitsky strode at the head of our column, holding on to the hilt of his sabre with one hand and twirling the tips of his mustache with the other. ‘God help them,’ he said, ‘if our foes take it into their heads to resist us. I know how to tame unruly creatures, and I shall not leave a single ear intact. And their noses shall catch it even more so!’ Behind him marched Don Alonzo, hanging his head down, looking crestfallen, and sighing heavily. The rest of us followed behind him, and behind everyone else followed Shafskopf, who was gasping for breath from fatigue. We hadn’t quite finished walking the two hundred sazhens up to the manor house, when the Pole suddenly stopped, looked intently along the edge of the forest, and quickly ran up to us, saying under his breath: ‘Gentlemen! Fellow cavaliers! I can see the silhouettes of some people moving around over there in the dark! Ooh! It’s nighttime, the time for us to liberate the maiden who’s being held captive! And we have located the place in the forest where Liubimov’s beloved is incarcerated. But wouldn’t it be better for us to postpone this battle to a later time?’ We all stared, wide-eyed, into the darkness, but we couldn’t see anything there. We advised the Pole to pluck up his courage. Suddenly, on the roof of the manor house, the sound of a howling eagle-owl resounded. Alonzo stopped in his tracks with a tremble, crossed himself, and said: ‘Oh! That’s a bad omen! The eagle-owl is an ominous bird!’ We tried to reassure the Spaniard with no less effort than we had made earlier with the Pole, and our conversations continued right up until the very moment when we arrived at the fence surrounding the castle. At this point, the Pole, who had already gone past the corner of the fence, rushed back toward us headlong, crying out: ‘Halloo! Halloo!’ Right behind him, coming from that same direction, could be seen the same man with a bald spot whom we had seen earlier. With him was another man, who was slightly younger than him. Seeing us, the two of them stopped in their tracks; they looked at one other, and then the man with a bald spot asked: ‘Gentlemen, who are you people?’”

LIUBIMOV: “We likewise would like to know who you people are!”

THE GERMAN: “We are all honest people, even though not all of us are Germans!”

THE SPANIARD: “We are true Christians, servants of God.”

CHISTYAKOV: “I know that you belong to this household. As people who are traveling across this country, we ask that you allow us to spend the night here.”

THE MAN WITH A BALD SPOT: “I’m extremely sorry that I must refuse this request being made by such worthy people. An evil spirit has taken up residence in this household, and it’s playing dirty tricks on strangers.”

“Upon saying this, he started to walk past us hurriedly and, just as he was drawing level with Shafskopf, he rushed at the latter from behind, grasped him by the neck, and hung
on to him with the weight of his entire body. The stranger wasn’t able to bear the weight, however, and so the two of them toppled to the ground. The Pole and the Spaniard threw themselves upon the recumbent foe, and grabbed hold of him. The German, meanwhile, sitting on the ground, clasped his belly in both of his hands and, catching his breath, uttered: ‘Victory!’ Liubimov and I likewise didn’t lose any time: we easily subdued the other adversary. And, obeying Liubimov’s orders, we tied the hands and feet of both of these men, and then we dragged them over to the fence.”

“Where are the keys?” Liubimov asked the men.”

“Have mercy on us! Let us go!” replied the man with a bald spot. ‘The keys to the gate are in my pocket.’”

“Are there still many of your men left in the castle?”

“Just two of them!”

“And women?”

“Not a single one!”

“You’re lying! If you wish to stay alive, tell me the truth!”

“At this point, Alonzo, in order to have something to do, started to exhort the prisoner not to hide the truth, ‘for,’ – he said, – ‘mendacious people shall not inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, but shall instead go down directly to the eternal flame in hell.’”

“The man with a bald spot, fearing that he would lose his life, or be forever in the eternal flame in hell, revealed that Sofia was alive, just as was her daughter, who had been born in this castle. This was quite enough. We left the two captives in the custody of Alonzo, who, with an air of importance, began to pace up and down near them with his sword drawn. We ourselves, meanwhile, flew to the gates of the castle, unlocked them, ascended discreetly to the courtyard, opened the doors, and, with the help of the lanterns that we had hidden, went down a narrow corridor. We knocked at the first doors that we came across, and, when they opened, we saw an old man and, together with him, a young man, both of whom, when they noticed us, jumped back. We took them prisoner as well and made them lead us to Sofia’s chambers. They were just about to try to refuse, but Klopovitsky, who could see that there was nothing to fear from them, waved his sabre in a terrifying manner and threatened to execute anyone who would resist. What are you going to do? They led us to the upper floor of the castle, and Liubimov soon fell into Sofia’s warm embrace. What amazement! What rapture! Sofia was a beautiful, tall woman with a Grecian face and a well-proportioned figure. With tears in her eyes, she handed her daughter over to her friend so that he could hold her in his arms. And he couldn’t have been any more joyful, seeing in person the fruit of his passionate love for Sofia. When the initial ecstasies had somewhat subsided, Sofia asked him: ‘By what
lucky circumstance am I able to see you today? And who are these traveling companions of yours? Is it possible that my father has softened?"

"'No,' Liubimov interrupted her, – ‘your father is as cruel now as he was before, and that’s the reason why he’s not worthy of having such a wonderful daughter as my priceless Sofia. Chance, – mere chance, – and these friends of mine, my fellow travelers, they are the ones who opened for me the doors to your cell. Let’s go right away, without tarrying any further. I shall lead you to my locales, and at that point all of the might of humankind shall not be strong enough to snatch you out of my arms!’"

"Sofia, with a feeling of bashfulness, offered one of her hands to her beloved, and took her young daughter’s hand with the other one. And we all left the castle, having strongly forbidden our guides to accompany us any farther. When we had come out beyond the fence, we could see that Don Alfonzo was keeping vigil wakefully and was saying to his captives at his leisure: ‘Cast your sorrow on the Lord, and this shall sustain you!’” We released them, and they sadly trudged back to the castle."

"Upon arriving back at our quarters, Shafskopf immediately ordered Louisa to go prepare something for us to eat and drink. During supper, everyone was laughing rather loudly at the knightly actions that Shafskopf had displayed while fighting against the bald man. He smiled and, – saying: ‘I’m a true German,’” – he continued to eat and to drink toasts to everyone. After supper, our ladies, – that’s to say, Licorisa, Louisa, Sofia, and her young daughter, – settled themselves down to sleep together in one room. The Frenchman tried in vain to convince us that it would be more comfortable and restful for him to sleep alongside his Louisa. Shafskopf threatened to strike him with a shoulder of veal, and so our lovebird had to drop his case, although Louisa did knit her brow and make a wry face, saying to her father: ‘How cold-blooded and composed you are! This is the reason why grandmother ran off with some baron.’” Louisa walked away in a fit of temper. Her father threw at her back the shoulder of veal that he was holding in his hands, and then he started to drink beer. This is how the evening ended."

"The next morning, Liubimov got married to his Sofia, – at this point in time, that was no longer difficult for him to do. Their faces were radiant with pleasure, a pleasure that was pure, innocent, and unsullied. All of us were in attendance at their wedding. Liubimov and I served, as before, as the musical virtuosos: he on his bandura, and I on my flute. The Frenchman and Louisa waltzed to the music, even though her corpulence hindered her dancing a little. Licorisa sang a few arias, and the praise that she was receiving for her singing was unpleasant for me to hear. Toward evening time, Liubimov’s carriage arrived. He had left it earlier in a neighboring village, and when we had all gathered together to bid farewell to the bride and groom, he took me aside and said: ‘My dear friend! You have participated actively in the successful effort to provide me with good fortune and happiness. I now have ample amounts of both of these things, while you don’t. Please accept my solemn pledge of everlasting friendship and gratitude. By accepting it, you shall augment the genuine pleasure that I’m enjoying at present.’” With these words, he slipped a large purse of gold coins into my hand, embraced me, took a seat in the carriage alongside Sofia and their daughter, and then drove off. The next day,
all of us put our affairs in order before going our separate ways. The Spaniard and the Pole set off to journey into the depths of Poland, where they could bow in reverence to the Catholic saints. Shafskopf, along with his daughter and her fiancé, galloped off to their place of residence. While Licorisa and I, traveling in Nikita’s humble troika, headed off in the direction of Warsaw, where we arrived, without any particular adventure occurring en route, in a relatively short period of time. I decided to pass Licorisa off as my wife.”

“Upon our arrival in the famous capital of the Polish Kingdom, we rented a small room and hired a cook, for I didn’t want to have Licorisa doing any damage to her dainty little hands by performing menial tasks of manual labor. Since I’m describing here only those things that touched upon me in any way, a description of cathedrals, squares, streets, and so on, shall be excluded from the scope of this narrative account of my past life. Having rested for a few days, after being on the road for such a long period of time, I decided to go learn something about Prince Latron’s abode, intending to go bow before him on the first public holiday, which was fast approaching. How much fuss and bustle Licorisa and I made over what robes I should wear for that event! How many arguments we had over taste! How many changes of mind occurred! By the appointed time, however, we had managed, somehow or other, to reach agreement. And I, – with a trembling heart and confused thoughts, – set off for the royal court of His Serene Highness. I said royal court intentionally here, because the homes of distinguished Polish grandees can indeed be called palaces.”

Chapter 73: The Entrance Hall of a Grandee

“Prince Latron’s entrance hall was filled with people of various ranks and titles. One could see here overcoats and kaftans of various colors and cuts. Some of the visitors distinguished themselves by the expensive attire that they were wearing, while others, on the contrary, stood there humbly and meekly in soiled rags. But all of them wore the faces of people who were visiting the baptismal font at Siloam, when they are expecting to witness the miraculous agitation of the healing water performed by an angel of God. I singled out, in particular, one short, elderly man, whose kaftan and hair were covered with down feathers. He got along very freely, and even haughtily, however, even with distinguished officers who had been awarded stars, orders, and other decorations for their government service. Such an observation gave birth inside me to a desire to find out more about this odd person, and so I asked about him to a man who was standing close to me. He uttered, with a deep sigh: ‘Oh! How is it that you don’t know of Mister Gadinsky, the secretary of His Serene Highness? All of Poland knows about him.’”

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56 The term “Pool of Siloam” refers to a number of rock-cut pools on the southern slope of the Wadi Hilweh, which is considered by some archaeologists to be the original site of Jerusalem. The Pool of Siloam became the starting point for pilgrims who made the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At the pools, these pilgrims underwent ritual purification, and often witnessed the healing power of the pool’s water, before bringing their sacrificial offerings to the temple.
“At this point, Gadinsky walked up to me and, looking to the side, asked: ‘What is it, my friend, that you need?’”

“Me?’ I replied with some bombast, ‘I need to meet with His Serene Highness!’”

“He’s busy! There are distinguished people here. One needs to allow them to see him first!”

“Allow me, at least, to see my sister Fiona.”

“What?’ he exclaimed with extreme delight. ‘Are you the brother of that worthy personage? I have the honor of congratulating you! Please allow me to embrace you! This shall be reported right away, this very minute.”

“We embraced one another, and he rushed off to the prince’s office. Soon thereafter, I was led inside his office and introduced to him. The prince looked me over, from head to toe, and then said to me affectionately: ‘I hope that you shall remain satisfied with me. Do you know how to speak Polish quite decently?”

“I hope that I know it well enough!”

“All right then! I need from you only efficiency and loyalty. You shall live in my home. Your responsibility in this new position shall be very simple: to wit, you are to keep an accurate, up-to-date list of the people who are visiting my chambers. And you aren’t to disregard not only a single significant word that they utter, but also a single significant glance that they take. And each morning you are to give me a written account of these visitations. It goes without saying, of course, that all of this must be kept secret from each visitor. Secretary! Show him his quarters!”

“Squirming in my attire under the ninety-degree heat, I left His Serene Highness’s office and forced my way through the crowd to get to Feklusha’s chambers, where I found that her entrance hall was likewise filled with distinguished people who were waiting to see her, but in this case they were women standing there, rather than men. She noticed me and rushed right over to embrace me, throwing her arms around my neck and exclaiming: ‘Oh! Are you all right, my dear brother?’”

“I thank you kindly, my dearest sister, for trying your best, body and soul, to keep the promise that you made to me. His Serene Highness has given me an excellent position on his staff!”

“Which one? Not, by any chance, Assistant to the Secretary?”

“Better than that!”

“Alas, not Secretary, surely?”
“‘Better even than that!’

“I can’t even begin to guess which one it is! It’s a good thing that you listened to me and came here. Well, come on now, tell me: what position have you been appointed to?”

“Commissionaire in His Serene Highness’s entrance hall!”

“She let loose such a guffaw that she nearly split her sides laughing.”

“My friend,” she uttered, ‘you need to get to know Prince Latron, and I shall describe him to you very faithfully and accurately. You can trust me, when I tell you that I know him thoroughly. He’s extremely ambitious; he can’t stand to have rivals; he likes people who are submissive, obedient, and obliging. Don’t contradict him, and accept with due gratitude the discharge of any assignment given to you. Have some patience and try to put up with him for a while, and you shall become convinced of the truth of my words. You don’t yet know the people here who serve in his court, but they’re a peculiar kind of creature. You can’t manage to get anything out of them without resorting to some ruse. One must have an estimate of the cost: that’s to say, one must crawl before one can soar, for soaring birds have sharp claws. Hold your tongue and say nothing about anything shameful that you see in them. What is it to you that the frog is going to mope and sulk? Go ahead and sing her praises! If a powerful fool utters some bon mot, even though that witty remark was found in some book and memorized, – act surprised, be dumbfounded, or even feign falling into a swoon, so staggered were you by the remark’s wittiness, – and then, following that, cry out that there’s not another sage like that to be found anywhere else in the whole wide world!’”

“Thus reasoned my eloquent spouse, and I took some solace in what she had to say. But Licorisa, when she heard about all of this, was very astounded. Where had all of our splendid plans for the future gone? I was afraid to turn down any of Prince Latron’s proposals. Somehow or other, I managed to calm Licorisa down and set her mind at rest. And I moved into the prince’s house, where I occupied the position of doorman.”

“For several days, I put my post into good working order with all due diligence. I looked sternly into the face of each and every visitor, and then I provided a meticulous description of his or her actions. The following morning, I gave the prince my composition, which, among other things, contained the following: ‘The first visitor to appear, before everyone else, was Colonel Trudovsky, who didn’t wish to say a single word to anybody. He did, however, sigh loudly. Then Chamberlain A---sky arrived, and he kicked up such a racket that he could be heard from three rooms away. He was angry that he hadn’t been given a pension.’ – And so on, and so forth.”

“The prince sang my praises, using these words: ‘Keep up the good work, my friend. You’ve made some stupid observations and remarks here, but soon you shall be smarter!’”
“I almost never managed to meet up with Licorisa (whom I didn’t dare to bring to my room), except perhaps only for a minute. She was bored, and I was tormented. But, remembering the admonition that my highly experienced Princess Fekla Sidorovna had made, I decided to experience for myself what patience can do. And that’s the reason why, despite Licorisa’s requests, I continued to perform my probationary responsibilities very diligently. It seems that this was noticed, for when I appeared in the entrance hall for duty, everybody, – people both large and small, people both secular and ecclesiastical, – would make way for me to pass, and they would glance at me from time to time with envy. The secretary himself, Gadinsky, would bow in my direction lower than he would bow to the gray-haired colonel, whom I would see in the entrance hall each morning. He would come to solicit help in receiving a pension for himself. But since he didn’t deserve to receive a pension, – that’s to say, since he was impoverished, – on the strength of all of the laws and rights, he didn’t receive anything. It’s clearly stated in the statutes: ‘A pension shall be given to a person who is propertied and well-off; and it shall be more than enough for him to live on, with money to spare; but for an indigent person, if it seems that he does have some property, it shall be taken away from him.’

“Be that as it may, the old colonel’s outward appearance seemed pitiful to me. He would be standing there, with his arms folded crosswise on his chest, he would bow abjectly to Mister Gadinsky, with cap in hand, but the latter, it seemed, wouldn’t even acknowledge his presence. The venerable old man would sigh and lift his teary eyes up toward the heavens above.”

“Although I was included in the number of courtiers authorized entry into the court, I was deceived on several occasions by people who had falsified their appearance. And that’s the reason why, in the first few minutes of impulsiveness, I swore that I would abandon the path of virtue, which had been so unprofitable for me. The innate sense of humanity and conscience inside me, however, cried out: ‘Help me, if you can!’ One day, while returning home from His Serene Highness’s office, I walked up to my old man, and, giving him a sign to follow behind me, I led him to my bedchamber and began the following conversation with him there:

CHISTYAKOV: “My dear sir! You shall, of course, forgive me for having the audacity, as a man who’s without any rank or title, to have a brief conversation with you. I myself have been unfortunate and unhappy, and that’s why I have an irresistible urge to help others, if I can find the means to do that. Your outward appearance indicates that you’re dissatisfied with your fate. Feel free to explain yourself openly: you see before you a man who had never been a doorman before and a man whose past life has been filled with events that reflect the whims of fate. Tell me: what is it that you have need of?”

THE OLD COLONEL (wiping away tears): “For three whole years now, I have been standing in Prince Latron’s entrance hall each morning. And, up until now, you have been the first person who has afforded me the courtesy of uttering a kind word. His Serene Highness’s last kitchen boy boasts of having made a rude comment to a poor colonel, who was seeking some kindness and charity from their master! You ask what it is that I have need of? Speaking frankly: I need a piece of bread!”
CHISTYAKOV: “With your rank and title? That’s astonishing!”

THE OLD COLONEL: “I don’t take offense at your astonishment, but I would tell you just as candidly that neither cards, nor wine, nor women are what deprived me of sustenance. You seem to me to be a good-hearted person, but it’s a pity that you yourself, as can be seen, are powerless.”

CHISTYAKOV (assuming a dignified air): “Put your trust in God! I have friends in high places who are on intimate terms with His Serene Highness!”

THE OLD COLONEL (taking a step back): “You do? And yet you serve in such a post.”

CHISTYAKOV: “That doesn’t matter! Sometimes one must pass through the muddiest swamp in order to reach a beautiful meadow.”

THE OLD COLONEL: “You are more experienced than your years would indicate!”

CHISTYAKOV: “Misfortune and unhappiness are excellent teachers! But tell me, to what extent are you poor?”

THE OLD COLONEL: “To such an extent that, if today they were no longer to believe in debt, as they did yesterday, then by tomorrow morning, I, my elderly wife, my unfortunate and unhappy daughter, and my decrepit servant would all end our unfortunate and unhappy lives, passing away due to starvation.”

CHISTYAKOV (truly touched): “Merciful God in heaven! Is it really possible, with a family such as the one that you have, not to have any hope? Your Gracious Majesty! I sincerely beseech you not to be angry with me. Make me your benefactor by accepting this small amount of financial assistance!”

“With these words, I rushed over to my suitcase, and I took out a small purse, for the main part of our funds were with Licorisa. I gave that small purse to the colonel, who stood there motionless for some time. Then, after shedding some tears and taking the financial help that had been offered to him, he said to me, pointing up to the sky, ‘Oh, just and righteous Father, I would render this up to you, but I don’t have the strength to do that.’ ‘Kindly wait a moment!’ I said. ‘Having learned, in short, the essence of the matter, I shall not let the opportunity slip of making an effort to help you even more!’” He left, showering me with blessings.”

“My first order of business was to rush over to see Feklusha. I eloquently described to her the situation that this impoverished, but deserving, family now found itself in, and I asked for her to intercede on their behalf. Although I wasn’t myself such a great elocutionist or such an eloquent orator, a simple description of their poverty might soften her heart, one that had once suffered in a similar situation. Feklusha swore that she
would, for a second time, use all of the powers at the disposal of her body and soul to help Colonel Trudovsky, and in that way conceal from God’s view, somehow or other, the stains of her not sinless past life. She asked me to give her three days to accomplish this mission, and I readily agreed, presupposing that this period of time wouldn’t mean anything compared to the time that the colonel had wasted, standing idly in the entrance hall while dealing with trifles.”

“I appeared at the quarters of my patroness at the time that we had agreed upon. She received me in an affectionate manner and said, with a cheerful look on her face: ‘Isn’t it the truth, Gavrilo Simonovich, that beauty and art mean more than intellect and services rendered? In three days, I succeeded in doing something that a man of meritorious service wouldn’t have been able to complete in three whole years.’”

“‘But how did you manage to do it?’ I exclaimed with delight. ‘Tell me, my darling! Or do you indeed possess a magical belt? And don’t services and contributions by themselves, rendered without any sneakiness, any deception, any chance, and any pulling of strings, have any force here at the court? And don’t they receive the due reward that they deserve?’”

“‘Hardly ever is that the case,’ she replied, ‘but please do sit down and listen to what I have to say to you!’”

“At this point, she told me the following: ‘The first day following your intercession on behalf of Colonel Trudovsky, I made use of the artistry of my inborn charms to advance the greatest possible embellishment of their case. When His Serene Highness came by to see me, he was beside himself from surprise about my appearance. I looked to him like a nymph or a goddess. I was breathing languorously, lovingly, and the prince melted. Amidst the rapture and the joy, he said to me: ‘It has been a long time since you have asked me for any favors. Tell me, what do you need?’ ‘Oh, Your Serene Highness,’ I replied with a heavy sigh, ‘if only I were bold enough to ask.’ ‘It’s okay,’ he objected, ‘Go ahead and explain yourself! I suppose that what you need is some necklace, bracelet, shawl, and other trifles of that sort?’ ‘No,’ I replied. ‘I don’t need anything of that sort right now. I have everything that I need thanks to your magnanimity, but if you wish to make me happy, then apply yourself to the acquisition of a pension for my uncle on my mother’s side of the family, – Colonel Trudovsky!’”

“He was surprised. ‘What? Trudovsky is an uncle of yours? And, up until now, you haven’t called this to mind?’ ‘I didn’t dare to! He, as is evident, has fallen into disfavor with you, because for three years now he has been standing in vain in your entrance hall!’ ‘That’s true,’ the prince interrupted her, ‘he was represented to me, slanderously it seems, as a highly evil and nasty man, but now, just as soon as I have discovered that he’s your uncle, the matter is settled. What need have I to consider whether he’s a good man or a bad one? It’s enough for me that you are requesting that I intercede for him!’” I was drowning in a sea of tears of gratitude. It goes without saying, of course, what kind of tears those were, since they were being shed over a man whom I had never seen in my life before.”
“The prince continued: ‘But since, due to certain circumstances, I don’t wish to disturb the princess with a request concerning Trudovsky, in compensation for his merits, consisting of his close kinship with you, I shall allocate a pension for him out of my own personal income. This way no one would dare to reproach me, but in the meantime I shall endeavor to place him in some post. For the time being, here’s a purse with a hundred gold pieces for you to give to your uncle.’” Then he left. ‘Now, my dear friend, I’m entrusting you to take these funds to your client. You deserve to witness the grateful supplication from a family that has just been made happy!’”

“I didn’t understand my feelings at the time. I don’t know whether it was the touching character traits exhibited by my benefactress spouse, whether it was the tender look, filled with trust, on her face, or whether it was the sweet tone of voice with which she said ‘my dear friend!’ – I don’t know which of these things was the reason. I only know that my heart was filled to overflowing with tenderness and affection, and that I fell into her warm embrace, planting a fiery kiss on her blazing lips, which were afire with passion. She suddenly became rigid, as if she were rooted to the spot. Her eyes were wandering all over. A certain savagery spread across her entire face, and her bosom was agitated. I took fright and, quickly taking a step back, I asked with consternation: ‘What’s wrong with you, my darling?’ ‘Darling!’ she said, breaking into tears and bawling, as she fell onto the sofa in a swoon, covering her face with her hands. I wanted to rush right over to help her, but, hearing the sound of a male footstep in the adjacent room, I quickly withdrew, not wishing to meet up with Prince Latron. I hurried over to Trudovsky’s lodgings, which I found after a considerable search.”

Chapter 74: A Turbid Source

“When I entered his room, I found that old man Trudovsky was sitting in a corner and reading an akathist hymn to his guardian angel.57 An elderly woman, apparently his wife, was darning decrepit underwear. Their daughter, Marya, who was as beautiful as Licorisa, but more innocent, was sitting at a lace-frame, embroidering with silk and gold the hem for a dress for some maiden who was living as a kept woman, supported financially by a certain count, who was her lover. As soon as the old man saw me, he jumped up quickly from his seat and exclaimed: ‘There he is! There’s our benefactor!’ Then he rushed over to embrace me. His cap fell off of his head, but he, in his delight over seeing me, didn’t notice this, and he cheerfully trampled it underfoot as he kept repeating over and over again: ‘A magnanimous man!’ His old, senile wife, who had been crushed by fate, as was evident in every look on her face and in every feature of her face, likewise favored me with an embrace, pressing her blue lips to my reddening cheek. Only the bashful Marya stood there motionless, lowering her beautiful eyes down to the

57 The akathist hymn is a profound, devotional poem that sings the praises of the Holy Mother and the Ever-Virgin Mary. It is one of the most beloved services in the Orthodox Church. Indeed, it has proven to be so popular in the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church that many other hymns have been written following in its format (as in the present instance, where Trudovsky addresses an akathist hymn to his guardian angel).
ground. This was a genuine image of innocence. Feklusha! Licorisa! How can your feminine charms, so embellished by artifice, compare with those of simple, unadorned nature?"

“I was given a seat, and I said to the colonel, with a look of satisfaction on my face: ‘Kind sir! I have succeeded this time in doing a little something for you!’”

“At this point, I handed him the purse and told him of the prince’s intentions to discuss the possibility of a pension and a post for him. The old man nearly lost his mind! He was weeping and praying, and, changing his seat and his position a hundred times over. He exclaimed at the top of his lungs: ‘Aha! My wife! My daughter! Wasn’t I speaking the truth when I told you that true services and contributions rendered, true merits and virtues exhibited, shall never remain unrewarded! You didn’t believe me, but now you can see for yourself that I was indeed speaking the truth!’”

“He ordered that two bottles of wine be brought out, and when we had emptied both bottles in celebration, and a crimson flush had begun to sparkle on Trudovsky’s face, he ordered that yet another bottle be brought to us. And, placing his cap aslant on his head, he asked me: ‘Tell me, please, how did it happen that an old, meritorious colonel like me spent three years making the rounds of entrance halls, and it was all in vain, while you, being no older than (but let us leave that alone) . . . were able to succeed in getting so much accomplished during such a short period of time? Explain to me, please, by means of what supernatural miracle did that occur? Oh, true services and contributions rendered! Oh, true merits and virtues exhibited!’”

CHISTYAKOV (touchily): “I have already told you that I had friends who did this at my request. By the way, you yourself have experienced how the services and contributions that you rendered, as well as the merits and virtues that you exhibited, were kept under wraps, hidden away for three years, and they would scarcely ever have arisen.”

COLONEL TRUDOVSKY: “What? Do you really mean to say that you yourself haven’t seen that they did indeed arise?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I did see that, it’s true, but they didn’t arise all by themselves! I had to raise the issue, and for that I had to take advantage of the right opportunity and make an effort to address earnest requests to those people who are on intimate terms with His Serene Highness!”

COLONEL TRUDOVSKY: “I humbly request that you make known to me the names of these people, in order that I might render thanks to them in a way that’s suitably in measure with the act of beneficence that they have rendered on my behalf!”

CHISTYAKOV (majestically): “You’re obliged to my sibling, my full sister Fiona, for everything!”
COLONEL TRUDOVSKY (standing up and taking a step back): “What? The same sister who boasts of the dishonor that she has brought upon herself and her family by occupying the position of concubine for His Serene Highness? And so I’m obliged to such a creature as this?”

“I was extremely confused and embarrassed, not knowing what to say in response to this salutation. His wife and daughter weren’t in any better a position than I was: they both were directing imploring looks at us, but the colonel was as firm and steadfast as a hundred-year-old oak tree.”

“Oh, just and righteous God!” he appealed, throwing off his cap and raising his eyes and his arms up to the heavens, ‘Oh, righteous and merciful God! I served the king and the fatherland for fifty years. I endured both intense heat and severe cold, both hunger and thirst, – and I didn’t murmur or grumble in complaint. I also received severe wounds, and I suffered from them, – and yet I didn’t murmur or grumble in complaint. After old age had exhausted all of my strength, and I could no longer continue my service with any useful benefit for the fatherland, I asked for a mere crust of bread for myself, – I asked for the basic means of subsistence and support, – and not receiving that, I would be hungry for a whole day, and then for a full second day. And yet I didn’t murmur or grumble in complaint. I saw the members of my family moaning and groaning, and my heart ached for them, in response to the distressing situation that I had put them in, – and yet I didn’t murmur or grumble in complaint. Now hear, omni-benevolent God, the first wailing of dispirited grief, and hear my murmur and grumble as I inquire of You: where is Your justice? During my entire lifetime I have striven to search for true honor. For what reason shall the end of my days be stained, spotted with the alms given by a concubine? Was my life really one that was devoted to princes and whoremongers? Great God Almighty! Examine and consider my case, – and please be just!”

“When he had concluded his speech, and, moreover, finished it with such a look on his face and such a tone in his voice, from which I nearly fainted, he shed bitter tears. Then, upon sitting down, with one hand he covered his eyes with his cap and with the other hand he extended out to me the unfortunate purse, saying: ‘Sire! Take this money back. Deliver it to your sister and tell her that poor Trudovsky would sooner agree to see his family members suffer from hunger, to see them die of thirst, than to ladle out even a tiny drop of water that comes from such a turbid source. When I’m gone, all of those people who knew me, – good and kind people, it goes without saying, – shall say of me: ‘He was very poor, but he was honest and honorable. He deserved a better fate. Blessed be his memory!’ This would be the very best gravestone for me!’”

“I grabbed the purse with a convulsive movement of my hand, tore myself away from his modest hut, and, without turning to look back, broke into a run toward Licorisa’s quarters, for they were closer than our palace. The frost was stinging my skin, my legs were giving way beneath me, sweat was pouring off of me thick and fast, my eyes were motionless, and my lips were trembling. All of those people who encountered me were hurrying away from me, running off to the side of the street, as if they were fleeing from a rabid dog. Vexation, anger, and spite were agitating my bosom. What could be more
intolerable, when one wishes to do a favor for someone else, than to receive insulting contempt rather than the recompense that one had expected! Calming down a bit, I started to walk more slowly and to discuss the situation with myself: ‘How long, Prince Gavriilo Simonovich, are you going to be an inexperienced madman? How long are you going to fail to learn, even if only a little, about the human heart? Could you really not see in Trudovsky, from the very first words that he spoke, a man who is, perhaps, honest and honorable, but also extremely obstinate and inveterate in his principles? What shame! What defamation! I didn’t dare, however, to contradict him. I couldn’t utter a single word! And as for when he became so angry at my sister: what would he have said, if he had known that the imaginary Fiona is my wife and that I traffic in her feminine charms? He, most likely, would have consigned me and her to eternal damnation, – and, truth be told, that’s what we deserve!”

“At this point, I fell to thinking long and hard, but suddenly I remembered the advice that was given to me by Savva Trifonovich in his wine cellar. I ran through his words lightly, then I cheered up and exclaimed joyfully: ‘That’s precisely it! Trudovsky’s behavior stems not from a strict and severe virtue, but rather from an unforgiving obstinacy, a pedantic haughtiness, and an excessive rudeness. If my wife and I, and our children, were wasting away from hunger, and someone were to give us some bread, – what need would I have to know who it was that provided this for us: what concern is it of mine whether it was a man, a woman, or a maiden? whether she was innocent or criminal? Someone is giving me the means to assuage my hunger, and that’s enough for me. He speaks about a turbid source. Undoubtedly, it’s unpleasant to slake my thirst with water that comes from such a source, but what am I to do when there’s no clean water anywhere nearby? If I go search for some, then it’s possible, after moving far away from the turbid source, that I would die from thirst. Wouldn’t this be considered an act of suicide? And this terrible sin would even be tripled by the murder of my wife and our children. A turbid source! Such importance! Why, if all of the people in the world were to go search for clean water, then probably two thirds of them, if not three fourths, would perish. And, what’s more, why did our Redeemer allow the fornicatress58 to anoint His feet with myrrh, – no matter how much Judas, like Trudovsky, reproached her for doing so? A turbid source? No, apparently you haven’t yet felt very thirsty; otherwise you would drink your fill, even if the water came from the most turbid of sources!’”

“Having reasoned in such a sound and thorough manner, I became completely composed and relaxed. And when I arrived at Licorisa’s lodgings, I told her this wonderful story. She, shaking her head, said to me: ‘Trudovsky didn’t reason properly in this matter. If you examine all of the sources of water strictly, you shall find some level of turbidity in each and every one of them, even if only temporarily! Is there, in the whole wide world,

58 When Chistyakov mentions that Christ allowed a “fornicatress” to anoint his feet with myrrh, he is apparently referring to Mary Magdalene (Mary of Magdala), a former prostitute who became one of the earliest followers of Jesus of Nazareth. According to the Bible, she traveled with Jesus, witnessed his crucifixion, and was one of the first people to learn of his resurrection. She is identified as the beloved friend of Jesus who anointed his feet with myrrh in her brother’s home as a sign of her gratitude for raising Lazarus from the dead.
even one source of water that’s truly clean?’” Such a wise observation on Licorisa’s part only confirmed my opinion that we should simply try to catch everything that flows along a river, without analyzing what kind of water source feeds that river, – large or small, shallow or deep, narrow or broad. Without analyzing whether fragrant roses or foul-smelling grass bloom along its banks.”

“With these thoughts fresh in my mind, I arrived at Feklusha’s quarters, where I recounted for her, with great enthusiasm, the insult that Trudovsky had hurled upon her, not forgetting to make mention, a thousand times over, of the turbid source with the most expressive and long-drawn-out tone of voice.”

“Feklusha’s eyes were flashing like two scorchingly hot coals, while I, in order to set her on fire even more, raised my voice and said: ‘Oh, if only I had been in your place!’” She became pensive, – and so did I. Shortly thereafter, suddenly remembering something, I said to her: ‘My darling Feklusha! But he shall, nevertheless, receive the reward that was allocated to him and the promised pension.’”

“At the first words that I spoke, Feklusha let her head fall upon my bosom, and, just as she had done earlier, she broke into tears and, clasping me closely to herself, she uttered weakly: ‘Prince! Don’t call me by such names. You’re tearing my heart apart. There was a lovely time when I, unashamedly, used to admire such names, but nowadays . . . nowadays . . . Oh! How appropriately I’m being punished, and I’m being made to feel even more unfortunate and unhappy by the fact that my conscience is reproaching me.’”

“At this point, she squeezed me even more tightly than before in her warm embrace.”

“I was at a loss as to what I should do, so troubled were my feelings due to the situation that I presently found myself in, and to my recollection of that similar episode that had occurred shortly before this, when suddenly a threatening voice roused us from our reverie: ‘What’s the meaning of this?’”

“We shuddered, we leapt to our feet, and both of us became petrified, seeing before us Prince Latron, sparkling with his crosses and diamond stars. I didn’t know what to do. Feklusha, – oh, the inimitable force of habit! – Feklusha, with downcast eyes and a bashful blush on her cheeks, said, while picking at her fingers: ‘Your Serene Highness! I stand before you extremely guilty. I deceived you!’”

CHISTYAKOV (under his breath): “The perfidious woman! I’m done for! This is vengeance for the sake of vengeance.”

PRINCE LATRON: “What’s going on here? It must be true, for I love her.”

FEKLUSHA: “My brother was asking me to put in a good word for our uncle, Colonel Trudovsky. He was inclined to do this as a result of the pleading that was coming from the colonel’s wife and their daughter. Your Serene Highness yielded to my petition and served as its benefactor. No matter how much I wanted to leave the house and get outside today, I commissioned my brother to bring to him a purse with money inside it.
But alas! He found him to be in an extreme fit of rage. Hearing that I was interceding on his behalf with Your Serene Highness, he treated me very poorly, using highly abusive language and reproaching me for the love that I bore you. After throwing the purse on the floor, he trampled upon it with his feet, and he ordered my brother to make it known to me that I should watch out for him, for he would sooner pierce me through with a sword than witness his sister’s daughter in the warm embraces of a villainous womanizer. And here is the purse.”

**Prince Latron** (*having turned pale*): “And the worm dared to do that! I know what needs to be done.”

“He stormed out of there in a state of great anger, and that very same day, toward evening time, some considerably strange events occurred. It was announced that I was being appointed His Serene Highness’s Secretary. Trudovsky, meanwhile, was in hiding, God knows where. Mister Gadinsky congratulated me on my appointment with the sort of look on his face that a raven would have when looking at another raven who had just snatched the booty out of his claws. I pretended, however, that I believed the benevolence and the favor that he was showing toward me.”

“Toward evening time, however, when Gadinsky and I got into a brief conversation at a friendly refectory, I couldn’t refrain from making the following exclamation: ‘The unfortunate old man, his poor wife, and their pitiful daughter! What shall become of you three now? Now you shall probably shed some bitter tears over an obstinate husband and father, who wouldn’t agree to drink water from a turbid source and who is forcing you to die! It’s only fitting that you’re weeping! Why would you wish to establish your own laws, overthrowing the most ancient ones? This is a sacrilege! The ancient wise men used to say: ‘Endeavor to be that which you wish to appear to be!’ Fine! But they, knowing the rights of humankind and the laws of nature, by no means said: ‘Endeavor to appear to be that which you indeed are!’ Oh, people, people! Oh, turbid sources!’”

**Chapter 75: Oh, My God! Something Shall Come of This**

“Having received the rank and title of Secretary, I was reborn. The many experiences that I had undergone in my life, whereby I would get into trouble while wishing to do a good deed for someone, had enlightened me. Even this latest incident had assisted in educating me quite a lot. Gadinsky had come to like me, or at least he gave the appearance that he did, perhaps because he was afraid of offending the highly distinguished brother of the highly helpful Fiona.”

“Whatsoever the case may be, I was very pleased with myself, and with His Serene Highness, who from day to day was becoming more and more gracious toward me. And, consequently, all of those people who were visiting his entrance hall began bending over lower and lower in front of me, while I, for my part, began straightening myself up higher and higher as my confidence grew. One evening, while Gadinsky and I, at our leisure, were chatting in a friendly way over goblets of champagne, he thrust his hands into his pockets, stretched out in his armchair, and then said to me, with an air of importance:
‘My friend! You can see that I’m fond of you, and that’s the reason why, since you’re still new in this post, while I’m already turning gray, as a result of serving in close proximity to members of the nobility, I’m able to give you a bit of advice, and I swear that it shall be the wisest bit of advice that you shall ever receive. Please be so kind as to listen carefully to what I have to say:

1st) Consider every distinguished person whom you are serving to be higher than any mere mortal. If your conscience is stubborn and persistent, then try to curb it as much as possible. Endeavor to bow down to him in as low and as humiliating a manner as possible, without breaking your back in two. Always extol him with praises, both to his face and in his absence. And if you find the opportunity, assure him that, even in your sleep, you dream in his honor.

2nd) May God help you if you mention in passing that you’re serving only the fatherland! Nonsense! The fatherland, just like God, doesn’t send its gifts to you directly. Accessible intercessors are necessary everywhere.

3rd) Perish the thought of using ancient words, which nowadays are considered dilapidated and decrepit, and thus have gone almost completely out of circulation. These words are as follows: virtue, charity, conscience, meekness, and others like them. I think that these words shall soon be completely cast out of the lexicons of all of the languages in the world, and, what’s more, they shall be cast out efficiently and effectively. Besides a beggar’s pouch, there’s nothing to be gained, and no profit to be made, from using them.

4th) Judging by your present situation, I would say that you’re no longer entirely a novice in the world. I’m speaking about the fact that you have avoided the unpardonable stupidity to which even intelligent people are sometimes susceptible to: that’s to say, you haven’t skimped on the feminine charms of your sister Fiona. So, my friend! Wives, sisters, daughters, and nieces have sometimes taken ensigns and made kings out of them. What do you think: what would I have turned out to be, if my wife, by some stroke of especial good fortune, hadn’t been favored to receive some special salutations from His Serene Highness? What significance would the prince himself have had if not for our princess! My friend! If someone who’s powerful, wealthy, and distinguished were to soil himself in the mud, everyone would call him His Serene Highness. That’s simply the way things are. Look at how our prince, out of a peculiar brand of capriciousness, sometimes trudges along on foot in the palace during the month of October; meanwhile, a magnificent gilded carriage, complete with hajduks, equestrians, and footmen, follows close behind him. Wouldn’t each and every one of us consider it an honor were our prince to nod his head in our direction and say: ‘Oh! It’s you!’ ‘Just as soon as you, Gavrilo Simonovich, start to act in accord with this advice, you shall become a very successful man. Otherwise, you have only yourself to blame.’”

“With these words, Gadinsky concluded his didactic little speech filled with moralizing advice. I gave him my word that I would follow these pious rules of behavior. And,
truly, do I myself not understand how I became a highly insensitive man? I would look calmly into the eyes of the poor widow who was shedding tears right in front of me. Her moans and sighs would not move me. It’s also true that just as soon as I began to soften and to be mollified, the reliable, observant view of my friend, Gadinsky, would fortify me. ‘Don’t be timid,’ he would often tell me, ‘tears are very deceptive. When you’re moved by them, you yourself must weep for a short while.’” I listened to his thoughtful, serious speeches and followed his advice: I became as firm and steadfast as flint.”

“In this way, I spent around two years serving on the prince’s staff, and my eminence rose. I’m not going to describe for you here all of the impertinent and insolent things that I said or the unjust, even unlawful, things that I did.”

“The prince blindly followed our advice, and we even more blindly followed the lure of our profits. My purse filled up rapidly, yet I incessantly became even greedier for gold.”

“However, following the narrative thread of events in my past life, I’m obliged to reveal some of them that had more of an influence on my destiny than did others.”

“I can begin by saying that it wasn’t in vain that Fekla Sidorovna promised me, while we were still in Moscow, to use all of her abilities and talents, of both body and soul, in order to help me attain a prominent position in society and success in life. Her good deeds were innumerable, and, what’s more, how could His Serene Highness, Prince Latron, refuse the highly experienced Fiona in anything, when His Lordship, Prince Chistyakov, wasn’t able to do the same with the simple country girl Feklusha? But, oh, what a difference there was between these two women! One thing that seemed somewhat strange to me was the fact that already a long time ago I had begun to notice some sort of bashfulness, timidity, and extreme feeling of embarrassment on her part when I fondled her with brotherly caresses. Sometimes she would push me away and quickly withdraw in tears, but at other times she would clasp me to her bosom with an ardor that wasn’t at all sisterly, and then she would become embarrassed, lower her eyes, and fall silent.”

“One day, while I was sitting in my room, dreaming up what punishment to set in motion in the case of a guilty, but wealthy and, – at that point in time, – generous rogue, the door opened and in walked Feklusha. After we had discussed the first few insignificant topics of conversation, I shared with her my conjectures about the sorrow that she was hiding and asked her to tell me what was the reason for that sorrow.”

“‘My friend,’ she said to me with tears in her eyes, ‘we have been living together for a long time, but up until now I haven’t revealed to you the nature of those adventures that I experienced during that unfortunate period of time in my life when I abandoned our little shack in Falaleevka. If it’s not too burdensome for you, I shall reveal them to you now. For a terrible weight lies upon my heart, and I feel that I shall die, if I don’t tell you everything.’”

“I bent forward slightly, hoping that I wouldn’t be greatly saddened, hearing about her infidelities, and she related the following to me:”
“Recalling these earlier circumstances, I can easily guess that the beginning of my adventures is already known to you, as a man who is acquainted with Prince Svetlozarov, my first seducer. This traitor held me captive for several days only out of curiosity alone, in order to find out how women from the Russian countryside make love. This scoundrel delivered me into the hands of an old tax farmer named Perevertov. If I had bored my first lover, then my second lover bored me much more so. His mind was filled with ideas for strange escapades, and sometimes he demanded sexual favors that even the most dishonorable of women wouldn’t willingly agree to perform. Seeing that I wasn’t obeying him, he consigned me to be educated by his obliging tradeswoman, who surpassed him in devising the greatest possible follies and absurdities. And no matter how much I had already become corrupted in my heart, living with him nonetheless bored me, the more so because a certain landowner’s son had fallen in love with me. His wealthy father had sent him away to Moscow to finish his education. The seventeen-year-old lad’s hofmeister, a German by birth, served as an intermediary in our house, and all three of us would gallop off together to the capital.”

“Having lived in Moscow for a considerable period of time, I hadn’t noticed that my lover was beginning to grow cold toward me. All of my cares were focused on settling my account with the hofmeister, paying him, in good order, half of the income that I was receiving in exchange for providing my feminine charms. Under this agreement, he would keep our affair secret from my sweetheart’s father, and he would support his ward’s love for me. You should know that, when I first arrived in the capital, I changed my name and started to be called Fiona. Fate, whose workings are incomprehensible to us, acquainted me with Mistress Amoureuse, a Frenchwoman who lived not far from us and who earned her living by trading the most lucrative commodity that isn’t yet considered contraband in Russia: namely, she bought up young peasant girls, taught them various crafts, skills, and branches of knowledge, as well as music, singing, and dancing, depending on the abilities and talents of each girl, and afterwards, when these girls had reached the age of maidenhood, and when Miss Amoureuse had spent a sufficient amount of time haggling over the price for the purchase of their feminine charms, she would sell them into slavery, subjugating them to the whims of old, wealthy satyrs. Since she didn’t have the right to deal with me so despotically, she once said to me, during one of my visits as a guest at her house, the following: ‘Dear maiden (she considered me to be one), I’m a connoisseur of people, and you can trust me in such matters. I notice great abilities in you and a kind of beauty that doesn’t deserve disdain. What are you expecting from your lover, who lives under the thumb of his strict father, who, if he were to hear of your liaison with his son, would, I swear, not let you escape a lifetime of working at a spinning mill! Come to your senses, my dear girl, and think better of this. Come over here and live with me. If we make a few adjustments, you shall deserve to be the mistress of a count, a duke, or a prince. I shall take this entire transformation project upon myself. In a little over a year, I shall make an absolute goddess out of you, and I won’t require any compensation from you for
any losses or damages that might be incurred. The only thing that I would ask of you is that, after all of this has been completed, you continue for a year to fulfill my wishes blindly, wishes that shall not be unpleasant for you. Judge for yourself which brilliant role, in the course of time, you shall come to play!"

“I don’t know whether it was the prospect of living luxuriantly and cheerfully or the fear of working at a spinning mill for the rest of my life that made me inclined at that time to accept her offer. I soon moved into her home, to the great despair of my lover. He was still so passionately in love with me that he came to our gates more than once, he called out to me, and he reproached me mercilessly for my alleged ingratitude. Mistress Amoureuse’s words of advice, however, had begun instantly to have a hold over me. I laughed in my lover’s face, and once, when he was somewhat disrespectful toward me, I gave him two slaps in the face.”

“He left, cursing me out, and from that time forward he never appeared at my gate again.”

“Desire, and perhaps, in truth, my abilities and talents, or else all of three of these factors taken together, were the reason why throughout the next year and a half I became the leading maiden in this new kind of boarding school and guest house. I sang, I played musical instruments, and I danced charmingly, at least in the eyes of the hostess and proprietress, Mistress Amoureuse. It was at this point that the time for payment had arrived, and I must confess that I didn’t find in this arrangement the merriments that I had been promised. At first, I played the part of a vestal virgin. Although I didn’t entirely like my life, for in large part I had to serve antiquated old men who hadn’t yet worn themselves out completely, I was nonetheless rather patiently waiting for this ordeal to come to an end, when an incident suddenly occurred that interrupted our exploits. A certain distinguished sixty-year-old grandee was captivated by one of my sworn sisters, whom the madam had refurbished so many times before, just as she had done with me. Unfortunately, she wasn’t entirely perfect medically, and our boyar was taken ill soon after their sexual experiences. He flew into a fit of rage and, making use of his power, he had our madam hidden away, where she should have been hidden away long ago. We scattered in various directions, like sheep without a shepherd when a predatory wolf is attacking them. I happened to find a position at a theatre and played a number of not insignificant parts during the time period when Prince Latron fell in love with me. You’re aware of the incident when I parted company with him. You, of course, acted cruelly toward me at that time, but you acted fairly as well. I was introduced to the House of Enlightenment by one of my girl friends, who didn’t attend meetings there herself, though, because she couldn’t, due to her age, arouse in the enlighteners of the world any inclinations toward her, but could only deliver these men to other maidens who were able to do this.”
“How this affair ended is not unknown to you. But one thing that you don’t know, that you can’t even imagine, and that I myself never, ever, could have thought would happen, – oh!”

“At this point in her confession, she faltered. She cast her eyes down toward the ground, and became completely silent.”

“‘What else, my darling Feklusha, happened to you?’ I exclaimed, presupposing that I was about to hear some unusual love story.”

“‘Prince,’ she said to me, trying to adopt a cheerful look, although her lips were trembling and her bosom was strongly agitated. ‘Oh! How difficult it is to be a woman in my situation. After all that had happened to me, and when I had already reached those years in life that should bring good sense with them, I didn’t think that I would once again be subjected to that dreadful burning passion, which, not having been satisfied, every minute carries away with it a part of my being. My situation was made that much more burdensome and painful by the fact that I was now at that age in life when one’s vital nature is at its full strength and when its might is invincible.’”

“This little speech of hers seemed to me at first to have been truly strange. ‘How is it possible,’ I thought to myself, ‘that a woman, who has for so many years been leading such a dissipated life, could truly fall in love?’ But, recalling the life of my Licorisa, I fell to thinking, and then I said to Feklusha: ‘Who is that fortunate fellow-mortal with whom you’ve been smitten with such a great love?’”

“‘Prince!’ she said to me, reddening even more than before, – ‘although I’m ashamed to admit this to you, I must, however, speak clearly and unequivocally. You’re that person for whom my previous love returned threefold. This is what I’m telling you! I didn’t love you before this! Chance, our close proximity to one another, and the sensitivity of an inexperienced youth, – these are the things that led to me becoming a mother earlier than I should have become one. Having lost that to which I could no longer return, and having such an insolvent man as Prince Sidor for a father, there was only one out of two options open for me: either I could become your wife or I could wander about the world with a baby at my breast and a beggar’s pouch on my back. But now, good God! Now, when some pleasant accomplishments and skills have enriched my intellect and have softened my feelings and sensibilities, now, when a life of luxury amidst pleasures and delights has, so to speak, spoiled and pampered my imagination, now, my blood is on fire, and all of me is burning up.’”

“When she had finished uttering these words, Feklusha fastened her burning eyes upon me and awaited some response. For a long time, I found myself in a really difficult spot. Various impulses were agitating my heart and my soul. Feklusha’s situation was so delectable, her sighs so voluptuous, her every movement so expressive and so full of the ecstasy of sexual passion, that if the most intractable of cynical philosophers, – a new
Diogenes,59 – had been in my place, even he would probably have become thoughtful and pensive. The early days of our love for each other, the delights that we had savored at that time in our passionate embraces of one another, presented themselves to my mind, – in a word, I caught fire and flamed up, wanting to hold out my arms to her and clasp her tender breast to my bosom, when suddenly the face of my dear, kind, good, ardent Licorisa, who for a long time now had been pregnant, carrying our child, a pledge to our reciprocal love for one another, arose in my imagination. In the heat of that moment, it seemed to me that I could hear her voice: ‘My darling! If I’ve been guilty of many sins in the past, and if you’ve not found in me that which you were seeking, I have been innocent, at any rate, ever since I have become yours. I shall soon become the mother of your child, and I shall never throw you over, as your wife did!’”

“I was filled with courage, cheerfulness, and good spirits, and I asked, with a cruel tone of voice, for which I pray that the Lord God shall forgive me: ‘What shall come of this, Princess Fekla Sidorovna?’”

“She was astounded, and deeply hurt, by what I said, but she quickly regained her composure and said the following to me so affectionately, so gently, that I began to turn red:”

‘My friend! What is there in high society for us to seek? My assets, even now, exceed our needs. You likewise aren’t poverty stricken. We have more wealth between us than all of the noblemen who were our neighbors in Falaleevka, and not just the local princes and village elders. Let’s return to our native village. If you’ve lost a son as a result of my carelessness and negligence, then perhaps he can still be found, or else I can give you another son as a gift.’”

“I must confess that she was capable of captivating and seducing a man, and if it hadn’t been for Licorisa, – at the mere mention of whose name I once again thought better of it and said just as affectionately as she had: ‘My darling! Your offers are charming. And I would have readily accepted them, but I’m already bound to someone else, newly tied to her with knots that bind our hearts together.’”

FEKLUSHA (extremely alarmed): “What! I don’t understand?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I considered you to be forever lost to me, and therefore I searched for someone whose love would correspond to my own, and I found that love in the person of your girl friend at the House of Enlightenment, – I found it in the beautiful Licorisa. I

59 Diogenes, also known as “Diogenes the Cynic,” was a Greek philosopher and one of the founders of Cynic philosophy. Born in Sinope, an Ionian colony on the Black Sea coast of Anatolia, in 412, Diogenes was a controversial figure who was banished (or fled) from his hometown for allegedly debasing currency. After his hasty departure from Sinope, he moved to Athens, where he proceeded to criticize many cultural conventions of the Athens of that day, making a virtue of poverty and gaining notoriety for his philosophical stunts (such as famously carrying a lamp during the day while “looking for an honest man”).
have succeeded in having her fall in love with me, and I hope to become a father soon. And, what’s most important of all, this mother-to-be shall not abandon her baby!”

**FEKLUSHA** (*turning pale and getting up from her seat*): “This is truly news that I didn’t expect to receive at this time. If I’m a criminal, which I steadfastly refuse to admit, and if I have, at any rate, shown disdain for the laws of decency and decorum, – but what more is there to say? After what we have just now said to each other, properly sparing ourselves, we should avoid having any more secluded rendezvous. They would only tear our hearts to pieces and torment us. I beg of you: please don’t curse your memory of me. At one time, I rested my head upon your heart, and I occupied a part of it. I readily forgive you the second love that you have found in your life. I deserved that blow, and my earlier instances of disorderliness deserve the punishment that our just and fair God imposed upon me when I thought of returning onto the path of truth. But if even Saint Mary Magdalene was guilty only early on in her life, and was later able to regain God’s kindness and obtain clemency by means of repentance, then why must I despair? I’m glad that I’m leaving you as the beloved favorite of a charming girl. May God bless the both of you. And may Licorisa comfort you in her warm embraces for those misfortunes that you have suffered on account of me. Don’t think for a moment that I started to sabotage the service that you were providing at court. May my guardian angel preserve me from that! If the heavens were to grant your wish to find our son, tell him that his mother’s example demonstrates how dangerous it is, – how fatal it is, – to abandon the rules that the heavens command us to preserve and abide by. Allow me to enjoy one last joy in life, allow me to fall to my knees at your feet and to kiss them, licking the dust off of them, and to hear you pronounce those sweet words granting me forgiveness and absolution: Forgive me! Pardon me! I’m so very sorry!”

“She did indeed fall to her knees at my feet and kiss them. Anyone can easily imagine how startled I was by all of this. I couldn’t understand what was happening to me. Some sort of sacred awe pursed my lips. And when, without getting up from her knees, she kept repeating over and over again: ‘In the name of God, I entreat you, – please forgive me!’” – all the while moaning and sobbing, I somehow or other managed to utter: ‘May our merciful God forgive you, just as I’m now forgiving you!’” At this point, I lifted her up from her knees and, now finding myself sobbing as well, I clasped her tightly to my heart and planted upon her lips a kiss of reconciliation. She quickly leaped up, covered her eyes with her hands, and set off for her chambers. From out of another room could be heard her bitter sobs. I myself was almost in a similar emotional state, and all night long I thought long and hard about this strange occurrence. I couldn’t get Feklusha’s tears, her degrading position, and her last words out of my mind. I would reproach now myself, now her, now my ill-starred fate. From time to time the thought occurred to me that, despite her promise, Feklusha wouldn’t abandon the idea of seeking revenge. And, knowing the power of Prince Latron, I shuddered at the thought. ‘Oh, my God!’ I said to myself at last, ‘shall something come of this? Great is the power of the Lord!’” Toward morning, having made up my mind to seek Licorisa’s advice at the first opportunity that presented itself, I began to doze off. ‘Women are sharper, more keen-witted, in such instances,‘ I said to myself, ‘and if I do happen to notice any change in my prince, then, – without giving it a second thought, – I shall take to my heels and hightail it out of here!’”
The next day, at the crack of dawn, I rushed over to Licorisa’s lodgings. But the moment that I entered her bedroom, my heart was lacerated from sorrow. She was in labor, suffering the painful contractions that accompany childbirth, and she was having difficulty being delivered of our child. Rather than provide my girlfriend with any assistance, however, the old cook, who had assured the young mother-to-be that in such cases she was a genuine student of Aesculapius, upon seeing the difficulties that Licorisa was experiencing, stood in front of an icon and read prayers aloud in a booming voice, adding at the end of each sentence some senseless words that she considered to be consoling. I rushed over to the bedside of the suffering Licorisa, but each and every thing that I did to try to help her proved to be ineffective. This surprised the old woman, who, upon seeing that her sympathetic reading of prayers was not helping, lost heart and hung her head in despair. At this point, however, she suddenly exclaimed with joy: ‘Alas! I’ve just remembered yet another medical treatment that people are fond of using, one that’s sure not to fail.’ Upon saying this, she lifted her arms up in the air and began to sing very loudly: ‘The pharaoh was traveling by land and by sea.’ This was the opening line of some comforting song. I became angry and started crying. ‘I don’t care if he, – this damned pharaoh, – was flying across the heavens, just quiet down!’

‘‘God forbid,’ she replied. ‘Only sorcerers and witches fly through the air, and, my dear fellow, he, – the pharaoh, – was a faithful husband, and, what’s more, a Christian. I beseech you not to interrupt me again.’ After this, she opened her mouth as wide as possible and began to howl even more loudly than before.”

“This, too, didn’t help, and, as a result, my dearest, my affectionate, my incomparable Licorisa didn’t survive the ordeal of childbirth. She passed away soon thereafter, dying in my arms. Just before taking her final breath, she pressed my hand to her heart and said to me: ‘I thank heaven that I’m dying after having been loved by you! It’s a bitter fate for me, however, that you shall not get to see the fruit of the most passionate love affair that I’ve ever experienced during my entire life! But this is the way that heaven wishes it to be! Forgive me forever and ever!’” With these words, her head inclined upon my bosom, and I . . . Oh! How am I to describe what my feelings were at that time? I was wallowing in tears, resembling a wild madman. But no matter how great my grief was, no matter how much I suffered, losing the most beloved object of my affection in the whole wide world, I nonetheless must confess that this suffering was incomparably less than the suffering that I had experienced upon losing Feklusha. And, what’s more, I have always thought that it would be more tolerable to lose one’s wife in a fire or as a result of drowning, to see her killed by thunder or crushed by a falling building, than to know that she was alive and was resting in the warm embraces of another man. Be that as it may, I

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60 Aesculapius was the Greek god of medicine. In Greek mythology he was the son of Apollo (the god of light, truth, and prophecy) and the nymph Coronis. The centaur Chiron taught him the art of healing, but Zeus (the king of gods), afraid that he might render all men immortal, slew him with a thunderbolt.
needed to think about the burial rite. Although I wasn’t in the same situation that I had been for the funeral of my father-in-law, Prince Sidor, and although I had plenty of money, I was finding it difficult to know exactly what to say to His Serene Highness about this funeral, for I would need to take at least two days of absence from my duties. Feklusha, upon hearing about Licorisa’s death, might cherish some hope of establishing a second coupling with me, and I very much didn’t want to have that happen. But what’s necessary is always necessary, – there’s no getting around it. When I appeared before His Serene Highness, I found that he, who was reading some letter at the time, was extremely sullen, and, judging from the look on his face, was experiencing some kind of emotional upset.”

“‘What is it?’ he asked drily. And I, bowing lower than I had ever bowed to him before, said, with a quivering voice: ‘I bring you a slavish submissiveness and a heart-felt admission that I have hidden from you the existence of a circumstance that has now reached its conclusion.’” Here, at his command, I told him about the death of Licorisa, whom, – here as elsewhere, – I had passed off as being my wife. Upon hearing me out graciously, the prince said: ‘You yourself are to blame, my friend, for hiding the true identity of your wife. She could have lived together with you, and if she had, then perhaps she would still be alive today, for I always have in readiness an entire medical council. You can be exempted from your duties for three days in order to tend to the burial rite for your wife. I would advise you, however, to take some consolation, for both of us are in almost the very same situation. Take this letter and read it.”

“I took the piece of paper from his hands and, with boundless surprise, I read the following:”

‘Dear Sir! Sooner or later the delusions that you entertain in your heart and mind should disappear. I’m abandoning the road along which I have been traveling up until now. Don’t think that I’m merely switching over to some other mere mortal, – Nothing of the kind! Neither now nor ever! It’s high time that I cease to be a traitor! It’s not necessary, and, what’s more, it’s not possible, for me to reveal to you my place of asylum.

Fiona”

“Upon reading these lines, I was dumbfounded. I fixed my gaze upon the prince and remained silent.”

“He likewise gazed at me intently, and he likewise remained silent. From the look on his face and from the entire situation that he was in, it seemed to me that it was possible to read the following: ‘Chistyakov, you’re a great rogue! How is it possible that Fiona would undertake something of such consequence without first speaking with her brother about it? Isn’t the death of your wife merely a pretext, by means of which you and Fiona wish to leave the capital and divide up equitably and fraternally the property that she managed to acquire here?’”
“Wishing to notify him in advance of such unfavorable views about my integrity, as any efficient man ought to do, I asked him, on this occasion, to allow several of our male and female servants to help me with organizing the rite of interment. Since everyone in the building couldn’t help but recognize the face of my sister-bride Fiona, the prince, whose face had now taken a satisfied look, said: ‘I myself shall attend the burial ceremony. Summon my steward: I shall give him the necessary orders for that and determine my expenses.’”

“Seeking to carry out the will of His Serene Highness, I rushed over to the deathbed of the unforgettable Licorisa. At this point in time, it didn’t enter my mind to think about what had become of Feklusha, where had she gone? No matter how much the prince’s steward and the latter’s wife tried to persuade me to calm down and to mind my own business, for I, like a madman, was poking my nose into everything, it was impossible for me to heed their advice. They had adorned Licorisa to look like a real princess, and when it became known that Prince Latron had taken it upon himself to pay for all of the funeral expenses and that he would be attending the ceremony himself, so many priests and monks gathered there, – I don’t know from where, – that there was almost nowhere to find any room to stand, even though this event was being held in quarters that were so much more spacious than her previous ones had been, just as my money purse at the time was now so much more spacious than my earlier one had been. The prince kept his word, and, examining Licorisa intently, he said: ‘It’s a pity: she was such a beautiful woman!’

“‘And, what’s more, such a good and kind one!’ I uttered, sobbing bitterly.”

“The ceremony came to an end. She was buried in the cemetery of the Capuchin Monastery, and the prince, out of a special feeling of magnanimity that lasted for some time, ordered that a monument be erected in her honor and that an epitaph be written. To that end, he hired the first Russian poet that was recommended to him, and he was satisfied with the verses, generously showing his gratitude to the author and ordering that the epitaph be engraved on the gravestone. I was curious to see the gravestone that had been designed for my beloved, and on it I read the following quatrains:”

“Beneath this stone lies buried
Licorisa, a wife most beautiful;
Above her, a husband sobs most strongly
And sheds bitter tears of grief!”

“It’s a shame that my benefactor was such a poor connoisseur of poetry! I would have readily pulled out this slab of stone and replaced it with another, but I was afraid of arousing the prince’s indignation: after all, could what seemed to him to be good actually be bad? And so I had to be content with doing this: I took out a piece of chalk and wrote beneath the gravestone in rather distinct handwriting: ‘Don’t be aggrieved, my darling, my beloved, that upon your beautiful tomb, which enshrinds your beautiful body, there are engraved, in the most beautiful letters, the ugliest and the most absurd lines of verse. You were gentle and not vindictive in life! May your meek soul enjoy eternal rest!’”
“Hardly had I managed to hide the chalk, when someone appeared, someone who, by his outward appearance, resembled a German pastry cook. He walked up to me and said: ‘Hello! You’re surprised, of course, by the verses! To tell you the truth, they’re really something to behold!’"

“At this point, he read aloud his literary creation with a satisfied look on his face. But by the time that he had reached the quatrain’s ending and saw the handwriting below it, he exclaimed: ‘What’s this? Hardly have they succeeded in erecting this monument, and already praise for the verses has been prepared. Let’s take a look!’"

“He began to read aloud, in a long-drawn-out manner, but soon he was reading each word more and more quietly! And half way through the panegyric he suddenly fell completely silent.”

“‘Oh, what an abominable, sacrilegious piece of writing this is!’ he exclaimed without reading it to the end. ‘The villainous hand that has inscribed these words should be burned at the stake, or, at any rate, have his knuckles chopped off!’"

“He pulled a soiled handkerchief out of his pocket and began to wipe away the panegyric to himself with an angry hand. When he had finished erasing it, I sat down again near Licorisa’s grave.”

“‘What is it, my dear sir, that you wish to do?’ he asked me fervently.”

CHISTYAKOV: “To write anew that which you have just erased.”

VERSIFIER: “So that was your work, murderer? Do you know that in one hour I can write a thousand verses of this kind, each of which would make your hair stand on end?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I shall be very happy when you nail one of those example to the gates of the house where I live.”

VERSIFIER: “And where exactly do you live? And who exactly might you yourself be, barbarian?”

CHISTYAKOV: “I live in Prince Latron’s palace. I’m his secretary, and the husband of the soul that’s resting here.”

“If the mightiest of thunder claps had come down directly upon him, he wouldn’t have been as terrified as he was by my response. Jumping back, he pulled off his hat and fell silent. I likewise fell silent as I left him there, feeling satisfied with the vengeance that I had exacted upon him.”

“When, upon Licorisa’s death, I moved entirely into the prince’s palace, I began, little by little, to recover from my grief and to occupy myself with the duties at my previous post. Although the gracious disposition of my benefactor didn’t change, from the day of
Feklusha’s departure, the attendants who were serving on the staff began to obey me not as blindly as they had before, while the petitioners began to bow down to me not as humbly as they had before.”

“One evening I noticed that there was a great deal of commotion in the house, and when I inquired about the reason for it, the valet who had been assigned to me, for previously I had brought my own servants with me, replied: ‘What? Didn’t you know that Mamzelle Victoria, the lead dancer at the local theatre, is moving into your sister’s chambers?’”

“At this point, he rushed over to help her manage the move. ‘His Serene Highness is adroit,’” I said to myself. ‘Isn’t it perhaps time, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, for you to pack your suitcase and, for the sake of your peace of mind, clear out of here before some new brother or uncle, the kith or kin of some new goddess, having taken your place, steals the small treasure trove that was acquired through the mental and physical efforts of your sister! But it’s beyond belief that the beautiful Mamzelle didn’t have some close relatives when my princess and I weren’t in need of them!’” While I was reasoning in this manner and didn’t know how to begin, fearing that I might incur the prince’s wrath if I were simply to move out of his home, without having been thrown out on my ear, an elderly house servant, who was more concerned about me than any of the others were, entered my room and said to me: ‘My dear sir, you’re wasting the most splendid opportunity! All of our courtiers, beginning with Gadinsky, are currently toadying to Mamzelle Victoria. Rush right over there and wish her many happy returns on this, the day of her housewarming. Your sister became angry at me for having failed to perform that courtesy. But I’m old now, and I no longer have need of any extra favors.’”

“Previously, I wouldn’t have done this, but having become completely corrupted in my morals, I took the old man’s advice gladly. I took out a dish, added some bread and salt, in accord with the Russian custom, and set off for Victoria’s chambers. When I arrived there, I saw, besides Gadinsky, with all of his underlings, Prince Latron, who was sitting cross-legged in an armchair. This unexpected meeting put me in considerable disarray. And I would have given the prince a rather light and breezy greeting, if Gadinsky hadn’t given me reason to think better of it. Standing erect directly in front of Victoria, holding his left hand over his chest while tapping his fingers and waving his right hand to the right and to the left, Gadinsky was delivering, in a trembling voice, a flowery homily, – one for all occasions. The other people who were there were raving like fakirs suffering from demonic possession, shuffling back and forth on their feet and shoving one another aside. Therefore, I had to stop behind them and wait for this comedy to end, which it soon did, coming to its conclusion as a tragedy completely in the style of Shakespeare. Victoria was, in truth, a very beautiful woman, and one who was much younger than Feklusha. She was amusing herself during Gadinsky’s speech, teasing two small monkeys who were jumping up and down right in front of her. Gadinsky, who was exercising his oratorical duties, made the goddess of the temple such an immoderate bow that his thick braid toppled over from the back of his torso onto the back of his head, and it snapped against the head of one of the monkeys. It’s a well known fact this particular breed of animal is vengeful. The monkey grabbed the braid in its paws, and when the secretary stood up again, after making his deep bow, he saw the beast, and, turning a bit
pale, he cried out: ‘Ah!’ The other monkey, giving chase to the first one, flew in an instant onto the secretary’s back and sank its claws into the back of his head. When Gadinsky extended his hand in order to remove the two of them, they bit him. They acted the same way with the footmen, who were slightly more daring, and who attempted to help the besieged and suffering secretary.

“The prince, who was smiling at all of this, ordered Victoria to have the monkeys removed, but the wench wasn’t in any hurry to do this, and, while running around Gadinsky, she laughed so loudly that one could have made out of her, on top of a dancer, a good singer. Gadinsky, who had been bitten by the monkeys about a dozen times, was deeply angered that an orator was being treated so ignobly. He grabbed one of the monkeys by the tail, and, clenching his teeth, began to drag it along the floor with all of his might. The monkey, not wishing to give in, caught hold of the back of Gadinsky’s head with its paws and its teeth, while the other monkey, seeing what the secretary intended to do, began to tear out tufts of the latter’s hair and to fling them at the people who were standing there in front of him. This was truly a battle! Gadinsky, however, was unyielding, as a secretary ought to be. Tears were running down his face, but he merely grunted and continued to drag the monkey around. Finally, gathering up all of his strength, he suddenly sat down and tugged at the monkey’s tail so firmly that the obstinate beast flew off from its perch on the back of the secretary’s head, having both of his front paws and his whole mouth full of human hair. The monkey, not out of malice or revenge, perhaps, but simply due to the pressure that was being applied by Gadinsky’s hands, banged against the floor so loudly that it let out a terrifying cry. The creature’s frightened girl friend likewise jumped down. Anyone who would have been witnessing this scene would have seen with what an expression of horror on her face, and with what a plaintive cry, Victoria rushed over to provide assistance for her yelping little darling. One might have thought that they had made a wager over who had the more ringing voice. After Victoria had lifted up the monkey and petted it soothingly, she turned to the prince and said majestically: ‘Who is this boor and lout that dares to act so impertinently in your presence, and, what’s more, to do so with my monkey?’”

“At the same time that she was uttering these words, the accursed little beast, who was watching its rival fiercely as the latter wiped his tears away with his fists, inserted his paw into his posterior, defecated on that paw, and then hurled the feces directly at Gadinsky’s face. At this point, there was nothing more that the secretary could do. He covered himself up as best he could with both hands and broke into a run, shoving everyone aside. Victoria liked very much to see such boldness on the part of her monkey, and so she smiled at this prank. Taking advantage of this moment of distraction, I walked up to her in the manner of a dance master, and, tilting my head the way that an authentic French petit-maitre would, I articulated the following: ‘My dearest madam! Allow me to have the great good fortune of congratulating you on your housewarming. And allow me to have the honor, following the ancient Russian custom, of presenting you with the ceremonial bread and salt!’”

“At this point, I placed on a table the items that I had brought with me to this house-warming party, I once again bowed deftly, and then I took a step back, straightening up
with a swagger. She glanced at my gift in a pleasant manner, then glanced at me, nodded her head, and asked the prince: ‘Who is this minion of yours?’” “‘This is my secretary,’ he replied, ‘and a very good man.’” “Mister Chistyakov!” he continued, ‘if you’re going to serve me henceforth with as much fervor as this, then you shall never be forgotten!” I exchanged bows with him and then withdrew, feeling extremely satisfied with myself after the highly foppish behavior that I had just exhibited. Since Gadinsky had neither seen nor heard about any of this, a crafty voice inside me told me that I should go visit him and do a little boasting at his expense. Let him know that I’m nobody’s fool, that even though I have been serving on the grande’s staff for only two years now, I was able to pull off such a rare prank, while he, Gadinsky, who has been serving him for so many years, has still not figured out how to do that.”

“When I arrived at his place, I found him to be deeply depressed, pacing up and down in his room with long strides. His wife and daughter were approaching him with questions, but all in vain. He was silent. Finally, he asked me languorously: ‘Were you toadying over there at the mamzelle’s?’”

“Yes, I was,’ I replied cheerfully. ‘Not only that: what’s more, I performed a glorious deed there!”

“After this, without waiting for any reaction from him, I began telling him about my bold action. He listened to me attentively, and when I had finished, he was filled with rage, clutching his ears and muttering, with his eyes looking upwards. ‘Oh, how ill-starred I am!”’ he lamented. ‘Oh, my crazy wife! Oh, my mindless daughter! You knew where I was going and to what end! How could you have failed to remember about a gift, while I myself was such a simpleton that I didn’t even guess that this might happen. Although giving a person a gift for a housewarming party is a particularly Russian custom, such customs aren’t offensive anywhere. Tell me, please, Gavril Simonovich, what was the prince like after I left his palace?’”

“I don’t understand how it had entered my head to play such a joke on him. I didn’t, in any event, expect such important consequences to result from that joke.”

“Ah!’ I replied to his question, ‘it would be better if you weren’t to ask!”’

“Why? What was he like?”

“The prince burst into such a fit of rage that it was as if he had turned into a tiger or a winged dragon. He started to grind his teeth, and he began kicking the floor with his feet and striking the table with his fists. Then he said: ‘What? He dared, in my presence, to grab a tail? And whose tail was it, no less? That of a monkey! And whose monkey was it, no less? Oh, righteous God in heaven! None other than Mamzelle Viktoria’s! Is this not the same as drawing a sword against an adversary in the palace, in the presence of the monarch? I shall give it to him! I shall give it to him, to be sure!” On top of that, in order to induce even more horror inside him, I distorted my face so much that I nearly popped my jawbone out of joint, so angrily did I act!”
“Oh, merciful God up in heaven!’ he said in despair, his body shaking all over, after which he crashed to the floor. We rushed over to help him, and lifted him up off the floor. And although there was some breathing left in him, it was extremely weak, and his eyes weren’t open. His wife was wailing plaintively and pitifully: ‘Oh, you, my darling, my little turtledove, why are you so frightened? After all, I’m acquainted with the prince, even if only slightly, and I’ve served him no worse than others have. And Matryona, my daughter, in what way has she been treating the young Prince Latron poorly up until now?’”

“Although such hopes, it seemed, were sound and reasonable, Gadinsky didn’t regain consciousness, and so we summoned a doctor, who, after examining the infirm secretary assiduously, announced, with a pleasant smile on his face, that the patient was paralyzed, and, moreover, that there was no hope for his recovery. Everyone cried out woefully, while I started trembling from horror. Not wishing to be a witness to the mournful and shameful scene that was sure to follow, I set off for home, not knowing what to be more surprised at: my own foolishness and the cowardice of my comrade? or the shamelessness of his wife, who was announcing the reasons for her to have hope?”

“For three days running, the prince, not seeing Gadinsky at his post, would ask me about him, and I would announce that he was suffering from a dangerous illness.”

“‘What use are sick people to me?’ the prince said to me coldly. ‘Prepare a designation of his retirement. You, by yourself, can fulfill the duties of his post, as well as those of your own.’”

“That very same day the fateful designation was signed, and I, when lying down to go to sleep that night, said to myself: ‘Well, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, you’re now a real, full-fledged secretary. Be careful, and conduct yourself wisely! As the saying goes: don’t fall on your face in the mud! Show yourself at your best, and don’t disgrace yourself. Show them that it wasn’t in vain that you learned all manner of wisdom during your tutelage under Bibarius’s guidance. I shall now be able to assure Savva Trifonovich that I was born to do something much more important than merely sealing wine bottles with resin in his wine cellar!’”

“The very next day, on the strength of such reasoning, I put the most majestic look that I could muster on my face and walked about the reception room. I had puffed out my cheeks and thrust both of my hands into my pockets, twiddling my fingers inside them. Yet I failed to notice that some distinguished lady was making a low bow directly in front of me. If someone greeted me, I, judging according to the level of importance of the petitioner, would respond appropriately: to one petitioner, I would respond: ‘Your most humble servant,’ to another, I would respond: ‘Your servant,’ and to a third, I would merely nod my head. And to yet another, I would stare at him with wide, protuberant eyes, making it seem as if I couldn’t see anything. Then, striking myself on the forehead with the palm of my hand, I would lift my eyes up toward the ceiling, standing there as if I were recalling something, and then, uttering hurriedly: ‘Ah! What a memory!’ I would
run across the room and go hide. After that, I would stand by the doors and look through a key-hole and watch admiringly how all of the awaiting eyes were following after me.”

“Such was the very clever way that I spent a considerable amount of my time as the prince’s secretary. And once, it’s true, I was punished for playing this trick. Usually a certain captain would be standing by the doors, a soldier, one of whose legs had been torn off by an enemy cannonball during battle. He was either very poor or very miserly. And the people who possessed qualities such as these weren’t at our social level. The only thing that allowed us to get rid of him was the old-fashioned way that he made bows: that’s to say, he would bow down all the way to the ground. And what’s the good of that? One day, while I was standing at the doors and watching a crowd of people, he, thinking that I was somewhere far away and wouldn’t hear him, said to his neighbor: ‘I thought that our current secretary would be a little more sensible than the previous one had been, for he seemed that way at first, but he has turned out to be just as much an idler as the last one, if not even worse. That earlier rogue pulled the wool over my eyes for six months, whereas this new swindler has been doing it for only three months. If I were to be in power, even if only for one single minute, I would divide that minute into two halves. In the first half, I would say: ‘Give me a true crust of bread, give me a true livelihood, one that would provide me with the necessary means of support, so that in my old age I wouldn’t be knocking a wooden leg against a grandee’s lacquered floor, begging for alms.’ In the second half of that minute, I would say: ‘Go hang that swine Chistyakov upside down, and let that damned rogue die of starvation!’” Hearing these words of praise, which I myself considered uncomplimentary, I involuntarily became embarrassed and moved away from the doors. My trick, which was likewise one of no small importance, consisted in this: after gathering together some completely unnecessary pieces of paperwork into a stack, I would go into the reception room and force an attendant from the clerical office to carry that stack of paperwork with him. I would stand by the window and scrutinize what was going on with an air of importance, holding a lorgnette up to my eyes, – even though I could see things a thousand times better with the naked eye, whereas I couldn’t make out even a single word through a lorgnette, – and then, afterwards, I would say, using the voice of an extremely exhausted man: ‘Carry this, old chap, back to the clerical office for me. When the prince and I set off for the palace, remind me about these papers. Oh, these requests! My head spins, to be sure, when I have to examine them!”

“That’s the sort of bold and daring fellow that I now was. I didn’t wish to have to think about anything. Feklusha and Licorisa had already long ago been forgotten, and I even rarely remembered about my son. My head was incessantly packed with ministerial inanities and with devising new ways to appear more important than I actually was.”

“On one occasion, when I was all by myself in my room, the wife of a former comrade of mine, along with her daughter, stopped by to see me, bringing with them, needless to say, a petition. At this point in time, I was adept at acting like a complete madman, as shall be evident from the conversation that I had with this petitioner.”
FEMALE PETITIONER (bowing deeply): “Kind sir, I consider it my duty to inform you that, by the will of God, my husband, on the very same day when he waged a battle against some monkeys, passed away, by the will of God.”

CHISTYAKOV (bursting into laughter): “Really? I congratulate you, I congratulate you. Let it be said, entre nous, that although he was a conscientious husband, and although he didn’t forbid his wife from enjoying permissible pleasures, all the same, he was, nonetheless, a husband, and thus he could on occasion prevent her from doing that out of capriciousness, – and you’re still at an age when, truth be told, a woman is not unworthy of a man’s attention.”

FEMALE PETITIONER: “But, kind sir! He served for such a long period of time that I ought to be able to hope to receive a pension.”

CHISTYAKOV (placing his legs on the sofa that he is sitting on): “Your daughter is lovely! How old is she?”

FEMALE PETITIONER: “Twenty! Can I get an answer from you, kind sir?”

CHISTYAKOV (biting his nails): “Why, yes, of course!”

FEMALE PETITIONER: “How large of a pension shall it be? Allow me to ask!”

CHISTYAKOV (rolling onto his back on the sofa): “Ah! Oh! What a painful stitch I’m feeling in my side! You wouldn’t believe, madam, how often I suffer from one of these. You wouldn’t happen to know what medicine I need to take to avoid them, now would you? I’d really like to have that information from you. Truly, how sweet your daughter is! Ah! What nice little hands! What nice little eyes! Allow me, madam, to give them a kiss!”

“I kissed the girl’s hand and ran out of the room whistling. From this brief conversation, it’s easy to discern to what extent my morals had become perverted and what a shallow, hale and hearty fellow I had become. Upon running into the reception hall, however, I thought the better of what I had just said and done. And, picturing to myself how my stupid joke had made Gadinsky’s wife a widow, I decided to present a report on her to the prince the following day.”

“After spending around a half hour with those petitioners who were awaiting the prince’s return, I arrived back in my room, where, to my surprise, I found the daughter of my female petitioner waiting for me, all alone by herself. She, having blushed red, said to me: ‘Please excuse my mother, kind sir, for having absented herself and for going somewhere not far from here to attend to some matter.’”

“After sitting beside her for some time, I don’t know for certain what particular emotion it was that I felt in my heart. The setting sun illuminated the full, scarlet cheeks of my female guest. Her eyes were so expressive, and her breathing was so ardent, that, taking
her hand, I kissed it and, not releasing it out of mine, I said to her: ‘Truly, you’re a lovely maiden!’

**THE DAUGHTER:** “Your lips are so passionate!”

**CHISTYAKOV:** “My heart is even more passionate!”

**THE DAUGHTER:** “You’re a dangerous man. Ah!”

**CHISTYAKOV:** “You’re a most precious maiden!”

**THE DAUGHTER:** “I don’t believe what you’re saying to me!”

**CHISTYAKOV:** “I could prove to you the justice of what I’m saying to you.”

“What’s the use of recounting the inane things that we said and that we did that evening! When the ecstasy of our lovemaking had passed, my new lover, the victory over whom had cost me so little effort, – as do all of the sexual victories won by all of the ministerial secretaries over the maidens who are petitioning them for pensions, – straightened the scarf on her bosom and said: ‘Ah! It’s now already nine o’clock in the evening, and my mother told me that if she hadn’t come back home by that time, she shall not be there, and that I should walk home alone. What should I do? I really am fearful.’”

“I understood very clearly what her words were inclined toward, but, due to a variety of reasons, I had to show her the door, promising her faithfully, as she was departing, that I would help her and her mother in their hour of need.”

“There’s no point in my speaking at length about similar instances of tomfoolery, – about the foolish things that I said and the stupid things that I did. It’s enough to remember that this incident, despite all of the disgust that Prince Latron harbored toward the Gadinsky family, served as the reason why his widow and their daughter were designated to receive an ample pension, one that, truth be told, they didn’t have any need to receive.”

**Chapter 77: The Most Trifling of Matters**

“Toward evening time, I set off, flying upon the wings of amorous ecstasy, to the Gadinsky apartment. I found only the daughter at home. She greeted me with the most natural friendliness, and, upon hearing that their business matter had ended so successfully, she expressed her gratitude to me a thousand times over. But since I’m a courteous cavalier and a fortunate lover, I, with a tender smile on my face, attributed this honor that she was bestowing upon me to the successful end of the business matter. Sitting upon a crimson sofa and playing with my side-whiskers with her right hand, – for I, following the infectious custom being observed at court, had grown such long side-whiskers that I resembled a wild animal more than a human being, – while with her left hand she had enveloped me crosswise and clasped me to her bosom, she said to me: ‘Ah! Gavriilo Simonovich! What good fortune and happiness you enjoy!’”
“‘There’s no doubt about that,’ I replied. ‘For I’m sitting here with such a sweet, such a priceless young lady!’”

“‘That isn’t at all what I wished to tell you,’ she caught me up, turning red and laying her cheek against mine. ‘I’m speaking about your good fortune in having attained such a high degree of power in such a short amount of time. Without your assistance, we would have sought in vain for help from the ungrateful Prince Latron. You were witness to how he initially received my mother, who at one time had . . .’”

“At this point the thought occurred to me what it was that Matryona herself had been at one time, and for that reason I asked her: ‘Tell me, my darling, how is it that you, being on friendly terms with the young Prince Latron, scorned the idea of appealing directly to him with your request, and turned to me instead, forgetting that he’s the son of that grandee whom I serve in my capacity as his secretary?’”

“Matryona blushed crimson, and the flame of indignation and spite was shining in her eyes.”

“‘He’s a scoundrel, he’s a monster,’ she replied irascibly. ‘But since you are speaking candidly with me, I don’t wish to be ungrateful, and so I shall behave the same way toward you. You were aware of my late father’s morals, and his principles were likewise revealed. I swear to you that the young Prince Latron was nothing more than the third distinguished gentleman that my father ushered into my bedroom. I acted as an obedient daughter for more than a year. During that entire time period, – believe me, my conscience is clear, – I, at the behest of my parents, had to receive ten chamberlains, twelve chamber junkers, four table setters, one beer brewer, one Englishman, and two stokers, whom, – truth be told, – I received on the sly from the others, for, besides their youth and their beauty, they had nothing else to offer me. Thus, judge for yourself, could the young prince justly get angry with me and call me unfaithful? He ought to have looked at his older sister and his own mother. But what’s the point of talking so much about this? He parted with me completely a week before my father died. God grant unto him eternal rest and the heavenly kingdom! He was a real father, the likes of which there are so few in this world! What’s to be done! Everyone has given himself up to debauchery, everyone has become corrupted, all the while rushing around to find various moral admonitions and philosophical meditations! But what benefits are to be found in doing that?’”

“‘Tell me more, my dear Matryona, more!’ I exclaimed, struck by the stories that my sweetheart was telling me. Never had I imagined that a girl could reach such a level of equanimity. I, a sophisticated courtier, was surprised at this, – what would the gentlemen from one of our rural counties, especially our Russian gentlemen from those counties, have to say about this? They most likely would have called her the kind of unmarried girl from whom the Antichrist could be born!”

“Matryona modestly continued:”
“No matter how much I tried to persuade my mother not to send me to the young prince to request financial assistance for our family following my father’s death, it was all in vain! She herself would whiten my face, rouge my cheeks, spray me with perfume, and, in a word, dress me up in such a way that, instead of looking like an orphaned daughter, I more closely resembled a bride-to-be on her way to the matrimonial altar. When I arrived unimpeded at the prince’s bedroom, for he, evidently, hadn’t seen fit to tell his servants about our break-up, I was somewhat amazed to find that there was a doctor there.”

“Upon seeing me, the young prince leaped up from his seat and burst out laughing, then he came running up to me and embraced me, and, having forgotten that we weren’t alone, he said to me, – but what was the use of talking. I was dumbfounded, feeling as if I was rooted to the spot. I was staggered by everything that I was seeing and hearing. I managed to collect myself, however, and regained my presence of mind. And, calling upon the feeling of my innocence to help me, I said to him: ‘I have come to request that you petition your father on our behalf and solicit from him a pension for my mother!’” ‘What do you mean petition my father?’ he exclaimed cheerfully. ‘I have the power to arrange that pension myself.’” At that point, he walked up to me, slapped me in the face half a dozen times, and then, turning his back to me, he nudged me in the right place with his knees, such that I would undoubtedly have fallen down, had his valet not supported me. This valet grabbed me by my arms and dragged me down the stairs. There was nothing that I could do, and so my mother and I decided to have recourse to you, and we don’t repent of the fact that, after having to deal with such a scoundrel as Latron’s son, we met a genuine benefactor in his father’s secretary.”

“At this point, she embraced me tenderly again: by means of her embraces and kisses, she was trying to awaken me from the dream in which, it seemed, I had been immersed. My blood was running cold, and, imagining the position occupied by the young Prince Latron, I shuddered from horror. She couldn’t understand the reason for this, and thus was somewhat displeased with me. We parted, therefore, with mutual displeasure.”

“For the first time since my accession to the brilliant position of ministerial secretary, I fell asleep pondering what were other distinguishing features of excellence, rather than pondering new ways of representing myself as a very powerful person. The sun had risen, and its crimson rays were penetrating through the brocade curtains of the windows and of my bed. I awoke, and the first order of business was for me to test the state of my health. ‘Good heavens!’ I thought to myself. I found unmistakable signs of illness. My hair stood on end! A cold chill spread throughout my entire body. ‘Oh, you treacherous woman! Oh, you wayward rogue!’ I exclaimed in a lamenting voice. ‘You deserved not just a dozen slaps to the face: that number needs to be multiplied seven times over!’” I howled so pitifully that my valet came running headlong into my bedroom wearing only a shirt. And he, thinking that I, like all of the distinguished courtiers do, wander around in my sleep as if I were in waking reality, asked me: ‘Are you alright?’ ‘Go summon the doctor right away!’ I exclaimed despondently. My valet, seeing from the look on my face that something unusual was the matter, thought at first that I was merely fooling
around, and that’s the reason why he didn’t hurry to fulfill my command. But when I again ordered him to summon the doctor, this time in a threatening voice, he set off, and a half hour later he appeared with the doctor. While he was away, fulfilling this errand for me, I did some thinking and made some conjectures about what was ailing me, and I decided that the shame that is felt in such cases is a false shame, and that, for my own good, I must not, and I should not, put this matter aside for a later time. That’s the reason why, abandoning all hints and innuendoes, I told the doctor directly, when he arrived, all about my illness. But no matter how much I girded myself, no matter how much I brought to mind the courageous, heroic deeds that I had performed in the reception hall, I couldn’t refrain from telling the doctor, with a sigh: ‘I’m very ashamed, after living in this world for more than thirty-five years, that I must undergo treatment for an illness that is unforgiveable, even for young people, to contract, and that must always signify a depraved heart and a perverted taste. I humbly entreat you to take me under your care, while I, for my part, assure you that you won’t find in me an ungrateful patient.’”

“Having said this so that I could instill in this Aesculapius an appreciation for the work that he would be doing, I took my cash purse out from under my pillow, counted out ten gold coins, and handed them to him. And I was extremely surprised to find that, instead of expressing his gratitude, he burst out laughing at the top of his lungs. And, seeing that I was looking at him with eyes that expressed bewilderment at his reaction, he said to me, accepting what I had offered to him:

“My dear sir! I’m truly having some difficulty here, since I’m finding signs that you’re upset, judging by the look on your face, which is always an indication of one’s state of mind. Oh, my God! You’re still not entirely a full-fledged courtier! Two young people, each from the most distinguished of gentry homes, encounter each other on the street and embrace, and one of them asks: ‘Do you know, mon cher, that Countess Miloglazova has given me a fairly nice gift?’ ‘Fie!’ the other replies, ‘Do you think that receiving such ornaments from a forty-year-old hag is, in all honesty, splendid? Not on your life! I, sir, am much more considerate than you are! I, too, receive fairly nice gifts, only not from the mother, but rather from her comely daughter, whom each and every one of you would, I think, consider to be a sanctum of purity and chastity. She, in truth, represents the vestal virgin not at all badly!’ ‘So, my dear sir,’ the doctor continued, ‘is it for you to lament the fact that, in the relatively short amount of time that you have been residing here, serving His Serene Highness, you have become so highly educated and cultivated that you can, without a twinge of conscience, argue about one’s preference in the science of courtly life with pupils of that science whose hair has turned gray? But if some fear still remains with you, which is characteristic of provincials, and especially of Russian provincials, then I stake my life on it that in fewer than six weeks you shall be completely healthy again. Although you’re the secretary to a powerful grandee, I hope, nonetheless, that you shall respect my prescription and follow my instructions. For my part, although I’m a doctor and, most important of all, a courtier, nonetheless, out of respect for your accomplishments, I shall, for your sake, deviate somewhat from my customary practice, and instead of trying to intensify the illness, in order to reduce it more, a treatment that follows the
example of my medical colleagues, I promise to make use of all of the methods of treatment employed by distinguished physicians in order that we can see you in good health in the very near future.”

“There’s nothing more annoying,” the physician continued, having cheered up, “than treating young people from the nobility. Let’s take as an example Prince Latron’s son. In the morning, I usually bring him the necessary medications and I try to persuade to take at least a third of the proper dosage. After breakfast, he drinks down no more than two shot glasses of liqueur and two tall glasses of Madeira wine. After attending a theatre performance, we usually have supper at the house of one of the French or Italian actresses. And then, the next morning, he again takes the medications that I have prescribed. Could there be a path to recovery here? This young man, however, holds forth the greatest hope for himself. At twenty-three years of age, he has succeeded in forgetting what shame, conscience, and fear of God mean. He considers modesty and decency to be such awful vices that he avails himself of all possible measures to refrain from practicing them.”

“I shall give you one example as proof of what I’m saying. One day, toward evening time, our young lord happened to notice that his mother’s foremost chambermaid was peeping through the window quite often and glancing at the guardhouse on the grounds of our palace. This aroused some curiosity in him, and so he conceived the idea of finding out how these visitations would end. And, in truth, a little after midnight, he caught sight of a girl leading a young horse-guardsman, – where do you think? – right into the princess’s bedroom! This event seemed to him to be very deserving of observation, and he thought it was a pity that he alone could profit from this beautifully shameful event. That’s the reason why he rushed over to the bedroom of his sister Lizaveta, who, however, didn’t wish to allow him to enter, for he was in a most difficult situation at the time. Young Prince Latron was surprised. He began to eavesdrop on her conversation inside the room, and he soon distinguished the deep groans of a woman who was clearly suffering, and, right after that, the cry of an infant. ‘Thank you, sister,’ he said directly into the keyhole, ‘for what you have given us as a gift: a knight errant or a lady in waiting?’ After this, he set off quietly for his room and, when he arrived there, he had a good long laugh with his servants over the grave situation that his sister and mother were in. The next day, the entire household had found out about it. Prince Latron’s unmarried daughter blushed a little bit, his wife smiled indifferently, while the prince himself said calmly: ‘This young man is adroit. I hope, with time, to make a worthy man out of him!’”

“At this point, the modest doctor had concluded recounting the stories containing his observations about sexual morality. I swore to him by all that was holy that I would follow his instructions and take the medications that he had prescribed for me. Left alone by myself, I got down to work on thinking up a plan to take revenge, writing the following threatening dispatch to Gadinsky’s criminal daughter Matryona:”
“Oh, you perfidious woman! Oh, you obscene woman! You deserve, as
punishment, that young Prince Latron, instead of giving you a dozen and a half
slaps to the face, should give you a thousand and a half of the most ringing slaps
to the face. Know this, you most lawless woman, that I myself am suffering!”

“After sending off this letter, I awaited a reply, but upon sending it off, I was already
regretting that I had written it, anticipating the horror that my outburst of anger would
produce upon this unfortunate woman, a feeling that would stagger her! But my fear
didn’t last for long, for the messenger, when he returned, reported that Miss Gadinsky
had ordered him to convey to me her regards and to tell me that she doesn’t at all believe
what I had said to her. But then again, she noted, if the words that I had spoken had
indeed been true and just, then I should have been reproaching the members of my own
gender, for it was from one of them that she had become the source of my illness. And,
what’s more, if I’m so vindictive, then she would advise me to hand that gift over to the
first girl who gives herself up to me. I was greatly surprised at such extreme
shamelessness on her part, and I formed the firm intention henceforth not to be so
courageous under similar circumstances. Let this serve as yet another lesson to me.”

“My medical condition didn’t prevent me from performing my duties, and the prince
didn’t notice any change in me.”

“Moderation in food and drink, as well as a healthy constitution and a sturdy physique,
helped me, and, after several weeks, I felt myself to be completely healthy again. My
gratitude to the doctor was commensurate with my joy at no longer feeling ill. I can’t
remain silent about the fact that, during the time when I was feeling ill, my character
softened imperceptibly: I listened patiently to requests, I replied to those requests
leniently, and even I myself noticed that, although the visitors to the reception room
looked upon me with less servility, they made up for it by looking at me with greater
friendliness, good will, and benevolence. It was during this prominent time period that I
pleaded on behalf of the one-legged captain, who was petitioning for a proper place to
live and for a decent salary to be paid to him. When he thanked me humbly for this
assistance, I, in vengeance for his earlier rudeness toward me, said to him: ‘My dear sir!
I swear that, if up until now, in accord with your wishes, I had been hung upside down
and had been left to die of starvation, then you yourself would have experienced nearly
the very same fate.’ His anxiety and disarray were, for me, sufficient vengeance! This
was the kind of man that I had become! But, oh, for how long a time would I remain this
way? Oh, what a weak creature man is, how greatly he is out of harmony with himself!
Scarceley had the doctor declared that I was completely healthy again than I once again
forgot that I’m also a man who was born in the ashes of obscurity. I began to puff myself
up, becoming even more haughty than I had been before, and I was celebrated every day
for having concocted some new foolish prank, one that I, at that time, would have
considered to be a very precious invention. My rabid madness had intensified to such an
extent that I didn’t wish to lift my eyes skyward. And when someone, standing up
straight, would speak with me, he no doubt found in me a most malevolent enemy, which
is why I, being of medium height, couldn’t stand tall people.”
“In the midst of exploits such as these, perpetrated during the period when I was presenting myself as a man who was high and mighty, the date May 10th arrived, the commemoration of the death of my father, Prince Simon. I never would have remembered that date if a certain circumstance hadn’t brought it to mind. While I was sitting in my office, taking it easy as I sipped some hot chocolate, they let a man in to see me, a man whom I recognized at first sight as the versifier who had composed the inscription on the gravestone of my Licorisa. ‘What is it that you want?’ I asked, looking into my cup, and he handed me a paper notebook in a gold binding. Judging from his back, which was bent over from stooping, and from the look in his eyes, which reflected his declining years, I thought that he had come to me to make a request. And that’s the reason why, without paying him the least bit of attention, I said: ‘Leave your request, and I shall give it consideration!’” ‘My dear sir,’ the versifier said in an overtone, lowering his hands down toward the floor as a sign of his disheartenment, as is the custom among the Poles, ‘‘I’m requesting that you, for the sake of an angel of hallowed memory, that’s to say, your father, would gladden my heart by taking a quick look at this manuscript that I have handwritten.’ An involuntary feeling inside me said to me: ‘Go ahead and give it a quick look.’ I took the notebook, – and how great was my joy and gratification! The document opened with the following words: ‘Ode to the Gracious Sovereign, Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov, on the Day of Commemoration of his Father of Eternally Worthy Memory.’ These words, although they were very familiar to me, now seemed new and lovely. I promptly offered the versifier a seat, ordered that he be served a cup of hot chocolate, and requested that he recite, as audibly and intelligibly as possible, his ode. He began:”

If you were, from your celestial heights,  
To glance back at the sublunary world,  
You, the apostle, Simon the Zealot,  
Would be smiling pleasantly,  
As the son of another Simon, a Pole,  
Walks the globe in vain, Russian style,  
Stifling everything he wishes to stifle,  
He is like Samson, – an ancient giant!

“How could such beautiful lines of verse not help but entice me? What could possibly have been contrived that would have been more intricate than this ode? Is there anything missing here? There are visions and divinations attributed to saintly Simon, my father. It is said that he shall become the father of the kind of son who, – oh, my God! – shall create such wonders! I was made out to be an Apollo, who lends a helping hand to those he loves, to those who trundle along on their way to Mount Helicon.61 The rays of light around me were shining. The muses were going into raptures from my voice and they were playing delightfully sweet songs.”

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61 Mount Helicon is a mountain in the region of Thespial in Boeotia, Greece, that is celebrated in Greek mythology as a site that serves as a source of poetic inspiration. Indeed, in classical literature it was considered the favorite haunt of the Muses.
“Generously lavishing praise upon the versifier, I gave orders that a precious poem, such as this one, must be published. I soon saw to it that his poem was recited at court, in our chambers, and, – in order to insure that it was made known to a wide public audience, – from the rooftops. All of the people were pointing their fingers at me. Oh, what a triumph! Oh, what joy!”

Chapter 78: Innocence! Where Art Thou?

“Up to this point in time, as each and every one of us can clearly see, the worthy son of Prince Simon Chistyakov had perpetrated a thousand acts of impertinence, injustice, and tomfoolery. His conscience, at any rate, didn’t accuse him of committing any true villainy. His behavior with old Trudovsky, it’s true, did resemble villainy, but I, out of especial modesty and piety, didn’t wish to ascribe to myself someone else’s deeds. And I humbly ascribed the honor of having committed such an act to my spouse of hallowed memory and to His Serene Highness. But the following incident, which occurred shortly afterwards, can be attributed to my all-embracing imagination, and may the merciful Lord God above forgive me for the reprehensible sin that I committed, just as the offended party has forgiven me.”

“One day, upon entering the prince’s office, I found him to be in a rather sullen mood. ‘My friend,’ the prince said, glancing at me languorously, ‘I wish to take you into my confidence regarding a matter that I haven’t shared with anyone, not even with my son. I wish to entrust you with a secret, upon which my peace of mind depends. Hear me out! Although I’m exalted far above all of those others who have risen to high office, and although it seems that I, like Colossus,62 am standing firmly on my pedestal, earthquakes nonetheless do occur, as a result of which even the Colossi themselves can come crashing down. I’m becoming like a tightrope-walker, who’s being supported by a tightly stretched rope high up in the air. One careless movement, – and he will fall off, flying down to the ground, head over heels. My liaison with the princess, who rules the kingdom here with nearly unbounded authority, is not unknown to you. She’s a woman, consequently, she would like, – not so much out of love, as out of vanity, empty-headedness, and caprice, – to see me in that high office in order that she could say to all of Europe: ‘I have spoken, and so it shall be!’ She turns a blind eye to my frequent infidelities, the same way that I act relative to hers. I grant her the freedom to enjoy comfortably all of the pleasures of sensual lovemaking, trying only to suggest the inculcation of a subtle sense of what distinguishes this kind of passionate lovemaking from tender, heart-felt love. Hitherto everything has gone very smoothly. But recently, as you are well aware, our young Count Pustoglavsky, who had been traveling abroad,

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62 Although “colossus” has come to refer to any statue that is much bigger than life size, Prince Chistyakov seems to be referring here to the Colossus of Rhodes, the statue of the Greek sun-god Herlios that was erected in the city of Rhodes (on the island of the same name). One of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, it was constructed in 280 BC to celebrate the successful defense of Rhodes against an attack by Demetrius Poliorcetes, who had besieged it for a year with a large army and navy.
arrived here, just back from Paris. This is a man who’s very dangerous for women. On top of his pleasing appearance, he’s flighty, cheeky, and obsequious. And during his entire life he hasn’t uttered a single sensible word. How could a man such as this fail to please? Thus, my friend, with each passing day I’m noticing that the princess is developing a passion for him, and if up until now he hasn’t celebrated a complete victory over her, that’s only because he has been trying, – by means of his obstinacy and his apparent dimwittedness, – to show his lack of skill and adeptness in similar matters. In this way, he’s able to ignite passion more strongly in the object of his desire. I’m charging you to become well acquainted with him, to divert his heart toward some other girl, and then, if it’s no longer possible to make him fall truly in love with this girl, to compel him, at least, to display his good looks to her. And I shall leave no stone unturned in my effort, when the occasion permits, to exhibit him to the princess in the brightest possible light.”

“By accepting this arduous proposal, I seemed to be, in my own eyes, a great man. In a relatively short amount of time, I managed to develop a close relationship with Count Pustoglavsky, and I tried to penetrate to the most secret mainsprings of his heart. And after a month of the most astronomical observation of his heart and soul, I found that this young man had a highly romantic spirit, that’s to say: he was a real playboy, a man who, – for the sake of the common weal, – ought to have been hanged a long time ago. In order to attract him more closely to me, I tried more and more to imitate him, copying all of his rakish tricks. Our tomfoolery, – the impudent pranks that we perpetrated, – was completely separate from the performance of our ministerial duties. The count and I would chase after every woman that we met, and, when she hadn’t yet stolen away from us, we would run up to another one, look her straight in the eyes, and, without saying a word, we would laugh out loud, like madmen. In order to be more obliging, we would try as much as possible to appear absent-minded and distracted. We would jabber away, uttering smutty double entendres and lavishing praise without any rhyme or reason. Thus, for example, not infrequently he would praise the blue eyes of a female beauty when she actually had dark eyes, and once I made myself out to be such a high-spirited dandy that I marveled at the beauty and splendor of the eyes of one distinguished old woman, when, in fact, she suffered from ‘walleye.’ Count Pustoglavsky, of course, couldn’t help but come to love an exact replica of himself, but I did notice, with some chagrin, that his heart was just as empty as his head. He wasn’t able to become attached to anyone or anything. For him, all women were lovely. He would run after all of them and lead them almost to the final terminus of victory, when suddenly he would cast them aside and begin pursuing new prospects for amorous liaisons.”

“Once, while I was discussing with him ways that we might outwit His Serene Highness, a precious idea crossed my mind, and I had almost no doubts that it would succeed.”

“‘Count,’ I said to him the next time that we met, ‘why is it that you’re so inconstant? Why do you cast aside a female beauty before she deigns to make you happy?’”
“‘My friend!’ he replied, embracing me and laughing his lungs out. ‘It’s because they’re in such a great hurry, and thus they don’t even have the time to arouse your desire, before they’re already offering you their flaccid charms!’”

CHISTYAKOV: “You, count, know little about women, and you judge all of them on the basis of a few. You wouldn’t find such well-disposed women everywhere.”

PUSTOGLAVSKY: “What’s that you’re saying? I know little about women? You’re the one telling me that? At least I haven’t encountered an instance where I’ve experienced how some woman has . . .”

CHISTYAKOV: “Would you like me to provide you with an instance where you can experience that?”

PUSTOGLAVSKY: “Perhaps, is the woman one hundred years old? In that case, I wouldn’t quarrel with you! But if she were only ninety-nine years old, – in that case, you would lose!”

CHISTYAKOV: “She’s seventeen years old! Go ahead and place your bet!”

“He accepted my offer joyfully. We placed a bet of a thousand gold coins, and I promised to show him the cantankerous woman in three days’ time. What was the identity of that unfortunate woman, whom my policy at the time had doomed to become a victim of vice? It was Marya, the good, kind, and innocent daughter of Colonel Trudovsky. Her father had been locked up in a madhouse for his frank discussion of turbid sources, which I learned about only much later.”

“When I had finished telling Prince Latron about my plan, he couldn’t refrain from embracing me. It goes without saying that I had to make use of all of the measures at my disposal to lose my bet. Three days later, Marya appeared at the court of Prince Latron as the so-called ‘wench’ of His Serene Highness. The poor girl herself didn’t understand what was happening to her. It was enough that she had crossed over from poverty to prosperity, and that she had gained the opportunity to help her mother in hopes of one day helping her father as well.”

“The count, upon seeing her, confessed that his eyes had never beheld a woman quite like her before. ‘She,’ he said, ‘is either a very great actress or truly a real innocent!’” Setting up his plans, the count began his attack. He praised her more than all of the others, not sparing either the shuffling of his feet or the tender expression of his feelings for her. Instead of running away from him, the way that all of the other women did, – in order thus to make him chase after them even more fervently, – Marya listened to him patiently, looking at him in the eyes serenely, and when he would become entangled in lies, she would say to him: ‘Count! For me, you are either boring or funny. I laugh willingly when you leap into the air right in front of other young maidens, and I grow bored when you distort your body right in front of me!’”
“At this point, all three of us – that’s to say, Count Pustoglavsky, Mamzelle Viktoria, who was likewise taking part in our common conspiracy, and I, – could see that we needed to deal with Marya in a completely different way than we would have with other women. The count was afraid that I, for the sake of winning our bet, would be hampering him, whereas I, on the contrary, was afraid that he, having grown bored with Marya’s obstinacy, would be casting her aside. In this instance, however, my fears proved to be unfounded. The courtiers weren’t all that compliant. They usually run from those who are chasing them, whereas they chase after those who are running from them. There wouldn’t have been a laurel tree if Daphne hadn’t been so stubborn. Acting in accord with this conclusion, Count Pustoglavsky changed his behavior, and, thinking along the lines of Marya’s morals and manners, he disposed of his own.”

“Thus it was necessary for Viktoria to re-educate Marya. And this meant that she needed to turn a simple, good-hearted, innocent maiden into a debauched wench. And this would be made easier to put into action by the fact that they were all living in one house. And, what’s more, this conspiracy was being made against a single inexperienced girl who didn’t have a father (in the moral sense of the word, for he did exist physically), and it was being made by a foursome of experienced (what else could we call them?) ne’er-do-wells! Viktoria made Marya’s acquaintance and developed a close relationship with her. And how could Marya beware of the influence of a false friend, when Count Pustoglavsky himself had been deceived by me? A blush appears on my cheeks even now when I recall some of my further actions. But when I’m feeling heartfelt pleasure at the recollection of a good deed that I performed, fairness demands that I not hide a foul deed that I committed as well. A new education began for me when I became acquainted with fashionable books and engravings, which truly deserved to be cremated in a vernacular way, both them and the people who created them. While Marya didn’t dare to open her mouth or her eyes, Viktoria took upon herself the duties of this post, and since she was a fine actress, she played her role with great zeal. Marya was captivated, if not seduced, as if by some inspiration. She was finding in Viktoria her guardian angel and, – I don’t quite know how to express my thoughts about this, – her lover! Yes! This French behavioral fashion poured its poison throughout Europe, a poison that, up until that time, had exercised dominion exclusively in Asiatic seraglios. Young maidens started to search for love amongst fellow maidens, and it was by means of exactly the same demand. At first, Marya greeted the embraces of the perfidious Viktoria with her own naïve embraces of pure innocence. But this very same innocence soon lost its brilliance. What can a bad example, drenched in evil, not do in the most innocent of hearts? Viktoria, over time, managed to explain to her that such a type of love was extremely insufficient for providing the complete enjoyment that sexual love is capable of providing. And it was at this point in time that Count Pustoglavsky appeared, not in his earlier semblance as a fashionable rake and a frivolous playboy, but rather in the guise of

63 Daphne was a Greek dryad, or tree spirit, and the daughter of Peneus, the river god. According to Greek mythology, Daphne rejected every lover, including Apollo, for she was sworn to remain a virgin. When that god pursued her, she prayed to her river god father to rescue her, whereupon he transforms her into a laurel tree, thus foiling Apollo, who subsequently developed a special reverence for laurel.
an Arcadian shepherd. The languorous, bashful look on his face couldn’t help but attract
the attention of the languorous, bashful Marya. With all of her innate chasteness, she
opened up her soul to Viktoria, heeded her words of advice, and, in two months’ time,
she had fixed the date for a secret rendezvous with an unworthy sexual partner. Since
Marya’s every step was known to me, it was only natural that this secret rendezvous was
not concealed from Prince Latron as well. At the very same moment when the carefree
Marya was comfortably ensconced in the passionate embraces of her perfidious lover,
Prince Latron, taking the princess by her arm, appeared at her sinful bed. Indignation
revealed itself in each and every feature of the mistress’s face. The embarrassment of the
guilty parties was indescribable. The princess, looking away, said to them: ‘Stop what
you’re doing here!’ Half an hour later, both of the lovers were summoned to the court
chapel, where they were immediately married, despite their extreme confusion and
shamefacedness. Count Pustoglavsky was ordered to leave the capital immediately, and,
on the strength of an official decree, he left it that very same night, entrusting his wife to
the care, – and the watchful eye, – of the steward at their town house. I myself can’t
understand why it was that my conscience didn’t trouble me at that time! Oh, the power
of bad examples and of moral corruption! How was it that I could have failed to shudder,
sacrificing the innocence of a good and kind maiden? Wasn’t I the one who was to
blame for her moral ruin, for her perdition? I think so now, but at that time! . . .”

Chapter 79: A Scholarly Banquet and an Appetizer

“At that time, I couldn’t get my fill of admiring the feat that I had just accomplished.
Success in such a delicate undertaking, which was so ticklish for a gray-haired man like
myself, who was serving at court, raised my standing in the eyes of His Serene Highness.
And I was unable to find another man who was quite like me. With each passing hour, I
was becoming more and more arrogant. And seeing the felicitous successes that I was
enjoying in my stupid little schemes, I didn’t set any limits to my haughtiness. Seldom
did a week go by without my reading works of verse in some periodical publication that
lavished praise upon me. And if one were to rely strictly upon the excellent expressions
invoked by these Horaces of mine, then I would emerge as being more salutary, by far,
than Maecenas64 ever was, and as being worthy of much more than just a single poem. I
myself held no worse an opinion in regard to my contributions as a patron of the arts.”

“Some time later, Mister Nekrasin, the Russian versifier who had written Licorisa’s
epitaph and, shortly afterward, an ode in honor of my exalted father Simon, visited me a
second time, requesting that I gladden his heart by attending a banquet to which the most
celebrated members of the Warsaw Academy had been invited. The occasion for this
celebration was provided by the election of Nekrasin himself to membership in the
Academy, and he was awarded this honor after writing a short poem in Russian on the
victory of the Muscovite Prince Dmitry Donskoy over the proud, tempestuous Tatar
Khan Mamai in the Battle of Kulikovo. There was much in this poem that was truly

64 The Roman patron Gaius Maecenas (68 BC – 8 BC) was a friend of, and political advisor
to, Octavian, who later reigned as Caesar Augustus. He was also an important patron for the
new generation of Augustan poets, including both Horace and Virgil.
wondrous: for example, there were no fewer than two to three thousand bolts of lightning during the battle. The Don River was seething, the Nepryadva River was blustering, and the Mecha River was hissing. At the same time, an important discovery in Russian antiquities was made: the beard of Khan Mamai, since he was an evil Tatar, was longer than the beard of Prince Dmitry. But, on the other hand, the tail on the prince’s horse was much shorter than the one on the khan’s horse, and it was due largely to this fact that the Tatar army was defeated in the battle. Even if I had never been escorted to the versifier’s home before, it would have been easy for me to single out his apartment by the horrible amount of shouting and screaming that was resounding loudly from there and echoing all over the place. When learned men are making that much noise at a banquet, just imagine what it would have been like during an actual battle if a few more of them had been recruited into the army. They would either have muffled the sound of cannon balls exploding or they themselves would have been struck dumb by the explosions. For it has been observed that a person who’s very clamorous over trifling matters, shouting loudly when discussing them, is the same one who is very quiet, – seeming to be muffled or even rendered voiceless, – when important matters are at stake. An empty vessel, in short, is louder than a full one.”

“When I entered the front hall of the versifier’s apartment, I found that about a dozen learned men were gathered there: for example, some Poles, some Russians, and some people of other nationalities, and, what’s more, some actors, several of whom were there with their wives. Seeing me, they all paid their respects to me, and I, for my part, wasn’t impolite to them, deviating slightly from the way that I would behave at my ministerial receptions.”

“When everyone had assuaged their hunger a bit, and especially those food cravings that learned men don’t endure very patiently, a lean, elderly man, a philologist by title and rank, asked the actor who was sitting opposite him: ‘Tell me, please, for what reason has it come about that actors and actresses have taken it upon themselves to preach to the members of our society, giving them public admonitions (although these admonitions, it’s true, come from someone else’s composition), – for what reason, I say, do they themselves frequently not understand what it is that they’re saying?’”

AN ACTOR (holding a glass): “For what reason is it that a Professor of Moral Philosophy, who frequently speaks *ex cathedra* about abstinence and temperance, can hardly move his tongue without great difficulty?”

A MATHEMATICIAN: “That happens! That certainly does happen!”

A MORALIST: “It’s better to be hardly able to move one’s tongue, but to do it efficiently, than to jabber away loudly in public about inanities!”

A PHILOLOGIST: “A learned man, who hasn’t discovered anything new, is a fruitless fig tree that deserves to be dried out. How much better is it for him to devise his own ideas than to declaim someone else’s ideas either *ex cathedra* or on the stage?”
THE ACTOR: “To declaim well someone else’s good ideas is much more praiseworthy than devising novel inanities, which is exactly what you do, Mister Philologist.”

THE PHILOLOGIST: “What is that you say, you worthless hypocrite? I devise inanities? Why, aren’t I the one who first introduced some magnificent new words into the Russian language? Aren’t I the one who named a male actor a *litsedei* [face maker] and a female actress a *litsedeika* [face maker], a theater a *pozorishche* [shameful place], a tragedy a *pechal’novoishche* [sorrowful howling], billiards a *sharokat* [rolling ball], a cue stick a *sharopekh* [poke with a stick], and a billiard pocket a *prorezdyrie* [cut a hole]? Huh? Aren’t I the one who did all of this?”

THE PHILOLOGIST’S WIFE: “Out of all of the words that you have devised, the most felicitous ones are *sharopekh* and *prorezdyrie*.”

THE ACTOR: “Isn’t that because they’re part of a pair, – two peas in a pod, – just like you and your husband are?”

THE PHILOLOGIST: “What? Why, you scoundrel! Are you saying that I’m a *sharopekh*?”

THE PHILOLOGIST’S WIFE: “What? Why, you damned thespian! Are you saying that I’m a *prorezdyrie*?”

THE MATHEMATICIAN: “Ha, ha, ha! Congratulations on your new rank, Mister Sharopekh, and the rank of your missus, – what do you wish for us to call her?” (*He takes a drink*).

THE PHILOLOGIST (*He strikes him on the ear*): “Here’s an *A*-minus\*B-plus for your grade.”

THE MATHEMATICIAN: “Oh! Oh! This is no laughing matter! I shall prove to you that an observer of the stars is much more outstanding than an observer of billiard pockets!”

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65 In this dispute between the philologist and the actor, Narezhny appears to be poking fun at the attempt on the part of some hyper-patriotic Russians in the early years of the nineteenth century to reduce the number of foreign borrowings (especially from the French) that were beginning, as they saw it, to pollute their native tongue and to replace them instead with indigenous Russian words. This movement to purify the native tongue was closely associated with the efforts of Admiral Alexander Shishkov (1754-1841), who, upon his retirement from the military in 1807, became a self-styled philologist and founder of a literary society, “The Gathering of Lovers of the Russian Word,” whose members insisted on purging the Russian language of foreign terms and replacing them with native ones, especially those that came from the country’s historical past.
“With these words, he struck the philologist about the head, asking, ‘How many stars are you able to see now?’ Everyone rushed from the table. While the mathematician was dealing with the philologist, who this time was also not sluggish in discovering places where he could strike his foe more suitably, the mathematician’s wife sank her claws into the hair of the observer of the heavens. And the actor’s wife, seeing that her husband was to blame for the fervor of this fight, jumped up and, with a most tragic exclamation, dealt the philologist’s wife several slaps to the face. ‘You damned litsedeika!’ exclaimed the wife of one of the scholars, and, casting her husband aside, she started grappling with the goddess of the pozorishche. This is where the trouble erupted. No matter how much the host and I shouted at them, no matter how much we tried to get them to calm down, – it was all to no avail. One could sooner separate two starving wolves than two learned scholars! However, the litsedei, who was more agile than all of the rest of us, quickly devised a means of restoring peace. Without sorting out who was right and who was wrong, who was to blame and who wasn’t, he began to dole out weighty slaps in the face to all of us, while reading to us aloud from some tragedy:”

“The highly impudent ones I tame, the repugnant ones I depose,
I strike with thunder, – insolent, as well as smooth-tongued, foes.”

“And soon he truly did manage to tame the highly impudent ones, only not the smooth-tongued foes, for they were very openly shouting at one another as they resorted to name-calling: ‘You fool!’ ‘You drunkard!’ ‘You ass!’ and so on. The wig on the head of the Professor of Moral Philosophy flew far away, and the philologist’s undercoat was splitting at the seams. Everyone stood up, but what new shameful event presented itself? The litsedeika and the female inventor of that sobriquet were rolling around on the floor. The former, starting at the breast, was trying to tear to pieces the dress that her rival was wearing, whereas the latter was trying to do the very same thing, starting from the opposite end of the female anatomy. Both the one and the other succeeded in doing this, and we caught sight of some feminine charms that had hitherto been concealed from us. The philologist was the first one to turn nasty and become savage. And this time, being more prudent than he had been at other times prior to this, instead of seeking revenge on the cohabitating lover who had offended him, he descended upon her and forced her, by means of kicks to her body, to withdraw from the field of battle. The actor didn’t want to cede primacy to the philologist, as far as magnanimity was concerned, so he launched an attack, making several marks on the face of the litsedeika, after which, I should think, she wouldn’t be able, at any time soon, to litsedeistvovat’. Both heroines, becoming angry at their respective spouses, decided to leave the gathering, and this helped to calm us down a little. Although the day had passed in a noisy uproar and a hubbub, it didn’t, however, include any fights, something that the host and I had made a special effort to prevent. At the setting of the sun, everyone dispersed and left for home, or, to put it more properly, everyone crawled away, each to his or her own place of residence. Being in the vicinity of the Capuchin Monastery, I wished to go spend a few minutes at the gravesite of my Licorisa and to revive my memory of those golden days that I had spent with her. I went inside the gate. My heart was never calm and at peace whenever I reminisced about Licorisa, although, to tell the truth, I was reminiscing about her more infrequently than I had before. But, all the same, my memory of her was still precious to me. My heart
became constricted at the mere sight of her grave. Leaning my elbows on her tombstone and holding a wild daisy in my hand, I watched as the sun was setting and, shortly thereafter, as the moon was rising in the sky. ‘Your radiance is lovely, Tsarina of the Night,’ I said to myself. ‘You serve as an ornament of the Sky, just as my Licorisa used to serve as an ornament of the Earth. Oh! And she, too, was once a Tsarina of the Night! May a higher justice forgive her for that.’

“I was absorbed in these thoughts, and others like them, and at this site where the ashes of my deceased friend were buried, I was, if I may be permitted to put it this way, taking pleasure in some incomprehensible, languorous sensation, when I heard some voices nearby, which compelled me to glance behind me. At about a dozen paces away from me, I could see two men whose heads were uncovered. One of them was a venerable old man whose face was overgrown with a beard, the other was a young man who had taken him by the arm to support him. Approaching an expensive tombstone, they fell to their knees, and they began a conversation between them that horrified me. Oh! At no time in my life, not even on my deathbed, shall I ever forget even a single word of that conversation! So amazing were the words that were spoken by these two strangers.”

THE OLD MAN: “And so, my son, this is where the martyr sleeps? This is where the unfortunate sacrifice to the forces of malice and seduction lies? Are you here, Marya, my sweet, kind Marya?”

THE YOUNG MAN: “Here, ill-fated, venerable old man, reside the cold remains of the one whose heart you had destined to be mine! She’s here beneath this cold soil! Marya! When shall I get to see you and imprint a farewell kiss upon your heavenly cheeks?”

THE OLD MAN: “Don’t burden your memory of her with indignation. She always loved you, she loved you even during that time when treacherous scoundrels plunged her into the embraces of vice. Oh, Latron! Oh, Chistyakov! Is it really possible that there shall be no divine justice rendered? But tell me, my son! How were you able to obtain a free minute for me, so that I could, at least once, shed some tears of grief and sorrow over the death of my Marya? How? Without you having any money, or any friends in high places?”

THE YOUNG MAN: “It was, to wit, through a friend who is related by marriage to the overseer of the house where you’re being held captive! Hardly had I left the army and hurried back here, in order to merge my fate with the fate of your unforgettable daughter, than word of what had happened to you astounded me, just as did word of Marya’s marriage to Count Pustoglavsky. They assured me that he, on the very same day as her wedding, abandoned her, charging his loyal servant to make use of all of his powers to show her how to find her end. When I saw her, – alas! – she was already in her grave. Anyone who has loved another person would understand what my situation was at that time. The count soon arrived at a gallop and, in order to deflect any suspicion away from himself, he organized an enormous funeral and erected this monument at her gravesite. That’s the way it is, venerable old man! That’s the way it is here on earth, when, as often
happens, blood-thirsty scoundrels have the power to act freely, with impunity! Oh, Latron! Oh, Chistyakov!"

Chapter 80: The Tale of a Young German Baron

“This brief story told by a young stranger seemed to me to be extremely protracted. The gloom of the tombs and the darkness of the night intensified the expressiveness of his words. I would have liked at that time to have been named Pogantsev, that is, a mean, unprincipled person, instead of Chistyakov, if only not to have to hear my surname being invoked so negatively. At his exclamation, – and with the sound of his voice when the name was pronounced – ‘Oh, Chistyakov,’ it seemed to me that I was hearing the voice of an angel, who was calling me to appear before the Judge of the world. They continued their conversation even longer, and every word of theirs resounded in my soul, as if it were a parental curse. I didn’t dare to stir or to breathe, and when they withdrew, it seemed to me that Marya, – poor Marya, who had been murdered by fate, – was coming out from under the tomb, casting threatening glances in my direction and pointing up at the starry heavens with her finger, and then saying: ‘Do you see the throne of a higher justice? Tremble at the sight of it! Its judgment is near at hand!’ I left the cemetery with my whole body shuddering, and I didn’t dare to take a look back at it until I had left it far behind me. ‘Oh, virtue! How great is your might, even when embodied in people dressed in the most tattered of rags! Oh, vice! How weak, worthless, and insignificant you are, even though you might have been shining, dressed in a regal crown and a purple mantle!’"

“For several nights on end, I couldn’t sleep peacefully, for the image of the lovely Marya was incessantly floating right before my very eyes. In addition to this, I couldn’t remove from my memory the damned painting that belonged to the village elder in Falaleevka, the one that depicted how devils, armed with burning hot pincers, were pulling out the tongues of the seducers of innocent maidens. What is there that time shall not bring to pass? And what shall dissipation not cause? Little by little, I began to forget the nighttime stroll that I had taken at the cemetery. And after some time had passed, I decided to report all of this to Prince Latron and to request that he order that old Trudovsky be placed in iron chains, so that henceforth he wouldn’t be taking strolls in those places that are reserved for the sake of the peace of mind of the Orthodox faithful. When I had finished forming such a fine intention and had set it aside, waiting for an appropriate opportunity to bring it to the attention of the prince, a young army officer, dressed in a Hussar’s full-dress uniform, came to see me in my bedroom one night. The look on his face indicated that he was experiencing something extremely distressful in his soul. He walked up to me, he bowed politely, and then, placing a purse filled with gold coins very delicately on the table, he said to me, with a bitter smile on his face: ‘My dear sir! If you shall not help me, I shall be on the brink of ruin! Please be my intercessor!’”

“‘My liege’ I replied, glancing at him with one eye and at his gift for me with the other, ‘I don’t yet know the reason for your request, so I can’t promise you any assistance. There’s no time for us to do that today, so drop by here tomorrow!’"
“‘I would gladly fulfill your command,’ replied the officer, ‘but without your assistance I shall be locked up in the fortress before tomorrow arrives.’”

“‘Well!’ I said in a long, drawn-out fashion, ‘this means that your case is sound and full-fledged!’”

“‘Precisely,’ he interrupted me, and, rather than observing the conventions of etiquette, which were so useless in this instance, he placed a diamond ring upon the table.”

“‘Very well,’ was my response, ‘stay here for a little while and tell me what’s the case that you’re pursuing, so that when His Serene Highness arrives back from the palace, I shall be able to give him a report about it.’”

“I indicated to him a chair, he took a seat, and he began to recount his story in the following way:”

“My fatherland is Tuscany. My father was a German baron named Brown, and my mother was an Italian. If you were to pile up ten dozen of all of the German barons in the world and distill them in a communal pot, you would just barely get as much stupid arrogance in that pot as you would find in my father. He would walk with his head lifted as high in the air as possible, and although he would often stumble, he would nonetheless have sooner agreed to fall into a deep ditch than to watch his step. At that time, he would only incline his head when he had to peek inside a tankard of punch, for he, as a German baron, didn’t wish to drink out of a glass, but always out of his father’s silver tankard instead! He tried to pour his own rules and thoughts about honor into me, and to have me imbibe them. And he would have completely succeeded in that endeavor, if one circumstance hadn’t prevented it from happening. In our neighborhood there lived an Italian artist who traded in portraits of his daughter, representing her in various situations: in the embraces of Cupid, in the image of Psyche, etc.66 By chance, I obtained several of these paintings, and since her father didn’t conceal the truth about their being originals, I was captivated by Angelica, a truly lovely maiden, who was about fifteen years old. I tried to start up an acquaintanceship with her, and, with the help of her pious mother, I succeeded over time in doing precisely that. I swore an oath, – and this oath of mine was sincere, – that I was choosing Angelica as my spouse. When I explained myself to my father, his face turned pale, the pipe that he was smoking fell out of his mouth, and he, looking wide-eyed, stared at me in silence. Finally, regaining the use of his tongue, he

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66 In the story of Cupid, the Roman god of erotic love, and Psyche, the goddess of the soul, written in the 2nd century AD by Lucius Apulelius Madaurensis, Cupid is sent by Venus to shoot Psyche with an arrow so that she may fall in love with something hideous. Cupid instead scratches himself with his own dart, which makes any living thing fall in love with the first thing that it sees. Consequently, he falls deeply in love with Psyche and disobeys his mother’s order. The tale concerns the overcoming of obstacles to the love between Psyche and Cupid, and their ultimate union in a sacred marriage.
said to me in a fit of rage: ‘What? You want the daughter of a house painter to become the daughter-in-law of a German baron! Oh, heavens! If you make mention of this again, at some other point in time, you shall not receive even the crust of a sandwich from me. And I shall be the death of you by way of starvation!’"

“These fierce, furious words of his didn’t deprive me of all hope, however. On various occasions I attempted to remind him of my need to marry Angelica, but after waiting for more than three months’ time and knowing that an eighteen-year-old man can be his own person, I talked my lover into it, and we got married by the first priest that we came across. And I led my young spouse triumphantly into the baronial house. That which we had feared did indeed come to pass: instead of receiving forgiveness, we received slaps in the face and nice little kicks in the rear end. And thus we were thrown out of the house with the injunction never to return. But since I myself was a baron who was of no less importance than was my father, I promptly anathematized him and, with the help of the money that my mother had given me, I set off with my baroness to seek my fortune in Poland. At first, we drew breath on love alone, failing to remember that without a crust of bread it’s impossible to breathe anything for very long.”

“The discovery of this secret brought us to our senses, and we began to think of how we could make an honest living. But where could one achieve this goal honestly? Certainly not in Warsaw at any rate! That’s the reason why, after having experienced so many failures in the course of our journey here, we didn’t find any better means to this end than to join a troupe of Warsaw actors, which is what we did shortly upon arriving here. But he who thinks that one can make a comfortable living in that profession, – as soon as the wife doesn’t pitch in, and mine was a real Lucretia,67 – is a stupid fool. What grief and woe! What toil and trouble! I looked with envy upon those actors who were riding in carriages and spending large sums of money. We, meanwhile, were being nourished solely by the verses that we had learned by heart, and this was a very meager diet. Scarcity and her sister, boredom, imperceptibly exhausted my wife and ruined her health. She passed away during the second year of our chivalrous wandering around the world. The theatre became repulsive to me, and so I, without lingering at all, cast it aside. I wrote to my father several times, asking for forgiveness, but in vain! The baron, who had grown angry at me, was always fiercer than a crocodile. The heavens above, which look after the unfortunate and the unhappy, didn’t abandon me, however. I soon made the acquaintance of the young son of a wealthy

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67 According to Roman tradition, Lucretia was a noblewoman in ancient Rome whose rape by Sextus Tarquinius, and her subsequent suicide, precipitated a rebellion that overthrew the Roman monarchy and led to the transition of Roman government from a kingdom to a republic. The incident kindled the flames of dissatisfaction over the tyrannical methods used by Tarquin’s father, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. As a result, the prominent families instituted a republic, drove the extensive royal family of Tarquin away from Rome, and successfully defended the new republic against attempted Etruscan and Latin intervention.
merchant. He liked my gifts and talents, for I played the guitar not badly, I sang fairly well, and I jabbered away verbally quite a lot, something that he himself didn’t know how to do. And that’s the reason why he talked his father into accepting me to work for him as a bookkeeper in his office. Although I didn’t consider book-keeping to be a science, as many people now boast, but simply a skill or a trade, in this trade I was, nonetheless, not any more skillful than a royal bookkeeper, who, without understanding anything, talks a lot about his knowledge at the top of his lungs. I decided to imitate this great man and accepted the position that his father had offered me. But since the merchant’s son and I kept accounts only with the owners of wine cellars, with former acquaintances from the theatre world, and with the owners of fashion shops, it wasn’t a prolonged period of time that elapsed before I had thoroughly collected the entire balance and thus it was time for me to leave the wealthy merchant’s office. His son gave me two hundred silver rubles and a saddle horse for my journey. And I, with God’s help, rode out of Warsaw.”

“Upon hearing that Russian troops had entered Poland, I took it into my head to serve for a while under their flag and to try my luck in the military. In the process of heading for Grodno, at one location where we were crossing a bridge over a river, I fell off at the end of it and, along with my horse, flew head over heels into the water. Somehow or other I succeeded in reaching the river bank, but my fine steed, – along with the suitcase that contained all of my worldly possessions, – was carried away by the rushing currents of the river. I stood for a long time on the banks of the river and watched, with teary eyes, at this loss of mine, but since there was nothing that I could do to remedy it, I set off on foot for the Russian army. I was readily accepted into a chasseur regiment as a mere chasseur. During the remainder of the campaign, no matter how like a baron I fought, I was twice taken prisoner by the Poles and the same number of times by the Russians. At the conclusion of this campaign, I heard, to my great delight, that the highly distinguished Baron Brown had, by the grace of God, departed from this world, moving off to join his noble ancestors up in heaven. Right away I sent off a highly tearful epistle to my mother, and, describing to her my pitiful situation, I asked for her forgiveness and for her blessing. Although she was an Italian by birth, she was, however, more compassionate than a German would have been, sending me the necessary paperwork to attest to my baronial title and rank, as well as sending me a sufficient amount of money to pay for my return trip home and into her waiting arms. Soon afterwards, I rose through the ranks and was promoted to officer status, and I, of course, would have resigned my commission and retired. But love, – my natural element, – stood in the way and hindered me from doing that. A long time before this, I had developed a friendship with Karolina, the daughter of the decent and honest Pan Kruchinsky, and, upon receiving my promotion in rank at the officer level, I married her.”

“Six months later, we received orders to proceed to Moscow. Since there was no possibility of taking my wife along with me, I left her in the bosom of her family under the care of her parents. Life in Moscow seemed merry and gay for us
soldiers, and we had fun there. How could it be otherwise when we were being received as heroes who had just returned home triumphantly from the field of battle? To my misfortune, the quarters that had been assigned to me were in the home of a Russian merchant named Karyakin. The worst thing of all is that he was an obstinate Old Believer, and his wife was a stupid fool, whereas their daughter Dunyasha was so nice and kind, so lovely and delightful, that I couldn’t help but fall in love with her, – and, what’s more, I ought not to have fallen in love with her. Since there was nothing good that I could expect from her parents, who didn’t understand at all what the word “baron” meant and who thought, judging from my curly hair, that I was called that mockingly, since they mistook it for the homonymic word used for goat [baran], I decided, therefore, to select the final option that was available to me: to abduct the lovely and delightful Dunyasha and to marry her. The old people, as usual, got very angry at me, and, as usual, they ultimately forgave me, because they weren’t German barons. For a whole year, I lived in comfort and contentment, and then, after being transferred to a Hussar regiment, I set off for Petersburg, leaving this wife behind in her parents’ home, for the same reasons that I had earlier left behind my first wife.”

“In Petersburg, I took up quarters in a house together with a captain in our company, Mister Von Nirengof. For two years I maintained a correspondence with both of my wives, beguiling each one of them, in turn, with the promise that I would soon be visiting her, so that they themselves shouldn’t request to see me unexpectedly. And the real reason for this was that I had become strongly attracted to Doroteia, my captain’s daughter. So as not to let the opportunity slip by, I began right away to court her, and I received her parents’ consent without any difficulty and married her. And now, about a year later, my peace and quiet have not been disrupted.”

“I continued, as before, to correspond with my wives, and I managed to wheedle some money out of each of them. The unrest, which had begun in Poland again, forced the Russian government to introduce their troops there. Having left my most recent wife in Russia, I was once again united with Karolina and led a most amiable life with her. One evening, while I was amusing myself at home, playing a card game with my father-in-law and some guests, a young woman came in, she looked all around, and then, throwing herself upon my neck, she exclaimed: ‘My dearest spouse!’ I stood there dumbfounded, feeling as if I were rooted to the spot, just the same as all of those who were present there felt. It was Doroteia. I hadn’t yet managed to regain my senses, when yet another female personage entered, and she, too, embraced me, saying: ‘My dear husband!’ It was Dunyasha! You can imagine the general state of astonishment! All of the people

68 Old Believers (or Old Ritualists) are Eastern Orthodox Christians who maintain the liturgical and ritual practices of the Russian Orthodox Church as they were before the reforms instituted by Patriarch Nikon of Moscow between 1652 and 1666. These Christians, together with their rituals, were anathematized in the Synod of 1666-1667, producing a schism between the Old Believers and those who followed the state church in its condemnation of the Old Rite.
there were looking at one another with puzzled looks on their faces, not understanding anything, until the frightening voice of Pan Kruchinsky interrupted everything with the exclamation: ‘What’s going on here, you traitor! How dared you to make fun of a nobleman, and, what’s more, a Polish one? Oh, you scoundrel! I shall see to it that you’re punished!’” At this point, he drew his sabre and rushed toward me. This sudden movement of his brought me back to my senses. I did the same thing that he had just done, and we hadn’t succeeded in waving our sabres more than a couple of times before his weapon had already begun to knock against the floor, and right beside it fell three of his fingers. Not expecting anything good to result from this, I rushed out of the house and came running directly here to see you, hoping that you, my dear sir, would clearly see justice in this matter from my perspective and that you would render me your assistance. I have revealed everything to you candidly and sincerely!”

“With these words, the officer concluded his lengthy story. Although it was obvious to me that he was a fairly adept rake and ne’er-do-well, nonetheless, I looked at his ring and his gold coins, and I said to him: ‘My dear sir, although you’re indeed guilty of committing a crime, the Polish nobleman is not entirely within his rights either. What a shame it was that his daughter had two female rivals! I would advise you to seek refuge for this one night at the home of one of your friends, and tomorrow we shall see what God grants you!’”

“He left my bedroom feeling satisfied with himself, while I went to bed feeling even more satisfied with myself.”

Chapter 81: A Tempest

“It seems to me that I have provided you with an adequate description of my behavior during that period in my life when I served at court. The only instances of idling about that I didn’t attempt to infringe upon were the ones that didn’t come to mind for me. And I was so bold and boastful that I considered the prompting of conscience to be a substantial flaw in a person’s character. Being constantly surrounded by brilliance and splendor, hearing only endearments and salutations from every quarter, I completely forgot my earlier way of life in Falaleevka and the words of advice that had been provided by my deceased father, Prince Simon. A strong desire now arose inside me to unearth, from out of hiding, the inner brilliance of mine that had grown dim and faded. ‘Why,’ I asked myself one night, while I was tossing and turning on the divan, ‘should I continue any longer to hide the fact that my lineage and ancestry are at least as renowned as, – if not even more renowned than, – those of Prince Latron himself? To what end am I doing this? And what about the many service contributions that I have rendered to the state? Yes, indeed! Since I’m not yet even forty years of age, and since my Feklusha has vanished, I could well enter into matrimony with some princess or countess, and in that case my chambers would be no worse than a palace. I could have lackeys, footmen, and hajduks, – all of them attired in gold braid, – to serve me. Right now, thank God, those times, – when I used to discuss with Feklusha the future grandeur that we would be enjoying soon after the birth of our son Nikandr, – were all gone. And, what’s more, was
I perhaps being naïve and simplistic when I decided to conceal, up until now, my lineage and ancestry? How surprised His Serene Highness would be to find out what they truly were! And why should he not know! Perhaps he would even give me his daughter’s hand in marriage! Yes, he would most certainly give it to me. And I, for my part, wouldn’t be stupid: I wouldn’t show, by the look on my face, that I know a thing or two about her amorous exploits. And how else could a noblewoman like her distinguish herself from a common philistine, who considers her virginity to be the main dowry item that she holds in her possession? Well, what do you know! Tomorrow the entire court, – tomorrow the entire city, – shall learn that Chistyakov is not only, and not simply, Chistyakov, but is Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov!”

“I smiled with satisfaction at such a foppish fabrication as this, and, as a reward for coming up with it, I patted myself on the belly, when suddenly a mixture of noise and shouting coming from the adjacent room startled me. I raised my head slightly from the divan and opened my mouth wide, preparing to summon the valet, when the door to my bedroom opened with a crackle, and a man, accompanied by a dozen armed soldiers carrying lanterns, appeared. They rushed headlong over to where I was lying, and, while some of them were wrapping me up in a sheet, their leader said to them: ‘Be careful! You must handle this thief and robber more cautiously if we are to deliver him to the proper place! He must serve as an example of justice being rendered!’’ They dragged me down the stairs, laid me down in a closed sleigh, and then galloped off. Horror seized me. My breathing stopped, and I was frozen in place like a statue. Our drive had continued for several hours, at which time I heard the creak of gates opening. They removed me from the sleigh, carried me in their arms, and then stopped soon thereafter, laying me down on the ground. And one of the guards, as he was leaving, gave me a kick and said: ‘Here you go, you dirty dog, die!’” Everything fell silent. Feeling that they weren’t intending to suffocate me in the sheet any longer, I took the liberty of lifting my head a little and opening my eyes, but only darkness held sway. Finding myself to be as if in a grave, I humbly entrusted my soul to the Lord God above. After several hours had passed, as far as I could judge the time, it started to turn grey around me, then more and more grey, until finally enough light reached me through a small window that I could discern all of the objects that surrounded me. I found myself inside a small room with an iron door. There was a bunch of straw in one corner, and in another corner stood a dilapidated little table, on which a crust of bread and a tankard of water were perceptible. Examining all of this with an attentive eye, I got down on my knees and lifted my arms upward, saying with a moan: ‘Oh, my Creator! Shall I, for a long time yet, be a plaything of fortune? Shall I, for a long time yet, have to suffer storms and shipwrecks on the inconstant sea of my life? Or shall this dungeon be the final place of refuge to which Your avenging right hand has brought me? So be it! I’ve been a great outlaw in my life, and I deserve Your righteous wrath! I forgot all about Your retribution during the periods of good fortune and happiness in my life, and I deserve now, during these days of affliction, to be consigned to oblivion!’”

“Handing myself over, in this way, to the will of Providence, I got to my feet, looked in the window, and didn’t see anything except a field and some juniper shrubs. Wild birds were flying around up in the air, heralding a storm with their clamor. And, indeed, rain
clouds began to accumulate, and my sadness grew. ‘So, Prince Gavriilo Simonovich,’ I said to myself with a sigh, ‘so you’re encountering the day on which you intended to reveal to the world the eminence of your family and kin and to choose a spouse for yourself from a princely home! Where are my palaces? Where are my *hajduks* and footmen? Alas! All of that has disappeared, – and, most likely, disappeared forever!’

Around noontime I heard the creak of a key in the lock of my door. The door opened, and I saw a tall man with a pale face and somber eyes, dressed in rags. He added some water from a jug to my tankard, he placed a chunk of bread next to it, and, pointing at the bread with his finger, he said sternly: ‘Dinner.’ He turned around and got set to leave. ‘Dear friend,’ I caught him up, ‘tell me, for the love of God, where am I?’ ‘In a safe place,’ he replied. He left the room and locked the door behind him, just as he had done earlier. Thus passed the whole day. Toward nighttime, my guest appeared again. And again he added some bread and water, and, pointing at the rations with his finger, he intoned this time: ‘Supper.’ There was nothing that I could do. A short while later, I ate some bread and washed it down with some water, and then, lowering myself onto my straw bed, dressed in my rose-colored damask dressing gown, the piece of clothing that I had been wearing when they took me captive, I couldn’t help but say, through tears: ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!’ You can easily surmise that this night was spent not any more calmly or comfortably than the day had been spent. And that’s the way that many days and nights were spent. My despondency increased. I looked with dead eyes out the window of my wretched little hovel. And nothing touched me any longer. When, in the distance, a blue sky would, so to speak, kiss the gentle, emerald green face of a field, I would say: ‘Shall this last for much longer? Soon the clouds shall spread out on your ridge, the sky shall become visible, whirlwinds shall blow for a while, rain and hail shall pour down, and nature shall present an image of havoc and destruction. Oh, time! Time! How changeable and fickle you are!’”

“By my count, I spent more than two months in these conditions of seclusion and solitude, and I began to become accustomed to them, just as people usually do become accustomed to all manner of misfortunes. At my leisure, I would, in my mind, go over my past life and examine all of the stupid things that I had done. And I saw that I had grumbled dreadfully about wise Providence, which had never abandoned me. Didn’t Providence endow me with a good, kind heart, which I myself proceeded to corrupt and debauch, and with an adequate mind, which I employed to devise and refine unlawful acts? I shed tears of repentance, and I promised myself, deep down in my soul, that if I were ever to regain my freedom and to have the opportunity, I would apply all of the powers of my mind to becoming a man who was completely different from the one that I had been before. And I also promised myself that, having cleansed my soul, I would emerge from the darkness of this dungeon and step out into the light of day, just as a man emerges from a bathhouse after having cleansed his body.”

“One morning, while I was saying my prayers, – and saying them much more diligently than the way I used to say them in church, when I was trying to attract, and seduce, Countess Takalova, or at the Palace of Wisdom, when I was preparing to enlighten *Celestial Taurus*, – the door to my prison cell suddenly opened, and I jumped back two steps in horror when I saw that, along with my usual guard, Colonel Trudovsky likewise
entered. He stared at me intently for some time, and then he said: ‘Follow me,’ and we left the dungeon. I followed him in silence, imagining that he was leading me to the scaffold. At this point in time, I was no longer giving any thought to my past life. A horrible death was what was occupying my imagination now. After walking along numerous passageways and crossings, we found ourselves on a small landing, which was enclosed by high walls. Several raised platforms, on which stood wooden crosses, led me to think that this was perhaps a cemetery, where they bury unfortunate and unhappy prisoners like me. When we had reached a newly dug grave, on the edge of which stood a poor coffin that had been knocked together somehow or other, Trudovsky stopped and said to me: ‘Take a good look at this!’ I glanced inside the coffin, and the blood inside me froze. Beneath a simple dyed shroud, dressed in rags, lay the prostrate body of a person who, not long before, used to make the entire kingdom tremble, a person at whose command entire armies would be set in motion, a person whose mere look would either make people extremely happy or plunge them into deep distress and unhappiness, a person whose friendship was sought after by crowned heads of state, – there lay the body of Prince Latron.”

“‘Do you see him?’ the colonel appealed to me in a tone of voice that I had hitherto not heard from him. ‘Where is the magnificence and where is the splendor that used to surround him? Where is the gold and where are the precious stones that used to shine on his person? Where is that pride that used to disclose itself with his every glance? He’s lying here like the lowliest of slaves! Who fears his threatening beck and call now? Who sings laudatory songs to him? Isn’t he just a clod of earth along which a hungry worm shall start to crawl? Oh, merciful God up in heaven! Is it really worth all of this vanity just so that a man can forget his own insignificance during days of glory, good fortune, and happiness? This is how it is, Chistyakov! You and the prince, your benefactor, were cruel and brutal people who deserve condemnation and damnation. You have cost me many tears and sighs, but I swear to the great interpreter of the human heart that I forgive both of you. Could you ever have thought that the poor, helpless Trudovsky would be the head of the dungeon that was assigned the task of taming your pride and your cruelty? And that assignment has been successfully fulfilled! Chistyakov! You’re free to go! Yesterday I received the injunction to release you from your captivity here, but with this proviso: you must promise, without delay, to leave not only this capital, but also this kingdom. God shall be your traveling partner. Right now, you’re poor, of course, so here is my cash purse for you to use!’”

“He withdrew, and I set off behind the dungeon guard, shedding bitter tears. The first thing that I did, upon being released from confinement, was to make an effort to get dressed, and then, after that, to set off immediately for the capital, where I paid my last respects to the memory of the unforgettable Licorisa. After fulfilling that duty, I right away left Warsaw, inside whose walls I had seen so much good fortune and happiness, as well as so much affliction, so many delights, and so many troubles. I left this city with the intention never to return to this bottomless abyss ever again.”
“After being on the road for several days, I set foot within the boundaries of the Kiev Voivodeship.69 And one morning, as I was walking along some fields, I said to myself: ‘So then, I’ve already abandoned my second homeland. Almost twenty years ago, I was leaving Falaleevka, and I was just as destitute and doleful then as I am now. There, just like here, too, I lost my wife, as well as my peace of mind. But, at that time, I was young and, consequently, full of hope, a feeling that constitutes the most important part of our patrimony. But upon whom am I going to place my hopes now? The heavens above have become irritated by the injustices that I have committed down here on earth. People have an aversion to the mere mention of my name. Oh, now I see how terribly those people act, the ones who base their idea of bliss on vain honors and riches!’”

“Reasoning in this fashion, I couldn’t help but shed some tears of sorrow. My eyes, as a result, grew a bit turbid, and I couldn’t see anything in front of me, when suddenly an unfamiliar voice stopped me in my tracks with a question: ‘Where are you going?’ I winced, I glanced back, and I saw that I was standing on the edge of the riverbank of a rather swiftly flowing stream. Several old linden trees were standing there, and an elderly man, dressed in a dark frock coat, was sitting near the roots of one of them. His dark-complexioned face was adorned with several warts, and his black hair, flecked with grey, was closely cropped. A leather knapsack was lying next to him, and a notepad sat atop that knapsack. The stranger was holding a pencil in his hand, and it seemed as if he was deeply absorbed in thought.”

“Coming back to my senses following this brief sleepy lull, I walked up to him, and then, without having yet lost the art of paying compliments that I had developed during my former ministerial service, I bowed down in front of him with a foppish grimace on my face, and said: ‘My dear sir! Grief blinded me! You have saved a man from a watery grave. Without you, I would now be at the bottom of this stream. Please allow me to thank you.’”

“‘I only regret,’ the stranger replied, ‘that a madman, such as yourself, isn’t swimming in the water right now. If you’re coming back from Warsaw, then you’re a fairly good rake and scapegrace. But if you’re still only on your way there, then, judging by your verbal skills and your pompous manner, I would say that you can expect to enjoy excellent successes there!’”

Chapter 82: A Sage

“I was struck dumb by the words that he had spoken, and I was at a loss to know how to reply to this strange man. But the desire to find out who he was made me resourceful.

69 The Kiev Voivodeship was a unit of administrative division and local government in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (from 1471 until 1569), and then of the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland (from 1569 until 1793), as part of Lesser Poland Province of the Polish Crown. The voivodeship was established in 1471 upon the death of the last prince of Kiev, Simeon Olelkovich, and the transformation of the Duchy of Kiev (appanage duchy of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania) into the Voivodeship of Kiev.
Seeing that he must have been a special kind of scholar, I abandoned my French bows and simply walked up to him, sat down beside him, and said to him: ‘What a beautiful morning! The clean air and my weariness from the journey are stimulating my appetite for some breakfast. You wouldn’t happen to have anything to eat in your knapsack now, would you?’”

“He looked at me attentively, and then, after thinking about it a little, he said to me indifferently: ‘You’re starving, and you don’t have even a crust of bread to eat! Very well! Let’s go to my shack! It’s located no more than five versts away from here.’”

“And so we set off. Along the way, he asked me: ‘Are you coming from Warsaw?’”

“Yes, I am,’ I replied.”

“‘Why did you leave that city?’ he asked.”

“‘I suffered too many unfortunate incidents there!’ I told him.”

“This prompted the following comments from the stranger: ‘And did you seek your fortune in the capital? And, what’s more, in the Polish capital? What a stupid person you are! Didn’t you know that the thicker and the more impenetrable a forest is, the wilder and fiercer are the beasts that inhabit it? Each and every city is a deep and vast sea: there’s no counting the number of reptiles in that sea. Although that sea abounds in pearls, who would boast, before he could manage to obtain a single one of these pearls, that he wouldn’t fall into the clutches of a powerful monster, into the claws that were in abundance when the former government was in power there? Oh, you ungrateful blind men! Isn’t nature in its rural beauty truly glorious? Do you seriously think that it scrimps on its gifts? Isn’t the shade provided by this tree pleasant? Isn’t the water provided by this spring cool and refreshing? What more are you searching for? Enormous palaces? Bright, shining ornaments? You unfortunate, unhappy people! You exchange your essential well-being for a handful of gold, – and to what end? So that you, groveling and crawling at the threshold of entry into the circles of distinguished people, and choking from the dust raised at their feet, shall be able to say: ‘I’m dying in a gold-braided kaftan, and over my ashes a marble monument shall be erected!’ Is this worth anything?’”

“Such a beginning to our conversation convinced me even more that my confrère was, at the very least, not a stupid or foolish person. Recollecting that I myself had anointed my lips with the branches of scholarly knowledge, I told him, with a conceited and arrogant look on my face: ‘Sire! Each and every person travels a road that fate has preordained for him. One man is content with his preordained road, and he curls up, like a worm, in the mud; another man, like an eagle, soars toward the sun!’”

“‘He soars?’ the stranger said. ‘But does he ever reach the object of his soaring? Would you say that it’s a characteristic trait of a noble spirit to strive to attain a great goal, even though one can’t hope ever to attain it? I agree! If I were to act that way, then I would need to be completely sure that I have both the rapid eye of an eagle and the strong
muscles of his wings. Otherwise everyone would call me Aesop’s turtle, who felt an inclination to fly, who flew for a short while, and who then proceeded to smash himself up to smithereens.”

“I replied cogently: ‘If one were to limit the range of action to that one dominant trait, to that one dominant characteristic with which one is born, then how much of what is great in the world, how much of what is useful in it, would be lost? Would he have ever seen Vladimir Monomakh, Aleksandr Nevsky, Dmitry Donskoy, or Peter the Great?’”

“Yes, he would!” said my eccentric stranger. “But he wouldn’t have seen Yury Dolgoruky, Grigory Otrepev, Stenka Razin, Prince Latron, Oliver Cromwell, and other scourges of humankind. You shall say that even scoundrels can be useful to the world, the same way that ulcers, starvation, fires, and floods are useful! Yes, that’s true! I don’t wish to argue that point with you, for both philosophers and theologians have accepted this pitiful consolation. But it goes without saying that, if we are to believe this, as is appropriate for a verbal creature, then I find that it would be better if those thousands of unfortunate and unhappy people, who fell beneath the blows of tyrants, had existed up until now, than that whole millions of people would be enjoying themselves while gazing at the cruel death and destruction of the latter.”

“By this time, heavy storm clouds had gathered, and fiery bolts of lightning had begun to rush past us. Our conversation broke off as we redoubled the pace of our steps. A cold wind was blowing right through us, and suddenly a strong torrent of rain started pouring down upon us. The steeple of the church in the village, where our repose seemed preordained, was already in sight, when we overtook a man on the road who was wearing a full-dress uniform with gold braiding on his sword. The full-dress uniform and the sword indicated to us that he had survived more than just a single battle during his lifetime, although at that time it was not yet the custom to give swords with the inscription ‘for bravery’ engraved on them. But just the look of the venerable old man, and of his sword, indicated that he hadn’t received it for cowardice. Encountering us, the warrior removed his tricorn hat, – a hat that was not only cornered on three sides, but that also bore the marks of twenty bullet holes on each of those sides, thus making his headgear, in truth, a sixtycorn hat, – and he stopped respectfully.”

“My stranger, after looking at him intently in the eyes for a while, asked: ‘Who are you?’ ‘Where are you headed?’ and ‘Where are you coming from?’”

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70 The stranger is referring here to Aesop’s fable about the tortoise that wanted to fly. Discontented with his lowly life, and envious of the birds that he saw amusing themselves up in the air, the tortoise begged an eagle to teach him how to fly. The eagle advised the tortoise not to try to fly, for nature had not provided him with wings and thus he was not fit for it. The tortoise continued to press the eagle, however, and the latter finally relented, picking him up with his talons and soaring with him to a great height in the sky, where he let him go. The wretched tortoise fell headlong and was dashed to pieces on a rock. Lev Tolstoy, late in his life, wrote a Russian version of this fable, titled “The Turtle and the Eagle” (1904).
“‘I’m coming directly from the Polish border, my lord,’ the old man replied. ‘At the most recent battle that we were engaged in there, a battle against insurgent rebels, I received five wounds. Right now, I’m going to Ukraine, to my homeland, to endure the last assault coming from Lady Death, who is all the more likely to defeat me, due to the fact that she, while in the vanguard of the army, ordered the distinguished regimental commander, Commander Starvation, to attack me. He’s such a courageous knight that he could suddenly slay anyone he pleases. Indeed, he has already begun to send out his forward cavalry patrols.’”

“‘What!’ exclaimed my companion. ‘And you mean to say that you’ve been left without anything?’”

“Why do you say without anything?’ the soldier replied. ‘Having served in the military for more than thirty years, I have preserved my heart and my conscience, as well as my two hands and my two feet. And not everyone succeeds in doing that! However . . .’”

“‘However,’ said my companion, ‘it’s now cold outside, and it shall soon start raining. You’re old and, consequently, weak. Here’s my frock coat: go ahead and put it on and wear it.’”

“With these words, he cast off his own frock coat, placed it upon the shoulders of the man whom we had overtaken, and, turning around to face me, he said: ‘Let’s start walking more rapidly.’”

“The man whom we had overtaken was dumbfounded by this gesture, and he asked: ‘But to whom am I obliged for this frock coat?’”

“‘My name is Ivan,’ my companion replied, continuing on his way. We hadn’t yet gone a hundred paces when pouring rain started coming down upon us. Ivan, – for it was only now that I had learned his name, – was drenched to the bone, yet he was walking along cheerfully, singing a merry tune: ‘Blessed is the husband who doesn’t take into consideration any advice provided by the impious and the ungodly.’”

“Half a verst away from the village, we overtook a bareheaded beggar, dressed in rags, who was trudging through the mud on bare feet that were badly swollen. ‘Oh, my God,’ said Ivan with a groan, ‘is there really not a single humane soul left on this earth?’ He rushed over to the side of the road, sat down on a grassy knoll, took off his boots, and handed them over to the beggar. Then he put his own hat on the beggar’s head, and, ignoring the muttering of the amazed beneficiary of this act of kindness and charity, he set off on the road, walking more rapidly than before. I found myself in such a state of astonishment, such a state of confusion, that I didn’t dare to utter a single word. My feelings toward Ivan were filled with the greatest reverence, and walking along behind a man who was dressed in only a shirt, without a hat on his head or boots on his feet, a man who was soaking wet all over his body, who was mud-stained and dirty, I felt so much contentment in my soul, as if I were accompanying some hero or some monarch in a cortège: in a solemn, yet also triumphant and festive, procession.”

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“Scarcely had we set foot in the village than a group of children, who were playing in some puddles, raised a cry: ‘Ivan, Ivan!’ All of them rushed over to see him, thronging around him while shouting, ‘Hello.’ A minute later, some peasant men and some old peasant women appeared at the gates to their houses, each one of them holding various gifts of food in their hands: some were holding a chicken, others were holding eggs, yet others were holding salad greens. Ivan waved his hand at them as a sign of turning down their generous offerings, and the peasants returned back inside their homes with some measure of displeasure and disappointment.”

“Finally, we reached Ivan’s abode. It was a small peasant hut that stood at the end of a vast garden, from whose apex one could see the roof of an enormous house. The interior of the hut matched its exterior. There were two benches, a table, on which several books were lying, and, in a corner, an icon by an artist of the Suzdal school of icon painting. These constituted all of the furnishings and decorations in the hut. Ivan, in his own unique fashion, made a welcoming speech in my honor and requested that I sit down, while he, for his part, donned an uncovered sheepskin coat and started to work at building a fire in the stove, which had not yet managed to light the firewood. At this point, in walked a boy who was carrying with him a dressed chicken, a leg of veal, some bread, a small decanter of vodka, and a pitcher of water. ‘Pyotr,’ said my host, ‘tell Vladimir that I don’t have a frock coat, nor boots, nor a hat. Have him bring me those three items, as well as another couple of chickens and some more bread. I’m entertaining a guest here today.’” The boy left silently. My host got down to work on the cooking, while I, not knowing what to think and what to do, worked up the courage to ask him: ‘Who is this Vladimir, whom Pyotr instructed to fetch some new clothes for you and some more food?’ ‘I hope,’ Ivan replied, ‘that he’s a human being! By the way, you’re soaking wet and frozen stiff. Since, for the time being, dinner isn’t ready yet, here’s some vodka and bread, and here’s Virgil’s Aeneid, – I have obeyed the teachings in this work of literature in everything that I do, expecting the same denouement, – I’m leaving it for you since I’ve noticed that you’re not from among the ranks of the illiterate and uneducated.’”

“Five minutes later, I saw, through the small window in the hut, a tall, strapping man of advanced years, wearing a cape while walking around the garden, and a gold-braided footman, who was carrying an umbrella and holding it above the elderly man’s head. The boy that I had seen earlier was dragging along a large basket after them. As soon as the new guest had entered the hut and cast off his cape, I saw, with extreme agitation, that two stars were shining brightly on his frock coat. He sat down on a bench, the servants left, and a conversation of a peculiar kind ensued between the two men, one that I had never had occasion to hear while I was serving in my capacity as secretary for the grandee.”

VLADIMIR: “Here, in this basket, is a dry frock coat, a shirt, underwear, boots, and so on.”

IVAN: “Good! (He takes the clothing out of the basket in sequential order) Everything here looks fine! But what are these stars on the frock coat for? You forgot to bring a
candle! In weather like this, a candle shall illuminate a room better than a dozen of your stars could.”

VLADIMIR: “That’s true. Hand me a knife: I’ll rip out these stars (occupying himself with that task). It’s absolutely essential that I go visit Petersburg one of these days.”

IVAN: “Bon voyage!”

VLADIMIR: “They’ve bestowed the title of Kamerjunker upon my son, and bestowed upon my daughter the title of Fräulein! I must thank them for that.”

IVAN: “Yes, you really ought to!”

VLADIMIR: “For what reason do you stubbornly persist in refusing to go to Petersburg with me?”

IVAN: “Why should I go there? To what end?”

VLADIMIR: “Simply to go! To go take a look at the city and the people who live there, to see the amusements and entertainments at the royal court!”

IVAN: “That’s nonsense, my brother Vladimir! A city is a city everywhere: they’re all the same. The only difference is that in one of them there are more bricks and boards, while in another there are fewer. As far as people are concerned: I’ve seen more of them than I ever needed to in order to learn how to tolerate any of them at all. And the amusements and entertainments at the royal court are of no importance compared to the amusements and entertainments of the human heart. And confess honestly: is it consoling to watch fools and clowns occupying the most important positions in the government? To watch young lads who have learned only how to chase after nymphs? To watch Thalias and Terpsichores commanding armies and ruining them? Isn’t it true that it’s better not to have to witness all of this nonsense than to see it and then to sigh, expressing sadness over the fate of the impoverished part of our population?”

VLADIMIR: “You look at everything through a magnifying glass, and everywhere you find more evil than there actually is in the thing itself.”

IVAN: “You’re quite right! And thank God that what you say is true! Promise me, however, that you shall answer candidly two questions that I have for you.”

VLADIMIR: “I’d be glad to! Go ahead and ask me as many questions as you’d like!”

IVAN: “Are you going to the capital to thank personally those officials who bestowed upon your son the title of Kamerjunker? That’s one reason that would truly compel you to take a break and to get out of here for a while. You’re still here, however, and the not-

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71 In Greek mythology, Thalia was the goddess of comedy and pastoral poetry, while Terpsichore was the goddess of dance and the dramatic chorus.
very-prompt expression of your gratitude remains here with you. In the meantime, so as not to remain idle, are you currently compiling a register of the names of those people in Petersburg whom you should approach with a request, and upon whom you should bestow a gift, – which prince, count, fraulein, lady-of-honor, valet, cloakroom master? And, – if the person who oversees the concubines has some power and influence, – Her Worship? All of this shall be done so that your son shall, as soon as possible, be appointed to serve in the Office of Civil Affairs at the rank of State Councilor?"

VLADIMIR: “Your last comment is rather just!”

IVAN: “Wait a minute! When he receives this important rank, shall you make use of new efforts, – or, better yet, new intrigues, – to get the powers that be to give your son a position that’s commensurate with his rank and breeding? That’s to say: shall he be offered a position as a military commander and sit in the voevode’s chair? Huh?”

VLADIMIR: “What’s wrong with that? With God’s help, I shall, after all, succeed in this endeavor!”

IVAN: “Beware of invoking God’s holy name in those realms of endeavor where it’s almost always only just the devil that operates there any more. And you yourself should devote some honest reflection upon this matter. Your son Volodya is now twenty years old. He speaks French well and speaks some Russian. He’s turned two of your female house-serfs from being wenches into becoming mothers. He’s knocked out two or three teeth at a time from the mouths of dozens of huntsmen. And, at various times, he has caught more than twenty hares. But after falling off his horse just once, he hurt himself very badly, and, as a result, he has now become quite weak and has gone into decline. As you yourself can plainly see, however, he caused a little mischief during his younger years. But this ‘a little mischief’ is not at all to say that he deserves to be a voivode: that’s to say, a man upon whose intelligence and activity the peace and quiet, – and sometimes even the very life and honor – of an entire half-million people ought to depend. So then, let your Volodya become a kamerjunker or a kamerger. Well, let him become whatever you’d like. But you should no longer be the one who’s leading him to these various positions, for these ranks and titles possess such great importance. It would be as if you had taken it into your head to reward someone by granting him the powers possessed by such gods as Jupiter, Neptune, and so on, granting him the right to hurl thunderbolts and to agitate the sea. I’d laugh heartily, looking at these newly conferred gods, and being firmly convinced that their power didn’t concern me at all, and was nothing for the world to worry about either. But, my friend! If this imaginary thunderbolt, by some stroke of blind chance, – it doesn’t matter what kind of stroke, – were to be transformed into a simple twig and placed in the hands of someone who didn’t know how to control it, then woe to him, and woe to all of those people who are close to him. He would experience the fate of Phaethon, and the poor earth, and the rivers, and

72 In Greek mythology, Phaethon, the son of the sun-god Helios, asks his father one day for permission to drive the latter’s sun-chariot through the sky (to have his parentage confirmed), but he loses control and drives the chariot too close to the earth, burning it, and too far from it,
the trees, they would all suffer. Thus, Vladimir, may God be with you during your trip to the capital, but, right then and there, call out His holy name, not so that He shall help you make your son Volodya a voivode, but so that He shall deliver you from the mortal sin of even thinking about trying to do that. When the time comes that I shall hear these words spoken: ‘Volodya, – is a chamberlain above all other chamberlains, above all palace dogs, eagles, and kites, and above various kinds of marmosets,’ – then I shall begin to laugh warm-heartedly, and I shall say: ‘Glory to you, oh, Lord!’ But I would be so unhappy, if I were to hear: ‘Volodya is now a voivode!’ – Eh! My heart would then be torn to pieces, I would burst out sobbing, and I would raise a lamentation to the heavens above: ‘Oh, Lord! Forgive the sin of this man, Vladimir, – he’s truly a good and kind man, – but, unfortunately, he’s also a count!’

“Ivan fell silent and continued cooking his concoction assiduously. Count Vladimir, fastening his gaze upon him attentively, was mechanically removing with his fingers the unstitched stars that he had ripped out of the frock coat. Then he stood up, wiped his forehead with his hand, and left immediately, muttering through his clenched teeth: ‘Good-bye, Ivan!’ ‘Farewell!’ Ivan replied, locking the doors behind him.”

“Although I had served for such a long period of time as the secretary to the greatest of all possible court favorites, and although I was accustomed to standing by and watching indifferently all of the marvels of both the natural world and the moral world, Ivan seemed to me, nonetheless, to be the most marvelous of all manner of marvels. Who is he, this man whose entire distinction seems to consist in the five warts located on his face, and who gives orders so imperiously regarding the actions of officials who wear medals on their uniforms? Isn’t he the same as a count? But he’s more impoverished: he himself cooks up concoctions on the stove and at the same time he teaches moral lessons to a grandee. How is his considerable power and authority maintained and supported? Doesn’t he likewise have a sister named Fiona? Oh! That idea is inappropriate! Be that as it may, one still wants to find out: who is this mysterious Ivan, the man with five warts on his face?”

“During dinner time, and during part of the evening that followed, I tried to start some conversations on various subjects, using all of the means available to me, although I was careful to show that I deserved a better reception than the one that I had received from him at gunpoint. His replies to my queries were all based upon one model: they were brief and precise. Little by little, however, he softened up, and he started to speak with more trust and confidence in me than he had before. In the evening, I peeped out the window and said: ‘The stormy weather isn’t abating. The rain is pouring down just as torrentially as it was before!’”

“‘Stay here with us overnight,’ he said to me. ‘You shall not be a burden to me. Perhaps the morning sun shall correct and improve today’s disorderly weather.’” I gladly accepted freezing it. As punishment, Zeus strikes Phaethon with one of his lightning bolts, killing him instantly. His dead body falls into the river Eridanus, and his sisters, the Heliades, are turned into black poplar trees as they mourn his death.
his kind offer. The evening was spent pleasantly. When the time came for us to go to bed, my host led me to a small storeroom, where a pile of fresh hay, an arshin in height, was lying on the floor, saturated with moisture. Instead of a sheet, a large treated animal hide served as my bedding. And instead of a blanket, – a patchwork quilt. ‘Sleep tight,’ said Ivan. ‘Don’t grieve over the fact that hay is being used here instead of swan’s down: the blessed patriarchs poured forth such complaints and they were lucky and happy here on earth, and they’re probably even luckier and happier now that they are in heaven. The more closely that our bed resembles the common, earthen bed of the future, which we shall all share one day, the more frequently a man is apt to think about his own inevitable demise, and, it would seem, the more likely it is that he shall become a better person.’”

“Ivan’s wish was granted: that’s to say, I slept much better in his small storeroom than I used to sleep earlier in Prince Latron’s luxurious palace. To my great delight, the weather hadn’t changed at all, and, – in accordance with my wish and with Ivan’s request, – I spent the next five days with him at his home. Count Vladimir would often come by to visit us and would sometimes sit with us for several hours on end, and, as time went on, he would become better acquainted with me.”

“Ivan’s way of living, his way of thinking, as well as his way of forming opinions and making judgments, were always one and the same. He was alien to everything that was superfluous or unnecessary. He didn’t know either coercion or compulsion, in whatever form they might take, except for trivialities that were suggested by decency and decorum. When he found out that I had once been not the worst of Latinists and philosophers, he took pleasure in frequently bringing me texts written in that language and in bestowing upon me the honor of translating them into Russian for Count Vladimir. His favorite books were: the Bible, The Enchiridion by Epictetus,73 and Conversations of the Venerable Plato. Ivan was, apparently, a good and kind Christian, although when it came to names, he, it seems, didn’t make any distinction: when he needed to confirm an idea of his by means of some argument, he wouldn’t worry about the choice of his source and would say directly: ‘Thus spoke Ioann Bogoslov, Chapter N, Verse N;’ ‘Thus spoke Socrates, Chapter N, Chapter N;’ ‘Thus thought Epictetus, Chapter N;’ and so on. Count Vladimir noticed this eccentricity in his Christian friend and remarked about it to him, adding, with a smile, that in Spain and Portugal they wouldn’t have allowed him to elevate pagans in this way for long, and to place them side by side with pious writers and thinkers who are pleasing to God!”

“‘I wouldn’t start doing this in Spain,’ Ivan replied. ‘A stubborn blind man, who raises a cudgel and then uses it to strike the back of a man who is trying to point out to him the path to follow in life, deserves to fall into the abyss, for he adds, to a corporeal defect that isn’t arbitrary or voluntary, a mental defect that is both arbitrary and voluntary. As far as I’m concerned, what need is there to know the name of a man who has said something? What I need to know is this: what is it that he has said? Is it something correct or something false? Is it something helpful or something harmful? Once this has been

73 The Enchiridion (or Handbook) of Epictetus (125 CE) is a short manual of Stoic ethical advice compiled by Arrian, a 2nd-century disciple of the Greek philosopher Epictetus.
determined, and it has been found to be something good, then we can adapt it to serve our purposes.”

Chapter 83: Unsuccessful Schemes

“The weather finally changed. A beautiful day had arrived, and although I didn’t wish to leave the good, kind, generous, and intelligent Ivan so soon, nonetheless, preserving decorum and fearing that I might bore him if I were to stay any longer, I thanked him for the amicable reception that he had afforded me and asked him, out of especial kindness, to reveal his name to me, so that I could preserve the memory of it to the grave. ‘I can tell you almost the very same thing,’ Ivan replied with a smile, ‘that was once said to the apostle Filipp: ‘So much time have you been with me, Filipp, and yet you didn’t get to know me!’’

‘‘Where are you headed from here?’

‘‘To my hometown in the Oryol governorate.’

‘‘That’s good, and I, meanwhile, would like to visit Kiev, so let us go there together tomorrow, but today stay here with me. A mild, refreshing evening, with its cooling air, is coming today, and so we can enjoy it together here in the local garden. The person who, after spending a whole week indoors, under a roof, doesn’t hasten to refresh himself out in the fresh air, – getting his fill of inhaling the fragrance of aromatic flowers and trees, admiring the stars that God has created, and, in the depths of his soul, bowing down in worship before the sovereign creator of the universe, – isn’t very smart!’’

“Right before sunset, we went out to the count’s garden, which, both in its vastness and in its elegance, was worthy of especial attention. Radiant streams were flowing down from artificial mountain tops into stone reservoirs below that were surrounded by ancient maple and linden trees. Tree-lined paths were adorned with uncommon statues, and summer houses, – in the English, Italian, Chinese, and other national styles, – were scattered about in appropriate locations. After walking down a multitude of sandy paths and pathways, we reached the right-hand corner of the garden, almost near the count’s home itself. Interlaced between themselves there were acacia trees, at whose feet wild orchids, forget-me-nots, and daisies were growing. Beneath the arch of the trees stood a wooden divan, along whose sides marble busts of Peter the Great and several of his friends were placed on stone pedestals. While walking up to the divan, Ivan removed his hat, bowed to the image of Peter, and then, upon taking a seat, said: ‘Behold the greatest of all earthly sovereigns! The nickname that has been given to him, – ‘the Great,’ – hardly conveys his true greatness.’”

“After speaking for some time, with all of the ardor of youth, about this unforgettable sovereign, he concluded his expression of gratitude to the Almighty for blessing Russia from time to time with rulers such as these. Then he stopped speaking, remained silent for a while, and quietly started singing a well-known verse from the Psalms:’”
Endeavor, my spirit, to send
Praise to the Lord Almighty:
I shall sing in a thundering voice
About Him, while I am able to breathe.

“At this point, he pulled out of his pocket several transverse flutes, a type of flute that
dates from ancient times; his flutes, after they had cracked several times, had been
repaired by binding them with string. But this didn’t hinder my Ivan from striking up
some song on one of them in a certain kind of tone. When he had stopped playing, and I
had given him his due for the artistry of his music playing, despite the shortcomings of
his instrument, I grabbed the flute out of his hands, and, to his considerable surprise,
started to play a song on it. But I had scarcely managed to finish half of the first couplet,
when the sound of music being played on horn instruments, coming from the house,
began to thunder in the air. From the unexpectedness of this sudden burst of music, the
flute fell out of my hands, but Ivan, who had heard this music somewhat before I did,
said: ‘Evidently, Vladimir has some guests over at his house. Nothing, however,
prevents us from listening to their music, and all the more shall be the pleasure, knowing
that we, being secluded and solitary here, won’t attract any attention or curiosity on the
part of those swine, – those distinguished fools, – who, when they see a person dressed in
clothing that lacks gold and silver, are so surprised, as if they had just seen some wild sea
creature.’ When the music coming from these horn instruments fell silent, instrumental
music, accompanied by a choir of singers, rang out. ‘They’re having quite a feast,’ said
Ivan, hiding his flute in his pocket, and, after turning pensive, listening attentively to the
music and expressing his pleasure by the movements of his face. Our occupation, –
entertaining ourselves by listening to the music, – continued for about an hour, at which
time a masculine voice from behind our arbor distracted us. We glanced back, and, being
completely imperceptible, we saw two men through the tree branches. One of them was
short, delightfully pot-bellied, and all dressed up in braids of gold lace. The other was
wearing a full-dress army uniform with a lofty toupée. Ivan, after scrutinizing the two of
them, whispered in my ear: ‘This is an old brigadier, an enthusiast for hunting dogs,
wine, and other pleasures in that same vein, and his son, who was expelled from the
Sergeants of the Guard by his captain, even though up until now he has been firing his
rifle only at the geese in the courtyard. Let’s listen in on the conversation between the
brigadier and his son.’”

THE FATHER: “Stop lying to me, you rake! How could this have happened?”

THE SON: “So what if I’m a rake, – I act this way to your satisfaction. But, on the other
hand, I’m young, good-looking, cunning, and playful: in a word, I’m capable of
captivating even the most intractable of females . . .”

THE FATHER: “Ha, ha, ha! You’re young and good-looking! What sense can one
expect to find in a handsome puppy dog like you!”

THE SON: “Bravo, father! What a comparison you make! It’s one that a brigadier
would well make.”
THE FATHER: “Yes, it really is true! Come on, what’s a wench going to be looking for in someone like you? Your male torso? When you, from the head down, resemble a dried up, withered old burdock plant? Your face? When yours looks like a limp, faded cucumber! And what about me? Is a young wench going to want to embrace me? To kiss me? Is she going to want to be embraced by me? Ooh! Well, I shall now set an example for you: didn’t you, as a young pup, have occasion to prevaricate, to behave affectedly, to pay court to women, and to squire them? And God knows what you wouldn’t have done in your quest to charm Yulia, my steward’s daughter? Well then, did you have your way with her? I saw all of this with my own two eyes, – and I laughed, – ‘ha, ha, ha!’ And how is it that I, yes, I myself, on the contrary, just as soon as I set to work on seducing Yulia, succeeded in getting her to melt! At first, it’s true, she stubbornly resisted my advances, but we know how to force a zealous horse to obey our commands, how to break her, and so Yulia, in the end, gave herself up to me, yes, she gave herself fully up to me! Well, what do you say to that, Prince Charming?”

THE SON: “And did this surrender happen a long time ago?”

THE FATHER: “A week ago! Yes! Speak up, you adroit, good-looking man!”

THE SON (shuffling his feet, he laughs): “I have the honor, kind sir, father, of congratulating you on this stroke of great good fortune, and on the distinction of having accomplished this feat in your old age!”

THE FATHER: “Aha!”

THE SON: “And I wish you, in future, the great good fortune of taking pleasure in such advantages! I’m, in all honesty, envious of you! And I, as your devoted and faithful son, shall not delay in making it known throughout the entire district that the brigadier, my father, considers it a stroke of great good fortune when he, somehow or other, manages to crawl into a fortress that his own son, the captain, had already conquered through a successful assault, breaking open the gates and thus opening up a free, easy, and extensive entrance for each and every male passer-by.”

THE FATHER: “How is that? What are you saying?”

THE SON: “And I shall likewise make it known throughout the entire district that I have been taking pleasure in Yulia’s charms for more than a month now already, – and I swear to you that I’ve been doing this in my capacity as an honest and honorable man, as well as in my capacity as a captain.” (He runs off).

THE FATHER: “Ah, she’s an indecent and obscene creature! Aren’t I the one who provided her father, a poor, retired major, with refuge, room and board, and a salary, in a word, with everything? Although I gave him these things under the pretense that he was my comrade-in-arms in our regiment and that he had once hacked to death a Turk who had taken aim to shoot me while I lay sleeping behind some bushes. Was it my fault that,
after drinking excessively to give myself courage, I fell asleep, against my will, on the field of battle? Ah, that worthless creature! I did all sorts of good things for the benefit of his pretty little daughter, and now she, that damned ungrateful creature, – Oh! Right this very minute I shall throw her out of my courtyard, making her pay through the nose for this offense and leaving her without a shirt on her back, – and she can go straight to hell for all I care.”

“Having uttered these words, he left hurriedly. A silvery moon had risen in the sky, such that a shadow spread across the garden, shielding both Ivan and me. He wanted to say something to me, but, hearing that a conversation was taking place between two women, he fell silent. Once again we fastened our eyes upon, and directed our attention to, two of the guests at Count Vladimir’s party, and we heard the following conversation between the two women.”

THE ONE WOMAN: “No, I would never ask for that! Is it possible that I would see in you such a fool, such an unsociable and unsophisticated savage, such an uncouth puppet! Oh! If only I had known that such are the unfortunate consequences that can come from an education provided in a monastery, I never would have sent even this statue there. Thank God that I’m not poverty stricken. My husband is a general who owns a thousand peasant souls!”

THE OTHER WOMAN: “What in tarnation am I to do, Mommy? I don’t know what to do!”

THE ONE WOMAN: “You fool, what are you to do? You’re nineteen years old, and you still don’t know what to do? Isn’t it noticeable that the young count sitting next to you is hanging around and following you around? Out of all of the possible sentiments, he’s not sparing any of them, and people are listening to him. Oh, heavens! If only I were this age again! What does he say to you when he finds the opportunity to speak with you alone?”

THE OTHER WOMAN: “That he loves me!”

THE ONE WOMAN: “Good! And what else?”

THE OTHER WOMAN: “He requests that we arrange a time for a rendezvous . . .”

THE ONE WOMAN: “Very good. And what do you say to that?”

THE OTHER WOMAN: “Nothing!”

THE ONE WOMAN (in an outburst of anger): “If I hear such an answer from you again, you shall see what I shall do to you! From this moment forward, you shouldn’t refuse the count anything, – do you hear me? Not anything. He’s young, good-looking, and wealthy, and he’s a kamerjunker.”
THE OTHER WOMAN: “But what if he won’t take me as his bride after that?”

THE ONE WOMAN: “In that case, someone else shall take you as his bride, but the elderly count, in accordance with his code of gentility, shall not forsake his son, but shall instead help to set him up in the world and help him to get on his feet. After all, how did your own father come out in the world?”

THE OTHER WOMAN: “But what if someone else doesn’t find in me that which constitutes an honest and honorable woman?”

THE ONE WOMAN: “In that case, I would give that honest and honorable woman a good lesson about how to obey her mother, who looks after her good fortune and her happiness with all of her might. Move away from me and walk all around: I can see that someone is coming this way!”

“The daughter left. Ivan and I moved over to the very edge of the divan, and he said to me in a whisper: ‘Here are two examples of the best kind of education. A father is arguing with his son about what is of primary importance in the acquisition of some female libertine, and a mother, – oh, my Lord God, how is it that Your thunder shall not strike and stagger her!’”

“At this point, a tall, middle-aged man, dressed in a dragoon colonel’s full-dress uniform, was dragging himself along. The full moon was playing upon his crimson cheeks. He was swaying a little, and that’s why, with every step that he took, he was frequently leaning against something for balance, – now against a tree, now against the lattice fence that stood opposite him, – calling out to the devil, and to the devil’s mother, for help. After walking up to a lady who was strolling around the grounds, he stopped, looked at her intently, then turned her face toward the moon and gave her a smacking kiss, adding: ‘It’s you! I was afraid to make a mistake!’”

THE LADY: “Stop doing that, colonel, when we meet in private. You’re always so impertinent!”

THE COLONEL: “That’s the way that I need to be!”

THE LADY: “Let’s get going, what if my husband . . .”

THE COLONEL: “That old fool of yours? He sits in the corner and, like a good little seminarian, he gives a homily about how he used to take down artillery batteries! One doesn’t need to talk about what one used to do; one needs instead to do something worth talking about. And so, with your permission, I wish to launch an assault here, this very minute, upon a fortress that’s in a most pleasant position.”

THE LADY: “There’s a wooden divan here, – it’s so dark!”
THE COLONEL (entering the arbor together with her): “What need have we of a lot of light? Be careful, however, that you don’t scratch your pretty little face, or else that shall be a double loss for your husband.”

THE LADY: “Here I am, I’m already on the bench! Come here, more to the right.”

THE COLONEL (he goes to the right, he stumbles against a bench, and he falls down): “May a hundred thousand devils take the person who placed this bench here. I hit my head right against a corner of it.”

THE LADY: “It’s nothing, it’s nothing, get up. I shall help you. Aren’t I the one who has told you so many times that it’s possible for a military combatant sometimes to enjoy himself, to have some fun, and to go for a short stroll, holding on to the memory of victory? But you are always so agile and nimble before the start of a battle. What is it?”

THE COLONEL: “Well, I’ve taken a seat. And how about you?”

THE LADY: “It’s so hard and rigid that way. Oh, well, so be it.”

THE COLONEL: “No! Although I’m a cavalryman, I know, nonetheless, what exactly civility and courtesy are! Come on now, help me cast off this full-dress uniform.”

“They began to toil over this matter, which was made that much more difficult by the fact that Mister Dragoon was swaying back and forth. Finally, however, they succeeded in getting him out of his full-dress uniform.”

“At this point, Ivan, who had been pulling me by the arm, whistled gently.”

THE LADY: “Oh! What in the world was that? A whistle?”

THE COLONEL: “Let anyone who wants to whistle go ahead and whistle! Well! There goes another whistle. Who goes there? Come out of there, do you hear me! There’s nobody there! It only seemed to us that somebody was whistling. Where are you off to? What the hell is going on here? It was only . . .”

THE LADY: “Sh-sh! I can hear some low voices speaking and, what’s more, a shadow can be seen in the distance. Be quiet! For God’s sake!”

THE COLONEL: “Who? Me? A dragoon colonel? Truly, however, they do say: ‘Be careful, don’t say a word!’”

“At this point, yet another couple was approaching. And, judging by their voices, we recognized Volodya and Natasha, the daughter of our neighbor, a venerable lady.”

VOLODYA (dragging her along): “Come here, come here, dear Natasha! In this dark and gloomy grotto, we shall erect an altar of love.”
NATASHA: “Oh, my God! You’re going to strangle me. Stop for a moment. I shall go on my own. Oh, how dark it is!”

VOLODYA: “Don’t be afraid! Your passionate lover is right here with you!”

“In the darkness, Volodya happened upon the general’s wife, who, taking fright, rushed aside and bumped her forehead directly against the forehead of the dragoon. The latter began to howl. He jumped up, and, stumbling upon Volodya, knocked him off his feet. And he, in his flight behind him, caught hold of the honorable mother’s hair, and all of them were sent sprawling on the ground! Wishing to hide herself, Natasha, in her frenzy, threw herself right at me, and, sensing that some creature was moving beneath her, she became terrified and fell unconscious on top of those who were rolling around on the ground. We didn’t manage to render her any assistance.”

“Right then and there is when the real comedy began. While everybody else was crawling around like snakes, I, feeling pity for poor Natasha, jumped up, grabbed her by the arm, and dragged her out of the circle of three warriors who had already commenced their fighting. The dragoon, who was stronger than the other two combatants, narrowed his eyes and unleashed his mighty muscles every which way. Volodya, upon receiving two or three hefty slaps to the face and several punches, flew into a rage and likewise defended himself boldly. The general’s wife would have gotten to her feet long before, but, unfortunately, she was so tangled up in the dragoon’s spurs that there was no way that she could have done that. Volodya and the lady, seeing that they didn’t have the strength to endure anything more, resorted to the last resort of those who are weak: that’s to say, they yelled and screamed with all of their might and begged for help.”

“Ivan, who, prior to this time, had been idle, and who wished to stop this riot by whatever means possible, stood up on the divan, so that his voice would seem condescending, emanating from on high, and then proclaimed, in a loud voice: ‘Stop it! I have something to say unto you!’ A feeling of horror descended upon those who had been fighting. Both the tongues of the vanquished and the hands of the victors grew numb. In order to stun them even further, Ivan continued: ‘I want each and every one of you to stage your riot in silence and to go home.’”

“The combatants would, perhaps, have done what Ivan requested of them, when suddenly people carrying torches and lamps appeared at the corner of the arbor and, in an instant, they were standing at the site of the battle. Count Vladimir, surrounded by a throng of house guests, was looking around in amazement at all of the things that were strewn about. But the old man with a drawn sword, who was accompanying him, said: ‘Have no fear, count, it’s nothing. I’m here with you! Oh! And I would have readily subdued foes such as these!’ But when he had time to examine all of us more intently, he began to tremble, and he uttered with a groan: ‘Oh, my God! My wife, my daughter, – and both of them in such a deplorable condition! What’s the meaning of this?’”
“And, indeed, there was much to be amazed at. The lady’s hair was all tousled and her
dress was disheveled, with the hem torn to pieces, and the dress itself soiled and stained
by the black polish from the dragoon’s waxed boots. And imprints of a mustache were
drawn on both sides of her nose from the dye that had been used to color the dragoon’s
mustache. Her daughter’s appearance was likewise all disorderly and untidy.”

“Volodya resembled a devilish hobgoblin, while the dragoon resembled Satan himself.”

“‘What’s the meaning of all of this?’ Count Vladimir asked Ivan, who was still standing
on the bench in an oratorical position, and the latter answered him: ‘Ask this lady here,
the landowner’s wife! She’s the one who composed this whole stage comedy and who
watched it from beginning to end. She’s the one who ordered her daughter to show your
Volodya some kindness and favor. And she herself came to be here in order to show the
selfsame kindness and favor to the gentleman colonel. Not knowing this latter bit of
information, Volodya brought his mistress here with him, – and that’s the beginning of
the comedy, but its end . . .’”

“‘But its end I myself understand,’ the husband exclaimed with rage, and he rushed over
to the dragoon, who grabbed him by the arm and said to him coldly: ‘Hold on, Mister
General, and listen to what I have to say! Perhaps you’re now thinking something
offensive as regards my honor and your spouse? Know, then, that you’re mistaken! This
is already the third day that I’ve been uninterruptedly drunk. And to be drunk and old at
the same time makes one, in that case, harmless! You should conclude from this that it’s
already the third day now that your spouse has not breached the faithfulness that you are
due. I swear to this with the honor of a dragoon colonel. And if you don’t believe me,
just ask your spouse, – she worships you with the degree of honor that an army general’s
wife worships her husband.’”

“Without waiting to listen for any response, he took hold of his dress uniform by the
armpit and left everyone dumbfounded. Volodya disappeared soon after him, so, too, did
the general’s wife, and then her disconsolate husband, taking their daughter by the hand,
led her to their chambers, saying: ‘What good are titles and ranks to me, what good is
wealth to me, when I’m so ill-fated!’”

“Ivan, who had come down from his rostrum, walked up to the count and said amicably:
‘Did you hear, Vladimir, the last words of this poor husband and father? When ranks,
titles, and wealth don’t make people happy, what good does it do for me, – and for others
like me, – to seek to acquire them, since we’ve been satisfied enough living without
them? Consequently, we’ve been as fortunate and as happy as one can be on this earth.’”

“Instead of responding, the count, after shaking hands with Ivan, said: ‘Good-bye, and
good night. We shall see each other tomorrow. My presence is needed now at home!’”

“We parted company, and I set off with Ivan to our peasant hut.”

Chapter 84: Two Courts of Justice
“Scarcely had I awakened the next morning, when Ivan entered the storeroom that was serving as my bedroom, and he said to me: ‘It’s time to get ready. Anyone who’s about to set out for a long journey shouldn’t wait for the sun to rise. We’re going to go together. While I’m waiting to receive a reply to the letter that I sent to Vladimir, you can go ahead and get dressed.’”

“Indeed, by the time I entered the hut, I found our boy there and also Ivan, who was reading Vladimir’s reply to his letter. After reading it, Ivan opened his pack up wide and, picking some items out of it, he said to me: ‘Thank you! Here’s a shirt, two handkerchiefs, and a new Psalter 74 in sixteen parts. These are things that shall be needed for the road. But what kind of bundle is that?’ He unwrapped it and poured out a handful of gold coins onto the table. ‘Well! Well! What good is so much trash of this sort going to do me!’”

“He counted out four coins and said to the boy: ‘Take the other coins back. But hold it, hold it! I forgot that I’m getting ready for a journey that I’m not taking alone. Gavrilo! Perhaps you shall have need of some money more than I shall, so go ahead and take the rest of these coins for yourself!’”

“It truly was sad for me to watch him giving back so much gold. Thus, not forcing myself to ask for money a second time, especially from Ivan, who never asked for anything, I began to put the gold coins into my pocket, telling him that I owned a small home in my native village, and that’s the reason why I needed some money, – to set up a household there. I had succeeded, in part, in learning what his disposition was, so I didn’t thank him in the least, fearing that he might take back what he had given me. Hoisting onto my shoulders my burdensome pack, inside which, on top of everything else that I needed, a sufficient amount of food and a flask of wine had been placed, we set out on our trip.”

“A ruddy sun appeared in a cloudless sky. Skylarks were soaring in the air, and linnets were leaping by the sides of the road. Everything testified to the joy and delight alive in nature. A cheerful dragonfly was chirping in the grass, and an industrious ant was crawling out of a hole on its way to its daytime work site. Soon some ploughmen, with their wives and children, made their appearance. Some were equipped with a sickle, others with a scythe, and still others with a rake or a pitchfork. Their cheerful songs, which could be heard from far away, blended in with the singing of birds, the murmuring of insects, and the whispering of grasses, flowers, and tree leaves. All of this was forming a harmony that was, for me and especially for Ivan, much more pleasant than the music that had been provided at the home of Count Vladimir. Being in a state of rapture, we walked briskly and cheerfully, not feeling any fatigue until such time as the sun was

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74 A Psalter is a volume containing the Book of Psalms, often with other devotional material bound in it as well, such as a liturgical calendar and a Litany of the Saints. Until the emergence of the Book of Hours in the Late Middle Ages, Psalters were the devotional books most widely owned by wealthy lay persons.
approaching the midpoint of its daily course and sweat was making its appearance upon our brows. Ivan, turning to me, said: ‘Do you see how all of God’s creatures comprehend the use of their time! They know when to make merry and when to rest. No longer is the skylark to be heard, and no longer is the linnet to be seen, – everything is resting, so we, too, shall take a rest.’”

“Turning off the road, we entered a birch forest, where we ate some of the provisions that we had taken with us, drank down a gulp of wine, and stretched ourselves out upon the grass. Ivan said to me: ‘Resting doesn’t always mean the same thing as sleeping. If you wish, I can now tell you a little bit about myself. What I shall not manage to tell you now, I can finish once we are back on the highroad. We should be in Kiev by nightfall, and about thirty **versts** still remain.’”

“I expressed my gratitude for his trust in me, and he began to tell me the following story:”

“I was born into a noble family in the Little Russian section of Ukraine, and, upon completing some initial instruction at home, I was sent to the Kiev Academy. Receiving an education there for several years and being not without some innate gifts and talents of my own, I learned to understand Latin and Polish fairly well, and, with time, I gained distinction in philosophy and theology. When I attained the age of twenty, word of my fame and glory was resounding throughout all of Kiev. Observing a long-standing custom, which had been introduced there, – and which, perhaps, even today is still being observed there, – I would, on holy days, holidays, and Sundays, deliver sermons from the pulpit in church. And I brought the distinguished male and female citizens who were there to the point of rapture. Nothing brought me more glory than two of my sermons, which were the most intricate and complicated of all of the earlier sermons that I had given and of all of the possible future ones that I would later give. The consequences of my grandiloquence were surprising. In the same month, three distinguished female citizens, young maidens who were groaning beneath the burden of the blows that they received from the fists of their parents, cried out that even they themselves didn’t know why their bellies were rising and heaving. And five thieves, who were driven to the town square for their court sentence to be carried out, a sentence that would involve lashes of the knout administered upon their backs, spoke meekly and humbly in the presence of the crowd that had gathered in the square: ‘Remember me, oh, Lord, when I arrive in your heavenly kingdom.’

Although I had become learned in the branches of scholarly knowledge and had been guided by the monks in everything involving that knowledge, I never could become accustomed, however, to their monastic way of life. No matter how many just and righteous fathers tried to persuade me to join their fellowship, there was no way that I could yield to their entreaties. And in the event that my parents were to become ill, I would abandon scholarship and scholars, theology and theologians, and set off for the countryside. My father, while on his deathbed, said to me: ‘Ivan! Listen to these parting words of mine, pay heed to them, and carry my blessing with you! Always be fair, just, and honest. Don’t rely upon
princes and their human offspring. Love simplicity, and flee from vanity. Don’t burden those who are lower than you in status, – for they are your brethren!”

“I swore in my soul to fulfill my father’s last will and testament. According to that document, I had become the inheritor of a new house with a beautiful garden, ponds, plow lands, and, what’s more, two hundred creatures called serfs, not including oxen, cows, sheep, and an innumerable multitude of chickens and geese.”

“Reflecting for a long time, – and, what’s more, in accord with all of the rules of logic, – I concluded that a serf, – a bondman, – is precisely a man, just like I am, and has all of the advantages of body and soul before other live animals, just as I do. And, therefore, he has an immortal soul and free will. It seemed to me, therefore, that to constrain the latter meant to offend the former, and, in that way, to oppose the will of the exalted Creator of both the one and the other. Basing myself on such serious and thoughtful principles, I wished to rectify the previous injustice that had been perpetrated by my ancestors. And so, on the first holy day, I delivered a highly bombastic sermon to the people who had assembled in the church, in which I explained to them the rights and advantages that they enjoyed as men who were not bound to service without wages. And I asked them not to burden themselves with any unnecessary and unwanted obedience to my whims. And if I were to start giving them any orders that are unworthy of a fellow human being, then they must always remind me that they, too, are children of the Lord God.”

“This particular sermon of mine had more consequences than any of the previous ones that I had delivered in Kiev. The people at the church accompanied me to my home with joyful exclamations and blessings, calling me their father and benefactor. I spent the remainder of that day in an ecstasy of joy and happiness. And a dream presented to my imagination flattering pictures of myself as having a reputation for philanthropy and humanitarianism.”

“One month, and then another, passed rather tolerably, although day by day I was noticing more changes taking place in my household and in my village, and, unfortunately, they were not changes for the better. The most temperate admirers of taverns, – and of the doors to the peasant huts that housed widows, – began to visit those places, secretly at first, and then more overtly later. These two new developments, having put down deep roots, brought forth the same kind of branches. Rowdiness, ribaldry, laziness, and dissipation, in general, reigned in my small village. I delivered yet some more sermons, trying to prove that although man has been endowed with free will, there are, nonetheless, some limits that are prescribed for that will. My successes, however, were few: the male peasants, hearing that I was adjusting my singing so as to sing a different tune, started leaving the church at the beginning of the sermon and heading directly over to the tavern, where they would drink their fill, get into a fight, make peace and reconcile, and then get drunk all over again, and again get into a fight. In the entire settlement, there was not a single wench, among those who had come of
age, whose name wouldn’t have been stained, and yet who wouldn’t have been ashamed of this; there was not a single pater familias who would have cared about this; there was not a single husband and wife who would have pledged their mutual faithfulness in anything. And such, in the course of a little more than two years, was precisely the good that I had done with my very wise sermons. One circumstance did lead somewhat to changes. Some people who had gathered together at the crossroads got into a squabble with the village constable and thrashed him. The offended party rushed over to the home of his father-in-law, who served as a deputy in the village, and demanded vengeance. The deputy, shaking his head, replied: “What am I to do? We’re all equal here.” The dissatisfied constable spit in his eye and ran over to the home of the village elder, who at that moment was busy entertaining some widow and, consequently, being occupied with a different matter, didn’t enter into any investigation of the complaint and merely threw the petitioner out on his ear. The latter assembled a group of young men, arrived with them at the home of the village elder, dragged him out to the courtyard, and thrashed him very immoderately. Afterwards, they all took off, singing Cossack songs. In this way, a revolt began, one that cost my parishioners much blood and hair, as well as many teeth, bruises, cuckold horns, and so on. Although I could see that my monarchy had turned into anarchy, I had completely weakened the mainsprings, by means of which the fury and frenzy of the raging mob might be calmed down. Zealously concerning myself with saving those who were rushing headlong toward destruction, I mixed in with the crowd and proclaimed: ‘Listen to me!’ ‘Listen to whom? To you?’ they all cried out. ‘You’re the one who’s the instigator of all of the evil that has befallen us!’” After I had spoken these words, blows from rods began to rain down upon me, blows that accompanied me all the way to my home, where I locked myself inside and assigned some of the yardmen to stand guard. This time, on a whim, they took my side.”

“A matter of this kind couldn’t remain a secret for long. News of the incident, passing from one person to another, reached the voivode. An investigation was launched, and soon afterwards the sexton appeared at my door, accompanied by a detachment of soldiers.”

“Oh, he said upon entering my house, ‘you should be happy: your case has been decided. In accord with the determination of the clerical office, it has been ruled that, since you are incapable of managing your own estate, two trustees, both of them honest and conscientious individuals, have been assigned over you to manage it for you. These trustees are, namely, I myself and . . .’”

“‘Trustees?’ I exclaimed, ‘over me?’”

“‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘but not over your person, but rather over your estate!’”

“‘I don’t need any trustee,’ I said, ‘and I’m renouncing everything. Leave me in peace and at liberty. As far as the estate is concerned: do with it what you wish. I
give it up to the first person who wants to take this onerous burden upon himself.’”

“‘Oh, my Lord God!’ said the sexton softly. ‘You are judging sensibly, just like a rare voivode would. But, on the strength of what has been established, you don’t have the right to transfer your estate to anyone, – it’s an ancestral estate that’s considered patrimony. But perhaps if you were to transfer it by means of a sale, – now that would be an entirely different matter. And what you say is true: the unenviable peasants who live here are indeed drunkards and thieves. I shall, however, find a conscientious merchant, one who shall give you a good price for the estate and, what’s more, shall pay with ready cash. And he shall not impose the kinds of obligations as a result of which one seldom succeeds in receiving payment in full. And you see standing before you just such a merchant.’”

“What was the point of my saying anything more! We quickly made all of the necessary arrangements. I sold him the village for two thousand silver rubles and gave it up, sighing sadly, from the depth of my heart, at the thought that, although I had wished to do so much good for the people here, I had caused them so much harm. The sexton, as I would hear afterward, set up barriers right then and there for everyone, both the innocent and the guilty, not allowing them to visit the village any longer. And every time that they did visit it, he would flay the skin off the backs of those sinful peasants. In the space of two years, he made them once again the sober and industrious peasants that they had been before. ‘Oh, my God!’ I said to myself, ‘is the nature of man really such that only an oppressive yoke can make him walk the strait and narrow path of righteousness! Is it really the case that, without a bridle, he shall always clamber up onto some steep, precipitous mountains so as to be able, from there, to fall more swiftly into the abyss below?’”

“After having gotten rid of the property of my ancestors so profitably, I reflected upon this question: what should I begin to do in my new station? People told me that the capital cities are the sources of happiness, but they didn’t hide the fact that, in order to attain that happiness, one must know how to bow, how to crawl, and how to grovel. I didn’t like that prospect one bit, and so I swore that I would remain forever that person whom the loftiest wisdom had made me become: that’s to say, a free man. That’s the reason why I decided to visit Kiev again, and, after hiring the driver Kharko (his name is short for Khariton), along with his horse and wagon, I left the village. Kharko was a gray-haired old man, and I considered him to be the most honest and most honorable man in the entire district. And that’s the reason why, during our trip, I felt free to discuss issues with him with brotherly trust and respect.”

“On the third day of our journey, when the sun was approaching midday, Kharko and I stopped in an oak grove close to the road and had something to eat. I lay down on the grass, leaning against a tree root, and fell fast asleep. When I awoke, I found that, no matter how much I tried, I couldn’t half-rise to my feet. And
Kharko, glancing at me from time to time with a smile, was pulverizing a hind quarter of ham with his jaw.

“‘What’s the meaning of this?’ I exclaimed. ‘Why can’t I stand up?’”

**KHARKO:** “Because you’re tightly tied to an oak tree!”

**IVAN:** “And who is it that tied me to the tree?”

**KHARKO:** “I did!”

**IVAN:** “Why?”

**KHARKO:** “So that I could leave here with your money!”

**IVAN:** “That damned silver! But I shall voluntarily be giving all of it to you, anyway, so just free me from this tree!”

**KHARKO:** “I’m already a gray-haired old man, and yet you want to deceive me. No, my friend, even a Yid wouldn’t be able to fool and cheat me. If I were to let you go, you’d tie me up and take me to court! No! May God continue to be with you. Perhaps He shall send you a man who shall deliver you from this bondage.”

“This old ne’er-do-well took his hat off and began to make bows in front of me, imitating a rural boyar, then he sat down in the cart and drove off. But he hadn’t managed to drive five *sazhens*, when he suddenly stopped and jumped headlong out of the cart. A look of fear was expressed on his face. Before long, a band of about fifty horsemen, with long lances, long carbine rifles, and very long mustaches, galloped up to us. I myself didn’t know what we were to think of these men.”

“When these heroes had dismounted and surrounded us, an undersized man, whose growth had been stunted, who was bedangled with daggers and pistols, and who stood out from the others by virtue of the colorful red *kaftan* that he was wearing, asked Kharko: ‘Who are you? Where are you coming from? And where are you headed to?’”

“‘Kind sirs,’ replied the old man, ‘I’m a simple peasant, and I was assigned to give a ride to the city to this man, who, unfortunately, has lost his mind and has become inordinately malicious and vicious. It’s for that reason that I have tied him up . . .’”

“‘And it’s for that reason that you need to set him free,’ said their leader threateningly. ‘Good, kind, and gentle people aren’t good for anything here on this earth, where everything has been forgotten: honor, conscience, truth!’”
“They untied me. And when they forced me to tell them the truth about myself, I told them about everything frankly, without concealing anything. The undersized man assumed a threatening air. His eyes were burning with the fire of anger and vengeance, and every hair on his mustache was stirring. Finally, he said to the crowd of people surrounding him: ‘Brothers and comrades! We have taken an oath, swearing, on the promise of mutual allegiance and heavenly justice, that we would be loyal and just. Did we ever think that we would be called upon today to serve as the executor of the sacred will of God on high!’”

“Following this short speech, people walked up to Kharko and started bombarding him with questions. And they showed themselves to be no less skillful in their search for the truth than would the most experienced police officers or bailiffs in the secret chancellery.”

“He confessed to his crimes, and, dropping to his knees at the feet of the senior representative of the group, he begged for their forgiveness.”

“After a certain period of silence had elapsed, the senior representative of the group, leaning on his rifle, announced the following decision: ‘I have long known that many of the wealthy people in our village, spoiled by good fortune and happiness, are full of lies, treacheries, impertinences, and all manner of injustices. And I have become convinced that this is indeed the case here. And I have long known that these wealthy people either flout the laws or else manipulate them in such a way that they lead only to the ruin of those people who stand at the lower level of our social hierarchy. And I have long known that these wealthy people have bathed in the blood, sweat, and tears of the unfortunate and the unhappy, – I have long known all of this, and I have sought to be a judge who acts in accordance with the rights given to me by nature, and with the rights given to me as a powerful person! But never did I imagine that those people who stand at the lower level in our social hierarchy, having forgotten God’s law and our Tsar’s law, could be just as malicious, spiteful, and unjust as those wealthy people, standing at the higher level in our social hierarchy, who so oppress them. The crime that this old rogue has committed is obvious enough, and legal proceedings shall be brought against him. And it’s also obvious enough that he shall be convicted of his crime and condemned by us. So go ahead and hang him on the strongest bough of the tallest tree.’”

“Despite all of my supplications, and despite all of Kharko’s howling and sobbing, he was duly hanged, and he soon consigned his sinful soul to the one to whom it should belong after death. After this, the chief who was in charge of these judges said to me: ‘You must clear out of here and travel your own road, taking your money with you. In addition, you must pay heed to the admonition: never put your trust in a man who is below you, in whatever way, for envy, greed, and avarice are habitual companions in our lives. Beware of fellow human beings more than of wild bears. In this matter, you must believe me and put your trust in me, Garkusha, the renowned Cossack ataman of these courageous knights!’”
“At this point, they all mounted their horses and galloped away.”

“I was unable to pluck up any courage after learning the name of Kharmo’s terrifying judge. This was the renowned robber, who, along with the numerous members of his gang, had been terrorizing the entire district. He directed his rage especially against the members of the nobility. His villainy and evil deeds exceeded all probability. And those poor noblemen who suffered at his hands would nearly have joined the ranks of the saintly martyrs, if the vogue for that brand of justice that he delivered had not passed. But, for all that, he was a most just and righteous judge in the case between me and Kharko.”

“I didn’t dare even to touch lightly the body of the man who had been hanged, and for that reason I got into the wagon and set off. But I hadn’t gone twenty paces when I caught sight of a police detachment galloping directly toward me. I obeyed their chief’s order to halt, and to the first question that was addressed to me, – had I encountered Garkusha? – I replied: ‘Yes!’ They looked me over, and, when they saw the silver coins, they all exclaimed joyfully: ‘Aha! This is one of the members of his gang!’” As I was about to tell them the story of my adventure with Kharko, I could tell that these new heroes weren’t as patient as the earlier ones had been. And, seeing Kharko’s corpse hanging from the tree, they raised a hue and cry, and they decided instantly that I was a thief and a robber, that I had run over the peasant in order to avail myself of his money, and so on, and so forth. What effect could my assurances to the contrary possibly have? Once again I was tied up, placed in the wagon, together with Kharko’s corpse, and brought to the town with such boastful exultation, that it was if they had taken prisoner the renowned Cossack ataman himself, the man who was in charge of this gang of robbers.”

“I won’t speak about the town jail that they put me in, nor about the five months used by the court to track down the errant truth. Suffice it to say that they released me, allowing me to go wherever the good Lord would direct my steps, leaving me as naked and poor as I was when I first came out of the dungeon in which I was originally imprisoned, – my mother’s womb.”

“After I had left that town, with due reverence, I denounced both silver itself and the people who love it so ardently, consigning the one and the other to anathema. And I made a vow never again to have any silver coins on my person, no matter how essential it might be for securing the provisions that one needs for making it through even a single day. I walked all the way to Kiev, just as an ancient patriarch would have done: if I felt a pang of hunger, I would go into the first peasant hut that I came across and I would ask the owner for some bread. If my request was denied, which, however, only happened no more than twice, I would go into another hut, and there I would receive what I had requested. When I reached Kiev, the cradle of my learning and erudition, I presented myself to the monks and the laymen there with whom I was acquainted, and I told them the
story of my adventures, which aroused pity in the hearts of the latter, but loud laughter and guffaws in those of the former. These monks, however, after having a good laugh at the expense of my simplicity, – and of my simple-mindedness, – did provide me with a place of employment: I was to serve as a teacher of moral philosophy at the local academy. And so I readily accepted this position and the title of pedagogue that it bestowed upon me.”

Chapter 85: A Man Who Stands Apart

“Having taken upon myself the sacred duty of teaching young people the rules of life, in order to make them as happy and successful as possible, I at the same time resolved to do something that was completely different than what other teachers had been doing: namely, while preaching from my rostrum about meekness, abstinence, fairness and justice, I swore that during all of my lifetime I myself would be meek, abstinent, fair, and just. And, what’s more, I would be this way not merely in words, but also in deeds. Behavior such as this could not remain unnoticed, and everywhere that I went I passed for a Man Who Stands Apart, – that’s to say, I passed for someone who kept apart, if not aloof, from others. And it was under this moniker that I gained fame everywhere. So that my speeches would become more striking and dramatic, and so that the rules of life that I was trying to teach people would become, so to speak, more obvious, I tried to reinforce them by providing examples, and not, as is usually done, by providing some distant and remote examples, but, to the contrary, by providing examples that were the closest and the dearest to us, examples that occurred right before our very eyes. Thus, for instance, I once said to my students: ‘Did you know that the Military Ataman and the Bunchukovy Comrade are both currently sitting in jail? And for committing what offence? For committing this offence: after both of them had finished having sexual relations with the widow who owns the tavern in town, they loaded themselves up with Greek walnuts, they quarreled, they came to blows, and afterwards they jointly thrashed the town’s police force, which had come running over to separate the two of them. What was the cause of these offences? Concupiscence, drunkenness, and pridefulness!’”

“On another occasion, I was asked to deliver the graveside eulogy for either a local bailiff or the town mayor. I began my eulogy in this way: ‘The person who’s being presented here before your very eyes is, when considered in terms of his body, an old man, but in terms of his spirit, he’s an infant. And, in terms of his mind, he’s worse than any animal! What does the corpulence of his unbounded belly signify? Is it possibly abstinence and self-restraint? And what about his flabby cheeks? What do they signify?’” I wasn’t given the opportunity to declaim any further. They led me out of the church, and directly to the penitentiary, where, in keeping with the tradition of seeking absolution through penance, I sat for three days, subsisting on bread and water alone, for the bailiff was the blood brother of the prior at the monastery. This incident, however, didn’t diminish my fervor for fairness and justice, and the fame that I gained as a result of this incident resounded everywhere. I can’t understand how it is that I
received from Petersburg only the rank of officer and, against my will, had to buckle on a sword. On that very same day, when, filled with a teacher’s sense of self-importance, I was walking across a little bridge over a small stream, my sword fell down between my legs, I stumbled over it, and then went flying headlong into the water. ‘That damned fabrication that I invented!’ I said to myself as I crawled onto the muddy riverbank. ‘Why the hell would they give a sword to a man who’s not a soldier? And why would they do that during peace time?’” I tore the sword out of its sheath, threw it into the small stream, and supposed that I would no longer wear it, and that I would no longer remember my term of service as a military officer or the camaraderie of my fellow officers. A group of boys, with their loud shouting, accompanied me home, right up to my quarters themselves.”

“Having spent several years at this post, and having gained, from time to time, a foothold in teaching my rules of life to the students, although my conscience was completely clear in that regard, I learned, however, that the entire monastery and the entire academy had been incited to stage a revolt against me. Not a single day passed without my feeling their animosity and bitterness toward me. While passing through the gate, I would often feel at my back the blow from a stone thrown by some unseen hand. The boys that I taught never ceased to chase after me, hallooing me and shouting all sorts of obscenities at me. If one of these boys distinguished himself by the impertinence and audacity of an obscene remark that he had made about me, he would receive from my persecutors, as a reward, some children’s gift that was commensurate with the bravery that he had displayed by making that remark. I could see where all of this was coming from, and, without being in the least embarrassed, I continued to teach my admonitions to the students and to provide examples that reinforced the rules of life that I was trying to instill in them. Sometimes the rector himself would admonish me, asking me to be more tolerant and lenient, both toward my colleagues and toward other people. But I assured him that the examples that I was providing were having a marvelous effect upon the listeners, and I continued to adhere to my rules. This practice, however, had certain consequences, and they took their toll. I found out from one of my students that a first-rate member of the town council, an elderly man and a family man, who had stayed in Moscow for about two months, making some necessary purchases there, returned home with foreign gifts, such as sugar, coffee, and vanilla, as well as with a disease that, at that time, terrified even the youngest of people. I didn’t let the opportunity slip to use the contraction of this dreadful disease as an example in one of my admonitions to the young people in my charge. And so, at the first available opportunity, I said to the students in class: ‘Hypocrisy is a serious vice, and the person who succumbs to this vice amuses and entertains demons. For example: who would have thought that one of our town council members was not a fair and just old man? Isn’t he the same one who, standing at prayer and sighing heavily, strikes himself on the breast and fastens his gaze upon the heavens? But, in fact, all of this turns out to be a deception and a fraud.’” At this point, I spoke about everything in detail, exhorting the young men in my class to beware of all of those temptations that have the power to lead them to perdition.
One of my young listeners, the nephew of a wealthy female citizen who was the godmother of the town councilor, reported this to his auntie, who, for some reason, had occasion to fly into a rage and attack her godson’s honor. She slapped his face a few times, tore out a tusk of his hair, and, when leaving, said to the dumbfounded old man: ‘Take that, you ne’er-do-well! May you never set foot inside my house again! It should be made known to you, thief that you are, that today I’m sending for the chief magistrate, the Bürgermeister, who has been attached to me for such a long time. To hell with you, you crook!’”

“The town councilor soon found out the reason why this storm had arisen, and I was summoned immediately. His eyes were burning with rage, and he uttered these words angrily, speaking with trembling lips: ‘How dared you, you accursed man, say so many defamatory things about me, – and say them in the presence of the entire school?’”

IVAN: “But what I said about you was, after all, the truth!”

TOWN COUNCILOR: “Oh, you assassin! And so now you’re repeating, in my presence, the very same slanderous things that you said about me earlier to your students?”

IVAN: “I’m prepared to repeat, in front of the entire world, why you are such a scoundrel!”

TOWN COUNCILOR: “Righteous God up in heaven, and you, His holy saints! Have you ever seen anywhere such a wicked reprobate like this one?”

IVAN: “Like you! You’re a hypocritical Pharisee: you say one thing, but you do another thing!”

TOWN COUNCILOR: “Forgive, Lord, your obedient servant!”

“With these words, he began to make the sign of the cross over me with his cane. I was extremely amazed by this, but I didn’t, however, lose my presence of mind or my composure. Not seeing next to me anything close by, except for the leather stem from a pipe, I grabbed it and began to brandish it in the air, to my right and to my left, with all of the might that Providence had entrusted to me. The fury coming from both directions grew. The town councilor, seeing the fury coming from both directions, and seeing that the cane and the leather stem were not evoking much of a response, grabbed me by my braid. And I grabbed him, – since he was walking in the Polish fashion, – by his mustache. The picture we made was worthy of the brush of Raphael! Finally, both of us, from an excess of manliness and fortitude, raised a horrible wail, in response to which his people came running, and, in all fairness, took me prisoner, presenting me before the authorities, where the town councilor declared, in an impassioned manner, that if
they didn't punish me privately, in secret, then I would be brought to a public trial and given a public punishment. The prior at our monastery deemed his words to be reasonable, and he, along with the entire brotherhood of monks, unanimously convicted me and sentenced me to do penitence at home, under house arrest. I sat in captivity in the monastery’s jail for more than two months, living in a state of extreme mortification of the flesh. In the morning, and again near evening time, four monks would come to my cell, placing some bread and water on the table. After that, they would lay me out on the floor and count out fifty blows to my back with ox sinews. They performed this task so zealously that there wasn’t a single blow delivered to my back that I wouldn’t have held up in my classes as a model worthy of imitation. But, unfortunately, this would not be the case, not when I would be describing human virtues. Finally, they brought me out to the light of day, and, while leading me to the gates with full-weighted blows to my back, they exhorted me, with brotherly love, to be more modest in future and to refrain from slandering honest and honorable people.”

“Rumors about this incident spread throughout the entire city. Everyone was curious to see me: some people felt sorry for me, others laughed at what had happened to me, while still others heaped abuse upon me. Wherever I might be, – whether I was walking down the street or standing in church, – everywhere I would hear one and the same thing: ‘There he is, there goes that Man Who Stands Apart! Oh, how pathetic he is! Oh, how ludicrous he is! Oh, what a ne’er-do-well he is! And with such an ugly mug!’” Amongst those people who belonged to the first group, that’s to say, those who felt sorry for me, one was found who asked me whether I might be interested in serving as a tutor for his son. Upon receiving my consent to his offer, he set off with me to the countryside, where my instruction in oratorical splendors should have begun anew. My pupil was a rather decent boy, but his father, on the other hand, was so strange that I had never seen anything quite like it before. He was revered by everyone, though, and was taken to be an intelligent and kind man, for he was sufficiently prosperous. And, by means of his horses, carriages, coaches, snuffboxes, and clocks, he received titles and ranks from time to time. And by the time of my arrival at his estate, he was already a lieutenant colonel. In the early morning, he would sit on the sofa, smoke his pipe, and take a peek inside a book, without understanding anything in it. Then he would utter, in the softest of voices, ‘Boy!’ He would repeat this about five or six times, and then, seeing that no one was coming, he would leap up from the sofa like a madman, stamp his feet, and shout: ‘Servants! Servants!’ In response to this wail of his, the poor people who worked for him would come running from all quarters, and he would say: ‘How dared you, Peter, not obey your master and not come running to him when he called for you?’ Without listening to Peter’s apologies, his master would cry out: ‘Ivan! Punch the rogue Peter!’ And when Peter had received first one blow and then another, his master would suddenly order that the punishment be stopped, and he would then ask Ivan threateningly: ‘How dared you punch him so painfully?’ Following this, he would order Peter to wreak vengeance for the punches that he had received, by punching, in turn, Ivan; he would order Foma, in turn, to punch Sidor; he would
order Arkhip, in turn, to punch Vlas; and so on. At this point, a bloody battle would ensue, one, moreover, where the servants were not prohibited from uttering all manner of swearwords, which happened in such cases. Having enjoyed himself immensely while watching this spectacle, and having laughed to his heart’s content, the master would order each servant to calm down and to drink a glass of wine. From this one example, it’s possible to conclude what some of my new host’s other actions were like, and to conclude that it wasn’t all that pleasant for me to reside in his house. For every little trifle, he would nag his wife mercilessly, pestering her constantly and picking a fight with her, or at least he would frighten her by threatening to do so. Knowing this habit of his, she would grab whatever came to hand and throw it at her husband. And he would fall to the floor on the spot and feign being dead. After lying still for about five minutes, he would lift up his head a little and ask those servants who were standing there whether there was any blood flowing from his nose. God help anyone who answered ‘No.’ And that’s the reason why they would always say, ‘Yes, sir, there is!’ ‘Is there a lot of blood?’ ‘Yes, sir, quite a lot!’ ‘Really? Am I still alive?’ ‘No, sir, you’re dead!’ After this, he would say, in a mournful voice, ‘There, you see, Avdotiya, you’ve gone and killed me! Let God be your judge!’ After lying there for a while, he would calmly stand up and proceed to commit some other tomfooleries.’”

“He would often suffer toothaches, and, when that happened, anyone who made him angry would have hell to pay. The first thing that he would order his servants to do was to place a multitude of candles in front of the icon. And once that was done, he would get down on his knees in front of the icon and beg, in the most grief-stricken voice, that his pain be stopped. When he didn’t feel any easing of the pain, he would stand up, straighten out his clothing, and utter angrily: ‘What? You’re not relieving my pain? Why do I even bother to place candles in front of you? Servants! Remove all of them! Don’t leave even a kopeck’s worth of candles standing!’ His orders would be carried out, and he would withdraw calmly and quietly. There was no way that I could have stayed there for long, living at the home of such a madman. One day, while he was lying on his back on the floor, he asked me: ‘Is it true that my wife murdered me?’ ‘You should have sent such a madcap to the devil a long time ago!’ I replied. ‘How’s that? What did you say?’ ‘The fact is: everyone here is sick and tired of your madness and foolhardiness.’ ‘Alas! Servants!’”

“His servants came running, and he, with an air of importance, assured them that I was preparing to murder him, and that although it would have been proper to take me to court, he didn’t wish to do that. Instead, he was ordering that I be expelled from his house and that my suitcase be thrown out the window. All of his orders were fulfilled, and I left his home, thanking God that I was finally through with this madman. I suddenly recalled that not far away from here lived an elderly widow, the owner of an estate, who had some adult children living with her. Thus, I set off for her home in the village in order to offer her my services as a tutor for those children. After I had explained to her the reason why I had left the
home of my previous employer, she burst into peals of laughter, and she said: ‘You did the right thing in leaving the home of such a fool. You’ll be much happier here at my house. And I shall tell you in advance that I don’t like any kind of compulsion or coercion. But, on the other hand, there’s nothing else that I would stand in the way of, nothing that I would impede or hinder. Let every person live the way that he or she pleases.’” I praised her way of thinking, and I stayed on at her home in my capacity as the tutor for her twenty-year-old son, her eighteen-year-old daughter, and her eighteen-year-old niece.”

“I shall now tell you briefly about some of the new oddities that I encountered in this house: they are so unusual that not everyone would be inclined to believe that they actually existed. Believe me, at least, as the kind of person who loves the truth passionately, and who has endured unpleasant incidents on its account, but who has never regretted being truthful or has never repented of his devotion to the truth.”

“I had spent about a week in this house, occupying myself with teaching lessons, when I noticed that extreme disorder exercised dominion here. The servants fraternized with their masters, and the masters had completely destroyed any sense of shame, conscience, and decency that they might once have possessed. I couldn’t endure such behavior, nor could I refrain from delivering nice little sermons, as was my wont, and from providing examples, taken from those sermons themselves, that reinforced the rules of life that I was trying to teach to my pupils. The mother, who happened to be here, and who was filled with the inspiration of Bacchus, said to me, laughingly: ‘I didn’t think that you would be such a sanctimonious person! We all know that life has been given to a person only once, so why wear oneself out with coercion and compulsion? I can tell you plainly, without beating around the bush, that I consider it a pleasure to eat well, to drink well, – and then, immediately afterwards, to rest well!’” She talked to me a lot about things that were so strange and unusual, so repulsive and disgusting, and she talked so openly, without the slightest pangs of conscience, about the self-serving rules of life that were being followed both by her and by her children, that even now I shudder at the mere memory of them. She concluded this declaration of her immoral values with a sentence that completely petrified me, a sentence that not only surprised and shocked me, but also filled me with extreme indignation. When I had regained my composure, I crossed myself and then I thundered: ‘May God rise again from the dead!’ for I truly thought that I had fallen into a hellhole of ungodliness and wickedness. I walked out of the room on legs that were trembling, I grabbed my travel bag and rushed out of the house, running with all of my might so that the heavenly fire wouldn’t burn me, along with the lawless heathens who lived there. I didn’t dare even to look back, fearing that I, following the example of Lot’s wife, would turn into a pillar of salt.”

“Since then, I have formed the firm intention not to take upon myself the post of a mentor or teacher, and to lead a life that’s in conformity with my inclinations, my
aptitudes, and my rules of life: that’s to say, to stick to the truth, to despise all that is superfluous, not to flatter others, not to bend, and not to have any need for anyone. As soon as the members of the gentry class and the merchant class who surrounded me found out that I didn’t have any need for them, they began vying with each other, searching for opportunities to do favors for me. No matter where I would make an appearance, everywhere that I went I would seem to bring a holiday atmosphere along with me. My requests and demands became law, and everyone considered it ungodly and impious to refuse me anything. And, what’s more, I, for my part, didn’t request or demand anything that was impossible, or even difficult, to provide. I have spent more than twenty-five years living in this manner, and, thanks be to God Almighty, I have always been healthy, contented, and in good spirits. To what end did I need gold? To what end did I need jewels? Would they really have increased my might, my cheerfulness, or my merriment? Just the opposite is true! I’m sure that it’s always more comforting to be the observer than to be the object of observation. And the funnier, the more ludicrous, the role of a comic actor becomes, the more difficult it becomes for him to perform that role. And where there’s difficulty, there’s no longer any pleasure, any enjoyment, or any gratification.”

“It was due to our involvement in conversations such as these, – and others like them, – that night caught us unaware while we walked along the road. Ivan and I doubled our pace, and by around midnight we had reached the walls of the monastery near Kiev. A deep silence reigned everywhere.”

“‘Gavrilo!’ Ivan said to me, ‘we shall have to disturb the town’s inhabitants. So wouldn’t it be better for us to take a rest in the cemetery at this monastery? And I can see that the wicket gate to the cemetery is open.’”

“We entered the enclosure and quietly lay down on the roots of some birch trees near a graveside tombstone. We were already preparing to close our eyes and fall asleep for the night, when some noise and a cry resounded in the distance. Shortly thereafter, some lighted torches and a multitude of bustling people, both male and female alike, made their appearance.”

“‘What need do we have of them?’ asked Ivan. ‘They, apparently, had been sleeping soundly all day long, and now, to make up for it, they’re staying awake to keep vigil all night long, – let’s try to go to sleep!’”

Chapter 86: A New Encounter

“In the meantime, the noise was growing louder. Opening our eyes a second time, we could see that the bustling crowd was drawing closer to us. Finally, they reached us, and a nun, who had rushed over to the rustle that had been produced by our movement, stumbled against me and flew headlong onto the grass. I wanted to leap up into the air, but I did so rather awkwardly, and I ended up lying down beside her. Who could
describe the joyful communal cry that suddenly erupted: ‘We’ve caught him! We’ve caught him!’ Ivan, who had calmly raised himself up on his elbows, was alone in asking: ‘Who is it that you’ve caught? If, however, all of you aren’t evil spirits, then please move along and go get some rest. If you are indeed devils, which, judging by your outward appearance, you seem to be, then know this: we are Christians, and we shall not allow you to make fun of us so impudently.’” After uttering these words, he began to cross himself, making the outline of a large cross with his hands, and began to read prayers aloud, as well as to blow and spit upon those dumbfounded people who were standing there right in front of him, while he kept repeating, over and over again: ‘Begone, you hostile force!’ When Ivan had finished doing all of this, he once again lay down on the grass.”

“‘Oho!’ said, in a long, drawn out manner, a bald, dwarfish old man whose growth had been stunted, ‘there’s no way that we shall be gone. Have these scoundrels taken it into their heads to mock and ridicule us? We shall see! We shall go take a good look! As it’s written in scripture: ‘I shall raise my horn and trample under foot the lion and the serpent.’” In accordance with a command that was given, we were lifted up to our feet and exhorted to walk voluntarily behind the guards, if we weren’t very keen about compulsion and the use of force. Seeing that there was nothing that we could do, we went ahead and set off behind them. And our former baldheaded friend, who was following behind us, was extolling military victories in song: ‘If Israel were to defeat the Pharaoh, – it would be glorious to be glorified for that.’ Both Ivan and I soon found ourselves together in one jail cell, and we had been abandoned by all of the other people. Apparently, they didn’t expect to find anything in our pouches that would be worthy of their curiosity, for they threw them down, right after us, into our shelter. Ivan immediately laid down on the floor, placing his head upon his travel bag, and suggested that I do the very same thing.”

“‘How is it,’ I asked him, ‘that you, finding yourself in a situation such as this one, are not troubled by anything?’”

“‘It’s true,’ he replied, ‘that it would be much more pleasant for me to be sleeping outdoors in the fresh air, but what’s to be done? It seems to me that we’re not the ones who dropped in at this place, but rather they are the ones who dragged us off to this place. What is there for us to think about?’” Having said this, Ivan fell fast asleep, and, a little while later, so, too, did I!”

“We awoke early the next morning and spent a long time waiting until we could see someone to find out what was the purpose of our incarceration. After an early dinner, the baldheaded, potbellied man that we had encountered the day before turned up at our cell and said: ‘Rejoice, you’re free! A certain incident was to blame for them treating you as if you were some suspicious characters. It’s true that such incidents are not uncommon in the world. Our brother, however, an experienced old man, can’t be careful each and every time. For, as the prophet David said: ‘We are all human, we are all flesh and blood.’ ‘If you deign to favor your very humble servant, the reclusive sexton Sidor, with a
visit to the refectory and to share his morning meal with him there, then he shall be able to tell you, to the extent that he knows, about the whole incident.”

“In light of this man’s goodwill and kindness, we consented to his proposal: we arrived at the sexton Sidor’s peasant hut, which stood at the corner of the enclosure, and there we accepted his modest culinary gifts, which consisted of bread, onion, turnip, and similar other items of basic, peasant fare. And when he saw that we were ready to listen to his account of the incident, he began his story with the following words:

“The Lord said, through the mouth of the holy prophet, I really can’t recall which one exactly, but what need is there to recall his name, – it’s enough to recall what he said, which is: ‘it’s better to marry than to be set on fire like kindling, that’s to say, to be sexually aroused.’ One wealthy gentleman, who was living not far from here, and who was as obstinate as Balaam’s ass, didn’t wish to believe these words and continued to try, at every opportunity, to convince Anfisa, the daughter of the Mother Superior at our convent, who was likewise a noblewoman and wasn’t at all poverty stricken, that he loved her, without saying a word about marriage. Our Anfisa was as wise as a snake and as pure as a dove. However, she didn’t cede superiority, in regard to guarding one’s purity, to those most chaste maidens who were brought up in our cloister. Instead of telling this to her mother, she endeavored to attract the heart of this wealthy gentleman toward her by means of her feminine charms and her tender caresses. Finally, she herself started to feel enkindled, to feel sexually aroused, and little by little, forgetting maidenly shame, she succumbed to temptation and permitted her lover to taste the forbidden fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This came to light afterwards. For it’s written: ‘Don’t try to conceal awls in a sack, for the secret cannot be concealed. One who gives oneself up to the pleasures of the flesh is a slave to the devil.’ So it was with Anfisa. Intending to arrange an escape to her lover’s house, she left behind in her cell the letter that she had written, informing her mother about this plan.”

“Scarcely had she gone out the door than the Mother Superior entered her cell, read the letter, and raised such a clamor that we thought at first that it was her struggling against a most cheerful demon. After she disclosed to us the true reason for her wailing, she set off in hot pursuit of the runaway. And before

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75 This biblical story takes place at a time when Israelites are drawing near to the land known as Moab, and Balak, the king of the Moabites, who fears that they are about to invade his homeland, sends for the soothsayer Balaam, hiring him to pronounce a curse upon the invaders so that he’ll be able to defeat them in battle. God, meanwhile, appears several times to Balaam in a dream, forbidding him to curse the Israelites. Eventually, however, the deity grants Balaam permission to accept Balak’s assignment. What follows is the well-known scene where Balaam’s ass, after repeated beatings, suddenly and miraculously speaks up, asking why the soothsayer has been treating him so unkindly, and Balaam repents of his behavior, pronouncing not a curse, but a blessing, upon the neighboring Jews.
Anfisa had managed to leave the enclosure behind, I had already fastened the oak gates to the iron posts. Earlier they had attacked us. And we, considering one of them to be the kidnapper and the other to be his helper, had dispatched the two of them to a safe refuge. Later, while we were hurrying to inform the Mother Superior, another part of the group of spies had found Anfisa hiding beneath a stone, just like a cowardly hare, for it is said: ‘A stone is the refuge for a hare.’ The next morning, Judgment Day, commenced for Anfisa. The Mother Superior, attired in a judge’s robe and leaning upon a walking stick, appeared, accompanied by the Deputy Mother Superior, the housekeeper, and all of the other important local officials in general. I, along with the loudmouth cleric Ciprian, brought up the tail end of the procession. When all of us had taken our places, the interrogations commenced, and they concluded with Anfisa’s admission that she, wishing only, in keeping with her childishness, to play a joke on her mother, had written that letter to her. She had then gone outside to take some pleasure in the night air, but, upon seeing the torches and the multitude of people, and upon hearing some wailing and a clamor, she got it into her head that robbers had burst into the cloister. And that’s the reason why she decided to take cover beneath a stone."

“Upon hearing Anfisa out, and listening to her sincere confession with the proper amount of attention, the Mother Superior, raising her voice, spoke these words: ‘Although your transgression is insignificant and ought to be ascribed to infantile inexperience, nonetheless, in order that others shall be made to reflect upon how grave an offense it is to play a joke on the Mother Superior, even if she’s a close blood relative of hers, and to leave one’s cell at night and go outdoors, – you, Anfisa, shall be administered corporal punishment as your form of penance!’”

“At the given sign, two of the humble servants who worked at the monastery, – that’s to say, Ciprian and I, – stepped forward, each of us armed with a bundle of birch rods in our right hand. No matter how much the other righteous mothers in attendance begged for mercy to be rendered upon the inexperienced maiden Anfisa, – it was all in vain. She soon made her appearance in front of us, just as, a long time ago, Saint Mary of Egypt had once made her appearance in front of the righteous elder Zosima of Palestine.76 I don’t wish to speak in a boasting manner, but I must say that I began to use my weapon with the same artistry that the archangel did during the expulsion of the transgressor Adam and his beloved Eve from the Garden of Eden. That archangel, Uriel, had to expel both of them, while I had to expel only one of them: the little one, Eve. We saw, to our mutual

76 Saint Zosima (460-560) was a monk, living in Palestine during the sixth century, who encountered St. Mary of Egypt, a former prostitute, while wandering in the desert during Lent, and she proceeded to tell him her life story. When, upon her request, he came back the following year on Holy Thursday to give her Holy Communion, she walked across the water to meet him, instructing him to come and meet her during the following Lent. When he did so, Zosima found her dead, but miraculously preserved. He proceeded, according to tradition, to bury her, assisted, so the legend goes, by a lion that had been rendered tame in the presence of the holy man.
horror, two souls that were shouting: both the inexperienced virgin, Eve, that is to say, Anfisa, and the still more inexperienced maiden, who was begotten beneath our blows. ‘It's a miracle!’ we all cried out. Our arms, raised up into the air, turned to stone. And the Mother Superior, who, upon letting out a wail, had fallen to the floor, in the process knocking a monk’s headgear off his head and breaking his glasses. The other people who were in attendance there didn’t know what to do either, like the Deputy Mother Superior, who, in similar circumstances, had earlier shown heroic presence of mind. Now she started to pontificate, telling us: ‘Leave everything to me and the Deputy Mother Superior here. We alone shall decide the question about the danger that’s posed for inexperienced maidens to be going outside at night and enjoying themselves in the fresh air.’ We withdrew. And since I have come to the conclusion that you two weren’t in any way guilty, I am releasing the both of you, in God’s name, to go anywhere that you please, especially since I know reasonably well that gentleman who first lured Anfisa into taking nighttime strolls.”

“When Sidor, our loquacious sexton, had concluded his narrative account of the inexperienced maiden named Anfisa, Ivan and I could see that some of the nuns were walking past our window. ‘Here are all of our pious swine,’ said our host, ‘and, if you would like, I can report to you a little about them as well.’ Here’s what he told us:”

“This portly old mother, named Olympia, was earlier the owner of a house where people, both young and old alike, used to gather to spend their time together having fun: things there were far from dull or boring. She got into a quarrel over some issue with the police, who ordered her to be dispatched out of town. She wasn’t able to find any better refuge than to have her hair cut short and become a nun in the convent. Another woman, who, from a distance, resembles a skeleton more than a live creature, is a maiden of noble birth. She was, for a long time, indifferent to all of the obsequiousness that’s characteristic of lovers: they all seemed to her to be good-for-nothings with whom it wasn’t worthwhile to correspond. And so she turned down their marriage proposals until such time as love plunged her into our dwelling place. In her father’s house, there lived a fool who was deaf and dumb. This curious item attracted the glances of our intractable maiden, and she permitted him more than she should have. They say that an intelligent lover is dangerous, but I’ve come to the conclusion that even a foolish one isn’t any less dangerous. On the first feast day, when the guests wished to see the fool, he came to our gathering. And since fools have a strong urge to eat, drink, and so on, this guest rushed over to the young lady and knocked her over. And before the dumbfounded guests could think of what to do, he managed to discover more than he should have. The consequences were deplorable: the girl’s mother died from grief shortly afterwards; her father killed the fool and was punished for his crime, I don’t know exactly how; and the daughter didn’t find anything better to do than to escape notice by taking cover in our cloister. A third woman, about whom I can report to you briefly, walks with her eyes staring down at the ground. They say that she was once the wife of a certain very great rogue, who, being the favorite of a Polish minister who served
during a previous administration, committed all sorts of crimes and villainies. His pious, devout wife wasn’t able to get along with this scamp: she had disdain for the world and its vanity, and so she moved away from us.”

“Our narrator halted at this point, seeing that the expression on my face had changed. And, what’s more, this is why my facial expression had changed: it occurred when I recognized in this nun my Feklusha. ‘Oh, righteous and just heaven above!’ I said to myself, ‘is this woman really going to play the hypocrite with me as well, now when she is under the cover of a sacred vestment?’”

“‘My dear friend,’ I continued, addressing Sidor, ‘please grant me the opportunity to see this nun alone, to meet with her in private. I have some important news to relay to her from her husband, whom I once knew briefly, but intimately!’”

“‘Really?’ Sidor asked. ‘But I must tell you in advance that Mother Feodosia is more experienced than the maiden Anfisa was, and I don’t know whether she would agree to come out to the garden to enjoy some fresh evening air. We shall see, however.’”

“What would be the point of describing at length the incidents that had caused both of us so much grief and sorrow in our lives? My first wife and I had already seen each other before and had gotten together. Her tears had rendered my heart.”

“‘Such is the nature of our human life,’ I said to her. ‘Could one have possibly thought earlier that, sometime later in my life, I, the banished favorite of the grandest of grandees, would be bidding farewell with his wife-cum-nun in this abode, in a convent?’”

“‘Prince,’ she said to me at last, ‘you and I need to part company, and for the last time now. Each new encounter would be extremely sad and pitiful for the both of us. You’re already well enough along in years to be able to attain some happiness for yourself by making a different choice of woman for you to love, a choice of someone other than me. Having lost irrevocably both your love and your respect, I’ve lost forever any hope of happiness, and I’ve decided to spend the remainder of my pitiful life in seclusion and solitude here. Pray to God that He shall forgive me for all of the grief and sorrow that I have caused you. Forgive me! . . .’”

“With these words, she withdrew, and I never saw her ever again. Several months later, I received word that she was no longer on this earth. I shed sincere tears in tribute to her memory, and I prayed to God on behalf of the repentant mother of my son Nikandr.”

“Ivan and I left the monastery and continued our wandering. On the road, nothing happened to us, nothing of the sort that’s worth being mentioned here. We parted company in Kiev with mutual and reciprocal regret. Ivan set off to visit some acquaintances of his, while I turned onto the road leading to the Oryol governorate and, after some time had passed, I arrived in Falaleevka, my dear and precious hometown.”

Chapter 87: A Corpse
“The sun was setting by the time that I drew near to the village of Falaleevka. I caught sight of the tin-plated cupola of our ancient church, and my heart began to tremble. Walking through the cemetery, I couldn’t help but visit the graves of my parents. I got down on my knees and knelt for a long while at the head of the grave of Prince Simon. ‘Oh, if only I could have heeded your words, father of mine,’ I said through my tears, ‘I never would have trampled down my vegetable garden, I never would have become Feklusha’s husband, I never would have served as the secretary to a grand boyar, and I never would have been so unfortunate and so unhappy in my life!’ What I was feeling at that moment was inexplicable. I resembled an infant who had been weaned from his mother’s breast prematurely, and then, after several days had passed, was once again allowed to drink his fill of her breast milk. Never had I felt Horace’s famous line of verse – ‘And the smoke from the stoves of one’s fatherland is so sweet’ [et fumus patriae dulcis] – to be more alive and more vivid. It was appropriate, at that moment, that this saying would come to my mind, for I saw, while I was approaching my hut, that it had halfway collapsed. Nettles and burdock were exercising dominion in the vegetable garden. In a word, the rising moon presented the image of my former dwelling place to me as an abode of destruction.”

“At the gates to my home themselves, – or, better to say, at the place where they had once stood, for I wasn’t able to see even any vestiges of them, – I saw several elderly princes, who, while walking past me, crossed themselves with an air of importance, all the while uttering: ‘May the Lord God protect us!’ The little princes and princesses who were walking behind them made obscene gestures directed against my house, giving it the finger and shouting ‘halloo’ at it, not forgetting, however, all the while, to hold onto the loose and shapeless garments that their parents were wearing. I concluded from this that things weren’t going well in my house and, for that reason, I stopped their Highnesses and said to them: ‘My dear sirs! I would like to take a rest in this village from my travel along the highway and, since it’s rather late right now, I intend to spend the night in this empty hut, so as not to be a burden to the venerable princes, such as you yourselves, who reside in this village. Tell me, please, for God’s sake, why is it that you gentlemen are crossing yourselves so assiduously and, it seems, appealing so assiduously to God for help?’”

“‘And his cross is holy and blessed’ said the eldest of the princes. ‘Know that a corpse has recently made his appearance in this hut, and he’s not giving us any peace and quiet. For three days and nights now, he has been moaning and groaning in there, and, despite all of the incantations that we have recited and all of the spells that we have cast, he’s not quieting down. This means that he’s not a Christian! It’s been decided that tomorrow an incantation, which our sexton Yakov and the renowned sorcerer Manuel should have completed by then, shall be delivered to him. God knows why, but Manuel, after being demoted out of the Orthodox clergy, has started practicing sorcery, and now the renowned fortune-teller knows how to handle devils. And, as far as this art is concerned, it’s his customary treatment of his wife, more than anything else, that has taught him how to do this, since she is, in truth, a real devil herself. May the Lord God protect us!’”
“With these stupid words, they left me. ‘A corpse!’ I said to myself. ‘But why did he wish to leave his peaceful grave and move into my hut? Is it so that he can frighten the young children and the princes of Falaleevka? That’s not worth the trouble!’ ‘Oh, divine metaphysics!’ I exclaimed, ‘Without you, I myself, perhaps, would have been afraid of these absurdities that they have declared! But now my mind has been enlightened, and I detest all of these human ravings and fantasies.’”

“After pulling my hat down over my eyes and fastening all of the buttons on my frock coat, – I myself don’t know exactly why I did this, – I bravely entered the courtyard, and then the hut itself. I must admit, however, that a shiver was penetrating my being and that my hands were shaking. Summoning metaphysics to come to my assistance, I sat down on the bench and didn’t have any need to open up the window to let in any fresh air, for the window now resembled a railing, and traces of glass were noticeable here and there. The moon had risen to all of its fullness; the night was beautiful. Anyone who has, at one time or another, roamed outside the borders of his homeland, has experienced, just as I did, all sorts of amicable and inimical incidents in his life, – that sort of person can easily understand what was the state of my soul when I saw those places that had witnessed my birth. Thinking for a moment and guessing that I should wait until tomorrow to start repairing the hut, I felt an inclination to retire for the night, and that’s the reason why I lay my bag beneath my head and stretched out on the floor.”

“I had scarcely closed my eyes when I heard beside me a light sigh and, soon afterwards, an extremely heavy one. Where did my metaphysics disappear to? My heart really did stand still, and all of my limbs froze, especially when the sighs, little by little, began to increase in frequency. And, finally, some indistinct and incomprehensible words started to be heard, words that resembled more the hissing of a snake than the voice of a human being. Having cast aside metaphysics, I was about to attempt resorting to another means for driving away hostile forces: namely, following the custom of the Orthodox faithful, to compose some prayers. But my tongue wouldn’t stir and my lips wouldn’t relax. And so I started to pray mentally, and, what’s more, to pray a thousand times more diligently than I ever used to pray in the past, such as when I was turning somersaults in the cathedral so that Countess Takalova would notice me, or when I was reposing on the damask couch at the home of Prince Latron. My adversary, however, was obstinate, and not only wouldn’t he calm down, but, from time to time, he would actually raise his voice even louder. And, shortly following that, he would utter rather clearly and distinctly: ‘Lord God of the Israelites! Why hast Thou forsaken me! Why hast Thou turned thy face away from me?’”

“Just like an ancient Roman gladiator, who, when being attacked by a mighty foe and seeing that either his imminent death or a victory awaits him, gathers together all of his remaining strength, raises his sword, and delivers a blow that should decide his fate, I, too, having assured myself that I wouldn’t drive away a devil by means of some secret prayer, plucked up my courage, half-raised myself up from the floor, crossed myself, and then asked, in a voice that was quivering, and with teeth that were being grinded so much that I myself could have been considered a devil incarnate: ‘Who goes there?’ A long, protracted silence ensued in the hut. Imagining that the corpse had become afraid, I took
heart: I got to my feet, walked up to the window, and asked, in a voice that was louder and clearer than before: ‘Who are you? Answer me! In the name of the crucified Christ, I command you to answer me! Tell me who is to blame for your nocturnal wandering? Did you perhaps offend the village elder, who is shedding tears over this? Did you perhaps act in a highly selfish and mercenary way toward others, embezzling the property of a widow or of a helpless orphan? Reveal yourself to me, and I shall request that heaven grant you forgiveness for what you have done, that your bones be granted calmness and tranquility, and that your shadow stop howling at the crossroads.’”

“I had once read this beautiful speech in one of the famous German tragedies, and since at that time no better speech came to mind, I made use of it here in my speech to the corpse, without feeling any pangs of conscience, although I did force it to open at the point in the tragedy where an abduction is taking place in order to calm my trembling bones. Usually people punish plagiarism less for the theft of good ideas than for the theft of the very worst things. The corpse didn’t leave me without a reply, one that was no less eloquent than my own speech had been. ‘If you,’ he said, ‘are one of Adam’s sons, if you, like me, have flesh and bones, if, in your bosom, there beats a heart, and if, in your brain, the thought of some future retribution is imagined, – then yield to the feeling of commiseration toward one of the most ill-starred sons on this earth! I’m not a shadow, as you dream that I am: come here and touch these bones of mine. Don’t be like those other fellow human beings, those mitmenschen who imagine that they are pleasing our heavenly Father, God Almighty, by their persecution of His children. Three days have passed, and I have yet to see even a single bread crumb. For three whole days my lips have been burning from thirst, and yet not a single drop of water has cooled the flame that is consuming me. If you’re a human creature, if you were born of a man’s wife, take some pity on me, someone who has been abandoned by everyone, and the Lord Gods, – Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, – shall reward you!’”

“For my part, I couldn’t admit to myself that the speech given by the corpse was any more eloquent than my own speech had been, and that’s the reason why I must conclude that it was his own composition. I couldn’t understand, however, on what items of food and drink the corpse was subsisting, and the thought struck me that perhaps he was only a corpse in the minds of the Falaleevka princes.”

“Why, he himself offers to allow me to touch his bones. This last idea remained a constant one, – and so, after ordering him to wait a bit, I got down to lighting the fire, for, as a result of following Ivan’s advice, during the entire time of our trip the medicaments that we needed were being kept in our bags, so that we were able at any time to have light and to have at hand the means for slaking our thirst and hunger. After lighting a small wax candle, I stood by the door and, – more from horror than from curiosity, – I began to examine my palace, – the whole place was empty. A single small bench constituted the entire furnishings. A bundle of hay was lying on the floor in the left corner, – and on top that hay . . . my hair once again stood on end when I saw a scarecrow. This was a small, contorted facsimile of a human being. Its hair was hanging down in tufts along a face that looked dead, and its eyes were opening. A tousled beard was sticking out and standing on end, its fingers were dry, one of them was striking another and producing a
sound. A dilapidated old cloak constituted all of the protection that it had from the elements. ‘Righteous heavens above!’ I said under my breath, ‘is this really a human being that I see right here in front of me?’ With these words, I rushed over to my bag again and took out a wooden flask filled with wine that was to be used in case of an emergency. I poured some of it into a goblet and lifted it up to the mouth of the skeleton, saying: ‘Drink this up and fortify yourself with it.’ He opened his mouth, and I poured several drops of wine into it. After that, I lifted him up slightly, placed my bag under his back, and straightened his cloak. Out of all of God’s creatures, both the rational ones and the irrational ones, all that they left this poor man, apparently, was a gray cat, who was lying at his feet, and two of her kittens. When, in this way, my guest became more capable of feeding himself food and drink, I once again treated him to gulps of wine from the goblet. And, a short time later, he had sufficiently recovered enough strength that he could now speak more fluently, and the first words that he uttered were to express his gratitude.”

“I thank you a thousand times over,’ he said, ‘magnanimous stranger, for having made the final moments of my life more comforting and pleasing for me. The Lord God became angry with me, and His heavy hand fell upon the top of my head. The entire universe, – everyone and everything under the sun, – abandoned me, and, out of such a multitude of godly creatures, not a single one could be found that would have wanted to close its eyes and commit to the earth the pitiful remains of the unfortunate and unhappy Yid, Yanka!'”

“I began to tremble at the mere mention of this name.”

“‘Oh, just and righteous God above!’ I exclaimed, ‘is it really you? And to find you in such a woeful and grievous condition? And don’t you recognize me? Don’t you recognize your old friend, Prince Gavrilo Simonovich, the former master of this hut?’”

“Yanka himself shuddered, he raised his hand, pushed his hair back from in front of his eyes, and, extending his hand out to me, he said: ‘Thanks be to God Almighty that He deigned to allow me to see yet one more human being before I appear before His throne!’”

“I fell to my knees in front of him and, with goodwill and kindness in my heart, I kissed the Jew’s venerable brow. He broke into tears, and I myself couldn’t hold back my tears either. A series of reciprocal questions and answers between the two of us continued for a long time. Finally, Yanka said in reply to a query of mine:”

“I shall satisfy your wish and inform you, in a few words, of the circumstances that have led me to my current situation. Upon your departure from Falaleevka, in accordance with the allocation that had been decided upon, I moved into this house, even though the priest and the village elder were opposed to that idea, declaring that your property belonged to the entire village community. Be that as it may, I gained the upper hand and held sway, living peacefully and quietly for several years. They say that love is the strongest passion. I agree with that,
because I have experienced hatred, which is the direct opposite of love. I don’t
know why the people here hated me. I only know that they hated me more than
was necessary. The village priest publicly consigned me to perdition, and when
the intoxicated princes would tell me about this, I would always reply: ‘God shall
judge between him and me!’ On the eve of every holiday, I would always send as
good a wine as possible to him and to the village elder: they would accept it
graciously, drink it down, and then afterwards, as usual, – they would curse me. I
became so accustomed to their curses that I would have been greatly surprised if I
had succeeded in hearing anything different from them. When God would bless
me with a son or a daughter, the entire village would become agitated, as if some
great misfortune was threatening us, since one more Yid had been added to the
local population. As you’re not unaware, I already long ago included patience
amongst those virtues that were essential for me to cultivate. And that’s the
reason why, having armed myself with this virtue, I would listen with indifference
to the slanderous and abusive things that people were saying about me."

“Five years ago, when a police detachment that had come from town demanded
that I appear in court, I set off for that destination without any fear, for my
conscience was clear, although I was sad to leave behind my crying wife and my
complaining children. I sat in jail for several months, and I couldn’t succeed in
finding out why exactly I was being summoned before the judges, and for what
crime I was being accused of having committed. At last, my bailiff, a very pious
man, revealed to me, under the pretext of sharing a secret with me, that I would be
sitting there in jail for an entire century, if I didn’t die before then, unless I
prevailed upon the secretary and the judges to decide my case out of turn. ‘But
how am I going to prevail upon them,’ I asked, ‘when I’ve been spending so
much time sitting here in jail and I haven’t seen a single person?’ ‘Nor shall you
see them in future,’ replied the guard, ‘but that won’t hinder your cause. If you
have either a wife or a daughter, either a son or a brother, either a son-in-law’s
father or a daughter-in-law’s father, or any other kind of family relative, – let
them come here on your behalf, only make sure that they don’t come here with
their hands empty, – most of all, make sure that they don’t come here with their
hands empty!’”

“My bailiff explained the whole case to me clearly, and he brought me sheets of
paper, a pen, and some ink. And I wrote to my wife, asking her to come to town
immediately, without tarrying, and to do everything that my honest and honorable
bailiff might advise her to do. The poor creature did everything that was
demanded of her. She collected all of the money that we had on hand, as well as
some bagatelles, and then she went to town. There she made some requests, she
bestowed some gifts, she made still more requests, and she obtained enough
things by asking for them that she set off for our village halfway impoverished,
but with the assurance that my case would immediately come to an end. And,
indeed, soon afterwards, I was summoned to appear before the judges. They read
to me the decision of the court, which consisted of the following statement:
“Yanka Yankelevich, a Yid from the village of Falaleevka, according to the evidence provided by the local priest and the most distinguished princes in the village, has been exposed as harboring an intransigent hatred toward Christians and of having committed impious crimes that follow from that hatred, crimes that consist, incidentally, in the following: he, the Yid Yanka, upon the advice that he had received from a warring devil who derives from the earliest times, found a certain potion and poured it into the wine that he sells at his tavern, as a result of which obvious damage occurs to the mental faculties of those people who drink the wine, as we see, namely, in the following instances: (1) for an entire day, the eminent Prince Luka Zapivokhin clambered on the wall, climbed up trees, and, after falling from one of them, broke his right leg in two places; (2) Prince Miron Bestolkov ran along the streets of the village, dressed only in a shirt, and, after pursuing Princess Khovroniya Bespalaya and then overtaking her, he started to drag her around on the ground. And if the princess hadn’t voluntarily laid down on the ground, in accord with his wishes, the two of them would have fallen into the well that was located nearby; (3) Princess Akulina Zaderikhina, instead of going to the bed of her husband, Prince Zaderikhin, she herself not knowing why she did this, found herself on a felt bed cover, lying beside Pantelei, a young farm laborer. And, in a state of unconsciousness, she raised such a commotion with him on that bed cover, for which she received a severe punishment. The power of the potion that she imbibed, however, as the evidence provided by some reliable people indicates, is acting upon her in such a way that, just as soon as she takes a drink of the Yid Yanka’s wine, she immediately finds herself lying down on Pantelei’s felt bed cover; (4) Princess Poraskevia Podstegina, after tasting this drink with the potion in it from the glass of her parents, became pregnant as a result of the invasion of her body by this hostile force. Such clearly impious, sacrilegious acts on the part of the Yid Yanka are sufficient to merit burning him alive at the stake. But our merciful brand of justice, which pardons sinners, turns its forgiving eye toward him, and that’s the reason why it imposes the following sentence instead: all of the Yid Yanka’s estate is hereby confiscated, to be sold at public auction, and the proceeds shall be donated to the poor.”

“There was nothing that could be done with such a merciful distribution of justice. My tears prompted only laughter on the part of the judges, one of whom, when exiting the court house, admonished me, telling me that, in future, I should no longer make such a drink as that, since it brings so much harm to Christian men and women alike. To put it briefly: all that remained of my estate, after I had exhausted funds on gifts, was seized and sold at auction, and thus I was left as naked as I had been when I came out of my mother’s womb. In the course of the past five years, I have suffered the fate of Job: my wife has died from grief, and my children have followed her in death, – one from smallpox, another from starvation, and a third from beatings at the hands of Christians. I have endured all
of this, and I haven’t grumbled. In the end, my weary nature couldn’t endure it any longer, and not long ago I fell ill with despair. The inhabitants of Falaleevka, – those philistines, – learned of this and broke out in tears. They started visiting me incessantly, and each time, just as they were leaving, they would say to me: ‘Die, you dog!’ I fell unconscious, and, of course, they considered me dead, so that’s why I’ve no longer seen any of them since that time, until, that is, Providence led you, a magnanimous and generous person, to my door, so that at least my mortal remains can be committed to the earth and my Orthodox neighbors can be prohibited from humiliating themselves, – and all of humankind, for that matter, – by cursing each other and quarreling over those remains.”

“With these words, Yanka concluded his account of what had happened to him since my departure from Falaleevka. And I, assuring him that he was merely weak, rather than fatally ill, reassured him that as long as there was enough strength left inside me to be able to break the legs of all of the local Highnesses, – the princes as well as the princesses, – I wouldn’t allow anyone to disturb him or to cause him any worry.”

“A bright, radiant sun made its appearance on the horizon of Falaleevka. I greeted it with a tear of gratitude, I offered up a prayer to God Almighty, and then I left the hut, thinking about how I could feed Yanka some breakfast. At the home of some neighbors, who didn’t know who I was or where I came from, I purchased a pair of chickens and some salad greens, and when I arrived home, I lit a fire in the oven. Yanka’s lacklustre eyes brightened up, and I could assume that exhaustion and grief were the main cause of his illness. He looked greedily at the cat, whom I had treated to the innards of my chickens, and who, evidently, had fasted for as long a period of time as had his master.”

“Suddenly I heard an unusual noise out in the courtyard, and the sound of a multitude of people talking.”

**Chapter 88: An Incantation**

“I walked up to the window and saw a crowd of people, both males and females, standing outside. And, in the midst of this crowd, I saw my old acquaintance, the sexton Yakov, along with a lame man, whom I recognized as the sorcerer Manuel. All of the people in this crowd had stopped at the doors, and one was coercing another to enter, but no one dared to be the first one to step across the threshold. I recalled yesterday’s princes, and I surmised that all of these swine had come here for no other reason than to exorcize the corpse by performing incantations over it. This is the reason why I decided to play a joke on them. I quietly closed the doors and locked them on a hook, but I myself, through a hole that worms had eaten through the doors, would be able to observe what would be going on out there. At this point, the village sexton, the baldheaded Yakov, who, although he had already grown much older than he had been before, didn’t, however, shout any less loudly than did any of the others, proclaimed: ‘What’s the meaning of this, Mister Manuel? It befits you to be the one who would lead the way! You’ve stocked up on power from on high. What’s stopping you now?’”
"‘Nothing,’ replied the retired priest. ‘You’ve stocked up on supplies more than I have. You have an incense burner filled with benzoin resin and, what’s more, your larynx has more volume than mine does. Thus, it befits you to be the one who enters the hut first. You should be there ahead of all of the others. And I, to provide assistance, should be the last one to enter!’"

"‘So!’ a tall, dried-up, old woman caught him up. ‘When they summon someone to go to the tavern, you’re the first one to rush on over there. But when they summon someone to handle a business matter, you crawl as slowly as a crab! You’re a stupid, feckless man! Here, I’ll go and show them that I don’t fear anything, even if it be Satan himself who’s hiding in there!’"

"‘Who’s ever heard of such a thing? That devils should fear other devils that are the same creatures as they are?’ objected the lame exorcist, and he received a pretty handsome fillip to his nose as a result. After this, his wife (for she was a bold old woman) pushed at the doors, but no matter how much she tried, she wasn’t able to open them. Yakov said to her: ‘Don’t touch that door, honest and honorable mother! It’s obvious that the devil, our enemy, having smelled the incense, has locked himself inside the hut. But that won’t hinder us: we can exorcise him even here.’"

"After this, the action began. Manuel started shouting loudly, but Yakov started shouting even louder. Witnessing such tomfoolery, I myself started to yell, with all of my might, the lyrics to the popular Russian folk song that begins with the line: ‘In the valley there stood.’ Horror gripped the two exorcists. Everybody rushed headlong out of the entrance hall, and since the central figure in this scheme, Manuel, who was lame, was standing behind all of the rest of them, he was the first one that they knocked off his feet. And upon falling to the ground, he started to roll, and after him, so, too, did Yakov, and so on. A general outcry and wailing filled the air, and, instead of exorcising the devil, as they had intended, all of them at this point started vying with each other, summoning the dozens of farm laborers at their disposal to come to their assistance. I couldn’t restrain myself, and so I started to laugh out loud, the sound of which likewise frightened the exorcists, no less so than the song of a shepherd would frighten his vocal flock. With their fists, the lower people, the ones who were rolling around on the floor, were forcing the upper people, the ones who were being knocked off their feet, to make haste. And Yakov’s bald spot was covered over by the lumps that resulted from the several blows to the head that he had received from the sorcerer. Little by little, everybody finally put themselves in order, and they ran out of the hut and into the courtyard. And, from a distance, they looked back in silence at the hut’s window. I thought that the matter would end in this way. I had forgotten, however, that an ecclesiastical rank can be just as vindictive as a secular one. The sorcerer’s wife, having shaken herself off, grabbed a stone and threw it at the window. Yakov followed suit, and, after Yakov, many others likewise followed suit. Witnessing such an attack, I decided to defend myself, and, grabbing a burning hot log out of the stove, I touched it against a pile of clothing lying on the floor, and then I tossed it at the back of the female instigator. Everybody raised a cry and scattered, the same way that a hundred jackdaws would scatter at the sound of rifle shots aimed at them.’"
“When all of the commotion had come to an end, I returned to cooking my concoction, and soon I finished eating a very successful dinner with the Yid Yanka, who, although he proved to be a rather poor dining companion for me, as far as the consumption of food was concerned, he did, however, fortify himself a bit by eating some soup. After dinner, we discussed what we would begin doing, and Yanka advised me to go immediately and reveal to the entire village that I had returned, for, he added, one should, all in all, beware of malice and ignorance, and try to avoid them at all costs. I took his advice to heart, and so I set off for the home of the village elder, who was still new to that position, having replaced the recently departed Pamfil Paramonovich. I was told that he was not at home, and so I set off for Manuel’s home, to seek his advice in regard to this important matter. Guessing what the conversation there would be about, I proceeded to the thief’s house, and I actually did find the village elder there, as well as the sexton Yakov, and about a dozen other men, both princes and peasants alike, who were sitting around an open bottle of wine and talking about the corpse. Just as soon as I revealed to them who I was, all of them were considerably surprised and didn’t know what to say to me. I, for my part, entrusted myself to their lofty understanding of protection and patronage, telling them, using the choicest expressions found in the capital, that I would consider it an honor to continue living there amongst them, just as I had done before. All of them congratulated me, and, seating me down beside themselves, they began to regale me. At this point, the village elder said to me: ‘We’re very happy, prince, that you have returned again to your hometown, but we must sadden you, for, in the first place, there shall be no place for you to attach yourself to. We have condemned your house and have ordered it to be burned down to the ground, an order that we shall fulfill this very day, as soon as night falls. For us, as Orthodox believers, it’s not comely to endure the mischief-making on the part of the corpse, who has taken up residence there. We wanted to exorcize him today, but he, the accursed one, wouldn’t give himself up to us.’”

“‘And, what’s more, how terrifying he is,’ said one of the princes, having taken a glass of wine in hand. ‘His eyes are like lampions, and they’re as red as a piece of burning coal.’”

“‘And his ears,’ put in Manuel, ‘are like those of a Finnish pig.’”

“‘And his tail,’ his wife caught him up, ‘is exactly like that of an ox.’”

“‘No, my dear,’ her husband objected. ‘I saw him myself, with these two eyes of mine, and I can tell you that the tail on the corpse is like that of a horse. It flutters in the same way.’”

“‘Oh, what nonsense you’re speaking!’ his wife exclaimed. ‘Who would know better than I what kind of a tail that he has, when the head of that damned beast fell directly on my back. His tail, I’m telling you, is that of an ox!’”

“‘Even if his head had fallen directly on your belly, his tail, all the same, is that of a horse!’”
“‘Of an ox!’”

“‘Of a horse!’”

“‘You yourself are a horse!’ exclaimed the priest’s wife. ‘That’s why you even dream about horses!’”

“After this heated exchange, she spat directly into her husband’s beard. All of the high-ranking princes shook their heads at this insulting gesture, and some of them added that it’s one thing to endure a blow to the cheek, to the forehead, or to another not-so-noble part of the human body, but to endure a blow to one’s beard, – to have someone spit into one’s beard, – may God save us, and our children, from such a shameful disgrace! Such reminders strongly annoyed the sorcerer and inclined him against his wife. And so, with all of his might, he threw an unfinished glass of wine at her. The glass succeeded in reaching his wife’s forehead, where it broke into pieces, and this resulted in bloody currents starting to flow along her brow. She was about to fling herself at him, but the village elder restrained her, as did the other guests who were present there, and the rabid old woman had to withdraw from the scene, shedding tears and voicing thousands of curses.”

“With the establishment of peace, these local princes and peasants started to talk once again about the fire that had nearly burned down my house and about the eradication of the corpse. I had to make use of all of the eloquence that I possessed in order to calm and quiet them down, and I had to take all of their fear upon myself, promising them, by way of an oath, that just as soon as they have to suffer any sort of disturbance as a result of the ferocity of the corpse, I myself shall set fire to my house and shall thus put to an end all of those arguments about the corpse’s ears and tail. After they had conferred for a sufficient amount of time, they yielded, finally, to my representations, and I set off to go see Yanka. The food and drink that he had consumed the evening before had set him right, and I held out undoubted hope that he would recover his health. We spent the evening in amicable conversations, and we fell asleep so pleasantly, the way that a man does when he doesn’t fear anything and doesn’t regale himself with anything unnecessary.”

“We greeted the morning with an expression of gratitude toward our beneficent God, who sends his gifts to a Christian and a Jew alike with the same kindness. When we came out onto the street, I found a multitude of people waiting to see the completion of my act of bravery. Everyone was congratulating me and showing me affection, especially when I, in an effort to distance myself from their curiosity, which made me uncomfortable, invited the most distinguished people among them to join me at the tavern. Those people whom I didn’t invite to go there with me were saying to one another rather clearly: ‘It’s not for nothing that he’s inviting them there! This doesn’t happen without some miracle-working element being afoot! What shall Moscow and Warsaw not teach a man?’ I didn’t wish to pay any heed to this gossip and to these rumors.”
“To put it briefly: I soon renewed my acquaintanceships with, – and my goodwill toward, – my fellow countrymen. In an effort to preserve their benevolence and their trust, I tried to mention Moscow and Warsaw as little as possible, and I almost never spoke a single word that was incomprehensible for them. The Yid Yanka recovered from his illness. I divided up my money with him, and he set off for town secretly. There, having cast aside the idea of trading in wine, he bought up a number of various trifles, such as, for example: ribbons, tape, lace, white pigment, rouge, and so on. And, after he had closed his days as a tavern-keeper, he appeared openly in Falaleevka as a small tradesman. All of the male and female inhabitants were extremely surprised when they saw the deceased Jew, who, even after his death, had created so much confusion, turmoil, and chaos in their lives, was again alive and well. Little by little, everything resumed its normal course. He practiced working as an auctioneer, while I was engaged in household work. To help out, I took on work as a farm laborer. And, in order to avoid, as much as possible, slander and gossip, we seldom spent time at the homes of other people. And if we did go out somewhere, Yanka would always bring some present from town with him, – it didn’t really matter what kind of present it was, any kind at all would do, – for the host, the hostess, or their children.”

“Autumn, winter, and the following spring passed rather well for these two people who had experienced so much hardship in life. I forgot more and more about the nobility that had flowed in my veins, and I ceased to be attracted to stupid dreams of some future grandeur that I might attain. In a word, I supposed that I would fall asleep in Falaleevka, at last, with one final dream, for a strange, unexpected adventure completely changed all of my life. It’s all well and good that everything is inconstant in this world. Today, I’m free; consequently, I’m happy as well. But tomorrow, due to the slightest cause, desires shall appear; after them, some intentions, concerns, cares, and troubles shall appear, and a man once again becomes the plaything of his passions.”
Vasily Trofimovich Narezhny

A Russian Gil Blas, or
The Adventures of Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov

Part VI

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Thus Prince Gavrilo Simonovich Chistyakov, while providing to his friend Prichudin and to his son Nikandr an account of the adventures in his life, up until the time of his arrival back in his home village, stopped at the point of the most entertaining and absorbing situation that had occurred in his entire life.

“My friends!” he said: “You’ve seen me from the time of my youth up until the time of my old age. You’ve seen my congenital, as well as my acquired, virtues and vices. You’ve seen the heights of my good fortune and happiness, as well as, simultaneously, the depths of my misfortune and unhappiness. Learn from my example, my son, that those of our actions that conform more with the promptings of our heart than with the suggestions of our reason, shall never be correct ones. And, for that reason, they shall never calm our soul. The duty of a father, – a father not in name only, – obliges me to tell you that virtue, in and of itself, is always vitally important. But, in regard to society, there is, in the opinion of some people, something conventional about virtue: that’s to say, being virtuous, in the grand scheme of things, means only that a man is not a robber, and nothing more than that! But enough of this! I myself, who served in close proximity to Prince Latron and who committed thousands of unjust and immoral acts, considered myself to be a fairly good person, because the boss in charge of the buffoons and clowns at court was even viler than I was. If I displayed obvious disdain for, – and unfairness toward, – those who provided service contributions, and if my quiescent head used to spin around on the brocade divan as I imagined some of the idle pleasures that I enjoyed, I could take some comfort in a splendid thought: ‘Look at what an elderly, slow-witted grandee and a politician are able to do by means of a single word. The former takes care of the fattening up of his wallet, for his belly is already obesely stout, while the latter roams the streets of the city, looking through his eyeglasses, – and at whom? At the heavens above? In keeping with the power that he wields, Prince Latron accepts vicious – rather than virtuous, – people to serve under his command, he promotes them to various ranks, he decorates their uniforms with various medals, he presents them with money, – not his own, however, – for he already knows where to get this money! And to what end? What’s the point of explaining this when the matter is, in and of itself, already quite clear?’”

“Sometimes,” he continued, “of course, it’s possible, – such is the nature of human weakness, – that after having made a mistake, or even after having committed a crime, one can find some consolation in the knowledge that other people do things that are even worse than those misdeeds. But fortunate is the person who’s able to avoid the need to resort to this pitiful consolation! In my life I’ve enjoyed moments of greatness and glory! But what good are these high points when idlers, loafers, and scoundrels could celebrate after giving me, as my share, a third of the booty that they had gained through an abduction? Meanwhile, good, kind, hard-working, peaceful people used to tremble at the mere mention of my name, in the same way that a superstitious person trembles at the mention of Satan’s name? Oh, my son! May God spare you from ever having to occupy the kind of government position where your father once so distinguished himself!”

“That’s wonderful!” exclaimed the enraptured Prichudin: “Your words ring out as true, for my heart is quivering from agreement with you. We’ll soon see to it that Nikandr, if the foolish idea
of seeking glory, such as you did, were ever to arise inside him, shall cast it away. I’ve found the means for driving such a desire out of his head, and those means are as ordinary as they are reliable! What means do I have in mind? To marry him off to a female compatriot.”

The word ‘marry’ doesn’t seem to have anything inherently awful in it, but it staggered the poor young man. He cast such a plaintive glance at his father that the latter, with a smile on his face, said to him: “Don’t be alarmed, my son! Our friend and benefactor didn’t intend to sadden you, or even to make you unhappy. Matrimony, just like all official posts and human responsibilities in general, can be considered from three perspectives: there are good ones, there are bad ones, and there are middling ones. I would consider the man who doesn’t call his own marriage evil or malicious to be a happy man. You’ve heard about my marriage to Princess Feklusha, and you’ve heard about my life with Licorisa, who, for all intents and purposes, could likewise have been called my wife. But it was my third marriage that could have been called truly chivalrous and that deserved, at the very least, to have been extolled in song in the form of some romantic ballad. And, what’s more, I already have in mind a certain seminarian, who, for a reasonable price, would write an entire poem about that marriage.”

“What?” Prichudin exclaimed hurriedly. “Do you mean to say that your arrival back in your home village isn’t the final installment in the narrative account of your past adventures? And that, after two wives already, you really did take it into your head to try your luck in a third marriage, and, I suppose, one with yet some other Falaleevka princess!”

“Not at all,” replied the prince. “My third marriage, – as I’ve told you already, – was a real love affair, a true romance.”

“And we’ll probably hear all about it,” Prichudin said, “just as soon as I return from my trip to the Korenskaya Fair just outside Kursk.”

“That’s a sensible idea,” replied the prince.

And, in this way, his stories ceased to be recounted for a while. The merchant set off for the fair, and Prince Gavrilo occupied himself, during his host’s absence, with reading and writing, while his son was kept occupied serving at his government post and taking strolls.

One evening, while walking past the local shopping arcade, Nikandr saw a group of people, and several Guardians of Law and Order, standing there. All of them were making noise, shouting and bustling about. Nikandr, out of an innate curiosity about everything in the world around him, likewise walked up to where the crowd had gathered, and he saw, to his great surprise, a woman of majestic stature standing in the middle of this crowd, a woman who was beautiful, although rather tidily, – yet also poorly, – dressed.

“After you confess that these things don’t belong to you,” the chief Guardian of Law and Order was saying to this woman, “it shall then be necessary for you to tell us to whom they do belong. Otherwise, it shall mean that they are stolen goods. So then, – hand them over to us, and please be so kind as to march over to a place where it’s calm, quiet, and cooled off: that’s to say, to jail.”
The poor woman suddenly burst into tears.

“I’ve already told you,” she said, “that these things are not mine. And that I’ve been instructed only to sell them, but by whom, – that I didn’t dare to ask, for I had promised to preserve secrecy. I can attest, by all that’s holy, to the truth of my words!”

“It’s too bad,” replied the police officer, “that you, my dear, don’t have any witnesses who are a little more trustworthy and reliable than you are. I’m afraid that we shall have to settle accounts with the judiciary.” Looking at the pitiful expression on the face of this female stranger, looking at her confusion, her timidity, and her indecision, Nikandr took a heart-felt interest in her situation and wanted to help her out. He made his way through the crowd and reached the Guardian of Law and Order, saying to him in a rather sharp tone of voice: “Sire! If the witnesses for this woman, with whom I’m not acquainted, are not valid, then I shall testify to the truth of her words. You know me rather well!”

“Oh, of course, I do,” replied this indefatigable police officer, removing his hat and making a low bow to Nikandr. “I’m under an obligation to believe you, but if, in the event of some kind of extraordinary occurrence, you were to respond, in that case as well, I would need to have witnesses.”

He walked away, and Nikandr, leading to the side the woman with whom he was not acquainted, asked her what her interaction with the police consisted of.

“My dear sir,” she replied, “you defended me and saved me from receiving what might have been some powerful and oppressive harassment at the hands of the police, and that’s why the debt of gratitude that I owe to you prohibits me from concealing from you what I’m at liberty to reveal. It’s not the bonds of blood, but a certain strange incident that united me with a venerable family at a time when this family was at the apex of a rather peaceful life, while I was standing at the edge of the very abyss of perdition. Due to some unfortunate circumstances, the members of this family have now gone into extreme decline, and the bonds of gratitude that I feel towards them are what hold me back and keep me living with them at their home. At present, I’ve been instructed to sell this gold chain, which I wear around my neck like a shackle, and just as soon as I showed it to an interested buyer, a policeman, who just happened to be standing there, asked me: ‘To whom does this item of jewelry belong?’ There was no way that I dared to reply, for it was clear to me that this was prohibited, and yet he kept demanding, unconditionally, for a reply, and he had begun to threaten me. I don’t know what might have come of all of this, if you, – a generous and magnanimous young man, – hadn’t taken me under your wing and protected me!”

“I would like,” said Nikandr, “for you to be able to arrive home with the reply that the members of this family were expecting, and that’s why I shall buy your gold chain!”

“Here it is!”

“What price are they asking for it?”
“Fifty rubles!”

“Here’s the money,” said Nikandr, handing the money over to her with one hand, while taking the item that he was purchasing from her with the other. He couldn’t help but notice that this unknown woman, while handing over the gold chain, was wiping her eyes.

“What’s the matter?” Nikandr asked.

“Oh! A poor maiden had wept bitterly when parting with this item, which had been given to her by her good and kind father as a gift on her birthday.”

“What!” Nikandr exclaimed, “and she decided to part with such a valuable treasure?”

“What is there that poverty shall not cause one to do!”

“Take this gold chain and give it back to that good and kind daughter who had received it as a birthday gift from her father! Thanks to merciful Providence, I have by now broken off my acquaintanceship with poverty! What’s the name of this good and kind maiden?”

“That’s one thing that I can tell you. Her name is – Elizaveta!”

“Elizaveta!” Nikandr uttered softly. “Oh! and to think: I once knew a certain maiden with that name. For that Elizaveta, – and for any fair maiden who bears that same name, – there’s no effort that I wouldn’t spare! Tell your friend that she shouldn’t be selling anything to anyone. As soon as poverty reaches the threshold of your doors, let me know. I’m wealthy, and I don’t know of a better use for my money than to assuage the modesty of those who are in need. Every evening you can find me on the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas. In half an hour, I would gladly tell you my name as well, but, for now, please excuse me. Your Elizaveta shall perhaps consider me a sly and cunning seducer, the kind that not infrequently appears in these parts, some rake who, under the simple and modest guise of philanthropy, tries to catch an inexperienced young maiden in his net. From this time forward, my name shall remain concealed from you, – in the same way that the address of your abode shall remain concealed from me. I want only to help Elizaveta. Forgive me! Don’t forget the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas!”

Nikandr, – even he himself not knowing why, – concealed this incident from his father. Perhaps he didn’t wish to share with anyone else the feelings that he held about his philanthropy. And, indeed, what could be more seductive for a well-educated young man than to be a philanthropist who’s supporting a young maiden in need? His imagination draws for him a portrait of her in the most brilliant colors. She, probably, is beautiful, and, no doubt, virtuous. And if she isn’t? Oh, that can’t be! How could a woman, embellished and enriched with the name Elizaveta, be wanton, be depraved? Such thoughts were occupying Nikandr as he lay down in bed to go to sleep that night, and such thoughts were swirling around in his head when he woke up and got out of bed the next morning. It was with some impatience that he awaited the arrival of evening time, and hardly had he caught sight of the final rays of the setting sun gliding across the tin dome of the Church of Saint Nicholas than he flew to the church porch, and he found there, to his great
delight, that his unknown woman was sitting there beneath a tree near the ruins of a broken down tombstone. Seeing Nikandr approaching, she walked up to him, with eyes down cast, and said:

“My dear sir! Forgive me, if my words shall not be entirely pleasant for you to hear. My friend wishes to thank you sincerely for displaying concern for her situation, for taking an interest in her fate, and for trying to help her out. She has given me orders to tell you that, being competent to dispose of her possessions as she sees fit, she has sold her necklace. But she never gave any thought to begging for alms, and this idea upsets her immeasurably. So then, here’s the gold chain, and here’s your money. You can’t have it both ways: choose whichever one of these two items you wish!”

Nikandr stood there greatly dumbfounded.

“This account is truly somewhat romanticized: indeed, it’s as if it were taken straight out of a novel,” he said in reply. “And I never thought that one who was in such dire straits would be so exacting! So be it. If this is the way that your Elizaveta wants it to be, then I select for myself the gold chain. But since each buyer has the right to evaluate, in his own way, the item that he’s purchasing, – and to fix a price for it, – I, taking advantage of this right, shall add fifty rubles more to the earlier asking price. Here they are! Don’t forget the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas!”

Nikandr left the site of their rendezvous hastily. The unknown woman turned and set off in the opposite direction. For several evenings in a row, Nikandr visited the church porch, but he didn’t see her there. A depression of some sort spread across his face: he was gloomy and sullen. Indeed, he didn’t resemble his usual self to such an extent that his father noticed this and, out of concern, remarked about it to him. The son, after making several meaningless excuses, told his father about his adventure with the unknown woman. The look of importance that was etched upon his face, as well as the languid quality of that look, as he was describing this adventure, amused the prince, who broke into a loud laugh.

“Thank God,” he said, “that your pensiveness doesn’t have a more important source. The fact that some female rogue has received a hundred rubles from you in exchange for a knick-knack, – that’s something for you to think about: you shall just need to be more circumspect in future!”

“Who is it, though, father, that ordered this invisible Elizaveta to send back to me both the necklace and the money?” Nikandr asked. “Was it really impossible to use both the one item and the other without all of these circumlocutions?”

“Of course it was!” his father replied. “But, in that case, she wouldn’t have received a hundred rubles instead of fifty!”

“I don’t believe that!”

“Then put it to the test!”

This conversation concluded with the prince saying: “Fine! So as to find out which one of us is right, I’ll take the trouble, beginning this evening, of visiting the porch of the Church of Saint
Nicholas with you. If we manage to meet up with your majestic unknown woman during that time, we’ll attempt to ascertain the truth. It’s not so easy to fool me.” – They did, in fact, visit the church porch several days in a row, but it was all in vain.

“There, do you see?” asked the prince. “Your virtuous woman, evidently, has very moderate attributes. She’s satisfied with a hundred rubles, but other people, as would only be right, were not so conscientious.”

Sitting on the church porch, they engaged in a lengthy conversation. The hours flew by imperceptibly, and the clock on the bell tower struck eleven. A lovely moon was calmly rolling across the lovely sky. The trees standing nearby were barely waving their leaves. Only some beetles and dragonflies would occasionally break the silence.

“What a beautiful night!” said the prince, wrapping himself up snugly in his frock coat. Scarcely had he made a movement to raise himself up a little, when suddenly three female figures appeared at the latticed fence across from where Nikandr and his father were sitting. These three female figures were moving quietly in the direction of our two curious onlookers, and the father-and-son pair, looking at one another, didn’t know what to say about this occurrence. When the three female figures had drawn close enough, it seemed to Nikandr that he recognized in one of these newcomers his unknown woman, even though her face, just like the faces of the other two female figures, was covered by a black veil. Walking along as the middle member of the trio, she was sobbing loudly and wringing her hands. The other two women, supporting her quietly, were, apparently, trying to console her. When they were about ten paces away from the church porch, they stopped, and Nikandr’s unknown woman, after placing a basket on the ground, walked up to the church wall and dropped down to her knees. She bent her head down, in the direction of the cellars, and uttered, – gently, but clearly: “Ah – oooh! Ah – oooh!” A cold shiver ran down the backs of the prince and his son. This hallooing was repeated again several more times, and then suddenly a frightful scarecrow crawled out of the cellar. He was a handsome man, wrapped in a cloak, whose hat was pulled down to his eyes. Hardly had he managed to lift himself up to his feet, when the woman who had been crying let out a cry, stretched out her arms, and rushed over to him, – and he likewise rushed over to her, – as they met up with one another and fell into each other’s warm embrace. The other two women were crying silently. Involuntarily, the prince’s eyes, and those of Nikandr, likewise welled up with tears.

“A pitiful scene,” the prince said quietly to his son. “God grant that they’re merely unfortunate and unhappy lovers, and not some criminals.”

“My heart responds to this scene,” uttered the son, speaking just as quietly as the prince had done, and, placing his father’s hand on his chest, he said: “We shall see!”

Chapter 90: A Nocturnal Battle and a New Skald

It wasn’t possible to understand anything detailed out of the conversation that had taken place between the unknown man and the three unknown women. They mutually deplored what had happened to them, crying and consoling one another. Nikandr daydreamed about recognizing, in
the voice of one of the women, his unforgettable Elizaveta. But, at this point, the idea presented itself to him that such a resemblance was wandering about only in his imagination, and that this was especially the case because his unknown woman was called by the very same name. The nocturnal occurrence at the cemetery concluded with the man in the cloak once again embracing the woman whom they had seen earlier, picking the basket up off the ground, withdrawing from his three female friends, and then crawling back into the cellars located beneath the church. The three unknown women stood there for a minute, and then they, too, withdrew, leaving the church porch with slow, reluctant steps. Silence descended upon the church again, but Nikandr was laboring under the force of his feelings, which were making him very anxious and uneasy.

After this, he embraced his father and said to him, under his breath: “Father! What do you think about all of this?”

THE FATHER: “In order to think in a decisive way, one must first be able to judge honestly!”

THE SON: “Didn’t you hear the voice of my Elizaveta?”

THE FATHER: “The voice of one of the women was rather similar to Elizaveta’s. But the voice of the other woman, the one you called your ‘unknown woman,’ was much more similar to the voice of a woman who once made a strong impression on me. Oh, my God, my head is spinning! My imagination is ablaze! You’ll ask: what does this mean? – You’ll find out soon enough. You shall hear the ending to my life story very shortly, and you shall see from it why the voice of one of the unknown women astonished me so much. Prichudin is returning home tomorrow, and you’ll hear all about my fate subsequent to my return to my hometown. In the meantime, I shall not prohibit you from visiting the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas. Only please be careful, however. Some incidents begin with laughter, but they end with bitter tears.”

They returned home at midnight, and they found, to their great delight, that Afanasy Anisimovich, who was closely examining the gifts for them that he had brought back from the Korenskaya Fair, was there. The reception that they gave him was the usual one: that’s to say, it was open, direct, and genuinely joyful. The prince made no mention at this time of the nocturnal rendezvous that they had witnessed, so as not to hinder this dear friend from falling asleep peacefully after his recent journey.

Several days passed, days that were spent putting in order Prichudin’s turnovers on account of the buying, selling, and bartering that he had engaged in while at the Korenskaya Fair. Prince Gavrilko, who verified the calculations of the stewards and the books of the accountants, spent almost all of his time in the merchant’s office. Therefore, there was a lot of free time left over for Nikandr, – especially time for him to amuse himself at his church porch, even though it was empty. His impatience was beginning to turn into chagrin, and if he had been at the church porch on that strange night without his father, he would have almost thought that everything that he had seen there had either been a dream or a figment of his overheated imagination. Finally, things reached the point where he swore that he would give up going there any longer and that he would consider the dreamy voice of Elizaveta to have been merely an empty dream. In due time, the duties involved with his government post, as well as the diversions that were offered to him in his social circle, which was made up of so many young friends and acquaintances, calmed him
down. He had almost completely forgotten about that puzzling scene at the cemetery, and he had stopped thinking about the unknown woman. He hadn’t noticed the same look of tranquility and serenity, however, on his father’s face. It seemed that the fateful nocturnal occurrence had triggered a very acute change in all of the prince’s actions. When Nikandr had a talk with his father about this, – a talk that was filled with all of the son’s characteristic candor and agitation, – Prince Gavrilo, who was emotionally moved by his son’s concern, said to him: “My son! If you wish to set your father’s mind at rest, then apply all of your care and concern for me to tracking down your unknown woman again. Don’t conceal from her any longer what your name is, but do keep a more attentive eye on what effect your name shall have upon her, what impression it shall produce. Let me know about all of this, and then we shall see!”

This assignment that he had received from his father was, for the son, a law to be strictly followed. He took to roaming the streets of the city like a lovesick Parisian. He would peep into the eyes of all of the women that he encountered on the street. He would train his lorgnette on them, and so on. In Petersburg, he would have been considered a dandy who was attired in accord with the latest fashion, but in Oryol he was given the evocative appellation rake. Word of this reached his ears, but he wasn’t moved by it, for he had received the appellation while satisfying the request of his father, who wouldn’t do anything without having a good reason for doing it. One day, having become tired from running up and down the city streets, Nikandr came up with the bright idea of spending several evenings in a row, – and, if necessary, several nights in a row as well, – at the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas. For the thought had entered his head that perhaps they were concealing themselves from him there, and that if he were to hide between the tombs near the church porch, it would be easy for him to witness an incident similar to the one to which he had been a witness several weeks earlier. He set off for the place where he had launched his previous searches. He settled down at the foot of an enormous old tomb. A majestic burdock plant and a blossoming nettle plant surrounded him. While it was still possible for him to make out the letters, Nikandr took a look at a book that he had brought along with him, for, to be quite honest, he hadn’t yet read even a single page of it. He was continually turning his head every which way, trying to decipher what was written in it, and he calmly closed the book when it was no longer possible to make out anything at all in it.

Scarcely, – to speak poetically, and, what’s more, to speak appropriately, for everyone considered Nikandr to be Apollo in his current incarnation, – scarcely, I say, had night, with its lackluster glances and its wings made drunk by dew, stretched itself out across the entire expanse of the Oryol horizon. Before long, one could hear the distant sound of feet stepping upon some graveside stones, and in the moonlight Nikandr could see some people who were walking toward him, only they weren’t the previous three unknown women, however, but two new unknown men. They were slowly drawing very near to where Nikandr was sitting, and then they likewise took a seat on the turf between the graves. And one of the men, under his breath, said to the other man: “Be careful, my friend, not to repent of participating in our undertaking!”

The other man replied: “No matter what he might do, a Russian nobleman of long standing should never repent. I received a large estate as an inheritance from my ancestors, and I’ve run through all of it, even before turning fifty, but I don’t repent of it. Tell me honestly: who has owned better hunting dogs than the ones that I have? Who has owned better horses than the ones that I have? What has the entire province been saying about my female house serfs? Have there
been any of them who are more beautiful than mine? Have there been any of them who are more magnificent than my outstanding ladies? Although they have by now been passed on to others, what is one to do? I’m not accustomed to restraining the urges of my desires! I have fallen in love with the Countess Firsova, and today, with your help, I intend to take her with me to my forested village, which is all that remains for me of the entire estate that I inherited. There she can do with herself whatever she wishes! If she wishes to laugh, then she can go right ahead and laugh! If she wishes to weep, then God be with her! I’ve learned from my couriers, who are reliable sources, that Count Firsov, after our duel, thought that I had died, and, fearing the courts of justice, he has gone into hiding somewhere nearby in these parts. I’ve also learned from these reliable sources that his dear wife has taken it into her head, at this inopportune time, to love him in a romanticized fashion, – as if coming straight out of a novel, – and so at night she sometimes visits this valley, this vale of tears, which is, apparently, the place where they rendezvous for their trysts. With the count being alone, it shall be easy for the two of us to handle him, in the event that he takes it into his head to act the lord, giving himself airs and graces. The lively, beautiful countess shall most likely suffer a fainting spell, which is all the better, for she won’t regain consciousness until she is already in my carriage, – and in my warm embrace. Look over there, do you see those two women who are just now making their appearance? I shall sell the body and soul of a hundred devils if that woman over there, the one who’s a little shorter and a little thinner, doesn’t become my princess! *Bon courage*, my friend! Why are we tarrying so long! Let’s rush right over there to go meet them.”

And, indeed, after one of the men had uttered these words, the two of them stood up and hurriedly rushed over in the direction of this pair of nocturnal female travelers, one of whom Nikandr immediately recognized as being his unknown woman. Therefore, without debating very much what needed to be done, he likewise set off in hot pursuit of the two Russian noblemen who never repent of anything. Scarcely had these two Russian noblemen caught up with the two ladies that they were pursuing, when one of the latter cried out plaintively, and, just as she was lapsing into unconsciousness, uttered softly: “Oh, heavens! That monster is still alive!”

At this point, one of the two unknown men, grabbing the swooning lady by the hand, said to her female friend: “Madam! There’s no longer any need for you to be here, and so you may get away from here, if you so desire. I know, no worse than Your Highness does, how to accompany beautiful women home all by myself!”

He was preparing to drag his victim away from there, when Nikandr quietly walked up from behind and calmly asked him: “Do you have far to go, my lord?”

The latter glanced back quickly, looked his interrogator over, from head to toe, and then replied contemptuously: “I’m accustomed to replying to such rude questions with some fully weighted slaps to the face of the person who is asking them!”

Nikandr became very angry at the way that this Russian nobleman, in the presence of ladies, had treated him so discourteously, and that’s the reason why he exclaimed: “Well, evidently, I shall need to phrase the question in such a way that it suits your taste!” Then he struck the man so soundly on the ear that the latter fell to the ground like a stone, with his forehead smacking
against the damp ground. Nikandr’s unknown woman, having seated her friend down and supporting her, said to him: “I recognize you: you’re the magnanimous and generous young man that I met! Oh, please help me to save the honor, – and the life, – of this unfortunate and unhappy woman!”

“You can rely on me,” our hero replied, standing there in a challenging pose and waiting until his smitten foe would get back up on his feet so that he could perform some new acts of bravery at his expense. The Russian nobleman did, indeed, get back up on his feet, with scratched arms and hands, as well as, in several places, a besieged forehead.

“Oh, buddy of mine!” he exclaimed to the other unknown man, “why is it that you’re not giving me a helping hand?”

“There’s no way that I’ll do that!” the latter replied. “I’m likewise a Russian nobleman, and so I know what honor is! How can two men attack a lone man? Be more bold, more daring!”

The courageous Russian nobleman bent over and began to dig in the ground with both hands, trying to dislodge a stone for the purpose of using it to defeat his opponent, Nikandr, who, likewise being perspicacious, had guessed correctly as to what malicious intent against his health and wellbeing the Russian nobleman was devising. Therefore, he threw himself, as quickly as a lynx, upon his foe, knocking him off his feet. But, in the process, Nikandr, having become entangled in the nettles, flew at his foe with all of his might. Groaning beneath Nikandr’s weight, his foe, somehow or other, managed to work his hands free and stuck all ten of his fingers tightly into brave Nikandr’s toupee. Hands and feet were put into motion. Words of abuse, shouting, moaning and groaning, – all of this could be heard throughout the entire church porch. After taking a seat on the stone, the colleague of the heroic knight, the latter now being down to his underwear, said calmly; “Right from the very beginning, it’s been evident that the battle here wouldn’t be ending quickly and that there would be bloodshed. And, for that reason, so as not to remain idle, I wish at this time to become a new skald.” Upon making this announcement, and right after taking a pinch of snuff, he began, with a highly pompous voice and in a very singsong manner, to recite bardic verse, declaiming with the help of his hands: “For what reason do the graveyard stones moan? For what reason do the nettles and the burdock waver? – They do this because two great knights are engaged in a fierce battle over a lovely princess! Tufts of hair are flying in the air, and the palms of hands, sliding across teeth, are causing bloody currents to flow from their noses! Battle on, bold knights! Glory is ready to crown you! Your cravat, oh, knight, you, who is unbeknownst to us, has been tattered and torn to shreds, and is, perhaps, suitable now only for tinder. But, oh, my bellicose friend, much has befallen even your shirt! Oh, night! Oh, silvery moon and shining stars! Oh, you sleeping bumblebees and hornets! Oh, you, black, horned beetles, – Awaken, all ye insectile creatures, and hearken to my song!”

He fell silent, and then, after a few moments, he said softly: “What’s this? What devil is crawling out from under the church over there? Aren’t these, perhaps, spirits of the deceased that are coming here to witness this glorious nocturnal battle and to listen to the skald’s bardic song? I’m your obedient servant! And the bravest of Russian noblemen are withdrawing from the battle against the evil spirit of the devil.” Upon saying this, he stood up and quickly set off for the exit.
Such a move on the part of the new skald put an end to the battle. Nikandr and his rival stood there together, facing one another, and the latter muttered: “How stupid I was to choose such an idler to be one of my comrades.” Not any more lazily than had his former comrade, the skald rushed over to the fence and suddenly disappeared. The devil that had crawled out from under the church ran over to the women, and seeing that one of them was still not in any condition to raise herself halfway up, he went down on his knees right in front of her and said to her: “Tell me, please, for the love of God, what’s the meaning of all the strange things that I’ve been witnessing during this night?”

“Thank this young man,” said the elder of the two women, “for saving the life of your countess!”

“What?”

“Your unworthy friend, Prince Vikhrevertov, was just here, intending to abduct her!”

“Oh, good heavens! Didn’t I kill him in a duel? Isn’t this his shadow that has come here to avenge his death?”

“He doesn’t resemble a shadow at all,” replied Nikandr, who had just walked up to them, “for I’m feeling that much more than anyone else here is. My sides, my back, the top of my head, and especially my toupee, they’re all feeling the corporeality of this specter very tangibly.”

“I thank you a thousand times over,” exclaimed the unknown count, “for the part that you’ve played in my wife’s situation! How glad I am that fate has let me know of the continued existence of this monster, one that I thought had died beneath the blows that I had rained down upon him during a duel. It was for that reason that I decided to flee from my homeland, until a more suitable opportunity to return here would arrive, and so I went into hiding amidst the graves of dead people. God grant that I may one day repay you for the favor that you’ve rendered me.”

Chapter 91: The Community Assembly

They exchanged a lot of courteous, civil remarks to one another, and then, finally, the count said: “I entreat you, my dear sir, not to conceal your name from us, for my entire family and I shall be eternally grateful to you!”

“Although what you say is true,” replied Nikandr, “the deed that I performed was, in and of itself, inconsequential, and I myself paid my assailant back handsomely for the shoves that I had received from him. And that’s the reason why I don’t have the right to expect any gratitude on your part. There’s no need, however, for me to conceal my name from you. I’m Prince Nikandr Chistyakov!”

“Oh, heavens above!” both of the women exclaimed together, being, evidently, extremely dumbfounded by this revelation.
“Do you really mean to say,” asked the countess, who had by now regained the use of her senses, “do you really mean to say that you’re the very same young man who had once been expelled from our local boarding school for having kissed my sister Elizaveta?”

“Oh, my God!” exclaimed Nikandr, beside himself with surprise. “Do you really mean to say that you’re Katerina, the eldest daughter of the now deceased Ivan Efremovich?”

“Just so!”

“Where, then, is your younger sister?”

“Oh! She’s here with us!”

“Where can I see her?”

“For the time being, – nowhere! She’s not appearing in public at all. Our situation right now is a most unpleasant one. Leave your curiosity aside for the time being: I’ll explain things to you more at our first rendezvous. The favor that you’ve rendered us shall remain a memory in my heart forever.”

She set off with the count, who, having learned that his rival wouldn’t stab him to death, had calmed down a little, and who didn’t fail, when parting from him, to shower him with praises for the courage and fortitude that he had displayed in battle not long before. A certain unknown woman, stopping for a moment, asked Nikandr in a quivering voice: “For God’s sake, I beg of you: don’t hide from me! Do you still have a father or an uncle?”

“I have a father, and his name is Gavrilo Simonovich!”

“Oh, my God! Where does he live?”

“In the home of a relative of his, a local merchant named Prichudin!”

The unknown woman quickly jumped back, raised her arms up to the sky, and then swiftly left him standing there. Somehow everything seemed very strange to Nikandr. The image of Elizaveta presented itself to his imagination vividly. He trudged home, filled with profound reflections.

Old-timer Prichudin and Prince Gavrilo were sitting at table, eating supper, when our hero made his appearance there. Both of them exclaimed “Oh!” and this is the reason why: Nikandr’s face had been so badly scratched, and he looked so haggard and jaded, after his encounter with his adversary. They proceeded to bombard him with questions, and Nikandr, as was his wont, told them about all that he had seen and heard that night. After hearing him out, Prince Gavrilo said, with a sigh: “It’s clear to me: it’s she!”

PRICHUDIN: “Who is she?”
CHISTYAKOV: “Tomorrow, my friends, I shall satisfy your curiosity by answering that question. You’ll see how my strange adventures came to an end, and you, Nikandr, shall find out why it is that I charged you to track down your unknown woman. Till tomorrow!”

At the appointed hour, when our friends had all found the time to gather together, Prince Gavrilo began the continuation of the narrative account of his adventures in the following way:

“All recall that I had stopped at that point in the narrative account of my past life when the good and kind Yid, Yanka, and I had arranged anew the domestic management of our small household. I oversaw the plowing of the fields, while he oversaw the trading of the agricultural products that resulted from those cultivation efforts. We lived in peace and harmony with our neighbors, and we never turned them down, if at all possible, when they happened to request our help in some matter. People are speaking the truth, however, when they say that there’s no place in the world where the devil can’t install himself. Yanka, while at a certain country fair, had made the acquaintance of another Yid, named Iosif, who was likewise engaged in trading, and Yanka, liking him for his promptness and efficiency, brought him back with him to visit me in Falaleevka. Iosif was young, rather handsome, and not crippled or poverty-stricken. The idea immediately arose of the three of us combining our revenues together and beginning to extend our trading activities a bit more broadly. This idea drew us even closer to Iosif, for nothing unites people as quickly as mutual and reciprocal profit. We soon came to an agreement with Iosif and began our new merger. And our plan met with success. We spent a year in business together, and all of us were satisfied with one another.”

“I, it seems, have already let my thoughts about love and hate be partly noticeable to my audience. These are two human feelings that, no matter how opposed they might be to each other, often produce, however, one and the same consequence: namely, – people’s ruin and perdition. In Falaleevka, there was a female commoner, a philistine named Ustiniya, who was, by profession, a tavern-keeper. Everyone is sufficiently familiar with this kind of person. Even though she was a maiden, she didn’t, however, lead a boring life and didn’t even think about getting married. By chance, our Iosif made her acquaintance, and although he was a sufficiently diligent worshipper of the God of Abraham, he, in this instance, however, didn’t entertain any doubts about offering a sacrifice to the accursed Astaroth. The consequences of attending this idolatrous church service, it would turn out, were very weighty.”

“Soon the chaste Ustiniya noticed that she was pregnant, and she revealed this news to her tempter and seducer, Iosif.”

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77 In demonology, Astaroth is known to be the Great Duke of Hell, in the first hierarchy with Beelzebub and Lucifer (he is part of the evil trinity), a demon who seduces by means of laziness, self-doubt, and rationalized philosophies. He is known to be a male figure, most likely named after the Phoenician goddess Astarte. His adversary is Saint Batholomew, who can protect against him for he has resisted Astaroth’s “temptations.” In art, Astaroth is depicted as a nude man with feathered wings, wearing a crown, holding a serpent in one hand, and riding a beast with dragon-like wings and a serpent-like tail.
“What am I to do?’ asked the dumbfounded Jew. ‘Am I to blame that fate didn’t wish to bring you into the world as a Jewess? If that had happened, it would have been an entirely different matter.’”

“No,’ Ustiniya objected. ‘I’ll prove to you that fate has, without fail, played a part in this matter, seeking to make you a Christian and to make you my husband!’”

“Not on your life,’ the Yid said with sangfroid. ‘Great is the need for fate to meddle in the secret exhilarations of a Yid male and a Christian female!’”

“Oh!’ exclaimed the female tavern-keeper angrily. ‘So I’ll prove to you right now that I won’t allow, not only such an accursed Yid as you, but also the village elder himself, to make fun of me, and so I’m going to go see him right away.’”

“Upon saying this, she turned her back on Iosif and set off hurriedly to go see the village elder. And the Yid, laughing at her threat, came home and merrily related her story to the two of us.”

“Oh, my friend!’ forecasted Yanka in a prophetic voice, raising his eyes and casting a heavenward glance, ‘Oh, Iosif! You’re lost, ruined! What have you gone and done, you unfortunate and unhappy youth? Are you unaware of what my life has been like? Haven’t I been deprived of a wife, and children, and property? Haven’t I been made to sit in a dungeon merely because the strength of my wine made some Falaleevka princesses, who had gorged themselves on it, keel over and fall into the embraces of some farm laborers? And also because many Falaleevka princes, for the very same reason, took to clambering up the walls? But you, oh, woe is you, my friend! You’ve impregnated a Christian woman, and, what’s more, a tradeswoman, one who deals with a commodity toward which the judges in this village feel a kindred love. Woe is you, Iosif!’”

“Instead of heeding these wise exhortations that had been given to him by the highly experienced Yanka, and instead of taking measures in a hurry to remedy his woeful situation, Iosif merely scoffed at his fellow Jew and concluded that he would spit upon all of the judges in this village, not giving a damn about what they thought or how they felt.”

“Scarcely had he finished voicing his bold threats, when a mixture of noise and conversation could be heard around our hut, a mixture that was similar to the sound that we ourselves had made when we came to exorcize the corpse. Before long, the village elder, accompanied by five of his deputies, burst into our hut. All of the rest of the swine surrounded the house. The village elder began his harangue so stormily that his mustache and beard stirred, as if from a gust of wind: ‘So is it you, you accursed Yid, who had no qualms about making such a disgrace out of our ancient custom of bread-and-salt hospitality? Oh, you accursed man! And you did this just as soon as you could touch Christian flesh? Oh, you traitor of Jesus Christ! You’re more evil than even Judas himself! Go and pay us for what you owe us!’” The village elder then turned to his
deputies and told them: ‘Tie his hands behind his back and put his right leg in the stocks, and then be good enough to take him to the community hut!’”

“When the deputies rushed off to arrest Iosif, with all of the ardor that is characteristic of people who have been aggrieved in such a delicate matter as this one, the indefatigable Yid, instead of showing humility, such as Iakov’s son, Iosif,78 – a man in the Bible who bears the same name as our Yid, – had done in Egypt, he wished instead to imitate brave and strong Samson, and so he punched the bravest of the assaulters with his fist. The blow that he delivered was so deft that his opponent fell down, after being knocked off his feet. But, in falling to the ground, he bumped the back of his head against the village elder’s nose, and, as a result, the mustache and beard of Falaleevka’s His Highness-and-Mightyness were painted red from a bloody torrent that flowed from his nose. As anyone can guess, this matter didn’t seem like a joke. No matter how bravely Iosif waged battle, he had to yield, however, to the might of his opponents. The heroes of all ages have been subject to this necessity. There was simply no way of getting around it. They tied Iosif up and dragged him over to the community hut, scheduling a meeting of the Grand Council of the Mir for the following day. Moreover, I, too, was invited to attend, as an honorable resident of the village.”

“I spent the night in a mood of despondency, while Yanka spent it in a mood of sorrow and grief. With tears in his eyes, he begged me to avail myself of all of the resources at my disposal to have his friend released from confinement, and I did promise him that I would do that. And I made that promise, moreover, with much greater zeal and fervor than I ever used to make such promises earlier in my life, back when I was serving as the secretary to Prince Latron.”

“The decisive day arrived, and I set off for the community assembly. I blushed a little while entering this gathering of Falaleevka’s amphictyons,79 recalling who the person was that had represented the people of ancient Greece during a much earlier governmental administration. The village elder opened the meeting with the following speech:

‘As you, my fellow members of the Orthodox laity, are well aware, the Yids have been formidable enemies of the Christian tribe since ancient times. These nefarious heathens tortured Christ, – and many saintly martyrs, – to death. For this, our Lord God punished them rather properly. And, on those occasions when He did not have mercy on these monsters, it wasn’t befitting for us, as sinful

78 Iosif (Joseph), who was the sixth son of Iakov (Jacob), is best known for his coat of “many colors” and his God-given ability to interpret dreams. He was sold into slavery by his jealous half-brother, Benjamin, but was later freed and became the chief advisor to the Egyptian Pharaoh. He became the central figure to lead the children of Israel during their course of exile in Egypt.

79 An amphictyon was one of the deputies from the confederated states of Ancient Greece to a congress or council, where they considered both political and religious matters.
creatures, to spare them either. All of you are well aware that this monster, the
Yid Iosif, captivated and seduced the Orthodox tavern-keeper, Ustiniya. What do
you have to say on this matter? What should we do with him?”

THE FIRST DEPUTY: “To my admittedly stupid mind, it follows that we should
deprive him of the possibility of creating similar impertinences in the future.”

THE SECOND DEPUTY: “You spoke the truth when you said just now that your mind
isn’t wise. How are we going to start doing something that the highly distinguished chief
of police in our district and the elective district court, with all of its assessors, can’t
make up their mind about what should be done? What shall other people say?”

THE THIRD DEPUTY: “I think that, without seeing this matter through to the end,
without going the distance with it, so to speak, we should clean him out, – bleed him
white and strip him naked, – and then chase him out of our village with brooms!”

THE FIRST DEPUTY: “This opinion that you’re voicing isn’t worth a damn. The
judge at the elective district court has reserved to himself alone the right to clean
criminals out, and he gets more into a furious rage doing that than he does from taking
away from criminals the possibility of committing sins.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “But what kind of devil are we going to make out of him?”

THE THIRD DEPUTY: “Well, if that’s the case, then let him, the dirty dog, get
baptized, and then we’ll marry him off to the tavern-keeper. This way, all of the devils
would be tossed into the water, and he would regale us, well and truly, for doing this: he
would give us men some sashes to wear and would give our women some headdresses.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “What say you to this idea, prince?”

PRINCE CHISTYAKOV: “Iosif has now heard all of the opinions that have been
voiced, so let him declare what he himself thinks.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “That’s a sensible idea! Speak, you unbaptized heathen!”

IOSIF: “I can report to you that I’m not guilty in the least. First of all, it isn’t me who
seduced the female tavern-keeper, – I can swear to that on the Ten Commandments, – but
rather it’s she who seduced me. She spared nothing in her efforts to get me to yield to her
amorous designs, for she herself confessed to me, at our very first rendezvous, that she

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80 The *zemskii sud* (an elective district court in pre-modern Russia) was a forerunner of the
*zemstvo*, an institution of local government set up during the great emancipation reform of 1861
that was carried out in Imperial Russia by Emperor Alexander II. The system of elected bodies
of local self-government in the Russian Empire was represented at the lowest level by the Mir.
The goal of the *zemstvo* reform was the creation of local organs of self-government on an elected
basis, possessing sufficient authority and independence to resolve local economic problems.
felt a strong desire to experience the difference between a circumcised and a non-circumcised penis. Consequently, if a Turk, a Persian, or an Arab had happened to catch her eye, then she would have committed the very same act with one of them. Second of all, if our sexual union had been repugnant to fate, then fate could have used her power to prohibit a tavern-keeper from mothering a child that derives from a Yid. But since just the opposite of that happened here, this clearly demonstrates that, in this instance, fate’s approbation was given.”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “Oh, you loathsome, impious heretic!”

THE FIRST DEPUTY: “You damned Yid!”

EVERYONE: “This is blasphemy against our Lord God!”

THE VILLAGE ELDER: “This matter, however, is complicated and confusing, and so we need to be able to break it down into its constituent parts and resolve it!”

“At this point, he glanced out the window and said to us: ‘The sun has risen high in the sky! It’s time for us to drink a goblet. We shall put aside our business until tomorrow. After all, by that time, he, the accursed one, shall perhaps not have passed away! Whose turn is it now to host our gathering?’”

“He looked at me in such an unremarkable way that I right away understood what was expected of me, and so I exclaimed cheerfully: ‘To my house, gentlemen! I humbly request that all of you come to my house, all of you.’”

“As a result of this turn of events, the prisoner was left in the little hut, under guard by two peasants who were armed with long cudgels, while all of the other people present hurried over to my house. I made an effort to entertain these judges as inexpensively as possible, but they were unrestrained in their appetites, and by noontime they had been treated to so much food and drink that they were hardly able to crawl their way back to their own huts. And so Yanka and I were left alone by ourselves.”

“Here is Falaleevka justice for you,’ I said with a sigh. ‘But surely not all of the judges are the same! Surely it’s not always the case that either malice, or self-interest, or fanaticism creeps in. If a judge is susceptible to one or another of these states of mind, then the accused shall thus be convicted. The malicious judge shall make him experience all manner of torments, the self-interested judge shall clean him out, and the fanatical judge, depending upon the criminal’s way of thinking, shall either alleviate the fate that he’s suffering or aggravate it incomparably more!’”

Chapter 92: Malice Doesn’t Slumber

“It would be excessive for me to supply you with an account of our plans during the course of that entire day, but I shall tell you that, just as soon as deep twilight arrived, Yanka and I, well equipped with flasks, bottles, and pies, set off for the community hut.
‘Good people,’ Yanka said to the two bearded sentries who were standing guard, ‘all of us have had some fun today and have enjoyed ourselves, but you two are probably dying of thirst, for I know that your wives must have brought you nothing today except bread. But so that our joy might be made complete, we don’t want you to be forgotten. Let’s at least celebrate a little with you now!’ He spread out his presents, and our two sentry guards took them in their arms and embraced them, the way that a mother would embrace a son who was returning home from the field of battle after a long absence. They were kissing the flasks with such heartfelt ardor that, as it was getting on to midnight, they had gone mad from drink. At that time, we said good-bye and parted company with them, but we had not managed to walk more than a hundred paces away from them when we saw that they had stretched themselves out at the doors of the community hut. We quietly returned, and, seeing that both of them were dead to the world, – sound asleep and snoring loudly, – we immediately took from one of them the wooden key that was sticking out from under his belt, we unlocked the door, and we led the surprised Iosif out of jail. When we arrived home, we untied the fetters that had been imposed by the judge and set him free. Yanka lifted onto Iosif’s back a knapsack, in which all of his most valuable possessions and all of his ready cash had been collected beforehand. Yanka thrust into his hand a small bundle filled with provisions and, after accompanying him to the gates, he said to him in parting: ‘Go with the grace of the God of the Israelites, wherever He may direct your steps! Remember how dangerous similar connections can be, especially for Yids! How many Christians there are who have captivated and seduced Jewesses, and who have plunged them into an abyss of lasciviousness! Yet they merely laugh at this. But may God’s archangel preserve you and save you, keeping you from establishing any amorous relationships with Christian women!’”

“After bidding us farewell and parting from us, Iosif rushed off, fleeing the village on the run. Yanka and I, meanwhile, set off for home to get some sleep.”

“Scarcely had the sun appeared in our hut than we were awakened by a loud knock at the door. A mixture of shouting and wailing could be heard in our courtyard. We already knew what was the meaning of this, and we had prepared ourselves for it beforehand. Scarcely had I unlocked and opened the door than the village elder leapt into our hut and asked us in a menacing manner: ‘Where is he, the scoundrel?’”

“Who?”

“What do mean: who? The Yid!”

“And why would we know that? After all, he’s being held in custody under good supervision!”

“That’s exactly the problem: he’s no longer there! What did you give the sentry guards to drink yesterday, prince?”

“I gave them the very same refreshments that I treated all of our invited guests to yesterday! I wanted everyone to be contented!”
“But, in fact, it didn’t turn out that way!”

“The village elder left, and everyone started to run off in search of the escaped Yid. No matter where they searched, however, they couldn’t unearth Iosif anywhere. Having grown tired of searching for him, everyone gathered at the community assembly, but they no longer invited me to join them. After some time had passed, I learned on the side that the two sentry guards, who had so neglected their duty and abandoned their posts, and who were thus the cause of Iosif’s escape and subsequent flight, were, on the strength of the ruling by the community court, quite appropriately punished by being struck with batons, as an edifying example to others. This was extremely unpleasant for Yanka and me to hear, and we were afraid that the two sentry guards might seek to exact vengeance upon us. So as to avoid boring visits and reproaches, we decided, at least for the present, to get out of the village, and so we set off for the fields, where we spent the entire day and evening in a small copse. Toward nighttime, we stopped at a roadside tavern and began to eat supper. We were in a jolly mood, and as the meal was approaching its end, the owner came in quietly and said to his wife, scratching his brow: ‘There’s a nice fire burning in Falaleevka right now. I was thinking that I might run over there to take a look at it. It’s hardly more than half a mile away from us.’” Yanka and I glanced at one another, and we both exclaimed ‘Oh!’ We hurriedly paid our bill and then took to our heels. Who could describe the horror and astonishment that we felt when we came a little closer to the village and learned for certain that our hut, – and, along with it, all of our possessions, – was burning, and that all of our hopes were turning to ashes. Yanka, standing there idly, with his hands on his head, looked up at the starry heavens and, after remaining silent for a short while, he said with a groan: ‘Oh, Lord, master of heaven and earth, forgive this desperate soul when he shall inquire of You: where are you, Lord? and why has Your eye slumbered?’” A cold sweat was streaming onto my brow, and I watched, motionlessly, as our hut was burning down to the ground. When the flames were no longer visible, we started to wander over to the hut mechanically, just like two automatons. We sat down on the grass, at some distance away from where the hut had once stood, and we silently turned our attention to the circles of thick smoke that were rising up into the air, following with our eyes the smoke’s movements. We spent the entire night in this fashion, without uttering a single word.”

“At last, a scarlet dawn began to shine its radiant light upon a beautiful sky. Princes and peasants began to make their appearance out on the street, but not a single one of them approached us, not a single one of them felt at all sorry for us in our time of woe and misfortune. The sun rose, and, at the same time as its light appeared, my soul became clear. Ivan Osobnyak came to mind, and I, smiling unintentionally, turned to Yanka and said: ‘Your fellow countryman was speaking the truth when he said, ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’”

“Yes,” he replied with a dull, turbid look on his face, ‘but pangs of conscience have been weighing heavily on me and oppressing me. Evidently, Providence on high had appointed the hour of my ruin, but you have deflected that appointed hour. You, by yourself, would have lived quietly and peacefully in your legacy: you wouldn’t have known Iosif; he
wouldn’t have been here; he wouldn’t have committed that sin with a Christian woman; your hut would have remained whole and intact. I’m the one who’s to blame for all of these evil misfortunes that have befallen you."

“He covered his eyes with his hands, fell face down on the ground, and began to weep bitter tears. This miserable emotional state that he was in tore my heart to pieces. I tried to console him, to persuade him that it wasn’t his fault. I threatened him, warning him that he would provoke God’s wrath for displaying such faint-heartedness. But it was all in vain! ‘Enough!’ he said, with a look of despair on his face. ‘I’ve had enough, oh, exalted God up in heaven, of being a burden down here on Your earth! I’ve made one of the most venerable of people on earth unhappy. I shall behold Your anger, and I shall obey Your command! Stretched out here in ashes is the head of the most insignificant of Your slaves. Raise up the palm of his hand, create movement and will inside him, – that should be easy enough. But permit me, oh, sovereign of thunder and lightning, permit me to hope, as I lay on my death bed, that this admirer and worshipper of Jesus Christ, this one and only friend of mine, shall find joy and consolation for himself even while he’s still here on earth. This would be a great joy for my spirit as well, a spirit that’s flying off to the heart of Abraham, Your beloved Abraham. But if, oh, God of Gods, oh, Lord of Lords, if it’s prophesized justly and righteously that You loved them above all others, above all other people under the sun, then be kind toward me, someone who never intended to deviate from the paths prescribed on the tablets that You gave to Your servant and slave Moses. Naked was I when I came out of my mother’s womb, naked shall I be when I return to the womb of the earth, – to the mother of all living creatures.’"

“I shrank back from him with a certain amount of involuntary horror, for to try to console someone who is in such a dire emotional state almost means increasing the extent of the grief that he’s experiencing. Convulsive movements could be discerned in him. He turned around, with his face pointing up at the sky, he again covered his eyes with his hands, and then he calmed down. I walked up to him slowly and, remaining motionless, watched him for a few minutes to see whether he displayed even the slightest convulsive movement. I took him by the hand and found that it was cold. His eyes were closed. I put my hand on his chest and found that his heart had stopped beating. Yanka was no more!”

“There’s no need to tell you what my soul felt at that moment. If my fields had burned down to the ground, if my orchard and vegetable garden had been trampled down by hail, if half of my body had become paralyzed, – I wouldn’t have been as staggered as I was by Yanka’s sudden death. Falling to my knees, I kissed his lips, which were already growing cold, and, with bitter tears in my eyes, I extended my arms out to the sky and appealed to the divine forces that be: ‘Oh, son of the living God! Would you really reject the soul of this sufferer, and not invite him to join you for a repast at Your dining table simply because he didn’t get to behold You, to know You? Have mercy, oh, Lord! Have mercy!’"

“No matter how indignant and outraged I was feeling in spirit, I did remember, nonetheless, that I would be doing a considerable favor for the Christians in our village if
I were to conceal Yanka’s dead body from their view, so that they wouldn’t dishonor themselves, given the opportunity that they would have to display their fanatical bigotry by the way they treated the lifeless remains of this righteous Jew. I took Yanka into my arms and carried him away to his small garden, placing his body in the very farthest corner of the garden, directly beneath some wild rose bushes. And, at this point, I conceived the idea of laying his bones to rest in a grave, just as soon as the moon would begin to rise.”

“Left alone to my own devices, I began to rake aside the coal ash on my hearth, presupposing that I might find some money to spend on food items to support my sustenance, for I was absolutely sure that I wouldn’t be able to obtain even a crust of bread from my fellow countrymen. I supposed that there was more hope of my finding some money because paper currency was still largely unknown in our parts, as was true in many European countries as well. Knowing those secret places where we had kept our treasure, I began to rummage around, but, alas, I couldn’t find anything, except two gold coins worth ten rubles each. This offended me! At this point in time, I understood that it wasn’t just malice and vengeance that took part in the burning down of my house, but also financial self-interest. What could be viler and fouler than that? Once again, however, Ivan Osobnyak came to mind, and I took comfort in remembering what he had said about vanity. At this point in time, I intended to spend the remainder of my life in a way that was similar to how he was living his life, and to take all of the measures necessary not to have need of any assistance from other people! I spent the day in the tavern, where I ate dinner and supper, and toward nighttime I plodded over to where my deceased friend was lying. All day long, all of the princes and peasants in the village had avoided speaking with me, as if I was capable of infecting them with some disease.”

“I dug a pit right beside some wild rose bushes and, lowered into it, with due reverence, the venerable remains of this good and kind Jew. I spent the entire night at his gravesite, in prayer for the peace and tranquility of his soul. I didn’t suppose that there was any sin in reading over his grave the funeral service in accordance with the Christian rite, and I think that my reading wasn’t in any way worse than any of the usual ones. The rising of the sun found me occupied with this activity. Sleep didn’t close my eyelashes. I was plunged into self-forgetfulness as I sat by his grave right up until noontime. At this point, nature told me that it was time for me to fortify my strength by means of food and sleep. And so I set off for the tavern, where I stayed until nighttime. I couldn’t decide what I should undertake right away. Naked and poor and barefoot, where was I to turn? I didn’t have any shelter or refuge, and so that’s why, to begin with, Yanka’s grave would have to serve as my bedside, as my pillow. I arrived at his gravesite and, – oh, horrors! – I saw that his corpse had been dug up out of the ground and that the body of my disfigured friend was now lying at the grave’s surface. Such malice and such inhumanity deprived me of absolutely all of my reason, intellect, and good sense, driving me out of my mind. I solemnly cursed all of the inhabitants of Falaleevka, and I decided to leave my home village, – and to leave it forever. Burying Yanka’s body yet again, I laid down on the grave and promptly fell fast asleep. From experience, I have ascertained that a person who has innocently been offended always sleeps more peacefully than does the person who was the offender. The sun was already high up in the sky when I was
awakened by the rumble of wheels on a carriage, drawn by four horses, which had stopped at my gates. A footman, dressed in expensive livery, looked over the place where my house had stood, and asked one of the young princes, who had probably accompanied him: ‘Well, where on earth is he?’ The boy pointed at me with his finger, and then he withdrew, whereupon the servant walked up to me with deference and inquired: ‘Are you Prince Gavriilo Simonovich Chistyakov?’”

“Yes, I am!’ I replied with bewilderment.”

THE SERVANT: “Judging from the looks of it, you’re a venerable man!”

CHISTYAKOV: “Thank you for the kind words!”

THE SERVANT: “Would you like to be genuinely happy?”

CHISTYAKOV: “Who wouldn’t want that?”

THE SERVANT: “That depends on you!”

CHISTYAKOV: “In what way?”

THE SERVANT: “Please sit down in the carriage. I’ll bring you to the sort of place where you, without a doubt, shall find your happiness. Only don’t ask where we’re going. Time shall explain everything to you. Do you agree to these conditions?”

“Everything that I heard from this servant surprised me, and I, of course, in other circumstances, wouldn’t have put my faith in the hands of a person with whom I wasn’t acquainted. But when my fellow countrymen burned my house down to the ground, and when they murdered, one could say, my closest friend, I immediately decided that, no matter where I might go to live, it wouldn’t be a worse place than my native village, where these horrible acts had been committed. And so I decided to leave Falaleevka, although even I myself didn’t know exactly where I would be heading. I took a seat in the carriage, and I allowed myself to be taken wherever it was that they wanted to take me. The servant sat down beside me in the carriage, and he jabbered away incessantly throughout the entire trip. No matter how much I tried to find out from him who it was that wanted me and where it was that I was going, he kept trying to get out of it by using one and the same reply: ‘You yourself shall find out soon enough!’”

“Towards evening of the third day, we were drawing near to an enormous, dense forest.”

“Don’t get angry at me, prince,’ said the servant, ‘that I shall now have to do the bidding of the person who sent me. Please be so kind as to permit us to cover your eyes with a blindfold!’”

“To what end?”
“It must be done this way!”

“I became thoughtful and pondered this request for a moment. But reasoning that I had already dared to travel for three days and nights with a man with whom I was not acquainted, I felt that I could resolve to grant him this most recent request, for if there had been, in fact, some criminal design planned against me, it could have been put into action well before now. Thus, I decided to permit them to do whatever it was that they demanded of me. They blindfolded my eyes, and we continued on our way. After about another four hours on the road, the carriage came to a halt. The blindfold was removed from my eyes, and, through the darkness of deep twilight, I saw a rather large wooden house, at whose porch our carriage had halted. ‘You may alight from the carriage now, prince,’ said the servant, and I stepped down. I was led through several rooms to a quaint bedchamber that was furnished and decorated in a rather elegant fashion. ‘This is your bedchamber,’ said the servant, placing the candle on a table, bowing in my direction, and then exiting.”

“Examining what was in my bedroom, I found a comfortable bed, a bookcase with some books on it, and some blank sheets of paper on a desk equipped with an ink well and other writing implements.”

“I reasoned that my host was, evidently, not unacquainted with me, since he knew of my appetite for reading and of my taste in books. That’s why, upon taking down from the shelf The Adventures of Gil Blas de Santillana, I occupied myself by reading this book, and at every new situation that the hero found himself in, I would compare myself with him. My current situation at that time was truly GilBlasque. The clock that was hanging in my room struck eleven. The door to my room opened, and the servant appeared with a supper that seemed to me to be more delicate than the food that was served to me at the banquets that I used to attend in Falaleevka. When I had finished eating supper, the servant cleared the table, made a bow to me once again, and then quickly disappeared. I, for my part, hurried over to the bed and tumbled into it.”

“It was precisely at this time that I began to await the denouement of this comedy. But I waited in vain. A deep silence reigned all around me, and sleep imperceptibly closed my eyes. I awoke rather late the next morning and walked over to the window. An enormous grove presented itself to me. It was filled with chamois, hares, and similar other animals, from which I concluded that this was surely a menagerie. After a while, the earlier servant entered with breakfast, which sufficiently revealed the host’s lack of stinginess. The servant told me that, if I wished, I could walk through their menagerie, which was right in front of my very eyes. When I asked again about the master of the house, I received in reply the very same thing that I had received before: ‘You yourself shall find out soon enough!’ He conducted me to the gates of the menagerie, he let me enter it, he locked the door again behind me, and then, without waiting to see whether I had any questions, he withdrew.”

“I wasn’t able to judge the temper of the master of the house on the basis of his garden. Here, in some sort of swamp, were some beautiful rose bushes and lilies, but towering
over them were some nearby nettles. A superb work, – a marble statue of Cupid, – which
was fastened to an oak tree, was hung upside down. What kind of allegory is that? Here
was a bust of Socrates, depicting, apparently, the moment when this righteous pagan
philosopher was opening his mouth in order to swallow a lethal dose of hemlock. The
radiant look on his face, which was turned upward, toward the heavens, and the peaceful
features of his face, gave me occasion to come to a halt. But I couldn’t help but smile
when I saw that his mouth was stuffed with mud. In a word, no matter where I walked, I
was surprised everywhere, and, finally, I concluded that my host was, if not a complete
madman, then at least someone who was only half-witted. After walking through the
entire garden, I saw at the very end of it an arbor that was rather strange and unusual. It
was a temple, surrounded by wooden columns, on each of which were painted, – from top
to bottom, – the images of wild beasts, birds, fish, and reptiles in strange positions. The
roof was made out of thatch. Upon approaching this temple more closely, I saw a
woman, dressed comfortably in a white morning dress, sitting at a window inside the
arbor with her back toward me. She was embroidering silk on a lace frame, and she was
so absorbed in what she was doing that she didn’t even notice that I was approaching.
But, on the other hand, there were others who did notice. I hadn’t managed to stand at the
window for more than two seconds when I was startled by the sound of a chain and a
frightful barking. Standing right in front of me, and baring its teeth, was a large,
terrifying dog. Thank God that it was chained up. I jumped back a couple of steps. The
unknown woman, meanwhile, gave out a cry and jumped up from her seat. Seeing me
standing there, she said hurriedly: ‘Don’t come any closer! This is a total nightmare.’ I
removed my hat and bowed to her deferentially. She was a woman of about thirty years
of age, who was, one could say, both beautiful and majestic. She soon appeared before
me, reprimanding the dog and inviting me to join her in the arbor.”

“‘I’m guessing who you are!’ she said. ‘You’re Prince Chistyakov, aren’t you?’”

“‘Exactly so, madam! But allow me to ask for your indulgence, so that I might know in
whose house I’m now standing and with whom I now have the great good fortune of
speaking?’”

“‘You’re now speaking with the mistress of this house,’ she replied. ‘I beseech you to
come join me in the arbor. This way, please.’”

“I gladly accepted her invitation and entered the temple. And there were no fewer
oddities to be found inside the temple than there had been outside it, on the grounds of
the estate. Indeed, one could call this edifice, – with its collection of numerous and
various weapons, – more the palatial armory of some robber than the summerhouse of
some Russian noblewoman. This beautiful woman entered into conversation with me,
and I found that she was rather incisive and judicious. When suppertime arrived, she
asked if I would consent to dine together with her. One can easily guess that I didn’t
compel her to wait long for me to reply to her request. In a word, we spent the entire day
together, and we didn’t part company until rather late, long after supper had been served.
At her request, I gave her my word that I would be just as favorably inclined to have
breakfast with her on the following day, as I had been to have had dinner and supper with her today. A whole five days passed in this manner.”

“On the sixth day, – which was for me an unforgettable one, – just as we were, as usual, finishing up our breakfast, she blushed a little and then she said to me: ‘Prince! It’s time for me to reveal to you the reason why I requested that you be brought here. I’m a widow, and, as you can see for yourself, a widow who is far from being poverty-stricken. While driving through the village of Falaleevka, I had the opportunity to see you and to single you out from all of the other men that I had seen in my life up until then. Being my own sovereign mistress, I decided voluntarily to subject myself for a second time to the bonds of matrimony. You’re already at that mature age when you shall know how to make your wife happy. I have handpicked you, prince, to be my husband. Since you can see how candid I’m being, please be that same way with me as well. What say you to my proposition?’”

“Who, if they were to be put into my position, would have turned down such an offer and rejected such prospects? A man who’s over forty years old, who’s destitute and nearly naked, captivates a beautiful young woman, who is, moreover, wealthy! Isn’t this, indeed, a miracle? I was delighted with this prospect and went into raptures thinking about it. My head became filled with images of Petersburg receptions. Swiftly going down on one knee, I extended my arms out to her with the skill of a paramour and cried out to her: ‘Oh, lady worthy of adoration! What mere mortal would decline such an honor? Dispose of your most obedient servant as your own free will desires!’”

“Seeing my readiness to accept her proposition, she extended her hand out to me with a smile, and I, getting back up on my feet, kissed her hand with delight. This is how crazy a man can sometimes become in his old age! Walking arm in arm, we entered the bedroom, where she showed me several wardrobes filled with some ready-to-wear men’s clothing and linen.”

“Select, prince,’ she said to me, ‘whatever catches your fancy and whatever fits you best. Tomorrow is the day when our mutual and reciprocal desires shall be crowned with success.’” With these words, she left me, and in her place appeared the servant with whom I was already acquainted. He congratulated me on my upcoming marriage, and we began to try fervently to select some appropriate apparel for the wedding. And this did, indeed, cost us no small amount of difficulty. Just as it was evident that my bride’s late husband was taller than me by a whole nine inches, he was, on the other hand, twice as thin. But there was nothing that could be done about that! Where were we to find tailors who would have time to make the necessary alterations within a single twenty-four-hour period? The day passed in very great bustle and fuss, and I sank into bed that night filled with the most pleasant thoughts. Sometimes, it’s true, the thought occurred to me that perhaps I was hurrying too much to get married for the third time in my life. Such arguments, however, would instantly disappear at the mere thought of the charms of the lovely Kharitina. This was the name of my new benefactress. The longed-for day arrived. Sarcely had they learned that I had opened my eyes than the sounds of hunting horns began to resound in the courtyard. And soon afterwards an envoy from my
goddess arrived, expressing congratulations and reminding me that on this day, in accord with the custom of Orthodox believers, I wasn’t to see my bride otherwise than in church during the wedding ceremony. ‘The fact that I won’t see her during the day is nothing,’ I thought to myself, ‘for the two of us shall make up for it by speaking our fill to one another, – to the point of satiety, – afterwards.’”

“When it came time for me to get dressed, in preparation for walking down the aisle to the altar, I somehow managed, with the help of my servant, to struggle into a kaftan, and, looking at myself in the mirror, I nearly gasped: the kaftan reached all the way down to my very heels. But, on the other hand, it was exactly as if my arms had already been tied back. But so be it! Toward evening time, I was informed that since there was only one carriage available at the house, and my bride would be riding in it, would I please deign to ride to the wedding on horseback. I gave my consent, and, making the sign of the cross in all four directions, I set off for the trip to the church, escorted by four armed servants and burning with impatience to put an end, as soon as possible, to all of these ceremonial niceties.”

Chapter 93: What Unexpected Surprises!

“We arrived at the church in about two hours time. The lamps were lit, before long my lovely bride made her appearance, and the marital union was concluded with heartfelt pleasure. I swore eternal faithfulness to her, but it seemed to me that my bride made her promise not to commit adultery not all that cheerfully. And I attributed this to her inherent female shyness. I was indescribably happy, and, while I was riding back to her estate alongside my new wife, I thanked God for sending such good fortune and such happiness down to me here on earth.”

“We were met at the gates of her estate by celebratory rifle shots being fired by the servants, and I couldn’t get my fill of admiring the respectful way that they helped me disembark from the carriage and then led me to my bedchamber, where a table, laden with victuals and various beverages, was standing, despite the fact that there were only two mouths to feed, for I learned, to my great surprise, that no one else had been invited to join us in feasting at a banquet meal. It was a little after midnight when we got up from the table, and a pair of servants, each of them supporting me under one of my arms, led me not to the nuptial bed, but instead to my earlier bedchamber. I remained silent, supposing that the newlywed bride would be ashamed of undressing in the presence of a man. The two servants undressed me, and, to my even greater amazement, they advised me to put on the same clothes that I had been wearing when I had first arrived at her estate. ‘The princess likes it that way,’ they explained, and that was sufficient for me to submit to her will unquestioningly. Scarcely had I donned my sackcloth clothing than she appeared, dressed in some beautiful bedroom apparel, and she seemed so lovely to me that I fell at her feet and extended my arms out to embrace her knees. She recoiled, however, taking three steps backward to move away from me, and then she said: ‘May your raptures die, prince! Sit down and hear me out. I’m one of those unfortunate and unhappy women who are called ‘tempted and seduced.’ A certain prince fell in love with me and proceeded to love me for several years, and I couldn’t help but respond to his
love. I robbed my venerable father and fled to this wasteland. Every day my abductor would promise that he would marry me, and he has been deceiving me up until now. I was ashamed of being a mere concubine, even in the presence of our servants. But after hearing repeatedly from my lover that in the village of Falaleevka there is a certain Prince Chistyakov, I took advantage of his absence, and the consequence is well known to you: I made myself into a princess. If he were to return here, and if I were to allow you, even if only once, to make use of the rights of wedlock, then both of us would perish. I know his disposition and his character! Thus, prince, for the trouble that you’ve gone to for my sake, please don’t refuse to take a small gift as a token of my appreciation. And so I beg you to leave here immediately. Indeed, I advise you not to come even close to this place ever again.”

“When she had concluded this speech, she stood up, thrust a purse in my bosom, bowed to me, and then left.”

“I sat there like a stone idol, and, perhaps I would have sat there much longer if a trio of servants hadn’t suddenly appeared, with two of them, once again, supporting me under each of my arms as they led me away. The third servant, meanwhile, increased the pace of our egress, punching me in the back with his fist from time to time. We descended to the courtyard, going through the gates there, and, finally, we set off through the forest. It was the dead of night, so we were immersed in darkness. And we were walking through an autumn shower, with rain pouring down on us in buckets from the heavens above. As far as I was able to tell, it seemed to me that we had been walking for about two hours when we finally stopped. And this trio of accursed rogues, – wishing His Highness ‘Good night!’ – abandoned me in an oak forest. Their loud guffawing resounded for a long time. I stood there, leaning against a tree, and for a long time I was unable to come to my senses properly. When I finally did regain consciousness and came to my senses, an overwhelming feeling of sorrow, bordering on despair, took possession of me. All that I could utter was: ‘You deluded madman! And you still flatter yourself with the idea of attaining happiness? Here’s your nuptial bed for you!’” At that point, I collapsed onto some moist moss and leaves near a tree root. I didn’t feel the dampness, although, after having arrived at the appropriate condition of my soul, I did see at dawn that I was almost swimming in mud and mire. A strong chill was running through my bones. Shivering throughout my entire body, I stood up and plodded along by guesswork. All of my earlier philosophical theorizing disappeared, in the same way that the last ray of daybreak disappears when the sky becomes covered by a thunderous storm cloud. The density of the forest was constantly making it difficult for me to walk. And since I was walking, to say it straight out, in a state of acute indignation, in a short time the switches had whipped my face fairly thoroughly. The shapeless rural garment that I was wearing had, in certain places, opened old wounds that I had received earlier, wounds that had healed in Falaleevka. My boots were likewise mutilated, and toward sunset one of them straight out refused to continue rendering services for its master. Not only toward evening time, but also toward nighttime itself, I couldn’t find an exit out of this accursed forest. I was beginning to think that my bride was nothing other than a damned witch, who had decided to destroy her husband in this bewitched place. Seeing clearly that I would have the same amount of provisions for my evening meal as I had already had for my dinner, I
selected a place to sleep for the night beneath a spreading spruce tree, for it was more elevated and sublime than any of the other trees around it. I made my bed out of leaves that had already dried out, I laid myself down upon that makeshift bed, I appealed to my guardian angel for assistance, I covered myself up with my shapeless smock, which, during the course of the day, had dried out, and I prepared to give myself up to the peaceful embrace of sleep, when, to my considerable amazement, I heard at some distance away from me some bass voices that were incessantly hallooing: ‘Ah – oooh!’ ‘Ah – oooh!’

‘Here precisely is the calamity that has befallen me!’ I said to myself. ‘A damned witch, evidently, has sent some wood goblins to crush me, like a bug.’’ Their exclamations were drawing closer to my lair by the minute. Seeing that there was no way for me to escape, I jumped up out of bed, threw on my shapeless smock, and resolutely clambered up to the very top of the spruce tree. Although its prickly needles were tickling me, I did manage, nonetheless, after picking out a sturdy and leafy bough, to sit atop it, and I made myself as comfortable there as I possibly could, as I awaited the conclusion of this hunt undertaken by unknown pursuers. And, indeed, they came together from various directions, gathering at the foot of my fir-tree fortress, where they could be heard to say: ‘We’ll stop here to take a rest for a while.’’

THE FIRST WOOD GOBLIN: “Well, this shall end badly for us: it looks like the damned fellow has slipped away from us.”

THE SECOND WOOD GOBLIN: “To tell you the truth: I myself don’t know for whom and for what we’ve been scouring the overgrown woods around here all day long, searching for him in these out-of-the-way places.”

THE THIRD WOOD GOBLIN: “Come on, let’s make a small fire and warm ourselves up a little. I have an emergency flask filled with wine.”

THE FIRST WOOD GOBLIN: “And I have a nice piece of roast beef. I had a premonition that we wouldn’t be coming back from here any time soon.”

THE SECOND WOOD GOBLIN: “And I have, as an hors d’oeuvre, a pipe and a bag of tobacco.”

THE THIRD WOOD GOBLIN: “What a sensible idea! Come on, let’s go make a fire.”

“I was genuinely frightened. If they were to fail to catch sight of me, these malicious wood goblins might well suffocate me with their smoke.”

“They set to work on making a fire, collecting an armful of firewood and then setting it on fire. Then they lay down quietly on the bed that I had prepared for myself and ate with great gusto the piece of roast beef that they had brought with them, and they drank wine out of the flask. And when they had finished consuming all of this food and drink,
they set to work on smoking the pipe, which was being passed around from hand to hand. Since I hadn’t eaten for a whole day, I would have gladly consented to being called the fourth wood goblin in their company! What I marveled at was the fact that these wood goblins very much resembled people who had been properly equipped. ‘For what purpose,’ I thought to myself, ‘were these devils carrying rifles and pistols? You certainly don’t mean to say that they’re robbers, now do you?’ This thought seemed to me to be reasonable, however, and I don’t know exactly why, but I pressed myself more tightly to the tree. Evidently there are cases where people are more terrifying than devils. From the latter, there is the hope of being saved by means of the power of the cross, but sometimes one can’t escape from the former even by means of a pestle.’”

“When they had concluded their gustatory activities involving their mouths, – that’s to say, their teeth and their lips, – the second wood goblin said to the first wood goblin: ‘Well, brother, tell us now the story of this strange affair, for you yourself, after all, were present while it was taking place.’”

“The first wood goblin consented to this request, and he told, in great detail, the story of my most recent adventure in Kharitina’s house: my wedding ceremony, my solemn exit from the church, and so on. In a word, I recognized in this rogue the servant who had brought me to this den of thieves, the servant who had waited upon me and then afterwards escorted me to the oak forest, a trip punctuated by his painful punches to my back.”

“‘We returned home at daybreak,’ the first wood goblin continued his narrative account, ‘and, to our great surprise, we heard some noise, – some wailing and shouting, – coming from the bedrooms. We walked into the entrance hall and, – oh, horror! – we saw the new Princess Chistyakova, down on her knees in front of the annoyed and irritated Prince Svetlozarov.’”

Prince Gavrilo was just about to continue his narrative account, and he had already opened his mouth to speak, when he noticed, with surprise, that old Prichudin had turned as white as snow.

“‘What’s that you say?’ said the latter in a quivering voice. “So you got married in the forest house to a dissolute woman who had abandoned her father and run away with the ne’er-do-well Svetlozarov?”

“Yes, I did!”

“How tall was she?”

“Above average height.”

“What color was her hair?”

“The most chestnut-colored hair!”
“What color were her eyes?”

“She has dark, shining eyes!”

“Did you happen to notice a small dark spot on her left nostril?”

“How could one not notice it, for it imparts an especial beauty to her face!”

“Enough!” exclaimed Prichudin. “That’s enough. Know this: your current wife is, – take pity on me, you noble man, take pity on an old, unfortunate, and unhappy friend, – know that I must reveal to you this truth: she is my daughter, Nadezhda!”

He burst out sobbing bitterly, covering his face with his hands, and he set off, with unsteady steps, for his prayer room, locking himself inside it and not leaving it that entire day, evening, and night.

The Chistyakov princes, both father and son, remained rooted to their spots. Finally, they cast a glance at one another, and Prince Gavrilo, taking his son by the hand, squeezed it, and then said, through tears: “You, too, should know this: my current wife is your unknown woman, the one who appeared on the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas.”

He left his son there and set off for his bedroom, forbidding anyone to follow him there. Nikandr, for his part, remained alone where he was.

Chapter 94: What an Encounter!

Nikandr, who was such an enthusiast for reasoning, – that is, for discussing, debating, and arguing a topic, – now found that an appropriate opportunity had turned up for him to satisfy this passion of his. And, what’s more, there was much to think about here! Although he didn’t lock himself inside a room, the way that both Prichudin and his father had done, he did eat supper with great gusto, and then he lay down to go to sleep. It was precisely at this point, however, that he put his ideas in order, as we hear him describe them here:

“I saw my unknown woman at the church porch when she was there together with Katerina, who had married some count. Defenseless Elizaveta, – one cannot help but doubt it, – probably was there together with the two of them. And, what’s more, Katerina confirmed this. Thus, after having tracked down the abode of my formerly unknown woman, whose identity is now known to me to be that of my stepmother, Princess Nadezhda Chistyakova, I shall reveal at the same time Elizaveta’s abode. This idea is superb, and I need to put it into action as soon as possible.”

Herein the thought flashed across his mind that since his father was the legal husband of Prichudin’s daughter, and since Prince Svetlozarov had been banished beyond Lake Baikal, the opportunity thus opened itself up of reconciling the husband with his wife, and, in this way, of providing some reassurance to the venerable old man Prichudin during his sunset days.
Scarcely had the sun risen up into the sky, when each of the inhabitants of Oryol, somehow or other, was already setting off on his way to work. Nocturnal thieves, card players, and habitués of places that provide merriment with nymphs were trudging back to the shelter of their homes, hoping to find there some peace and quiet after their nighttime labors. Merchants were dragging themselves along on their way to their shops, discussing the unfortunate drop in the prices of goods. Guardians of Justice and working people were walking at a rapid pace, gesticulating with one hand and brushing feathers off their heads and their clothes with the other hand, as they hurried to taverns, as if they were headed to temples, at which they carried out the usual sacrifice, having already crawled slowly to places that fate had appointed for them. It was impossible not to notice those chaste, God-fearing maidens, who, – with half-closed eyes, and with deathly pale, lifeless faces, – were dragging themselves along, at an uneven pace, to their modest abodes. It was exactly at such a time of day that Nikandr walked, – or, one could say, flew – out of his house and rushed out to roam the streets and markets of the city. There were a lot of people everywhere, but there was no trace of his stepmother! The loud sound of the church bells was calling the Orthodox faithful to the temple in order to offer thanks to God Almighty for a night well spent. And Nikandr didn’t leave out a single church or a single chapel from his list of places to stop and say a brief prayer. No! And to inspect every corner! But it was all in vain! Nor did he forget to visit the porch of the Church of Saint Nicholas. But even here he didn’t have any better luck. With a look of dissatisfaction and displeasure being expressed on his entire face, he came home at that time of day when the sun is already standing directly above the roofs of the houses in town. Scarcely had he succeeded in wiping the sweat from his face, when Prince Gavrilo appeared in the entrance hall. His face was not showing any signs of the slightest upset: all of the features of his face were fresh, and his look was calm and tranquil. With an amicable smile on his face, he extended one hand out to Nikandr, and, with the other hand, he passed him a note. In it, Nikandr read the following:

“My friend, Gavrilo Simonovich!

Due to an inescapable necessity, I’m leaving you for a short while: to be exact, for about two weeks or a little longer. You know what my business affairs are like! I’m leaving you the keys to all of my trunks, cellars, lockers, etc. – the keys to everything. As soon as I arrive at my destination, which I have selected, you shall receive a letter from me, and you may write back to me if you wish. I hope that you’ll enjoy yourself during your stay here. Please send my kind regards to Nikandr.

Prichudin.”

“Well, what are we going to do now?” Nikandr asked, somewhat anxiously.

“That which we were doing before,” replied the prince. “You shall attend to your matters, and I shall attend to mine!”

“What about Elizaveta?”

“You’re still thinking about her!”

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“Father! How could I possibly forget her?”

“But what if she were to forget you?”

“That’s impossible, – I swear to God, that’s impossible! In that domain, my heart is my guarantee.”

“A most evil, unreliable guarantee! My third marriage can testify to that!”

“Father! That’s an entirely different matter!”

“That may well be!”

“I shall track her down!”

“May God be with you!”

“What shall you say to her then?”

“We shall see!”

The prince left to go to his room, while his son remained where he was in a state of perplexity. Dinnertime arrived, and they dined together. They spoke about this and that, but not about anything that was especially important. Thus passed one day, and then a second one; thus passed an entire week, and then a second one, and then a third one. What was it that was making them sometimes so thoughtful and pensive? For the father, it was the delivery of letters from Prichudin, whereas, for the son, it was the absolute lack of any news about his stepmother and, along with her, about Elizaveta.

One shouldn’t think, however, that the tender, affectionate Nikandr was forgetting, even if only for a minute, his beloved sweetheart. He didn’t leave off running around town and its suburbs, as before, in the expectation of discovering the object of his tireless search. One day, early in the morning, he was wandering around an area that was three versts away from town, and when it came time to eat, he, having already eaten breakfast in a tavern located just off the main road, set off for the forest without any definite plan in mind. At that point in time, people didn’t yet know the type of stroll, – known as the stroll without any plan and without any goal, – that has now been incorporated into our system of strolls. Rousseau, so it seems, was the first to discover this great secret, and several of our fellow countrymen have so refined and perfected this very sage science that they not only stroll about during their entire lifetime, but also while leading a domestic life and a social life. And they manage to do all of this, as well, without any plan and without any goal.81 Nikandr wasn’t gathering any lilies-of-the-valley or any forget-me-nots,

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81 The narrator appears to be spoofing here the indiscriminate Gallomania and Sentimentalism that the author felt was being lionized by an increasing number of his fellow men of letters in early nineteenth-century Russia. An unfinished book by French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), titled Les reveries du Promeneur Solitaire, written near the end of the
either because there weren’t any of them there, or because he was preoccupied with some highly important thoughts. He had no sooner come to a halt than he heard the sound of some human voices not far off from where he was standing. He looked all around, and he saw through some wild raspberry bushes that a young man was sitting on the grass, leaning up against a half-rotted tree stump. The young man’s cheeks were pale yellow in color, his eyes were sparkling with a lackluster light, and his head, with its disheveled hair, was lying atop the chopped off stump. His right arm was serving as a pillow, while his left arm was resting on the bolt of the pistol that was lying at his feet. Nikandr, witnessing a scene that he had never seen before then, shuddered involuntarily. He stopped and stood there listening in deep silence, as the stranger said to himself: “Thus, I’m seeing you for the last time, heavenly sun! This shady, leafy grove shall be an eyewitness to the heroic death of an unfortunate and unhappy man! A predatory raven shall fall upon my lifeless corpse, and, with a loud, merry cry, he shall divide up my heart among his fledgling chicks! It’s horrible! My God!”

At this point, he immersed himself for a while into a semi-conscious state, but he soon emerged from it, seizing the pistol in his right hand, raising it up to his temple, and exclaiming in a wild, terrible voice: ‘Forgive me all of my sins!’ Nikandr, staggered by horror, desperately appealed to him: “Stop!” He rushed headlong over to the despairing young man, and, before the latter could come to his senses, he snatched the pistol out of his hand, fired it up into the air, and then waited in silence for a reply from him. The young man wasn’t long in asking Nikandr questions: ‘Who are you, unknown young man who rendered me a life-saving service? You, of course, must be a fortunate and happy person, since you’re able to consider life to be precious? Oh, if you only knew what a burden life is for an ill-starred person! There have already been a number of days and nights that have passed without my having a single crust of bread to alleviate my ferocious hunger. But what has happened to my poor family! Please be magnanimous, young man, and give me back the weapon that must extinguish the last spark of life inside me!’

“Never!” Nikandr exclaimed. “You spoke the truth just now, when you said that I can’t call myself unfortunate and unhappy, for I am beloved by those people whom I myself love. And that’s precisely the reason why it would be shameful on my part not to try, to the extent that it’s possible, to make other people happy. Apparently, you’re in need of money. Thank God, I have no shortage of that. But since you’re also in need of sustenance, let’s set off together. Not far from here, standing apart by itself, there’s a house where you can calm down and compose yourself.”

‘No, you magnanimous man!’ the stranger objected. ‘I would have gladly accepted your proposition, but I can’t. People are searching for me everywhere, and the town’s jail was already long ago cleaned out to make room for me.’

“So you’ve committed a serious crime?”

author’s life, was organized around ten chapters that were called “Walks” [Promenades], in which Rousseau combined autobiographical and philosophical musings about the things that he saw during his walks. The stroll without any plan and without any goal comes from the opening paragraph of Nikolai Karamzin’s famous sentimentalist novella, “Poor Liza” (1792), which tells the tale of an ill-fated love affair between a young nobleman and a poor peasant girl.
‘I’m in debt, owing people money, and money lenders are seeking to exercise their lawful rights against me!’”

“That’s all? It’s nothing more than that?”

“And isn’t that really bad enough?”

“Well, stay right here for a short while. I’ll return right away!”

Nikandr rushed headlong over to the main road, and came running up to an inn, where he purchased some comestibles and a bottle of wine. And then he took the same road back again to return to his newfound companion. He found him to be in a much calmer and more tranquil state of mind than before. And when Nikandr appeared before him and presented him with a list of inns where he could find some lodging, it seemed that this lonesome visitor was in a quandary of sorts and couldn’t believe his eyes. Nikandr provided him with an example of a good local inn, and little by little the stranger began to attach himself to this magnanimous young benefactor who possessed an exemplary desire to help him out in his time of trouble. The plate of roast beef and the bottle of wine were both soon emptied. The stranger, who had become more cheerful, said to Nikandr: ‘My lord! You have prolonged my life for two whole days. Judging by your most recent act of charity, one can see that you’re a good and kind man. Would it be possible for you to render a favor to my family as well? For I can’t go to see them myself! Tell me . . .’”

“What?” exclaimed Nikandr. “Do you mean to tell me that your family is likewise suffering? Let’s hurry and go see them! My purse . . .”

‘I won’t take any of your money,’ replied the stranger, ‘for I’m not permitted to appear at my home. They are guarding the house, and lying in wait for me.’”

“Well then, in that case, we’ll wait until dusk, and then we’ll go together to see my father. He has experienced an awful lot of both good and evil in his life, and that’s the reason why I can assure you that you’ll be glad, from the bottom of your heart, that you’ve met him. I’m assuming financial responsibility for your family, and I shall provide an account, – to you, to my father, and to God, – as to how my efforts to preserve your family are faring.”

From the conversations that he had with the stranger, Nikandr was able to see that this young man was well brought up and that he must have come from a decent and honest breed of people. His situation was such that one felt ashamed to ask questions: who was he? where was he going? whence had he come? Just before sunset, our voyager once again set off for the inn, and shortly afterwards he returned from it, laden with armor against hunger and thirst. And the setting of the sun was spent, if not merrily, then, at the very least, not boringly.

Nighttime arrived. Nikandr took the hand of this new unknown person of his and led him into town. When they entered the dining room at Prichudin’s house, Prince Gavriilo, who had prepared himself to meet his son with a reprimand for the latter’s day-long absence, suddenly postponed his plan when he saw that an unknown man was with him. The son let his father
know that he needed to discuss something with him in private, so his father left to go to his study. And when Nikandr told him all about the adventures of the past day, Prince Gavrilo embraced him, with tears in his eyes, and said to him: “May God reward you, my son, for the gift that you have given me.”

They prepared a bed for the unknown man, – whom no one had even bothered to ask what his name was – in a special room, and Nikandr, who had accompanied him there, said to him: “Without seeking to breach decorum, may I inquire, my lord, where your family is taking refuge? Circumstances prevent you from showing yourself in society. In that case, why not stay here with us? Don’t deprive us of the pleasure of helping you to the extent that we are capable of doing so!”

The stranger, with a sigh, told Nikandr that his wife was living with her family on the outskirts of town, right in the middle of a pasture. In addition to that, he also explained that his surname was Firsov. Nikandr was struck dumb when he heard the name of Katerina’s husband, the Katerina who was the sister of his Elizaveta. No matter how gladdened he was by this discovery, he tried to conceal the joyful state of his soul. That’s the reason why, after wishing Firsov good night, he set off for his bedchamber. Scarcely had the morning sun begun to show itself, and Nikandr was already up and about. Not wishing to turn any of his servants into participants in a scheme that involved his wellbeing, he threw on his cloak, took his money purse with him, and set off for the outskirts of town. He walked past all of the dwellings there, inquiring of children, who were gamboling outside, where the Firsov family lived. They replied by pointing to a distant little peasant hut that stood almost in the woods. It was located about a hundred sazhens away from the village.

The site where the hut stood was rather pleasant. A small brook flowed not far away from the hut. On one side of the hut there was a forest, and, on the other side, – a meadow and some arable land. These two visual features provided a veritable tableau of Russian country life. Nikandr, with a pleasant trembling of his heart, was approaching the hut, when an unexpected occurrence stopped him short for some time. It was a country girl, dressed in a sarafan, who was carrying an earthenware jug filled with water from a spring. What struck him as odd was how unusual the young peasant girl’s attire was. Her hair was cleaner and tidier than was usual for a peasant girl, and fresh cornflowers were adorning her bosom. Nikandr had stopped so that, after waiting for her to catch up, he could find out exactly from her whether or not this was, indeed, the Firsov family’s hut. When the country girl had drawn near, he examined her attentively, and she did the same with regard to him; and then, finally, the two them suddenly uttered simultaneously: “Nikandr!” – “Elizaveta!”

“Oh, just and righteous God up in heaven!” exclaimed the young man. “Is it really you, incomparable maiden! And in what a state!”

The earthenware jug dropped out of the girl’s hands, and her strength abandoned her: nature had gained the upper hand. Elizaveta, – for it was, indeed, her, – started to weep. Nikandr resembled a madman who was trying to maintain possession of his faculties.
“I thank you, merciful Providence,” Nikandr said with delight, “for granting me the great good fortune of finding the one and only blessing of my days here on earth! Such you are, Elizaveta! I’m obliged to all-merciful Providence alone that I can in any way give thanks, in your presence, to your venerable father! There was a time when he supported a helpless orphan with his charity, and now that orphan …”

“Stop!” Elizaveta interrupted him. “Next you’ll be reproaching us for the cruelty that we exhibited when we expelled you from our home.”

“It’s true,” Nikandr replied, “that at that time your family treated me none too kindly, even if justly and fairly! God knows to what end our youth and youth’s sisters, – foolishness and recklessness, – would have led us.”

When the initial flurry of surprises had passed, even though these surprises could well have been foreseen, Nikandr told Elizaveta, with a blush from bashfulness reddening his face, that he was aware of her family’s wretched financial situation and that he had taken it upon himself to try to set it right. He likewise spoke with her about his encounter the day before with Mister Firsov. And, little by little, their conversation became much more amicable.

Shortly thereafter, Maremyana Kharitonovna, along with Katerina, also appeared. There was no way that the mother would have recognized their young painter without Elizaveta first bringing that past episode to mind, adding that he was Prince Chistyakov. At this point, the old woman rushed over to where he was standing and threw her arms around his neck, embracing him as if he were her very own amiable son. And, through her tears, she said to him: “My dear fellow! Don’t think ill of me!” Nikandr knew how to deal with her, and after several minutes a pleasant silence established itself in the Firsov household. Nikandr suggested that they have breakfast on the banks of the brook, in the shade provided by the spreading branches of a linden tree. This suggestion was heartily endorsed and, up until the time when the breakfast was concluded, not a single passerby would have noticed that they didn’t make up a single family. Nikandr, however, couldn’t stay for long, since he hadn’t yet seen his stepmother. And that’s why he asked this question: “For a certain period of time, judging from a confluence of circumstances, it seemed to me that your family had one more female member in it, didn’t it?”

“Oh!” replied Maremyana. “That was our Kharitina, whom the late Ivan Efremovich brought to our household from God knows where. There’s nothing to hide: she was a good, kind, and hard-working girl, but here it has been already another week since she has gone missing.”

“What do you mean: has gone missing?”

“Christ only knows! It’s as if she had fallen into the drink and suddenly disappeared!”

Such news was extremely unpleasant for Nikandr to hear. Since there was no longer anything more to be done here, however, – after having reassured all of the family members of his unbounded love for, and devotion to, them, and after having set their minds at rest, as best as he could, concerning the fate of Count Firsov, – he set off for town, accompanied by their blessings. His purse remained in the hands of Maremyana, who at that time had either completely
forgotten, – or only seemed to have forgotten, – that in her late father’s home there used to be balls, theatre performances, and masquerades.

Prince Gavrilo was quite surprised when his son informed him, in considerable detail, of the morning stroll that he had taken. “My friend,” he told Nikandr confidentially, “our circumstances right now are such that you can think about Elizaveta, if your heart still feels one and the same way toward her. Fairness and decency, however, require that obligations are not to begin until such time as you receive permission from our venerable friend, Afanasy Anisimovich. I think that he won’t begin to dispute a marital union.” Nikandr had to be satisfied with his father’s disposition. Meanwhile, time was flowing along its regular course. He had been visiting the rural abode of his Elizaveta, providing it with all of the household items that were deemed necessary, and, upon returning home, he tried to set Count Firsov’s mind at rest, informing him of his family’s current financial status. The count, for his part, was grateful, and he tried, by means of sincerity, to repay his hosts for their kindness toward him and for their geniality. And, for that reason, their days were flowing fairly smoothly. There was one time, right after breakfast, when Prince Gavrilo made it known to the count that he wouldn’t be opposed to hearing about the reasons why he was brought to such a difficult and embarrassing position. ‘I shall gladly honor your request,’ the count replied, ‘but I must forewarn you that you won’t hear about anything significant, but only about numerous and various stupidities that I have committed. Since telling stories about foolish people has its own purposes and benefits, I shall, to that end, tell you some of mine, and I won’t hide from you even a single truth. Please be so kind as to listen!’”

Prince Gavrilo and his son moved their armchairs a little closer to each other and settled themselves down, and Count Firsov began to tell the following life story:

Chapter 95: A Well Deserved Reward

“Although my father, Count Firsov, was not the most distinguished count in the Russian kingdom, he could, however, have been considered a rather outstanding nobleman. He was, especially within the entire circumference of his estates, the wealthiest and most high-ranking nobleman. And when it came to hunting with hounds, his was the leading dog pack within the entire neighboring area. He had served in the military during wartime, and he was recognized as an outstanding warrior. During the time when he was single, and while he was serving in the guards, no one would have anything to do with him, either when he visited inns or the homes of women who were generally considered to be beautiful. In this domain, he wouldn’t have ceded primacy of place even to an actual prince. And seldom did a day pass when he wasn’t being crowned with new laurels. Then he got married, and he lived out in the countryside until such time as I turned ten years old. And since the war with the Turks had flared up by then, my father bravely advanced to the front with his company. And, by autumn, all of the troops were already abroad. After some time had passed, people discovered some rare talents in him, as well as a great capacity for work and purposeful activity. And so he was assigned to an embassy that turned out to be, as you shall see, a rather intricate and complicated entity. On one occasion, the generals and some of the most distinguished officers had
assembled to pay homage to the Commander-in-Chief. This took place in the middle of the deepest cold of winter. Those who were in attendance noticed, with some surprise, that their prince was knitting his brow, squirming, and stretching himself. And, to all of the questions that were being asked by the people who approached him, he would respond only with some strong yawns, which produced the very same reaction in other people. And so everyone, looking at him, would yawn to the point of tears. The prince took pity on these idle yawners, and so he said to them, in a voice that resembled that of a dying man: ‘Gentlemen! I’m feeling very ill! This morning I had an exorbitant urge to eat some fresh cherries. I feel as if one single berry, just one of those little cuties, would be quite enough to cure me. But where am I to get berries in this barbaric land, and in the middle of winter no less?’

“He fell silent. Like Homer’s epic heroes, those officers who were in attendance at this assembly were standing there silently and were glancing shyly at one another from time to time. It was precisely at this point that my father, like a new Achilles, stepped forward to the middle of the crowd and, upon stretching his limbs and standing erect, he said: ‘Most radiant prince! If it would be pleasing to Your Highness to entrust this matter to my tireless care, and to assign me to be the one who would undertake it, then I would stake my life on it that in ten days’ time you shall be eating, in very fine health, the very best cherries, the kind that one can only find in the capital!’ ‘Fine, old chap,’ the prince muttered through his teeth, for at that time he was biting his nails, ‘Go ahead.’

“My father didn’t linger for long. He rushed over to the courier wagon and galloped off like a whirlwind. Upon arriving in the capital, he truly didn’t sleep a wink, neither day nor night, as he ran around all of the hothouses in the city and gathered up about a hundred cherries, which he had a gardener pack up for him in such a way that he would be able to hold them close to his heart and thus prevent them from freezing on his way back. At the close of the eighth day on that journey, he appeared before His Highness, carrying a basket of cherries in his hands and wearing a triumphant look on his face. Everyone who was there exclaimed, ‘Oh!’ in surprise and admiration, and the prince asked: ‘What are these, old chap?’ ‘These are fresh cherries, Your Grace! Thanks be to God, I won my bet with two days to spare.’ The prince ate one of the cherries, then another, then a third, – and suddenly he was completely cured of his sickness!”

“The prince distributed the remaining cherries among his generals, who quickly ate them all up, pits and all, and they assured him that, although they had been feeling healthy up until then, they started feeling even healthier just as soon as they had eaten the cherries, it was as if they had taken a drink of acqua vitae: the elixir of life. At that point, the prince, turning to my father, said: ‘Congratulations on your promotion to major!’ Everyone pushed their way through the crowd to get to him, drowning him with their salutations. And my father considered this day to have been the happiest, and the most successful, day in his entire life.”

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82 In Greek mythology, Achilles was the strongest warrior and the greatest hero in the Greek army during the Trojan War. He is also the central character in Homer’s epic poem, The Iliad (8th century BC).
“Spring had arrived. The generals and the military officers tossed aside their playing cards, and they ordered that full bottles of wine be packed up, while empty bottles be smashed. And they made their appearance on the field of battle. My father, being a reasonable and sensible man, knew that it would be somewhat wiser to hunt Turks than to hunt hares. And, for that reason, right before a battle he would pull his pistols out of their holsters and order that a bottle of the best wine be slipped into their place. And, armed in this fashion, he would, at the order of the commanders, set out with his regiment through a dense forest in order to circumvent the enemy. Feeling that the deeper they were penetrating into the forest, the more their innate courage was wavering, he began, with all of his indefatigable might, to fortify himself with artificial courage, having heard once from a domestic tutor that artifice not infrequently triumphs over nature. And, truly, – it did indeed triumph! Towards nightfall, he found himself imperceptibly moving behind everyone else, and soon he had completely lost sight of them. He knew that the enemy was very close by and that this night was destined to be bloody. This thought worried him, so he poured the final and strongest dose of courage into himself and forced his horse to go more swiftly. The horse took a step, and suddenly, in the distance, there could be heard the sound of cannon shots being fired. My father tottered to the right, his horse broke into a run to the left, and, by virtue of such a heterogeneous movement, my father flew headlong into an overgrown area of the forest, striking stumps and logs with all of his limbs. Seeing how, despite all of his best efforts, he was no longer able to raise himself up, he debated for a while, as much as he could, and, finally, he decided to do what any intelligent person would decide to do in a similar situation: namely, to go to sleep, where and how he might come upon it. Thus, handing over his brave company of soldiers and his poor soul into the hands of God, and protecting himself by means of the sign of the cross, mentally, of course, for his hands could no longer be lifted physically, he went to sleep so courageously that, right up until the time when he awakened, he didn’t even think of acting in a cowardly manner, – not toward the Turks from the fields, not toward the wild beasts from the forest, not even toward the Turkish wood goblins from their spirit world. Awakening at dawn and composing a prayer, he crawled out of his bedchamber and set off at random. After remaining on the road for about two hours, he came upon an open field, and the horrible sight that he witnessed staggered him no worse than the mighty doses of artificial courage that he had imbibed the day before. Upon examining the field of battle, with a sullen look on his face, he became thoughtful, for an unpleasant thought touched his brain: what shall people say when they find out that he didn’t take part in the battle? Having thought about this intently, he calculated that since merciless fate had already thrown out, so to speak, the possibility of acquiring the glory that comes with actually distinguishing oneself in battle, prudence now prohibits one from not profiting from the fact that the battle had now ended! Hence, bringing forth from memory the courage of his ancestors, who fought in the battle waged on Kulikova Field,83 he became quite furious: he drew his magic "sword of steel" and began to strike all of his enemies with it, enemies who were showing only slight remnants of life.

83 The Battle of Kulikova, which took place on September 8, 1380, was fought in a field near the town of Yepifan, located on the Don River in the Tula Oblast. The battle was fought between the armies of the Golden Horde, under the command of Mamai, and various Russian
however. In this instance, he didn’t spare either terribly abusive language or menacing threats. If he happened to stumble over the body of a Turk and fall down, he would let out such a wail, as if he had been pierced by a cannonball and was bidding farewell to the world. Finally, he became so ensconced in such conspicuous courage that he would exclaim, while raising his sword, ‘What are you doing, you enemies of Christ? How is it going? Stand up, all of you, get on your feet! I shall hew down the whole flock of you, all by myself!’ Scarcely had he finished throwing down this challenge, – the only one of its kind in the whole wide world, – when he heard some loud laughter coming from behind him. He glanced back with horror and saw, not far off from him, a crowd of people who were headed in his direction. Where was the unfortunate soul to run? Where was he to hide? His sabre fell out of his hands, he closed his eyes, and, submissively, he handed his soul over to the Lord God! When the people who were headed his way had drawn near, one of them said: ‘What the devil is going on? Is that you? Why are you squinting? Open your eyes!’”

“My father, after doing the man’s bidding, peeped out and saw, to his great surprise, – and to his great joy, – that the man who was speaking to him was an old brigadier, an uncle of his, a courageous man on the field of battle, a humorous man who liked to make jokes in conversation, and a man who didn’t cede primacy of place to anyone when it came to downing glasses of beer at a tavern.”

“‘What, uncle?’ my father asked. ‘Is that you? But, really, I took you and your men for Turks!’”

“‘And it’s no wonder that you did,’ my uncle replied, ‘because I, along with two battalions of soldiers, had been dispatched to examine and sort out the corpses. And since, to attend to a matter such as this, there’s no point in getting all dressed up, my warriors and I went about in our overcoats and service caps, and some of them even went about in Turkish caps. It’s a good thing, nephew, that you’re so courageous! Now it’s time for us to eat breakfast, and you shall tell me all about the adventures that you had last night. That was splendid, wasn’t it!’”

“While lingering over their food and drink, to both of which my uncle was not at all averse, he talked all sorts of nonsense to my uncle while recounting the story of his adventures from the night before, so much so that the old man nearly shed a few tears. He embraced his nephew tenderly and then said: ‘Continue on this same path, my friend, and in future you shall discharge your duties just as well as you are doing now! Your religious faith and your duty towards His Majesty and the fatherland demand this of you. And I, for my part, am already committed to endeavoring to assist you in continuing on this path!’”

principalities, under the united command of Prince Dmitry of Moscow, who came to be known as Prince Dmitry Donskoy (of the Don) after the Russian forces won that battle.
“That whole day was spent sorting out the corpses. By evening time, those corpses had been placed into four common graves, a funeral service for the repose of their souls had been read over them, and all of the soldiers returned to the encampment much later that evening. My father’s uncle didn’t fail to report to the authorities that his nephew not only fought bravely all night long, but also, in keeping with his own personal zeal and diligence in advancing the good of the fatherland, spent the entire morning alone on the field of battle, finishing off our infidel enemies. As a result of the approbation contained in this glowing report, my father was made a cavalier.”

“Where does one find refuge from envy? It’s such an indefatigable visitor in the human heart that, once it takes up residence there, it’s already very difficult to send it packing in the usual manner, and thus one must make use of force.”

“There was to be found, in the very same regiment in which my father was serving, a certain colonel, who, at almost the very beginning of the aforesaid night of battle, lost first an ear, and then an eye. When his wounds had healed, this colonel, having heard that Count Firsov had been decorated with an illustrious mark of distinction, whereas he himself had been passed over, showed his upbringing and education by challenging my father to a duel. He also acted very stupidly in sending his challenge in the form of a letter, indicating the time and place for their gentlemanly combat.”

“At that time, duels were already strictly forbidden in Russia, and, for that reason, my father sought advice from his uncle, the brigadier, and he gave him the colonel’s letter to look at. His uncle showed this letter to a general, and he, in turn, showed it to the prince himself. Having been ordered to ascertain the truth in this matter, my father was found to be innocent of any wrongdoing. And, by virtue of his military status, the colonel was relieved of command of his regiment and discharged from the army. My father, on the other hand, for the bravery that he had exhibited and for the respect for the law that he had demonstrated, was promoted to the rank of colonel.”

“In the course of the several years of this campaign that were to follow, my father was always able to preserve the glory of his name, especially with the help of his uncle, who at that time was already a general. Not infrequently, Count Firsov’s regiment was present during the heat of battle, when the enemy was firing directly at the men in his regiment, and many soldiers lost their lives. But he himself would leave the field of battle completely unscathed. People didn’t know to what such a miracle should be attributed. And so they attributed it to the intercession of Saint George, whose cross he carried around his neck. But soon this miracle was explained: namely, when a battle was just beginning, my father would present an order from the Commander-in-Chief, which he, my father, had himself composed, directing his troops to hasten to a certain position. He would assign his soldiers to assist a courageous lieutenant colonel, and then he would go seek cover for himself in the best hiding places that he could find, until such time as he noticed that the enemy troops had been defeated and were running away in full flight. At that point, he would gallop up to his regiment and help his troops as they pursued those enemy soldiers who were fleeing. Perhaps such stratagems, – as he himself called them, – could have come to light at some time, and things wouldn’t have turned out very
pleasantly for our hero. But it pleased the divine fates to send down to earth the angel of peace. Both kingdoms had grown tired of all of the troubles and cares that the procurement of money entailed, money being essential in a matter such as this. And both armies had grown tired of all of the difficulties that were incessantly weighing them down. After numerous debates, as well as reciprocal demands and concessions, and after numerous tricks and dodges from both sides, finally, – thanks to the heavens above, – a peace treaty was concluded. And an incredible celebration arose in both camps. In the Turkish world, the sun became dark, clouded, and obscured from the smoke of pipe tobacco and burned coffee. While in the Russian world, from one end of the country to the other, there resounded the creaks of wagons loaded with bottles of wine yet to be delivered, and the cracking sound coming from the breaking glass of wine bottles, beer glasses, and wine glasses. This was precisely the kind of man that my father showed himself to be!”

“Things reached the point where awards and decorations needed to be conferred to pay homage to the courage and prudence of each and every hero who had manifested utter devotion to the cause. The rank of brigadier was bestowed upon my father, and, in accordance with his wishes, since there was no longer any need to reward him for his courage, he was released from his duties and allowed to retire to his home, where he had the right to recount tall tales about his courage in battle as much as he pleased.”

“I have come to know all of these details, which have been related to you here in brief, from the manuscript maintained secretly by my father’s valet, who was there with him in the army during all of this time. Currently, this notebook is still being preserved at my home, because all of the creditors listed in the estate’s inventory, failing to appreciate this manuscript even one iota, have unanimously agreed to cede ownership of it to me, who now gets to enjoy eternal, – and hereditary, – possession of this remarkable manuscript.”