

**TURGENEV
SERGEEVICH
IVAN**

A LEAR OF THE STEPPES,
ETC.

Turgenev Sergeevich Ivan
A Lear of the Steppes, etc.

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Содержание

INTRODUCTION	4
I	4
II	7
III	11
IV	14
A LEAR OF THE STEPPES	15
I	16
II	20
III	23
IV	26
V	28
VI	30
VII	35
VIII	38
IX	41
X	43
XI	51
XII	55
XIII	59
XIV	64
XV	68
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	73

Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev

A Lear of the Steppes, etc. / A Lear of the Steppes—Faust—Acia

INTRODUCTION

I

An examination of *A Lear of the Steppes* is of especial interest to authors, as the story is so exquisite in its structure, so overwhelming in its effects, that it exposes the artificiality of the great majority of the clever works of art in fiction. *A Lear of the Steppes* is great in art because it is a living organic whole, springing from the deep roots of life itself; and the innumerable works of art that are fabricated and pasted together from an ingenious plan – works that do not grow from the inevitability of things – appear at once insignificant or false in comparison.

In examining the art, the artist will note that Turgenev's method of introducing his story is a lesson in sincerity. Harlov, the Lear of the story, is brought forward with such force on the

threshold that all eyes resting on his figure cannot but follow his after movements. And absolute conviction gained, all the artist's artful after-devices and subtle presentations and side-lights on the story are not apparent under the straightforward ease and the seeming carelessness with which the narrator describes his boyish memories. Then, Harlov's household, his two daughters, and a crowd of minor characters, are brought before us as persons in the tragedy, and we see that all these people are living each from the innate laws of his being, *apparently independently of the author's scheme*. This conviction, that the author has no pre-arranged plan, convinces us that in the story we are living a piece of life: here we are verily plunging into life itself.

And the story goes on flowing easily and naturally till the people of the neighbourhood, the peasants, the woods and fields around, are known by us as intimately as is any neighbourhood in life. Suddenly a break – the tragedy is upon us. Suddenly the terrific forces that underlie human life, even the meanest of human lives, burst on us astonished and breathless, precisely as a tragedy comes up to the surface and bursts on us in real life: everybody runs about dazed, annoyed, futile; we watch the other people sustaining their own individuality inadequately in the face of the monstrous new events which go their fatal way logically, events which leave the people huddled and useless and gasping. And destruction having burst out of life, life slowly returns to its old grooves – with a difference to us, the difference in the relation of people one to another that a death or a tragedy always

leaves to the survivors. Marvellous in its truth is Turgenev's analysis of the situation after Harlov's death, marvellous is the simple description of the neighbourhood's attitude to the Harlov family, and marvellous is the lifting of the scene on the after-life of Harlov's daughters. In the pages (pages 140, 141, 146, 147) on these women, Turgenev flashes into the reader's mind an extraordinary sense of the inevitability of these women's natures, of their innate growth fashioning their after-lives as logically as a beech puts out beech-leaves and an oak oak-leaves. Through Turgenev's single glimpse at their fortunes one knows the whole intervening fifteen years; he has carried us into a new world: yet it is the old world; one needs to know no more. It is life arbitrary but inevitable, life so clarified by art that it is absolutely interpreted; but life with all the sense of mystery that nature breathes around it in its ceaseless growth.

II

This sense of inevitability and of the mystery of life which Turgenev gives us in *A Lear of the Steppes* is the highest demand we can make from art. *Acia*, the last story in the present volume, though it gives us a sense of mystery, is not inevitable: the end is *faked* to suit the artist's purpose, and thus, as in other ways, it is far inferior to *Lear*. *Faust*, the second story, has consummate charm in its strange atmosphere of the supernatural mingling with things earthly, but it is not, as is *Lear*, life seen from the surface to the revealed depths; it is a revelation of the strange forces in life, presented beautifully; but it is rather an idea, a problem to be worked out by certain characters, than a piece of life inevitable and growing. When an artist creates in us the sense of inevitability, then his work is at its highest, and is obeying nature's law of growth, unfolding from out itself as inevitably as a tree or a flower or a human being unfolds from out itself. Turgenev at his highest never quits nature, yet he always uses the surface, and what is apparent, to disclose her most secret principles, her deepest potentialities, her inmost laws of being, and whatever he presents he presents clearly and simply. This combination of powers marks only the few supreme artists. Even great masters often fail in perfect *naturalness*: Tolstoi's *The Death of Ivan Ilytch*, for example, one of the most powerful stories ever written, has too little that is typical of the whole of

life, too much that is strained towards the general purpose of the story, to be really *natural*. Turgenev's special feat in fiction is that his characters reveal themselves by the most ordinary details of their every-day life; and while these details are always giving us the whole life of the people, and their inner life as well, the novel's significance is being built up simply out of these details, built up by the same process, in fact, as nature creates for us a single strong impression out of a multitude of little details. The Impressionists, it is true, often give us amazingly clever pictures of life, seen subtly and drawn naturally; but, in general, their able pictures of the way men think and act do not reveal more than the actual thinking and acting that men betray to one another, – they do not betray the whole significance of their lives more than does the daily life itself. And so the Impressionists give pictures of life's surface, and not interpretations of its eternal depths: they pass away as portraits of the time, amazingly felicitous artistic portraits. But Turgenev's power as a poet comes in, whenever he draws a commonplace figure, to make it bring with it a sense of the mystery of its existence. In *Lear* the steward Kvitsinsky plays a subsidiary part; he has apparently no significance in the story, and very little is told about him. But who does not perceive that Turgenev looks at and presents the figure of this man in a manner totally different from the way any clever novelist of the second rank would look at and use him? Kvitsinsky, in Turgenev's hands, is an individual with all the individual's mystery in his glance, his coming and going, his way of taking things; but he

is a part of the household's breath, of its very existence; he breathes the atmosphere naturally and creates an atmosphere of his own. If Hugo had created him he would have been out of focus immediately; Balzac would have described the household minutely, and then let Kvitsinsky appear as a separate entity in it; the Impressionists would sketch him as a living picture, a part of the household, but he would remain as first created, he would always repeat the first impression he makes on us, a certain man in a certain aspect; and they would not give us the steward revealing his character imperceptibly from day to day in his minute actions, naturally, and little by little, as this man reveals his.

It is then in his marvellous sense of the growth of life that Turgenev is superior to most of his rivals. Not only did he observe life minutely and comprehensively, but he reproduces it as a constantly growing phenomenon, growing naturally, not accidentally or arbitrarily. For example, in *A House of Gentlefolk*, take Lavretsky's and Liza's changes of mood when they are falling in love one with another: it is nature herself in them changing very delicately and insensibly; we feel that the whole picture is alive, not an effect cut out from life, and cut off from it at the same time, like a bunch of cut flowers, an effect which many clever novelists often give us. And in *Lear* we feel that the life in Harlov's village is still going on, growing yonder, still growing with all its mysterious sameness and changes, when, in Turgenev's last words, 'The story-teller ceased, and we talked a

little longer, and then parted, each to his home.'

III

Turgenev's sympathy with women and his unequalled power of drawing them, not merely as they appear to men, but as they appear to each other, has been dwelt on by many writers. And in truth, of the three leading qualities into which his artistic powers may be arbitrarily analysed, the most apparent is precisely that delicate feminine intuition and sensitive emotional consciousness into all the nuances of personal relations that women possess in life and are never able to put into books. This fluid sympathetic perception is instinctive in Turgenev: it is his temperament to be sympathetic or receptive to all types, except, perhaps, to purely masculine men of action, whom he never draws with success. His temperament is bathed in a delicate emotional atmosphere quivering with light, which discloses all the infinite riches of the created world, the relation of each character to its particular universe, and the significance of its human fate. And this state of soul or flow of mood in Turgenev is creative, as when music floats from a distance to the listener, immediately the darkening fields, the rough coarse earth of cheap human life, with all the grind and petty monotony of existence, melt into harmony, and life is seen as a mysterious whole, not merely as a puzzling discrepancy of gaps and contradictions and days of little import. This fluid emotional consciousness of Turgenev is feminine, inasmuch as it is a receptive, sympathising, and harmonising

attitude; but just where the woman's faculty of receptiveness ends, where her perception fails to go beyond the facts she is alive to, Turgenev's consciousness flashes out into the great poet's creative world, with its immense breadth of vision, force, and imagination. Thus in laying down *A Lear of the Steppes* the reader is conscious that he is seeing past the human life of the tragedy on to the limitless seas of existence beyond, – he is looking beyond the heads of the moving human figures out on to the infinite horizon. Just where the woman's interest would stop and rest satisfied with the near personal elements in the drama, Turgenev's constructive poetic force sees the universal, and in turn interprets these figures in relation to the far wider field of the race, the age, and makes them symbolical of the deep forces of all human existence.

And thus Turgenev becomes a creator, originating a world greater than he received. His creation of Bazarov in *Fathers and Children* from a three hours' accidental meeting with a man while on a journey, is an extraordinary instance of how unerringly his vision created in fore-thought a world that was to come. He accepted the man, he was penetrated with the new and strange conceptions of life offered, and as a poet he saw in a flash the immense significance to society of this man's appearance in the age. He saw a new and formidable type had arisen in the nation, negating its traditions, its beliefs, its conceptions; and from this solitary meeting with an individual, Turgenev laid bare and predicted the progress of the most formidable social and

political movement in modern Russia, predicted it and set it forth in art, a decade before its birth.

IV

In truth, Turgenev's art at its highest may well be the despair of artists who have sufficient insight to understand wherein he excels. He is rich in all the gifts, so he penetrates into everything; but it is the perfect harmony existing between his gifts that makes him see everything in proportion. Thus he never caricatures; he is never too forcible, and never too clever. He is a great realist, and his realism carries along with it the natural breath of poetry. His art is highly complex, but its expression is so pellucid, so simple, that we can see only its body, never the mechanism of its body. His thought and his emotion are blended in one; he interprets life, but always preserves the atmosphere, the glamour, the mystery of the living thing in his interpretation. His creative world arises spontaneously from his own depths – the mark of the world's great masters. Never thinking of himself, he inspires his readers with a secret delight for the beauty that he found everywhere in life. And he never shuts his eyes against the true.

EDWARD GARNETT.

October 1898.

A LEAR OF THE STEPPES

We were a party of six, gathered together one winter evening at the house of an old college friend. The conversation turned on Shakespeare, on his types, and how profoundly and truly they were taken from the very heart of humanity. We admired particularly their truth to life, their actuality. Each of us spoke of the Hamlets, the Othellos, the Falstaffs, even the Richard the Thirds and Macbeths – the two last only potentially, it is true, resembling their prototypes – whom he had happened to come across.

‘And I, gentlemen,’ cried our host, a man well past middle age, ‘used to know a King Lear!’

‘How was that?’ we questioned him.

‘Oh, would you like me to tell you about him?’

‘Please do.’

And our friend promptly began his narrative.

I

‘All my childhood,’ he began, ‘and early youth, up to the age of fifteen, I spent in the country, on the estate of my mother, a wealthy landowner in X – province. Almost the most vivid impression, that has remained in my memory of that far-off time, is the figure of our nearest neighbour, Martin Petrovitch Harlov. Indeed it would be difficult for such an impression to be obliterated: I never in my life afterwards met anything in the least like Harlov. Picture to yourselves a man of gigantic stature. On his huge carcass was set, a little askew, and without the least trace of a neck, a prodigious head. A perfect haystack of tangled yellowish-grey hair stood up all over it, growing almost down to the bushy eyebrows. On the broad expanse of his purple face, that looked as though it had been peeled, there protruded a sturdy knobby nose; diminutive little blue eyes stared out haughtily, and a mouth gaped open that was diminutive too, but crooked, chapped, and of the same colour as the rest of the face. The voice that proceeded from this mouth, though hoarse, was exceedingly strong and resonant... Its sound recalled the clank of iron bars, carried in a cart over a badly paved road; and when Harlov spoke, it was as though some one were shouting in a high wind across a wide ravine. It was difficult to tell just what Harlov’s face expressed, it was such an expanse... One felt one could hardly take it all in at one glance. But it was not disagreeable

– a certain grandeur indeed could be discerned in it, only it was exceedingly astounding and unusual. And what hands he had – positive cushions! What fingers, what feet! I remember I could never gaze without a certain respectful awe at the four-foot span of Martin Petrovitch’s back, at his shoulders, like millstones. But what especially struck me was his ears! They were just like great twists of bread, full of bends and curves; his cheeks seemed to support them on both sides. Martin Petrovitch used to wear – winter and summer alike – a Cossack dress of green cloth, girt about with a small Tcherkess strap, and tarred boots. I never saw a cravat on him; and indeed what could he have tied a cravat round? He breathed slowly and heavily, like a bull, but walked without a sound. One might have imagined that having got into a room, he was in constant fear of upsetting and overturning everything, and so moved cautiously from place to place, sideways for the most part, as though slinking by. He was possessed of a strength truly Herculean, and in consequence enjoyed great renown in the neighbourhood. Our common people retain to this day their reverence for Titanic heroes. Legends were invented about him. They used to recount that he had one day met a bear in the forest and had almost vanquished him; that having once caught a thief in his beehouse, he had flung him, horse and cart and all, over the hedge, and so on. Harlov himself never boasted of his strength. ‘If my right hand is blessed,’ he used to say, ‘so it is God’s will it should be!’ He was proud, only he did not take pride in his strength, but in his rank, his descent,

his common sense.

‘Our family’s descended from the Swede Harlus,’ he used to maintain. ‘In the princely reign of Ivan Vassilievitch the Dark (fancy how long ago!) he came to Russia, and that Swede Harlus did not wish to be a Finnish count – but he wished to be a Russian nobleman, and he was inscribed in the golden book. It’s from him we Harlovs are sprung!.. And by the same token, all of us Harlovs are born flaxen-haired, with light eyes and clean faces, because we’re children of the snow!’

‘But, Martin Petrovitch,’ I once tried to object, ‘there never was an Ivan Vassilievitch the Dark. Then was an Ivan Vassilievitch the Terrible. The Dark was the name given to the great prince Vassily Vassilievitch.’

‘What nonsense will you talk next!’ Harlov answered serenely; ‘since I say so, so it was!’

One day my mother took it into her head to commend him to his face for his really remarkable incorruptibility.

‘Ah, Natalia Nikolaevna!’ he protested almost angrily; ‘what a thing to praise me for, really! We gentlefolk can’t be otherwise; so that no churl, no low-born, servile creature dare even imagine evil of us! I am a Harlov, my family has come down from’ – here he pointed up somewhere very high aloft in the ceiling – ‘and me not be honest! How is it possible?’

Another time a high official, who had come into the neighbourhood and was staying with my mother, fancied he could make fun of Martin Petrovitch. The latter had again referred to

the Swede Harlus, who came to Russia...

‘In the days of King Solomon?’ the official interrupted.

‘No, not of King Solomon, but of the great Prince Ivan Vassilievitch the Dark.’

‘But I imagine,’ the official pursued, ‘that your family is much more ancient, and goes back to antediluvian days, when there were still mastodons and megatheriums about.’

These scientific names were absolutely meaningless to Martin Petrovitch; but he realised that the dignitary was laughing at him.

‘May be so,’ he boomed, ‘our family is, no doubt, very ancient; in those days when my ancestor was in Moscow, they do say there was as great a fool as your excellency living there, and such fools are not seen twice in a thousand years.’

The high official was in a furious rage, while Harlov threw his head back, stuck out his chin, snorted and disappeared. Two days later, he came in again. My mother began reproaching him. ‘It’s a lesson for him, ma’am,’ interposed Harlov, ‘not to fly off without knowing what he’s about, to find out whom he has to deal with first. He’s young yet, he must be taught.’ The dignitary was almost of the same age as Harlov; but this Titan was in the habit of regarding every one as not fully grown up. He had the greatest confidence in himself and was afraid of absolutely no one. ‘Can they do anything to me? Where on earth is the man that can?’ he would ask, and suddenly he would go off into a short but deafening guffaw.

II

My mother was exceedingly particular in her choice of acquaintances, but she made Harlov welcome with special cordiality and allowed him many privileges. Twenty-five years before, he had saved her life by holding up her carriage on the edge of a deep precipice, down which the horses had already fallen. The traces and straps of the harness broke, but Martin Petrovitch did not let go his hold of the wheel he had grasped, though the blood spurted out under his nails. My mother had arranged his marriage. She chose for his wife an orphan girl of seventeen, who had been brought up in her house; he was over forty at the time. Martin Petrovitch's wife was a frail creature – they said he carried her into his house in the palms of his hands – and she did not live long with him. She bore him two daughters, however. After her death, my mother continued her good offices to Martin Petrovitch. She placed his elder daughter in the district school, and afterwards found her a husband, and already had another in her eye for the second. Harlov was a fairly good manager. He had a little estate of nearly eight hundred acres, and had built on to his place a little, and the way the peasants obeyed him is indescribable. Owing to his stoutness, Harlov scarcely ever went anywhere on foot: the earth did not bear him. He used to go everywhere in a low racing droshky, himself driving a rawboned mare, thirty years old, with a scar on

her shoulder, from a wound which she had received in the battle of Borodino, under the quartermaster of a cavalry regiment. This mare was always somehow lame in all four legs; she could not go at a walking pace, but could only change from a trot to a canter. She used to eat mugwort and wormwood along the hedges, which I have never noticed any other horse do. I remember I always used to wonder how such a broken-down nag could draw such a fearful weight. I won't venture to repeat how many hundred-weight were attributed to our neighbour. In the droshky behind Martin Petrovitch's back perched his swarthy page, Maximka. With his face and whole person squeezed close up to his master, and his bare feet propped on the hind axle bar of the droshky, he looked like a little leaf or worm which had clung by chance to the gigantic carcass before him. This same page boy used once a week to shave Martin Petrovitch. He used, so they said, to stand on a table to perform this operation. Some jocose persons averred that he had to run round his master's chin. Harlov did not like staying long at home, and so one might often see him driving about in his invariable equipage, with the reins in one hand (the other he held smartly on his knee with the elbow crooked upwards), with a diminutive old cap on the very top of his head. He looked boldly about him with his little bear-like eyes, shouted in a voice of thunder to all the peasants, artisans, and tradespeople he met. Priests he greatly disliked, and he would send vigorous abjurations after them when he met them. One day on overtaking me (I was out for a stroll with my gun), he halloed

at a hare that lay near the road in such a way that I could not get the roar and ring of it out of my ears all day.

III

My mother, as I have already stated, made Martin Petrovitch very welcome. She knew what a profound respect he entertained for her person. ‘She is a real gentlewoman, one of our sort,’ was the way he used to refer to her. He used to style her his benefactress, while she saw in him a devoted giant, who would not have hesitated to face a whole mob of peasants in defence of her; and although no one foresaw the barest possibility of such a contingency, still, to my mother’s notions, in the absence of a husband – she had early been left a widow – such a champion as Martin Petrovitch was not to be despised. And besides, he was a man of upright character, who curried favour with no one, never borrowed money or drank spirits; and no fool either, though he had received no sort of education. My mother trusted Martin Petrovitch: when she took it into her head to make her will, she asked him to witness it, and he drove home expressly to fetch his round iron-rimmed spectacles, without which he could not write. And with spectacles on nose, he succeeded, in a quarter of an hour, with many gasps and groans and great effort, in inscribing his Christian name, father’s name, and surname and his rank and designation, tracing enormous quadrangular letters, with tails and flourishes. Having completed this task, he declared he was tired out, and that writing for him was as hard work as catching fleas. Yes, my mother had a respect for him ... he was

not, however, admitted beyond the dining-room in our house. He carried a very strong odour about with him; there was a smell of the earth, of decaying forest, of marsh mud about him. ‘He’s a forest-demon!’ my old nurse would declare. At dinner a special table used to be laid apart in a corner for Martin Petrovitch, and he was not offended at that, he knew other people were ill at ease sitting beside him, and he too had greater freedom in eating. And he did eat too, as no one, I imagine, has eaten since the days of Polyphemus. At the very beginning of dinner, by way of a precautionary measure, they always served him a pot of some four pounds of porridge, ‘else you’d eat me out of house and home,’ my mother used to say. ‘That I should, ma’am,’ Martin Petrovitch would respond, grinning.

My mother liked to hear his reflections on any topic connected with the land. But she could not support the sound of his voice for long together. ‘What’s the meaning of it, my good sir!’ she would exclaim; ‘you might take something to cure yourself of it, really! You simply deafen me. Such a trumpet-blast!’

‘Natalia Nikolaevna! benefactress!’ Martin Petrovitch would rejoin, as a rule, ‘I’m not responsible for my throat. And what medicine could have any effect on me – kindly tell me that? I’d better hold my tongue for a bit.’

In reality, I imagine, no medicine could have affected Martin Petrovitch. He was never ill.

He was not good at telling stories, and did not care for it. ‘Much talking gives me asthma,’ he used to remark reproachfully.

It was only when one got him on to the year 1812 – he had served in the militia, and had received a bronze medal, which he used to wear on festive occasions attached to a Vladimir ribbon – when one questioned him about the French, that he would relate some few anecdotes. He used, however, to maintain stoutly all the while that there never had been any Frenchmen, real ones, in Russia, only some poor marauders, who had straggled over from hunger, and that he had given many a good drubbing to such rabble in the forests.

IV

And yet even this self-confident, unflinching giant had his moments of melancholy and depression. Without any visible cause he would suddenly begin to be sad; he would lock himself up alone in his room, and hum – positively hum – like a whole hive of bees; or he would call his page Maximka, and tell him to read aloud to him out of the solitary book which had somehow found its way into his house, an odd volume of Novikovsky's *The Worker at Leisure*, or else to sing to him. And Maximka, who by some strange freak of chance, could spell out print, syllable by syllable, would set to work with the usual chopping up of the words and transference of the accent, bawling out phrases of the following description: 'but man in his wilfulness draws from this empty hypothesis, which he applies to the animal kingdom, utterly opposite conclusions. Every animal separately,' he says, 'is not capable of making me happy!' and so on. Or he would chant in a shrill little voice a mournful song, of which nothing could be distinguished but: 'Ee ... eee ... ee ... a ... ee ... a ... ee ... Aaa ... ska! O ... oo ... oo ... bee ... ee ... ee ... ee ... la!' While Martin Petrovitch would shake his head, make allusions to the mutability of life, how all things turn to ashes, fade away like grass, pass – and will return no more! A picture had somehow come into his hands, representing a burning candle, which the winds, with puffed-out cheeks, were blowing

upon from all sides; below was the inscription: 'Such is the life of man.' He was very fond of this picture; he had hung it up in his own room, but at ordinary, not melancholy, times he used to keep it turned face to the wall, so that it might not depress him. Harlov, that colossus, was afraid of death! To the consolations of religion, to prayer, however, he rarely had recourse in his fits of melancholy. Even then he chiefly relied on his own intelligence. He had no particular religious feeling; he was not often seen in church; he used to say, it is true, that he did not go on the ground that, owing to his corporeal dimensions, he was afraid of squeezing other people out. The fit of depression commonly ended in Martin Petrovitch's beginning to whistle, and suddenly, in a voice of thunder, ordering out his droshky, and dashing off about the neighbourhood, vigorously brandishing his disengaged hand over the peak of his cap, as though he would say, 'For all that, I don't care a straw!' He was a regular Russian.

V

Strong men, like Martin Petrovitch, are for the most part of a phlegmatic disposition; but he, on the contrary, was rather easily irritated. He was specially short-tempered with a certain Bitchkov, who had found a refuge in our house, where he occupied a position between that of a buffoon and a dependant. He was the brother of Harlov's deceased wife, had been nicknamed Souvenir as a little boy, and Souvenir he had remained for every one, even the servants, who addressed him, it is true, as Souvenir Timofeitch. His real name he seemed hardly to know himself. He was a pitiful creature, looked down upon by every one; a toady, in fact. He had no teeth on one side of his mouth, which gave his little wrinkled face a crooked appearance. He was in a perpetual fuss and fidget; he used to poke himself into the maids' room, or into the counting-house, or into the priest's quarters, or else into the bailiff's hut. He was repelled from everywhere, but he only shrugged himself up, and screwed up his little eyes, and laughed a pitiful mawkish laugh, like the sound of rinsing a bottle. It always seemed to me that had Souvenir had money, he would have turned into the basest person, unprincipled, spiteful, even cruel. Poverty kept him within bounds. He was only allowed drink on holidays. He was decently dressed, by my mother's orders, since in the evenings he took a hand in her game of picquet or boston. Souvenir

was constantly repeating, ‘Certainly, d’rectly, d’rectly.’ ‘D’rectly what?’ my mother would ask, with annoyance. He instantly drew back his hands, in a scare, and lisped, ‘At your service, ma’am!’ Listening at doors, backbiting, and, above all, quizzing, teasing, were his sole interest, and he used to quiz as though he had a right to, as though he were avenging himself for something. He used to call Martin Petrovitch brother, and tormented him beyond endurance. ‘What made you kill my sister, Margarita Timofeevna?’ he used to persist, wriggling about before him and sniggering. One day Martin Petrovitch was sitting in the billiard-room, a cool apartment, in which no one had ever seen a single fly, and which our neighbour, disliking heat and sunshine, greatly favoured on this account. He was sitting between the wall and the billiard-table. Souvenir was fidgeting before his bulky person, mocking him, grimacing... Martin Petrovitch wanted to get rid of him, and thrust both hands out in front of him. Luckily for Souvenir he managed to get away, his brother-in-law’s open hands came into collision with the edge of the billiard-table, and the billiard-board went flying off all its six screws... What a mass of batter Souvenir would have been turned into under those mighty hands!

VI

I had long been curious to see how Martin Petrovitch arranged his household, what sort of a home he had. One day I invited myself to accompany him on horseback as far as Eskovo (that was the name of his estate). ‘Upon my word, you want to have a look at my dominion,’ was Martin Petrovitch’s comment. ‘By all means! I’ll show you the garden, and the house, and the threshing-floor, and everything. I have plenty of everything.’ We set off. It was reckoned hardly more than a couple of miles from our place to Eskovo. ‘Here it is – my dominion!’ Martin Petrovitch roared suddenly, trying to turn his immovable neck, and waving his arm to right and left. ‘It’s all mine!’ Harlov’s homestead lay on the top of a sloping hill. At the bottom, a few wretched-looking peasants’ huts clustered close to a small pond. At the pond, on a washing platform, an old peasant woman in a check petticoat was beating some soaked linen with a bat.

‘Axinia!’ boomed Martin Petrovitch, but in such a note that the rooks flew up in a flock from an oat-field near... ‘Washing your husband’s breeches?’

The peasant woman turned at once and bowed very low.

‘Yes, sir,’ sounded her weak voice.

‘Ay, ay! Yonder, look,’ Martin Petrovitch continued, proceeding at a trot alongside a half-rotting wattle fence, ‘that is my hemp-patch; and that yonder’s the peasants’; see the

difference? And this here is my garden; the apple-trees I planted, and the willows I planted too. Else there was no timber of any sort here. Look at that, and learn a lesson!

We turned into the courtyard, shut in by a fence; right opposite the gate, rose an old tumbledown lodge, with a thatch roof, and steps up to it, raised on posts. On one side stood another, rather newer, and with a tiny attic; but it too was a ramshackly affair. 'Here you may learn a lesson again,' observed Harlov; 'see what a little manor-house our fathers lived in; but now see what a mansion I have built myself.' This 'mansion' was like a house of cards. Five or six dogs, one more ragged and hideous than another, welcomed us with barking. 'Sheep-dogs!' observed Martin Petrovitch. 'Pure-bred Crimeans! Sh, damned brutes! I'll come and strangle you one after another!' On the steps of the new building, there came out a young man, in a long full nankeen overall, the husband of Martin Petrovitch's elder daughter. Skipping quickly up to the droshky, he respectfully supported his father-in-law under the elbow as he got up, and even made as though he would hold the gigantic feet, which the latter, bending his bulky person forward, lifted with a sweeping movement across the seat; then he assisted me to dismount from my horse.

'Anna!' cried Harlov, 'Natalia Nikolaevna's son has come to pay us a visit; you must find some good cheer for him. But where's Evlampia?' (Anna was the name of the elder daughter, Evlampia of the younger.)

'She's not at home; she's gone into the fields to get cornflowers,' responded Anna, appearing at a little window near the door.

'Is there any junket?' queried Harlov.

'Yes.'

'And cream too?'

'Yes.'

'Well, set them on the table, and I'll show the young gentleman my own room meanwhile. This way, please, this way,' he added, addressing me, and beckoning with his forefinger. In his own house he treated me less familiarly; as a host he felt obliged to be more formally respectful. He led me along a corridor. 'Here is where I abide,' he observed, stepping sideways over the threshold of a wide doorway, 'this is my room. Pray walk in!'

His room turned out to be a big unplastered apartment, almost empty; on the walls, on nails driven in askew, hung two riding-whips, a three-cornered hat, reddish with wear, a single-barrelled gun, a sabre, a sort of curious horse-collar inlaid with metal plates, and the picture representing a burning candle blown on by the winds. In one corner stood a wooden settle covered with a particoloured rug. Hundreds of flies swarmed thickly about the ceiling; yet the room was cool. But there was a very strong smell of that peculiar odour of the forest which always accompanied Martin Petrovitch.

'Well, is it a nice room?' Harlov questioned me.

'Very nice.'

‘Look-ye, there hangs my Dutch horse-collar,’ Harlov went on, dropping into his familiar tone again. ‘A splendid horse-collar! got it by barter off a Jew. Just you look at it!’

‘It’s a good horse-collar.’

‘It’s most practical. And just sniff it ... what leather!’ I smelt the horse-collar. It smelt of rancid oil and nothing else.

‘Now, be seated, – there on the stool; make yourself at home,’ observed Harlov, while he himself sank on to the settle, and seemed to fall into a doze, shutting his eyes and even beginning to snore. I gazed at him without speaking, with ever fresh wonder; he was a perfect mountain – there was no other word! Suddenly he started.

‘Anna!’ he shouted, while his huge stomach rose and fell like a wave on the sea; ‘what are you about? Look sharp! Didn’t you hear me?’

‘Everything’s ready, father; come in,’ I heard his daughter’s voice.

I inwardly marvelled at the rapidity with which Martin Petrovitch’s behests had been carried out; and followed him into the drawing-room, where, on a table covered with a red cloth with white flowers on it, lunch was already prepared: junket, cream, wheaten bread, even powdered sugar and ginger. While I set to work on the junket, Martin Petrovitch growled affectionately, ‘Eat, my friend, eat, my dear boy; don’t despise our country cheer,’ and sitting down again in a corner, again seemed to fall into a doze. Before me, perfectly motionless, with

downcast eyes, stood Anna Martinovna, while I saw through the window her husband walking my cob up and down the yard, and rubbing the chain of the snaffle with his own hands.

VII

My mother did not like Harlov's elder daughter; she called her a stuck-up thing. Anna Martinovna scarcely ever came to pay us her respects, and behaved with chilly decorum in my mother's presence, though it was by her good offices she had been well educated at a boarding-school, and had been married, and on her wedding-day had received a thousand roubles and a yellow Turkish shawl, the latter, it is true, a trifle the worse for wear. She was a woman of medium height, thin, very brisk and rapid in her movements, with thick fair hair and a handsome dark face, on which the pale-blue narrow eyes showed up in a rather strange but pleasing way. She had a straight thin nose, her lips were thin too, and her chin was like the loop-end of a hair-pin. No one looking at her could fail to think: 'Well, you are a clever creature – and a spiteful one, too!' And for all that, there was something attractive about her too. Even the dark moles, scattered 'like buck-wheat' over her face, suited her and increased the feeling she inspired. Her hands thrust into her kerchief, she was silyly watching me, looking downwards (I was seated, while she was standing). A wicked little smile strayed about her lips and her cheeks and in the shadow of her long eyelashes. 'Ugh, you pampered little fine gentleman!' this smile seemed to express. Every time she drew a breath, her nostrils slightly distended – this, too, was rather strange. But all the same, it seemed to me

that were Anna Martinovna to love me, or even to care to kiss me with her thin cruel lips, I should simply bound up to the ceiling with delight. I knew she was very severe and exacting, that the peasant women and girls went in terror of her – but what of that? Anna Martinovna secretly excited my imagination ... though after all, I was only fifteen then, – and at that age!..

Martin Petrovitch roused himself again, ‘Anna!’ he shouted, ‘you ought to strum something on the pianoforte ... young gentlemen are fond of that.’

I looked round; there was a pitiful semblance of a piano in the room.

‘Yes, father,’ responded Anna Martinovna. ‘Only what am I to play the young gentleman? He won’t find it interesting.’

‘Why, what did they teach you at your young ladies’ seminary?’ ‘I’ve forgotten everything – besides, the notes are broken.’

Anna Martinovna’s voice was very pleasant, resonant and rather plaintive – like the note of some birds of prey.

‘Very well,’ said Martin Petrovitch, and he lapsed into dreaminess again. ‘Well,’ he began once more, ‘wouldn’t you like, then, to see the threshing-floor, and have a look round? Volodka will escort you. – Hi, Volodka!’ he shouted to his son-in-law, who was still pacing up and down the yard with my horse, ‘take the young gentleman to the threshing-floor ... and show him my farming generally. But I must have a nap! So! good-bye!’

He went out and I after him. Anna Martinovna at once set to work rapidly, and, as it were, angrily, clearing the table. In the

doorway, I turned and bowed to her. But she seemed not to notice my bow, and only smiled again, more maliciously than before.

I took my horse from Harlov's son-in-law and led him by the bridle. We went together to the threshing-floor, but as we discovered nothing very remarkable about it, and as he could not suppose any great interest in farming in a young lad like me, we returned through the garden to the main road.

VIII

I was well acquainted with Harlov's son-in-law. His name was Vladimir Vassilievitch Sletkin. He was an orphan, brought up by my mother, and the son of a petty official, to whom she had intrusted some business. He had first been placed in the district school, then he had entered the 'seignorial counting-house,' then he had been put into the service of the government stores, and, finally, married to the daughter of Martin Petrovitch. My mother used to call him a little Jew, and certainly, with his curly hair, his black eyes always moist, like damson jam, his hook nose, and wide red mouth, he did suggest the Jewish type. But the colour of his skin was white and he was altogether very good-looking. He was of a most obliging temper, so long as his personal advantage was not involved. Then he promptly lost all self-control from greediness, and was moved even to tears. He was ready to whine the whole day long to gain the paltriest trifle; he would remind one a hundred times over of a promise, and be hurt and complain if it were not carried out at once. He liked sauntering about the fields with a gun; and when he happened to get a hare or a wild duck, he would thrust his booty into his game-bag with peculiar zest, saying, 'Now, you may be as tricky as you like, you won't escape me! Now you're *mine!*'

'You've a good horse,' he began in his lisping voice, as he assisted me to get into the saddle; 'I ought to have a horse like

that! But where can I get one? I've no such luck. If you'd ask your mamma, now – remind her.'

'Why, has she promised you one?'

'Promised? No; but I thought that in her great kindness –'

'You should apply to Martin Petrovitch.'

'To Martin Petrovitch?' Sletkin repeated, dwelling on each syllable. 'To him I'm no better than a worthless page, like Maximka. He keeps a tight hand on us, that he does, and you get nothing from him for all your toil.'

'Really?'

'Yes, by God. He'll say, "My word's sacred!" – and there, it's as though he's chopped it off with an axe. You may beg or not, it's all one. Besides, Anna Martinovna, my wife, is not in such favour with him as Evlampia Martinovna. O merciful God, bless us and save us!' he suddenly interrupted himself, flinging up his hands in despair. 'Look! what's that? A whole half-rood of oats, our oats, some wretch has gone and cut. The villain! Just see! Thieves! thieves! It's a true saying, to be sure, don't trust Eskovo, Beskovo, Erino, and Byelino! (these were the names of four villages near). Ah, ah, what a thing! A rouble and a half's worth, or, maybe, two roubles' loss!'

In Sletkin's voice, one could almost hear sobs. I gave my horse a poke in the ribs and rode away from him.

Sletkin's ejaculations still reached my hearing, when suddenly at a turn in the road, I came upon the second daughter of Harlov, Evlampia, who had, in the words of Anna Martinovna, gone into

the fields to get cornflowers. A thick wreath of those flowers was twined about her head. We exchanged bows in silence. Evlampia, too, was very good-looking; as much so as her sister, though in a different style. She was tall and stoutly built; everything about her was on a large scale: her head, and her feet and hands, and her snow-white teeth, and especially her eyes, prominent, languishing eyes, of the dark blue of glass beads. Everything about her, while still beautiful, had positively a monumental character (she was a true daughter of Martin Petrovitch). She did not, it seemed, know what to do with her massive fair mane, and she had twisted it in three plaits round her head. Her mouth was charming, crimson and fresh as a rose, and as she talked her upper lip was lifted in the middle in a very fascinating way. But there was something wild and almost fierce in the glance of her huge eyes. 'A free bird, wild Cossack breed,' so Martin Petrovitch used to speak of her. I was in awe of her... This stately beauty reminded one of her father.

I rode on a little farther and heard her singing in a strong, even, rather harsh voice, a regular peasant voice; suddenly she ceased. I looked round and from the crest of the hill saw her standing beside Harlov's son-in-law, facing the rood of oats. The latter was gesticulating and pointing, but she stood without stirring. The sun lighted up her tall figure, and the wreath of cornflowers shone brilliantly blue on her head.

IX

I believe I have already mentioned that, for this second daughter of Harlov's too, my mother had already prepared a match. This was one of the poorest of our neighbours, a retired army major, Gavril Fedulitch Zhitkov, a man no longer young, and, as he himself expressed it, not without a certain complacency, however, as though recommending himself, 'battered and broken down.' He could barely read and write, and was exceedingly stupid but secretly aspired to become my mother's steward, as he felt himself to be a 'man of action.' 'I can warm the peasant's hides for them, if I can do anything,' he used to say, almost gnashing his own teeth, 'because I was used to it,' he used to explain, 'in my former duties, I mean.' Had Zhitkov been less of a fool, he would have realised that he had not the slightest chance of being steward to my mother, seeing that, for that, it would have been necessary to get rid of the present steward, one Kvitsinsky, a very capable Pole of great character, in whom my mother had the fullest confidence. Zhitkov had a long face, like a horse's; it was all overgrown with hair of a dusty whitish colour; his cheeks were covered with it right up to the eyes; and even in the severest frosts, it was sprinkled with an abundant sweat, like drops of dew. At the sight of my mother, he drew himself upright as a post, his head positively quivered with zeal, his huge hands slapped a little against his thighs, and his

whole person seemed to express: ‘Command!.. and I will strive my utmost!’ My mother was under no illusion on the score of his abilities, which did not, however, hinder her from taking steps to marry him to Evlampia.

‘Only, will you be able to manage her, my good sir?’ she asked him one day.

Zhitkov smiled complacently.

‘Upon my word, Natalia Nikolaevna! I used to keep a whole regiment in order; they were tame enough in my hands; and what’s this? A trumpery business!’

‘A regiment’s one thing, sir, but a well-bred girl, a wife, is a very different matter,’ my mother observed with displeasure.

‘Upon my word, ma’am! Natalia Nikolaevna!’ Zhitkov cried again, ‘that we’re quite able to understand. In one word: a young lady, a delicate person!’

‘Well!’ my mother decided at length, ‘Evlampia won’t let herself be trampled upon.’

X

One day – it was the month of June, and evening was coming on – a servant announced the arrival of Martin Petrovitch. My mother was surprised: we had not seen him for over a week, but he had never visited us so late before. ‘Something has happened!’ she exclaimed in an undertone. The face of Martin Petrovitch, when he rolled into the room and at once sank into a chair near the door, wore such an unusual expression, it was so preoccupied and positively pale, that my mother involuntarily repeated her exclamation aloud. Martin Petrovitch fixed his little eyes upon her, was silent for a space, sighed heavily, was silent again, and articulated at last that he had come about something ... which ... was of a kind, that on account of...

Muttering these disconnected words, he suddenly got up and went out.

My mother rang, ordered the footman, who appeared, to overtake Martin Petrovitch at once and bring him back without fail, but the latter had already had time to get into his droshky and drive away.

Next morning my mother, who was astonished and even alarmed, as much by Martin Petrovitch’s strange behaviour as by the extraordinary expression of his face, was on the point of sending a special messenger to him, when he made his appearance. This time he seemed more composed.

‘Tell me, my good friend, tell me,’ cried my mother, directly she saw him, ‘what ever has happened to you? I thought yesterday, upon my word I did... “Mercy on us!” I thought, “Hasn’t our old friend gone right off his head?”’

‘I’ve not gone off my head, madam,’ answered Martin Petrovitch; ‘I’m not that sort of man. But I want to consult with you.’

‘What about?’

‘I’m only in doubt, whether it will be agreeable to you in this same contingency – ’

‘Speak away, speak away, my good sir, but more simply. Don’t alarm me! What’s this same contingency? Speak more plainly. Or is it your melancholy come upon you again?’

Harlov scowled. ‘No, it’s not melancholy – that comes upon me in the new moon; but allow me to ask you, madam, what do you think about death?’

My mother was taken aback. ‘About what?’

‘About death. Can death spare any one whatever in this world?’

‘What have you got in your head, my good friend? Who of us is immortal? For all you’re born a giant, even to you there’ll be an end in time.’

‘There will! oh, there will!’ Harlov assented and he looked downcast. ‘I’ve had a vision come to me in my dreams,’ he brought out at last.

‘What are you saying?’ my mother interrupted him.

‘A vision in my dreams,’ he repeated – ‘I’m a seer of visions,

you know!’

‘You!’

‘I. Didn’t you know it?’ Harlov sighed. ‘Well, so... Over a week ago, madam, I lay down, on the very last day of eating meat before St. Peter’s fast-day; I lay down after dinner to rest a bit, well, and so I fell asleep, and dreamed a raven colt ran into the room to me. And this colt began sporting about and grinning. Black as a beetle was the raven colt.’ Harlov ceased.

‘Well?’ said my mother.

‘And all of a sudden this same colt turns round, and gives me a kick in the left elbow, right in the funny bone... I waked up; my arm would not move nor my leg either. Well, thinks I, it’s paralysis; however, I worked them up and down, and got them to move again; only there were shooting pains in the joints a long time, and there are still. When I open my hand, the pains shoot through the joints.’

‘Why, Martin Petrovitch, you must have lain upon your arm somehow and crushed it.’

‘No, madam; pray, don’t talk like that! It was an intimation ... referring to my death, I mean.’

‘Well, upon my word,’ my mother was beginning.

‘An intimation. Prepare thyself, man, as ’twere to say. And therefore, madam, here is what I have to announce to you, without a moment’s delay. Not wishing,’ Harlov suddenly began shouting, ‘that the same death should come upon me, the servant of God, unawares, I have planned in my own mind this: to divide

– now during my lifetime – my estate between my two daughters, Anna and Evlampia, according as God Almighty directs me – ’ Martin Petrovitch stopped, groaned, and added, ‘without a moment’s delay.’

‘Well, that would be a good idea,’ observed my mother, ‘though I think you have no need to be in a hurry.’

‘And seeing that herein I desire,’ Harlov continued, raising his voice still higher, ‘to be observant of all due order and legality, so I humbly beg your young son, Dmitri Semyonovitch – I would not venture, madam, to trouble you – I beg the said Dmitri Semyonovitch, your son, and I claim of my kinsman, Bitchkov, as a plain duty, to assist at the ratification of the formal act and transference of possession to my two daughters – Anna, married, and Evlampia, spinster. Which act will be drawn up in readiness the day after to-morrow at twelve o’clock, at my own place, Eskovo, also called Kozulkino, in the presence of the ruling authorities and functionaries, who are thereto invited.’

Martin Petrovitch with difficulty reached the end of this speech, which he had obviously learnt by heart, and which was interspersed with frequent sighs... He seemed to have no breath left in his chest; his pale face was crimson again, and he several times wiped the sweat off it.

‘So you’ve already composed the deed dividing your property?’ my mother queried. ‘When did you manage that?’

‘I managed it ... oh! Neither eating, nor drinking – ’

‘Did you write it yourself?’

‘Volodka ... oh! helped.’

‘And have you forwarded a petition?’

‘I have, and the chamber has sanctioned it, and notice has been given to the district court, and the temporary division of the local court has ... oh!.. been notified to be present.’

My mother laughed. ‘I see, Martin Petrovitch, you’ve made every arrangement already – and how quickly. You’ve not spared money, I should say?’

‘No, indeed, madam.’

‘Well, well. And you say you want to consult with me. Well, my little Dmitri can go; and I’ll send Souvenir with him, and speak to Kvitsinsky... But you haven’t invited Gavrila Fedulitch?’

‘Gavrila Fedulitch – Mr. Zhitkov – has had notice ... from me also. As a betrothed, it was only fitting.’

Martin Petrovitch had obviously exhausted all the resources of his eloquence. Besides, it always seemed to me that he did not look altogether favourably on the match my mother had made for his daughter; possibly, he had expected a more advantageous marriage for his darling Evlampia.

He got up from his chair, and made a scrape with his foot. ‘Thank you for your consent.’

‘Where are you off to?’ asked my mother. ‘Stay a bit; I’ll order some lunch to be served you.’

‘Much obliged,’ responded Harlov. ‘But I cannot... Oh! I must get home.’

He backed and was about to move sideways, as his habit was,

through the door.

‘Stop, stop a minute,’ my mother went on, ‘can you possibly mean to make over the whole of your property without reserve to your daughters?’

‘Certainly, without reserve.’

‘Well, but how about yourself – where are you going to live?’

Harlov positively flung up his hands in amazement. ‘You ask where? In my house, at home, as I’ve lived hitherto ... so henceforward. Whatever difference could there be?’

‘You have such confidence in your daughters and your son-in-law, then?’

‘Were you pleased to speak of Volodka? A poor stick like him? Why, I can do as I like with him, whatever it is ... what authority has he? As for them, my daughters, that is, to care for me till I’m in the grave, to give me meat and drink, and clothe me... Merciful heavens! it’s their first duty. I shall not long be an eyesore to them. Death’s not over the hills – it’s upon my shoulders.’

‘Death is in God’s hands,’ observed my mother; ‘though that is their duty, to be sure. Only pardon me, Martin Petrovitch; your elder girl, Anna, is well known to be proud and imperious, and – well – the second has a fierce look...’

‘Natalia Nikolaevna!’ Harlov broke in, ‘why do you say that?.. Why, as though they ... My daughters ... Why, as though I ... Forget their duty? Never in their wildest dreams... Offer opposition? To whom? Their parent ... Dare to do such a thing?’

Have they not my curse to fear? They've passed their life long in fear and in submission – and all of a sudden ... Good Lord!

Harlov choked, there was a rattle in his throat.

'Very well, very well,' my mother made haste to soothe him; 'only I don't understand all the same what has put it into your head to divide the property up now. It would have come to them afterwards, in any case. I imagine it's your melancholy that's at the bottom of it all.'

'Eh, ma'am,' Harlov rejoined, not without vexation, 'you will keep coming back to that. There is, maybe, a higher power at work in this, and you talk of melancholy. I thought to do this, madam, because in my own person, while still in life, I wish to decide in my presence, who is to possess what, and with what I will reward each, so that they may possess, and feel thankfulness, and carry out my wishes, and what their father and benefactor has resolved upon, they may accept as a bountiful gift.'

Harlov's voice broke again.

'Come, that's enough, that's enough, my good friend,' my mother cut him short; 'or your raven colt will be putting in an appearance in earnest.'

'O Natalia Nikolaevna, don't talk to me of it,' groaned Harlov. 'That's my death come after me. Forgive my intrusion. And you, my little sir, I shall have the honour of expecting you the day after to-morrow.'

Martin Petrovitch went out; my mother looked after him, and shook her head significantly. 'This is a bad business,' she

murmured, ‘a bad business. You noticed’ – she addressed herself to me – ‘he talked, and all the while seemed blinking, as though the sun were in his eyes; that’s a bad sign. When a man’s like that, his heart’s sure to be heavy, and misfortune threatens him. You must go over the day after to-morrow with Vikenty Osipovitch and Souvenir.’

XI

On the day appointed, our big family coach, with seats for four, harnessed with six bay horses, and with the head coachman, the grey-bearded and portly Alexeitch, on the box, rolled smoothly up to the steps of our house. The importance of the act upon which Harlov was about to enter, and the solemnity with which he had invited us, had had their effect on my mother. She had herself given orders for this extraordinary state equipage to be brought out, and had directed Souvenir and me to put on our best clothes. She obviously wished to show respect to her protégé. As for Kvitsinsky, he always wore a frock-coat and white tie. Souvenir chattered like a magpie all the way, giggled, wondered whether his brother would apportion him anything, and thereupon called him a dummy and an old fogey. Kvitsinsky, a man of severe and bilious temperament, could not put up with it at last 'What can induce you,' he observed, in his distinct Polish accent, 'to keep up such a continual unseemly chatter? Can you really be incapable of sitting quiet without these "wholly superfluous" (his favourite phrase) inanities?' 'All right, d'rectly,' Souvenir muttered discontentedly, and he fixed his squinting eyes on the carriage window. A quarter of an hour had not passed, the smoothly trotting horses had scarcely begun to get warm under the straps of their new harness, when Harlov's homestead came into sight. Through the widely open gate, our

coach rolled into the yard. The diminutive postillion, whose legs hardly reached half-way down his horses' body, for the last time leaped up with a babyish shriek into the soft saddle, old Alexeitch at once spread out and raised his elbows, a slight 'wo-o' was heard, and we stopped. The dogs did not bark to greet us, and the serf boys, in long smocks that gaped open over their big stomachs, had all hidden themselves. Harlov's son-in-law was awaiting us in the doorway. I remember I was particularly struck by the birch boughs stuck in on both sides of the steps, as though it were Trinity Sunday. 'Grandeur upon grandeur,' Souvenir, who was the first to alight, squeaked through his nose. And certainly there was a solemn air about everything. Harlov's son-in-law was wearing a plush cravat with a satin bow, and an extraordinarily tight tail-coat; while Maximka, who popped out behind his back, had his hair so saturated with kvas, that it positively dripped. We went into the parlour, and saw Martin Petrovitch towering – yes, positively towering – motionless, in the middle of the room. I don't know what Souvenir's and Kvitsinsky's feelings were at the sight of his colossal figure; but I felt something akin to awe. Martin Petrovitch was attired in a grey Cossack coat – his militia uniform of 1812 it must have been – with a black stand-up collar. A bronze medal was to be seen on his breast, a sabre hung at his side; he laid his left hand on the hilt, with his right he was leaning on the table, which was covered with a red cloth. Two sheets of paper, full of writing, lay on the table. Harlov stood motionless, not even gasping; and what dignity was expressed

in his attitude, what confidence in himself, in his unlimited and unquestionable power! He barely greeted us with a motion of the head, and barely articulating 'Be seated!' pointed the forefinger of his left hand in the direction of some chairs set in a row. Against the right-hand wall of the parlour were standing Harlov's daughters wearing their Sunday clothes: Anna, in a shot lilac-green dress, with a yellow silk sash; Evlampia, in pink, with crimson ribbons. Near them stood Zhitkov, in a new uniform, with the habitual expression of dull and greedy expectation in his eyes, and with a greater profusion of sweat than usual over his hirsute countenance. On the left side of the room sat the priest, in a threadbare snuff-coloured cassock, an old man, with rough brown hair. This head of hair, and the dejected lacklustre eyes, and the big wrinkled hands, which seemed a burden even to himself, and lay like two rocks on his knees, and the tarred boots which peeped out beneath his cassock, all seemed to tell of a joyless laborious life. His parish was a very poor one. Beside him was the local police captain, a fattish, palish, dirty-looking little gentleman, with soft puffy little hands and feet, black eyes, black short-clipped moustaches, a continual cheerful but yet sickly little smile on his face. He had the reputation of being a great taker of bribes, and even a tyrant, as the expression was in those days. But not only the gentry, even the peasants were used to him, and liked him. He bent very free and easy and rather ironical looks around him; it was clear that all this 'procedure' amused him. In reality, the only part that had any

interest for him was the light lunch and spirits in store for us. But the attorney sitting near him, a lean man with a long face, narrow whiskers from his ears to his nose, as they were worn in the days of Alexander the First, was absorbed with his whole soul in Martin Petrovitch's proceedings, and never took his big serious eyes off him. In his concentrated attention and sympathy, he kept moving and twisting his lips, though without opening his mouth. Souvenir stationed himself next him, and began talking to him in a whisper, after first informing me that he was the chief freemason in the province. The temporary division of the local court consists, as every one knows, of the police captain, the attorney, and the rural police commissioner; but the latter was either absent or kept himself in the background, so that I did not notice him. He bore, however, the nickname 'the non-existent' among us in the district, just as there are tramps called 'the non-identified.' I sat next Souvenir, Kvitsinsky next me. The face of the practical Pole showed unmistakable annoyance at our 'wholly superfluous' expedition, and unnecessary waste of time... 'A grand lady's caprices! these Russian grandees' fancies!' he seemed to be murmuring to himself... 'Ugh, these Russians!'

XII

When we were all seated, Martin Petrovitch hunched his shoulders, cleared his throat, scanned us all with his bear-like little eyes, and with a noisy sigh began as follows:

‘Gentlemen, I have called you together for the following purpose. I am grown old, gentlemen, and overcome by infirmities... Already I have had an intimation, the hour of death steals on, like a thief in the night... Isn’t that so, father?’ he addressed the priest.

The priest started. ‘Quite so, quite so,’ he mumbled, his beard shaking.

‘And therefore,’ continued Martin Petrovitch, suddenly raising his voice, ‘not wishing the said death to come upon me unawares, I purposed ...’ Martin Petrovitch proceeded to repeat, word for word, the speech he had made to my mother two days before. ‘In accordance with this my determination,’ he shouted louder than ever, ‘this deed’ (he struck his hand on the papers lying on the table) ‘has been drawn up by me, and the presiding authorities have been invited by me, and wherein my will consists the following points will treat. I have ruled, my day is over!’

Martin Petrovitch put his round iron spectacles on his nose, took one of the written sheets from the table, and began:

‘Deed of partition of the estate of the retired non-commissioned officer and nobleman, Martin Harlov, drawn up

by himself in his full and right understanding, and by his own good judgment, and wherein is precisely defined what benefits are assigned to his two daughters, Anna and Evlampia – bow!’ – (they bowed), ‘and in what way the serfs and other property, and live stock, be apportioned between the said daughters! Under my hand!’

‘This is their document!’ the police captain whispered to Kvitsinsky, with his invariable smile, ‘they want to read it for the beauty of the style, but the legal deed is made out formally, without all these flourishes.’

Souvenir was beginning to snigger...

‘In accordance with my will,’ put in Harlov, who had caught the police captain’s remark.

‘In accordance in every point,’ the latter hastened to respond cheerfully; ‘only, as you’re aware, Martin Petrovitch, there’s no dispensing with formality. And unnecessary details have been removed. For the chamber can’t enter into the question of spotted cows and fancy drakes.’

‘Come here!’ boomed Harlov to his son-in-law, who had come into the room behind us, and remained standing with an obsequious air near the door. He skipped up to his father-in-law at once.

‘There, take it and read! It’s hard for me. Only mind and don’t mumble it! Let all the gentlemen present be able to understand it.’

Sletkin took the paper in both hands, and began timidly, but distinctly, and with taste and feeling, to read the deed of partition.

There was set forth in it with the greatest accuracy just what was assigned to Anna and what to Evlampia, and how the division was to be made. Harlov from time to time interspersed the reading with phrases. 'Do you hear, that's for you, Anna, for your zeal!' or, 'That I give you, Evlampia!' and both the sisters bowed, Anna from the waist, Evlampia simply with a motion of the head. Harlov looked at them with stern dignity. 'The farm house' (the little new building) was assigned by him to Evlampia, as the younger daughter, 'by the well-known custom.' The reader's voice quivered and resounded at these words, unfavourable for himself; while Zhitkov licked his lips. Evlampia gave him a sidelong glance; had I been in Zhitkov's shoes, I should not have liked that glance. The scornful expression, characteristic of Evlampia, as of every genuine Russian beauty, had a peculiar shade at that moment. For himself, Martin Petrovitch reserved the right to go on living in the rooms he occupied, and assigned to himself, under the name of 'rations,' a full allowance 'of normal provisions,' and ten roubles a month for clothes. The last phrase of the deed Harlov wished to read himself. 'And this my parental will,' it ran, 'to carry out and observe is a sacred and binding duty on my daughters, seeing it is a command; seeing that I am, after God, their father and head, and am not bounden to render an account to any, nor have so rendered. And do they carry out my will, so will my fatherly blessing be with them, but should they not so do, which God forbid, then will they be overtaken by my paternal curse that cannot be averted, now and for ever,

amen!’ Harlov raised the deed high above his head. Anna at once dropped on her knees and touched the ground with her forehead; her husband, too, doubled up after her. ‘Well, and you?’ Harlov turned to Evlampia. She crimsoned all over, and she too bowed to the earth; Zhitkov bent his whole carcass forward.

‘Sign!’ cried Harlov, pointing his forefinger to the bottom of the deed. ‘Here: “I thank and accept, Anna. I thank and accept, Evlampia!”’

Both daughters rose, and signed one after another. Sletkin rose too, and was feeling after the pen, but Harlov moved him aside, sticking his middle finger into his cravat, so that he gasped. The silence lasted a moment. Suddenly Martin Petrovitch gave a sort of sob, and muttering, ‘Well, now it’s all yours!’ moved away. His daughters and son-in-law looked at one another, went up to him and began kissing him just above his elbow. His shoulder they could not reach.

XIII

The police captain read the real formal document, the deed of gift, drawn up by Martin Petrovitch. Then he went out on to the steps with the attorney and explained what had taken place to the crowd assembled at the gates, consisting of the witnesses required by law and other people from the neighbourhood, Harlov's peasants, and a few house-serfs. Then began the ceremony of the new owners entering into possession. They came out, too, upon the steps, and the police captain pointed to them when, slightly scowling with one eyebrow, while his careless face assumed for an instant a threatening air, he exhorted the crowd to 'subordination.' He might well have dispensed with these exhortations: a less unruly set of countenances than those of the Harlov peasants, I imagine, have never existed in creation. Clothed in thin smocks and torn sheepskins, but very tightly girt round their waists, as is always the peasants' way on solemn occasions, they stood motionless as though cut out of stone, and whenever the police captain uttered any exclamation such as, 'D'ye hear, you brutes? d'ye understand, you devils?' they suddenly bowed all at once, as though at the word of command. Each of these 'brutes and devils' held his cap tight in both hands, and never took his eyes off the window, where Martin Petrovitch's figure was visible. The witnesses themselves were hardly less awed. 'Is any impediment known to you,' the police

captain roared at them, ‘against the entrance into possession of these the sole and legitimate heirs and daughters of Martin Petrovitch Harlov?’

All the witnesses seemed to huddle together at once.

‘Do you know any, you devils?’ the police captain shouted again.

‘We know nothing, your excellency,’ responded sturdily a little old man, marked with small-pox, with a clipped beard and whiskers, an old soldier.

‘I say! Eremeitch’s a bold fellow!’ the witnesses said of him as they dispersed.

In spite of the police captain’s entreaties, Harlov would not come out with his daughters on to the steps. ‘My subjects will obey my will without that!’ he answered. Something like sadness had come over him on the completion of the conveyance. His face had grown pale. This new unprecedented expression of sadness looked so out of place on Martin Petrovitch’s broad and kindly features that I positively was at a loss what to think. Was an attack of melancholy coming over him? The peasants, on their side, too, were obviously puzzled. And no wonder! ‘The master’s alive, – there he stands, and such a master, too; Martin Petrovitch! And all of a sudden he won’t be their owner... A queer thing!’ I don’t know whether Harlov had an inkling of the notions that were straying through his ‘subjects’ heads, or whether he wanted to display his power for the last time, but he suddenly opened the little window, stuck his head out, and

shouted in a voice of thunder, 'obedience!' Then he slammed to the window. The peasants' bewilderment was certainly not dispelled nor decreased by this proceeding. They became stonier than ever, and even seemed to cease looking at anything. The group of house-serfs (among them were two sturdy wenches, in short chintz gowns, with muscles such as one might perhaps match in Michael Angelo's 'Last Judgment,' and one utterly decrepit old man, hoary with age and half blind, in a threadbare frieze cloak, rumoured to have been 'cornet-player' in the days of Potemkin, – the page Maximka, Harlov had reserved for himself) this group showed more life than the peasants; at least, it moved restlessly about. The new mistresses themselves were very dignified in their attitude, especially Anna. Her thin lips tightly compressed, she looked obstinately down ... her stern figure augured little good to the house-serfs. Evlampia, too, did not raise her eyes; only once she turned round and deliberately, as it were with surprise, scanned her betrothed, Zhitkov, who had thought fit, following Sletkin, to come out, too, on to the steps. 'What business have you here?' those handsome prominent eyes seemed to demand. Sletkin was the most changed of all. A bustling cheeriness showed itself in his whole bearing, as though he were overtaken by hunger; the movements of his head and his legs were as obsequious as ever, but how gleefully he kept working his arms, how fussily he twitched his shoulder-blades. 'Arrived at last!' he seemed to say. Having finished the ceremony of the entrance into possession, the police captain,

whose mouth was literally watering at the prospect of lunch, rubbed his hands in that peculiar manner which usually precedes the tossing-off of the first glass of spirits. But it appeared that Martin Petrovitch wished first to have a service performed with sprinklings of holy water. The priest put on an ancient and decrepit chasuble; a decrepit deacon came out of the kitchen, with difficulty kindling the incense in an old brazen church-vessel. The service began. Harlov sighed continually; he was unable, owing to his corpulence, to bow to the ground, but crossing himself with his right hand and bending his head, he pointed with the forefinger of his left hand to the floor. Sletkin positively beamed and even shed tears. Zhitkov, with dignity, in martial fashion, flourished his fingers only slightly between the third and fourth button of his uniform. Kvitsinsky, as a Catholic, remained in the next room. But the attorney prayed so fervently, sighed so sympathetically after Martin Petrovitch, and so persistently muttered and chewed his lips, turning his eyes upwards, that I felt moved, as I looked at him, and began to pray fervently too. At the conclusion of the service and the sprinkling with holy water, during which every one present, even the blind cornet-player, the contemporary of Potemkin, even Kvitsinsky, moistened their eyes with holy water, Anna and Evlampia once more, at Martin Petrovitch's bidding, prostrated themselves to the ground to thank him. Then at last came the moment of lunch. There were a great many dishes and all very nice; we all ate terribly much. The inevitable bottle of Don wine

made its appearance. The police captain, who was of all of us the most familiar with the usages of the world, and besides, the representative of government, was the first to propose the toast to the health 'of the fair proprietresses!' Then he proposed we should drink to the health of our most honoured and most generous-hearted friend, Martin Petrovitch. At the words 'most generous-hearted,' Sletkin uttered a shrill little cry and ran to kiss his benefactor... 'There, that'll do, that'll do,' muttered Harlov, as it were with annoyance, keeping him off with his elbow... But at this point a not quite pleasant, as they say, incident took place.

XIV

Souvenir, who had been drinking continuously ever since the beginning of luncheon, suddenly got up from his chair as red as a beetroot, and pointing his finger at Martin Petrovitch, went off into his mawkish, paltry laugh.

‘Generous-hearted! Generous-hearted!’ he began croaking; ‘but we shall see whether this generosity will be much to his taste when he’s stripped naked, the servant of God ... and out in the snow, too!’

‘What rot are you talking, fool?’ said Harlov contemptuously.

‘Fool! fool!’ repeated Souvenir. ‘God Almighty alone knows which of us is the real fool. But you, brother, did my sister, your wife, to her death, and now you’ve done for yourself ... ha-ha-ha!’

‘How dare you insult our honoured benefactor?’ Sletkin began shrilly, and, tearing himself away from Martin Petrovitch, whose shoulder he had clutched, he flew at Souvenir. ‘But let me tell you, if our benefactor desires it, we can cancel the deed this very minute!’

‘And yet, you’ll strip him naked, and turn him out into the snow ...’ returned Souvenir, retreating behind Kvitsinsky.

‘Silence!’ thundered Harlov. ‘I’ll pound you into a jelly! And you hold your tongue too, puppy!’ he turned to Sletkin; ‘don’t put in your word where you’re not wanted! If I, Martin Petrovitch

Harlov, have decided to make a deed of partition, who can cancel the same act against my will? Why, in the whole world there is no power...'

'Martin Petrovitch!' the attorney began in a mellow bass – he too had drunk a good deal, but his dignity was only increased thereby – 'but how if the gentleman has spoken the truth? You have done a generous action; to be sure, but how if – God forbid – in reality in place of fitting gratitude, some affront come of it?'

I stole a glance at both Martin Petrovitch's daughters. Anna's eyes were simply pinned upon the speaker, and a face more spiteful, more snake-like, and more beautiful in its very spite I had certainly never seen! Evlampia sat turned away, with her arms folded. A smile more scornful than ever curved her full, rosy lips.

Harlov got up from his chair, opened his mouth, but apparently his tongue failed him... He suddenly brought his fist down on the table, so that everything in the room danced and rang.

'Father,' Anna said hurriedly, 'they do not know us, and that is why they judge of us so. But don't, please, make yourself ill. You are angered for nothing, indeed; see, your face is, as it were, twisted awry.'

Harlov looked towards Evlampia; she did not stir, though Zhitkov, sitting beside her, gave her a poke in the side.

'Thank you, my daughter Anna,' said Harlov huskily; 'you are a sensible girl; I rely upon you and on your husband too.' Sletkin

once more gave vent to a shrill little sound; Zhitkov expanded his chest and gave a little scrape with his foot; but Harlov did not observe his efforts. ‘This dolt,’ he went on, with a motion of his chin in the direction of Souvenir, ‘is pleased to get a chance to teaze me; but you, my dear sir,’ he addressed himself to the attorney, ‘it is not for you to pass judgment on Martin Harlov; that is something beyond you. Though you are a man in official position, your words are most foolish. Besides, the deed is done, there will be no going back from my determination... Now, I will wish you good-day, I am going away. I am no longer the master of this house, but a guest in it. Anna, do you do your best; but I will go to my own room. Enough!’

Martin Petrovitch turned his back on us, and, without adding another word, walked deliberately out of the room.

This sudden withdrawal on the part of our host could not but break up the party, especially as the two hostesses also vanished not long after. Sletkin vainly tried to keep us. The police captain did not fail to blame the attorney for his uncalled-for candour. ‘Couldn’t help it!’ the latter responded... ‘My conscience spoke.’

‘There, you see that he’s a mason,’ Souvenir whispered to me.

‘Conscience!’ retorted the police captain. ‘We know all about your conscience! I suppose it’s in your pocket, just the same as it is with us sinners!’

The priest, meanwhile, even though already on his feet, foreseeing the speedy termination of the repast, lifted mouthful after mouthful to his mouth without a pause.

‘You’ve got a fine appetite, I see,’ Sletkin observed to him sharply.

‘Storing up for the future,’ the priest responded with a meek grimace; years of hunger were expressed in that reply.

The carriages rattled up ... and we separated. On the way home, no one hindered Souvenir’s chatter and silly tricks, as Kvitsinsky had announced that he was sick of all this ‘wholly superfluous’ unpleasantness, and had set off home before us on foot. In his place, Zhitkov took a seat in our coach. The retired major wore a most dissatisfied expression, and kept twitching his moustaches like a spider.

‘Well, your noble Excellency,’ lisped Souvenir, ‘is subordination exploded, eh? Wait a bit and see what will happen! They’ll give you the sack too. Ah, a poor bridegroom you are, a poor bridegroom, an unlucky bridegroom!’

Souvenir was positively beside himself; while poor Zhitkov could do nothing but twitch his moustaches.

When I got home I told my mother all I had seen. She heard me to the end, and shook her head several times. ‘It’s a bad business,’ was her comment. ‘I don’t like all these innovations!’

XV

Next day Martin Petrovitch came to dinner. My mother congratulated him on the successful conclusion of his project. ‘You are now a free man,’ she said, ‘and ought to feel more at ease.’

‘More at ease, to be sure, madam,’ answered Martin Petrovitch, by no means, however, showing in the expression of his face that he really was more at ease. ‘Now I can meditate upon my soul, and make ready for my last hour, as I ought.’

‘Well,’ queried my mother, ‘and do the shooting pains still tingle in your arms?’

Harlov twice clenched and unclenched his left arm. ‘They do, madam; and I’ve something else to tell you. As I begin to drop asleep, some one cries in my head, “Take care!” “Take care!”’

‘That’s nerves,’ observed my mother, and she began speaking of the previous day, and referred to certain circumstances which had attended the completion of the deed of partition...

‘To be sure, to be sure,’ Harlov interrupted her, ‘there was something of the sort ... of no consequence. Only there’s something I would tell you,’ he added, hesitating – ‘I was not disturbed yesterday by Souvenir’s silly words – even Mr. Attorney, though he’s no fool – even he did not trouble me; no, it was quite another person disturbed me – ’ Here Harlov faltered.

‘Who?’ asked my mother.

Harlov fastened his eyes upon her: 'Evlampia!'

'Evlampia? Your daughter? How was that?'

'Upon my word, madam, she was like a stone! nothing but a statue! Can it be she has no feeling? Her sister, Anna – well, she was all she should be. She's a keen-witted creature! But Evlampia – why, I'd shown her – I must own – so much partiality! Can it be she's no feeling for me! It's clear I'm in a bad way; it's clear I've a feeling that I'm not long for this world, since I make over everything to them; and yet she's like a stone! she might at least utter a sound! Bows – yes, she bows, but there's no thankfulness to be seen.'

'There, give over,' observed my mother, 'we'll marry her to Gavril Fedulitch ... she'll soon get softer in his hands.'

Martin Petrovitch once more looked from under his brows at my mother. 'Well, there's Gavril Fedulitch, to be sure! You have confidence in him, then, madam?'

'I've confidence in him.'

'Very well; you should know best, to be sure. But Evlampia, let me tell you, is like me. The character is just the same. She has the wild Cossack blood, and her heart's like a burning coal!'

'Why, do you mean to tell me you've a heart like that, my dear sir?'

Harlov made no answer. A brief silence followed.

'What are you going to do, Martin Petrovitch,' my mother began, 'in what way do you mean to set about saving your soul now? Will you set off to Mitrophan or to Kiev, or may be you'll

go to the Optin desert, as it's in the neighbourhood? There, they do say, there's a holy monk appeared ... Father Makary they call him, no one remembers any one like him! He sees right through all sins.'

'If she really turns out an ungrateful daughter,' Harlov enunciated in a husky voice, 'then it would be better for me, I believe, to kill her with my own hands!'

'What are you saying! Lord, have mercy on you!' cried my mother. 'Think what you're saying! There, see, what a pretty pass it's come to. You should have listened to me the other day when you came to consult me! Now, here, you'll go tormenting yourself, instead of thinking of your soul! You'll be tormenting yourself, and all to no purpose! Yes! Here you're complaining now, and faint-hearted...'

This reproach seemed to stab Harlov to the heart. All his old pride came back to him with a rush. He shook himself, and thrust out his chin. 'I am not a man, madam, Natalia Nikolaevna, to complain or be faint-hearted,' he began sullenly. 'I simply wished to reveal my feelings to you as my benefactress and a person I respect. But the Lord God knows (here he raised his hand high above his head) that this globe of earth may crumble to pieces before I will go back from my word, or ... (here he positively snorted) show a faint heart, or regret what I have done! I had good reasons, be sure! My daughters will never forget their duty, for ever and ever, amen!'

My mother stopped her ears. 'What's this for, my good sir, like

a trumpet-blast! If you really have such faith in your family, well, praise the Lord for it! You've quite put my brains in a whirl!

Martin Petrovitch begged pardon, sighed twice, and was silent. My mother once more referred to Kiev, the Optin desert, and Father Makary... Harlov assented, said that 'he must ... he must ... he would have to ... his soul ...' and that was all. He did not regain his cheerfulness before he went away. From time to time he clenched and unclenched his fist, looked at his open hand, said that what he feared above everything was dying without repentance, from a stroke, and that he had made a vow to himself not to get angry, as anger vitiated his blood and drove it to his head... Besides, he had now withdrawn from everything. What grounds could he have for getting angry? Let other people trouble themselves now and vitiate their blood!

As he took leave of my mother he looked at her in a strange way, mournfully and questioningly ... and suddenly, with a rapid movement, drew out of his pocket the volume of *The Worker's Leisure-Hour*, and thrust it into my mother's hand.

'What's that?' she inquired.

'Read ... here,' he said hurriedly, 'where the corner's turned down, about death. It seems to me, it's terribly well said, but I can't make it out at all. Can't you explain it to me, my benefactress? I'll come back again and you explain it me.'

With these words Martin Petrovitch went away.

'He's in a bad way, he's in a bad way,' observed my mother, directly he had disappeared through the doorway, and she set to

work upon the *Leisure-Hour*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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