

THE ETERNAL HUSBAND

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FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY

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THE ETERNAL HUSBAND

CHAPTER I

Summer had come, and Velchaninoff, contrary to his expectations, was still in St. Petersburg. His trip to the south of Russia had fallen through, and there seemed no end to the business which had detained him.

This business—which was a lawsuit as to certain property—had taken a very disagreeable aspect. Three months ago the thing had appeared to be by no means complicated—in fact, there had seemed to be scarcely any question as to the rights and wrongs of the matter, but all seemed to change suddenly.

“Everything else seems to have changed for the worse, too!” said Velchaninoff to himself, over and over again.

He was employing a clever lawyer—an eminent man, and an expensive one, too; but in his impatience and suspicion he began to interfere in the matter himself. He read and wrote papers—all of which the lawyer put into his waste-paper basket—*holus bolus*; called in continually at the courts and offices, made inquiries, and confused and worried everybody concerned in the matter; so at least

the lawyer declared, and begged him for mercy's sake to go away to the country somewhere.

But he could not make up his mind to do so. He stayed in town and enjoyed the dust, and the hot nights, and the closeness of the air of St. Petersburg, things which are enough to destroy anyone's nerves. His lodgings were somewhere near the Great Theatre; he had lately taken them, and did not like them. Nothing went well with him; his hypochondria increased with each day, and he had long been a victim to that disorder.

Velchaninoff was a man who had seen a great deal of the world; he was not quite young, thirty-eight years old—perhaps thirty-nine, or so; and all this “old age,” as he called it, had “fallen upon him quite unawares.” However, as he himself well understood, he had aged more in the *quality* than in the number of the years of his life; and if his infirmities were really creeping upon him, they must have come from within and not from outside causes. He looked young enough still. He was a tall, stout man, with light-brown thick hair, without a suspicion of white about it, and a light beard that reached half way down his chest. At first sight you might have supposed him to be of a lax, careless disposition or character, but on studying him more closely you would have found that, on the contrary, the man was decidedly a stickler for the proprieties of this world, and withal brought up in the ways and graces of the very best society. His manners were very good—free but graceful—in spite of this lately-acquired habit of grumbling and reviling things in general. He was still full of the most perfect, aristocratic self-confidence: probably he did not himself suspect to how great an extent this was so, though he was a most decidedly intelligent, I may say clever, even talented man. His open, healthy-looking face was distinguished by an almost feminine refinement, which quality gained him much attention from the fair sex. He had large blue eyes—eyes which ten years ago had known well how to persuade and attract; such clear, merry, careless eyes they had been, that they invariably brought over to his side any person he wished to gain. Now, when he was nearly forty years old,

their ancient, kind, frank expression had died out of them, and a certain cynicism—a cunning—an irony very often, and yet another variety of expression, of late—an expression of melancholy or pain, undefined but keen, had taken the place of the earlier attractive qualities of his eyes. This expression of melancholy especially showed itself when he was alone; and it was a strange fact that the gay, careless, happy fellow of a couple of years ago, the man who could tell a funny story so inimitably, should now love nothing so well as to be all alone. He intended to throw up most of his friends—a quite unnecessary step, in spite of his present financial difficulties. Probably his vanity was to blame for this intention: he could not bear to see his old friends in his present position; with his vain suspicious character it would be most unpalatable to him.

But his vanity began to change its nature in solitude. It did not grow less, on the contrary; but it seemed to develop into a special type of vanity which was unlike its old self. This new vanity suffered from entirely different causes, “*higher* causes, if I may so express it,” he said, “and if there really be higher and lower motives in this world.”

He defined these “higher things” as matters which he could not laugh at, or turn to ridicule when happening in his own individual experience. Of course it would be quite another thing with the same subjects in society; by *himself* he could not ridicule then; but put him among other people, and he would be the first to tear himself from all of those secret resolutions of his conscience made in solitude, and laugh them to scorn.

Very often, on rising from his bed in the morning, he would feel ashamed of the thoughts and feelings which had animated him during the long sleepless night—and his nights of late had been sleepless. He seemed suspicious of everything and everybody, great and small, and grew mistrustful of himself.

One fact stood out clearly, and that was that during those sleepless nights his thoughts and opinions took huge leaps and bounds, sometimes changing entirely from the thoughts and opinions of the daytime. This fact struck him very forcibly; and he took occasion to consult an eminent medical friend. He spoke in fun, but the doctor informed him that the fact of feelings and opinions changing during meditations at night, and during sleeplessness, was one long recognised by science; and that that was especially the case with persons of strong thinking power, and of acute feelings. He stated further that very often the beliefs of a whole life are uprooted under the melancholy influence of night and inability to sleep, and that often the most fateful resolutions are made under the same influence; that sometimes this impressionability to the mystic influence of the dark hours amounted to a malady, in which case measures must be taken, the radical manner of living should be changed, diet considered, a journey undertaken if possible, etc., etc.

Velchaninoff listened no further, but he was sure that in his own case there was decided malady.

Very soon his morning meditations began to partake of the nature of those of the night, but they were more bitter. Certain events of his life now began to recur to his memory more and more vividly; they would strike him suddenly, and without apparent reason: things which had been forgotten for ten or fifteen years—some so long ago that he thought it miraculous that he should have been able to recall them at all. But that was not all—for, after all, what man who has seen any life has not hundreds of such recollections of the past? The principal point was that all this past came back to him now with an absolutely new light thrown upon it, and he seemed to look at it from an entirely new and unexpected point of view. Why did some of his acts appear to him now to be nothing better than crimes? It was not merely in the judgment of his intellect that these things appeared so to him now—had it been only his poor sick mind, he would not have trusted it; but his whole being seemed to condemn him; he would curse and even weep over these recollections of the

past! If anyone had told him a couple of years since that he would *weep* over anything, he would have laughed the idea to scorn.

At first he recalled the unpleasant experiences of his life: certain failures in society, humiliations; he remembered how some designing person had so successfully blackened his character that he was requested to cease his visits to a certain house; how once, and not so very long ago, he had been publicly insulted, and had not challenged the offender; how once an epigram had been fastened to his name by some witty person, in the midst of a party of pretty women and he had not found a reply; he remembered several unpaid debts, and how he had most stupidly run through two very respectable fortunes.

Then he began to recall facts belonging to a "higher" order. He remembered that he had once insulted a poor old grey-headed clerk, and that the latter had covered his face with his hands and cried, which Velchaninoff had thought a great joke at the time, but now looked upon in quite another light. Then he thought how he had once, merely for fun, set a scandal going about the beautiful little wife of a certain schoolmaster, and how the husband had got to hear the rumour. He (Velchaninoff) had left the town shortly after and did not know how the matter had ended; but now he fell to wondering and picturing to himself the possible consequences of his action; and goodness knows where this theme would not have taken him to if he had not suddenly recalled another picture: that of a poor girl, whom he had been ashamed of and never thought of loving, but whom he had betrayed and forsaken, her and her child, when he left St. Petersburg. He had afterwards searched for this girl and her baby for a whole year, but never found them.

Of this sort of recollections there were, alas! but too many; and each one seemed to bring along with it a train of others. His vanity began to suffer, little by little, under these memories. I have said that his vanity had developed into a new type of vanity. There were moments (few albeit) in which he was not even ashamed of having

no carriage of his own, now; or of being seen by one of his former friends in shabby clothes; or when, if seen and looked at by such a person contemptuously, he was high-minded enough to suppress even a frown. Of course such moments of self-oblivion were rare; but, as I said before, his vanity began little by little to change away from its former quarters and to centre upon one question which was perpetually ranging itself before his intellect. "There is some power or other," he would muse, sarcastically, "somewhere, which is extremely interested in my morals, and sends me these damnable recollections and tears of remorse! Let them come, by all means; but they have not the slightest effect on me! for I haven't a scrap of independence about me, in spite of my wretched forty years, I know that for certain. Why, if it were to happen so that I should gain anything by spreading another scandal about that schoolmaster's wife, (for instance, that she had accepted presents from me, or something of that sort), I should certainly spread it without a thought."

But though no other opportunity ever did occur of maligning the schoolmistress, yet the very thought alone that *if* such an opportunity were to occur he would inevitably seize it was almost fatal to him at times. He was not tortured with memory at every moment of his life; he had intervals of time to breathe and rest in. But the longer he stayed, the more unpleasant did he find his life in St. Petersburg. July came in. At certain moments he felt inclined to throw up his lawsuit and all, and go down to the Crimea; but after an hour or so he would despise his own idea, and laugh at himself for entertaining it.

"These thoughts won't be driven away by a mere journey down south," he said to himself, "when they have once begun to annoy me; besides, if I am easy in my conscience now, I surely need not try to run away from any such worrying recollections of past days!" "Why should I go after all?" he resumed, in a strain of melancholy philosophizing; "this place is a very heaven for a hypochondriac like myself, what with the dust and the heat, and the discomfort of this

house, what with the nonsensical swagger and pretence of all these wretched little 'civil servants' in the departments I frequent! Everyone is delightfully candid—and candour is undoubtedly worthy of all respect! I *won't* go away—I'll stay and die here rather than go!"

CHAPTER II

It was the third of July. The heat and closeness of the air had become quite unbearable. The day had been a busy one for Velchaninoff—he had been walking and driving about without rest, and had still in prospect a visit in the evening to a certain state councillor who lived somewhere on the Chornaya Riékhka (black stream), and whom he was anxious to drop in upon unexpectedly.

At six o'clock our hero issued from his house once more, and trudged off to dine at a restaurant on the Nefsky, near the police-bridge—a second-rate sort of place, but French. Here he took his usual corner, and ordered his usual dinner, and waited.

He always had a rouble¹ dinner, and paid for his wine extra, which moderation he looked upon as a discreet sacrifice to the temporary financial embarrassment under which he was suffering.

He regularly went through the ceremony of wondering how he could bring himself to eat "such nastiness," and yet as regularly he demolished every morsel, and with excellent show of appetite too, just as though he had eaten nothing for three days.

"This appetite can't be healthy!" he murmured to himself sometimes, observing his own voracity. However, on this particular occasion, he sat down to his dinner in a miserably bad humour: he threw his hat angrily away somewhere, tipped his chair back,—and reflected.

He was in the sort of humour that if his next neighbour—dining at the little table near him—were to rattle his plate, or if the boy serving him were to make any little blunder, or, in fact, if any little petty annoyance were to put him out of a sudden, he was quite capable of shouting at the offender, and, in fact, of kicking up a serious row on the smallest pretext.

Soup was served to him. He took up his spoon, and was about to commence operations, when he suddenly threw it down again, and started from his seat. An unexpected thought had struck him, and in an instant he had realized why he had been plunged in gloom and mental perturbation during the last few days. Goodness knows why he thus suddenly became inspired, as it were, with the truth; but so it was. He jumped from his chair, and in an instant it all stood out before him as plain as his five fingers! "It's all that hat!" he muttered to himself; "it's all simply and solely that damnable round hat, with the crape band round it; that's the reason and cause of all my worries these last days!"

He began to think; and the more he thought, the more dejected he became, and the more astonishing appeared the "remarkable circumstance of the hat."

"But, hang it all, there *is* no circumstance!" he growled to himself. "What circumstance do I mean? There's been nothing in the nature of an event or occurrence!"

The fact of the matter was this: Nearly a fortnight since, he had met for the first time, somewhere about the corner of the Podiacheskaya, a gentleman with crape round his hat. There was

nothing particular about the man—he was just like all others; but as he passed Velchaninoff he had stared at him so fixedly that it was impossible to avoid noticing him, and more than noticing—observing him attentively.

The man's face seemed to be familiar to Velchaninoff. He had evidently seen him somewhere and at some time or other.

“But one sees thousands of people during one's life,” thought Velchaninoff; “one can't remember every face!” So he had gone on his way, and before he was twenty yards further, to all appearances he had forgotten all about the meeting, in spite of the strength of the first impression made upon him.

And yet he had *not* forgotten; for the impression remained all day, and a very original impression it was, too,—a kind of objectless feeling of anger against he knew not what. He remembered his exact feelings at this moment, a fortnight after the occurrence: how he had been puzzled by the angry nature of his sentiments at the time, and puzzled to such an extent that he had never for a moment connected his ill-humour with the meeting of the morning, though he had felt as cross as possible all day. But the gentleman with the crape band had not lost much time about reminding Velchaninoff of his existence, for the very next day he met the latter again, on the Nefsky Prospect and again he had stared in a peculiarly fixed way at him.

Velchaninoff flared up and spat on the ground in irritation—Russian like, but a moment after he was wondering at his own wrath. “There are faces, undoubtedly,” he reflected, “which fill one with disgust at first sight; but I certainly *have* met that fellow somewhere or other.

“Yes, I *have* met him before!” he muttered again, half an hour later.

And again, as on the last occasion, he was in a vile humour all that evening, and even went so far as to have a bad dream in the night; and yet it never entered his head to imagine that the cause of his bad temper on both occasions had been the accidental meeting with the gentleman in mourning, although on the second evening he had remembered and thought of the chance encounter two or three times.

He had even flared up angrily to think that "such a dirty-looking cad" should presume to linger in his memory so long; he would have felt it humiliating to himself to imagine for a moment that such a wretched creature could possibly be in any way connected with the agitated condition of his feelings.

Two days later the pair had met once more at the landing place of one of the small Neva ferry steamers.

On the third occasion Velchaninoff was ready to swear that the man recognised him, and had pressed through the crowd towards him; had even dared to stretch out his hand and call him by name. As to this last fact he was not quite certain, however. "At all events, who the deuce *is* he?" thought Velchaninoff, "and why can't the idiot come up and speak to me if he really does recognise me; and if he so much wishes to do so?" With these thoughts Velchaninoff had taken a droshky and started off for the Smolney Monastery, where his lawyer lived.

Half an hour later he was engaged in his usual quarrel with that gentleman.

But that same evening he was in a worse humour than ever, and his night was spent in fantastic dreams and imaginings, which were anything but pleasant. "I suppose it's bile!" he concluded, as he paid his matutinal visit to the looking-glass.

This was the third meeting.

Then, for five days there was not a sign of the man; and yet, much to his distaste, Velchaninoff could not, for the life of him, avoid thinking of the man with the crape band.

He caught himself musing over the fellow. "What have I to do with him?" he thought. "What can his business in St. Petersburg be?—he looks busy: and whom is he in mourning for? He clearly recognises me, but I don't know in the least who he is! And why do such people as he is put crape on their hats? it doesn't seem 'the thing' for them, somehow! I believe I shall recognise this fellow if I ever get a good close look at him!"

And there came over him that sensation we all know so well—the same feeling that one has when one can't for the life of one think of the required word; every other word comes up; associations with the right word come up; occasions when one has used the word come up; one wanders round and round the immediate vicinity of the word wanted, but the actual word itself will not appear, though you may break your head to get at it!

"Let's see, now: it was—yes—some while since. It was—where on earth was it? There was a—oh! devil take whatever there was or wasn't there! What does it matter to me?" he broke off angrily of a sudden. "I'm not going to lower myself by thinking of a little cad like that!"

He felt very angry; but when, in the evening, he remembered that he had been so upset, and recollected the cause of his anger, he felt the disagreeable sensation of having been caught by someone doing something wrong.

This fact puzzled and annoyed him.

"There must be some reason for my getting so angry at the mere recollection of that man's face," he thought, but he didn't finish thinking it out.

But the next evening he was still more indignant; and this time, he really thought, with good cause. "Such audacity is unparalleled!" he said to himself.

The fact of the matter is, there had been a fourth meeting with the man of the crape hat band. The latter had apparently arisen from the earth and confronted him. But let me explain what had happened.

It so chanced that Velchaninoff had just met, accidentally, that very state-councillor mentioned a few pages back, whom he had been so anxious to see, and on whom he had intended to pounce unexpectedly at his country house. This gentleman evidently avoided Velchaninoff, but at the same time was most necessary to the latter in his lawsuit. Consequently, when Velchaninoff met him, the one was delighted, while the other was very much the reverse. Velchaninoff had immediately button-holed him, and walked down the street with him, talking; doing his very utmost to keep the sly old fox to the subject on which it was so necessary that he should be pumped. And it was just at this most important moment, when Velchaninoff's intellect was all on the *qui vive* to catch up the slightest hints of what he wished to get at, while the foxy old councillor (aware of the fact) was doing his best to reveal nothing, that the former, taking his eyes from his companion's face for one instant, beheld the gentleman of the crape hatband walking along the other side of the road, and looking at him—nay, *watching* him, evidently—and apparently smiling!

"Devil take him!" said Velchaninoff, bursting out into fury at once, while the "old fox" instantly disappeared, "and I should have succeeded in another minute. Curse that dirty little hound! he's simply spying me. I'll—I'll hire somebody to—I'll take my oath he laughed at me! D—n him, I'll thrash him. I wish I had a stick with me. I'll—I'll buy one! I won't leave this matter so. Who the deuce is he? I *will* know! Who is he?"

At last, three days after this fourth encounter, we find Velchaninoff sitting down to dinner at his restaurant, as recorded a page or two back, in a state of mind bordering upon the furious. He could not conceal the state of his feelings from himself, in spite of all his pride. He was obliged to confess at last, that all his anxiety, his irritation, his state of agitation generally, must undoubtedly be connected with, and absolutely attributed to, the appearance of the wretched-looking creature with the crape hatband, in spite of his insignificance.

"I may be a hypochondriac," he reflected, "and I may be inclined to make an elephant out of a gnat; but how does it help me? What use is it to me if I persuade myself to believe that *perhaps* all this is fancy? Why, if every dirty little wretch like that is to have the power of upsetting a man like myself, why—it's—it's simply unbearable!"

Undoubtedly, at this last (fifth) encounter of to-day, the elephant had proved himself a very small gnat indeed. The "crape man" had appeared suddenly, as usual, and had passed by Velchaninoff, but without looking up at him this time; indeed, he had gone by with downcast eyes, and had even seemed anxious to pass unobserved. Velchaninoff had turned rapidly round and shouted as loud as ever he could at him.

"Hey!" he cried. "You! Crape hatband! You want to escape notice this time, do you? Who are you?"

Both the question and the whole idea of calling after the man were absurdly foolish, and Velchaninoff knew it the moment he had said the words. The man had turned round, stopped for an instant, lost his head, smiled—half made up his mind to say something,—had waited half a minute in painful indecision, then twisted suddenly round again, and "bolted" without a word. Velchaninoff gazed after him in amazement. "What if it be *I* that haunt *him*, and not he me, after all?" he thought. However, Velchaninoff ate up his dinner, and then drove off to pounce upon the town councillor at the latter's house, if he could.

The councillor was not in; and he was informed that he would scarcely be at home before three or four in the morning, because he had gone to a "name's-day party."

Velchaninoff felt that this was too bad! In his rage he determined to follow and hunt the fellow up at the party: he actually took a droshky, and started off with that wild idea; but luckily he thought better of it on the way, got out of the vehicle and walked away towards the "Great Theatre," near which he lived. He felt that he must have motion; also he *must* absolutely sleep well this coming night: in order to sleep he must be tired; so he walked all the way home—a fairly long walk, and arrived there about half-past ten, as tired as he could wish.

His lodging, which he had taken last March, and had abused ever since, apologising to himself for living "in such a hole," and at the same time excusing himself for the fact by the reflection that it was only for a while, and that he had dropped quite accidentally into St. Petersburg—thanks to that cursed lawsuit!—his lodging, I say, was by no means so bad as he made it out to be!

The entrance certainly was a little dark, and dirty-looking, being just under the arch of the gateway. But he had two fine large light rooms on the second floor, separated by the entrance hall: one of these rooms overlooked the yard and the other the street. Leading out of the former of these was a smaller room, meant to be used as a bedroom; but Velchaninoff had filled it with a disordered array of books and papers, and preferred to sleep in one of the large rooms, the one overlooking the street, to wit.

His bed was made for him, every day, upon the large divan. The rooms were full of good furniture, and some valuable ornaments and pictures were scattered about, but the whole place was in dreadful disorder; the fact being that at this time Velchaninoff was without a regular servant. His one domestic had gone away to stay with her friends in the country; he thought of taking a man, but decided that

it was not worth while for a short time; besides he hated flunkeys, and ended by making arrangements with his dvornik's sister Martha, who was to come up every morning and "do out" his rooms, he leaving the key with her as he went out each day. Martha did absolutely nothing towards tidying the place and robbed him besides, but he didn't care, he liked to be alone in the house. But solitude is all very well within certain limits, and Velchaninoff found that his nerves could not stand all this sort of thing at certain bilious moments; and it so fell out that he began to loathe his room more and more every time he entered it.

However, on this particular evening he hardly gave himself time to undress; he threw himself on his bed, and determined that nothing should make him think of *anything*, and that he would fall asleep at once.

And, strangely enough, his head had hardly touched the pillow before he actually was asleep; and this was the first time for a month past that such a thing had occurred.

He awoke at about two, considerably agitated; he had dreamed certain very strange dreams, reminding him of the incoherent wanderings of fever.

The subject seemed to be some crime which he had committed and concealed, but of which he was accused by a continuous flow of people who swarmed into his rooms for the purpose. The crowd which had already collected within was enormous, and yet they continued to pour in in such numbers that the door was never shut for an instant.

But his whole interest seemed to centre in one strange looking individual,—a man who seemed to have once been very closely and intimately connected with him, but who had died long ago and now reappeared for some reason or other.

The most tormenting part of the matter was that Velchaninoff could not recollect who this man was,—he could not remember his name,—though he recollected the fact that he had once dearly loved him. All the rest of the people swarming into the room seemed to be waiting for the final word of this man,—either the condemnation or the justification of Velchaninoff was to be pronounced by him,—and everyone was impatiently waiting to hear him speak.

But he sat motionless at the table, and would not open his lips to say a word of any sort.

The uproar continued, the general annoyance increased, and, suddenly, Velchaninoff himself strode up to the man in a fury, and smote him because he would not speak. Velchaninoff felt the strangest satisfaction in having thus smitten him; his heart seemed to freeze in horror for what he had done, and in acute suffering for the crime involved in his action,—but in that very sensation of freezing at the heart lay the sense of satisfaction which he felt.

Exasperated more and more, he struck the man a second and a third time; and then—in a sort of intoxication of fury and terror, which amounted to actual insanity, and yet bore within it a germ of delightful satisfaction, he ceased to count his blows, and rained them in without ceasing.

He felt he must destroy, annihilate, demolish all this.

Suddenly something strange happened; everyone present had given a dreadful cry and turned expectantly towards the door, while at the same moment there came three terrific peals of the hall-bell, so violent that it appeared someone was anxious to pull the bell-handle out.

Velchaninoff awoke, started up in a second, and made for the door; he was persuaded that the ring at the bell had been no dream or illusion, but that someone had actually rung, and was at that moment standing at the front door.

"It would be *too* unnatural if such a clear and unmistakable ring should turn out to be nothing but an item of a dream!" he thought. But, to his surprise, it proved that such was nevertheless the actual state of the case! He opened the door and went out on to the landing; he looked downstairs and about him, but there was not a soul to be seen. The bell hung motionless. Surprised, but pleased, he returned into his room. He lit a candle, and suddenly remembered that he had left the door closed, but not locked and chained. He had often returned home before this evening and forgotten to lock the door behind him, without attaching any special significance to the fact; his maid had often respectfully protested against such neglect while with him. He now returned to the entrance hall to make the door fast; before doing so he opened it, however, and had one more look about the stairs. He then shut the door and fastened the chain and hook, but did not take the trouble to turn the key in the lock.

Some clock struck half-past two at this moment, so that he had had three hours' sleep—more or less.

His dream had agitated him to such an extent that he felt unwilling to lie down again at once; he decided to walk up and down the room two or three times first, just long enough to smoke a cigar. Having half-dressed himself, he went to the window, drew the heavy curtains aside and pulled up one of the blinds, it was almost full daylight. These light summer nights of St. Petersburg always had a bad effect upon his nerves, and of late they had added to the causes of his sleeplessness, so that a few weeks since he had invested in these thick curtains, which completely shut out the light when drawn close.

Having thus let in the sunshine, quite oblivious of the lighted candle on the table, he commenced to walk up and down the room. Still feeling the burden of his dream upon him, its impression was even now at work upon his mind, he still felt a painfully guilty sensation about him, caused by the fact that he had allowed himself

to raise his hand against "that man" and strike him. "But, my dear sir!" he argued with himself, "it was not a man at all! the whole thing was a dream! what's the use of worrying yourself for nothing?"

Velchaninoff now became obstinately convinced that he was a sick man, and that to his sickly state of body was to be attributed all his perturbation of mind. He was an invalid.

It had always been a weak point with Velchaninoff that he hated to think of himself as growing old or infirm; and yet in his moments of anger he loved to exaggerate one or the other in order to worry himself.

"It's old age," he now muttered to himself, as he paced up and down the room. "I'm becoming an old fogey—that's the fact of the matter! I'm losing my memory—see ghosts, and have dreams, and hear bells ring—curse it all! I know these dreams of old, they always herald fever with me. I dare swear that the whole business of this man with the crape hatband has been a dream too! I was perfectly right yesterday, he isn't haunting me the least bit in the world; it is I that am haunting *him*! I've invented a pretty little ghost-story about him and then climb under the table in terror at my own creation! Why do I call him a little cad, too? he may be a most respectable individual for all I know! His face is a disagreeable one, certainly, though there is nothing hideous about it! He dresses just like anyone else. I don't know—there's something about his look—There I go again! What the devil have I got to do with his look? what a fool I am—just as though I could not live without the dirty little wretch—curse him!"

Among other thoughts connected with this haunting crape-man was one which puzzled Velchaninoff immensely; he felt convinced that at some time or other he had known the man, and known him very intimately; and that now the latter, when meeting him, always laughed at him because he was aware of some great secret of his

former life, or because he was amused to see Velchaninoff's present humiliating condition of poverty.

Mechanically our hero approached the window in order to get a breath of fresh air—when he was suddenly seized with a violent fit of shuddering;—a feeling came over him that something unusual and unheard-of was happening before his very eyes.

He had not had time to open the window when something he saw caused him to slip behind the corner of the curtain, and hide himself.

The man in the crape hatband was standing on the opposite side of the street.

He was standing with his face turned directly towards Velchaninoff's window, but evidently unaware of the latter's presence there, and was carefully examining the house, and apparently considering some question connected with it.

He seemed to come to a decision after a moment's thought, and raised his finger to his forehead; then he looked quietly about him, and ran swiftly across the road on tiptoe. He reached the gate, and entered it; this gate was often left open on summer nights until two or three in the morning.

"He's coming to me," muttered Velchaninoff, and with equal caution he left the window, and ran to the front door; arrived in the hall, he stood in breathless expectation before the door, and placed his trembling hand carefully upon the hook which he had fastened a few minutes since, and stood listening for the tread of the expected footfall on the stairs. His heart was beating so loud that he was afraid he might miss the sound of the cautious steps approaching.

He could understand nothing of what was happening, but it seemed clear that his dream was about to be realised.

Velchaninoff was naturally brave. He loved risk for its own sake, and very often ran into useless dangers, with no one by to see, to please himself. But this was different, somehow; he was not himself, and yet he was as brave as ever, but with something added. He made out every movement of the stranger from behind his own door.

"Ah!—there he comes!—he's on the steps now!—here he comes!—he's up now!—now he's looking down stairs and all about, and crouching down! Aha! there's his hand on the door-handle—he's trying it!—he thought he would find it unlocked!—then he must know that I *do* leave it unlocked sometimes!—He's trying it again!—I suppose he thinks the hook may slip!—he doesn't care to go away without doing anything!"

So ran Velchaninoff's thoughts, and so indeed followed the man's actions. There was no doubt about it, someone was certainly standing outside and trying the door-handle, carefully and cautiously pulling at the door itself, and, in fact, endeavouring to effect an entrance; equally sure was it that the person so doing must have his own object in trying to sneak into another man's house at dead of night. But Velchaninoff's plan of action was laid, and he awaited the proper moment; he was anxious to seize a good opportunity—slip the hook and chain—open the door wide, suddenly, and stand face to face with this bugbear, and then ask him what the deuce he wanted there.

No sooner devised than executed.

Awaiting the proper moment, Velchaninoff suddenly slipped the hook, pushed the door wide, and almost tumbled over the man with the crape hatband!

CHAPTER III

The crape-man stood rooted to the spot dumb with astonishment.

Both men stood opposite one another on the landing, and both stared in each other's eyes, silent and motionless.

So passed a few moments, and suddenly, like a flash of lightning, Velchaninoff became aware of the identity of his guest.

At the same moment the latter seemed to guess that Velchaninoff had recognised him. Velchaninoff could see it in his eyes. In one instant the visitor's whole face was all ablaze with its very sweetest of smiles.

"Surely I have the pleasure of speaking to Aleksey Ivanovitch?" he asked, in the most dulcet of voices, comically inappropriate to the circumstances of the case.

"Surely you are Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky?" asked Velchaninoff, in return, after a pause, and with an expression of much perplexity.

"I had the pleasure of your acquaintance ten years ago at T——, and, if I may remind you of the fact, we were almost intimate friends."

"Quite so—oh yes! but it is now three o'clock in the morning, and you have been trying my lock for the last ten minutes."

"Three o'clock!" cried the visitor, looking at his watch with an air of melancholy surprise.

"Why, so it is! dear me—three o'clock! forgive me, Aleksey Ivanovitch! I ought to have found it out before thinking of paying you a visit. I will do myself the honour of calling to explain another day, and now I—."

"Oh no;—no, no! If you are to explain at all let's have it at once; this moment!" interrupted Velchaninoff warmly. "Kindly step in here, into the room! You must have meant to come in, you know; you didn't come here at night, like this, simply for the pleasure of trying my lock?"

He felt excited, and at the same time was conscious of a sort of timidity; he could not collect his thoughts. He was ashamed of himself for it. There was no danger, no mystery about the business, nothing but the silly figure of Pavel Pavlovitch.

And yet he could not feel satisfied that there was nothing particular in it; he felt afraid of something to come, he knew not what or when.

However, he made the man enter, seated him in a chair, and himself sat down on the side of his bed, a yard or so off, and rested his elbows on his knees while he quietly waited for the other to begin. He felt irritated; he stared at his visitor and let his thoughts run. Strangely enough, the other never opened his mouth; he seemed to be entirely oblivious of the fact that it was his duty to speak. Nay, he was even looking enquiringly at Velchaninoff as though quite expecting that the latter would speak to *him*!

Perhaps he felt a little uncomfortable at first, somewhat as a mouse must feel when he finds himself unexpectedly in the trap.

Velchaninoff very soon lost his patience.

"Well?" he cried, "you are not a fantasy or a dream or anything of that kind, are you? You aren't a corpse, are you? Come, my friend, this is not a game or play. I want your explanation, please!"

The visitor fidgeted about a little, smiled, and began to speak cautiously.

"So far as I can see," he said, "the time of night of my visit is what surprises you, and that I should have come as I did; in fact, when I remember the past, and our intimacy, and all that, I am astonished myself; but the fact is, I did not mean to come in at all, and if I did so it was purely an accident."

"An accident! Why, I saw you creeping across the road on tip-toes!"

"You saw me? Indeed! Come, then you know as much or more about the matter than I do; but I see I am annoying you. This is how it was: I've been in town three weeks or so on business. I am Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky, you recognized me yourself, my business in town is to effect an exchange of departments. I am trying for a situation in another place—one with a large increase of salary; but all this is beside the point; the fact of the matter is, I believe I have been delaying my business on purpose. I believe if everything were settled at this moment I should still be dawdling in this St. Petersburg of yours in my present condition of mind. I go wandering about as though I had lost all interest in things, and were rather glad of the fact, in my present condition of mind."

"What condition of mind?" asked Velchaninoff, frowning.

The visitor raised his eyes to Velchaninoff's, lifted his hat from the ground beside him, and with great dignity pointed out the black crape band.

"There, sir, in *that* condition of mind!" he observed.

Velchaninoff stared stupidly at the crape, and thence at the man's face. Suddenly his face flushed up in a hot blush for a moment, and he was violently agitated.

"Not Natalia Vasilievna, surely?"

"Yes, Natalia Vasilievna! Last March! Consumption, sir, and almost suddenly—all over in two or three months—and here am I left as you see me!"

So saying, Pavel Pavlovitch, with much show of feeling, bent his bald head down and kept it bent for some ten seconds, while he held out his two hands, in one of which was the hat with the band, in explanatory emotion.

This gesture, and the man's whole air, seemed to brighten Velchaninoff up; he smiled sarcastically for one instant, not more at present, for the news of this lady's death (he had known her so long ago, and had forgotten her many a year since) had made a quite unexpected impression upon his mind.

"Is it possible!" he muttered, using the first words that came to his lips, "and pray why did you not come here and tell me at once?"

"Thanks for your kind interest, I see and value it, in spite of——"

"In spite of what?"

"In spite of so many years of separation you at once sympathised with my sorrow—and in fact with myself, and so fully too—that I feel naturally grateful. That's all I had to tell you, sir! Don't suppose I doubt my friends, you know; why, even here, in this place, I could put my finger on several very sincere friends indeed (for instance, Stepan Michailovitch Bagantoff); but remember, my dear Aleksey Ivanovitch—nine years have passed since we were acquaintances—or friends, if you'll allow me to say so—and meanwhile you have never been to see us, never written."

The guest sang all this out as though he were reading it from music, but kept his eyes fixed on the ground the while, although, of course, he saw what was going on above his eyelashes exceedingly well all the same.

Velchaninoff had found his head by this time.

With a strange sort of fascinated attention, which strengthened itself every moment, he continued to gaze at and listen to Pavel Pavlovitch, and of a sudden, when the latter stopped speaking, a flood of curious ideas swept unexpectedly through his brain.

"But look here," he cried, "how is it that I never recognized you all this while?—we've met five times, at least, in the streets!"

"Quite so—I am perfectly aware of the circumstance. You chanced to meet me two or three times, and——"

"No, no! *you* met *me*, you know—not I you!" Velchaninoff suddenly burst into a roar of laughter, and rose from his seat. Pavel Pavlovitch paused a moment, looked keenly at Velchaninoff, and then continued:

"As to your not recognizing me, in the first place you might easily have forgotten me by now; and besides, I have had small-pox since last we met, and I daresay my face is a good deal marked."

"Smallpox? why, how did you manage that?—he has had it, though, by Jove!" cried Velchaninoff. "What a funny fellow you are—however, go on, don't stop."

Velchaninoff's spirits were rising higher and higher; he was beginning to feel wonderfully light-hearted. That feeling of agitation which had lately so disturbed him had given place to quite a different sentiment. He now began to stride up and down the room, very quickly.

"I was going to say," resumed Pavel Pavlovitch, "that though I have met you several times, and though I quite intended to come and look you up, when I was arranging my visit to Petersburg, still, I was in that condition of mind, you know, and my wits have so suffered since last March, that——"

"Wits since last March,—yes, go on: wait a minute—do you smoke?"

"Oh—you know, Natalia Vasilievna, never——"

"Quite so; but since March—eh?"

"Well—I might, a cigarette or so."

"Here you are, then! Light up and go on,—go on! you interest me wonderfully."

Velchaninoff lit a cigar and sat down on his bed again. Pavel Pavlovitch paused a moment.

"But what a state of agitation you seem to be in yourself!" said he, "are you quite well?"

"Oh, curse my health!" cried Velchaninoff,—"you go on!"

The visitor observed his host's agitation with satisfaction; he went on with his share of the talking with more confidence.

"What am I to go on about?" he asked. "Imagine me, Alexey Ivanovitch—a broken man,—not simply broken, but gone at the root, as it were; a man forced to change his whole manner of living, after twenty years of married life, wandering about the dusty roads without an object,—mind lost—almost oblivious of his own self,—and yet, as it were, taking some sort of intoxicated delight in his loneliness! Isn't it natural that if I should, at such a moment of self-forgetfulness come across a friend—even a *dear* friend, I might

prefer to avoid him for that moment? and isn't it equally natural that at another moment I should long to see and speak with some one who has been an eye-witness of, or a partaker, so to speak, in my never-to-be-recalled past? and to rush—not only in the day, but at night, if it so happens,—to rush to the embrace of such a man?—yes, even if one has to wake him up at three in the morning to do it! I was wrong in my time, not in my estimate of my friend, though, for at this moment I feel the full rapture of success; my rash action has been successful: I have found sympathy! As for the time of night, I confess I thought it was not twelve yet! You see, one sups of grief, and it intoxicates one,—at least, not grief, exactly, it's more the condition of mind—the new state of things that affects me.”

“Dear me, how oddly you express yourself!” said Velchaninoff, rising from his seat once more, and becoming quite serious again.

“Oddly, do I? Perhaps.”

“Look here: are you joking?”

“Joking!” cried Pavel Pavlovitch, in shocked surprise; “*joking*—at the very moment when I am telling you of——”

“Oh—be quiet about that! for goodness sake.”

Velchaninoff started off on his journey up and down the room again.

So matters stood for five minutes or so: the visitor seemed inclined to rise from his chair, but Velchaninoff bade him sit still, and Pavel Pavlovitch obediently flopped into his seat again.

“How changed you are!” said the host at last, stopping in front of the other chair, as though suddenly struck with the idea; “fearfully changed!”

“Wonderful! you're quite another man!”

"That's hardly surprising! *nine* years, sir!"

"No, no, no! years have nothing to do with it! it's not in appearance you are so changed: it's something else!"

"Well, sir, the nine years might account for anything."

"Perhaps it's only since March, eh?"

"Ha-ha! you are playful, sir," said Pavel Pavlovitch, laughing slyly. "But, if I may ask it, wherein am I so changed?"

"Oh—why, you used to be such a staid, sober, correct Pavel Pavlovitch; such a wise Pavel Pavlovitch; and now you're a good-for-nothing sort of Pavel Pavlovitch."

Velchaninoff was in that state of irritation when the steadiest, gravest people will sometimes say rather more than they mean.

"Good-for-nothing, am I? and *wise* no longer, I suppose, eh?" chuckled Pavel Pavlovitch, with disagreeable satisfaction.

"Wise, indeed! My dear sir, I'm afraid you are not sober," replied Velchaninoff; and added to himself, "I am pretty fairly insolent myself, but I can't compare with this little cad! And what on earth is the fellow driving at?"

"Oh, my dear, good, my best of Alexey Ivanovitches," said the visitor suddenly, most excitedly, and twisting about on his chair, "and why *should* I be sober? We are not moving in the brilliant walks of society—you and I—just now. We are but two dear old friends come together in the full sincerity of perfect love, to recall and talk over that sweet mutual tie of which the dear departed formed so treasured a link in our friendship."

So saying, the sensitive gentleman became so carried away by his feelings that he bent his head down once more, to hide his emotion,

and buried his face in his hat.

Velchaninoff looked on with an uncomfortable feeling of disgust.

"I can't help thinking the man is simply silly," he thought; "and yet—no, no—his face is so red he must be drunk. But drunk or not drunk, what does the little wretch want with me? That's the puzzle."

"Do you remember—oh, *don't* you remember—our delightful little evenings—dancing sometimes, or sometimes literary—at Simeon Simeonovitch's?" continued the visitor, gradually removing his hat from before his face, and apparently growing more and more enthusiastic over the memories of the past, "and our little readings—you and she and myself—and our first meeting, when you came in to ask for information about something connected with your business in the town, and commenced shouting angrily at me; don't you remember—when suddenly in came Natalia Vasilievna, and within ten minutes you were our dear friend, and so remained for exactly a year? Just like Turgenieff's story 'The Provincialka!'"

Velchaninoff had continued his walk up and down the room during this *tirade*, with his eyes on the ground, listening impatiently and with disgust—but listening *hard*, all the same.

"It never struck me to think of 'The Provincialka' in connection with the matter," he interrupted. "And look here, why do you talk in that sneaking, whining sort of voice? You never used to do that. Your whole manner is unlike yourself."

"Quite so, quite so. I used to be more silent, I know. I used to love to listen while others talked. You remember how well the dear departed talked—the wit and grace of her conversation. As to The Provincialka, I remember she and I used often to compare your friendship for us to certain episodes in that piece, and especially to the doings of one Stupendief. It really was remarkably like that character and his doings."

"What Stupendief do you mean, confound it all?" cried Velchaninoff, stamping his foot with rage. The name seemed to have evoked certain most irritating thoughts in his mind.

"Why, Stupendief, don't you know, the 'husband' in 'Provincialka,'" whined Pavel Pavlovitch, in the very sweetest of tones; "but that belongs to another set of fond memories—after you departed, in fact, when Mr. Bagantoff had honoured us with his friendship, just as you had done before him, only that his lasted five whole years."

"Bagantoff? What Bagantoff? Do you mean that same Bagantoff who was serving down in your town? Why, he also——"

"Yes, yes! quite so. He also, he also!" cried the enthusiastic Pavel Pavlovitch, seizing upon Velchaninoff's accidental slip. "Of course! So that there you are—there's the whole company. Bagantoff played the 'count,' the dear departed was the 'Provincialka,' and I was the 'husband,' only that the part was taken away from me, for incapacity, I suppose!"

"Yes; fancy *you* a Stupendief. You're a—you're first a Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky!" said Velchaninoff, contemptuously, and very unceremoniously. "But look here! Bagantoff is in town; I know he is, for I have seen him. Why don't you go to see *him* as well as myself?"

"My dear sir, I've been there every day for the last three weeks. He won't receive me; he's ill, and can't receive! And, do you know, I have found out that he really is very ill! Fancy my feelings—a five-year's friend! Oh, my dear Alexey Ivanovitch! you don't know what my feelings are in my present condition of mind. I assure you, at one moment I long for the earth to open and swallow me up, and the next I feel that I *must* find one of those old friends, eyewitnesses of the past, as it were, if only to weep on his bosom, only to weep, sir—give you my word."

"Well, that's about enough for to-night; don't you think so?" said Velchaninoff, cuttingly.

"Oh, too—too much!" cried the other, rising. "It must be four o'clock; and here am I agitating your feelings in the most selfish way."

"Now, look here; I shall call upon you myself, and I hope that you will then—but, tell me honestly, are you drunk to-night?"

"Drunk! not the least in the world!"

"Did you drink nothing before you came here, or earlier?"

"Do you know, my dear Alexey Ivanovitch, you are quite in a high fever!"

"Good-night. I shall call to-morrow."

"And I have noticed it all the evening, really quite delirious!" continued Pavel Pavlovitch, licking his lips, as it were, with satisfaction as he pursued this theme. "I am really quite ashamed that I should have allowed myself to be so awkward as to agitate you. Well, well; I'm going! Now you must lie down at once and go to sleep."

"You haven't told me where you live," shouted Velchaninoff after him as he left the room.

"Oh, didn't I? Pokrofsky Hotel."

Pavel Pavlovitch was out on the stairs now.

"Stop!" cried Velchaninoff, once more. "You are not 'running away,' are you?"

"How do you mean, 'running away?'" asked Pavel Pavlovitch, turning round at the third step, and grinning back at him, with his

eyes staring very wide open.

Instead of replying, Velchaninoff banged the door fiercely, locked and bolted it, and went fuming back into his room. Arrived there, he spat on the ground, as though to get rid of the taste of something loathsome.

He then stood motionless for at least five minutes, in the centre of the room; after which he threw himself upon his bed, and fell asleep in an instant.

The forgotten candle burned itself out in its socket.

CHAPTER IV

Velchaninoff slept soundly until half-past nine, at which hour he started up, sat down on the side of his bed, and began to think.

His thoughts quickly fixed themselves upon the death of "that woman."

The agitating impression wrought upon his mind by yesterday's news as to her death had left a painful feeling of mental perturbation.

This morning the whole of the events of nine years back stood out before his mind's eye with extraordinary distinctness.

He had loved this woman, Natalia Vasilievna—Trusotsky's wife,—he had loved her, and had acted the part of her lover during the time which he had spent in their provincial town (while engaged in

business connected with a legacy); he had lived there a whole year, though his business did not require by any means so long a visit; in fact, the tie above mentioned had detained him in the place.

He had been so completely under the influence of this passion, that Natalia Vasilievna had held him in a species of slavery. He would have obeyed the slightest whim or the wildest caprice of the woman, at that time. He had never, before or since, experienced anything approaching to the infatuation she had caused.

When the time came for departing, Velchaninoff had been in a state of such absolute despair, though the parting was to have been but a short one, that he had begged Natalia Vasilievna to leave all and fly across the frontier with him; and it was only by laughing him out of the idea (though she had at first encouraged it herself, probably for a joke), and by unmercifully chaffing him, that the lady eventually persuaded Velchaninoff to depart alone.

However, he had not been a couple of months in St. Petersburg before he found himself asking himself that question which he had never to this day been able to answer satisfactorily, namely, "*Did* he love this woman at all, or was it nothing but the infatuation of the moment?" He did not ask this question because he was conscious of any new passion taking root in his heart; on the contrary, during those first two months in town he had been in that condition of mind that he had not so much as looked at a woman, though he had met hundreds, and had returned to his old society ways at once. And yet he knew perfectly well that if he were to return to T—— he would instantly fall into the meshes of his passion for Natalia Vasilievna once more, in spite of the question which he could not answer as to the reality of his love for her.

Five years later he was as convinced of this fact as ever, although the very thought of it was detestable to him, and although he did not remember the name of Natalia Vasilievna but with loathing.

He was ashamed of that episode at T——. He could not understand how he (Velchaninoff) could ever have allowed himself to become the victim of such a stupid passion. He blushed whenever he thought of the shameful business—blushed, and even wept for shame.

He managed to forget his remorse after a few more years—he felt sure that he had “lived it down;” and yet now, after nine years, here was the whole thing resuscitated by the news of Natalia's death.

At all events, however, now, as he sat on his bed with agitating thoughts swarming through his brain, he could not but feel that the fact of her being dead was a consolation, amidst all the painful reflections which the mention of her name had called up.

“Surely I am a little sorry for her?” he asked himself.

Well, he certainly did not feel that sensation of hatred for her now; he could think of her and judge her now without passion of any kind, and therefore more justly.

He had long since been of opinion that in all probability there had been nothing more in Natalia Vasilievna than is to be found in every lady of good provincial society, and that he himself had created the whole “fantasy” of his worship and her worshipfulness; but though he had formed this opinion, he always doubted its correctness, and he still felt that doubt now. Facts existed to contradict the theory. For instance, this Bagantoff had lived for several years at T——, and had been no less a victim to passion for this woman, and had been as helpless as Velchaninoff himself under her witchery. Bagantoff, though a young idiot (as Velchaninoff expressed it), was nevertheless a scion of the very highest society in St. Petersburg. His career was in St. Petersburg, and it was significant that such a man should have wasted five important years of his life at T—— simply out of love for this woman. It was said that he had only returned to Petersburg even then because the lady had had enough of him; so

that, all things considered, there must have been something which rendered Natalia Vasilievna preeminently attractive among women.

Yet the woman was not rich; she was not even pretty (if not absolutely *plain*!) Velchaninoff had known her when she was twenty-eight years old. Her face was capable of taking a pleasing expression, but her eyes were not good—they were too hard. She was a thin, bony woman to look at. Her mind was intelligent, but narrow and one-sided. She had tact and taste, especially as to dress. Her character was firm and overbearing. She was never wrong (in her own opinion) or unjust. The unfaithfulness towards her husband never caused her the slightest remorse; she hated corruption, and yet she was herself corrupt; and she believed in herself absolutely. Nothing could ever have persuaded her that she herself was actually depraved; Velchaninoff believed that she really did not know that her own corruption was corrupt. He considered her to be “one of those women who only exist to be unfaithful wives.” Such women never remain unmarried,—it is the law of their nature to marry,—their husband is their first lover, and he is always to blame for anything that may happen afterwards; the unfaithful wife herself being invariably *absolutely* in the right, and of course perfectly innocent.

So thought Velchaninoff; and he was convinced that such a type of woman actually existed; but he was no less convinced that there also existed a corresponding type of men, born to be the husbands of such women. In his opinion the mission of such men was to be, so to speak, “permanent husbands,”—that is, to be husbands all their lives, and nothing else.

Velchaninoff had not the smallest doubt as to the existence of these two types, and Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky was, in his opinion, an excellent representative of the male type. Of course, the Pavel Pavlovitch of last night was by no means the same Pavel Pavlovitch as he had known at T——. He had found an extraordinary change in the man; and yet, on reflection, he was bound to admit that the change was but natural, for that he could only have remained what

he was so long as his wife lived; and that now he was but a part of a whole, allowed to wander at will—that is, an imperfect being, a surprising, an incomprehensible sort of a *thing*, without proper balance.

As for the Pavel Pavlovitch of T——, this is what Velchaninoff remembered of him:

Pavel Pavlovitch had been a husband, of course,—a formality,—and that was all. If, for instance, he was a clerk of department besides, he was so merely in his capacity of, and as a part of his responsibility as—a husband. He worked for his wife, and for her social position. He had been thirty-five years old at that time, and was possessed of some considerable property. He had not shown any special talent, nor, on the other hand, any marked incapacity in his professional employment; his position had been decidedly a good one.

Natalia Vasilievna had been respected and looked up to by all; not that she valued their respect in the least,—she considered it merely as her due. She was a good hostess, and had schooled Pavel Pavlovitch into polite manners, so that he was able to receive and entertain the very best society passably well.

He might be a clever man, for all Velchaninoff knew, but as Natalia Vasilievna did not like her husband to talk much, there was little opportunity of judging. He may have had many good qualities, as well as bad; but the good ones were, so to speak, kept put away in their cases, and the bad ones were stifled and not allowed to appear. Velchaninoff remembered, for instance, that Pavel Pavlovitch had once or twice shown a disposition to laugh at those about him, but this unworthy proclivity had been very promptly subdued. He had been fond of telling stories, but this was not allowed either; or, if permitted at all, the anecdote was to be of the shortest and most uninteresting description.

Pavel Pavlovitch had a circle of private friends outside the house, with whom he was fain, at times, to taste the flowing bowl; but this vicious tendency was radically stamped out as soon as possible.

And yet, with all this, Natalia Vasilievna appeared, to the uninitiated, to be the most obedient of wives, and doubtless considered herself so. Pavel Pavlovitch may have been desperately in love with her,—no one could say as to this.

Velchaninoff had frequently asked himself during his life at T——, whether Pavel Pavlovitch ever suspected his wife of having formed the tie with himself, of which mention has been made. Velchaninoff had several times questioned Natalia Vasilievna on this point, seriously enough; but had invariably been told, with some show of annoyance, that her husband neither did know, nor ever could know; and that “all there might be to know was not his business!”

Another trait in her character was that she never laughed at Pavel Pavlovitch, and never found him funny in any sense; and that she would have been down on any person who dared to be rude to him, at once!

Pavel Pavlovitch's reference to the pleasant little readings enjoyed by the trio nine years ago was accurate; they used to read Dickens' novels together. Velchaninoff or Trusotsky reading aloud, while Natalia Vasilievna worked. The life at T—— had ended suddenly, and so far as Velchaninoff was concerned, in a way which drove him almost to the verge of madness. The fact is, he was simply turned out—although it was all managed in such a way that he never observed that he was being thrown over like an old worn-out shoe.

A young artillery officer had appeared in the town a month or so before Velchaninoff's departure and had made acquaintance with the Trusotsky's. The trio became a quartet. Before long Velchaninoff was informed that for many reasons a separation was absolutely necessary; Natalia Vasilievna adduced a hundred excellent reasons

why this had become unavoidable—and especially one which quite settled the matter. After his stormy attempt to persuade Natalia Vasilievna to fly with him to Paris—or anywhere,—Velchaninoff had ended by going to St. Petersburg alone—for two or three months at the *very most*, as he said,—otherwise he would refuse to go at all, in spite of every reason and argument Natalia might adduce.

Exactly two months later Velchaninoff had received a letter from Natalia Vasilievna, begging him to come no more to T——, because that she already loved another. As to the principal reason which she had brought forward in favour of his immediate departure, she now informed him that she had made a mistake. Velchaninoff remembered the young artilleryman, and understood,—and so the matter had ended, once and for all. A year or two after this Bagantoff appeared at T——, and an intimacy between Natalia Vasilievna and the former had sprung up which lasted for five years. This long period of constancy, Velchaninoff attributed to advancing age on the part of Natalia. He sat on the side of his bed for nearly an hour and thought. At last he roused himself, rang for Mavra and his coffee, drank it off quickly—dressed—and punctually at eleven was on his way to the Pokrofsky Hotel: he felt rather ashamed of his behaviour to Pavel Pavlovitch last night. Velchaninoff put down all that phantasmagoria of the trying of the lock and so on to Pavel Pavlovitch's drunken condition and to other reasons,—but he did not know why he was now on his way to make fresh relations with the husband of that woman, since their acquaintanceship and intercourse had come to so natural and simple a termination; yet something seemed to draw him thither—some strong current of impulse,—and he went.

CHAPTER V

Pavel Pavlovitch was not thinking of "running away," and goodness knows why Velchaninoff should have asked him such a question last night—he did not know himself why he had said it!

He was directed to the Petrofsky Hotel, and found the building at once. At the hotel he was told that Pavel Pavlovitch had now engaged a furnished lodging in the back part of the same house.

Mounting the dirty and narrow stairs indicated, as far as the third storey, he suddenly became aware of someone crying. It sounded like the weeping of a child of some seven or eight years of age; it was a bitter, but a more or less suppressed sort of crying, and with it came the sound of a grown man's voice, apparently trying to quiet the child—anxious that its sobbing and crying should not be heard,—and yet only succeeding in making it cry the louder.

The man's voice did not seem in any way sympathetic with the child's grief; and the latter appeared to be begging for forgiveness.

Making his way into a narrow dark passage with two doors on each side of it, Velchaninoff met a stout-looking, elderly woman, in very careless morning attire, and inquired for Pavel Pavlovitch.

She tapped the door with her fingers in response to his inquiry—the same door, apparently, whence issued the noises just mentioned. Her fat face seemed to flush with indignation as she did so.

"He appears to be amusing himself in there!" she said, and proceeded downstairs.

Velchaninoff was about to knock, but thought better of it and opened the door without ceremony.

In the very middle of a room furnished with plain, but abundant furniture, stood Pavel Pavlovitch in his shirt-sleeves, very red in the face, trying to persuade a little girl to do something or other, and using cries and gestures, and what looked to Velchaninoff very like kicks, in order to effect his purpose. The child appeared to be some seven or eight years of age, and was poorly dressed in a short black stuff frock. She seemed to be in a most hysterical condition, crying and stretching out her arms to Pavel Pavlovitch, as though begging and entreating him to allow her to do whatever it might be she desired.

On Velchaninoff's appearance the scene changed in an instant. No sooner did her eyes fall on the visitor than the child made for the door of the next room, with a cry of alarm; while Pavel Pavlovitch—thrown out for one little instant—immediately relaxed into smiles of great sweetness—exactly as he had done last night, when Velchaninoff suddenly opened his front door and caught him standing outside.

“Alexey Ivanovitch!” he cried in real surprise; “who ever would have thought it! Sit down—sit down—take the sofa—or this chair,—sit down, my dear sir! I'll just put on——” and he rushed for his coat and threw it on, leaving his waistcoat behind.

“Don't stand on ceremony with me,” said Velchaninoff sitting down; “stay as you are!”

“No, sir, no! excuse me—I insist upon standing on ceremony. There, now! I'm a little more respectable! Dear me, now, who ever would have thought of seeing *you* here!—not I, for one!”

Pavel Pavlovitch sat down on the edge of a chair, which he turned so as to face Velchaninoff.

“And pray *why* shouldn't you have expected me? I told you last night that I was coming this morning!”

"I thought you wouldn't come, sir—I did indeed; in fact, when I thought over yesterday's visit, I despaired of ever seeing you again: I did indeed, sir!"

Velchaninoff glanced round the room meanwhile. The place was very untidy; the bed was unmade; the clothes thrown about the floor; on the table were two coffee tumblers with the dregs of coffee still in them, and a bottle of champagne half finished, and with a tumbler standing alongside it. He glanced at the next room, but all was quiet there; the little girl had hidden herself, and was as still as a mouse.

"You don't mean to say you drink that stuff at this time of day?" he asked, indicating the champagne bottle.

"It's only a remnant," explained Pavel Pavlovitch, a little confused.

"My word! You *are* a changed man!"

"Bad habits, sir; and all of a sudden. All dating from that time, sir. Give you my word, I couldn't resist it. But I'm all right now—I'm not drunk—I shan't talk twaddle as I did last night; don't be afraid sir, it's all right! From that very day, sir; give you my word it is! And if anyone had told me half a year ago that I should become like this,—if they had shown me my face in a glass then as I should be *now*, I should have given them the lie, sir; I should indeed!"

"Hem! Then you *were* drunk last night?"

"Yes—I was!" admitted Pavel Pavlovitch, a little guiltily—"not exactly *drunk*, a little *beyond* drunk!—I tell you this by way of explanation, because I'm always worse *after* being drunk! If I'm only a little drunk, still the violence and unreasonableness of intoxication come out afterwards, and stay out too; and then I feel my grief the more keenly. I daresay my grief is responsible for my drinking. I am capable of making an awful fool of myself and offending people

when I'm drunk. I daresay I seemed strange enough to you last night?"

"Don't you remember what you said and did?"

"Assuredly I do—I remember everything!"

"Listen to me, Pavel Pavlovitch: I have thought it over and have come to very much the same conclusion as you did yourself," began Velchaninoff gently; "besides—I believe I was a little too irritable towards you last night—too impatient,—I admit it gladly; the fact is—I am not very well sometimes, and your sudden arrival, you know, in the middle of the night——"

"In the middle of the night: you are quite right—it was!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, wagging his head assentingly; "how in the world could I have brought myself to do such a thing? I shouldn't have come in, though, if you hadn't opened the door. I should have gone as I came. I called on you about a week ago, and did not find you at home, and I daresay I should never have called again; for I am rather proud—Alexey Ivanovitch—in spite of my present state. Whenever I have met you in the streets I have always said to myself, 'What if he doesn't know me and rejects me—nine years is no joke!' and I did not dare try you for fear of being snubbed. Yesterday, thanks to that sort of thing, you know," (he pointed to the bottle), "I didn't know what time it was, and—it's lucky you are the kind of man you are, Alexey Ivanovitch, or I should despair of preserving your acquaintance, after yesterday! You remember old times, Alexey Ivanovitch!"

Velchaninoff listened keenly to all this. The man seemed to be talking seriously enough, and even with some dignity; and yet he had not believed a single word that Pavel Pavlovitch had uttered from the very first moment that he entered the room.

"Tell me, Pavel Pavlovitch," said Velchaninoff at last, "—I see you are not quite alone here,—whose little girl is that I saw when I came

in?"

Pavel Pavlovitch looked surprised and raised his eyebrow; but he gazed back at Velchaninoff with candour and apparent amiability:

"Whose little girl? Why that's our Liza!" he said, smiling affably.

"What Liza?" asked Velchaninoff,—and something seemed to cause him to shudder inwardly.

The sensation was dreadfully sudden. Just now, on entering the room and seeing Liza, he had felt surprised more or less,—but had not been conscious of the slightest feeling of presentiment,—indeed he had had no special thought about the matter, at the moment.

"Why—*our* Liza!—our daughter Liza!" repeated Pavel Pavlovitch, smiling.

"Your daughter? Do you mean to say that you and Natalia Vasilievna had children?" asked Velchaninoff timidly, and in a very low tone of voice indeed!

"Of course—but—what a fool I am—how in the world should *you* know! Providence sent us the gift after you had gone!"

Pavel Pavlovitch jumped off his chair in apparently pleasurable excitement.

"I heard nothing of it!" said Velchaninoff, looking very pale.

"How should you? how should you?" repeated Pavel Pavlovitch with ineffable sweetness. "We had quite lost hope of any children—as you may remember,—when suddenly Heaven sent us this little one. And, oh! my feelings—Heaven alone knows what I felt! Just a year after you went, I think—no, wait a bit—not a year by a long way!—Let's see, you left us in October, or November, didn't you?"

"I left T—— on the twelfth of September, I remember well."

"Hum! September was it? Dear me! Well, then, let's see—September, October, November, December, January, February, March, April—to the 8th of May—that was Liza's birthday—eight months all but a bit; and if you could only have seen the dear departed, how rejoiced——"

"Show her to me—call her in!" the words seemed to tear themselves from Velchaninoff, whether he liked it or no.

"Certainly—this moment!" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, forgetting that he had not finished his previous sentence, or ignoring the fact; and he hastily left the room, and entered the small chamber adjoining.

Three or four minutes passed by, while Velchaninoff heard the rapid interchange of whispers going on, and an occasional rather louder sound of Liza's voice, apparently entreating her father to leave her alone—so Velchaninoff concluded.

At last the two came out.

"There you are—she's dreadfully shy and proud," said Pavel Pavlovitch; "just like her mother."

Liza entered the room without tears, but with eyes downcast, her father leading her by the hand. She was a tall, slight, and very pretty little girl. She raised her large blue eyes to the visitor's face with curiosity; but only glanced surlily at him, and dropped them again. There was that in her expression that one always sees in children when they look on some new guest for the first time—retiring to a corner, and looking out at him thence seriously and mistrustingly; only that there was a something in her manner beyond the usual childish mistrust—so, at least thought Velchaninoff.

Her father brought her straight up to the visitor.

"There—this gentleman knew mother very well. He was our friend; you mustn't be shy,—give him your hand!"

The child bowed slightly, and timidly stretched out her hand.

"Natalia Vasilievna never would teach her to curtsy; she liked her to bow, English fashion, and give her hand," explained Pavel Pavlovitch, gazing intently at Velchaninoff.

Velchaninoff knew perfectly well that the other was keenly examining him at this moment, but he made no attempt to conceal his agitation: he sat motionless on his chair and held the child's hand in his, gazing into her face the while.

But Liza was apparently much preoccupied, and did not take her eyes off her father's face; she listened timidly to every word he said.

Velchaninoff recognised her large blue eyes at once; but what specially struck him was the refined pallor of her face, and the colour of her hair; these traits were altogether too significant, in his eyes! Her features, on the other hand, and the set of her lips, reminded him keenly of Natalia Vasilievna. Meanwhile Pavel Pavlovitch was in the middle of some apparently most interesting tale—one of great sentiment seemingly,—but Velchaninoff did not hear a word of it until the last few words struck upon his ear:

"... So that you can't imagine what our joy was when Providence sent us this gift, Alexey Ivanovitch! She was everything to me, for I felt that if it should be the will of Heaven to deprive me of my other joy, I should still have Liza left to me; that's what I felt, sir, I did indeed!"

"And Natalia Vasilievna?" asked Velchaninoff.

"Oh, Natalia Vasilievna—" began Pavel Pavlovitch, smiling with one side of his mouth; "she never used to like to say much—as you know yourself; but she told me on her deathbed—deathbed! you know, sir

—to the very day of her death she used to get so angry and say that they were trying to cure her with a lot of nasty medicines when she had nothing the matter but a simple little feverish attack; and that when Koch arrived (you remember our old doctor Koch?) he would make her all right in a fortnight. Why, five hours before she died she was talking of fixing that day three weeks for a visit to her Aunt, Liza's godmother, at her country place!" Velchaninoff here started from his seat, but still held the child's hand. He could not help thinking that there was something reproachful in the girl's persistent stare in her father's face.

"Is she ill?" he asked hurriedly, and his voice had a strange tone in it.

"No! I don't think so" said Pavel Pavlovitch; "but, you see our way of living here, and all that: she's a strange child and very nervous, besides! After her mother's death she was quite ill and hysterical for a fortnight. Just before you came in she was crying like anything; and do you know what about, sir? Do you hear me, Liza?—You listen!—Simply because I was going out, and wished to leave her behind, and because she said I didn't love her so well as I used to in her mother's time. That's what she pitches into me for! Fancy a child like this getting hold of such an idea!—a child who ought to be playing at dolls, instead of developing ideas of that sort! The thing is, she has no one to play with here."

"Then—then—are you two quite alone here?"

"Quite! a servant comes in once a day, that's all!"

"And when you go out, do you leave her quite alone?"

"Of course! What else am I to do? Yesterday I locked her in that room, and that's what all the tears were about this morning. What could I do? the day before yesterday she went down into the yard all by herself, and a boy took a shot at her head with a stone! Not only that, but she must needs go and cling on to everybody she met, and

ask where I had gone to! That's not so very pleasant, you see! But I oughtn't to complain when I say I am going out for an hour and then stay out till four in the morning, as I did last night! The landlady came and let her out: she had the door broken open! Nice for my feelings, eh! It's all the result of the eclipse that came over my life; nothing but that, sir!"

"Papa!" said the child, timidly and anxiously.

"Now, then! none of that again! What did I tell you yesterday?"

"I won't; I won't!" cried the child hurriedly, clasping her hands before her entreatingly.

"Come! things can't be allowed to go on in this way!" said Velchaninoff impatiently, and with authority. "In the first place, you are a man of property; how can you possibly live in a hole like this, and in such disorder?"

"This place! Oh, but we shall probably have left this place within a week; and I've spent a lot of money here, as it is, though I may be 'a man of property;' and——"

"Very well, that'll do," interrupted Velchaninoff with growing impatience, "now, I'll make you a proposition: you have just said that you intend to stay another week—perhaps two. I have a house here—or rather I know a family where I am as much at home as at my own fireside, and have been so for twenty years. The family I mean is the Pogoryeltseffs—Alexander Pavlovitch Pogoryeltseff is a state councillor (he may be of use to you in your business!) They are now living in the country—they have a beautiful country villa; Claudia Petrovna, the lady of the house, is like a sister—like a mother to me; they have eight children. Let me take Liza down to them without loss of time! they'll receive her with joy, and they'll treat her like their own little daughter—they will, indeed!"

Velchaninoff was in a great hurry, and much excited, and he did not conceal his feelings.

"I'm afraid it's impossible!" said Pavel Pavlovitch with a grimace, looking straight into his visitor's eyes, very cunningly, as it seemed to Velchaninoff.

"Why! why, impossible?"

"Oh, why! to let the child go—so suddenly, you know, of course with such a sincere well-wisher as yourself—it's not that!—but a strange house—and such swells, too!—I don't know whether they would receive her!"

"But I tell you I'm like a son of the house!" cried Velchaninoff, almost angrily. "Claudia Petrovna will be delighted to take her, at one word from me! She'd receive her as though she were my own daughter. Deuce take it, sir, you know you are only humbugging me, —what's the use of talking about it?"

He stamped his foot.

"No—no! I mean to say—don't it look a little strange? Oughtn't I to call once or twice first?—such a smart house as you say theirs is—don't you see——"

"I tell you it's the simplest house in the world; it isn't 'smart' in the least bit," cried Velchaninoff; "they have a lot of children: it will make another girl of her!—I'll introduce you there myself, to-morrow, if you like. Of course you'll have to go and thank them, and all that. You shall go down every day with me, if you please."

"Oh, but——"

"Nonsense! You know it's nonsense! Now look here: you come to me this evening—I'll put you up for the night—and we'll start off early to-morrow and be down there by twelve."

"Benefactor!—and I may spend the night at your house?" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, instantly consenting to the plan with the greatest cordiality,—"you are really *too* good! And where's their country house?"

"At the Liesnoy."

"But look here, how about her dress? Such a house, you know,—a father's heart shrinks——"

"Nonsense!—she's in mourning—what else could she wear but a black dress like this? it's exactly the thing; you couldn't imagine anything more so!—you might let her have some clean linen with her, and give her a cleaner neck-handkerchief."

"Directly, directly. We'll get her linen together in a couple of minutes—it's just home from the wash!"

"Send for a carriage—can you? Tell them to let us have it at once, so as not to waste time."

But now an unexpected obstacle arose: Liza absolutely rejected the plan; she had listened to it with terror, and if Velchaninoff had, in his excited argument with Pavel Pavlovitch, had time to glance at the child's face, he would have observed her expression of absolute despair at this moment.

"I won't go!" she said, quietly but firmly.

"There—look at that! Just like her mamma!"

"I'm *not* like mamma, I'm *not* like mamma!" cried Liza, wringing her little hands in despair. "Oh, papa—papa!" she added, "if you desert me—" she suddenly threw herself upon the alarmed Velchaninoff—"If you take me away—" she cried—"I'll——"

But Liza had no time to finish her sentence, for Pavel Pavlovitch suddenly seized her by the arm and collar and hustled her into the next room with unconcealed rage. For several minutes Velchaninoff listened to the whispering going on there,—whisperings and seemingly subdued crying on the part of Liza. He was about to follow the pair, when suddenly out came Pavel Pavlovitch, and stated—with a disagreeable grin—that Liza would come directly.

Velchaninoff tried not to look at him and kept his eyes fixed on the other side of the room.

The elderly woman whom Velchaninoff had met on the stairs also made her appearance, and packed Liza's things into a neat little carpet bag.

"Is it you that are going to take the little lady away, sir?" she asked; "if so, you are doing a good deed! She's a nice quiet child, and you are saving her from goodness knows what, here!"

"Oh! come—Maria Sisevna,"—began Pavel Pavlovitch.

"Well? What? Isn't it true! Arn't you ashamed to let a girl of her intelligence see the things that you allow to go on here? The carriage has arrived for you, sir,—*you* ordered one for the Liesnoy, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, good luck to you!"

Liza came out, looking very pale and with downcast eyes; she took her bag, but never glanced in Velchaninoff's direction. She restrained herself and did not throw herself upon her father, as she had done before—not even to say good-bye. She evidently did not wish to look at him.

Her father kissed her and patted her head in correct form; her lip curled during the operation, the chin trembled a little, but she did not raise her eyes to her father's.

Pavel Pavlovitch looked pale, and his hands shook; Velchaninoff saw that plainly enough, although he did his best not to see the man at all. He (Velchaninoff) had but one thought, and that was how to get away at once!

Downstairs was old Maria Sisevna, waiting to say good-bye; and more kissing was done. Liza had just climbed into the carriage when suddenly she caught sight of her father's face; she gave a loud cry and wrung her hands,—in another minute she would have been out of the carriage and away, but luckily the vehicle went on and she was too late!

CHAPTER VI

"Are you feeling faint?" asked Velchaninoff of his companion, frightened out of his wits: "I'll tell him to stop and get you some water, shall I?"

She looked at him angrily and reproachfully.

"Where are you taking me to?" she asked coldly and abruptly.

"To a very beautiful house, Liza. There are plenty of children,—they'll all love you there, they are so kind! Don't be angry with me, Liza; I wish you well, you know!"

In truth, Velchaninoff would have looked strange at this moment to any acquaintance, if such had happened to see him!

"How—how—how—oh! *how* wicked you are!" said Liza, fighting with suppressed tears, and flashing her fine angry eyes at him.

"But Liza—I——"

"You are bad—bad—and wicked!" cried Liza. She wrung her hands.

Velchaninoff was beside himself.

"Oh, Liza, Liza! if only you knew what despair you are causing me!" he said.

"Is it true that he is coming down to-morrow?" asked the child haughtily—"is it true or not?"

"Quite true—I shall bring him down myself,—I shall take him and bring him!"

"He will deceive you somehow!" cried the child, drooping her eyes.

"Doesn't he love you, then, Liza?"

"No."

"Has he ill-treated you,—has he?"

Liza looked gloomily at her questioner, and said nothing. She then turned away from him and sat still and depressed.

Velchaninoff commenced to talk: he tried to win her,—he spoke warmly—excitedly—feverishly.

Liza listened incredulously and with a hostile air,—but still she listened. Her attention delighted him beyond measure;—he went so

far as to explain to her what it meant when a man took to drink. He said that he loved her and would himself look after her father.

At last Liza raised her eyes and gazed fixedly at him.

Then Velchaninoff began to speak of her mother and of how well he had known her; and he saw that his tales attracted her. Little by little she began to reply to his questions, but very cautiously and in an obstinately monosyllabic way.

She would answer nothing to his chief inquiries; as to her former relations with her father, for instance, she maintained an obstinate silence.

While speaking to her, Velchaninoff held the child's hand in his own, as before; and she did not try to take it away.

Liza said enough to make it apparent that she had loved her father more than her mother at first, because that her father had loved the child better than her mother did; but that when her mother had died and was lying dead, Liza wept over her and kissed her, and ever since then she had loved her mother more than all—all there was in the whole world—and that every night she thought of her and loved her.

But Liza was very proud, and suddenly recollecting herself and finding that she was saying a great deal more than she had meant to reveal, she paused, and relapsed into obstinate silence once more, and gazed at Velchaninoff with something like hatred in her eyes, considering that he had beguiled her into the revelations just made.

By the end of the journey, however, her hysterical condition was nearly over, but she was very silent and sat looking morosely about her, obstinately silent and gloomy, like a little wild animal.

The fact that she was being taken to a strange house where she had never been before did not seem so far to weigh upon her; Velchaninoff saw clearly enough that other things distressed her, and principally that she was ashamed—ashamed that her father should have let her go so easily—thrown her away, as it were—into Velchaninoff's arms.

"She's ill," thought the latter, "and perhaps very ill; she has been bullied and ill-treated. Oh! that drunken, blackguardly wretch of a fellow!" He hurried on the coachman. Velchaninoff trusted greatly to the fresh air, to the garden, to the children, to the new life, now; as to the future, he was in no sort of doubt at all, his hopes were clear and defined. One thing he was quite sure of, and that was that he had never before felt what now swelled within his soul, and that the sensation would last for ever and ever.

"I have an object at last! this is Life!" he said to himself enthusiastically.

Many thoughts welled into his brain just now, but he would have none of them; he did not care to think of details at this moment, for without details the future was all so clear and so beautiful, and so safe and indestructible!

The basis of his plan was simple enough; it was simply this, in the language of his own thoughts:

"I shall so work upon that drunken little blackguard that he will leave Liza with the Pogoryeltseffs, and go away alone—at first, 'for a time,' of course!—and so Liza shall remain behind for me! what more do I want? The plan will suit him, too!—else why does he bully her like this?"

The carriage arrived at last.

It was certainly a very beautiful place. They were met first of all by a troop of noisy children, who overflowed on to the front-door

steps. Velchaninoff had not been down for some time, and the delight of the little ones to see him was excessive—they were very fond of him.

The elder ones shouted, before he had left the carriage, by way of chaff:

“How's the lawsuit getting on, eh?” and the smaller gang took up the joke, and all clamoured the same question: it was a pet joke in this establishment to chaff Velchaninoff about his lawsuit. But when Liza climbed down the carriage steps, she was instantly surrounded and stared at with true juvenile curiosity. Then Claudia Petrovna and her husband came out, and both of them good-humouredly bantered Velchaninoff about his lawsuit.

Claudia Petrovna was a lady of some thirty-seven summers, stout and well-favoured, and with a sweet fresh-looking face. Her husband was a man of fifty-five, a clever and long-headed man of the world, but above all, a good and kind-hearted friend to anyone requiring kindness.

The Pogoryeltseffs' house was in the full sense of the word a “home” to Velchaninoff, as the latter had stated. There was rather more here, however; for, twenty years since Claudia had very nearly married young Velchaninoff almost a boy at that time, and a student at the university.

This had been his first experience of love—and very hot and fiery and funny—and sweet it was! The end of it was, however, that Claudia married Mr Pogoryeltseff. Five years later she and Velchaninoff had met again, and a quiet candid friendship had sprung up between them. Since then there had always been a warmth, a speciality about their friendship, a radiance which overspread it and glorified their relations one to the other. There was nothing here that Velchaninoff could remember with shame—all was pure and sweet; and this was perhaps the reason why the friendship

was specially dear to Velchaninoff; he had not experienced many such platonic intimacies.

In this house Velchaninoff was simple and happy, confessed his sins, played with the children and lectured them, and never bothered his head about outside matters; he had promised the Pogoryeltseffs that he would live a few more years alone in the world, and then move over to their household for good and all; and he looked forward to that good time coming with all seriousness.

Velchaninoff now gave all the information about Liza which he thought fit, though his simple request would have been amply sufficient here.

Claudia Petrovna kissed the little "orphan," and promised to do all she possibly could for her; and the children carried Liza off to play in the garden. Half an hour passed in conversation, and then Velchaninoff rose to depart: he was in such a hurry, that his friends could not help remarking upon the fact. He had not been near them for three weeks, they said, and now he only stayed half an hour! Velchaninoff laughed and promised to come down to-morrow. Someone observed that Velchaninoff's state of agitation was remarkable, even for *him*! Whereupon the latter jumped up, seized Claudia Petrovna's hand, and, under pretence of having forgotten to tell her something most important about Liza, he led her into another room.

"Do you remember," he began, "what I told you, and only you,—even your husband does not know of it—about my year of life down at T——?"

"Oh yes! only too well! You have often spoken of it."

"No—I did not 'speak about it,' I *confessed*, and only to yourself; but I never told you the lady's name. It was Trusotsky, the wife of this Trusotsky; it is she who has died, and this little Liza is her child—*my* child!"

"Is this certain? Are you quite sure there is no mistake?" asked Claudia Petrovna, with some agitation.

"Quite, quite certain!" said Velchaninoff enthusiastically. He then gave a short, hasty, and excited narrative of all that had occurred. Claudia had heard it all before, excepting the lady's name.

The fact is, Velchaninoff had always been so afraid that one of his friends might some fine day meet Madame Trusotsky at T——, and wonder how in the world he could have loved such a woman as that, that he had never revealed her name to a single soul; not even to Claudia Petrovna, his great friend.

"And does the 'father' know nothing of it?" asked Claudia, having heard the tale out.

"N—no; he knows—you see, that's just what is bothering me now. I haven't sifted the matter as yet," resumed Velchaninoff hotly. "He must know—he *does* know. I remarked that fact both yesterday and to-day. But I wish to discover *how much* he knows. That's why I am hurrying back now; he is coming to-night. He knows all about Bagantoff; but how about myself? You know how such wives can deceive their husbands! If an angel from Heaven were to come down and convict a woman, her husband will still trust her, and give the angel the lie.

"Oh! don't nod your head at me, don't judge me! I have long since judged and convicted myself. You see, this morning I felt so sure that he knew all, that I compromised myself before him. Fancy, I was really ashamed of having been rude to him last night. He only called in to see me out of the pure unconquerably malicious desire to show me that he knew all the offence, and knew who was the offender! I behaved like a fool; I gave myself into his hands too easily; I was too heated; he came at such a feverish moment for me. I tell you, he has been bullying Liza, simply to 'let off bile,'—you

understand. He needs a safety-valve for his offended feelings, and vents them upon *anyone*, even a little child!

"It is exasperation, and quite natural. We must treat him in a Christian spirit, my friend; and do you know, I wish to change my way of treating him, entirely; I wish to be particularly kind to him. That will be a good action on my part, for I am to blame before him, I know I am; there's no disguising the fact! Besides, once at T——, it so happened that I required four thousand roubles at a moment's notice. Well, the fellow gave me the money, without a receipt, at once, and with every manifestation of delight to be able to serve me! And I took the money from his hands,—I did, indeed! I took it as though he were a friend. Think of that!"

"Very well; only be careful!" said Claudia Petrovna. "You are so enthusiastic that I am really alarmed for you! Of course Liza shall now be no less than my own daughter to me; but there is so much to know and to settle yet! Above all, be very careful and observant! You are not nearly careful enough when you are happy! You are much too exalted an individual to be cautious, when you are happy!" she added with a smile.

The whole family went out to see Velchaninoff off. The children brought Liza along with them; they had been playing in the garden. They seemed to look at her now with even more perplexity than at first! The girl became dreadfully shy when Velchaninoff kissed her before all, and promised to come down next day and bring her father with him. To the last moment she did not say a single word, and never looked at him at all; but just before he was about to start she seized his hand and drew him away to one side, looking imploringly in his face: she evidently had something to say to him. Velchaninoff immediately took her into an adjoining room.

"What is it, Liza?" he asked, kindly and encouragingly; but she drew him farther away,—into the very farthest corner of the room, anxious to get well out of sight and hearing of the rest.

"What is it, Liza? What is it?"

But she was still silent, and could not make up her mind to speak; she stared with her motionless, large blue eyes, into his face, and in every lineament of her little face was betrayed the wildest terror and anxiety.

"He'll—hang himself!" she whispered at last, as though she were talking in her sleep.

"Who will hang himself?" asked Velchaninoff, in alarm.

"He will—*he*! He tried to hang himself to a hook last night!" said the child, panting with haste and excitement; "I saw it myself! To-day he tried it again,—he wishes to hang himself; he told me so!—he told me so! He wanted to, long ago; he has always wanted to do it! I saw it myself—in the night!"

"Impossible!" muttered Velchaninoff, incredulously.

Liza suddenly threw herself into his arms, kissed his hands, and cried. She could hardly breathe for sobbing; she was begging and imploring Velchaninoff, but he could not understand what she was trying to say.

Velchaninoff never afterwards forgot the terrible look of this distressed child; he thought of it waking and thought of it sleeping—how she had come to him in her despair as to her last hope, and hysterically begged and prayed him to help her! "And to think of her being so deeply attached to him!" he reflected jealously, as he drove, impatient and feverish, towards town. "She said herself that she loved her mother better;—perhaps she hates him, and doesn't love him at all! And what's all that nonsense about 'hanging himself'! What did she mean by that? As if he would hang himself, the fool! I must sift the matter—the whole matter. I must settle this business once and for ever—and quickly!"

CHAPTER VII

He was in a great hurry to "know all." In order to lose no time about finding out what he felt he must know at once, he told the coachman to drive him straight to Trusotsky's rooms. On the way he changed his mind; "let him come to me, himself," he thought, "and meanwhile I can attend to my cursed law business."

But to-day he really felt that he was too absent to attend to anything at all; and at five o'clock he set out with the intention of dining. And at this moment, for the first time, an amusing idea struck him. What if he really only hindered his law business by meddling as he did, and hunting his wretched lawyer about the place, when the latter plainly avoided meeting him? Velchaninoff laughed merrily over this idea. "And yet," he thought; "if this notion had struck me in the evening instead of now, how angry I should have been!" He laughed again, more merrily than before. But in spite of his merriness he grew more and more thoughtful and impatient, and could settle to nothing, nor could he think out what he most wanted to reflect upon.

"I *must* have that fellow here!" he said at length; "I must read the mystery of *him* first of all, and then I can settle what to do next. There's a duel in this business!"

Returning home at seven o'clock he did not find Pavel Pavlovitch there, which fact first surprised him, then angered him, then depressed him, and at last, frightened him.

"God knows, God knows how it will all end!" he cried; first trying to settle himself on a sofa, and then marching up and down the room, and all the while looking at his watch every other minute.

At length—at about nine o'clock—Pavel Pavlovitch appeared.

"If this man was cunning enough to mean it he could not have managed better in order to put me into a state of nervousness!" thought Velchaninoff, though his heart bounded for joy to see his guest arrive.

To Velchaninoff's cordial inquiry as to why he was so late, Pavel Pavlovitch smiled disagreeably—took a seat with easy familiarity, carelessly threw his crapebound hat on a chair,—and made himself perfectly at home. Velchaninoff observed and took stock of the careless manner adopted by his visitor; it was not like yesterday. Velchaninoff then quietly, and in a few words, gave Pavel Pavlovitch an account of what he had done with Liza, of how kindly she had been received, of how good it would be for the child down there; then he led the conversation to the topic of the Pogoryeltseffs, leaving Liza out of the talking altogether, and spoke of how kind the whole family were, of how long he had known them, and so on.

Pavel Pavlovitch listened absently, occasionally looking ironically at his host from under his eyelashes.

"What an enthusiast you are!" he muttered at last, smiling very unpleasantly.

"Hum, you seem in a bad humour to-day!" remarked Velchaninoff with annoyance.

"And why shouldn't I be as wicked as my neighbours?" cried Pavel Pavlovitch suddenly! He said this so abruptly that he gave one the idea that he had pounced out of a corner where he had been lurking, on purpose to make a dash at the first opportunity.

"Oh dear me! do as you like, pray!" laughed Velchaninoff; "I only thought something had put you out, perhaps!"

"So it has," cried Pavel Pavlovitch, as though proud of the fact.

"Well, what was it?"

Pavel Pavlovitch waited a moment or two before he replied.

"Why it's that Stepan Michailovitch Bagantoff of ours—up to his tricks again; he's a shining light among the highest circles of society—he is!"

"Wouldn't he receive you again—or what?"

"N—no! not quite that, this time; on the contrary I was allowed to go in for the first time on record, and I had the honour of musing over his features, too!—but he happened to be a corpse, that's all!"

"What! Bagantoff dead?" cried Velchaninoff, in the greatest astonishment; though there was no particular reason why he *should* be surprised.

"Yes—my unalterable—six-years-standing friend is dead!—died yesterday at about mid-day, and I knew nothing of it! Perhaps he died just when I called there—who knows? To-morrow is the funeral! he's in his coffin at this moment! Died of nervous fever; and they let me in to see him—they did indeed!—to contemplate his features! I told them I was a great friend—and therefore they allowed me in! A pretty trick he has played me—this dear friend of six years' standing! why—perhaps I came to St. Petersburg *specially for him!*"

"Well—it's hardly worth your while to be angry with him about it, is it—he didn't die on purpose!" said Velchaninoff laughing.

"Oh, but I'm speaking out of pure sympathy—he was a *dear* friend to me! oh a *very dear* friend!"

Pavel Pavlovitch gave a smile of detestable irony and cunning.

"Do you know what, Alexey Ivanovitch," he resumed, "I think you ought to treat me to something,—I have often treated you; I used to be your host every blessed day, sir, at T——, for a whole year! Send for a bottle of wine, do—my throat is so dry!"

"With pleasure—why didn't you say so before! what would you like?"

"Don't say 'you!' say 'we'! we'll drink together of course!" said Pavel Pavlovitch defiantly, but at the same time looking into Velchaninoff's eyes with some concern.

"Shall it be champagne?"

"Of course! it isn't time for vodki yet!"

Velchaninoff rose slowly—rang the bell and gave Mavra the necessary orders.

"We'll drink to this happy meeting of friends after nine years' parting!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, with a very inappropriate and unnecessary giggle. "Why, you are the only real, true friend left to me now! Bagantoff is no more! it quite reminds one of the great poet:

"Great Patroclus is no more,
Mean Thersites liveth yet!"

—and so on,—don't you know!"

At the name "Thersites" Pavel Pavlovitch touched his own breast.

"I wish you would speak plainly, you pig of a fellow!" said Velchaninoff to himself, "I hate hints!" His own anger was on the rise, and he had long been struggling with his self-restraint.

"Look here,—tell me this, since you consider Bagantoff to have been guilty before you (as I see you do) surely you must be glad that your betrayer is dead? What are you so angry about?"

"Glad! Why should I be glad?"

"I judge by what I should imagine your feelings to be."

"Ha-ha! well, this time you are a little bit in error as to my feelings, for once! A certain sage has said 'my good enemy is dead, but I have a still better one alive! ha-ha!'"

"Well but you saw him alive for five years at a stretch,—I should have thought that was enough to contemplate his features in!" said Velchaninoff angrily and contemptuously.

"Yes, but how was I to know then, sir?" snapped Pavel Pavlovitch—jumping out of an ambush once more, as it were,—delighted to be asked a question which he had long awaited; "why, what do you take me for, Alexey Ivanovitch?" at this moment there was in the speaker's face a new expression altogether, transfiguring entirely the hitherto merely disagreeably malicious look upon it.

"Do you mean to say you knew nothing of it?" said Velchaninoff in astonishment.

"How! Didn't know? As if I could have known it and—Oh, you race of Jupiters! you reckon a man to be no better than a dog, and judge of him by your own sentiments. Look here, sir,—there, look at that." So saying, he brought his fist madly down upon the table with a resounding bang, and immediately afterwards looked frightened at his own act.

Velchaninoff's face beamed.

"Listen, Pavel Pavlovitch," he said; "it is entirely the same thing to me whether you knew or did not know all about it. If you did not know, so much the more honourable is it for you; but—I can't understand why you should have selected me for your confidant."

"I wasn't talking of you; don't be angry, it wasn't about you," muttered Pavel Pavlovitch, with his eyes fixed on the ground.

At this moment, Mavra entered with the champagne.

"Here it is!" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, immensely delighted at the appearance of the wine. "Now then, tumblers my good girl, tumblers quick! Capital! Thank you, we don't require you any more, my good Mavra. What! you've drawn the cork? Excellent creature. Well, ta-ta! off with you."

Mavra's advent with the bottle so encouraged him that he again looked at Velchaninoff with some defiance.

"Now confess," he giggled suddenly, "confess that you are very curious indeed to hear about all this, and that it is by no means 'entirely the same to you,' as you declared! Confess that you would be miserable if I were to get up and go away this very minute without telling you anything more."

"Not the least in the world, I assure you!"

Pavel Pavlovitch smiled; and his smile said, as plainly as words could, "That's a lie!"

"Well, let's to business," he said, and poured out two glasses of champagne.

"Here's a toast," he continued, raising his goblet, "to the health in Paradise of our dear departed friend Bagantoff."

He raised his glass and drank.

"I won't drink such a toast as that!" said Velchaninoff; and put his glass down on the table.

"Why not? It's a very pretty toast."

"Look here, were you drunk when you came here?"

"A little; why?"

"Oh—nothing particular. Only it appeared to me that yesterday, and especially this morning, you were sincerely sorry for the loss of Natalia Vasilievna."

"And who says I am not sorry now?" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, as if somebody had pulled a string and made him snap the words out, like a doll.

"No, I don't mean that; but you must admit you may be in error about Bagantoff; and that's a serious matter!"

Pavel Pavlovitch grinned and gave a wink.

"Hey! Wouldn't you just like to know how I found out about Bagantoff, eh?"

Velchaninoff blushed.

"I repeat, it's all the same to me," he said; and added to himself, "Hadn't I better pitch him and the bottle out of the window together." He was blushing more and more now.

Pavel Pavlovitch poured himself out another glass.

"I'll tell you directly how I found out all about Mr. Bagantoff, and your burning wish shall be satisfied. For you are a fiery sort of man, you know, Alexey Ivanovitch, oh, dreadfully so! Ha-ha-ha. Just give me a cigarette first, will you, for ever since March——"

"Here's a cigarette for you."

"Ever since March I have been a depraved man, sir, and this is how it all came about. Listen. Consumption, as you know, my dear friend" (Pavel Pavlovitch was growing more and more familiar!), "is an interesting malady. One sees a man dying of consumption without a suspicion that to-morrow is to be his last day. Well, I told you how Natalia Vasilievna, up to five hours before her death, talked

about going to visit her aunt, who lived thirty miles or so away, and starting in a fortnight. You know how some ladies—and gentlemen, too, I daresay—have the bad habit of keeping a lot of old rubbish by them, in the way of love-letters and so on. It would be much safer to stick them all into the fire, wouldn't it? But no, they must keep every little scrap of paper in drawers and desks, and endorse it and classify it, and tie it up in bundles, for each year and month and class! I don't know whether they find this consoling to their feelings afterwards, or what. Well, since she was arranging a visit to her aunt just five hours before her death, Natalia Vasilievna naturally did not expect to die so soon; in fact, she was expecting old Doctor Koch down till the last; and so, when Natalia Vasilievna *did* die, she left behind her a beautiful little black desk all inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and bound with silver, in her bureau; oh, a lovely little box, an heirloom left her by her grandmother, with a lock and key all complete. Well, sir, in this box everything—I mean *everything*, you know, for every day and hour for the last twenty years—was disclosed; and since Mr. Bagantoff had a decided taste for literature (indeed, he had published a passionate novel once, I am told, in a newspaper!)—consequently there were about a hundred examples of his genius in the desk, ranging over a period of five years. Some of these talented effusions were covered with pencilled remarks by Natalia Vasilievna herself! Pleasant, that, for a fond husband's feelings, sir, eh?"

Velchaninoff quickly cast his thoughts back over the past, and remembered that he had never written a single letter or a single note to Natalia Vasilievna.

He had written a couple of letters from St. Petersburg, but, according to a previous arrangement, he had addressed them to both Mr. and Mrs. Trusotsky together. He had not answered Natalia Vasilievna's last letter—which had contained his dismissal—at all.

Having ended his speech, Pavel Pavlovitch relapsed into silence, and sat smiling repulsively for a whole minute or so.

"Why don't you answer my question, my friend?" he asked, at length, evidently disturbed by Velchaninoff's silence.

"What question?"

"As to the pleasure I must have felt as a fond husband, upon opening the desk."

"Your feelings are no business of mine!" said the other bitterly, rising and commencing to stride up and down the room.

"I wouldn't mind betting that you are thinking at this very moment: 'What a pig of a fellow he is to parade his shame like this!' Ha-ha! dear me, what a squeamish gentleman you are to be sure!"

"Not at all. I was thinking nothing of the sort; on the contrary, I consider that you are—besides being more or less intoxicated—so put out by the death of the man who has injured you that you are not yourself. There's nothing surprising in it at all! I quite understand why you wish Bagantoff were still alive, and am ready to respect your annoyance, but——"

"And pray *why* do you suppose that I wish Bagantoff were alive?"

"Oh, that's your affair!"

"I'll take my oath you are thinking of a duel!"

"Devil take it, sir!" cried Velchaninoff, obliged to hold himself tighter than ever. "I was thinking that you, like every respectable person in similar circumstances, would act openly and candidly and straightforwardly, and not humiliate yourself with comical antics and silly grimaces, and ridiculous complaints and detestable innuendoes, which only heap greater shame upon you. I say I was thinking you would act like a respectable person."

"Ha-ha-ha!—but perhaps I am *not* a respectable person!"

"Oh, well, that's your own affair again and yet, if so, what in the devil's name could you want with Bagantoff alive?"

"Oh, my dear sir, I should have liked just to have a nice peep at a dear old friend, that's all. We should have got hold of a bottle of wine, and drunk it together!"

"He wouldn't have drunk with *you*!"

"Why not? *Noblesse oblige*? Why, *you* are drinking with me. Wherein is he better than you?"

"I have not drunk with you."

"Wherefore this sudden pride, sir?"

Velchaninoff suddenly burst into a fit of nervous, irritable laughter.

"Why, deuce take it all!" he cried, "you are quite a different type to what I believed. I thought you were nothing but a 'permanent husband,' but I find you are a sort of bird of prey."

"What! 'permanent husband?' What is a 'permanent husband?' " asked Pavel Pavlovitch, pricking up his ears.

"Oh—just one type of husbands—that's all, it's too long to explain. Come, you'd better get out now; it's quite time you went. I'm sick of you!"

"And bird of prey, sir; what did that mean?"

"I said you were a bird of prey for a joke."

"Yes; but—bird of prey—tell me what you mean, Alexey Ivanovitch, for goodness sake!"

"Come, come, that's quite enough!" shouted Velchaninoff, suddenly flaring up and speaking at the top of his voice. "It's time

you went; get out of this, will you?"

"No, sir, it's *not* enough!" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, jumping up, too. "Even if you *are* sick of me, sir, it's not enough; for you must first drink and clink glasses with me. I won't go before you do! No, no; oh dear no! drink first; it's *not* enough yet."

"Pavel Pavlovitch, will you go to the devil or will you not?"

"With pleasure, sir. I'll go to the devil with pleasure; but first we must drink. You say you don't wish to drink *with me*; but *I wish you* to drink with me—actually *with me*."

Pavel Pavlovitch was grimacing and giggling no longer. He seemed to be suddenly transfigured again, and was as different from the Pavel Pavlovitch of but a few moments since as he could possibly be, both in appearance and in the tone of his voice; so much so that Velchaninoff was absolutely confounded.

"Come, Alexey Ivanovitch, let's drink!—don't refuse me!" continued Pavel Pavlovitch, seizing the other tightly by the hand and gazing into his face with an extraordinary expression.

It was clear there was more in this matter than the mere question of drinking a glass of wine.

"Well," muttered Velchaninoff, "but that's nothing but dregs!"

"No, there's just a couple of glasses left—it's quite clear. Now then, clink glasses and drink. There, I'll take your glass and you take mine." They touched glasses and drank.

"Oh, Alexey Ivanovitch! now that we've drunk together—oh!" Pavel Pavlovitch suddenly raised his hand to his forehead and sat still for a few moments.

Velchaninoff trembled with excitement. He thought Pavel Pavlovitch was about to disclose *all*; but Pavel Pavlovitch said nothing whatever. He only looked at him, and quietly smiled his detestable cunning smile in the other's face.

"What do you want with me, you drunken wretch?" cried Velchaninoff, furious, and stamping his foot upon the floor; "you are making a fool of me!"

"Don't shout so—don't shout! Why make such a noise?" cried Pavel Pavlovitch. "I'm not making a fool of you! Do you know what you are to me now?" and he suddenly seized Velchaninoff's hand, and kissed it before Velchaninoff could recollect himself.

"There, that's what you are to me *now*; and now I'll go to the devil."

"Wait a bit—stop!" cried Velchaninoff, recollecting himself; "there's something I wished to say to you."

Pavel Pavlovitch turned back from the door.

"You see," began Velchaninoff, blushing and keeping his eye well away from the other, "you ought to go with me to the Pogoryeltseffs to-morrow—just to thank them, you know, and make their acquaintance."

"Of course, of course; quite so!" said Pavel Pavlovitch readily, and making a gesture of the hand to imply that he knew his duty, and there was no need to remind him of it.

"Besides Liza expects you anxiously—I promised her."

"Liza?" Pavel Pavlovitch turned quickly once more upon him. "Liza? Do you know, sir, what this Liza has been to me—has been and is?" he cried passionately and almost beside himself; "but—no!—afterwards—that shall be afterwards! Meanwhile it's not enough for

me, Alexey Ivanovitch, that we have drunk together; there's another satisfaction I must have, sir!" He placed his hat on a chair, and, panting with excitement, gazed at his companion with much the same expression as before.

"Kiss me, Alexey Ivanovitch!"

"Are you drunk?" cried the other, drawing back.

"Yes, I am—but kiss me all the same, Alexey Ivanovitch—oh, do! I kissed your hand just now, you know."

Alexey Ivanovitch was silent for a few moments, as though stunned by the blow of a cudgel. Then he quickly bent down to Pavel Pavlovitch (who was about the height of his shoulder), and kissed his lips, from which proceeded a disagreeably powerful odour of wine. He performed the action as though not quite certain of what he was doing.

"Well! *now, now!*" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, with drunken enthusiasm, and with his eyes flashing fiercely; "*now*—look here—I'll tell you what! I thought at that time: 'Surely not *he*, too! If *this* man,' I thought, 'if *this* man is guilty too—then whom am I ever to trust again!'"

Pavel Pavlovitch suddenly burst into tears.

"So now you must understand *how* dear a friend you are to me henceforth." With these words he took his hat and rushed out of the room.

Velchaninoff stood for several minutes in one spot, just as he had done after Pavel Pavlovitch's first visit.

"It's merely a drunken sally—nothing more!" he muttered.
"Absolutely nothing further!" he repeated, when he was undressed and settled down in his bed.

CHAPTER VIII

Next morning, while waiting for Pavel Pavlovitch, who had promised to be in good time in order to drive down to the Pogoryeltseffs with him, Velchaninoff walked up and down the room, sipped his coffee, and every other minute reflected upon one and the same idea; namely, that he felt like a man who had awaked from sleep with the deep impression of having received a box on the ear the last thing at night.

"Hm!" he thought, anxiously, "he understands the state of the case only too well; he'll take it out of me by means of Liza!" The dear image of the poor little girl danced before his eyes. His heart beat quicker when he reflected that to-day—in a couple of hours—he would see *his own* Liza once more. "Yes—there's no question about it," he said to himself; "my whole end and aim in life is *there* now! What do I care about all these 'memories' and boxes on the ear; and what have I lived for up to now?—for sorrow and discomfort—that's all! but *now*, now—it's all different!"

But in spite of his ecstatic feelings he grew more and more thoughtful.

"He is worrying me for Liza, that's plain; and he bullies Liza—he is going to take it out of me that way—for *all*! Hm! at all events I cannot possibly allow such sallies as his of last night," and Velchaninoff blushed hotly "and here's half-past eleven and he hasn't come yet." He waited long—till half-past twelve, and his anguish of impatience grew more and more keen. Pavel Pavlovitch did not appear. At length the idea began to take shape that Pavel Pavlovitch naturally would not come again for the sole purpose of another scene like that of last night. The thought filled Velchaninoff with despair. "The brute knows I am depending upon him—and what on

earth am I to do now about Liza? How can I make my appearance without him?"

At last he could bear it no longer and set off to the Pokrofsky at one o'clock to look for Pavel Pavlovitch.

At the lodging, Velchaninoff was informed that Pavel Pavlovitch had not been at home all night, and had only called in at nine o'clock, stayed a quarter of an hour, and had gone out again.

Velchaninoff stood at the door listening to the servants' report, mechanically tried the handle, recollected himself, and asked to see Maria Sisevna.

The latter obeyed his summons at once.

She was a kind-hearted old creature, of generous feelings, as Velchaninoff described her afterwards to Claudia Petrovna. Having first enquired as to his journey yesterday with Liza, Maria launched into anecdotes of Pavel Pavlovitch. She declared that she would long ago have turned her lodger out neck and crop, but for the child. Pavel Pavlovitch had been turned out of the hotel for generally disreputable behaviour. "Oh, he does dreadful things!" she continued. "Fancy his telling the poor child, in anger, that she wasn't his daughter, but——"

"Oh no, no! impossible!" cried Velchaninoff in alarm.

"I heard it myself! She's only a small child, of course, but that sort of thing doesn't do before an intelligent child like her! She cried dreadfully—she was quite upset. We had a catastrophe in the house a short while since. Some commissionaire or somebody took a room in the evening, and hung himself before morning. He had bolted with money, they say. Well, crowds of people came in to stare at him. Pavel Pavlovitch wasn't at home, but the child had escaped and was wandering about; and she must needs go with the rest to see the sight. I saw her looking at the suicide with an extraordinary

expression, and carried her off at once, of course; and fancy, I hardly managed to get home with her—trembling all over she was—when off she goes in a dead faint, and it was all I could do to bring her round at all. I don't know whether she's epileptic or what—and ever since that she has been ill. When her father heard, he came and pinched her all over—he doesn't beat her; he always pinches her like that,—then he went out and got drunk somewhere, and came back and frightened her. 'I'm going to hang myself too,' he says, 'because of you. I shall hang myself on that blind string there,' he says, and he makes a loop in the string before her very eyes. The poor little thing went quite out of her mind with terror, and cried and clasped him round with her little arms. 'I'll be good—I'll be good!' she shrieks. It was a pitiful sight—it was, indeed!"

Velchaninoff, though prepared for strange revelations concerning Pavel Pavlovitch and his ways, was quite dumbfounded by these tales; he could scarcely believe his ears.

Maria Sisevna told him many more such little anecdotes. Among others, there was one occasion, when, if she (Maria) had not been by, Liza would have thrown herself out of the window.

Pavel Pavlovitch had come staggering out of the room muttering, "I shall smash her head in with a stick! I shall murder her like a dog!" and he had gone away, repeating this over and over again to himself.

Velchaninoff hired a carriage and set off towards the Pogoryeltseffs. Before he had left the town behind him, the carriage was delayed by a block at a cross road, just by a small bridge, over which was passing, at the moment, a long funeral procession. There were carriages waiting to move on on both sides of the bridge, and a considerable crowd of foot passengers besides.

The funeral was evidently of some person of considerable importance, for the train of private and hired vehicles was a very

long one; and at the window of one of these carriages in the procession Velchaninoff suddenly beheld the face of Pavel Pavlovitch.

Velchaninoff would not have believed his eyes, but that Pavel Pavlovitch nodded his head and smiled to him. He seemed to be delighted to have recognised Velchaninoff; he even began to kiss his hand out of the window.

Velchaninoff jumped out of his own vehicle, and in spite of policemen, crowd, and everything else, elbowed his way to Pavel Pavlovitch's carriage window. He found the latter sitting alone.

"What are you doing?" he cried. "Why didn't you come to my house? Why are you here?"

"I'm paying a debt; don't shout so! I'm repaying a debt," said Pavel Pavlovitch, giggling and winking. "I'm escorting the mortal remains of my dear friend Stepan Michailovitch Bagantoff!"

"What absurdity, you drunken, insane creature," cried Velchaninoff louder than ever, and beside himself with outraged feeling. "Get out and come with me. Quick! get out instantly!"

"I can't. It's a debt——"

"I'll pull you out, then!" shouted Velchaninoff.

"Then I'll scream, sir, I'll scream!" giggled Pavel Pavlovitch, as merrily as ever, just as though the whole thing was a joke. However, he retreated into the further corner of the carriage, all the same.

"Look out, sir, look out! You'll be knocked down!" cried a policeman.

Sure enough, an outside carriage was making its way on to the bridge from the side, stopping the procession, and causing a commotion. Velchaninoff was obliged to spring aside, and the press

of carriages and people immediately separated him from Pavel Pavlovitch. He shrugged his shoulders and returned to his own vehicle.

"It's all the same. I couldn't take such a fellow with me, anyhow," he reflected, still all of a tremble with excitement and the rage of disgust. When he repeated Maria Sisevna's story, and his meeting at the funeral, to Claudia Petrovna afterwards, the latter became buried in deep thought.

"I am anxious for you," she said at last. "You must break off all relations with that man, and as soon as possible."

"Oh, he's nothing but a drunken fool!" cried Velchaninoff passionately; "as if I am to be afraid of *him*! And how can I break off relations with him? Remember Liza!"

Meanwhile Liza was lying ill; fever had set in last night, and an eminent doctor was momentarily expected from town! He had been sent for early this morning.

These news quite upset Velchaninoff. Claudia Petrovna took him in to see the patient.

"I observed her very carefully yesterday," she said, stopping at the door of Liza's room before entering it. "She is a proud and morose child. She is ashamed of being with us, and of having been thrown over by her father. In my opinion that is the whole secret of her illness."

"How 'thrown over'? Why do you suppose that he has thrown her over?"

"The simple fact that he allowed her to come here to a strange house, and with a man who was also a stranger, or nearly so; or, at all events, with whom his relations were such that——"

“Oh, but I took her myself, almost by force.”

Liza was not surprised to see Velchaninoff alone. She only smiled bitterly, and turned her hot face to the wall. She made no reply to his passionate promises to bring her father down to-morrow without fail, or to his timid attempts at consolation.

As soon as Velchaninoff left the sick child's presence, he burst into tears.

The doctor did not arrive until evening. On seeing the patient he frightened everybody by his very first remark, observing that it was a pity he had not been sent for before.

When informed that the child had only been taken ill last night, he could not believe it at first.

“Well, it all depends upon how this night is passed,” he decided at last.

Having made all necessary arrangements, he took his departure, promising to come as early as possible next morning.

Velchaninoff was anxious to stay the night, but Claudia Petrovna begged him to try once more “to bring down that brute of a man.”

“Try once more!” cried Velchaninoff, passionately; “why, I'll tie him hand and foot and bring him along myself!”

The idea that he would tie Pavel Pavlovitch up and carry him down in his arms overpowered Velchaninoff, and filled him with impatience to execute his frantic desire.

“I don't feel the slightest bit guilty before him any more,” he said to Claudia Petrovna, at parting, “and I withdraw all my servile, abject words of yesterday—all I said to you,” he added, wrathfully.

Liza lay with closed eyes, apparently asleep; she seemed to be better. When Velchaninoff bent cautiously over her in order to kiss—if it were but the edge of her bed linen—she suddenly opened her eyes, just as though she had been waiting for him, and whispered, “Take me away!”

It was but a quiet, sad petition—without a trace of yesterday's irritation; but at the same time there was that in her voice which betrayed that she made the request in the full knowledge that it could not be assented to.

No sooner did Velchaninoff, in despair, begin to assure her as tenderly as he could that what she desired was impossible, than she silently closed her eyes and said not another word, just as though she neither saw nor heard him.

Arrived in town Velchaninoff told his man to drive him to the Pokrofsky. It was ten o'clock at night.

Pavel Pavlovitch was not at his lodgings. Velchaninoff waited for him half an hour, walking up and down the passage in a state of feverish impatience. Maria Sisevna assured him at last that Pavel Pavlovitch would not come in until the small hours.

“Well, then, I'll return here before daylight,” he said, beside himself with desperation, and he went home to his own rooms.

What was his amazement, when, on arriving at the gate of his house, he learned from Mavra that “yesterday's visitor” had been waiting for him ever since before ten o'clock.

“He's had some tea,” she added, “and sent me for wine again—the same wine as yesterday. He gave me the money to buy it with.”

CHAPTER IX

Pavel Pavlovitch had made himself very comfortable. He was sitting in the same chair as he had occupied yesterday, smoking a cigar, and had just poured the fourth and last tumbler of champagne out of the bottle.

The teapot and a half-emptied tumbler of tea stood on the table beside him; his red face beamed with benevolence. He had taken off his coat, and sat in his shirt sleeves.

"Forgive me, dearest of friends," he cried, catching sight of Velchaninoff, and hastening to put on his coat, "I took it off to make myself thoroughly comfortable."

Velchaninoff approached him menacingly.

"You are not quite tipsy yet, are you? Can you understand what is said to you?"

Paul Pavlovitch became a little confused.

"No, not quite. I've been thinking of the dear deceased a bit, but I'm not quite drunk yet."

"Can you understand what I say?"

"My dear sir, I came here on purpose to understand you."

"Very well, then I shall begin at once by telling you that you are an ass, sir!" cried Velchaninoff, at the top of his voice.

"Why, if you begin that way where will you end, I wonder!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, clearly alarmed more than a little.

Velchaninoff did not listen, but roared again,

"Your daughter is dying—she is very ill! Have you thrown her over altogether, or not?"

"Oh, surely she isn't dying yet?"

"I tell you she's ill; very, very ill—dangerously ill."

"What, fits? or——"

"Don't talk nonsense. I tell you she is very dangerously ill. You ought to go down, if only for that reason."

"What, to thank your friends, eh? to return thanks for their hospitality? Of course, quite so; I well understand, Alexey Ivanovitch—dearest of friends!" He suddenly seized Velchaninoff by both hands, and added with intoxicated sentiment, almost melted to tears, "Alexey Ivanovitch, don't shout at me—don't shout at me, please! If you do, I may throw myself into the Neva—I don't know!—and we have such important things to talk over. There's lots of time to go to the Pogoryeltseffs another day."

Velchaninoff did his best to restrain his wrath. "You are drunk, and therefore I don't understand what you are driving at," he said sternly. "I'm ready to come to an explanation with you at any moment you like—delighted!—the the sooner the better. But first let me tell you that I am going to take my own measures to secure you. You will sleep here to-night, and to-morrow I shall take you with me to see Liza. I shall not let you go again. I shall bind you, if necessary, and carry you down myself. How do you like this sofa to

sleep on?" he added, panting, and indicating a wide, soft divan opposite his own sofa, against the other wall.

"Oh—anything will do for me!"

"Very well, you shall have this sofa. Here, take these things—here are sheets, blankets, pillow" (Velchaninoff pulled all these things out of a cupboard, and tossed them impatiently to Pavel Pavlovitch, who humbly stood and received them); "now then, make your bed,—come, bustle up!"

Pavel Pavlovitch laden with bed clothes had been standing in the middle of the room with a stupid drunken leer on his face, irresolute; but at Velchaninoff's second bidding he hurriedly began the task of making his bed, moving the table away from in front of it, and smoothing a sheet over the seat of the divan. Velchaninoff approached to help him. He was more or less gratified with his guest's alarm and submission.

"Now, drink up that wine and lie down!" was his next command. He felt that he *must* order this man about, he could not help himself. "I suppose you took upon yourself to order this wine, did you?"

"I did—I did, sir! I sent for the wine, Alexey Ivanovitch, because I knew *you* would not send out again!"

"Well, it's a good thing that you knew that; but I desire that you should know still more. I give you notice that I have taken my own measures for the future, I'm not going to put up with any more of your antics."

"Oh, I quite understand, Alexey Ivanovitch, that that sort of thing could only happen once!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, giggling feebly.

At this reply Velchaninoff, who had been marching up and down the room stopped solemnly before Pavel Pavlovitch.

"Pavel Pavlovitch," he said, "speak plainly! You are a clever fellow—I admit the fact freely,—but I assure you you are going on a false track now. Speak plainly, and act like an honest man, and I give you my word of honour that I will answer all you wish to know."

Pavel Pavlovitch grinned his disagreeable grin (which always drove Velchaninoff wild) once more.

"Wait!" cried the latter. "No humbug now, please; I see through you. I repeat that I give you my word of honour to reply candidly to anything you may like to ask, and to give you every sort of satisfaction—reasonable or even unreasonable—that you please. *Oh!* how I wish I could make you understand me!"

"Since you are so very kind," began Pavel Pavlovitch, cautiously bending towards him, "I may tell you that I am very much interested as to what you said yesterday about 'bird of prey'?"

Velchaninoff spat on the ground in utter despair and disgust, and recommenced his walk up and down the room, quicker than ever.

"No, no, Alexey Ivanovitch, don't spurn my question; you don't know how interested I am in it. I assure you I came here on purpose to ask you about it. I know I'm speaking indistinctly, but you'll forgive me that. I've read the expression before. Tell me now, was Bagantoff a 'bird of prey,' or—the other thing? How is one to distinguish one from the other?"

Velchaninoff went on walking up and down, and answered nothing for some minutes.

"The bird of prey, sir," he began suddenly, stopping in front of Pavel Pavlovitch, and speaking vehemently, "is the man who would poison Bagantoff while drinking champagne with him under the cloak of goodfellowship, as you did with me yesterday, instead of escorting his wretched body to the burial ground as you did—the deuce only knows why, and with what dirty, mean, underhand, petty

motives, which only recoil upon yourself and make you viler than you already are. Yes, sir, recoil upon yourself!"

"Quite so, quite so, I oughtn't to have gone," assented Pavel Pavlovitch, "but aren't you a little——"

"The bird of prey is not a man who goes and learns his grievance off by heart, like a lesson, and whines it about the place, grimacing and posing, and hanging it round other people's necks, and who spends all his time in such pettifogging. Is it true you wanted to hang yourself? Come, is it true, or not?"

"I—I don't know—I may have when I was drunk—I don't remember. You see, Alexey Ivanovitch, it wouldn't be quite nice for me to go poisoning people. I'm too high up in the service, and I have money, too, you know—and I may wish to marry again, who knows."

"Yes; you'd be sent to Siberia, which would be awkward."

"Quite so; though they say the penal servitude is not so bad as it was. But you remind me of an anecdote, Alexey Ivanovitch. I thought of it in the carriage, and meant to tell you afterwards. Well! you may remember Liftsoff at T——. He came while you were there. His younger brother—who is rather a swell, too—was serving at L —— under the governor, and one fine day he happened to quarrel with Colonel Golubenko in the presence of ladies, and of one lady especially. Liftsoff considered himself insulted, but concealed his grievance; and, meanwhile, Golubenko proposed to a certain lady and was accepted. Would you believe it, Liftsoff made great friends with Golubenko, and even volunteered to be best man at his wedding. But when the ceremony was all over, and Liftsoff approached the bridegroom to wish him joy and kiss him, as usual, he took the opportunity of sticking a knife into Golubenko. Fancy! his own best man stuck him! Well, what does the assassin do but run about the room crying. 'Oh! what have I done? Oh! what have I

done?' says he, and throws himself on everyone's neck by turns, ladies and all! Ha-ha-ha! He starved to death in Siberia, sir! One is a little sorry for Golubenko; but he recovered, after all."

"I don't understand why you told me that story," said Velchaninoff, frowning heavily.

"Why, because he stuck the other fellow with a knife," giggled Pavel Pavlovitch, "which proves that he was no type, but an ass of a fellow, who could so forget the ordinary manners of society as to hang around ladies' necks, and in the presence of the governor, too—and yet he stuck the other fellow. Ha-ha-ha! He did what he intended to do, that's all, sir!"

"Go to the devil, will you—you and your miserable humbug—you miserable humbug yourself," yelled Velchaninoff, wild with rage and fury, and panting so that he could hardly get his words out. "You think you are going to alarm *me*, do you, you frightener of children—you mean beast—you low scoundrel you?—scoundrel—scoundrel—scoundrel!" He had quite forgotten himself in his rage.

Pavel Pavlovitch shuddered all over; his drunkenness seemed to vanish in an instant; his lips trembled and shook.

"Are you calling *me* a scoundrel, Alexey Ivanovitch—you—*me*?"

But Velchaninoff was himself again now.

"I'll apologise if you like," he said, and relapsed into gloomy silence. After a moment he added, "But only on condition that you yourself agree to speak out fully, and at once."

"In your place I should apologise unconditionally, Alexey Ivanovitch."

"Very well; so be it then." Velchaninoff was silent again for a while. "I apologise," he resumed; "but admit yourself, Pavel Pavlovitch, that

I need not feel myself in any way bound to you after this. I mean with regard to *anything*—not only this particular matter.”

“All right! Why, what is there to settle between us?” laughed Pavel Pavlovitch, without looking up.

“In that case, so much the better—so much the better. Come, drink up your wine and get into bed, for I shall not let you go now, anyhow.”

“Oh, my wine—never mind my wine!” muttered Pavel Pavlovitch; but he went to the table all the same, and took up his tumbler of champagne which had long been poured out. Either he had been drinking copiously before, or there was some other unknown cause at work, but his hand shook so as he drank the wine that a quantity of it was spilled over his waistcoat and the floor. However, he drank it all, to the last drop, as though he could not leave the tumbler without emptying it. He then placed the empty glass on the table, approached his bed, sat down on it, and began to undress.

“I think perhaps I had better *not* sleep here,” he said suddenly, with one boot off, and half undressed.

“Well, I *don't* think so,” said Velchaninoff, who was walking up and down, without looking at him.

Pavel Pavlovitch finished undressing and lay down. A quarter of an hour later Velchaninoff also got into bed, and put the candle out.

He soon began to doze uncomfortably. Some new trouble seemed to have suddenly come over him and worried him, and at the same time he felt a sensation of shame that he could allow himself to be worried by the new trouble. Velchaninoff was just falling definitely asleep, however, when a rustling sound awoke him. He immediately glanced at Pavel Pavlovitch's bed. The room was quite dark, the blinds being down and curtains drawn; but it seemed to him that

Pavel Pavlovitch was not lying in his bed; he seemed to be sitting on the side of it.

"What's the matter?" cried Velchaninoff.

"A ghost, sir," said Pavel Pavlovitch, in a low tone, after a few moments of silence.

"What? What sort of a ghost?"

"Th—there—in that room—just at the door, I seemed to see a ghost!"

"Whose ghost?" asked Velchaninoff, pausing a minute before putting the question.

"Natalia Vasilievna's!"

Velchaninoff jumped out of bed and walked to the door, whence he could see into the room opposite, across the passage. There were no curtains in that room, so that it was much lighter than his own.

"There's nothing there at all. You are drunk; lie down again!" he said, and himself set the example, rolling his blanket around him.

Pavel Pavlovitch said nothing, but lay down as he was told.

"Did you ever see any ghosts before?" asked Velchaninoff suddenly, ten minutes later.

"I think I saw one once," said Pavel Pavlovitch in the same low voice; after which there was silence once more. Velchaninoff was not sure whether he had been asleep or not, but an hour or so had passed, when suddenly he was wide awake again. Was it a rustle that awoke him? He could not tell; but one thing was evident—in the midst of the profound darkness of the room something white stood

before him; not quite close to him, but about the middle of the room. He sat up in bed, and stared for a full minute.

"Is that you, Pavel Pavlovitch?" he asked. His voice sounded very weak.

There was no reply; but there was not the slightest doubt of the fact that someone was standing there.

"Is that you, Pavel Pavlovitch?" cried Velchaninoff again, louder this time; in fact, so loud that if the former had been asleep in bed he must have started up and answered.

But there was no reply again. It seemed to Velchaninoff that the white figure had approached nearer to him.

Then something strange happened; something seemed to "let go" within Velchaninoff's system, and he commenced to shout at the top of his voice, just as he had done once before this evening, in the wildest and maddest way possible, panting so that he could hardly articulate his words: "If you—drunken ass that you are—dare to think that you could frighten *me*, I'll turn my face to the wall, and not look round once the whole night, to show you how little I am afraid of you—a fool like you—if you stand there from now till morning! I despise you!" So saying, Velchaninoff twisted round with his face to the wall, rolled his blanket round him, and lay motionless, as though turned to stone. A deathlike stillness supervened.

Did the ghost stand where it was, or had it moved? He could not tell; but his heart beat, and beat, and beat—At least five minutes went by, and then, not a couple of paces from his bed, there came the feeble voice of Pavel Pavlovitch:

"I got up, Alexey Ivanovitch, to look for a little water. I couldn't find any, and was just going to look about nearer your bed——"

"Then why didn't you answer when I called?" cried Velchaninoff angrily, after a minute's pause.

"I was frightened; you shouted so, you alarmed me!"

"You'll find a caraffe and glass over there, on the little table. Light a candle."

"Oh, I'll find it without. You'll forgive me, Alexey Ivanovitch, for frightening you so; I felt thirsty so suddenly."

But Velchaninoff said nothing. He continued to lie with his face to the wall, and so he lay all night, without turning round once. Was he anxious to keep his word and show his contempt for Pavel Pavlovitch? He did not know himself why he did it; his nervous agitation and perturbation were such that he could not sleep for a long while, he felt quite delirious. At last he fell asleep, and awoke at past nine o'clock next morning. He started up just as though someone had struck him, and sat down on the side of his bed. But Pavel Pavlovitch was not to be seen. His empty, rumpled bed was there, but its occupant had flown before daybreak.

"I thought so!" cried Velchaninoff, bringing the palm of his right hand smartly to his forehead.

CHAPTER X

The doctor's anxiety was justified; Liza grew worse, so much so that it was clear she was far more seriously ill than Velchaninoff and Claudia Petrovna had thought the day before.

When the former arrived in the morning, Liza was still conscious, though burning with fever. He assured his friend Claudia, afterwards, that the child had smiled at him and held out her little hot hand. Whether she actually did so, or whether he so much longed for her to do so that he imagined it done, is uncertain.

By the evening, however, Liza was quite unconscious, and so she remained during the whole of her illness. Ten days after her removal to the country she died.

This was a sad period for Velchaninoff; the Pogoryeltseffs were quite anxious on his account. He was with them for the greater part of the time, and during the last few days of the little one's illness, he used to sit all alone for hours together in some corner, apparently thinking of nothing. Claudia Petrovna would attempt to distract him but he hardly answered her, and conversation was clearly painful to him. Claudia was quite surprised that "all this" should affect him so deeply.

The children were the best consolation and distraction for him; with them he could even laugh and play at intervals. Every hour, at least, he would rise from his chair and creep on tip-toes to the sick-room to look at the little invalid. Sometimes he imagined that she knew him; he had no hope for her recovery—none of the family had any hope; but he never left the precincts of the child's chamber, sitting principally in the next room.

Twice, however, he had evinced great activity of a sudden; he had jumped up and started off for town, where he had called upon all the most eminent doctors of the place, and arranged consultations between them. The last consultation was on the day before Liza's death.

Claudia Petrovna had spoken seriously to him a day or two since, as to the absolute necessity of hunting up Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky,

because in case of anything happening to Liza, she could not be buried without certain documents from him.

Velchaninoff promised to write to him, and did write a couple of lines, which he took to the Pokrofsky. Pavel Pavlovitch was not at home, as usual, but he left the letter to the care of Maria Sisevna.

At last Liza died—on a lovely summer evening, just as the sun was setting; and only then did Velchaninoff rouse himself.

When the little one was laid out, all covered with flowers, and dressed in a fair white frock belonging to one of Claudia Petrovna's children, Velchaninoff came up to the lady of the house, and told her with flashing eyes that he would now go and fetch the murderer. Regardless of all advice to put off his search until to-morrow he started for town immediately.

He knew where to find Pavel Pavlovitch. He had not been in town exclusively to find the doctors those two days. Occasionally, while watching the dying child, he had been struck with the idea that if he could only find and bring down Pavel Pavlovitch she might hear his voice and be called back, as it were, from the darkness of delirium; at such moments he had been seized with desperation, and twice he had started up and driven wildly off to town in order to find Pavel Pavlovitch.

The latter's room was the same as before, but it was useless to look for him there, for, according to Maria Sisevna's report, he was now two or three days absent from home at a stretch, and was generally to be found with some friends in the Voznecensky.

Arrived in town about ten o'clock, Velchaninoff went straight to these latter people, and securing the services of a member of the family to assist in finding Pavel Pavlovitch, set out on his quest. He did not know what he should do with Pavel Pavlovitch when found, whether he should kill him then and there, or simply inform him of the death of the child, and of the necessity for his assistance in

arranging for her funeral. After a long and fruitless search Velchaninoff found Pavel Pavlovitch quite accidentally; he was quarrelling with some person in the street—tipsy as usual, and seemed to be getting the worst of the controversy, which appeared to be about a money claim.

On catching sight of Velchaninoff, Pavel Pavlovitch stretched out his arms to him and begged for help; while his opponent—observing Velchaninoff's athletic figure—made off. Pavel Pavlovitch shook his fist after him triumphantly, and hooted at him with cries of victory; but this amusement was brought to a sudden conclusion by Velchaninoff, who, impelled by some mysterious motive—which he could not analyse, took him by the shoulders, and began to shake him violently, so violently that his teeth chattered.

Pavel Pavlovitch ceased to shout after his opponent, and gazed with a stupid tipsy expression of alarm at his new antagonist. Velchaninoff, having shaken him till he was tired, and not knowing what to do next with him, set him down violently on the pavement, backwards.

“Liza is dead!” he said.

Pavel Pavlovitch sat on the pavement and stared, he was too far gone to take in the news. At last he seemed to realize.

“Dead!” he whispered, in a strange inexplicable tone. Velchaninoff was not sure whether his face was simply twitching, or whether he was trying to grin in his usual disagreeable way; but the next moment the drunkard raised his shaking hand to cross himself. He then struggled to his feet and staggered off, appearing totally oblivious of the fact that such a person as Velchaninoff existed.

However, the latter very soon pursued and caught him, seizing him once more by the shoulder.

"Do you understand, you drunken sot, that without you the funeral arrangements cannot be made?" he shouted, panting with rage.

Pavel Pavlovitch turned his head.

"The artillery—lieutenant—don't you remember him?" he muttered, thickly.

"*What?*" cried Velchaninoff, with a shudder.

"He's her father—find him! he'll bury her!"

"You liar! You said that out of pure malice. I thought you'd invent something of the sort!"

Quite beside himself with passion Velchaninoff brought down his powerful fist with all his strength on Pavel Pavlovitch's head; another moment and he might have followed up the blow and slain the man as he stood. His victim never winced, but he turned upon Velchaninoff a face of such insane terrible passion, that his whole visage looked distorted.

"Do you understand Russian?" he asked more firmly, as though his fury had chased away the effects of drunkenness. "Very well, then, you are a——!" (here followed a specimen of the very vilest language which the Russian tongue could furnish); "and now you can go back to her!" So saying he tore himself from Velchaninoff's grasp, nearly knocking himself over with the effort, and staggered away. Velchaninoff did not follow him.

Next day, however, a most respectable-looking middle-aged man arrived at the Pogoryeltseff's house, in civil uniform, and handed to Claudia Petrovna a packet addressed to her "from Pavel Pavlovitch Trusotsky."

In this packet was a sum of three hundred roubles, together with all certificates necessary for Liza's funeral. Pavel Pavlovitch had written a short note couched in very polite and correct phraseology, and thanking Claudia Petrovna sincerely "for her great kindness to the orphan—kindness for which heaven alone could recompense her." He added rather confusedly that severe illness prevented his personal presence at the funeral of his "tenderly loved and unfortunate daughter," but that he "felt he could repose all confidence (as to the ceremony being fittingly performed) in the angelic goodness of Claudia Petrovna." The three hundred roubles, he explained, were to go towards the funeral and other expenses. If there should be any of the money left after defraying all charges, Claudia Petrovna was requested to spend the same in prayers for the repose of the soul of the deceased.

Nothing further was to be discovered by questioning the messenger; and it was soon evident that the latter knew nothing, excepting that he had only consented to act as bearer of the packet, in response to the urgent appeal of Pavel Pavlovitch.

Pogoryeltseff was a little offended by the offer of money for expenses, and would have sent it back, but Claudia Petrovna suggested that a receipt should be taken from the cemetery authorities for the cost of the funeral (since one could not well refuse to allow a man to bury his own child), together with a document undertaking that the rest of the three hundred roubles should be spent in prayer for the soul of Liza.

Velchaninoff afterwards posted an envelope containing these two papers to Trusotsky's lodging.

After the funeral Velchaninoff disappeared from the country altogether. He wandered about town for a whole fortnight, knocking up against people as he went blindly through the streets. Now and then he spent a whole day lying in his bed, oblivious of the most ordinary needs and occupations; the Pogoryeltseffs often invited him

to their house, and he invariably promised to come, and as invariably forgot all about it. Claudia Petrovna went as far as to call for him herself, but she did not find him at home. The same thing happened with his lawyer, who had some good news to tell him. The difference with his opponent had been settled advantageously for Velchaninoff, the former having accepted a small bonification and renounced his claim to the property in dispute. All that was wanting was the formal acquiescence of Velchaninoff himself.

Finding him at home at last, after many endeavours, the lawyer was excessively surprised to discover that Velchaninoff was as callous and cool as to the result of his (the lawyer's) labours, as he had before been ardent and excitable.

The hottest days of July had now arrived, but Velchaninoff was oblivious of everything. His grief swelled and ached at his heart like some internal boil; his greatest sorrow was that Liza had not had time to know him, and died without ever guessing how fondly he loved her. The sweet new beacon of his life, which had glimmered for a short while within his heart, was extinguished once more, and lost in eternal gloom.

The whole object of his existence, as he now told himself at every moment, should have been that Liza might feel his love about her and around her, each day, each hour, each moment of her life.

"There can be no higher aim or object than this in life," he thought, in gloomy ecstasy. "If there be other aims in life, none can be holier or better than this of mine. All my old unworthy life should have been purified and atoned for by my love for Liza; in place of myself—my sinful, worn-out, useless life—I should have bequeathed to the world a sweet, pure, beautiful being, in whose innocence all my guilt should have been absorbed, and lost, and forgiven, and in her I should have forgiven myself."

Such thoughts would flit through Velchaninoff's head as he mused sorrowfully over the memory of the dead child. He thought over all he had seen of her; he recalled her little face all burning with fever, then lying at rest in her coffin, covered with lovely flowers. He remembered that once he had noticed that one of her fingers was quite black from some bruise or pinch—goodness knows what had made it so, but it was the sight of that little finger which had filled him with longing to go straight away and *murder* Pavel Pavlovitch.

“Do you know what Liza is to me?” Pavel had said, he recollected, one day; and now he understood the exclamation. It was no pretence of love, no posturing and nonsense—it was real love! How, then, could the wretch have been so cruel to a child whom he so dearly loved? He could not bear to think of it, the question was painful, and quite unanswerable.

One day he wandered down—he knew not exactly how—to the cemetery where Liza was buried, and hunted up her grave. This was the first time he had been there since the funeral; he had never dared to go there before, fearing that the visit would be too painful. But strangely enough, when he found the little mound and had bent down and kissed it, he felt happier and lighter at heart than before.

It was a lovely evening, the sun was setting, the tall grass waved about the tombs, and a bee hummed somewhere near him. The flowers and crosses placed on the tomb by Claudia Petrovna were still there. A ray of hope blazed up in his heart for the first time for many a long day. “How light-hearted I feel,” he thought, as he felt the spell of the quiet of God's Acre, and the hush of the beautiful still evening. A flow of some indefinable faith in something poured into his heart.

“This is Liza's gift,” he thought; “this is Liza herself talking to me!”

It was quite dark when he left the cemetery and turned his steps homewards.

Not far from the gate of the burial ground there stood a small inn or public-house, and through the open windows he could see the people inside sitting at tables. It instantly struck Velchaninoff that one of the guests, sitting nearest to the window, was Pavel Pavlovitch, and that the latter had seen him and was observing him curiously.

He went on further, but before very long he heard footsteps pursuing him. It was, of course, Pavel Pavlovitch. Probably the unusually serene and peaceful expression of Velchaninoff's face as he went by had attracted and encouraged him.

He soon caught Velchaninoff up, and smiled timidly at him, but not with the old drunken grin. He did not appear to be in the smallest degree drunk.

"Good evening," said Pavel Pavlovitch.

"How d'ye do?" replied Velchaninoff.

CHAPTER XI

By replying thus to Pavel Pavlovitch's greeting Velchaninoff surprised himself. It seemed strange indeed to him that he should now meet this man without any feeling of anger, and that there should be something quite novel in his feelings towards Pavel Pavlovitch—a sort of call to new relations with him.

"What a lovely evening!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, looking observantly into the other's eyes.

"So you haven't gone away yet!" murmured Velchaninoff, not in a tone of inquiry, but as though musing upon the fact as he continued to walk on.

"I've been a good deal delayed; but I've obtained my petition, my new post, with rise of salary. I'm off the day after to-morrow for certain."

"What? You've obtained the new situation?"

"And why not?" said Pavel Pavlovitch, with a crooked smile.

"Oh, I meant nothing particular by my remark!" said Velchaninoff frowning, and glancing sidelong at his companion. To his surprise Pavel Pavlovitch, both in dress and appearance, even down to the hat with the crape band, was incomparably neater and tidier-looking than he was wont to be a fortnight since.

"Why was he sitting in the public-house then?" thought Velchaninoff. This fact puzzled him much.

"I wished to let you know of my other great joy, Alexey Ivanovitch!" resumed Pavel.

"Joy?"

"I'm going to marry."

"What?"

"Yes, sir! after sorrow, joy! It is ever thus in life. Oh! Alexey Ivanovitch, I should so much like if—but you look as though you were in a great hurry."

"Yes, I am in a hurry, and I am ill besides." He felt as though he would give anything to get rid of the man; the feeling of readiness to

develop new and better relations with him had vanished in a moment.

"I should so much like——"

Pavel Pavlovitch did not finish his sentence; Velchaninoff kept silence and waited.

"In that case, perhaps another time—if we should happen to meet."

"Yes, yes, another time," said Velchaninoff quickly, continuing to move along, and never looking at his companion.

Nothing was said for another minute or two. Pavel Pavlovitch continued to trot alongside.

"In that case, *au revoir*," he blurted, at last. "*Au revoir!* I hope ——"

Velchaninoff did not think it necessary to hear him complete his sentence; he left Pavel, and returned home much agitated. The meeting with "that fellow" had been too much for his present state of mind. As he lay down upon his bed the thought came over him once more: "Why was that fellow there, close to the cemetery?" He determined to go down to the Pogoryeltseffs' next morning; not that he felt inclined to go—any sympathy was intolerably painful to him, —but they had been so kind and so anxious about him, that he must really make up his mind to go. But next day, while finishing his breakfast, he felt terribly disinclined for the visit; he felt, as it were, shy of meeting them for the first time after his grief. "Shall I go or not?" he was saying to himself, as he sat at his table. When suddenly, to his extreme amazement, in walked Pavel Pavlovitch.

In spite of yesterday's *rencontre*, Velchaninoff could not have believed that this man would ever enter his rooms again; and when he now saw him appear, he gazed at him in such absolute

astonishment, that he simply did not know what to say. But Pavel Pavlovitch took the management of the matter into his own hands; he said "good morning," and sat down in the very same chair which he had occupied on his last visit, three weeks since.

This circumstance reminded Velchaninoff too painfully of that visit, and he glared at his visitor with disgust and some agitation.

"You are surprised, I see!" said Pavel Pavlovitch, reading the other's expression.

He seemed to be both freer, more at his ease, and yet more timid than yesterday. His outward appearance was very curious to behold; for Pavel Pavlovitch was not only *neatly* dressed, he was "got up" in the pink of fashion. He had on a neat summer overcoat, with a pair of light trousers and a white waistcoat; his gloves, his gold eye-glasses (quite a new acquisition), and his linen were quite above all criticism; he wafted an odour of sweet scent when he moved. He looked funny, but his appearance awakened strange thoughts besides.

"Of course I have surprised you, Alexey Ivanovitch," he said, twisting himself about; "I see it. But in my opinion there should be a something exalted, something higher—untouched and unattainable by petty discords, or the ordinary conditions of life, between man and man. Don't you agree with me, sir?"

"Pavel Pavlovitch, say what you have to say as quickly as you can, and without further ceremony," said Velchaninoff, frowning angrily.

"In a couple of words, sir," said Pavel, hurriedly, "I am going to be married, and I am now off to see my bride—at once. She lives in the country; and what I desire is, the profound honour of introducing *you* to the family, sir; in fact, I have come here to petition you, sir" (Pavel Pavlovitch bent his head deferentially)—"to beg you to go down with me."

"Go down with you? Where to?" cried the other, his eyes starting out of his head.

"To their house in the country, sir. Forgive me, my dear sir, if I am too agitated, and confuse my words; but I am so dreadfully afraid of hearing you refuse me."

He looked at Velchaninoff plaintively.

"You wish me to accompany you to see your bride?" said Velchaninoff, staring keenly at Pavel Pavlovitch; he could not believe either his eyes or his ears.

"Yes—yes, sir!" murmured Pavel, who had suddenly become timid to a painful degree. "Don't be angry, Alexey Ivanovitch, it is not my audacity that prompts me to ask you this; I do it with all humility, and conscious of the unusual nature of my petition. I—I thought perhaps you would not refuse my humble request."

"In the first place, the thing is absolutely out of the question," said Velchaninoff, turning away in considerable mental perturbation.

"It is only my immeasurable longing that prompts me to ask you. I confess I have a reason for desiring it, which reason I propose to reveal to you afterwards; just now I——"

"The thing is quite impossible, however you may look at it. You must admit yourself that it is so!" cried Velchaninoff. Both men had risen from their chairs in the excitement of the conversation.

"Not at all—not at all; it is quite possible, sir. In the first place, I merely propose to introduce you as my friend; and in the second place, you know the family already, the Zachlebnikoff's—State Councillor Zachlebnikoff!"

"What? how so?" cried Velchaninoff. This was the very man whom he had so often tried to find at home, and whom he never

succeeded in hunting down—the very lawyer who had acted for his adversary in the late legal proceedings.

“Why, certainly—certainly!” cried Pavel Pavlovitch, apparently taking heart at Velchaninoff's extreme display of amazement. “The very same man whom I saw you talking to in the street one day; when I watched you from the other side of the road, I was waiting my turn to speak to him then. We served in the same department twelve years since. I had no thought of all this that day I saw you with him; the whole idea is quite new and sudden—only a week old.”

“But—excuse me; why, surely this is a most respectable family, isn't it?” asked Velchaninoff, naïvely.

“Well, and what if it is respectable?” said Pavel, with a twist.

“Oh, no—of course, I meant nothing; but, so far as I could judge from what I saw, there——”

“They remember—they remember your coming down,” cried Pavel delightedly. “I told them all sorts of flattering things about you.”

“But, look here, how are you to marry within three months of your late wife's death?”

“Oh! the wedding needn't be at once. The wedding can come off in nine or ten months, so that I shall have been in mourning exactly a year. Believe me, my dear sir, it's all most charming—first place, Fedosie Petrovitch has known me since I was a child; he knew my late wife; he knows how much income I have; he knows all about my little private capital, and all about my new increase of salary. So that you see the whole thing is a mere matter of weights and scales.”

“Is she a daughter of his, then?”

"I'll tell you all about it," said Pavel, licking his lips with pleasure. "May I smoke a cigarette? Now, you see, men like Fedosie Petrovitch Zachlebnikoff are much valued in the State; but, excepting for a few perquisites allowed them, the pay is wretched; they live well enough, but they cannot possibly lay by money. Now, imagine, this man has eight daughters and only one little boy: if he were to die there would be nothing but a wretched little pension to keep the lot of them. Just imagine now—*boots* alone for such a family, eh? Well, out of these eight girls five are marriageable, the eldest is twenty-four already (a splendid girl, she is, you shall see her for yourself). The sixth is a girl of fifteen, still at school. Well, all those five elder girls have to be trotted about and shown off, and what does all that sort of thing cost the poor father, sir? They must be married. Then suddenly I appear on the scene—the first probable bridegroom in the family, and they all know that I have money. Well, there you are, sir—the thing's done."

Pavel Pavlovitch was intoxicated with enthusiasm.

"Are you engaged to the eldest?"

"N—no;—not the eldest. I am wooing the sixth girl, the one at school."

"What?" cried Velchaninoff, laughing in spite of himself. "Why, you say yourself she's only fifteen years old."

"Fifteen *now*, sir; but she'll be sixteen in nine months—sixteen and three months—so why not? It wouldn't be quite nice to make the engagement public just yet, though; so there's to be nothing formal at present, it's only a private arrangement between the parents and myself so far. Believe me, my dear sir, the whole thing is apple-pie, regular and charming."

"Then it isn't quite settled yet?"

"Oh, *quite* settled—quite settled. Believe me, it's all as right and tight as——"

"Does *she* know?"

"Well, you see, just for form's sake, it is not actually talked about—to her I mean,—but she *knows* well enough. Oh! now you *will* make me happy this once, Alexey Ivanovitch, won't you?" he concluded, with extreme timidity of voice and manner.

"But why should *I* go with you? However," added Velchaninoff impatiently, "as I am not going in any case, I don't see why I should hear any reasons you may adduce for my accompanying you."

"Alexey Ivanovitch!——"

"Oh, come! you don't suppose I am going to sit down in a carriage with you alongside, and drive down there! Come, just think for yourself!"

The feeling of disgust and displeasure which Pavel Pavlovitch had awakened in him before, had now started into life again after the momentary distraction of the man's foolery about his bride. He felt that in another minute or two he might kick the fellow out before he realized what he was doing. He felt angry with himself for some reason or other.

"Sit down, Alexey Ivanovitch, sit down! You shall not repent it!" said Pavel Pavlovitch in a wheedling voice. "No, no, no!" he added, deprecating the impatient gesture which Velchaninoff made at this moment. "Alexey Ivanovitch, I entreat you to pause before you decide definitely. I see you have quite misunderstood me. I quite realize that I am not for you, nor you for me! I am not quite so absurd as to be unaware of that fact. The service I ask of you now shall not compromise you in any way for the future. I am going away the day after to-morrow, for certain; let this one day be an exceptional one for me, sir. I came to you founding my hopes upon

the generosity and nobility of your heart, Alexey Ivanovitch—upon those special tender feelings which may, perhaps, have been aroused in you by late events. Am I explaining myself clearly, sir; or do you still misunderstand me?”

The agitation of Pavel Pavlovitch was increasing with every moment.

Velchaninoff gazed curiously at him.

“You ask a service of me,” he said thoughtfully, “and insist strongly upon my performance of it. This is very suspicious, in my opinion; I must know more.”

“The whole service I ask is merely that you will come with me; and I promise, when we return that I will lay bare my heart to you as though we were at a confessional. Trust me this once, Alexey Ivanovitch!”

But Velchaninoff still held out, and the more obstinately because he was conscious of a certain worrying feeling which he had had ever since Pavel Pavlovitch began to talk about his bride. Whether this feeling was simple curiosity, or something quite inexplicable, he knew not. Whatever it was it urged him to agree, and go. And the more the instinct urged him, the more he resisted it.

He sat and thought for a long time, his head resting on his hand, while Pavel Pavlovitch buzzed about him and continued to repeat his arguments.

“Very well,” he said at last, “very well, I’ll go.” He was agitated almost to trembling pitch. Pavel was radiant.

“Then, Alexey Ivanovitch, change your clothes—dress up, will you? Dress up in your own style—you know so well how to do it.”

Pavel Pavlovitch danced about Velchaninoff as he dressed. His state of mind was exuberantly blissful.

"What in the world does the fellow mean by it all?" thought Velchaninoff.

"I'm going to ask you one more favour yet, Alexey Ivanovitch," cried the other. "You've consented to come; you must be my guide, sir, too."

"For instance, how?"

"Well, for instance, here's an important question—the crape. Which ought I to do—tear it off, or leave it on?"

"Just as you like."

"No, I want your opinion. What should you do yourself, if you were wearing crape, under the circumstances? My own idea was, that if I left it on, I should be giving a proof of the fidelity of my affections. A very flattering recommendation, eh, sir?"

"Oh, take it off, of course."

"Do you really think it's a matter of 'of course'?" Pavel Pavlovitch reflected. "No," he continued, "do you know, I think I'd rather leave it on."

"Well, do as you like! He doesn't trust me, at all events, which is one good thing," thought Velchaninoff.

They left the house at last. Pavel looked over his companion's smart costume with intense satisfaction. Velchaninoff was greatly surprised at Pavel's conduct, but not less so at his own. At the gate there stood a very superior open carriage.

"H'm! so you had a carriage in waiting, had you? Then you were quite convinced that I would consent to come down with you, I suppose?"

"I took the carriage for my own use, but I was nearly sure you would come," said Pavel Pavlovitch, who wore the air of a man whose cup of happiness is full to the brim.

"Don't you think you are a little too sanguine in trusting so much to my benevolence?" asked Velchaninoff, as they took their seats and started. He smiled as he spoke, but his heart was full of annoyance.

"Well, Alexey Ivanovitch, it is not for *you* to call me a fool for that," replied Pavel, firmly and impressively.

"H'm! and Liza?" thought Velchaninoff, but he chased the idea away, he felt as though it were sacrilege to think of her here; and immediately another thought came in, namely, how small, how petty a creature he must be himself to harbour such a thought—such a mean, paltry sentiment in connection with Liza's sacred name. So angry was he, that he felt as though he must stop the carriage and get out, even though it cost him a struggle with Pavel Pavlovitch to do so.

But at this moment Pavel spoke, and the old feeling of desire to go with him re-entered his soul. "Alexey Ivanovitch," Pavel said, "are you a judge of articles of value?"

"What sort of articles?"

"Diamonds."

"Yes."

"I wish to take down a present with me. What do you think? Ought I to give her one, or not?"

"Quite unnecessary, I should think."

"But I wish to do it, badly. The only thing is, what shall I give?—a whole set, brooch, ear-rings, bracelet, and all, or only one article?"

"How much do you wish to spend?"

"Oh, four or five hundred roubles."

"Bosh!"

"What, too much?"

"Buy one bracelet for about a hundred."

This advice depressed Pavel Pavlovitch; he grew wondrous melancholy. He was terribly anxious to spend a lot of money, and buy the whole set. He insisted upon the necessity of doing so.

A shop was reached and entered, and Pavel bought a bracelet after all, and that not the one he chose himself, but the one which his companion fixed upon. Pavel wished to buy both. When the shopman, who originally asked one hundred and seventy five, let the bracelet go for a hundred and fifty roubles, Pavel Pavlovitch was anything but pleased. He was most anxious to spend a lot of money on the young lady, and would have gladly paid two hundred roubles for the same goods, on the slightest encouragement.

"It doesn't matter, my being in a hurry to give her presents, does it?" he began excitedly, when they were back in the carriage, and rolling along once more. "They are not 'swells' at all; they live most simply. Innocence loves presents," he continued, smiling cunningly. "You laughed just now, Alexey Ivanovitch, when I said that the girl was only fifteen; but, you know, what specially struck me about her was, that she still goes to school, with a sweet little bag in her hand, containing copy books and pencils. Ha-ha-ha! It was the little satchel that 'fetched' me. I do love innocence, Alexey Ivanovitch. I don't

care half so much for good looks as for innocence. Fancy, she and her friend were sitting in the corner there, the other day, and roared with laughter because the cat jumped from a cupboard on to the sofa, and fell down all of a heap. Why, it smells of fresh apples, that does, sir. Shall I take off the crape, eh?"

"Do as you like!"

"Well, I'll take it off!" He took his hat, tore the crape off, and threw the latter into the road.

Velchaninoff remarked that as he put his hat on his bald head once more, he wore an expression of the simplest and frankest hope and delight.

"Is he *really* that sort of man?" thought Velchaninoff with annoyance. "He surely *can't* be trundling me down here without some underhand motive—impossible! He *can't* be trusting entirely to my generosity?" This last idea seemed to fill him with indignation. "What *is* this clown of a fellow?" he continued to reflect. "Is he a fool, an idiot, or simply a 'permanent husband'? I can't make head or tail of it all!"

CHAPTER XII

The Zachlebnikoffs were certainly, as Velchaninoff had expressed it, a most respectable family. Zachlebnikoff himself was a most eminently dignified and "solid" gentleman to look at. What Pavel Pavlovitch had said as to their resources was, however, quite true;

they lived well, but if paterfamilias were to die, it would be very awkward for the rest.

Old Zachlebnikoff received Velchaninoff most cordially. He was no longer the legal opponent; he appeared now in a far more agreeable guise.

"I congratulate you," he said at once, "upon the issue. I did my best to arrange it so, and your lawyer was a capital fellow to deal with. You have your sixty thousand without trouble or worry, you see; and if we hadn't squared it we might have fought on for two or three years."

Velchaninoff was introduced to the lady of the house as well—an elderly, simple-looking, worn woman. Then the girls began to troop in, one by one and occasionally two together. But, somehow, there seemed to be even more than Velchaninoff had been led to expect; ten or a dozen were collected already—he could not count them exactly. It turned out that some were friends from the neighbouring houses.

The Zachlebnikoffs' country house was a large wooden structure of no particular style of architecture, but handsome enough, and was possessed of a fine large garden. There were, however, two or three other houses built round the latter, so that the garden was common property for all, which fact resulted in great intimacy between the Zachlebnikoff girls and the young ladies of the neighbouring houses.

Velchaninoff discovered, almost from the first moment, that his arrival—in the capacity of Pavel Pavlovitch's friend, desiring an introduction to the family—was expected, and looked forward to as a solemn and important occasion.

Being an expert in such matters he very soon observed that there was even more than this in his reception. Judging from the extra politeness of the parents, and by the exceeding smartness of the

young ladies, he could not help suspecting that Pavel Pavlovitch had been improving the occasion, and that he had—not, of course, in so many words—given to understand that Velchaninoff was a single man—dull and disconsolate, and had represented him as likely enough at any moment to change his manner of living and set up an establishment, especially as he had just come in for a considerable inheritance. He thought that Katerina Fedosievna, the eldest girl—twenty-four years of age, and a splendid girl according to Pavel's description—seemed rather “got up to kill,” from the look of her. She was eminent, even among her well-dressed sisters, for special elegance of costume, and for a certain originality about the make-up of her abundant hair.

The rest of the girls all looked as though they were well aware that Velchaninoff was making acquaintance with the family “for Katie,” and had come down “to have a look at her.” Their looks and words all strengthened the impression that they were acting with this supposition in view, as the day went on.

Katerina Fedosievna was a fine tall girl, rather plump, and with an extremely pleasing face. She seemed to be of a quiet, if not actually sleepy, disposition.

“Strange, that such a fine girl should be unmarried,” thought Velchaninoff, as he watched her with much satisfaction.

All the sisters were nice-looking, and there were several pretty faces among the friends assembled. Velchaninoff was much diverted by the presence of all these young ladies.

Nadejda Fedosievna, the school-girl and bride elect of Pavel Pavlovitch, had not as yet condescended to appear. Velchaninoff awaited her coming with a degree of impatience which surprised and amused him. At last she came, and came with effect, too, accompanied by a lively girl, her friend—Maria Nikitishna—who was considerably older than herself and a very old friend of the family,

having been governess in a neighbouring house for some years. She was quite one of the family, and boasted of about twenty-three years of age. She was much esteemed by all the girls, and evidently acted at present as guide, philosopher, and friend to Nadia (Nadejda). Velchaninoff saw at the first glance that all the girls were against Pavel Pavlovitch, friends and all; and when Nadia came in, it did not take him long to discover that she absolutely *hated* him. He observed, further, that Pavel Pavlovitch either did not, or *would not*, notice this fact.

Nadia was the prettiest of all the girls—a little *brunette*, with an impudent audacious expression; she might have been a Nihilist from the independence of her look. The sly little creature had a pair of flashing eyes and a most charming smile, though as often as not her smile was more full of mischief and wickedness than of amiability; her lips and teeth were wonders; she was slender but well put together, and the expression of her face was thoughtful though at the same time childish.

“Fifteen years old” was imprinted in every feature of her face and every motion of her body. It appeared afterwards that Pavel Pavlovitch had actually seen the girl for the first time with a little satchel in her hand, coming back from school. She had ceased to carry the satchel since that day.

The present brought down by Pavel Pavlovitch proved a failure, and was the cause of a very painful impression.

Pavel Pavlovitch no sooner saw his bride elect enter the room than he approached her with a broad grin on his face. He gave his present with the preface that he “offered it in recognition of the agreeable sensation experienced by him at his last visit upon the occasion of Nadejda Fedosievna singing a certain song to the pianoforte,” and there he stopped in confusion and stood before her lost and miserable, shoving the jeweller's box into her hand. Nadia, however, would not take the present, and drew her hands away.

She approached her mother imperiously (the latter looked much put out), and said aloud: "I won't take it, mother." Nadia was blushing with shame and anger.

"Take it and say 'thank you' to Pavel Pavlovitch for it," said her father quietly but firmly. He was very far from pleased.

"Quite unnecessary, quite unnecessary!" he muttered to Pavel Pavlovitch.

Nadia, seeing there was nothing else to be done, took the case and curtsied—just as children do, giving a little bob down and then a bob up again, as if she had been on springs.

One of the sisters came across to look at the present whereupon Nadia handed it over to her unopened, thereby showing that she did not care so much as to look at it herself.

The bracelet was taken out and handed around from one to the other of the company; but all examined it silently, and some even ironically, only the mother of the family muttered that the bracelet was "very pretty."

Pavel Pavlovitch would have been delighted to see the earth open and swallow him up.

Velchaninoff helped the wretched man out of the mess. He suddenly began to talk loudly and eloquently about the first thing that struck him, and before five minutes had passed he had won the attention of everyone in the room. He was a wonderfully clever society talker. He had the knack of putting on an air of absolute sincerity, and of impressing his hearers with the belief that he considered them equally sincere; he was able to act the simple, careless, and happy young fellow to perfection. He was a master of the art of interlarding his talk with occasional flashes of real wit, apparently spontaneous but actually pre-arranged, and very likely *stale*, in so far that he had himself made the joke before.

But to-day he was particularly successful; he felt that he must talk on and talk well, and he knew that before many moments were past he should succeed in monopolizing all eyes and all ears—that no joke should be laughed at but his own, and no voice heard but his.

And sure enough the spell of his presence seemed to produce a wonderful effect; in a while the talking and laughter became general, with Velchaninoff as the centre and motor of all. Mrs. Zachlebnikoff's kind face lighted up with real pleasure, and Katie's pretty eyes were alight with absolute fascination, while her whole visage glowed with delight.

Only Nadia frowned at him, and watched him keenly from beneath her dark lashes. It was clear that she was prejudiced against him. This last fact only roused Velchaninoff to greater exertions. The mischievous Maria Nikitishna, however, as Nadia's ally, succeeded in playing off a successful piece of chaff against Velchaninoff; she pretended that Pavel Pavlovitch had represented Velchaninoff as the friend of his childhood, thereby making the latter out to be some seven or eight years older than he really was. Velchaninoff liked the look of Maria, notwithstanding.

Pavel Pavlovitch was the picture of perplexity. He quite understood the success which his "friend" was achieving, and at first he felt glad and proud of that success, laughing at the jokes and taking a share of the conversation; but for some reason or other he gradually relapsed into thoughtfulness, and thence into melancholy—which fact was sufficiently plain from the expression of his lugubrious and careworn physiognomy.

"Well, my dear fellow, you are the sort of guest one need not exert oneself to entertain," said old Zachlebnikoff at last, rising and making for his private study, where he had business of importance awaiting his attention; "and I was led to believe that you were the most morose of hypochondriacs. Dear me! what mistakes one does make about other people, to be sure!"

There was a grand piano in the room, and Velchaninoff suddenly turned to Nadia and remarked:

"You sing, don't you?"

"Who told you I did?" said Nadia curtly.

"Pavel Pavlovitch."

"It isn't true; I only sing for a joke—I have no voice."

"Oh, but I have no voice either, and yet I sing!"

"Well, you sing to us first, and then I'll sing," said Nadia, with sparkling eyes; "not now though—after dinner. I hate music," she added, "I'm so sick of the piano. We have singing and strumming going on all day here;—and Katie is the only one of us all worth hearing!"

Velchaninoff immediately attacked Katie, and besieged her with petitions to play. This attention from him to her eldest daughter so pleased mamma that she flushed up with satisfaction.

Katie went to the piano, blushing like a school-girl, and evidently much ashamed of herself for blushing; she played some little piece of Haydn's correctly enough but without much expression.

When she had finished Velchaninoff praised the music warmly—Haydn's music generally, and this little piece in particular. He looked at Katie too, with admiration, and his expression seemed to say. "By Jove, you're a fine girl!" So eloquent was his look that everyone in the room was able to read it, and especially Katie herself.

"What a pretty garden you have!" said Velchaninoff after a short pause, looking through the glass doors of the balcony. "Let's all go out; may we?"

"Oh, yes! do let's go out!" cried several voices together. He seemed to have hit upon the very thing most desired by all.

So they all adjourned into the garden, and walked about there until dinner-time; and Velchaninoff had the opportunity of making closer acquaintance with some of the girls of the establishment. Two or three young fellows "dropped in" from the neighbouring houses—a student, a school-boy, and another young fellow of about twenty in a pair of huge spectacles. Each of these young fellows immediately attached himself to the particular young lady of his choice.

The young man in spectacles no sooner arrived than he went aside with Nadia and Maria Nikitishna, and entered into an animated whispering conversation with them, with much frowning and impatience of manner.

This gentleman seemed to consider it his mission to treat Pavel Pavlovitch with the most ineffable contempt.

Some of the girls proposed a game. One of them suggested "Proverbs," but it was voted dull; another suggested acting, but the objection was made that they never knew how to finish off.

"It may be more successful with you," said Nadia to Velchaninoff confidentially. "You know we all thought you were Pavel Pavlovitch's friend, but it appears that he was only boasting. I am *very* glad you have come—for a certain reason!" she added, looking knowingly into Velchaninoff's face, and then retreating back again to Maria's wing, blushing.

"We'll play 'Proverbs' in the evening," said another, "and we'll all chaff Pavel Pavlovitch; *you* must help us too!"

"We *are* so glad you're come—it's so dull here as a rule," said a third, a funny-looking red-haired girl, whose face was comically hot, with running apparently. Goodness knows where she had dropped from; Velchaninoff had not observed her arrive.

Pavel Pavlovitch's agitation increased every moment. Meanwhile Velchaninoff took the opportunity of making great friends with Nadia. She had ceased to frown at him as before, and had now developed the wildest of spirits, dancing and jumping about, singing and whistling, and occasionally even catching hold of his hand in her innocent friendliness.

She was very happy indeed, apparently; but she took no more notice of Pavel Pavlovitch than if he had not been there at all.

Pavel Pavlovitch was very jealous of all this, and once or twice when Nadia and Velchaninoff talked apart, he joined them and rudely interrupted their conversation by interposing his anxious face between them.

Katia could not help being fully aware by this time that their charming guest had not come in for her sake, as had been believed by the family; indeed, it was clear that Nadia interested him so much that she excluded everyone else, to a considerable extent, from his attention. However, in spite of this, her good-natured face retained its amiability of expression all the same. She seemed to be happy enough witnessing the happiness of the rest and listening to the merry talk; she could not take a large share in the conversation herself, poor girl!

"What a fine girl your sister, Katerina Fedosievna is," remarked Velchaninoff to Nadia.

"Katia? I should think so! there is no better girl in the world. She's our family angel! I'm in love with her myself!" replied Nadia enthusiastically.

At last, dinner was announced, and a very good dinner it was, several courses being added for the benefit of the guests: a bottle of tokay made its appearance, and champagne was handed round in honour of the occasion. The good humour of the company was general, old Zachlebnikoff was in high spirits, having partaken of an

extra glass of wine this evening. So infectious was the hilarity that even Pavel Pavlovitch took heart of grace and made a pun. From the end of the table where he sat beside the lady of the house, there suddenly came a loud laugh from the delighted girls who had been fortunate enough to hear the virgin attempt.

"Papa, papa, Pavel Pavlovitch has made a joke!" cried several at once: "he says that there is quite a 'galaxy of gals' here!"

"Oho! *he's* made a pun too, has he?" cried the old fellow. "Well, what is it, let's have it!" He turned to Pavel Pavlovitch with beaming face, prepared to roar over the latter's joke.

"Why, I tell you, he says there's quite a 'galaxy of gals.'"

"Well, go on, where's the joke?" repeated papa, still dense to the merits of the pun, but beaming more and more with benevolent desire to see it.

"Oh, papa, how stupid you are not to see it. Why 'gals' and 'galaxy,' don't you see?—he says there's quite a gal-axy of gals!"

"Oh! oh!" guffawed the old gentleman, "Ha-ha! Well, we'll hope he'll make a better one next time, that's all."

"Pavel Pavlovitch can't acquire all the perfections at once," said Maria Nikitishna. "Oh, my goodness! he's swallowed a bone—look!" she added, jumping up from her chair.

The alarm was general, and Maria's delight was great.

Poor Pavel Pavlovitch had only choked over a glass of wine, which he seized and drank to hide his confusion; but Maria declared that it was a fishbone—that she had seen it herself, and that people had been known to die of swallowing a bone just like that.

"Clap him on the back!" cried somebody.

It appeared that there were numerous kind friends ready to perform this friendly office, and poor Pavel protested in vain that it was nothing but a common choke. The belabouring went on until the coughing fit was over, and it became evident that mischievous Maria was at the bottom of it all.

After dinner old Mr. Zachlebnikoff retired for his post-prandial nap, bidding the young people enjoy themselves in the garden as best they might.

"You enjoy yourself, too!" he added to Pavel Pavlovitch, tapping the latter's shoulder affably as he went by.

When the party were all collected in the garden once more, Pavel suddenly approached Velchaninoff: "One moment," he whispered, pulling the latter by the coat-sleeve.

The two men went aside into a lonely by-path.

"None of that *here*, please; I won't allow it here!" said Pavel Pavlovitch in a choking whisper.

"None of what? Who?" asked Velchaninoff, staring with all his eyes.

Pavel Pavlovitch said nothing more, but gazed furiously at his companion, his lips trembling in a desperate attempt at a pretended smile. At this moment the voices of several of the girls broke in upon them, calling them to some game. Velchaninoff shrugged his shoulders and re-joined the party. Pavel followed him.

"I'm sure Pavel Pavlovitch was borrowing a handkerchief from you, wasn't he? He forgot his handkerchief last time too. Pavel Pavlovitch has forgotten his handkerchief again, and he has a cold as usual!" cried Maria.

"Oh, Pavel Pavlovitch, why didn't you say so?" cried Mrs. Zachlebnikoff, making towards the house; "you shall have one at once."

In vain poor Pavel protested that he had two of those necessary articles, and was *not* suffering from a cold. Mrs. Zachlebnikoff was glad of the excuse for retiring to the house, and heard nothing. A few moments afterwards a maid pursued Pavel with a handkerchief, to the confusion of the latter gentleman.

A game of "proverbs" was now proposed. All sat down, and the young man with spectacles was made to retire to a considerable distance and wait there with his nose close up against the wall and his back turned until the proverb should have been chosen and the words arranged. Velchaninoff was the next in turn to be the questioner.

Then the cry arose for Pavel Pavlovitch, and the latter, who had more or less recovered his good humour by this time, proceeded to the spot indicated; and, resolved to do his duty like a man, took his stand with his nose to the wall, ready to stay there motionless until called. The red-haired young lady was detailed to watch him, in case of fraud on his part.

No sooner, however, had the wretched Pavel taken up his position at the wall, than the whole party took to their heels and ran away as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Run quick!" whispered the girls to Velchaninoff, in despair, for he had not started with them.

"Why, what's happened? What's the matter?" asked the latter, keeping up as best he could.

"Don't make a noise! we want to get away and let him go on standing there—that's all."

Katia, it appeared, did not like this practical joke. When the last stragglers of the party arrived at the end of the garden, among them Velchaninoff, the latter found Katia angrily scolding the rest of the girls.

"Very well," she was saying, "I won't tell mother this time; but I shall go away myself: it's too bad! What will the poor fellow's feelings be, standing all alone there, and finding us fled!"

And off she went. The rest, however, were entirely unsympathizing, and enjoyed the joke thoroughly. Velchaninoff was entreated to appear entirely unconscious when Pavel Pavlovitch should appear again, just as though nothing whatever had happened. It was a full quarter of an hour before Pavel put in an appearance, two thirds, at least, of that time he must have stood at the wall. When he reached the party he found everyone busy over a game of *Goriélki*, laughing and shouting and making themselves thoroughly happy.

Wild with rage, Pavel Pavlovitch again made straight for Velchaninoff, and tugged him by the coat-sleeve.

"One moment, sir!"

"Oh, my goodness! he's always coming in with his 'one moments'!" said someone.

"A handkerchief wanted again probably!" shouted someone else after the pair as they retired.

"Come now, this time it was you! You were the originator of this insult!" muttered Pavel, his teeth chattering with fury.

Velchaninoff interrupted him, and strongly recommended Pavel to bestir himself to be merrier.

"You are chaffed because you get angry," he said; "if you try to be jolly instead of sulky you'll be let alone!"

To his surprise these words impressed Pavel deeply; he was quiet at once, and returned to the party with a guilty air, and immediately began to take part in the games engaged in once more. He was not further bullied at present, and within half an hour his good humour seemed quite re-established.

To Velchaninoff's astonishment, however, he never seemed to presume to speak to Nadia, although he kept as close to her, on all occasions, as he possibly could. He seemed to take his position as quite natural, and was not put out by her contemptuous air towards him.

Pavel Pavlovitch was teased once more, however, before the evening ended.

A game of "Hide-and-seek" was commenced, and Pavel had hidden in a small room in the house. Being observed entering there by someone, he was locked in, and left there raging for an hour. Meanwhile, Velchaninoff learned the "special reason" for Nadia's joy at his arrival. Maria conducted him to a lonely alley, where Nadia was awaiting him alone.

"I have quite convinced myself," began the latter, when they were left alone, "that you are not nearly so great a friend of Pavel Pavlovitch as he gave us to understand. I have also convinced myself that you alone can perform a certain great service for me. Here is his horrid bracelet" (she drew the case out of her pocket)—"I wish to ask you to be so kind as to return it to him; I cannot do so myself, because I am quite determined never to speak to him again all my life. You can tell him so from me, and better add that he is not to worry me with any more of his nasty presents. I'll let him know something else I have to say through other channels. Will you do this for me?"

"Oh, for goodness sake, spare me!" cried Velchaninoff, almost wringing his hands.

"How spare you?" cried poor Nadia. Her artificial tone put on for the occasion had collapsed at once before this check, and she was nearly crying. Velchaninoff burst out laughing.

"I don't mean—I should be delighted, you know—but the thing is, I have my own accounts to settle with him!"

"I knew you weren't his friend, and that he was lying. I shall never marry him—never! You may rely on that! I don't understand how he could dare—at all events, you really *must* give him back this horrid bracelet. What am I to do if you don't? I *must* have it given back to him this very day. He'll catch it if he interferes with father about me!"

At this moment the spectacled young gentleman issued from the shrubs at their elbow.

"You are bound to return the bracelet!" he burst out furiously, upon Velchaninoff, "if only out of respect to the rights of woman ____"

He did not finish the sentence, for Nadia pulled him away from beside Velchaninoff with all her strength.

"How stupid you are," she cried; "go away. How dare you listen? I told you to stand a long way off!" She stamped her foot with rage, and for some while after the young fellow had slunk away she continued to walk along with flashing eyes, furious with indignation. "You wouldn't believe how stupid he is!" she cried at last. "You laugh, but think of my feelings!"

"That's not *he*, is it?" laughed Velchaninoff.

"Of course not. How could you imagine such a thing! It's only his friend, and how he can choose such friends I can't understand! They say he is a 'future motive-power,' but I don't see it. Alexey Ivanovitch, for the last time—I have no one else to ask—will you give the bracelet back or not?"

"Very well, I will. Give it to me!"

"Oh, you dear, good Alexey Ivanovitch, thanks!" she cried, enthusiastic with delight. "I'll sing all the evening for that! I sing beautifully, you know! I was telling you a wicked story before dinner. Oh, I *wish* you would come down here again; I'd tell you *all*, then, and lots of other things besides—for you are a dear, kind, good fellow, like—like Katia!"

And sure enough when they reached home she sat down and sang a couple of songs in a voice which, though entirely untrained, was of great natural sweetness and considerable strength.

When the party returned from the garden they had found Pavel Pavlovitch drinking tea with the old folks on the balcony. He had probably been talking on serious topics, as he was to take his departure the day after to-morrow for nine months. He never so much as glanced at Velchaninoff and the rest when they entered; but he evidently had not complained to the authorities, and all was quiet as yet. But, when Nadia began to sing, he came in. Nadia did not answer a single one of his questions, but he did not seem offended by this, and took his stand behind her chair. Once there, his whole appearance gave it to be understood that that was his own place by right, and that he allowed none to dispute it.

"It's Alexey Ivanovitch's turn to sing now!" cried the girls, when Nadia's song was finished, and all crowded round to hear Velchaninoff, who sat down to accompany himself. He chose a song of Glinke's, too much neglected nowadays; it ran:—

"When from your merry lips

Tenderness flows," &c.

Velchaninoff seemed to address the words to Nadia exclusively, but the whole party stood around him. His voice had long since gone the way of all flesh, but it was clear that he must have had a good one once, and it so happened that Velchaninoff had heard this particular song many years ago, from Glinkes' own lips, when a student at the university, and remembered the great effect that it had made upon him when he first heard it. The song was full of the most intense passion of expression, and Velchaninoff sang it well, with his eyes fixed upon Nadia.

Amid the applause that followed the completion of the performance, Pavel Pavlovitch came forward, seized Nadia's hand and drew her away from the proximity of Velchaninoff; he then returned to the latter at the piano, and, with every evidence of frantic rage, whispered to him, his lips all of a tremble,

"One moment with you!"

Velchaninoff, seeing that the man was capable of worse things in his then frame of mind, took Pavel's hand and led him out through the balcony into the garden—quite dark now.

"Do you understand, sir, that you must come away at once—*this very minute?*" said Pavel Pavlovitch.

"No, sir, I do not!"

"Do you remember," continued Pavel in his frenzied whisper, "do you remember that you begged me to tell you *all, everything*—down to the smallest details? Well, the time has come for telling you all—come!"

Velchaninoff considered a moment, glanced once more at Pavel Pavlovitch, and consented to go.

"Oh! stay and have another cup of tea!" said Mrs. Zachlebnikoff, when this decision was announced.

"Pavel Pavlovitch, why are you taking Alexey Ivanovitch away?" cried the girls, with angry looks. As for Nadia, she looked so cross with Pavel, that the latter felt absolutely uncomfortable; but he did not give in.

"Oh, but I am very much obliged to Pavel Pavlovitch," said Velchaninoff, "for reminding me of some most important business which I must attend to this very evening, and which I might have forgotten," laughed Velchaninoff, as he shook hands with his host and made his bow to the ladies, especially to Katia, as the family thought.

"You must come again soon!" said the host; "we have been so glad to see you; it was so good of you to come!"

"Yes, *so* glad!" said the lady of the house.

"Do come again soon!" cried the girls, as Pavel Pavlovitch and Velchaninoff took their seats in the carriage; "Alexey Ivanovitch, *do* come back soon!" And with these voices in their ears they drove away.

CHAPTER XIII

In spite of Velchaninoff's apparently happy day, the feeling of annoyance and suffering at his heart had hardly actually left him for a single moment. Before he sang the song he had not known what to do with himself, or suppressed anger and melancholy—perhaps

that was the reason why he had sung with so much feeling and passion.

"To think that I could so have lowered myself as to forget everything!" he thought—and then despised himself for thinking it; "it is more humiliating still to cry over what is done," he continued. "Far better to fly into a passion with someone instead."

"Fool!" he muttered—looking askance at Pavel Pavlovitch, who sat beside him as still as a mouse. Pavel Pavlovitch preserved a most obstinate silence—probably concentrating and ranging his energies. He occasionally took his hat off, impatiently, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead.

Once—and once only—Pavel spoke, to the coachman, he asked whether there was going to be a thunder-storm.

"Wheugh!" said the man, "I should think so! It's been a steamy day—just the day for it!"

By the time town was reached—half-past ten—the whole sky was overcast.

"I am coming to your house," said Pavel to Velchaninoff, when almost at the door.

"Quite so; but I warn you, I feel very unwell to-night!"

"All right—I won't stay too long."

When the two men passed under the gateway, Pavel Pavlovitch disappeared into the 'dvornik's' room for a minute, to speak to Mavra.

"What did you go in there for?" asked Velchaninoff severely as they mounted the stairs and reached his own door.

"Oh—nothing—nothing at all,—just to tell them about the coachman.—"

"Very well. Mind, I shall not allow you to drink!"

Pavel Pavlovitch did not answer.

Velchaninoff lit a candle, while Pavel threw himself into a chair;—then the former came and stood menacingly before him.

"I may have told you I should have *my* last word to say to-night, as well as you!" he said with suppressed anger in his voice and manner: "Here it is. I consider conscientiously that things are square between you and me, now; and therefore there is no more to be said, understand me, about *anything*. Since this is so, had you not better go, and let me close the door after you?"

"Let's cry 'quits' first, Alexey Ivanovitch," said Pavel Pavlovitch, gazing into Velchaninoff's eyes with great sweetness.

"Quits?" cried the latter, in amazement; "you strange man, what are we to cry quits about? Are you harping upon your promise of a 'last word'?"

"Yes."

"Oh, well, we have nothing more to cry quits for. We have been quits long since," said Velchaninoff.

"Dear me, do you really think so?" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, in a shrill, sharp voice, pressing his two hands tightly together, finger to finger, as he held them up before his breast.

Velchaninoff said nothing. He rose from his seat and began to walk up and down the room. The word "Liza" resounded through and through his soul like the voice of a bell.

"Well, what is there that you still consider unsettled between us?" he asked at last, looking angrily at Pavel, who had never ceased to follow him with his eyes—always holding his hands before his breast, finger tip to finger tip.

"Don't go down there any more," said Pavel, almost in a whisper, and rising from his seat with every indication of humble entreaty.

"*What!* is *that* all?" cried Velchaninoff, bursting into an angry laugh; "good heavens, man, you have done nothing but surprise me all day." He had begun in a tone of exasperation, but he now abruptly changed both voice and expression, and continued with an air of deep feeling. "Listen," he said, "listen to me. I don't think I have ever felt so deeply humiliated as I am feeling now, in consequence of the events of to-day. In the first place, that I should have condescended to go down with you at all, and in the second place, all that happened there. It has been such a day of pettifogging—pitiful pettifogging. I have profaned and lowered myself by taking a share in it all, and forgetting—Well, it's done now. But look here—you fell upon me to-day, unawares—upon a sick man. Oh, you needn't excuse yourself; at all events I shall certainly *not* go there again. I have not the slightest interest in so doing," he concluded, with an air of decision.

"No, really!" cried Pavel Pavlovitch, making no secret of his delight and exultation.

Velchaninoff glanced contemptuously at him, and recommenced his march up and down the room.

"You have determined to be happy under any circumstances, I suppose?" he observed, after a pause. He could not resist making the remark disdainfully.

"Yes, I have," said Pavel, quietly.

"It's no business of mine that he's a fool and a knave, out of pure idiocy!" thought Velchaninoff. "I can't help hating him, though I feel that he is not even worth hating."

"I'm a permanent husband," said Pavel Pavlovitch, with the most exquisitely servile irony, at his own expense. "I remember you using that expression, Alexey Ivanovitch, long ago, when you were with us at T——. I remember many of your original phrases of that time, and when you spoke of 'permanent husbands,' the other day, I recollected the expression."

At this point Mavra entered the room with a bottle of champagne and two glasses.

"Forgive me, Alexey Ivanovitch," said Pavel, "you know I can't get on without it. Don't consider it an audacity on my part—think of it as a mere bit of by-play unworthy your notice."

"Well," consented Velchaninoff, with a look of disgust, "but I must remind you that I don't feel well, and that—"

"One little moment—I'll go at once, I really will—I *must* just drink *one* glass, my throat is so——"

He seized the bottle eagerly, and poured himself out a glass, drank it greedily at a gulp, and sat down. He looked at Velchaninoff almost tenderly.

"What a nasty looking beast!" muttered the latter to himself.

"It's all her friends that make her like that," said Pavel, suddenly, with animation.

"What? Oh, you refer to the lady. I——"

"And, besides, she is so very young still, you see," resumed Pavel. "I shall be her slave—she shall see a little society, and a bit of the

world. She will change, sir, entirely."

"I mustn't forget to give him back the bracelet, by-the-bye," thought Velchaninoff, frowning, as he felt for the case in his coat pocket.

"You said just now that I am determined to be happy, Alexey Ivanovitch," continued Pavel, confidentially, and with almost touching earnestness. "I *must* marry, else what will become of me? You see for yourself" (he pointed to the bottle), "and that's only a hundredth part of what I demean myself to nowadays. I cannot get on without marrying again, sir; I *must* have a new faith. If I can but believe in some one again, sir, I shall rise—I shall be saved."

"Why are you telling *me* all this?" exclaimed Velchaninoff, very nearly laughing in his face; it seemed so absurdly inconsistent.

"Look here," he continued, roaring the words out, "let me know now, once for all, why did you drag me down there? what good was I to do you there?"

"I—I wished to try——," began Pavel, with some confusion.

"Try what?"

"The effect, sir. You see, Alexey Ivanovitch, I have only been visiting there a week" (he grew more and more confused), "and yesterday, when I met you, I thought to myself that I had never seen her yet in society; that is, in the society of other *men* besides myself—a stupid idea, I know it is—I was very anxious to try—you know my wretchedly jealous nature." He suddenly raised his head and blushed violently.

"He *can't* be telling me the truth!" thought Velchaninoff; he was struck dumb with surprise.

"Well, go on!" he muttered at last.

"Well, I see it was all her pretty childish nature, sir—that and her friends together. You must forgive my stupid conduct towards yourself to-day, Alexey Ivanovitch. I will never do it again—never again, sir, I assure you!"

"I shall never be there to give you the opportunity," replied Velchaninoff with a laugh.

"That's partly why I say it," said Pavel.

"Oh, come! I'm not the only man in the world you know!" said the other irritably.

"I am sorry to hear you say that, Alexey Ivanovitch. My esteem for Nadejda is such that I——"

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me! I meant nothing, I assure you! Only it surprises me that you should have expected so much of me—that you trusted me so completely."

"I trusted you entirely, sir, solely on account of—all that has passed."

"So that you still consider me the most honourable of men?" Velchaninoff paused, the naïve nature of his sudden question surprised even himself.

"I always did think you that, sir!" said Pavel, hanging his head.

"Of course, quite so—I didn't mean quite that—I wanted to say, in spite of all prejudices you may have formed, you——"

"Yes, in spite of all prejudices!"

"And when you first came to Petersburg?" asked Velchaninoff, who himself felt the monstrosity of his own inquisitive questions, but could not resist putting them.

"I considered you the most honourable of men when I first came to Petersburg, sir; no less. I always respected you, Alexey Ivanovitch!"

Pavel Pavlovitch raised his eyes and looked at his companion without the smallest trace of confusion.

Velchaninoff suddenly felt cowed and afraid. He was anxious that nothing should result—nothing disagreeable—from this conversation, since he himself was responsible for having initiated it.

"I loved you, Alexey Ivanovitch; all that year at T—— I loved you—you did not observe it," continued Pavel Pavlovitch, his voice trembling with emotion, to the great discomfiture of his companion. "You did not observe my affection, because I was too lowly a being to deserve any sort of notice; but it was unnecessary that you should observe my love. Well, sir, and all these nine years I have thought of you, for I have never known such a year of life as that year was." (Pavel's eyes seemed to have a special glare in them at this point.) "I remembered many of your sayings and expressions, sir, and I thought of you always as a man imbued with the loftiest sentiments, and gifted with knowledge and intellect, sir—of the highest order—a man of grand ideas. 'Great ideas do not proceed so frequently from greatness of intellect, as from elevation of taste and feeling.' You yourself said that, sir, once. I dare say you have forgotten the fact, but you did say it. Therefore I always thought of you, sir, as a man of taste and feeling; consequently I concluded—consequently I trusted you, in spite of everything."

Pavel Pavlovitch's chin suddenly began to tremble. Velchaninoff was frightened out of his wits. This unexpected tone must be put an end to at all hazards.

"Enough, Pavel Pavlovitch!" he said softly, blushing violently and with some show of irritation. "And why—why (Velchaninoff suddenly began to shout passionately)—why do you come hanging round the

neck of a sick man, a worried man—a man who is almost out of his wits with fever and annoyance of all sorts, and drag him into this abyss of lies and mirage and vision and shame—and unnatural, disproportionate, distorted nonsense! Yes, sir, that's the most shameful part of the whole business—the disproportionate nonsense of what you say! You know it's all humbug; both of us are mean wretches—both of us; and if you like I'll prove to you at once that not only you don't love me, but that you loathe and hate me with all your heart, and that you are a liar, whether you know it or not! You took me down to see your bride, not—not a bit in the world to try how she would behave in the society of other men—absurd idea!—You simply saw me, yesterday, and your vile impulse led you to carry me off there in order that you might show me the girl, and say, as it were. There, look at that! She's to be mine! Try your hand *there* if you can! It was nothing but your challenge to me! You may not have known it, but this was so, as I say; and you felt the impulse which I have described. Such a challenge could not be made without hatred; consequently you hate me.”

Velchaninoff almost *rushed* up and down the room as he shouted the above words; and with every syllable the humiliating consciousness that he was allowing himself to descend to the level of Pavel Pavlovitch afflicted him and tormented him more and more!

“I was only anxious to be at peace with you, Alexey Ivanovitch!” said Pavel sadly, his chin and lips working again.

Velchaninoff flew into a violent rage, as if he had been insulted in the most unexampled manner.

“I tell you once more, sir,” he cried, “that you have attached yourself to a sick and irritated man, in order that you may surprise him into saying something unseemly in his madness! We are, I tell you, man, we are men of different worlds. Understand me! between us two there is a grave,” he hissed in his fury, and stopped.

"And how do you know,—sir," cried Pavel Pavlovitch, his face suddenly becoming all twisted, and deadly white to look at, as he strode up to Velchaninoff, "how do you know what that grave means to me, sir, here!" (He beat his breast with terrible earnestness, droll though he looked.) "Yes, sir, we both stand on the brink of the grave, but on my side there is more, sir, than on yours—yes, more, more, more!" he hissed, beating his breast without pause—"more than on yours—the grave means more to me than to you!"

But at this moment a loud ring at the bell brought both men to their senses. Someone was ringing so loud that the bell-wire was in danger of snapping.

"People don't ring like that for me, observed Velchaninoff angrily."

"No more they do for me, sir! I assure you they don't!" said Pavel Pavlovitch anxiously. He had become the quiet timid Pavel again in a moment. Velchaninoff frowned and went to open the door.

"Mr. Velchaninoff, if I am not mistaken?" said a strange voice, apparently belonging to some young and very self-satisfied person, at the door.

"What is it?"

"I have been informed that Mr. Trusotsky is at this moment in your rooms. I must see him at once."

Velchaninoff felt inclined to send this self-satisfied looking young gentleman flying downstairs again; but he reflected—refrained, stood aside and let him in.

"Here is Mr. Trusotsky. Come in."

CHAPTER XIV

A young fellow of some nineteen summers entered the room; he might have been even younger, to judge by his handsome but self-satisfied and very juvenile face.

He was not badly dressed, at all events his clothes fitted him well; in stature he was a little above the middle height; he had thick black hair, and dark, bold eyes—and these were the striking features of his face. Unfortunately his nose was a little too broad and tip-tilted, otherwise he would have been a really remarkably good-looking young fellow.—He came in with some pretension.

“I believe I have the opportunity of speaking to Mr. Trusotsky?” he observed deliberately, and bringing out the word opportunity with much apparent satisfaction, as though he wished to accentuate the fact that he could not possibly be supposed to feel either honour or pleasure in meeting Mr. Trusotsky. Velchaninoff thought he knew what all this meant; Pavel Pavlovitch seemed to have an inkling of the state of affairs, too. His expression was one of anxiety, but he did not show the white feather.

“Not having the honour of your acquaintance,” he said with dignity, “I do not understand what sort of business you can have with me.”

“Kindly listen to me first, and you can then let me know your ideas on the subject,” observed the young gentleman, pulling out his tortoiseshell glasses, and focusing the champagne bottle with them. Having deliberately inspected that object, he put up his glasses again, and fixing his attention once more upon Pavel Pavlovitch, remarked:

“Alexander Loboff.”

"What about Alexander Loboff?"

"That's my name. You've not heard of me?"

"No."

"H'm! Well, I don't know when you should have, now I think of it; but I've come on important business concerning yourself. I suppose I can sit down? I'm tired."

"Oh, pray sit down," said Velchaninoff, but not before the young man had taken a chair. In spite of the pain at his heart Velchaninoff could not help being interested in this impudent youngling.

There seemed to be something in his good-looking, fresh young face that reminded him of Nadia.

"You can sit down too," observed Loboff, indicating an empty seat to Pavel Pavlovitch, with a careless nod of his head.

"Thank you; I shall stand."

"Very well, but you'll soon get tired. You need not go away, I think, Mr. Velchaninoff."

"I have nowhere to go to, my good sir, I am at home."

"As you like; I confess I should prefer your being present while I have an explanation with this gentleman. Nadejda Fedosievna has given you a flattering enough character, sir, to me."

"Nonsense; how could she have had time to do so?"

"Immediately after you left. Now, Mr. Trusotsky, this is what I wish to observe," he continued to Pavel, the latter still standing in front of him; "we, that is Nadejda Fedosievna and myself, have long loved one another, and have plighted our troth. You have suddenly come between us as an obstruction; I have come to tell you that you had

better clear out of the way at once. Are you prepared to adopt my suggestion?"

Pavel Pavlovitch took a step backward in amazement; his face paled visibly, but in a moment a spiteful smile curled his lip.

"Not in the slightest degree prepared, sir," he said, laconically.

"Dear me," said the young fellow, settling himself comfortably in his chair, and throwing one leg over the other.

"Indeed, I do not know whom I am speaking to," added Pavel Pavlovitch, "so that it can't hardly be worth your while to continue."

So saying he sat down at last.

"I *said* you'd get tired," remarked the youth. "I informed you just now," he added, "that my name is Alexander Loboff, and that Nadejda and I have plighted our troth; consequently you cannot truthfully say, as you did say just now, that you don't know who I am, nor can you honestly assert that you do not see what we can have to talk about. Not to speak of myself—there is Nadejda Fedosievna to be considered—the lady to whom you have so impudently attached yourself: that alone is matter sufficient for explanation between us."

All this the young fellow rattled off carelessly enough, as if the thing were so self-evident that it hardly needed mentioning. While talking, he raised his eye-glass once more, and inspected some object for an instant, putting the glass back in his pocket immediately afterwards.

"Excuse me, young man," began Pavel Pavlovitch: but the words "young man" were fatal.

"At any other moment," observed the youth, "I should of course forbid your calling me 'young man' at once; but you must admit that

in this case my youth is my principal advantage over yourself, and that even this very day you would have given anything—nay, at the moment when you presented your bracelet—to be just a little bit younger.”

“Cheeky young brat!” muttered Velchaninoff.

“In any case,” began Pavel Pavlovitch, with dignity, “I do not consider your reasons as set forth—most questionable and improper reasons at the best—sufficient to justify the continuance of this conversation. I see your 'business' is mere childishness and nonsense: to-morrow I shall have the pleasure of an explanation with Mr. Zachlebnikoff, my respected friend. Meanwhile, sir, perhaps you will make it convenient to—depart.”

“That's the sort of man he is,” cried the youth, hotly, turning to Velchaninoff: “he is not content with being as good as kicked out of the place, and having faces made at him, but he must go down again to-morrow to carry tales about us to Mr. Zachlebnikoff. Do you not prove by this, you obstinate man, that you wish to carry off the young lady by force? that you desire to *buy* her of people who preserve—thanks to the relics of barbarism still triumphant among us—a species of power over her? Surely she showed you sufficiently clearly that she *despises* you? You have had your wretched tasteless present of to-day—that bracelet thing—returned to you; what more do you want?”

“Excuse me, no bracelet has been, or can be returned to me,” said Pavel Pavlovitch, with a shudder of anxiety, however.

“How so? hasn't Mr. Velchaninoff given it to you?”

“Oh, the deuce take you, sir,” thought Velchaninoff. “Nadejda Fedosievna certainly did give me this case for you, Pavel Pavlovitch,” he said; “I did not wish to take it, but she was anxious that I should: here it is, I'm very sorry.”

He took out the case and laid it down on the table before the enraged Pavel Pavlovitch.

"How is it you have not handed it to him before?" asked the young man severely.

"I had no time, as you may conclude," said Velchaninoff with a frown.

"H'm! Strange circumstance!"

"*What, sir?*"

"Well, you must admit it *is* strange! However, I am quite prepared to believe that there has been some mistake."

Velchaninoff would have given worlds to get up and drub the impertinent young rascal and drag him out of the house by the ear; but he could not contain himself, and burst out laughing. The boy immediately followed suit and laughed too.

But for Pavel Pavlovitch it was no laughing matter.

If Velchaninoff had seen the ferocious look which the former cast at him at the moment when he and Loboff laughed, he would have realized that Pavel Pavlovitch was in the act of passing a fatal limit of forbearance. He did not see the look; but it struck him that it was only fair to stand up for Pavel now.

"Listen, Mr. Loboff," he said, in friendly tones, "not to enter into the consideration of other matters, I may point out that Mr. Trusotsky brings with him, in his wooing of Miss Zachlebnikoff, a name and circumstances fully well-known to that esteemed family; in the second place, he brings a fairly respectable position in the world; and thirdly, he brings wealth. Therefore he may well be surprised to find himself confronted by such a rival as yourself—a gentleman of great wealth, doubtless, but at the same time so very

young, that he could not possibly look upon you as a serious rival; therefore, again, he is quite right in begging you to bring the conversation to an end."

"What do you mean by 'so very young'? I was nineteen a month since; by the law I might have been married long ago. That's a sufficient answer to your argument."

"But what father would consent to allowing his daughter to marry you *now*—even though you may be a Rothschild to come, or a benefactor to humanity in the future. A man of nineteen years old is not capable of answering for himself and yet you are ready to take on your own responsibility another being—in other words, a being who is as much a child as you are yourself. Why, it is hardly even honourable on your part, is it? I have presumed to address you thus, because you yourself referred the matter to me as a sort of arbiter between yourself and Pavel Pavlovitch."

"Yes, by-the-bye, 'Pavel Pavlovitch,' I forgot he was called that," remarked the youth. "I wonder why I thought of him all along as 'Vassili Petrovitch.' Look here, sir (addressing Velchaninoff), you have not surprised me in the least. I knew you were all tarred with one brush. It is strange that you should have been described to me as a man of some originality. However, to business. All that you have said is, of course, utter nonsense; not only is there nothing 'dishonourable' about my intentions, as you permitted yourself to suggest, but the fact of the matter is entirely the reverse, as I hope to prove to you by-and-bye. In the first place, we have promised each other marriage, besides which I have given her my word that if she ever repents of her promise she shall have her full liberty to throw me over. I have given her surety to that effect before witnesses."

"I bet anything your friend—what's his name?—Predposiloff invented that idea," cried Velchaninoff.

"He-he-he!" giggled Pavel Pavlovitch contemptuously.

"What is that person giggling about? You are right, sir, it was Predposiloff's idea. But I don't think you and I quite understand one another, do we? and I had such a good report of you. How old are you? Are you fifty yet?"

"Stick to business, if you please."

"Forgive the liberty. I did not mean anything offensive. Well, to proceed. I am no millionaire, and I am no great benefactor to humanity (to reply to your arguments), but I shall manage to keep myself and my wife. Of course I have nothing now; I was brought up, in fact, in their house from my childhood."

"How so?"

"Oh, because I am a distant relative of this Mr. Zachlebnikoff's wife. When my people died, he took me in and sent me to school. The old fellow is really quite a kind-hearted man, if you only knew it."

"I do know it!"

"Yes, he's an old fogey rather, but a kind-hearted old fellow; but I left him four months ago and began to keep myself. I first joined a railway office at ten roubles a month, and am now in a notary's place at twenty-five. I made him a formal proposal for her a fortnight since. He first laughed like mad, and afterwards fell into a violent rage, and Nadia was locked up. She bore it heroically. He had been furious with me before for throwing up a post in his department which he procured for me. You see he is a good and kind old fellow at home, but get him in his office and—oh, my word!—he's a sort of *Jupiter Tonans*! I told him straight out that I didn't like his ways; but the great row was—thanks to the second chief at the office; he said I insulted him, but I only told him he was an ignorant beggar. So I threw them all up, and went in for the notary

business. Listen to that! What a clap! We shall have a thunder-storm directly! What a good thing I arrived before the rain! I came here on foot, you know, all the way, nearly at a run, too!"

"How in the world did you find an opportunity of speaking to Miss Nadia then? especially since you are not allowed to meet."

"Oh, one can always get over the railing; then there's that red-haired girl, she helps, and Maria Nikitishna—oh, but she's a snake, that girl! What's the matter? Are you afraid of the thunder-storm?"

"No, I'm ill—seriously ill!"

Velchaninoff had risen from his seat with a fearful sudden pain in his chest, and was trying to walk up and down the room.

"Oh, really! then I'm disturbing you. I shall go at once," said the youth, jumping up.

"No, you don't disturb me!" said Velchaninoff ceremoniously.

"How not; of course I do, if you've got the stomach ache! Well now, Vassili—what's your name—Pavel Pavlovitch, let's conclude this matter. I will formulate my question for once into words which will adapt themselves to your understanding: Are you prepared to renounce your claim to the hand of Nadejda Fedosievna before her parents, and in my presence, with all due formality?"

"No, sir; not in the slightest degree prepared," said Pavel Pavlovitch witheringly; "and allow me to say once more that all this is childish and absurd, and that you had better clear out!"

"Take care," said the youth, holding up a warning forefinger; "better give it up now, for I warn you that otherwise you will spend a lot of money down there, and take a lot of trouble; and when you come back in nine months you will be turned out of the house by Nadejda Fedosievna herself; and if you don't go *then*, it will be the

worse for you. Excuse me for saying so, but at present you are like the dog in the manger. Think over it, and be sensible for once in your life."

"Spare me the moral, if you please," began Pavel Pavlovitch furiously; "and as for your low threats I shall take my measures to-morrow—*serious* measures."

"Low threats? pooh! You are low yourself to take them as such. Very well, I'll wait till to-morrow then; but if you—there's the thunder again!—*au revoir*—very glad to have met you, sir." He nodded to Velchaninoff and made off hurriedly, evidently anxious to reach home before the rain.

CHAPTER XV

"You see, you see!" cried Pavel to Velchaninoff, the instant that the young fellow's back was turned.

"Yes; you are not going to succeed there," said Velchaninoff. He would not have been so abrupt and careless of Pavel's feelings if it had not been for the dreadful pain in his chest.

Pavel Pavlovitch shuddered as though from a sudden scald. "Well, sir, and you—you were loth to give me back the bracelet, eh?"

"I hadn't time."

"Oh! you were sorry—you pitied me, as true friend pities friend!"

"Oh, well, I pitied you, then!" Velchaninoff was growing angrier every moment. However, he informed Pavel Pavlovitch shortly as to how he had received the bracelet, and how Nadia had almost forced it upon him.

"You must understand," he added, "that otherwise I should never have agreed to accept the commission; there are quite enough disagreeables already."

"You liked the job, and accepted it with pleasure," giggled Pavel Pavlovitch.

"That is foolish on your part; but I suppose you must be forgiven. You must have seen from that boy's behaviour that I play no part in this matter. Others are the principal actors, not I!"

"At all events the job had attractions for you." Pavel Pavlovitch sat down and poured out a glass of wine.

"You think I shall knuckle under to that young gentleman? Pooh! I shall drive him out to-morrow, sir, like dust. I'll smoke this little gentleman out of his nursery, sir; you see if I don't." He drank his wine off at a gulp, and poured out some more. He seemed to grow freer as the moments went by; he talked glibly now.

"Ha-ha! Sachinka and Nadienka!² darling little children. Ha-ha-ha!" He was beside himself with fury.

At this moment, a terrific crash of thunder startled the silence, and was followed by flashes of lightning and sheets of heavy rain. Pavel Pavlovitch rose and shut the window.

"The fellow asked you if you were afraid of the thunder; do you remember? Ha-ha-ha! Velchaninoff afraid of thunder! And all that about 'fifty years old' wasn't bad, eh? Ha-ha-ha!" Pavel Pavlovitch was in a spiteful mood.

"You seem to have settled yourself here," said Velchaninoff, who could hardly speak for agony. "Do as you like, I must lie down."

"Come, you wouldn't turn a *dog* out to-night!" replied Pavel, glad of a grievance.

"Of course, sit down; drink your wine—do anything you like," murmured Velchaninoff, as he laid himself flat on his divan, and groaned with pain.

"Am I to spend the night? Aren't you afraid?"

"What of?" asked Velchaninoff, raising his head slightly.

"Oh, nothing. Only last time you seemed to be a little alarmed, that's all."

"You are a fool!" said the other angrily, as he turned his face to the wall.

"Very well, sir; all right," said Pavel.

Velchaninoff fell asleep within a minute or so of lying down. The unnatural strain of the day, and his sickly state of health together, had suddenly undermined his strength, and he was as weak as a child. But physical pain would have its own, and soon conquered weakness and sleep; in an hour he was wide awake again, and rose from the divan in anguish. Pavel Pavlovitch was asleep on the other sofa. He was dressed, and in his boots; his hat lay on the floor, and his eye-glass hung by its cord almost to the ground. Velchaninoff did not wake his guest. The room was full of tobacco smoke, and the bottle was empty; he looked savagely at the sleeping drunkard.

Having twisted himself painfully off his bed, Velchaninoff began to walk about, groaning and thinking of his agony; he could lie no longer.

He was alarmed for this pain in his chest, and not without reason. He was subject to these attacks, and had been so for many years; but they came seldom, luckily—once a year or two years. On such occasions, his agony was so dreadful for some ten hours or so that he invariably believed that he must be actually dying.

This night, his anguish was terrible; it was too late to send for the doctor, but it was far from morning yet. He staggered up and down the room, and before long his groans became loud and frequent.

The noise awoke Pavel Pavlovitch. He sat up on his divan, and for some time gazed in terror and perplexity upon Velchaninoff, as the

latter walked moaning up and down. At last he gathered his senses, and enquired anxiously what was the matter.

Velchaninoff muttered something unintelligible.

"It's your kidneys—I'm sure it is," cried Pavel, very wide awake of a sudden. "I remember Peter Kuzmich used to have the same sort of attacks. The kidneys—why, one can die of it. Let me go and fetch Mavra."

"No, no; I don't want anything," muttered Velchaninoff, waving him off irritably.

But Pavel Pavlovitch—goodness knows why—was beside himself with anxiety; he was as much exercised as though the matter at issue were the saving of his own son's life. He insisted on immediate compresses, and told Velchaninoff he must drink two or three cups of very hot weak tea—boiling hot. He ran for Mavra, lighted the fire in the kitchen, put the kettle on, put the sick man back to bed, covered him up, and within twenty minutes had the first hot application all ready, as well as the tea.

"Hot plates, sir, hot plates," he cried, as he clapped the first, wrapped in a napkin, on to Velchaninoff's chest. "I have nothing else handy; but I give you my word it's as good as anything else. Drink this tea quick, never mind if you scald your tongue—life is dearer. You can die of this sort of thing, you know." He sent sleepy Mavra out of her wits with flurry; the plates were changed every couple of minutes. At the third application, and after having taken two cups of scalding tea, Velchaninoff suddenly felt decidedly better.

"Capital! thank God! if we can once get the better of the pain it's a good sign!" cried Pavel, delightedly, and away he ran for another plate and some more tea.

"If only we can beat the pain down!" he kept muttering to himself every minute.

In half an hour the agony was passed, but the sick man was so completely knocked up that, in spite of Pavel's repeated entreaties to be allowed to apply "just one more plate," he could bear no more. His eyes were drooping from weakness.

"Sleep—sleep," he muttered faintly.

"Very well," consented Pavel, "go to sleep."

"Are you spending the night here? What time is it?"

"Nearly two."

"You must sleep here."

"Yes, yes—all right. I will."

A moment after the sick man called to Pavel again.

"You—you—" muttered the former faintly, as Pavel ran up and bent over him, "you are better than I am. I understand all—all—thank you!"

"Go to sleep!" whispered Pavel Pavlovitch, as he crept back to his divan on tip-toes.

Velchaninoff, dozing off, heard Pavel quietly make his bed, undress and lie down, all very softly, and then put the light out.

Undoubtedly Velchaninoff fell asleep very quietly when the light was once out; he remembered that much afterwards. Yet all the while he was asleep, and until he awoke, he dreamed that he could not go to sleep in spite of his weakness. At length he dreamed that he was delirious, and that he could not for the life of him chase away the visions which crowded in upon him, although he was conscious the whole while they *were* but visions and not reality. The apparition was familiar to him. He thought that his front door was

open, and that his room gradually filled with people pouring in. At the table in the middle of the room, sat one man exactly as had been the case a month before, during one of his dreams. As on the previous occasion, this man leant on his elbow at the table and would not speak; he was in a round hat with a crape band.

"How?" thought the dreamer. "Was it really Pavel Pavlovitch last time as well?" However, when he looked at the man's face, he was convinced that it was quite another person.

"Why has he a crape band, then?" thought Velchaninoff in perplexity.

The noise and chattering of all these people was dreadful; they seemed even more exasperated with Velchaninoff than on the former occasion. They were all threatening him with something or other, shaking their fists at him, and shouting something which he could not understand.

"It's all a vision," he dreamed, "I know quite well that I am up and about, because I could not lie still for anguish!"

Yet the cries and noise at times seemed so real that he was now and again half-convinced of their reality.

"Surely this *can't* be delirium!" he thought. "What on earth do all these people want of me—my God!"

Yet if it were not a vision, surely all these cries would have roused Pavel Pavlovitch? There he was, fast asleep in his divan!

Then something suddenly occurred as in the old dream. Another crowd of people surged in, crushing those who were already collected inside. These new arrivals carried something large and heavy; he could judge of the weight by their footsteps labouring upstairs.

Those in the room cried, "They're bringing it! they're bringing it!"

Every eye flashed as it turned and glared at Velchaninoff; every hand threatened him and then pointed to the stairs.

Undoubtedly it was reality, not delirium. Velchaninoff thought that he stood up and raised himself on tip-toes, in order to see over the heads of the crowd. He wanted to know what was being carried in.

His heart beat wildly, wildly, wildly; and suddenly, as in his former dream, there came one—two—three loud rings at the bell.

And again, the sound of the bell was so distinct and clear that he felt it *could* not be a dream. He gave a cry, and awoke; but he did not rush to the door as on the former occasion.

What sudden idea was it that guided his movements? Had he any idea at all, or was it impulse that prompted him what to do? He sprang up in bed, with arms outstretched, as though to ward off an attack, straight towards the divan where Pavel Pavlovitch was sleeping.

His hands encountered other hands outstretched in his direction; consequently some one must have been standing over him.

The curtains were drawn, but it was not absolutely dark, because a faint light came from the next room, which had no curtains.

Suddenly something cut the palm of his left hand, some of his fingers causing him sharp pain. He instantly realized that he had seized a knife or a razor, and he closed his hand upon it with the rapidity of thought.

At that moment something fell to the ground with a hard metallic sound.

Velchaninoff was probably three times as strong as Pavel Pavlovitch, but the struggle lasted for a long while—at least three minutes.

The former, however, forced his adversary to the earth, and bent his arms back behind his head; then he paused, for he was most anxious to tie the hands. Holding the assassin's wrist with his wounded left hand, he felt for the blind cord with his right. For a long while he could not find it; at last he grasped it, and tore it down.

He was amazed afterwards at the unnatural strength which he must have displayed during all this.

During the whole of the struggle neither man spoke a word; only their heavy breathing was audible, and the inarticulate sounds emitted by both as they fought.

At length, having secured his opponent's hands, Velchaninoff left him on the ground, rose, drew the curtains, and pulled up the blind.

The deserted street was light now. He opened the window, and stood breathing in the fresh air for a few moments. It was a little past four o'clock. He shut the window once more, fetched a towel and bound up his cut hand as tightly as he could to stop the flow of blood.

At his feet he caught sight of the opened razor lying on the carpet; he picked it up, wiped it, and put it by in its own case, which he now saw he had left upon the little cupboard beside the divan which Pavel Pavlovitch occupied. He locked the cupboard.

Having completed all these arrangements, he approached Pavel Pavlovitch and looked at him. Meanwhile the latter had managed to raise himself from the floor and reach a chair; he was now sitting in it—undressed to his shirt, which was stained with marks of blood both back and front—Velchaninoff's blood, not his own.

Of course this was Pavel Pavlovitch; but it would have been only natural for any one who had known him before, and saw him at this moment, to doubt his identity. He sat upright in his chair—very stiffly, owing to the uncomfortable position of his tightly bound hands behind his back; his face looked yellow and crooked, and he shuddered every other moment. He gazed intently, but with an expression of dazed perplexity, at Velchaninoff.

Suddenly he smiled gravely, and nodding towards a carafe of water on the table, muttered, "A little drop!" Velchaninoff poured some into a glass, and held it for him to drink.

Pavel gulped a couple of mouthfuls greedily—then suddenly raised his head and gazed intently at Velchaninoff standing over him; he said nothing, however, but finished the water. He then sighed deeply.

Velchaninoff took his pillows and some of his clothing, and went into the next room, locking Pavel Pavlovitch behind him.

His pain had quite disappeared, but he felt very weak after the strain of his late exertion. Goodness knows whence came his strength for the trial; he tried to think, but he could not collect his ideas, the shock had been too great.

His eyes would droop now and again, sometimes for ten minutes at a time; then he would shudder, wake up, remember all that had passed and raise the blood-stained rag bound about his hand to prove the reality of his thoughts; then he would relapse into eager, feverish thought. One thing was quite certain, Pavel Pavlovitch had intended to cut his throat, though, perhaps, a quarter of an hour before the fatal moment he had not known that he would make the attempt. Perhaps he had seen the razor case last evening, and thought nothing of it, only remembering the fact that it was there. The razors were usually locked up, and only yesterday Velchaninoff had taken one out in order to make himself neat for his visit to the country, and had omitted to lock it up again.

"If he had premeditated murdering me, he would certainly have provided himself with a knife or a pistol long ago; he could not have relied on my razors, which he never saw until yesterday," concluded Velchaninoff.

At last the clock struck six. Velchaninoff arose, dressed himself, and went into Pavel Pavlovitch's room. As he opened the door he wondered why he had ever locked it, and why he had not allowed Pavel to go away at once.

To his surprise the prisoner was dressed, he had doubtless found means to get his hands loose. He was sitting in an arm-chair, but rose when Velchaninoff entered. His hat was in his hand.

His anxious look seemed to say as plain as words:—

"Don't talk to me! It's no use talking—don't talk to me!"

"Go!" said Velchaninoff. "Take your jewel-case!" he added.

Pavel Pavlovitch turned back and seized his bracelet-case, stuffing it into his pocket, and went out.

Velchaninoff stood in the hall, waiting to shut the front door after him.

Their looks met for the last time. Pavel Pavlovitch stopped, and the two men gazed into each others eyes for five seconds or so, as though in indecision. At length Velchaninoff faintly waved him away with his hand.

"Go!" he said, only half aloud, as he closed the door and turned the key.

CHAPTER XVI

A feeling of immense happiness took possession of Velchaninoff; something was finished, and done with, and settled. Some huge anxiety was at an end, so it seemed to him. This anxiety had lasted five weeks.

He raised his hand and looked at the blood-stained rag bound about it.

"Oh, yes!" he thought, "it is, indeed, all over now."

And all this morning—the first time for many a day, he did not even once think of Liza; just as if the blood from those cut fingers had wiped out that grief as well, and made him "quits" with it.

He quite realized how terrible was the danger which he had passed through.

"For those people," he thought, "who do not know a minute or two before-hand that they are going to murder you, when they once get the knife into their hands, and feel the first touch of warm blood—Good Heaven! they not only cut your throat, they hack your head off afterwards—right off!"

Velchaninoff could not sit at home, he *must* go out and let something happen to him, and he walked about in hopes of something turning up; he longed to *talk*, and it struck him that he might fairly go to the doctor and talk to him, and have his hand properly bound up.

The doctor inquired how he hurt his hand, which made Velchaninoff laugh like mad; he was on the point of telling all, but refrained. Several times during the day he was on the point of telling

others the whole story. Once it was to a perfect stranger in a restaurant, with whom he had begun to converse on his own initiative. Before this day he had hated the very idea of speaking to strangers in the public restaurants.

He went into a shop and ordered some new clothes, not with the idea of visiting the Pogoryeltseffs however—the thought of any such visit was distasteful to him; besides he could not leave town, he felt that he must stay and see what was going to happen.

Velchaninoff dined and enjoyed his dinner, talking affably to his neighbour and to the waiter as well. When evening fell he went home, his head was whirling a little, and he felt slightly delirious; the first sight of his rooms gave him quite a start. He walked round them and reflected. He visited the kitchen, which he had hardly ever done before in his life, and thought, "This is where they heated the plates last night." He locked the doors carefully, and lit his candles earlier than usual. As he shut the door he remembered that he had asked Mavra, as he passed the dvornik's lodging, whether Pavel Pavlovitch had been. Just as if the latter could possibly have been near the place!

Having then carefully locked himself in, he opened the little cupboard where his razors were kept, and took out "the" razor. There was still some of the blood on the bone handle. He put the razor back again, and locked the cupboard.

He was sleepy; he felt that he must go to sleep as speedily as possible, otherwise he would be useless "for to-morrow," and to-morrow seemed to him for some reason or other to be about to be a fateful day for him.

But all those thoughts which had crowded in upon him all day, and had never left him for a moment, were still in full swing within his brain; he thought, and thought, and thought, and could not fall asleep.

If Pavel Pavlovitch arrived at murdering point accidentally, had he ever seriously thought of murder even for a single evil instant before? Velchaninoff decided the question strangely enough: Pavel Pavlovitch *had* the desire to murder him, but did not himself know of the existence of this desire.

"It seems an absurd conclusion; but so it is!" thought Velchaninoff.

Pavel Pavlovitch did not come to Petersburg to look out for a new appointment, nor did he come for the sake of finding Bagantoff, in spite of his rage when the latter died. No! he despised Bagantoff thoroughly. Pavel Pavlovitch had come to St. Petersburg for *him*, and had brought Liza with him, for him alone, Velchaninoff.

"Did *I* expect to have my throat cut?" Velchaninoff decided that he *had* expected it, from the moment when he saw Pavel Pavlovitch in the carriage following in Bagantoff's funeral procession. "That is I expected something—of course, not exactly to have my throat cut! And surely—surely, it was not all *bonâ fide* yesterday," he reflected, raising his head from the pillow in the excitement of the idea. "*Surely* it cannot have been all in good faith that that fellow assured me of his love for me, beating his breast, and with his under lip trembling, as he spoke!

"Yes, it was absolutely *bonâ fide*!" he decided. "This quasimodo of T— was quite good enough and generous enough to fall in love with his wife's lover—his wife in whom he never observed 'anything' during the twenty years of their married life.

"He respected and loved me for nine years, and remembered both me and my sayings. My goodness, to think of that! and I knew nothing whatever of all this! Oh, no! he was not lying yesterday! But did he love me *while* he declared his love for me, and said that we must be 'quits!' Yes, he did, he loved me spitefully—and spiteful love is sometimes the strongest of all.

"I daresay I made a colossal impression upon him down at T——, for it is just upon such Schiller-like men that one is liable to make a colossal impression. He exaggerated my value a thousand fold; perhaps it was my 'philosophical retirement' that struck him! It would be curious to discover precisely what it was that made so great an impression upon him. Who knows, it may have been that I wore a good pair of gloves, and knew how to put them on. These quasimodo fellows love æstheticism to distraction! Give them a start in the direction of admiration for yourself, and they will do all the rest, and give you a thousand times more than your due of every virtue that exists; will fight to the death for you with pleasure, if you ask it of them. How high he must have held my aptitude for illusionizing others; perhaps that has struck him as much as anything else! for he remarked: 'If *this* man deceived me, whom am I ever to trust again!'

"After such a cry as that a man may well turn wild beast.

"And he came here to 'embrace and weep over me,' as he expressed it. H'm! that means he came to cut my throat, and *thought* that he came to embrace and weep over me. He brought Liza with him, too.

"What if I *had* wept with him and embraced him? Perhaps he really would have fully and entirely forgiven me—for he was yearning to forgive me, I could see that! And all this turned to drunkenness and bestiality at the first check. Yes, Pavel Pavlovitch, the most deformed of all deformities is the abortion with noble feelings. And this man was foolish enough to take me down to see his 'bride.' My goodness! his bride! Only such a lunatic of a fellow could ever have developed so wild an idea as a 'new existence' to be inaugurated by an alliance between himself and Nadia. But you are not to blame, Pavel Pavlovitch, you are a deformity, and all your ideas and actions and aspirations must of necessity be deformed. But deformity though he be, why in the world was *my* sanction, *my* blessing, as it were, necessary to his union with Miss Zachlebnikoff?

Perhaps he sincerely hoped that there, with so much sweet innocence and charm around us, we should fall into each other's arms in some leafy spot, and weep out our differences on each other's shoulders?

"Was *murder* in his thoughts when I caught him standing between our beds that first time, in the darkness? No. I think not. And yet the first idea of it may have entered his soul as he stood there—And if I had not left the razors out, probably nothing would have happened. Surely that is so; for he avoided me for weeks—he was *sorry* for me, and avoided me. He chose Bagantoff to expend his wrath upon, first, not me! He jumped out of bed and fussed over the hot plates, to divert his mind from murder perhaps—from the knife to charity! Perhaps he tried to save both himself and me by his hot plates!"

So mused Velchaninoff, his poor overwrought brain working on and on, and jumping from conclusion to conclusion with the endless activity of fever, until he fell asleep. Next morning he awoke with no less tired brain and body, but with a new terror, an unexpected and novel feeling of dread hanging over him.

This dread consisted in the fact that he felt that he, Velchaninoff, must go and see Pavel Pavlovitch that very day; he knew not why he must go, but he felt drawn to go, as though by some unseen force. The idea was too loathsome to look into, so he left it to take care of itself as an unalterable fact. The madness of it, however, was modified, and the whole aspect of the thought became more reasonable, after a while, when it took shape and resolved itself into a conviction in Velchaninoff's mind that Pavel Pavlovitch had returned home, locked himself up, and hung himself to the bedpost, as Maria Sisevna had described of the wretched suicide witnessed by poor Liza.

"Why should the fool hang himself?" he repeated over and over again; yet the thought *would* return that he was bound to hang himself, as Liza had said that he threatened to do. Velchaninoff could

not help adding that if he were in Pavel Pavlovitch's place he would probably do the same.

So the end of it was that instead of going out to his dinner, he set off for Pavel Pavlovitch's lodging, "just to ask Maria Sisevna after him." But before he had reached the street he paused and his face flushed up with shame. "Surely I am not going there to embrace and weep over him! Surely I am not going to add this one last pitiful folly to the long list of my late shameful actions!"

However, his good providence saved him from this "pitiful folly," for he had hardly passed through the large gateway into the street, when Alexander Loboff suddenly collided with him. The young fellow was dashing along in a state of great excitement.

"I was just coming to you. Our friend Pavel Pavlovitch—a nice sort of fellow he is——"

"Has he hung himself?" gasped Velchaninoff.

"Hung himself? Who? Why?" asked Loboff, with his eyes starting out of his head.

"Oh! go on, I meant nothing!"

"Tfu! What a funny line your thoughts seem to take. He hasn't hung himself a bit—why in the world should he?—on the contrary, he's gone away. I've just seen him off! My goodness, how that fellow can drink! We had three bottles of wine. Predposiloff was there too—but how the fellow drinks! Good heavens! he was singing in the carriage when the train went off! He thought of you, and kissed his hand to you, and sent his love. He's a scamp, that fellow, eh?"

Young Loboff had apparently had quite his share of the three bottles, his face was flushed and his utterance thick. Velchaninoff roared with laughter.

"So you ended up by weeping over each others shoulders, did you? Ha-ha-ha! Oh, you poetical, Schiller-ish, funny fellows, you!"

"Don't scold us. You must know he went down *there* yesterday and to-day, and he has withdrawn. He 'sneaked' like anything about Nadia and me. They've shut her up. There was such a row, but we wouldn't give way—and, my word, how the fellow drinks! He was always talking about you; but, of course, he is no companion for you. You are, more or less, a respectable sort of man, and must have belonged to society at some time of your life, though you seem to have retired into private life just now. Is it poverty, or what? I couldn't make head or tail of Pavel Pavlovitch's story."

"Oh! Then it was he who gave you those interesting details about me?"

"Yes; don't be cross about it. It's better to be a citizen than 'a swell' any-day! The thing is one does not know whom to respect in Russia nowadays! Don't you think it a diseased feature of the times, in Russia, that one doesn't know whom to respect?"

"Quite so, quite so. Well, go on about Pavel Pavlovitch——"

"Well, he sat down in the railway carriage and began singing, then he cried a bit. It was really disgusting to see the fellow. I hate fools! Then he began to throw money to beggars 'for the repose of Liza's soul,' he said. Is that his wife?"

"Daughter."

"What's the matter with your hand?"

"I cut it."

"H'm! Never mind, cheer up! It'll be all right soon! I am glad that fellow has gone, you know,—confound him! But I bet anything he'll marry as soon as he arrives at his place."

"Well, what of that? You are going to marry, too!"

"I! That's quite a different affair! What a funny man you are! Why, if *you* are fifty, he must be sixty! Well, ta-ta! Glad I met you—can't come in—don't ask me—no time!"

He started off at a run, but turned a minute after and came back.

"What a fool I am!" he cried, "I forgot all about it—he sent you a letter. Here it is. How was it you didn't see him off? Ta-ta!"

Velchaninoff returned home and opened the letter, which was sealed and addressed to himself.

There was not a syllable inside in Pavel Pavlovitch's own hand writing; but he drew out another letter, and knew the writing at once. It was an old, faded, yellow-looking sheet of paper, and the ink was faint and discoloured; the letter was addressed to Velchaninoff, and written ten years before—a couple of months after his departure from T——. He had never received a copy of this one, but another letter, which he well remembered, had evidently been written and sent instead of it; he could tell that by the substance of the faded document in his hand. In this present letter Natalia Vasilievna bade farewell to him for ever (as she had done in the other communication), and informed him that she expected her confinement in a few months. She added, for his consolation, that she would find an opportunity of purveying his child to him in good time, and pointed out that their friendship was now cemented for ever. She begged him to love her no longer, because she could no longer return his love, but authorized him to pay a visit to T—— after a year's absence, in order to see the child. Goodness only knows why she had not sent this letter, but had changed it for another!

Velchaninoff was deadly pale when he read this document; but he imagined Pavel Pavlovitch finding it in the family box of black wood with mother-of-pearl ornamentation and silver mounting, and reading it for the first time!

"I should think he, too, grew as pale as a corpse," he reflected, catching sight of his own face in the looking-glass. "Perhaps he read it and then closed his eyes and hoped and prayed that when he opened them again the dreadful letter would be nothing but a sheet of white paper once more! Perhaps the poor fellow tried this desperate expedient two or three times before he accepted the truth!"

CHAPTER XVII

THE ETERNAL HUSBAND

Two years have elapsed since the events recorded in the foregoing Chapters, and we find our friend Velchaninoff, one lovely summer day, seated in a railway carriage on his way to Odessa; he was making the journey for the purpose of seeing a great friend, and of being introduced to a lady whose acquaintance he had long wished to make.

Without entering into any details, we may remark that Velchaninoff was entirely changed during these last two years. He was no longer the miserable, fanciful hypochondriac of those dark days. He had returned to society and to his friends, who gladly forgave him his temporary relapse into seclusion. Even those whom he had ceased to bow to, when met, were now among the first to extend the hand of friendship once more, and asked no questions—

just as though he had been abroad on private business, which was no affair of theirs.

His success in the legal matters of which we have heard, and the fact of having his sixty thousand roubles safe at his bankers—enough to keep him all his life—was the elixir which brought him back to health and spirits. His premature wrinkles departed, his eyes grew brighter, and his complexion better; he became more active and vigorous—in fact, as he sat thinking in a comfortable first-class carriage, he looked a very different man from the Velchaninoff of two years ago.

The next station to be reached was that at which passengers were expected to dine, forty minutes being allowed for this purpose.

It so happened that Velchaninoff, while seated at the dinner table, was able to do a service to a lady who was also dining there. This lady was young and nice looking, though rather too flashily dressed, and was accompanied by a young officer who unfortunately was scarcely in a befitting condition for ladies' society, having refreshed himself at the bar to an unnecessary extent. This young man succeeded in quarrelling with another person equally unfit for ladies' society, and a brawl ensued, which threatened to land both parties upon the table in close proximity to the lady. Velchaninoff interfered, and removed the brawlers to a safe distance, to the great and almost boundless gratitude of the alarmed lady, who hailed him as her "guardian angel." Velchaninoff was interested in the young woman, who looked like a respectable provincial lady—of provincial manners and taste, as her dress and gestures showed.

A conversation was opened, and the lady immediately commenced to lament that her husband was "never by when he was wanted," and that he had now gone and hidden himself somewhere just because he happened to be required.

"Poor fellow, he'll catch it for this," thought Velchaninoff. "If you will tell me your husband's name," he added aloud, "I will find him, with pleasure."

"Pavel Pavlovitch," hiccupped the young officer.

"Your husband's name is Pavel Pavlovitch, is it?" inquired Velchaninoff with curiosity, and at the same moment a familiar bald head was interposed between the lady and himself.

"Here you are *at last*," cried the wife, hysterically.

It was indeed Pavel Pavlovitch.

He gazed in amazement and dread at Velchaninoff, falling back before him just as though he saw a ghost. So great was his consternation, that for some time it was clear that he did not understand a single word of what his wife was telling him—which was that Velchaninoff had acted as her guardian angel, and that he (Pavel) ought to be ashamed of himself for never being at hand when he was wanted.

At last Pavel Pavlovitch shuddered, and woke up to consciousness.

Velchaninoff suddenly burst out laughing. "Why, we are old friends"—he cried, "friends from childhood!" He clapped his hand familiarly and encouragingly on Pavel's shoulder. Pavel smiled wanly. "Hasn't he ever spoken to you of Velchaninoff?"

"No, never," said the wife, a little confused.

"Then introduce me to your wife, you faithless friend!"

"This—this is Mr. Velchaninoff!" muttered Pavel Pavlovitch, looking the picture of confusion.

All went swimmingly after this. Pavel Pavlovitch was despatched to cater for the party, while his lady informed Velchaninoff that they were on their way from O——, where Pavel Pavlovitch served, to their country place—a lovely house, she said, some twenty-five miles away. There they hoped to receive a party of friends, and if Mr. Velchaninoff would be so very kind as to take pity on their rustic home, and honour it with a visit, she should do her best to show her gratitude to the guardian angel who, etc., etc. Velchaninoff replied that he would be delighted; and that he was an idle man, and always free—adding a compliment or two which caused the fair lady to blush with delight, and to tell Pavel Pavlovitch, who now returned from his quest, that Alexey Ivanovitch had been so kind as to promise to pay them a visit next week, and stay a whole month.

Pavel Pavlovitch, to the amazed wrath of his wife, smiled a sickly smile, and said nothing.

After dinner the party bade farewell to Velchaninoff, and returned to their carriage, while the latter walked up and down the platform smoking his cigar; he knew that Pavel Pavlovitch would return to talk to him.

So it turned out. Pavel came up with an expression of the most anxious and harassed misery. Velchaninoff smiled, took his arm, led him to a seat, and sat down beside him. He did not say anything, for he was anxious that Pavel should make the first move.

“So you are coming to us?” murmured the latter at last, plunging *in medias res*.

“I knew you'd begin like that! you haven't changed an atom!” cried Velchaninoff, roaring with laughter, and slapping him confidentially on the back. “Surely, you don't really suppose that I ever had the smallest intention of visiting you—and staying a month too!”

Pavel Pavlovitch gave a start.

"Then you're *not* coming?" he cried, without an attempt to hide his joy.

"No, no! of course not!" replied Velchaninoff, laughing. He did not know why, but all this was exquisitely droll to him; and the further it went the funnier it seemed.

"Really—are you really serious?" cried Pavel, jumping up.

"Yes; I tell you, I won't come—not for the world!"

"But what will my wife say now? She thinks you intend to come!"

"Oh, tell her I've broken my leg—or anything you like!"

"She won't believe!" said Pavel, looking anxious.

"Ha-ha-ha! You catch it at home, I see! Tell me, who is that young officer?"

"Oh, a distant relative of mine—an unfortunate young fellow——"

"Pavel Pavlovitch!" cried a voice from the carriage, "the second bell has rung!"

Pavel was about to move off—Velchaninoff stopped him.

"Shall I go and tell your wife how you tried to cut my throat?" he said.

"What are you thinking of—God forbid!" cried Pavel, in a terrible fright.

"Well, go along, then!" said the other, loosing his hold of Pavel's shoulder.

"Then—then—you won't come, will you?" said Pavel once more, timidly and despairingly, and clasping his hands in entreaty.

"No—I won't—I swear!—run away—you'll be late!" He put out his hand mechanically, then recollected himself, and shuddered. Pavel did not take the proffered hand, he withdrew his own.

The third bell rang.

An instantaneous but total change seemed to have come over both. Something snapped within Velchaninoff's heart—so it seemed to him, and he who had been roaring with laughter a moment before, seized Pavel Pavlovitch angrily by the shoulder.

"If I—*I* offer you my hand, sir" (he showed the scar on the palm of his left hand)—"if *I* can offer you my hand, sir, I should think *you* might accept it!" he hissed with white and trembling lips.

Pavel Pavlovitch grew deadly white also, his lips quivered and a convulsion seemed to run through his features:

"And—Liza?" he whispered quickly. Suddenly his whole face worked, and tears started to his eyes.

Velchaninoff stood like a log before him.

"Pavel Pavlovitch! Pavel Pavlovitch!" shrieked the voice from the carriage, in despairing accents, as though some one were being murdered.

Pavel roused himself and started to run. At that moment the engine whistled, and the train moved off. Pavel Pavlovitch just managed to cling on, and so climb into his carriage, as it moved out of the station.

Velchaninoff waited for another train, and then continued his journey to Odessa.

THE END



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FOOTNOTES

1. The present value of a rouble is about two shillings.
 2. Short for Alexander and Nadejda.
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