

**ANTON  
PAVLOVICH  
CHEKHOV**

THE SCHOOLMASTER AND  
OTHER STORIES

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**and Other Stories**

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*The Schoolmaster and Other Stories:*

# Содержание

THE SCHOOLMASTER	4
ENEMIES	15
THE EXAMINING MAGISTRATE	35
BETROTHED	43
I	43
II	50
III	56
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	59

# **Anton Pavlovich Chekhov**

## **The Schoolmaster and Other Stories**

### **THE SCHOOLMASTER**

FYODOR LUKITCH SYSOEV, the master of the factory school maintained at the expense of the firm of Kulikin, was getting ready for the annual dinner. Every year after the school examination the board of managers gave a dinner at which the inspector of elementary schools, all who had conducted the examinations, and all the managers and foremen of the factory were present. In spite of their official character, these dinners were always good and lively, and the guests sat a long time over them; forgetting distinctions of rank and recalling only their meritorious labours, they ate till they were full, drank amicably, chattered till they were all hoarse and parted late in the evening, deafening the whole factory settlement with their singing and the sound of their kisses. Of such dinners Sysoev had taken part in thirteen, as he had been that number of years master of the factory school.

Now, getting ready for the fourteenth, he was trying to make himself look as festive and correct as possible. He had spent

a whole hour brushing his new black suit, and spent almost as long in front of a looking-glass while he put on a fashionable shirt; the studs would not go into the button-holes, and this circumstance called forth a perfect storm of complaints, threats, and reproaches addressed to his wife.

His poor wife, bustling round him, wore herself out with her efforts. And indeed he, too, was exhausted in the end. When his polished boots were brought him from the kitchen he had not strength to pull them on. He had to lie down and have a drink of water.

"How weak you have grown!" sighed his wife. "You ought not to go to this dinner at all."

"No advice, please!" the schoolmaster cut her short angrily.

He was in a very bad temper, for he had been much displeased with the recent examinations. The examinations had gone off splendidly; all the boys of the senior division had gained certificates and prizes; both the managers of the factory and the government officials were pleased with the results; but that was not enough for the schoolmaster. He was vexed that Babkin, a boy who never made a mistake in writing, had made three mistakes in the dictation; Sergeyev, another boy, had been so excited that he could not remember seventeen times thirteen; the inspector, a young and inexperienced man, had chosen a difficult article for dictation, and Lyapunov, the master of a neighbouring school, whom the inspector had asked to dictate, had not behaved like "a good comrade"; but in dictating had, as it were, swallowed

the words and had not pronounced them as written.

After pulling on his boots with the assistance of his wife, and looking at himself once more in the looking-glass, the schoolmaster took his gnarled stick and set off for the dinner. Just before the factory manager's house, where the festivity was to take place, he had a little mishap. He was taken with a violent fit of coughing.. He was so shaken by it that the cap flew off his head and the stick dropped out of his hand; and when the school inspector and the teachers, hearing his cough, ran out of the house, he was sitting on the bottom step, bathed in perspiration.

"Fyodor Lukitch, is that you?" said the inspector, surprised. "You.. have come?"

"Why not?"

"You ought to be at home, my dear fellow. You are not at all well to-day.."

"I am just the same to-day as I was yesterday. And if my presence is not agreeable to you, I can go back."

"Oh, Fyodor Lukitch, you must not talk like that! Please come in. Why, the function is really in your honour, not ours. And we are delighted to see you. Of course we are!.."

Within, everything was ready for the banquet. In the big dining-room adorned with German oleographs and smelling of geraniums and varnish there were two tables, a larger one for the dinner and a smaller one for the hors-d'oeuvres. The hot light of midday faintly percolated through the lowered blinds... The twilight of the room, the Swiss views on the blinds, the

geraniums, the thin slices of sausage on the plates, all had a naïve, girlishly-sentimental air, and it was all in keeping with the master of the house, a good-natured little German with a round little stomach and affectionate, oily little eyes. Adolf Andreyitch Bruni (that was his name) was bustling round the table of hors-d'oeuvres as zealously as though it were a house on fire, filling up the wine-glasses, loading the plates, and trying in every way to please, to amuse, and to show his friendly feelings. He clapped people on the shoulder, looked into their eyes, chuckled, rubbed his hands, in fact was as ingratiating as a friendly dog.

"Whom do I behold? Fyodor Lukitch!" he said in a jerky voice, on seeing Sysoev. "How delightful! You have come in spite of your illness. Gentlemen, let me congratulate you, Fyodor Lukitch has come!"

The school-teachers were already crowding round the table and eating the hors-d'oeuvres. Sysoev frowned; he was displeased that his colleagues had begun to eat and drink without waiting for him. He noticed among them Lyapunov, the man who had dictated at the examination, and going up to him, began:

"It was not acting like a comrade! No, indeed! Gentlemanly people don't dictate like that!"

"Good Lord, you are still harping on it!" said Lyapunov, and he frowned. "Aren't you sick of it?"

"Yes, still harping on it! My Babkin has never made mistakes! I know why you dictated like that. You simply wanted my pupils to be floored, so that your school might seem better than mine.

I know all about it!."

"Why are you trying to get up a quarrel?" Lyapunov snarled. "Why the devil do you pester me?"

"Come, gentlemen," interposed the inspector, making a woebegone face. "Is it worth while to get so heated over a trifle? Three mistakes.. not one mistake.. does it matter?"

"Yes, it does matter. Babkin has never made mistakes."

"He won't leave off," Lyapunov went on, snorting angrily. "He takes advantage of his position as an invalid and worries us all to death. Well, sir, I am not going to consider your being ill."

"Let my illness alone!" cried Sysoev, angrily. "What is it to do with you? They all keep repeating it at me: illness! illness! illness!.. As though I need your sympathy! Besides, where have you picked up the notion that I am ill? I was ill before the examinations, that's true, but now I have completely recovered, there is nothing left of it but weakness."

"You have regained your health, well, thank God," said the scripture teacher, Father Nikolay, a young priest in a foppish cinnamon-coloured cassock and trousers outside his boots. "You ought to rejoice, but you are irritable and so on."

"You are a nice one, too," Sysoev interrupted him. "Questions ought to be straightforward, clear, but you kept asking riddles. That's not the thing to do!"

By combined efforts they succeeded in soothing him and making him sit down to the table. He was a long time making up his mind what to drink, and pulling a wry face drank a wine-

glass of some green liqueur; then he drew a bit of pie towards him, and sulkily picked out of the inside an egg with onion on it. At the first mouthful it seemed to him that there was no salt in it. He sprinkled salt on it and at once pushed it away as the pie was too salt.

At dinner Sysoev was seated between the inspector and Bruni. After the first course the toasts began, according to the old-established custom.

"I consider it my agreeable duty," the inspector began, "to propose a vote of thanks to the absent school wardens, Daniel Petrovitch and.. and.. and."

"And Ivan Petrovitch," Bruni prompted him.

"And Ivan Petrovitch Kulikin, who grudge no expense for the school, and I propose to drink their health.."

"For my part," said Bruni, jumping up as though he had been stung, "I propose a toast to the health of the honoured inspector of elementary schools, Pavel Gennadievitch Nadarov!"

Chairs were pushed back, faces beamed with smiles, and the usual clinking of glasses began.

The third toast always fell to Sysoev. And on this occasion, too, he got up and began to speak. Looking grave and clearing his throat, he first of all announced that he had not the gift of eloquence and that he was not prepared to make a speech. Further he said that during the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster there had been many intrigues, many underhand attacks, and even secret reports on him to the authorities, and

that he knew his enemies and those who had informed against him, and he would not mention their names, "for fear of spoiling somebody's appetite"; that in spite of these intrigues the Kulikin school held the foremost place in the whole province not only from a moral, but also from a material point of view."

"Everywhere else," he said, "schoolmasters get two hundred or three hundred roubles, while I get five hundred, and moreover my house has been redecorated and even furnished at the expense of the firm. And this year all the walls have been repapered.."

Further the schoolmaster enlarged on the liberality with which the pupils were provided with writing materials in the factory schools as compared with the Zemstvo and Government schools. And for all this the school was indebted, in his opinion, not to the heads of the firm, who lived abroad and scarcely knew of its existence, but to a man who, in spite of his German origin and Lutheran faith, was a Russian at heart.

Sysoev spoke at length, with pauses to get his breath and with pretensions to rhetoric, and his speech was boring and unpleasant. He several times referred to certain enemies of his, tried to drop hints, repeated himself, coughed, and flourished his fingers unbecomingly. At last he was exhausted and in a perspiration and he began talking jerkily, in a low voice as though to himself, and finished his speech not quite coherently: "And so I propose the health of Bruni, that is Adolf Andreyitch, who is here, among us.. generally speaking.. you understand."

When he finished everyone gave a faint sigh, as though

someone had sprinkled cold water and cleared the air. Bruni alone apparently had no unpleasant feeling. Beaming and rolling his sentimental eyes, the German shook Sysoev's hand with feeling and was again as friendly as a dog.

"Oh, I thank you," he said, with an emphasis on the *oh*, laying his left hand on his heart. "I am very happy that you understand me! I, with my whole heart, wish you all things good. But I ought only to observe; you exaggerate my importance. The school owes its flourishing condition only to you, my honoured friend, Fyodor Lukitch. But for you it would be in no way distinguished from other schools! You think the German is paying a compliment, the German is saying something polite. Ha-ha! No, my dear Fyodor Lukitch, I am an honest man and never make complimentary speeches. If we pay you five hundred roubles a year it is because you are valued by us. Isn't that so? Gentlemen, what I say is true, isn't it? We should not pay anyone else so much... Why, a good school is an honour to the factory!"

"I must sincerely own that your school is really exceptional," said the inspector. "Don't think this is flattery. Anyway, I have never come across another like it in my life. As I sat at the examination I was full of admiration... Wonderful children! They know a great deal and answer brightly, and at the same time they are somehow special, unconstrained, sincere... One can see that they love you, Fyodor Lukitch. You are a schoolmaster to the marrow of your bones. You must have been born a teacher. You have all the gifts – innate vocation, long experience, and

love for your work... It's simply amazing, considering the weak state of your health, what energy, what understanding.. what perseverance, do you understand, what confidence you have! Some one in the school committee said truly that you were a poet in your work... Yes, a poet you are!"

And all present at the dinner began as one man talking of Sysoev's extraordinary talent. And as though a dam had been burst, there followed a flood of sincere, enthusiastic words such as men do not utter when they are restrained by prudent and cautious sobriety. Sysoev's speech and his intolerable temper and the horrid, spiteful expression on his face were all forgotten. Everyone talked freely, even the shy and silent new teachers, poverty-stricken, down-trodden youths who never spoke to the inspector without addressing him as "your honour." It was clear that in his own circle Sysoev was a person of consequence.

Having been accustomed to success and praise for the fourteen years that he had been schoolmaster, he listened with indifference to the noisy enthusiasm of his admirers.

It was Bruni who drank in the praise instead of the schoolmaster. The German caught every word, beamed, clapped his hands, and flushed modestly as though the praise referred not to the schoolmaster but to him.

"Bravo! bravo!" he shouted. "That's true! You have grasped my meaning!.. Excellent!." He looked into the schoolmaster's eyes as though he wanted to share his bliss with him. At last he could restrain himself no longer; he leapt up, and, overpowering

all the other voices with his shrill little tenor, shouted:

"Gentlemen! Allow me to speak! Sh-h! To all you say I can make only one reply: the management of the factory will not be forgetful of what it owes to Fyodor Lukitch!."

All were silent. Sysoev raised his eyes to the German's rosy face.

"We know how to appreciate it," Bruni went on, dropping his voice.

"In response to your words I ought to tell you that.. Fyodor Lukitch's family will be provided for and that a sum of money was placed in the bank a month ago for that object."

Sysoev looked enquiringly at the German, at his colleagues, as though unable to understand why his family should be provided for and not he himself. And at once on all the faces, in all the motionless eyes bent upon him, he read not the sympathy, not the commiseration which he could not endure, but something else, something soft, tender, but at the same time intensely sinister, like a terrible truth, something which in one instant turned him cold all over and filled his soul with unutterable despair. With a pale, distorted face he suddenly jumped up and clutched at his head. For a quarter of a minute he stood like that, stared with horror at a fixed point before him as though he saw the swiftly coming death of which Bruni was speaking, then sat down and burst into tears.

"Come, come!.. What is it?" he heard agitated voices saying.

"Water! drink a little water!"

A short time passed and the schoolmaster grew calmer, but the party did not recover their previous liveliness. The dinner ended in gloomy silence, and much earlier than on previous occasions.

When he got home Sysoev first of all looked at himself in the glass.

"Of course there was no need for me to blubber like that!" he thought, looking at his sunken cheeks and his eyes with dark rings under them. "My face is a much better colour to-day than yesterday. I am suffering from anemia and catarrh of the stomach, and my cough is only a stomach cough."

Reassured, he slowly began undressing, and spent a long time brushing his new black suit, then carefully folded it up and put it in the chest of drawers.

Then he went up to the table where there lay a pile of his pupils' exercise-books, and picking out Babkin's, sat down and fell to contemplating the beautiful childish handwriting..

And meantime, while he was examining the exercise-books, the district doctor was sitting in the next room and telling his wife in a whisper that a man ought not to have been allowed to go out to dinner who had not in all probability more than a week to live.

# ENEMIES

BETWEEN nine and ten on a dark September evening the only son of the district doctor, Kirilov, a child of six, called Andrey, died of diphtheria. Just as the doctor's wife sank on her knees by the dead child's bedside and was overwhelmed by the first rush of despair there came a sharp ring at the bell in the entry.

All the servants had been sent out of the house that morning on account of the diphtheria. Kirilov went to open the door just as he was, without his coat on, with his waistcoat unbuttoned, without wiping his wet face or his hands which were scalded with carbolic. It was dark in the entry and nothing could be distinguished in the man who came in but medium height, a white scarf, and a large, extremely pale face, so pale that its entrance seemed to make the passage lighter.

"Is the doctor at home?" the newcomer asked quickly.

"I am at home," answered Kirilov. "What do you want?"

"Oh, it's you? I am very glad," said the stranger in a tone of relief, and he began feeling in the dark for the doctor's hand, found it and squeezed it tightly in his own. "I am very.. very glad! We are acquainted. My name is Abogin, and I had the honour of meeting you in the summer at Gnutchev's. I am very glad I have found you at home. For God's sake don't refuse to come back with me at once... My wife has been taken dangerously ill... And

the carriage is waiting.."

From the voice and gestures of the speaker it could be seen that he was in a state of great excitement. Like a man terrified by a house on fire or a mad dog, he could hardly restrain his rapid breathing and spoke quickly in a shaking voice, and there was a note of unaffected sincerity and childish alarm in his voice. As people always do who are frightened and overwhelmed, he spoke in brief, jerky sentences and uttered a great many unnecessary, irrelevant words.

"I was afraid I might not find you in," he went on. "I was in a perfect agony as I drove here. Put on your things and let us go, for God's sake... This is how it happened. Alexandr Semyonovitch Paptchinsky, whom you know, came to see me... We talked a little and then we sat down to tea; suddenly my wife cried out, clutched at her heart, and fell back on her chair. We carried her to bed and.. and I rubbed her forehead with ammonia and sprinkled her with water.. she lay as though she were dead... I am afraid it is aneurism.. Come along.. her father died of aneurism."

Kirilov listened and said nothing, as though he did not understand

Russian.

When Abogin mentioned again Paptchinsky and his wife's father and once more began feeling in the dark for his hand the doctor shook his head and said apathetically, dragging out each word:

"Excuse me, I cannot come.. my son died.. five minutes ago!"

"Is it possible!" whispered Abogin, stepping back a pace. "My God, at what an unlucky moment I have come! A wonderfully unhappy day.. wonderfully. What a coincidence... It's as though it were on purpose!"

Abogin took hold of the door-handle and bowed his head. He was evidently hesitating and did not know what to do – whether to go away or to continue entreating the doctor.

"Listen," he said fervently, catching hold of Kirilov's sleeve. "I well understand your position! God is my witness that I am ashamed of attempting at such a moment to intrude on your attention, but what am I to do? Only think, to whom can I go? There is no other doctor here, you know. For God's sake come! I am not asking you for myself... I am not the patient!"

A silence followed. Kirilov turned his back on Abogin, stood still a moment, and slowly walked into the drawing-room. Judging from his unsteady, mechanical step, from the attention with which he set straight the fluffy shade on the unlighted lamp in the drawing-room and glanced into a thick book lying on the table, at that instant he had no intention, no desire, was thinking of nothing and most likely did not remember that there was a stranger in the entry. The twilight and stillness of the drawing-room seemed to increase his numbness. Going out of the drawing-room into his study he raised his right foot higher than was necessary, and felt for the doorposts with his hands, and as he did so there was an air of perplexity about his whole figure as though he were in somebody else's house, or were drunk for

the first time in his life and were now abandoning himself with surprise to the new sensation. A broad streak of light stretched across the bookcase on one wall of the study; this light came together with the close, heavy smell of carbolic and ether from the door into the bedroom, which stood a little way open... The doctor sank into a low chair in front of the table; for a minute he stared drowsily at his books, which lay with the light on them, then got up and went into the bedroom.

Here in the bedroom reigned a dead silence. Everything to the smallest detail was eloquent of the storm that had been passed through, of exhaustion, and everything was at rest. A candle standing among a crowd of bottles, boxes, and pots on a stool and a big lamp on the chest of drawers threw a brilliant light over all the room. On the bed under the window lay a boy with open eyes and a look of wonder on his face. He did not move, but his open eyes seemed every moment growing darker and sinking further into his head. The mother was kneeling by the bed with her arms on his body and her head hidden in the bedclothes. Like the child, she did not stir; but what throbbing life was suggested in the curves of her body and in her arms! She leaned against the bed with all her being, pressing against it greedily with all her might, as though she were afraid of disturbing the peaceful and comfortable attitude she had found at last for her exhausted body. The bedclothes, the rags and bowls, the splashes of water on the floor, the little paint-brushes and spoons thrown down here and there, the white bottle of lime water, the very air, heavy

and stifling – were all hushed and seemed plunged in repose.

The doctor stopped close to his wife, thrust his hands in his trouser pockets, and slanting his head on one side fixed his eyes on his son. His face bore an expression of indifference, and only from the drops that glittered on his beard it could be seen that he had just been crying.

That repellent horror which is thought of when we speak of death was absent from the room. In the numbness of everything, in the mother's attitude, in the indifference on the doctor's face there was something that attracted and touched the heart, that subtle, almost elusive beauty of human sorrow which men will not for a long time learn to understand and describe, and which it seems only music can convey. There was a feeling of beauty, too, in the austere stillness. Kirilov and his wife were silent and not weeping, as though besides the bitterness of their loss they were conscious, too, of all the tragedy of their position; just as once their youth had passed away, so now together with this boy their right to have children had gone for ever to all eternity! The doctor was forty-four, his hair was grey and he looked like an old man; his faded and invalid wife was thirty-five. Andrey was not merely the only child, but also the last child.

In contrast to his wife the doctor belonged to the class of people who at times of spiritual suffering feel a craving for movement. After standing for five minutes by his wife, he walked, raising his right foot high, from the bedroom into a little room which was half filled up by a big sofa; from there he went

into the kitchen. After wandering by the stove and the cook's bed he bent down and went by a little door into the passage.

There he saw again the white scarf and the white face.

"At last," sighed Abogin, reaching towards the door-handle.

"Let us go, please."

The doctor started, glanced at him, and remembered..

"Why, I have told you already that I can't go!" he said, growing more animated. "How strange!"

"Doctor, I am not a stone, I fully understand your position.. I feel for you," Abogin said in an imploring voice, laying his hand on his scarf. "But I am not asking you for myself. My wife is dying. If you had heard that cry, if you had seen her face, you would understand my pertinacity. My God, I thought you had gone to get ready! Doctor, time is precious. Let us go, I entreat you."

"I cannot go," said Kirilov emphatically and he took a step into the drawing-room.

Abogin followed him and caught hold of his sleeve.

"You are in sorrow, I understand. But I'm not asking you to a case of toothache, or to a consultation, but to save a human life!" he went on entreating like a beggar. "Life comes before any personal sorrow! Come, I ask for courage, for heroism! For the love of humanity!"

"Humanity – that cuts both ways," Kirilov said irritably. "In the name of humanity I beg you not to take me. And how queer it is, really! I can hardly stand and you talk to me about humanity!"

I am fit for nothing just now... Nothing will induce me to go, and I can't leave my wife alone. No, no.."

Kirilov waved his hands and staggered back.

"And.. and don't ask me," he went on in a tone of alarm. "Excuse me. By No. XIII of the regulations I am obliged to go and you have the right to drag me by my collar.. drag me if you like, but.. I am not fit.. I can't even speak.. excuse me."

"There is no need to take that tone to me, doctor!" said Abogin, again taking the doctor by his sleeve. "What do I care about No. XIII! To force you against your will I have no right whatever. If you will, come; if you will not – God forgive you; but I am not appealing to your will, but to your feelings. A young woman is dying. You were just speaking of the death of your son. Who should understand my horror if not you?"

Abogin's voice quivered with emotion; that quiver and his tone were far more persuasive than his words. Abogin was sincere, but it was remarkable that whatever he said his words sounded stilted, soulless, and inappropriately flowery, and even seemed an outrage on the atmosphere of the doctor's home and on the woman who was somewhere dying. He felt this himself, and so, afraid of not being understood, did his utmost to put softness and tenderness into his voice so that the sincerity of his tone might prevail if his words did not. As a rule, however fine and deep a phrase may be, it only affects the indifferent, and cannot fully satisfy those who are happy or unhappy; that is why dumbness is most often the highest expression of happiness or unhappiness;

lovers understand each other better when they are silent, and a fervent, passionate speech delivered by the grave only touches outsiders, while to the widow and children of the dead man it seems cold and trivial.

Kirilov stood in silence. When Abogin uttered a few more phrases concerning the noble calling of a doctor, self-sacrifice, and so on, the doctor asked sullenly: "Is it far?"

"Something like eight or nine miles. I have capital horses, doctor! I give you my word of honour that I will get you there and back in an hour. Only one hour."

These words had more effect on Kirilov than the appeals to humanity or the noble calling of the doctor. He thought a moment and said with a sigh: "Very well, let us go!"

He went rapidly with a more certain step to his study, and afterwards came back in a long frock-coat. Abogin, greatly relieved, fidgeted round him and scraped with his feet as he helped him on with his overcoat, and went out of the house with him.

It was dark out of doors, though lighter than in the entry. The tall, stooping figure of the doctor, with his long, narrow beard and aquiline nose, stood out distinctly in the darkness. Abogin's big head and the little student's cap that barely covered it could be seen now as well as his pale face. The scarf showed white only in front, behind it was hidden by his long hair.

"Believe me, I know how to appreciate your generosity," Abogin muttered as he helped the doctor into the carriage. "We

shall get there quickly. Drive as fast as you can, Luka, there's a good fellow! Please!"

The coachman drove rapidly. At first there was a row of indistinct buildings that stretched alongside the hospital yard; it was dark everywhere except for a bright light from a window that gleamed through the fence into the furthest part of the yard while three windows of the upper storey of the hospital looked paler than the surrounding air. Then the carriage drove into dense shadow; here there was the smell of dampness and mushrooms, and the sound of rustling trees; the crows, awakened by the noise of the wheels, stirred among the foliage and uttered prolonged plaintive cries as though they knew the doctor's son was dead and that Abogin's wife was ill. Then came glimpses of separate trees, of bushes; a pond, on which great black shadows were slumbering, gleamed with a sullen light – and the carriage rolled over a smooth level ground. The clamour of the crows sounded dimly far away and soon ceased altogether.

Kirilov and Abogin were silent almost all the way. Only once Abogin heaved a deep sigh and muttered:

"It's an agonizing state! One never loves those who are near one so much as when one is in danger of losing them."

And when the carriage slowly drove over the river, Kirilov started all at once as though the splash of the water had frightened him, and made a movement.

"Listen – let me go," he said miserably. "I'll come to you later. I must just send my assistant to my wife. She is alone, you

know!"

Abogin did not speak. The carriage swaying from side to side and crunching over the stones drove up the sandy bank and rolled on its way. Kirilov moved restlessly and looked about him in misery. Behind them in the dim light of the stars the road could be seen and the riverside willows vanishing into the darkness. On the right lay a plain as uniform and as boundless as the sky; here and there in the distance, probably on the peat marshes, dim lights were glimmering. On the left, parallel with the road, ran a hill tufted with small bushes, and above the hill stood motionless a big, red half-moon, slightly veiled with mist and encircled by tiny clouds, which seemed to be looking round at it from all sides and watching that it did not go away.

In all nature there seemed to be a feeling of hopelessness and pain. The earth, like a ruined woman sitting alone in a dark room and trying not to think of the past, was brooding over memories of spring and summer and apathetically waiting for the inevitable winter. Wherever one looked, on all sides, nature seemed like a dark, infinitely deep, cold pit from which neither Kirilov nor Abogin nor the red half-moon could escape..

The nearer the carriage got to its goal the more impatient Abogin became. He kept moving, leaping up, looking over the coachman's shoulder. And when at last the carriage stopped before the entrance, which was elegantly curtained with striped linen, and when he looked at the lighted windows of the second storey there was an audible catch in his breath.

"If anything happens.. I shall not survive it," he said, going into the hall with the doctor, and rubbing his hands in agitation. "But there is no commotion, so everything must be going well so far," he added, listening in the stillness.

There was no sound in the hall of steps or voices and all the house seemed asleep in spite of the lighted windows. Now the doctor and Abogin, who till then had been in darkness, could see each other clearly. The doctor was tall and stooped, was untidily dressed and not good-looking. There was an unpleasantly harsh, morose, and unfriendly look about his lips, thick as a negro's, his aquiline nose, and listless, apathetic eyes. His unkempt head and sunken temples, the premature greyness of his long, narrow beard through which his chin was visible, the pale grey hue of his skin and his careless, uncouth manners – the harshness of all this was suggestive of years of poverty, of ill fortune, of weariness with life and with men. Looking at his frigid figure one could hardly believe that this man had a wife, that he was capable of weeping over his child. Abogin presented a very different appearance. He was a thick-set, sturdy-looking, fair man with a big head and large, soft features; he was elegantly dressed in the very latest fashion. In his carriage, his closely buttoned coat, his long hair, and his face there was a suggestion of something generous, leonine; he walked with his head erect and his chest squared, he spoke in an agreeable baritone, and there was a shade of refined almost feminine elegance in the manner in which he took off his scarf and smoothed his hair. Even his paleness and

the childlike terror with which he looked up at the stairs as he took off his coat did not detract from his dignity nor diminish the air of sleekness, health, and aplomb which characterized his whole figure.

"There is nobody and no sound," he said going up the stairs. "There is no commotion. God grant all is well."

He led the doctor through the hall into a big drawing-room where there was a black piano and a chandelier in a white cover; from there they both went into a very snug, pretty little drawing-room full of an agreeable, rosy twilight.

"Well, sit down here, doctor, and I.. will be back directly. I will go and have a look and prepare them."

Kirilov was left alone. The luxury of the drawing-room, the agreeably subdued light and his own presence in the stranger's unfamiliar house, which had something of the character of an adventure, did not apparently affect him. He sat in a low chair and scrutinized his hands, which were burnt with carbolic. He only caught a passing glimpse of the bright red lamp-shade and the violoncello case, and glancing in the direction where the clock was ticking he noticed a stuffed wolf as substantial and sleek-looking as Abogin himself.

It was quiet... Somewhere far away in the adjoining rooms someone uttered a loud exclamation:

"Ah!" There was a clang of a glass door, probably of a cupboard, and again all was still. After waiting five minutes Kirilov left off scrutinizing his hands and raised his eyes to the

door by which Abogin had vanished.

In the doorway stood Abogin, but he was not the same as when he had gone out. The look of sleekness and refined elegance had disappeared – his face, his hands, his attitude were contorted by a revolting expression of something between horror and agonizing physical pain. His nose, his lips, his moustache, all his features were moving and seemed trying to tear themselves from his face, his eyes looked as though they were laughing with agony..

Abogin took a heavy stride into the drawing-room, bent forward, moaned, and shook his fists.

"She has deceived me," he cried, with a strong emphasis on the second syllable of the verb. "Deceived me, gone away. She fell ill and sent me for the doctor only to run away with that clown Paptchinsky! My God!"

Abogin took a heavy step towards the doctor, held out his soft white fists in his face, and shaking them went on yelling:

"Gone away! Deceived me! But why this deception? My God! My God! What need of this dirty, scoundrelly trick, this diabolical, snakish farce? What have I done to her? Gone away!"

Tears gushed from his eyes. He turned on one foot and began pacing up and down the drawing-room. Now in his short coat, his fashionable narrow trousers which made his legs look disproportionately slim, with his big head and long mane he was extremely like a lion. A gleam of curiosity came into the apathetic face of the doctor. He got up and looked at Abogin.

"Excuse me, where is the patient?" he said.

"The patient! The patient!" cried Abogin, laughing, crying, and still brandishing his fists. "She is not ill, but accursed! The baseness! The vileness! The devil himself could not have imagined anything more loathsome! She sent me off that she might run away with a buffoon, a dull-witted clown, an Alphonse! Oh God, better she had died! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

The doctor drew himself up. His eyes blinked and filled with tears, his narrow beard began moving to right and to left together with his jaw.

"Allow me to ask what's the meaning of this?" he asked, looking round him with curiosity. "My child is dead, my wife is in grief alone in the whole house... I myself can scarcely stand up, I have not slept for three nights... And here I am forced to play a part in some vulgar farce, to play the part of a stage property! I don't.. don't understand it!"

Abogin unclenched one fist, flung a crumpled note on the floor, and stamped on it as though it were an insect he wanted to crush.

"And I didn't see, didn't understand," he said through his clenched teeth, brandishing one fist before his face with an expression as though some one had trodden on his corns. "I did not notice that he came every day! I did not notice that he came today in a closed carriage! What did he come in a closed carriage for? And I did not see it! Noodle!"

"I don't understand." muttered the doctor. "Why, what's the meaning of it? Why, it's an outrage on personal dignity, a

mockery of human suffering! It's incredible... It's the first time in my life I have had such an experience!"

With the dull surprise of a man who has only just realized that he has been bitterly insulted the doctor shrugged his shoulders, flung wide his arms, and not knowing what to do or to say sank helplessly into a chair.

"If you have ceased to love me and love another – so be it; but why this deceit, why this vulgar, treacherous trick?" Abogin said in a tearful voice. "What is the object of it? And what is there to justify it? And what have I done to you? Listen, doctor," he said hotly, going up to Kirilov. "You have been the involuntary witness of my misfortune and I am not going to conceal the truth from you. I swear that I loved the woman, loved her devotedly, like a slave! I have sacrificed everything for her; I have quarrelled with my own people, I have given up the service and music, I have forgiven her what I could not have forgiven my own mother or sister.. I have never looked askance at her... I have never gainsaid her in anything. Why this deception? I do not demand love, but why this loathsome duplicity? If she did not love me, why did she not say so openly, honestly, especially as she knows my views on the subject?"

With tears in his eyes, trembling all over, Abogin opened his heart to the doctor with perfect sincerity. He spoke warmly, pressing both hands on his heart, exposing the secrets of his private life without the faintest hesitation, and even seemed to be glad that at last these secrets were no longer pent up in his breast.

If he had talked in this way for an hour or two, and opened his heart, he would undoubtedly have felt better. Who knows, if the doctor had listened to him and had sympathized with him like a friend, he might perhaps, as often happens, have reconciled himself to his trouble without protest, without doing anything needless and absurd... But what happened was quite different. While Abogin was speaking the outraged doctor perceptibly changed. The indifference and wonder on his face gradually gave way to an expression of bitter resentment, indignation, and anger. The features of his face became even harsher, coarser, and more unpleasant. When Abogin held out before his eyes the photograph of a young woman with a handsome face as cold and expressionless as a nun's and asked him whether, looking at that face, one could conceive that it was capable of duplicity, the doctor suddenly flew out, and with flashing eyes said, rudely rapping out each word:

"What are you telling me all this for? I have no desire to hear it! I have no desire to!" he shouted and brought his fist down on the table. "I don't want your vulgar secrets! Damnation take them! Don't dare to tell me of such vulgar doings! Do you consider that I have not been insulted enough already? That I am a flunkey whom you can insult without restraint? Is that it?"

Abogin staggered back from Kirilov and stared at him in amazement.

"Why did you bring me here?" the doctor went on, his beard quivering. "If you are so puffed up with good living that you

go and get married and then act a farce like this, how do I come in? What have I to do with your love affairs? Leave me in peace! Go on squeezing money out of the poor in your gentlemanly way. Make a display of humane ideas, play (the doctor looked sideways at the violoncello case) play the bassoon and the trombone, grow as fat as capons, but don't dare to insult personal dignity! If you cannot respect it, you might at least spare it your attention!"

"Excuse me, what does all this mean?" Abogin asked, flushing red.

"It means that it's base and low to play with people like this! I am a doctor; you look upon doctors and people generally who work and don't stink of perfume and prostitution as your menials and *mauvais ton*; well, you may look upon them so, but no one has given you the right to treat a man who is suffering as a stage property!"

"How dare you say that to me!" Abogin said quietly, and his face began working again, and this time unmistakably from anger.

"No, how dared you, knowing of my sorrow, bring me here to listen to these vulgarities!" shouted the doctor, and he again banged on the table with his fist. "Who has given you the right to make a mockery of another man's sorrow?"

"You have taken leave of your senses," shouted Abogin. "It is ungenerous. I am intensely unhappy myself and.. and."

"Unhappy!" said the doctor, with a smile of contempt. "Don't

utter that word, it does not concern you. The spendthrift who cannot raise a loan calls himself unhappy, too. The capon, sluggish from over-feeding, is unhappy, too. Worthless people!"

"Sir, you forget yourself," shrieked Abogin. "For saying things like that.. people are thrashed! Do you understand?"

Abogin hurriedly felt in his side pocket, pulled out a pocket-book, and extracting two notes flung them on the table.

"Here is the fee for your visit," he said, his nostrils dilating.

"You are paid."

"How dare you offer me money?" shouted the doctor and he brushed the notes off the table on to the floor. "An insult cannot be paid for in money!"

Abogin and the doctor stood face to face, and in their wrath continued flinging undeserved insults at each other. I believe that never in their lives, even in delirium, had they uttered so much that was unjust, cruel, and absurd. The egoism of the unhappy was conspicuous in both. The unhappy are egoistic, spiteful, unjust, cruel, and less capable of understanding each other than fools. Unhappiness does not bring people together but draws them apart, and even where one would fancy people should be united by the similarity of their sorrow, far more injustice and cruelty is generated than in comparatively placid surroundings.

"Kindly let me go home!" shouted the doctor, breathing hard.

Abogin rang the bell sharply. When no one came to answer the bell he rang again and angrily flung the bell on the floor; it fell on the carpet with a muffled sound, and uttered a plaintive

note as though at the point of death. A footman came in.

"Where have you been hiding yourself, the devil take you?" His master flew at him, clenching his fists. "Where were you just now? Go and tell them to bring the victoria round for this gentleman, and order the closed carriage to be got ready for me. Stay," he cried as the footman turned to go out. "I won't have a single traitor in the house by to-morrow! Away with you all! I will engage fresh servants! Reptiles!"

Abogin and the doctor remained in silence waiting for the carriage. The first regained his expression of sleekness and his refined elegance. He paced up and down the room, tossed his head elegantly, and was evidently meditating on something. His anger had not cooled, but he tried to appear not to notice his enemy... The doctor stood, leaning with one hand on the edge of the table, and looked at Abogin with that profound and somewhat cynical, ugly contempt only to be found in the eyes of sorrow and indigence when they are confronted with well-nourished comfort and elegance.

When a little later the doctor got into the victoria and drove off there was still a look of contempt in his eyes. It was dark, much darker than it had been an hour before. The red half-moon had sunk behind the hill and the clouds that had been guarding it lay in dark patches near the stars. The carriage with red lamps rattled along the road and soon overtook the doctor. It was Abogin driving off to protest, to do absurd things..

All the way home the doctor thought not of his wife, nor

of his Andrey, but of Abogin and the people in the house he had just left. His thoughts were unjust and inhumanly cruel. He condemned Abogin and his wife and Paptchinsky and all who lived in rosy, subdued light among sweet perfumes, and all the way home he hated and despised them till his head ached. And a firm conviction concerning those people took shape in his mind.

Time will pass and Kirilov's sorrow will pass, but that conviction, unjust and unworthy of the human heart, will not pass, but will remain in the doctor's mind to the grave.

# THE EXAMINING MAGISTRATE

A DISTRICT doctor and an examining magistrate were driving one fine spring day to an inquest. The examining magistrate, a man of five and thirty, looked dreamily at the horses and said:

"There is a great deal that is enigmatic and obscure in nature; and even in everyday life, doctor, one must often come upon phenomena which are absolutely incapable of explanation. I know, for instance, of several strange, mysterious deaths, the cause of which only spiritualists and mystics will undertake to explain; a clear-headed man can only lift up his hands in perplexity. For example, I know of a highly cultured lady who foretold her own death and died without any apparent reason on the very day she had predicted. She said that she would die on a certain day, and she did die."

"There's no effect without a cause," said the doctor. "If there's a death there must be a cause for it. But as for predicting it there's nothing very marvellous in that. All our ladies – all our females, in fact – have a turn for prophecies and presentiments."

"Just so, but my lady, doctor, was quite a special case. There was nothing like the ladies' or other females' presentiments about her prediction and her death. She was a young woman, healthy and clever, with no superstitions of any sort. She had such clear, intelligent, honest eyes; an open, sensible face with a faint,

typically Russian look of mockery in her eyes and on her lips. There was nothing of the fine lady or of the female about her, except – if you like – her beauty! She was graceful, elegant as that birch tree; she had wonderful hair. That she may be intelligible to you, I will add, too, that she was a person of the most infectious gaiety and carelessness and that intelligent, good sort of frivolity which is only found in good-natured, light-hearted people with brains. Can one talk of mysticism, spiritualism, a turn for presentiment, or anything of that sort, in this case? She used to laugh at all that."

The doctor's chaise stopped by a well. The examining magistrate and the doctor drank some water, stretched, and waited for the coachman to finish watering the horses.

"Well, what did the lady die of?" asked the doctor when the chaise was rolling along the road again.

"She died in a strange way. One fine day her husband went in to her and said that it wouldn't be amiss to sell their old coach before the spring and to buy something rather newer and lighter instead, and that it might be as well to change the left trace horse and to put Bobtchinsky (that was the name of one of her husband's horses) in the shafts.

"His wife listened to him and said:

"Do as you think best, but it makes no difference to me now. Before the summer I shall be in the cemetery."

"Her husband, of course, shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"I am not joking," she said. "I tell you in earnest that I shall

soon be dead.'

"What do you mean by soon?"

"Directly after my confinement. I shall bear my child and die.'

"The husband attached no significance to these words. He did not believe in presentiments of any sort, and he knew that ladies in an interesting condition are apt to be fanciful and to give way to gloomy ideas generally. A day later his wife spoke to him again of dying immediately after her confinement, and then every day she spoke of it and he laughed and called her a silly woman, a fortune-teller, a crazy creature. Her approaching death became an *idée fixéé* with his wife. When her husband would not listen to her she would go into the kitchen and talk of her death to the nurse and the cook.

"I haven't long to live now, nurse,' she would say. 'As soon as my confinement is over I shall die. I did not want to die so early, but it seems it's my fate.'

"The nurse and the cook were in tears, of course. Sometimes the priest's wife or some lady from a neighbouring estate would come and see her and she would take them aside and open her soul to them, always harping on the same subject, her approaching death. She spoke gravely with an unpleasant smile, even with an angry face which would not allow any contradiction. She had been smart and fashionable in her dress, but now in view of her approaching death she became slovenly; she did not read, she did not laugh, she did not dream aloud. What was more she drove with her aunt to the cemetery and selected a spot

for her tomb. Five days before her confinement she made her will. And all this, bear in mind, was done in the best of health, without the faintest hint of illness or danger. A confinement is a difficult affair and sometimes fatal, but in the case of which I am telling you every indication was favourable, and there was absolutely nothing to be afraid of. Her husband was sick of the whole business at last. He lost his temper one day at dinner and asked her:

"Listen, Natasha, when is there going to be an end of this silliness?"

"It's not silliness, I am in earnest."

"Nonsense, I advise you to give over being silly that you may not feel ashamed of it afterwards."

"Well, the confinement came. The husband got the very best midwife from the town. It was his wife's first confinement, but it could not have gone better. When it was all over she asked to look at her baby. She looked at it and said:

"Well, now I can die."

"She said good-bye, shut her eyes, and half an hour later gave up her soul to God. She was fully conscious up to the last moment. Anyway when they gave her milk instead of water she whispered softly:

"Why are you giving me milk instead of water?"

"So that is what happened. She died as she predicted."

The examining magistrate paused, gave a sigh and said:

"Come, explain why she died. I assure you on my honour, this

is not invented, it's a fact."

The doctor looked at the sky meditatively.

"You ought to have had an inquest on her," he said.

"Why?"

"Why, to find out the cause of her death. She didn't die because she had predicted it. She poisoned herself most probably."

The examining magistrate turned quickly, facing the doctor, and screwing up his eyes, asked:

"And from what do you conclude that she poisoned herself?"

"I don't conclude it, but I assume it. Was she on good terms with her husband?"

"H'm, not altogether. There had been misunderstandings soon after their marriage. There were unfortunate circumstances. She had found her husband on one occasion with a lady. She soon forgave him however."

"And which came first, her husband's infidelity or her idea of dying?"

The examining magistrate looked attentively at the doctor as though he were trying to imagine why he put that question.

"Excuse me," he said, not quite immediately. "Let me try and remember." The examining magistrate took off his hat and rubbed his forehead. "Yes, yes.. it was very shortly after that incident that she began talking of death. Yes, yes."

"Well, there, do you see?.. In all probability it was at that time that she made up her mind to poison herself, but, as most likely

she did not want to kill her child also, she put it off till after her confinement."

"Not likely, not likely!.. it's impossible. She forgave him at the time."

"That she forgave it quickly means that she had something bad in her mind. Young wives do not forgive quickly."

The examining magistrate gave a forced smile, and, to conceal his too noticeable agitation, began lighting a cigarette.

"Not likely, not likely," he went on. "No notion of anything of the sort being possible ever entered into my head... And besides.. he was not so much to blame as it seems... He was unfaithful to her in rather a queer way, with no desire to be; he came home at night somewhat elevated, wanted to make love to somebody, his wife was in an interesting condition.. then he came across a lady who had come to stay for three days – damnation take her – an empty-headed creature, silly and not good-looking. It couldn't be reckoned as an infidelity. His wife looked at it in that way herself and soon.. forgave it. Nothing more was said about it.."

"People don't die without a reason," said the doctor.

"That is so, of course, but all the same.. I cannot admit that she poisoned herself. But it is strange that the idea has never struck me before! And no one thought of it! Everyone was astonished that her prediction had come to pass, and the idea.. of such a death was far from their mind. And indeed, it cannot be that she poisoned herself! No!"

The examining magistrate pondered. The thought of the

woman who had died so strangely haunted him all through the inquest. As he noted down what the doctor dictated to him he moved his eyebrows gloomily and rubbed his forehead.

"And are there really poisons that kill one in a quarter of an hour, gradually, without any pain?" he asked the doctor while the latter was opening the skull.

"Yes, there are. Morphia for instance."

"H'm, strange. I remember she used to keep something of the sort

... But it could hardly be."

On the way back the examining magistrate looked exhausted, he kept nervously biting his moustache, and was unwilling to talk.

"Let us go a little way on foot," he said to the doctor. "I am tired of sitting."

After walking about a hundred paces, the examining magistrate seemed to the doctor to be overcome with fatigue, as though he had been climbing up a high mountain. He stopped and, looking at the doctor with a strange look in his eyes, as though he were drunk, said:

"My God, if your theory is correct, why it's.. it was cruel, inhuman! She poisoned herself to punish some one else! Why, was the sin so great? Oh, my God! And why did you make me a present of this damnable idea, doctor!"

The examining magistrate clutched at his head in despair, and went on:

"What I have told you was about my own wife, about myself.

Oh, my God! I was to blame, I wounded her, but can it have been easier to die than to forgive? That's typical feminine logic – cruel, merciless logic. Oh, even then when she was living she was cruel! I recall it all now! It's all clear to me now!"

As the examining magistrate talked he shrugged his shoulders, then clutched at his head. He got back into the carriage, then walked again. The new idea the doctor had imparted to him seemed to have overwhelmed him, to have poisoned him; he was distracted, shattered in body and soul, and when he got back to the town he said good-bye to the doctor, declining to stay to dinner though he had promised the doctor the evening before to dine with him.

# BETROTHED

## I

IT was ten o'clock in the evening and the full moon was shining over the garden. In the Shumins' house an evening service celebrated at the request of the grandmother, Marfa Mihalovna, was just over, and now Nadya – she had gone into the garden for a minute – could see the table being laid for supper in the dining-room, and her grandmother bustling about in her gorgeous silk dress; Father Andrey, a chief priest of the cathedral, was talking to Nadya's mother, Nina Ivanovna, and now in the evening light through the window her mother for some reason looked very young; Andrey Andreitch, Father Andrey's son, was standing by listening attentively.

It was still and cool in the garden, and dark peaceful shadows lay on the ground. There was a sound of frogs croaking, far, far away beyond the town. There was a feeling of May, sweet May! One drew deep breaths and longed to fancy that not here but far away under the sky, above the trees, far away in the open country, in the fields and the woods, the life of spring was unfolding now, mysterious, lovely, rich and holy beyond the understanding of weak, sinful man. And for some reason one wanted to cry.

She, Nadya, was already twenty-three. Ever since she was

sixteen she had been passionately dreaming of marriage and at last she was engaged to Andrey Andreitch, the young man who was standing on the other side of the window; she liked him, the wedding was already fixed for July 7, and yet there was no joy in her heart, she was sleeping badly, her spirits drooped... She could hear from the open windows of the basement where the kitchen was the hurrying servants, the clatter of knives, the banging of the swing door; there was a smell of roast turkey and pickled cherries, and for some reason it seemed to her that it would be like that all her life, with no change, no end to it.

Some one came out of the house and stood on the steps; it was Alexandr Timofeitch, or, as he was always called, Sasha, who had come from Moscow ten days before and was staying with them. Years ago a distant relation of the grandmother, a gentleman's widow called Marya Petrovna, a thin, sickly little woman who had sunk into poverty, used to come to the house to ask for assistance. She had a son Sasha. It used for some reason to be said that he had talent as an artist, and when his mother died Nadya's grandmother had, for the salvation of her soul, sent him to the Komissarovsky school in Moscow; two years later he went into the school of painting, spent nearly fifteen years there, and only just managed to scrape through the leaving examination in the section of architecture. He did not set up as an architect, however, but took a job at a lithographer's. He used to come almost every year, usually very ill, to stay with Nadya's grandmother to rest and recover.

He was wearing now a frock-coat buttoned up, and shabby canvas trousers, crumpled into creases at the bottom. And his shirt had not been ironed and he had somehow all over a look of not being fresh. He was very thin, with big eyes, long thin fingers and a swarthy bearded face, and all the same he was handsome. With the Shumins he was like one of the family, and in their house felt he was at home. And the room in which he lived when he was there had for years been called Sasha's room. Standing on the steps he saw Nadya, and went up to her.

"It's nice here," he said.

"Of course it's nice, you ought to stay here till the autumn."

"Yes, I expect it will come to that. I dare say I shall stay with you till September."

He laughed for no reason, and sat down beside her.

"I'm sitting gazing at mother," said Nadya. "She looks so young from here! My mother has her weaknesses, of course," she added, after a pause, "but still she is an exceptional woman."

"Yes, she is very nice." Sasha agreed. "Your mother, in her own way of course, is a very good and sweet woman, but.. how shall I say? I went early this morning into your kitchen and there I found four servants sleeping on the floor, no bedsteads, and rags for bedding, stench, bugs, beetles.. it is just as it was twenty years ago, no change at all. Well, Granny, God bless her, what else can you expect of Granny? But your mother speaks French, you know, and acts in private theatricals. One would think she might understand."

As Sasha talked, he used to stretch out two long wasted fingers before the listener's face.

"It all seems somehow strange to me here, now I am out of the habit of it," he went on. "There is no making it out. Nobody ever does anything. Your mother spends the whole day walking about like a duchess, Granny does nothing either, nor you either. And your Andrey Andreitch never does anything either."

Nadya had heard this the year before and, she fancied, the year before that too, and she knew that Sasha could not make any other criticism, and in old days this had amused her, but now for some reason she felt annoyed.

"That's all stale, and I have been sick of it for ages," she said and got up. "You should think of something a little newer."

He laughed and got up too, and they went together toward the house. She, tall, handsome, and well-made, beside him looked very healthy and smartly dressed; she was conscious of this and felt sorry for him and for some reason awkward.

"And you say a great deal you should not," she said. "You've just been talking about my Andrey, but you see you don't know him."

"My Andrey... Bother him, your Andrey. I am sorry for your youth."

They were already sitting down to supper as the young people went into the dining-room. The grandmother, or Granny as she was called in the household, a very stout, plain old lady with bushy eyebrows and a little moustache, was talking loudly, and

from her voice and manner of speaking it could be seen that she was the person of most importance in the house. She owned rows of shops in the market, and the old-fashioned house with columns and the garden, yet she prayed every morning that God might save her from ruin and shed tears as she did so. Her daughter-in-law, Nadya's mother, Nina Ivanovna, a fair-haired woman tightly laced in, with a pince-nez, and diamonds on every finger, Father Andrey, a lean, toothless old man whose face always looked as though he were just going to say something amusing, and his son, Andrey Andreitch, a stout and handsome young man with curly hair looking like an artist or an actor, were all talking of hypnotism.

"You will get well in a week here," said Granny, addressing Sasha. "Only you must eat more. What do you look like!" she sighed. "You are really dreadful! You are a regular prodigal son, that is what you are."

"After wasting his father's substance in riotous living," said Father Andrey slowly, with laughing eyes. "He fed with senseless beasts."

"I like my dad," said Andrey Andreitch, touching his father on the shoulder. "He is a splendid old fellow, a dear old fellow."

Everyone was silent for a space. Sasha suddenly burst out laughing and put his dinner napkin to his mouth.

"So you believe in hypnotism?" said Father Andrey to Nina Ivanovna.

"I cannot, of course, assert that I believe," answered Nina

Ivanovna, assuming a very serious, even severe, expression; "but I must own that there is much that is mysterious and incomprehensible in nature."

"I quite agree with you, though I must add that religion distinctly curtails for us the domain of the mysterious."

A big and very fat turkey was served. Father Andrey and Nina Ivanovna went on with their conversation. Nina Ivanovna's diamonds glittered on her fingers, then tears began to glitter in her eyes, she grew excited.

"Though I cannot venture to argue with you," she said, "you must admit there are so many insoluble riddles in life!"

"Not one, I assure you."

After supper Andrey Andreitch played the fiddle and Nina Ivanovna accompanied him on the piano. Ten years before he had taken his degree at the university in the Faculty of Arts, but had never held any post, had no definite work, and only from time to time took part in concerts for charitable objects; and in the town he was regarded as a musician.

Andrey Andreitch played; they all listened in silence. The samovar was boiling quietly on the table and no one but Sasha was drinking tea. Then when it struck twelve a violin string suddenly broke; everyone laughed, bustled about, and began saying good-bye.

After seeing her fiancé out, Nadya went upstairs where she and her mother had their rooms (the lower storey was occupied by the grandmother). They began putting the lights out below

in the dining-room, while Sasha still sat on drinking tea. He always spent a long time over tea in the Moscow style, drinking as much as seven glasses at a time. For a long time after Nadya had undressed and gone to bed she could hear the servants clearing away downstairs and Granny talking angrily. At last everything was hushed, and nothing could be heard but Sasha from time to time coughing on a bass note in his room below.

## II

When Nadya woke up it must have been two o'clock, it was beginning to get light. A watchman was tapping somewhere far away. She was not sleepy, and her bed felt very soft and uncomfortable. Nadya sat up in her bed and fell to thinking as she had done every night in May. Her thoughts were the same as they had been the night before, useless, persistent thoughts, always alike, of how Andrey Andreitch had begun courting her and had made her an offer, how she had accepted him and then little by little had come to appreciate the kindly, intelligent man. But for some reason now when there was hardly a month left before the wedding, she began to feel dread and uneasiness as though something vague and oppressive were before her.

"Tick-tock, tick-tock." the watchman tapped lazily. "..  
Tick-tock."

Through the big old-fashioned window she could see the garden and at a little distance bushes of lilac in full flower, drowsy and lifeless from the cold; and the thick white mist was floating softly up to the lilac, trying to cover it. Drowsy rooks were cawing in the far-away trees.

"My God, why is my heart so heavy?"

Perhaps every girl felt the same before her wedding. There was no knowing! Or was it Sasha's influence? But for several years past Sasha had been repeating the same thing, like a copybook,

and when he talked he seemed naïve and queer. But why was it she could not get Sasha out of her head? Why was it?

The watchman left off tapping for a long while. The birds were twittering under the windows and the mist had disappeared from the garden. Everything was lighted up by the spring sunshine as by a smile. Soon the whole garden, warm and caressed by the sun, returned to life, and dewdrops like diamonds glittered on the leaves and the old neglected garden on that morning looked young and gaily decked.

Granny was already awake. Sasha's husky cough began. Nadya could hear them below, setting the samovar and moving the chairs. The hours passed slowly, Nadya had been up and walking about the garden for a long while and still the morning dragged on.

At last Nina Ivanovna appeared with a tear-stained face, carrying a glass of mineral water. She was interested in spiritualism and homeopathy, read a great deal, was fond of talking of the doubts to which she was subject, and to Nadya it seemed as though there were a deep mysterious significance in all that.

Now Nadya kissed her mother and walked beside her.

"What have you been crying about, mother?" she asked.

"Last night I was reading a story in which there is an old man and his daughter. The old man is in some office and his chief falls in love with his daughter. I have not finished it, but there was a passage which made it hard to keep from tears," said Nina

Ivanovna and she sipped at her glass. "I thought of it this morning and shed tears again."

"I have been so depressed all these days," said Nadya after a pause.

"Why is it I don't sleep at night!"

"I don't know, dear. When I can't sleep I shut my eyes very tightly, like this, and picture to myself Anna Karenin moving about and talking, or something historical from the ancient world.."

Nadya felt that her mother did not understand her and was incapable of understanding. She felt this for the first time in her life, and it positively frightened her and made her want to hide herself; and she went away to her own room.

At two o'clock they sat down to dinner. It was Wednesday, a fast day, and so vegetable soup and bream with boiled grain were set before Granny.

To tease Granny Sasha ate his meat soup as well as the vegetable soup. He was making jokes all through dinner-time, but his jests were laboured and invariably with a moral bearing, and the effect was not at all amusing when before making some witty remark he raised his very long, thin, deathly-looking fingers; and when one remembered that he was very ill and would probably not be much longer in this world, one felt sorry for him and ready to weep.

After dinner Granny went off to her own room to lie down. Nina Ivanovna played on the piano for a little, and then she too

went away.

"Oh, dear Nadya!" Sasha began his usual afternoon conversation, "if only you would listen to me! If only you would!"

She was sitting far back in an old-fashioned armchair, with her eyes shut, while he paced slowly about the room from corner to corner.

"If only you would go to the university," he said. "Only enlightened and holy people are interesting, it's only they who are wanted. The more of such people there are, the sooner the Kingdom of God will come on earth. Of your town then not one stone will be left, everything will be blown up from the foundations, everything will be changed as though by magic. And then there will be immense, magnificent houses here, wonderful gardens, marvellous fountains, remarkable people... But that's not what matters most. What matters most is that the crowd, in our sense of the word, in the sense in which it exists now – that evil will not exist then, because every man will believe and every man will know what he is living for and no one will seek moral support in the crowd. Dear Nadya, darling girl, go away! Show them all that you are sick of this stagnant, grey, sinful life. Prove it to yourself at least!"

"I can't, Sasha, I'm going to be married."

"Oh nonsense! What's it for!"

They went out into the garden and walked up and down a little.

"And however that may be, my dear girl, you must think, you must realize how unclean, how immoral this idle life of yours is,"

Sasha went on. "Do understand that if, for instance, you and your mother and your grandmother do nothing, it means that someone else is working for you, you are eating up someone else's life, and is that clean, isn't it filthy?"

Nadya wanted to say "Yes, that is true"; she wanted to say that she understood, but tears came into her eyes, her spirits drooped, and shrinking into herself she went off to her room.

Towards evening Andrey Andreitch arrived and as usual played the fiddle for a long time. He was not given to much talk as a rule, and was fond of the fiddle, perhaps because one could be silent while playing. At eleven o'clock when he was about to go home and had put on his greatcoat, he embraced Nadya and began greedily kissing her face, her shoulders, and her hands.

"My dear, my sweet, my charmer," he muttered. "Oh how happy I am!

I am beside myself with rapture!"

And it seemed to her as though she had heard that long, long ago, or had read it somewhere.. in some old tattered novel thrown away long ago. In the dining-room Sasha was sitting at the table drinking tea with the saucer poised on his five long fingers; Granny was laying out patience; Nina Ivanovna was reading. The flame crackled in the ikon lamp and everything, it seemed, was quiet and going well. Nadya said good-night, went upstairs to her room, got into bed and fell asleep at once. But just as on the night before, almost before it was light, she woke up. She was not sleepy, there was an uneasy, oppressive

feeling in her heart. She sat up with her head on her knees and thought of her fiancé and her marriage... She for some reason remembered that her mother had not loved her father and now had nothing and lived in complete dependence on her mother-in-law, Granny. And however much Nadya pondered she could not imagine why she had hitherto seen in her mother something special and exceptional, how it was she had not noticed that she was a simple, ordinary, unhappy woman.

And Sasha downstairs was not asleep, she could hear him coughing. He is a queer, naïve man, thought Nadya, and in all his dreams, in all those marvellous gardens and wonderful fountains one felt there was something absurd. But for some reason in his naïveté, in this very absurdity there was something so beautiful that as soon as she thought of the possibility of going to the university, it sent a cold thrill through her heart and her bosom and flooded them with joy and rapture.

"But better not think, better not think," she whispered. "I must not think of it."

"Tick-tock," tapped the watchman somewhere far away. "Tick-tock.. tick-tock.."

### III

In the middle of June Sasha suddenly felt bored and made up his mind to return to Moscow.

"I can't exist in this town," he said gloomily. "No water supply, no drains! It disgusts me to eat at dinner; the filth in the kitchen is incredible.."

"Wait a little, prodigal son!" Granny tried to persuade him, speaking for some reason in a whisper, "the wedding is to be on the seventh."

"I don't want to."

"You meant to stay with us until September!"

"But now, you see, I don't want to. I must get to work."

The summer was grey and cold, the trees were wet, everything in the garden looked dejected and uninviting, it certainly did make one long to get to work. The sound of unfamiliar women's voices was heard downstairs and upstairs, there was the rattle of a sewing machine in Granny's room, they were working hard at the trousseau. Of fur coats alone, six were provided for Nadya, and the cheapest of them, in Granny's words, had cost three hundred roubles! The fuss irritated Sasha; he stayed in his own room and was cross, but everyone persuaded him to remain, and he promised not to go before the first of July.

Time passed quickly. On St. Peter's day Andrey Andreitch went with Nadya after dinner to Moscow Street to look once

more at the house which had been taken and made ready for the young couple some time before. It was a house of two storeys, but so far only the upper floor had been furnished. There was in the hall a shining floor painted and parqueted, there were Viennese chairs, a piano, a violin stand; there was a smell of paint. On the wall hung a big oil painting in a gold frame – a naked lady and beside her a purple vase with a broken handle.

"An exquisite picture," said Andrey Andreitch, and he gave a respectful sigh. "It's the work of the artist Shismatchevsky."

Then there was the drawing-room with the round table, and a sofa and easy chairs upholstered in bright blue. Above the sofa was a big photograph of Father Andrey wearing a priest's velvet cap and decorations. Then they went into the dining-room in which there was a sideboard; then into the bedroom; here in the half dusk stood two bedsteads side by side, and it looked as though the bedroom had been decorated with the idea that it would always be very agreeable there and could not possibly be anything else. Andrey Andreitch led Nadya about the rooms, all the while keeping his arm round her waist; and she felt weak and conscience-stricken. She hated all the rooms, the beds, the easy chairs; she was nauseated by the naked lady. It was clear to her now that she had ceased to love Andrey Andreitch or perhaps had never loved him at all; but how to say this and to whom to say it and with what object she did not understand, and could not understand, though she was thinking about it all day and all night... He held her round the waist, talked so affectionately, so

modestly, was so happy, walking about this house of his; while she saw nothing in it all but vulgarity, stupid, naïve, unbearable vulgarity, and his arm round her waist felt as hard and cold as an iron hoop. And every minute she was on the point of running away, bursting into sobs, throwing herself out of a window. Andrey Andreitch led her into the bathroom and here he touched a tap fixed in the wall and at once water flowed.

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