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Transcriber's Note:

1. Page scan source: <http://books.google.com/books?id=VTMZAAAAYAAJ>
2. Ossip Schubin is the pseudonym for Lola Kirschner.
3. There are 4 missing words or two-word phrases in the 3d para., Page 54; and 6 missing words or two-word phrases in the 2nd para. page 55. Missing text is indicated with "[...]" sequences.



BORIS LENSKY

From the German

BY

OSSIP SCHUBIN

TRANSLATED BY ÉLISE L. LATHROP

ILLUSTRATED

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BORIS LENSKY.

"He had many faults, but one greatest of all faults he had not, that of quackery--

"With all his faults he was a man, fiery real from the great fire bosom of nature herself."--
CARLYLE.

"Whoever wishes to know how great is the power which the charm of music can exercise over humanity must visit one of Boris Lensky's concerts.

"Boris Lensky! The name in itself has a legendary sound--a magic fascination surrounds the man and his violin. For every one who has attended one of his concerts, the longing, listening expression on the faces of the women who hear him is something which remains forever interwoven in remembrance with the complaining sweetness of his art. The best and noblest of women, when they listen to his wonderful violin, fall into a feverish trance which makes them lose all power over themselves.

"In Russia they call Boris Lensky the devil's violinist, and in explanation of the godless charm which glows in his art, the following neat little tale is told:

"Almost fifty years ago, crept through the poorest quarter of Moscow a neglected, ugly child, who, in order to earn his scanty food, scraped his violin as best he might, and sometimes received a copeck, but never a caress. This child was Boris Lensky. His heart languished for tenderness, like that of all repulsed ones. Then the devil met him, and allured him with splendid temptations. He would lay the whole world at his feet, if the boy would give him his soul for his own in exchange. But the boy felt a terror at this hellish slavery and said: 'No.' Then the devil at first went his way, and gnashed his teeth that he had not succeeded in capturing a human soul. But suddenly he turned back and called to the boy: 'I desire nothing of you; keep your soul; but you shall accept a present from me--a gift. In your art shall dwell a charm which no one can resist.'

"Then the boy was astonished at the devil's generosity, and accepted the gift. But the devil rejoiced, for he said to himself: 'If I have lost one soul, I have taken ten thousand others for it.' But the violinist soon noticed what a curse had fallen to his share.

"Denying all nobility, and still feeling a horror of the degrading power within him, he now goes through the world, restless, joyless, and without power over his own demoniac art--a resisting tool in the devil's hand. And he longs despairingly to find a being who could resist the fiendish charm, but he finds none.

"Thus the Russian tale.

"Now Lensky has grown old and gray in the service of the devil. His friends with fright notice in him the evermore plainly noticeable signs of physical decay. In his art he stands greater than ever, and from his violin sounds out to the public a wild, triumphing, and despairing swan song!"

This somewhat exaggerated production an old lady read aloud with declamatory emphasis, in whom at the first glance one perceived the Englishwoman and the spinster. She sits in a pretty, charming room, furnished with all kinds of rarities, by the hearth, and refreshes herself by turns with the newspaper and with tea.

It is in Paris.

The newspaper in which the old Englishwoman revels is *Figaro*, and the windows of the pretty little room look out on the Parc Monceau.

Already dressed to go out, a second, much younger lady in the same room busies herself in hastily, and to all appearance disapprovingly, looking through a just-opened package of books.

Somewhat vexed that her reading has called forth no remark from her listener, the old Englishwoman now says:

"Well, what do you say to this legend?"

"What shall I say?" replies the young lady, without looking up from the package of books, with blameless English accent, but in a decidedly un-English deep, soft voice--"that the French write much nonsense, if it is to raise the price of concert tickets."

"Nita!" said the Englishwoman, angrily; "you surely will not assert that this article is a common advertisement?"

"Certainly I assert it, Miss Wilmot," is the calm answer. "I am firmly convinced that Lensky's impressario has had the article printed."

"Well, I say, Nita, a strange change has taken place in you!" says Miss Wilmot, astonished and discontented, while she at the same time let her wrinkled hands sink down on her cinnamon-colored dress. "But, advertisement or not, Nita, Lensky's results speak for themselves. The Parisians run like mad to his concerts; recently there was such a crowd before the doors of the Salle Erard that the police had to interfere!"

"Bah!" replied she addressed as Nita. "Reliable musicians have told me that Lensky has gone very far back in his art. The animation with which the French do him homage is only a new proof

of their immoderate worship of all that is Russian. This tasteless idolatry makes me furious. Then, see here!" And Nita, for the first time in the course of the above conversation, turned her face to the old lady, while at the same time she drew a number of yellow books out from the package which she had been busy glancing over. Piling these up on each other, she said: "Three, five, seven books, translated from the Russian and mere trash, not a sensible line in the whole! What does that matter? The mere circumstance that 'from the Russian' stands upon it assures the worst Galimathias in Paris a publisher and a circle of readers. It is odious."

"Well, Nita, it seems to me that you least of all have the right to wonder over any Russian worship," remarks the old Englishwoman phlegmatically. "You yourself, in my recollection, have accomplished considerable in this respect."

"Who has not some youthful folly to reproach one's self for?" said Nita, shrugging her shoulders. "Fortunately, only in politics is one sentenced to never perceive one's errors. I also once had a violent passion for Russia leather, and I have gotten over that. Nothing in the world is now more unbearable than too much Russia leather, especially in a small room."

"A strange change has taken place in you, Nita," repeated the Englishwoman, who, as if petrified with astonishment, sat there motionless in the position of an Assyrian goddess, still with a hand on each knee. "You not only raved over the Russians, you raved over Boris Lensky; and how you raved!"

A dark blush rose in Nita's pale cheeks; at the same time her eyes darkened. "Good-by, Miss Wilmot," said she, without replying anything to the remarks of the old lady, and turned to the door.

"Will you not take a cup of tea before you go, Nita?" the Englishwoman calls after her.

"No, Miss Wilmot; I must hurry a great deal without that in order to reach the studio before twilight. I have promised Sonia to come; so once more adieu; and I beg of you, send all this plunder"--pointing to the books---"back to Calman Levy, and send him word he need no longer disturb me with his Russian stories." With that Nita vanished.

"A strange change, a very strange change," says Miss Wilmot to herself, while she still stares with the same abashed, astonished expression at the door which has just closed behind her young friend. Then she wishes to again take up *Figaro* in order to translate the article on the devil's violinist into German, for which language she has for twenty years had a love. In vain--the paper is nowhere to be found.

II.

Nita von Sankjéwitch is a young Austrian who lives perfectly independent on her income in Paris. Miss Wilmot, her former governess, now serves as chaperon in her little home.

If Miss Wilmot can be described in brief as an English old maid who reminds one of David's Marie Antoinette on the poor sinner's car, it would, on the contrary, have been quite difficult to give in as few words a half-way significant and life-like description of Nita.

Her figure, tall and slender, with very delicate limbs and long, slender hands and feet, has in carriage and movements something of the harsh, so to say, repellant charm with which the Greeks loved to characterize their Diana statues. Her abundant hair, which is cut straight across her forehead and gathered up in a heavy knot on her neck, is of a light-brown color with reddish lights; her face, long but prettily rounded, is pale, with regular features, finely arched little nose, and full, somewhat arrogantly curved little mouth.

But the most remarkable in her face, the most remarkable in her whole appearance, are the eyes--large, brilliant gray eyes with greenish and bluish lights in them, eyes which suddenly darken, and then become strangely and unfathomably deep, as if she had tasted all the bitterness of creation, and in the next moment look out upon the world again as challengingly bright and cold as if they did not believe there could be a heart-ache that could not be overcome by a gay jest.

In her family Nita was called the "melancholy scamp." Her age was difficult to decide. Just as her nature completely lacked that unrestrained, youthful exuberance, so her face, in spite of the ivory smoothness of the skin, was without all freshness. From her manner she might be forty.

She is the daughter of a born Countess Bärenburg and a Baron Sankjéwitch, who obtained the

Theresien cross and the title of Freiherr on the battlefield. Both parents are dead. On her father's side she has no relatives; with her mother's numerous relatives she stands on the best footing, without letting herself be much influenced by them. "It would be very uncomfortable to me to be obliged to be as distinguished as the clan Bärenburg," she used frequently to say, and preferred to say it to the face of the clan Bärenburg. The clan Bärenburg shook its head sadly at that, and regretted her peculiarities, without losing its respect, or even its sympathy, for her. The sharpest judgment which the family had ever pronounced upon her was: "Nita is an original."

Even the sun has spots, the most charming being has her unlovely peculiarities--Nita von Sankjéwitch is an artist! She has her independent studio in the rear of a building in a little court adorned with a pleasure ground, in the Avenue Frochot. Since some months she has shared it with a friend, a young Russian, of whom she is very fond. Nita's studio has two doors: one which leads directly out on the little court, and one which connects Nita's own sanctum with the great painting school of which Monsieur Sylvain is at the head. She has the key of her art nest in her pocket. Before she has yet had time to put it in the key-hole, the door is opened from within. A pretty, blonde young girl comes to meet her, and embraces her as if they had been separated for two years. It is Sonia--*i.e.*, Sophia Dimitrievna Kasin.

"Do I come too late?" asks Nita. "Has Monsieur Sylvain already been?"

"No," replied Sophie, "we are about to give him up. Will you have tea?"

Nita laughs. "Tea, and yet again tea! At home Miss Wilmot has already pursued me with offers of tea; that comes of it if one lives between an Englishwoman and a Russian. Well, give me a cup of your nectar, Sonia. I am a little out of tune to-day; perhaps it will do me good."

"You must wait a moment; it is not yet ready," replies Sonia, and bends listening over the copper tea-kettle, which stands on a little table delicately set with all kinds of tea things.

It is four o'clock in the afternoon. The last whitish light of an already quickly dying November day falls through a large window occupying almost one entire side of the studio, a roomy, square apartment, whose gray walls are adorned with a couple of studies, abundant bold sketches by Nita, anxiously neat attempts by Sophie; beside those, a plaster cast of St. John, *bas reliefs* of Donatello, with many bits of picturesque old stuffs, and two or three Japanese crapes. Furniture is scarce: a divan, over which an old Persian rug is spread; a couple of comfortable chairs, mostly of cane, but with a supplement of silken cushions; tables which bend under a weight of books, portfolios, plaster casts, and paint-boxes; many easels; a vase of withered chrysanthemums; in one corner a manikin with gracefully bent arms, in the other a skeleton, many old paint tubes--form the furnishings.

The door into the adjoining painting school stands half open. Idly waiting for the completion of Sophie's brewing, Nita glances in there.

Between a forest of easels she sees eight or ten women, who look weary, yawn; one of them smokes a cigarette, another nibbles at a biscuit; a third, her hat already on her head and veil over her eyes, makes a correction on her picture; while still another sits at a little piano, and with desperate energy drums the Saint Saens *danse macabre*.

The lady who is making yet another correction in her picture is the Countess d'Olbreuse, a butterfly of fashion, who not only raves over painting, but also has a great love for music.

"It is useless to wait longer for Sylvain," she remarks, laying aside her brushes and addressing the lady at the piano. "Apropos, have you procured tickets for Lensky's concert in Eden?"

"Not yet, and yet I have telephoned for twenty-four hours like a detective or a broker."

Nita turns away, and closes the half-opened door between the two studios, not without force.

"Tea is ready," says Sonia; "but what is the matter, dear, you look so gloomy?"

"Nothing," says Nita, "only that"--with a glance at the door--"vexes me so. Such a ladies' studio is only a kind of hospital for ruined feminine existences. There! what an absent-minded being I am! Where is it?--a letter for you; perhaps it contains something interesting." And after some search, Nita finds the letter in the pocket of her jacket. Scarcely has Sophie opened the letter when she cries out for joy.

"Well, what is it, little goose?" asks Nita, quite pleased at Sophie's beaming face.

"The letter is from my cousin, Nikolai Lensky, the son of the famous violinist, you know----"

"I know nothing. I had no suspicion that you were related to Lensky," replies Nita, quickly and harshly.

"My mother was a cousin of his wife," stammers Sophie, somewhat vexed at Nita's unpleasant tone. "Yesterday I met Nikolai at the Jeliagins. He has recently come from St. Petersburg. He will soon come to see me; meanwhile he sends me two tickets to his father's concert day after tomorrow--the concert for which there is not a seat to be had in all Paris, either for good words or

for money. So you can rejoice with me."

"Over what?"

"You will go with me to the concert?"

"I?--no."

"But, Nita, what are you thinking of?"

"I really cannot; I have no time. Go with the Countess d'Olbreuse, who hurried here from Madrid and missed a bull-fight in order to be present at Lensky's concert, and who appeals by turns to the Russian ambassador and her music-teacher to coax a ticket."

But Sophie shook her head. "I would rather burn the ticket than give it to any one but you. I do not understand you, Nita--you who are so musical that you attend every concert that is worth the while. You do not wish to hear Boris Lensky? What is the reason?"

Nita tapped her little foot vexedly on the floor, and said: "When not long ago a sceptical old Frenchman, who had nothing to do with death, learned from his physician that his last hour had come, he said: 'Well, it is not agreeable to me, but still I have one consolation: I shall, at least, when I am dead, hear nothing more of Sarah Bernhardt and the great French nation'--he could have added, and of Boris Lensky!"

III.

"You will certainly not run into the *foyer* after him?" asks Nita, dryly.

"I am not thinking of it," Sophie assures her.

"Well, I only thought that you are one of his relatives," says Nita.

"Since his wife's death I have had no intercourse with him," Sophie confides to her friend. "He cannot bear me, thinks me narrow and prudish. As a man, I have never been in sympathy with him; he treated my dear cousin, his wife, much too badly for me to ever pardon him. But as an artist--as artist--he stands alone. I have heard other wonderful violinists, but it is only he that sends such hot and cold shudders over one's back at each stroke of his bow."

"Yes, he is a great artist," says Nita. Her voice sounds weary and hoarse, and the words fall slowly, syllable for syllable, from her lips, as if they were forced from her in a magnetic sleep. She looks pale, and her eyes again have their mysterious look. After much coaxing and pleading from Sophie, she has at length resolved to go with her friend to Lensky's concert, announced for that afternoon, and now seems to regret her decision.

"I think that we have a great musical treat before us," remarks Sophie, after a while. "Lensky has an uncommonly fine programme to-day. The first number is a trio of Schumann; then his accompanist plays a couple of little things; then comes a saraband, by Bach; something by Paganini, I do not know what; then a melody by Lensky himself--'La Legende' is the name, I think. It is dedicated to his wife."

"Ah! he plays that also?" asks Nita, shortly.

"Have you already heard him play it?" asks Sophie.

"Yes, once, a few years ago," replies Nita, without looking up.

"I am usually not very fond of his compositions, but I know of nothing that goes to one's heart more than this melody when he plays it," says Sophie. Nita is silent.

"You seem tired and ill, my heart," says Sophie, after a pause. "If you really do not want to go to the concert, if you were really going merely on my account, I would rather stay at home."

"No," says Nita, gloomily. "I have said it. I will go."

Lensky's concert is to take place at four o'clock. About half-past three Nita and Sophie, in a rattling fiacre, roll out of the quiet Rue Murillo into the noisy heart of the city. All at once the cab slows its pace. "What is the matter?" asks Sophie, putting her head out of the window.

"I cannot go on. The row of carriages blocks the way," answers the coachman. The horses stop. Nita also looks out. "What a tumult!" says she. "One carriage crowds another; it is as if a celebrity was to be buried."

Meanwhile the rain pours down on the roofs of the carriages, on the hard macadam, on the umbrellas of the pedestrians, who remorselessly push each other forward on the sidewalks. The coachmen crack their whips, cry out, curse; the horses stamp and press against each other.

At last, with difficulty enough, the carriage with the two girls pushes forward a few steps. Sonia looks at her watch. Four o'clock! With a start, she remembers Lensky's fabulous punctuality. "Nita, if we do not wish to miss the beginning, we must get out and walk."

And they get out. They are not the only ones. The most distinguished ladies get out of the prettiest coupés, thread their way between the muddy carriage wheels, crowd on the slippery sidewalk between piano teachers with waterproofs and overshoes, musicians with turned-up coat collars and dented silk hats, and among them the Countess d'Olbreuse, with a great bundle of music under her arm.

The young girls' places are on the stage. They go, or rather are pushed forward by the crowd, through an endless length of corridors smelling of gas and sawdust.

All the places on the stage Lensky has given to acquaintances. There is no more generous artist than he--none who, with such an immense crowding, and with doubled prices, still continues to keep hundreds of free tickets for his personal disposal. In consequence, all kinds of people are crowded together on the stage--ladies of every age and quite every rank in life, music teachers, conservatorists, ladies from the highest society, people who speak Spanish, French, Russian, or English.

"Where are our two places?" asks Sophie, looking round attentively--"24, 25, 24, 25."

"Here, Sonia," says a gentle, good-natured man's voice.

Sonia suddenly becomes fiery red. Her blue eyes sparkle. She stands as if rooted to the ground. A young man, tall, broad-shouldered, under whose severely English exterior something of his true Russian bearishness is betrayed, with an oval, rather yellow, unusually regular face, sympathetic, almond-shaped eyes, and thick brown hair, comes up to her and gives her his hand. "These are the places," says he, "here in the third row. I only came day before yesterday; my father had no better ones to give away."

"But, I beg you, we are splendidly placed. It was so nice in you to think of me," Sophie assures him cordially.

"Well, the time has not yet come when I have forgotten you!" Suddenly his glance rests on Nita, and remains fixed on her face.

"Have the kindness to introduce me, Sonitschka," asks he. His voice trembles a little.

"My cousin, Nikolai Lensky," says Sophie, in a tone which betrays that this cousin is not merely a cousin for her.

"Fräulein von Sankjéwitch," she adds, explanatorily. "But what is the matter, my heart, you look so faint?" This turning to Nita.

"It is nothing; it will pass off," murmurs Nita, and sits down.

Nikolai's features take on a truly anxious expression, and he cannot take his eyes from off her. Why does she, just she, please him, before she has exchanged a word with him, better than formerly any woman has pleased him? She looks unusually attractive to-day, besides. The weary fever which quite weighs her down to the ground takes from her appearance the harshness which often makes her somewhat cold. The outline of her face is much softer than formerly. A mysterious light shines from her large eyes, the eyes in which a strange grief lies buried, and round her mouth trembles an expression as of death-sentenced tenderness which will not die.

"Could you possibly get me a vinaigrette, Colia?" asks Sonia, anxiously.

A mad storm of applause cuts short her words. Through the passage left between the audience on the stage strides a large man, with long, half-curved hair, which begins to grow gray; with a face whose features remind one of an Egyptian Sphinx, a face with an indescribable expression of gloomy sadness, austere pride, and touching kindness; a face that is not handsome, but which one never forgets when one has once seen it, the face of a man who has tasted all the pleasures of earth and who is yet always hungry--the face of a man who still desperately longs for something in which he has long ceased to believe.

The two coöperators are behind him--the 'cellist, a Parisian celebrity with curly hair parted in the middle, and a very long mustache, which he had inherited from an exiled Polish martyr; the pianist, a pupil of De Sterny, like him in appearance, blond, slender, medium sized, faultlessly attired, almost dandified.

Lensky bows simply, benevolently, in all directions; the Schumann trio commences.

Dominating the two other instruments, the silvery sweet tones of the violin vibrate through the hall.

Nita bends her head forward--listens--listens. Young Lensky has brought her the vinaigrette which Sophie had asked for. She turns it absent-mindedly in her hands. Her eyes become gloomier.

Why had she come here, why?--to oblige Sophie? No: because, again and again, the whole night long, she had ever heard these silvery violin tones, in a thousand caressing shadings, oppressive, sad, alluring. She had promised herself the highest musical enjoyment which can be offered to one, and feels a fearful disappointment.

Already after the first bars Lensky begins to hurry. He is vexed at the cold playing of the Parisian 'cellist, at a gnat which has flown against his face, at God knows what.

From that moment his playing differs from other violin virtuosos only through a raging acceleration of *tempo*, an astonishing lack of purity, and a luxuriant fullness of sound, an inimitable softness and satiety of tone which none of the other violinists have ever attained. His playing is of an arbitrariness which completely confuses the 'cellist, ignorant of his peculiarities. At many parts the three instruments are not together.

It is pitiable music. The veins in Lensky's forehead swell with rage. Ever more fiercely he draws the bow across his violin; it is now for him merely an instrument on which he can vent his bad moods.

A critic who is present describes his playing as a musical crime, the performance of the trio as a sin against Schumann's creation. Still, at the close of the number, abundant applause falls to the share of the artists. It is the fashion to rave over the "devil's violinist." What in any case seems strange in the performance to the Parisians, they describe as "Slavonic," and with this short word lull all such thoughts.

"It is one of his bad days," sighs Sophie, "or it is no longer the same man."

For the first time Nita's eyes rest on the virtuoso, who now, recalled by the audience with loud cries of applause, again steps on the stage between the two other performers.

He stoops, his lower lip is flabby, deep furrows are in his cheeks, there are heavy shadows under his eyes, the chin has no longer the firm, marked outline of formerly, and still-- "He is quite the same," says Nita, shortly, and turns away her head.

Naturally he is the same, only the dross in his nature comes to light more hatefully and intrusively than formerly, when the whole charm of fiery manhood glorified his faults. These faults become a young man, but an old man they do not.

At last the audience has become quiet; the concert proceeds.

Monsieur Albert Perfection sits down to the piano, plays a nocturne of Chopin, an *étude* of Thalberg, and a Liszt tarentella with blameless technical perfection, and without faltering a single time.

After the impure, confused, over-hasty, and still, in spite of everything, fascinating playing of Lensky, his performance has a calm, soothing effect on the nerves, and without reckoning to what phenomenon to ascribe the effect, the public breathes freely, breaks out in stormy bravos, then suddenly recollects itself--considers. To distinguish his accompanist at one of Boris Lensky's concerts! It is not fitting.

Then follows quite a long pause, and at length Lensky once more steps upon the stage.

In two minutes scarcely one of those present remembers that Albert Perfection exists. Whatever musical adherents Lensky had lost, he has quite won back.

Even now his playing is not perfectly free from continual little technical faults and impurities, but still, who would have time to stop at those while this sense-enthraling, oppressing, resonant charm flows from his violin? It is now no longer a violin; it is a human heart which spreads out all its treasures before the crowd, exposes its holiest of holies to it, and in a wonderful, mysterious language, a language which all understand, and to which no one can lend words, confesses his joys and sorrows, his heaven-aspiring enthusiasm, and, swooning, back to earth sinking, human sadness.

His appearance also has changed, become ennobled. His formerly flushed face is now deathly pale; the deeply sunken eyes are almost closed; the hateful expression about his mouth has disappeared, and has given place to an inconsolably melancholy expression; his lips are half parted; he breathes with difficulty, sometimes something like a gasp interrupts his performance. The insane story from *Figaro* comes to the mind of more than one of his listeners. It is not to be denied, his playing gives the impression of a bad charm to which he himself has fallen victim.

Now Lensky plays his own composition, his famous, wonderful "La Légende," for which every one in the audience waited eagerly. In the middle of the powerful, striking melody of the piece something like a sob and the wearily fluttering wings of an angel who has wandered into Hades, and now vainly seeks the way to its home, sounds from beneath his bow.

The audience is beside itself. Men laugh, weep, rejoice, clap their hands, stamp their feet, mount on chairs in order to see him better.

"*Bis, bis, bis!*" sounds from all sides. He repeats it.

Then a murmur goes through the room: some one has fainted yonder on the stage--Nita! Her head falls forward. With difficulty Sophie holds her for one moment upright in her arms; then Nikolai springs to her help, carries out the unconscious woman. Sonia follows him.

An unpleasant excitement overpowers the audience; without entirely stopping, Lensky retards his strokes, coughs compassionately, looks short-sightedly squinting after his son. A splendid fellow! How easily he carries the dark form! Who was she? A slender, supple young body, evidently. Then he takes up the rhythm anew--the incident is forgotten.

IV.

Now the concert is over. After much that was beautiful and noble, in conclusion Lensky, in a superior, quite negligent manner, threw to the public a bravura piece by some unknown Russian composer, a wild, triumphal fanfare of neck-breaking double notes.

They hurrah, clap, are mad with enthusiasm, call him back again and again, but Lensky shows himself no more. He and his son roll along in a cab to the Hotel Westminster, where the great violinist, according to old custom, has his quarters.

The fever of his musical excitement still throbs in Lensky's every vein. His nerves are still quivering from the fierce, jubilant storm of applause. Something like an echo of the hand-clapping, which sounds quite like a hail-storm, yet rings in his ears.

Nikolai has no noise of applause in his ears, therefore he hears again and again the first sweet, dreamy bars of the "Légende." They form in his soul the musical background for a pale little face with large, gloomy eyes and melancholy, lovely mouth. How she had listened to his father's playing, quite with a kind of horror in her solemn gaze! He had never seen any one listen so. At every tone the expression of her face had changed. Were there, then, really people upon whom music could have such an effect?

And then how she had suddenly sunk down! Ah! how charming it was to take the slender, supple body in his arms, which scarcely felt the weight. Her head had rested so heavily and wearily on his shoulder; her hair, the silky, soft, golden-brown hair, had touched his cheek. He could not forget it; it seemed to him that he still held her; he felt the unconscious leaning of the warm young body against his breast. And this little face! How much more beautiful it had become when the forced self-restraint had left it. The cold, gloomy expression had vanished; it looked deathly sad, the poor, pale little face. But what an indescribable tenderness and goodness mingled with the sadness!

What might the great pain which lay hidden in her young heart be? Ah, to be able to console her! A foolish wish! Where were his thoughts wandering?

"Have you a match, Colia?" asks a rough voice near him.

Nikolai starts. He seems to himself impolite in his silence to his father. He should have said a few words to him upon his success.

"To-day was an inspiration, father," he remarks, while he hands the virtuoso his match-box.

"There was a great noise, at any rate," says Lensky, and shrugs his shoulders. "That does not mean much. I beg you! A success is always like an epidemic or a conflagration. No one really knows why. Sometimes one achieves it, and not at other times. Apropos, some one fainted to-day. Who was it? An old woman, was it not?"

"No; a young girl."

"Was she pretty?"

"She pleased me."

"H-m! h-m! And she fainted because she was too tightly laced?"

"No, father. She evidently fainted from excitement. I have never seen any one listen as she listened to you."

"Swooned from excitement," repeats Lensky. "A pretty young woman! *Mais c'est un succès de Torreador*--the highest that a man can attain."

The carriage stops before the Hotel Westminster.

"Will you dine with me?" Lensky asks, as he gets out.

"If you will permit me," replies Nikolai.

"Only no such formalities!" bursts out the violinist. "Do not force yourself to anything from politeness. You must not, if you do not wish. The company which you will find with me will not suit you without that."

Lensky says that quite roughly and angrily. In general, the opposing manners of the two men are strange enough. At heart they evidently cling to each other very greatly; still, a perceptible lack of confidence is apparent in the relations between father and son.

"And at what hour may I come?" asks Nikolai.

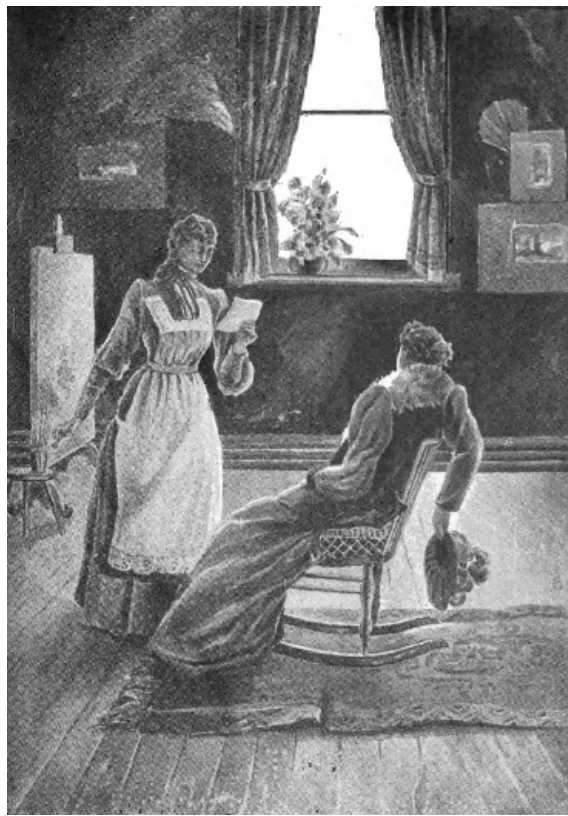
"May I come!" his father mimics him. "That is really not to be borne. Leave me in peace with your aristocratic manners. Do not forget that you have a proletary for a father. My guests come at half-past eight, and you can come when you will."

With that they have reached the first story of the hotel, where are the violinist's secluded rooms.

Nikolai's room is one story higher. "For, near each other, we would mutually annoy each other," the virtuoso has from the beginning signified to his son. "*Adieu à tantôt*," he calls to the young man. With that they separate.

When Nikolai joins Lensky, half an hour later, they are already at table.

The atmosphere of the little dining-room is filled with the savory odor of *potage bisque*, the virtuoso's favorite dish. Gay dishes of dessert stand on the table, the chandelier sheds its glaring light over an extremely mixed assembly. At Lensky's right sits Madame Grévin, a very old friend of his; at his left, the Countess d'Olbreuse, who, probably to accentuate the situation, has kept on her hat. This great lady, in the *rôle* of guest in artistic circles, is in some manner annoying to Nikolai. He feels especially constrained, seems to himself awkward in his pedantically correct clothes; he wears a dress-coat and white cravat, because after dinner he is going into society--laughable. The place opposite his father has been left vacant for him. His eyes wander over the guests. He sees a strikingly dressed young harpist, with loud, noisy manners and bold expressions, Mademoiselle Klein, from Vienna; then a violin virtuoso of good family, Monsieur Paul, not without intelligence and wit, but without belief in his art, which he seems to consider a moderately remunerative trade; a vain French journalist with pretentious cynicism--no single artist of really significant renown; and in the midst of all this unenlivening gang--his father.



"Can he feel at home with these men?" Nikolai asks himself, and looks at him scrutinizingly.

At first he sits quite silently there, and only addresses a few friendly words across the table to Madame Bulatow, the wife of a poor, unrecognized composer. His boundless kindness of heart never fails with poor unfortunates, however raging, untamably wild, quite rough he may otherwise be. But to no one is he so tender as to his own country people. Poor Russians in a strange land he treats as relatives.

The further the dinner progresses, the worse becomes the universal tone, the more unrestrained Lensky. His manner to the Countess d'Olbreuse becomes completely inadmissible.

In the beginning he scarcely noticed her. But as she, from vanity and a whim, had evidently determined to make his conquest, to rouse him from his indifference with all kinds of flatteries and coquetries, he gradually warms, presses her hand, whispers all kinds of insidious remarks to her with wicked glances, permits himself so much that at last she is frightened and tries to restrain him. But to restrain Lensky after the second bottle of wine, at the close of a good dinner, and near a very pretty woman, who has suddenly become prudish after she had, a few minutes before, thrown herself at his head, is no easy thing.

Nikolai, whose blood burns in his brown cheeks, foolishly lets himself be brought to remark a shy, "*Mais, mon père!*" and by that attains a not at all pleasing result. Always excited by the slightest weight or restraint, to violent opposition, Lensky is least of all inclined to submit to be lectured by his "aristocratic son." His face, flushed by wine, becomes distorted, his eyes glisten. He is just about to say something horrible, unpardonable--the word dies on his lips; he turns his head and listens. A very excited child's voice outside is heard by turns with a waiter's voice: "I wish to go in, *laissez-moi donc!*"

Was it possible? The door opens. Breathless, with cheeks flushed from the cold, a girl of perhaps seventeen years bursts in and into Lensky's arms, who has hastily sprung up.

"Here I am at last!" said she, breathless, between laughing and weeping, in Russian. "Oh, if you knew how much trouble I had in getting to you! They would not let me in. What does it matter, now I am with you? And how are you? Are you well again? Oh, you poor dear, I could not bear it any longer, I was so worried about you!"

He holds her delightedly to his breast, covers her whole face with kisses. "It is my daughter," he explains to his astonished-looking guests. "Please make room for her near me, Madame Grévin." And as a waiter pushes a chair between the old woman and the virtuoso, he continues: "Take off your coat and hat, Mascha, and now sit down and get your breath." Then he passes his hand over her soft dark hair. His touching tenderness has wiped away every trace from his face of the hateful expression which formerly disfigured it. "Yes, yes, this is my daughter, my foolish, ignorant daughter, a little goose, who loves me dearly." And the voice of the spoiled despot, who recently only tolerated the homage of hundreds of women crazy about him, trembles at these words quite as if he wondered that his own child loves him! "Are you hungry, my little dove?" asks he.

"No, papa, I am too happy to be hungry; but I am thirsty." And she reaches for his champagne

glass.

"Oh, you little wretch!" admonishes Lensky, tenderly, while Nikolai calls to him across the table: "Don't give her any champagne; she cannot stand it. A thimbleful goes to her head."

"And I like it so much," sighs the girl.

"Tell us, please, how you really came here, Mascha," Lensky asks his daughter in French. "I thought you still in Arcachon."

"I ran away," says she, gayly, and laughs till her white teeth show between her full child's lips. "Ran away secretly, and quite alone!"

"So, well, that is good," says Lensky, and immediately is vexed at having made an unsuitable remark before his daughter. He adds: "You at least took your maid with you?"

"No, papa, no one. Ah! please do not look so gloomy; only do not be angry. If you must quarrel with me, quarrel to-morrow, but not to-day; I am too happy to be with you. See, it was this way: Since October, I have been with Aunt Sophie in Arcachon, because Aunt Barbara has not yet arranged her house in Paris, and therefore cannot take me. Ah! I must always go from one aunt to another, because you will not have me with you, you naughty papa!"

At this jesting reproof Lensky's face darkens; meanwhile, the girl continues: "All at once I heard you were in Paris. Ah! to know you were in Paris and not dare to come--that was unbearable. But, however, I begged.... 'It is impossible,' was the answer every time. Aunt Barbara could not receive me before the fifteenth, and then, besides, no one had time to accompany me to Paris--and all sorts of simple excuses, which made me furious. Meanwhile, I read in the papers how people half kill each other for places at your concerts, how all Paris is on its knees before you, and I am happy and proud of you."

"Ah! you are proud of me?" says Lensky, in a tone which among all those present only his son understands.

"But, papa," says Mascha, shrugging her shoulders impatiently at this interruption, "am I proud? How can you ask? Yes, immensely proud of you. But then I read that you look pale and weary; then I am quite consumed with anxiety, and dream every night that you are ill. Then yesterday evening I read that you had had a stroke of apoplexy. I was beside myself. They tried to talk me out of my anxiety, to convince me that if you were dangerously ill they would certainly have already telegraphed me. They were all very kind, and wished to telegraph to you, but I could not sit there idle for hours, waiting for a telegram. And so I ran away at six o'clock in the morning while every one was asleep. It was bitterly cold. I sold my watch, and then did not have money enough to buy my ticket; a young man was so kind as to assist me."

"Ah! an obliging young man," interrupted the journalist.

"He was very nice," affirmed Mascha. "He took the ticket for me--he spoke English to me; only think, papa, he took me for an Englishwoman. Then I left him and hurried into a coupé, and away we went. In my coupé sat an old man and an old woman. I thought they were married, because they quarrelled incessantly, but the old woman got out at Bordeaux. I remained alone with the old man. For one moment I was afraid."

"Of what, then?" asks the journalist in an unpleasant tone.

"It was just before a tunnel; he drew out a large pocket-knife. I thought he would murder me, but no, it was only to peel a pear. He wished to force half of it upon me. When I refused, he offered me chocolate; he became very insolent. I cannot bear that, and threatened to signal for help." She interrupts her confession with a pretty little shudder. "I did not know that it would be so unpleasant to travel alone."

"In a ladies' coupé you would have been spared these unpleasantnesses," said Madame Grévin, provincially stiffly.

"Ah, madame!" says Mascha, with her soft eyes looking first at Lensky and then at the old woman, "I had quite forgotten that there were ladies' coupés. I only thought to come to Paris as quickly as possible. It all turned out well, you shall see. God be thanked, just then the train stopped. I opened the window, called to the conductor to open the door; he did not hear me. French conductors never hear one. Then my young gentleman discovered me. You know the one from the station in Arcachon, who was walking up and down the platform smoking. He threw away his cigar and hurried to my help. I would like to change my coupé, I said, with a glance at my objectionable travelling companion. He understood, took me in another compartment, said I was evidently not accustomed to travelling alone, and asked if I would permit him to offer me his protection. I was very thankful to him, and then I told him my whole story, and that I was your daughter, papa. He said that he was an old friend of yours, Nikolinka"--to her brother. "He told me his name, Count Bärenburg. He is a diplomat, was in St. Petersburg, and said he had often met you at Uncle Sergeis. Do you remember him, Nikolinka?"

"I believe it," said Nikolai. "He is a man who saved my life on a bear hunt. I was in very close

quarters with a wounded beast."

"And he shot the bear?" said Lensky.

"No," replied Nikolai; "he was, as he modestly expressed it, too cowardly to discharge his gun--the ball might have hit me. 'Every one who will cannot be a William Tell,' said he, afterward, laughing. He stabbed the brute with his hunting-knife, in danger of being strangled with me."

"He saved you with danger to his life? Then he must like you very much," bursts out Maschenka.

"He scarcely knew me."

"Ah, how generous!" said Mascha. "How glad I am to have learned to know him, and you cannot think how nice he was to me. He spoke so pleasantly of you, Colia. Then he got a paper to see whether there was anything about you in it, papa. We found a notice which relieved me as to your health, and then after the worry I had had, my heart was so light that I cried. Arrived in Paris, he sent his servant with me because he did not want me to drive all the way through the city alone, and here I am. You see, madame"--she turns coaxingly to Grévin--"on the whole it was certainly better than if I had travelled in a ladies' compartment."

But Madame Grévin only shrugged her shoulders, and said: "That is a matter of taste; for my daughter, I should have preferred the ladies' compartment."

Lensky is silent; he notices vexedly what a false effect the story of his petted daughter has made on those present.

Most of the men smile; they seek behind Mascha's *naïveté* calculating frivolity seeking for adventures.

Meanwhile, without embarrassment, she drinks a few sips of champagne from her father's glass, and continues: "The stupidest was that they did not want to let me in here to you in the hotel. They said, 'Monsieur Lensky is dining now.' And yet I told them that I was your daughter. They said very coarsely: 'Anyone could say that.' For what did they take me, then--for one of those fools who run after you?"

"Mascha!" Lensky says, reprovingly.

"And, besides, I look so strikingly like you," she continues.

"So, do you really look like me?" asks Lensky, who cannot look stern before this sweet childish tenderness. "Really like me?" Then, taking her by the chin and looking attentively at her face: "Well, yes; the dear God is a great artist. Strange what wonderfully beautiful variations he can write on an ugly theme!"

"Mamma always said it was quite laughable how much I resembled you," whispers Mascha; and adds softly: "She always said that to me when she was especially good to me."

Those present have ceased to interest themselves in the child; only Madame d'Olbreuse looks at her kindly across the virtuoso. The journalist industriously supplies Mademoiselle Klein with champagne; the other men talk together, murmur bad jokes in each other's ears, half aloud, with the evident intention to be heard. The champagne goes more and more to Mademoiselle Klein's head. After an animated tirade upon Lensky, she says, laughingly: "I have been in Paradise often enough to hear Lensky, but if it were necessary, I would go into hell for him."

"Ah, so!" calls out Lensky, amused at the immoderateness of the young woman. "But if they would not let you into hell?"

"I would pay a few sins for admittance." And looking at him boldly from half-closed eyes, she takes a flower from the bouquet on her breast, and throws it across the table at him. He catches it laughingly. Suddenly he feels something strange. His daughter's eyes rest upon him, astonished, surprised. With a gesture of anger, he throws the flower under the table. "Nikolai, I beg you, take the child home," says he, springing up.

"Where, father?"

"Where?" repeats Lensky. "Why, to the Jeliagin--anywhere, only away from here."

"Will you permit me to take your daughter to Princess Jeliagin's? My carriage waits below. I have room for her and Monsieur Nikolas," says the Countess d'Olbreuse.

"I am very much obliged to you, Countess," replied Lensky. Then, dismissing Mascha with a kiss on the forehead, he turns to his guests. "I think we can go in the drawing-room; coffee is waiting already."

Still, while Mascha, quite amazed at her father's sudden unfriendliness, slips into her sable-lined velvet coat, Lensky comes up to his two children. "See that she is well wrapped up, Colia," says he to his son. "She is very delicate, and takes cold easily. She is, indeed, thoroughly like me,

but still in much she is like her mother. God, those eyes! And say a good word for her to Barbara; see that she is not too harshly received."

"We will both defend her," says Countess d'Olbreuse kindly. "I understand that an anxious papa is frightened at such a mad prank, but one must be very hard-hearted not to pardon it."

"Ah, you have no idea what is before me! Aunt Barbara is not bad, she even likes me; but her daughter, my Cousin Anna, is terrible!" says Mascha "Why do you send me away, papa? I hoped that you would keep me with you."

"It is impossible," says he, with a short, characteristic motion of the head and shoulders, and with a gloomy decision which permits no objecting.

"Really impossible?" repeats Mascha, depressed. "Well, then, good-by. It still was lovely to see you again. If only those horrid people had not been there! That bold girl who threw you the flower--how could she dare to presume so with you!" And Mascha's eyes sparkled with anger.

"She is charming, your daughter; I am quite in love with her," says the kind D'Olbreuse; "but now come, my dear child."

"One more kiss," murmurs Lensky, and takes the sweet, pale little face of his daughter between his great, warm hands. It is as if he could not look long enough on this sad, tender loveliness. "Oh, you angel, you! I will visit you to-morrow in the morning; but do not come here any more, I beg you. So--one kiss, and one more on your dear eyes--goodnight!"

V.

Now he sits alone in the desolate hotel parlor. He who usually flees solitude, who keeps his guests always until his eyes close, has to-day given them to understand before ten o'clock that they bore him. But now he would fain call them back, however indifferent all, however unsympathetic most of them are to him. At least they could dissipate the troop of recollections which pass through his mind in a confused throng. Involuntarily he compares his heart to a caravansary through which thousands of men have gone in and out, without a single one settling there, or leaving a trace.

He did not believe in friendship; he remained faithful to his old acquaintances even if they became burdensome to him, from a characteristic or from obstinacy; but he felt drawn to no one. His passions were of such a fleeting nature, left his heart so completely untouched, that the impression of women to whom he had stood in near relations was quite summarily a mixture of scorn, compassion, and disgust.

He had forgotten the names of the most. The pressure of every restraint, every discipline, every check, had been unbearable to him; he had given rein to all his instincts, had been moderate in nothing, had submitted to nothing, had always preached that one must forget one's self, and yet could never quite forget himself. No; during this mad bacchanal, in which the last fifteen years of his existence had been spent, something which he could not satisfy had remained within him.

He denied every religion, even that of duty. He only lived for enjoyment; but enjoyment died when he touched it, pleasure was in his arms a cold, stiff corpse.

The only thing which could still rouse him was his art; and he was about to lose his power in this. His compositions--that of his art which really was dear to his heart--had more and more become a group of contrasts seeking after effect. The inner voice which had formerly sung him such sweet songs was--not strong enough to be heard in the noisy confusion of his life--wearily silent. His creative power was paralyzed, and his playing--the Parisians might clap as loud as they wished; he knew best of all that it went downward.

For more than forty years he had given concerts, and for twenty years he had played over the same *répertoire*--an immense one, but, with a few little exceptions, still the same. It bored him. He no longer listened to himself when he played, only sometimes, half unconsciously, all that wounded head and heart slipped into his fingers, and then he sobbed himself out in tones; and what so powerfully moved his listeners was not what they suspected--it was compassion for a great man who despairingly tries to find in art what he has wasted in life.

How slowly time passes! He had not suspected that it would be so unpleasant for him to stay alone.

More, yet more, of those strange faces! There are princesses of blood royal among them; then, again, beauties for whose favor potentates have sued in vain; famous artists, and, finally, pale, poor girls whom a moment of morbid enthusiasm had robbed of their senses. They nodded to him, smiled confidentially, all the same smile of secret understanding.

"One just like the others," he calls out, and stamps on the floor, as if he would stamp upon the whole crowd. "One just like the other----"

Then one form separated itself from the throng, and stepped up to him.

He stretches out his arms to her. "Natalie," he calls. She vanishes. It was his wife; how plainly he had seen her!

She was not like the others. How had he ventured to name this angel in the same breath with the others? He had loved her passionately, however immoderately he had offended against her.

Her name was Natalie--yes, Natalie. And when he led her to the altar she was a charming, petted young girl, a Princess Assanow, who had married him against the wishes of her family. He had worshipped her, and strewn flowers at her feet, and she had been happy, and he with her. The children had come--how delightful all that was! Those were the golden years in his life--five, six years. Then--then the demon had begun to weary of Paradise. His gipsy nature had demanded its rights. He had left home, only for a time, and to let his passions have their sway; then oftener, ever oftener.

At first she had pardoned him only too easily, so easily that it had almost vexed him, so easily that he had thought she would bear anything.

But at last even she could endure it no longer--had separated from him. That was terrible, so terrible that he had thought he could not bear it. She also could not bear it, he imagined, but would recall him. He waited for that every day, and she called him back--when she lay dying.

That was now four years ago; but it seemed to him that she had died yesterday. He saw it all so plainly before him--the large room in Rome, the half-emptied medicine bottles on the invalid's night-table, and the ticking watch, a watch which he had given her years before at Colia's birth; the dim night-lamp in the corner, her white morning-dress that hung over a chair, the little slippers--the dear, tiny little slippers! There in the white bed, she, so long, so thin, with her poor wasted body, whose outline was so plainly visible under the covers, a white flannel covering with red stripes on the edge--he even remembered that. But, best of all, he remembered her, her wonderfully beautiful face. She raised herself from the pillows at his entrance, and greeted him with a smile that forgave him all; no, not only forgave, but begged his forgiveness that she--she, the poor angel--had been too weak to save him from himself, to redeem him. Then he had taken her in his arms and kissed her. He would not believe that all was over. Then, suddenly, the sun had risen, there, over the Spanish place, behind the church of Trinita de' Monti; a broad, golden ray stretched out to the dying woman.

It was like the shining arm of God who had come to take her soul. She had raised her weary hand to point upward--the hand sank, sank.

What a horrible time! He, to whom the thought of dying caused a terror that could not be overcome; he, who, if he met a funeral procession on the street, turned away his head, and could not bear the sight of a corpse, he had watched near her coffin for two nights long without moving, without eating. In the second night he had fallen asleep from unvanquishable weariness. He had dreamed of old times, of dead happiness. It seemed to him that he sat with her on the terrace of the country-house near St. Petersburg, where they had passed the mid-summer, the short northern summer. It was a bright August night; they sat together hand in hand, and her voice fell softly and caressingly on his ear. Sometimes she laughed, then he laughed also, only because she laughed, and pressed a kiss on her lips. Ah, how warmly her thirsty young lips met his!

Suddenly he awoke; an insect had flown across his face. Around him all was black--the walls, the floor, the ceiling--and there, near him, surrounded by tall, red flickering candles by a blooming wall of flowers--ah! how beautiful she still was! He bent over the coffin and raised her from the white satin cushions and kissed her. The chill of this touch penetrated to his marrow; for the first time he understood what a terrible gulf had opened between her and him.

When Colia had come to relieve his father from his watch over the corpse, he had found him lying senseless on his face near the coffin.

Yes, the one, the only one whom he had passionately loved; but she had not been able to protect him from himself, either by her life or by her death.

At first, really, in the first few days after her burial, he had thought the fever had left his veins. He no longer felt it. Miserable and weary, at that time, he had shut himself up for hours, for days in her room, in the room in which all had been left as it was before she had been carried out, in which all looked as if she must come back. And when he had at length resolved to leave Rome, he had passed a few months quietly and soberly with his children. He had even tried to work again, to compose--but he had accomplished nothing. Then despair at his wasted genius had come over

him, and with despair the fever. He could not bear quiet, he simply could not. He needed noise, incessant change, excitement and stunning.

He sent Mascha to relatives--Maschenka, his charming little daughter, whom he adored, and whom he now pushed out of his way with a violent haste, as if she were merely an inconvenient burden for him. And then-- then he took up life again exactly at the point where he had left it before Natalie died.

From city to city, from concert hall to concert hall, from hotel to hotel he rushed, always the same, restless, joyless, without peace, always idolized, raved over, only still madder in the waste of his life than formerly, because sadness was greater in him, and it needed more excitement to kill it.

Now all that was to some degree bearable, but how would it be in a couple of years? Involuntarily his glance wandered to a pile of papers which lay on the table in the centre of the room--thirty, forty copies of that number of *Figaro* which contained the fable. He laughed at the people who had sent him this absurdity to flatter him.

"I will lay a charm in your art which no one can resist," he murmured to himself. "Bah! how long could that yet last?" He did not deceive himself; things were going rapidly down with him, his violin playing, his health, all.

"The devil will no longer be able to use me," murmured he. "One will know nothing more of me; I am growing old!" he gasped out. Suddenly he seized his head and called: "But what does a man like me do when he is old?"

For the first time in his life he asked himself the question. "To grow old without the courage to calmly submit, to be like a languishing spendthrift who drinks repulsive sediment from emptied goblets."

How hateful, how horrible! Would it not be better to break with all, to devote himself to his children, to lead a prudent existence?

He laughed bitterly. A prudent existence--he, whom two hours of solitude brought almost to the boundaries of insanity! There could be no more talk of that; it was too late. To grow old! Vain spectre of fear! People like him never grow old--they die!

Yes, that was the end. To die, to leave nothing behind him, no name in art, no enduring work; to be forgotten, wiped out of the world. A little while longer, sunshine and air, and motion, color, and sound, and then all dark, a great black blur, nothing more--death. Yes, it was that. Perhaps it would come to-morrow, perhaps in a few years. Come it must; he also would not fight against it. But meanwhile--meanwhile he would live with every fibre, live with every drop of blood--live!

Then--around the window crept something like a sad, sighing, ghostly voice. His face took on a strained, listening, thirstily longing expression. It was like the sob of a tormented soul which has forgotten to take the way to heaven because a great love holds her back to earth--a great love and unrest at an unfulfilled task, an unlifted treasure.

Was it an over-excitement of his nerves of hearing, or the beginning of that mysticism to which, at a certain period of life, quite all great Russian minds fall victim? However this may be, he would have sworn that he heard her voice compassionately and tenderly. There, once more. "Boris! Boris!"

He feels something strange, the calming of a loving presence. A passionate, indescribable longing takes possession of him. He stretches out his arms--it is gone! He shakes as with frost, sweat stands upon his brow. He thought of the repellant coldness which had met his lips when he had raised the corpse from the lace-edged pillows of the coffin.

No; death took all, it lets nothing return. Weak-headed nervousness to believe in such a thing! There is nothing but life! And while the longing for the unattainable heavenly still consumes his heart, he murmurs hoarsely: "Yes, to live, to live!"

VI.

To-day there is nothing left of Lensky's melancholy; at least for the present he has put it aside, has not had much time to devote to it. Since nine o'clock in the morning he has been overwhelmed with visits. At the moment there is no one with him but the gay violinist of

yesterday, Monsieur Paul. As Lensky cannot remain unoccupied for a moment without being nervous, he has proposed to Monsieur Paul to play a game of piquet.

Just then Nikolai enters the room. He brings with him a cool, well-bred atmosphere, which disturbs the two musicians. All comfort is over for them. Monsieur Paul looks at his watch and declares that it is high time for him to go and have his hair cut. Father and son remain alone.

"So you show yourself at last, sluggard?" says Lensky, while he still mechanically shuffles the cards.

"I wished to present myself several times already," remarks Nikolai, "but I heard that you were engaged."

"That need not have prevented you," replies the virtuoso. "Your discretion has deprived you of great enjoyment, *per primo*, the praises sung of a young lady whose voice I really could not well judge, because she, as her companion told me, had been hoarse for six months from unhappy love. I did not really learn what she wished to get from me--a stipend, an engagement at the opera in St. Petersburg, or that I should cure her of her unhappy love; but, apropos, I am really a little tired of playing the Brahmin who gives his body prey to vermin for penance. You can ring the bell. I will tell the waiter he shall admit no one else."

The waiter has appeared and disappeared again. Father and son can be assured not to be disturbed. They can now talk unrestrainedly together. But the somewhat forced, humorous flow of speech of his father has ceased. Stronger than yesterday is apparent the mutual lack of confidence of the two, a lack of confidence which in the young Lensky betrays itself by a quite exaggerated deference; in the older by a grumbling roughness. He cannot understand this son. Not that anything about him displeases him; his eyes rest not without pride and satisfaction on the young giant with the slender, delicate hands, the fine, aristocratic face. The most exacting father would be content with this son. He has studied with distinction; he has never made debts; he is scarcely twenty-three years old, *attaché* to the Russian embassy in Paris, and a thoroughly good fellow. What more can Lensky wish, what does he miss in Nikolai? A little imprudent enthusiasm, hot-blooded frivolity, a little youthfulness--that he misses in him. Nikolai is old at twenty-three.

And then these perpetual well-bred manners. Lensky could never bear men of the world, and Nikolai is one; that enrages him.

"How did the Jeliagin welcome my little tomboy?" he asks his son at last.

"Very graciously," replies Nikolai.

"That pleases me."

Nikolai is silent.

After a while Lensky begins anew.

"Yes, yes, I am very glad that things went well with the little one. I was worried. No one can less easily bear loveless treatment than our kobold."

Nikolai looks straight in his father's eyes.

"Do you imagine that Aunt Barbara will treat her lovingly?" he asks, dryly.

"Well, you said--" says Lensky.

"I said that she received our Mascha graciously, *voilà tout!*" says Nikolai. "Her manner to the child did not please me. As the Countess d'Olbreuse insisted upon pleading Mascha's cause, and as she is, as Aunt Barbara informed me later, in spite of her apparent eccentricities, very well accredited in the Faubourg St. Germain, the warmth with which she defended Mascha may have made some impression. In any case, aunt pleased herself with laughing at Mascha's exaltation. She and her lovable daughter were about to go out, and it was arranged that I should accompany them, but I would have preferred to remain with Mascha to lecture her a little as she deserved for her over-haste."

Lensky frowned. "So you would have liked to scold the poor child! What a narrow-hearted philister you are; have copied in everything your distinguished uncle, the correct statesman, under whose protection you are making a career, he who tore us apart--your mother and me. Poor little Mascha! Poor little dove! But she was charming with her foolish, childish anxiety and her incredible innocence." Lensky struck his fist on the table. "I would have liked to box their ears, all of them, as they sat there, the scoundrels who dared to wink at her tale," called he.

"So should I, father, but still they did all wink," said Nikolai, dryly.

"The idiots!"

"Yes, indeed, idiots--but---"

"Well, what will you say?" asked Lensky, roughly.

"I will say that Mascha will still meet many idiots in life who will misunderstand her innocence, and that she may once meet a rascal who will misuse her innocence."

"Nonsense! nonsense!" murmurs Lensky. "You do not understand your sister. If she were frivolous, then she would need strict surveillance. But our Mascha is not frivolous; she is given to exaggeration, tender, romantic. And, between ourselves, life is so common, so boundlessly common and dirty, that it seldom affords a temptation to a truly exalted nature. No, no; I have no fear for my pretty defiant one. I do not believe in the necessity of strict guarding."

"I think that young girls should be watched," said Nikolai, earnestly. "Our Mascha has no more worldly knowledge than a six-year-old child. She does not suspect that there is a danger in the world which she must avoid."

"But that is beautiful, wonderfully beautiful!" the virtuoso thunders at his son. "Would you wish it otherwise? Not I. No; I would not have our little gipsy differ by a hair from what she is."

"Nor I, on the whole," says Nikolai; "but under the existing sad circumstances----"

"What sad circumstances?" Lensky interrupts him. "Well, yes, that she has lost her mother is sad; I can never replace her to her. A mother cannot be replaced, least of all, one like hers; there is not another one like her in the world. But otherwise I think she does not fare badly. One pardons her wherever she goes; she is always treated like a little princess, always well cared for."

"Well cared for!" Nikolai bursts out. "Well cared for! I think she cannot be worse cared for than with the Jeliagins."

"Why?" asks Lensky, uneasily. "Barbara is not a bad woman. She is very good-natured."

"And perfectly characterless," replies Nikolai. "You were pleased that she overlooked Mascha's precipitation so easily yesterday. I was not. Aunt Barbara is in bad circumstances; if I am not mistaken, she will very soon turn to you in her money matters, and with Mascha she will play the *rôle* of an indulgent step-mother, who flatters the step-child in order not to offend the father. If Mascha is to prosper, she must live with people who understand her, who love her, but who are conscientious enough to be severe with her, and to guide her from time to time, tenderly but firmly, in the right way. She is much too gifted, much too obstinate for one to dare to leave her to herself. Mascha is a little race-horse who must be caressed, spared, but held very firmly in check. I know her better than you, for I have had more opportunity to observe her, and I tell you it is really dangerous to leave Mascha with people who will trouble themselves as little about her as the Jeliagins."

"You exaggerate, you exaggerate," grumbled Lensky. "Besides, how can I help it? Shall I shut up my song-bird in a cage, in a convent or a boarding-school? I tried it. She would not bear it. What shall I do with her?"

"Take her with you," says Nikolai.

"With me! That is impossible," bursts out Lensky--"impossible! What can a widower do with a grown daughter?"

Nikolai frowned. For a moment he is silent, then he says: "Do you remember how strongly you expressed yourself about Kasin, when he sent his daughter out into the wide world merely because she interfered with his bachelor life?"

Lensky's face darkens. This time Nikolai's remark has hit its aim. "And you will draw a comparison between me and Kasin?" says he, slowly, cuttingly.

Nikolai thinks he has gone too far. "Naturally I did not think of that," he begins; "the actions of a great artist, of a genius----"

But there Lensky interrupts him.

"Spare me this genius; I am sick of being eternally pursued with this word," he cries. "I will be judged as a man with Kasin. As a man, what have I in common with this frivolous egoist, who first ran through his own and his wife's property, and then lived on still poorer devils, while he went about the world without troubling himself that his wife, his child, meanwhile suffered from hunger, without asking if they were well or ill; while I"--he drew a deep breath--"while I have tormented myself, worried myself about you my whole life long? All that you possess I won with my head and hands. God knows, I desired little for myself, but for you nothing was good enough. And if one of you wanted anything, I left everything and came from the ends of the earth to look after you--" He stops, out of breath.

"And you stayed with us as long as you were worried about us," says Nikolai, softly. "Yes, father, you were boundlessly generous to us, and still miserly. You never denied us anything, and still everything--yourself!"

"H-m! and did you miss me?" asks Lensky, harshly, quite repellantly, and looks at his son

sideways, mistrustfully.

"Very much!" replied Nikolai.

Lensky had not expected that; the short, simple words went deep to his heart. He changed color, rose, walked up and down a number of times, and at length remained standing before Nikolai, and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"I know that I was in the wrong," says he, in a changed, indescribably gentle voice. "I do not deserve any children such as you are. If you had both turned out quite badly, I still could not have wondered. But you have but another's blood in your veins, and--and--" [...than you] and lays his hand over his eyes, then he [...e her, a ...] foot. "I have neglected you, that is true [... ..u] must not imagine--" Again he pauses, [...] after awhile he continues: "As regards Mascha, God knows I should like to have my little lark about me, but with me it is really somewhat different than with--well, with Kasin. Kasin has his brilliant position and lives in St. Petersburg; but I--to-day I am in Paris, to-morrow in Berlin, the next day in Vienna. How, then, can I take a young girl about with me?"

"Is it, then, necessary that you should still so torment yourself?" remarks Nikolai gently, quite pleadingly.

Lensky is silent.

And Nikolai, who, in spite of his early knowledge of life, is still an inexperienced idealist, thinks he has persuaded his father, hopes to win him entirely to the plan laid out for him. "You could certainly settle down now," says he. "I have planned that so finely. You could have an old relative, Marie Dimitrievna, for instance, mamma's cousin, who is sympathetic to you, to keep house for you; and under the united influence of your fame and Mascha's charm, your home in St. Petersburg or Moscow would become a true paradise. You could be so gay and happy, so petted and honored in your old age, if you only would not grudge yourself rest!"

"Not grudge myself rest?" groaned Lensky. "Yes, if I could [en.. ...] rest." And with a gesture peculiar to him, [...] this back his thick hair with both hands from h[...] and [...], he adds: "Ask what you will of me, [only ...rer dev...] I should sit still; that I can do no more [... ..bli...] is silent for awhile, then, with hoarse, hollow voice, as if in a dream, he begins anew: "Yes, if they had left me your mother, perhaps it would have been different; just at that time, before our separation, I began to be weary of the dancing-bear life: with her, I perhaps could have led a respectable old age. But you knew better what was suited to her than she herself. You pointed out to her what would never have occurred to her of herself, poor angel!--that it was a shame to have patience with me. Please yourself with the result! You have killed her and me. But of what use to bring up again the old grief, what use to reproach others? It is all my fault. Now nothing can be changed. I am what I am; I can no longer subdue myself. I cannot be without women and applause," says he, brutally. "Be as horrified as you will, I cannot, I cannot. I will some time die with my bow in my hand, and can be happy if I am not hissed before that!"

His breath fails him. He is silent. They stand opposite each other, father and son, gazing into each other's eyes. Never before has Nikolai seen a face which expresses a more incurable sadness. Why does he understand now, just now, in spite of the inconsolable confession which his father has just made to him, the unescapable charm which he exercises on all men not fish-blooded?

Something of his thoughts are mirrored in his features. The polite mask has disappeared, and for the first time Lensky feels that it is his own flesh and blood that stands before him; for the first time he sees not only a young diplomat, dressed in the most correct English style, but his son, and in the features of the grown young man he finds something of the dear little face of the boy who used to spring joyfully out to meet him when he came home, who was so proud if he could show his father the slightest service, who boasted so imposingly to his playmates of his father's fame. He thinks of the tall, pale youth whose ideal he was until the day when Nikolai began to understand, and his bright eyes suddenly saddened with the hardest suffering that a young man can experience, the pain of being obliged to see a flaw in the one who is highest to him.

And from that time it was like an illness to the boy. He had learned to understand life so soon that it had made him old before his time. From his sixteenth year, and before that, he had carried about with him the grief of his poor, idolized mother. And Lensky reproached him for having lost his freshness.

Suddenly he takes his son by both shoulders and draws him to his breast--for the first time in years.

VII.

A little later, Nikolai and his father are rolling along the boulevard to see Mascha. The cab stops before a pretty private residence in the Avenue Wagram.

"Is Madame Jeliagin at home?" asks Lensky, while his son pays the cabman. Lensky never carries a groschen of money about with him.

"Madame cannot be seen," replies the servant at the house-door. Then a charming figure in a short, dark blue dress rushes down four, five steps at a time to the virtuoso.

"Ah!"

How often the little cry of joy with which his little daughter throws her soft, warm arms round his neck will ring in the ears of the artist as he grows older. And the kiss of her dewy, fresh, innocent lips--will he ever forget it? Mascha has lips like a four-year-old child.

"Papa! Colia! How lovely that you are both here, but how late!" says she, taking the hand of each and leading them into the hall. "Yes, how late! I have been standing at the window since ten o'clock, and looking to see if you were coming."

"You have lost much time, little one," says Lensky, and laughs.

"I had nothing to do but be happy with you, papa," replies she, and rubs her delicate, flower-like face against his hand.

They are now in the hall. One can scarcely think of anything more attractive than this room, with its old Flemish tapestry hangings, and in the background the heavy oaken stairs leading to the upper stories.

"It is pretty here, is it not, papa?" says Mascha, as she notices Lensky's glance slowly wandering over every object. "The colors all harmonize so charmingly," she continues; and with the important consciousness of saying something wise, she adds: "I call that eye music."

"A highly descriptive word. I will write it down," jests Lensky. "I had no suspicion that the Jeliagins lived so well," he adds, and seeks Nikolai's glance. How could he have asserted that Barbara Alexandrovna was in bad circumstances?

"Yes, the whole house is pretty, all the rooms," says Mascha. "I have been all over it already, in the stable and in the attic. But sit down here near the chimney, papa; and you here, Colia. Ah! how nice to have you both together. Only poor mamma is missing!"

And the tender-hearted child, with whom joy and pain are always near together, rubs the tears from her eyes. Then she gives herself a little shake--this is not the day to be sad. "Only think, papa!"

"Well, what then, my angel?"

"When one comes in here, one imagines that aunt is very wealthy; but she is quite, quite poor." Maschenka's voice sinks tragically. "Early this morning some one came with a bill from the dressmaker, I think. At first aunt denied herself; and then there was such a noise that she came out to quiet the people. Poor aunt had to beg the people to wait. How horrible! But the worst of all was"--Maschenka whispers quite mysteriously to him--"the worst of it was that then, afterward, Anna scolded poor aunt; the daughter scolded her mother. '*Vous manquez de dignité maman!*' cried she. 'You behave like a baker-woman. Never would these dirty loafers'--yes, she expressed herself so, '*ces sales canailles*'--'permit themselves such insolence if you knew how to act like a lady.' And poor aunt only replied quite humbly: 'Don't be vexed, my heart. I will be wiser another time. Have patience with me.' That went to my heart. I would have liked to fall on poor aunt's neck, but I dared not let her perceive that I had heard anything. She is very nice and good to me. Except Anna, they are all good to me." She throws her arms round Lensky's neck, and drawing his head down to her, she whispers in his ear: "What has Nikolai against me, papa? He does not look at me to-day."

"He is dissatisfied with you."

"With me?" Mascha springs up. "What have I done to you, Colia? I have noticed the whole time that you have not laughed a single time. Please say it, so that it will be over."

Nikolai stands there like the picture of an earnest young mentor who prepares himself for a lecture that will not cross his lips.

Mascha loses patience. "Don't cough incessantly; open your mouth and speak!" calls out she, and the energetic little person stamps her foot violently.

"Do not be so angry," says Nikolai, good-naturedly. Then he takes his sister's hand in his, and

looking down at her very lovingly, he says: "Yes, Mascha, I am dissatisfied with you; you have guessed rightly. Every one who really loves you must be dissatisfied with the imprudent self-will which you showed by your yesterday's prank."

"H-m! were you dissatisfied?" asks Maschenka, turning to her father, defiantly.

To her great astonishment, Lensky remains silent. She pouts, and Nikolai continues: "Father was so touched by your tenderness that he forgot everything else, but I assure you that the thought that you could a second time go about in the world so unprotected is just as fearful to him as to me."

"God knows it," Lensky assures her emphatically.

Maschenka's childish self-sufficiency diminishes considerably; she lowers her head and bites her under lip; she fights back tears. She had been so proud of her stroke of genius, and now---

"I do not want to quarrel with you," continues Nikolai, kindly, "only warn you. You imagine that I am displeased with you for worldly reasons, which you despise. Oh! we know that. But this time I have nothing to say of the gossip to which you expose yourself. The principal thing with me is, that by such wrong precipitation as your flight from Arcachon you run the risk of dangers and embarrassments of which you have no suspicion, and which could destroy all happiness in your existence for you. Therefore, Maschenka, be wise, give me your hand upon it, and your word of honor that you will never again run away from home secretly and unprotected."

The tender tone in which Nikolai has delivered his little lecture has evidently gone to Mascha's heart.

"Well, Maschenka, darling, will you give me your word of honor?" asks Nikolai, earnestly.

She is just about to stretch out her hand to him to seal the solemn promise he has asked; then suddenly her manner changes, she throws back her head. "I will promise nothing," says she, looking at her brother out of her dark blue eyes with tender roguishness--"nothing at all."

"But, Mascha!"

"No, no, no," says she. "Why should I? It would be no use, Nikolai. For, do you see, if I should ever be in a similar fit of anxiety about you, then, then, Colia, I should lose my head again, and not only run away a second time, but, if it was necessary, break my word of honor." And laughing, but with eyes full of tears, she throws both arms around Nikolai's neck and says: "Now be angry, very angry, quickly!"

Lensky laughs his good-natured, deep laugh, and repeats mockingly: "So, please be angry, Colia, really." And Nikolai draws himself up, wishes to once more explain to his sister more emphatically and severely how perfectly unsuitable he has found her behavior, and instead of that--yes, instead of that--he only kisses her tenderly, and murmurs: "Ah! you dear, good-for-nothing little witch, you, if you were only half so wise as you are good and charming--or, or if one could always be with you to protect you!"

At these loving words, Maschenka bursts into tears. "What is the matter, darling?" asks Nikolai.

"But, my little dove!" says Lensky, quite amazed.

She turns from one to the other. "You are both too good to me, and I am too happy," sobs she. While father and brother are still occupied in calming her with jests and caresses, the rustle of a silk dress causes them to turn their heads.

Down the broad oak stairs came two ladies, Madame Jeliagin and her daughter Anna; the first, her hair arranged in the fashion of twenty years ago, in a faded violet silk dress; the second, a brilliant apparition in faultless morning dress, tall, blonde, with regular features, which, alas! are disfigured by an expression of great arrogance.

Barbara Jeliagin throws herself upon Lensky, and kisses him on both cheeks. Anna scarcely gives him her finger-tips. She cannot bear these barbarous caresses which are repeated at all Russian family scenes. Lensky himself feels a little surprised at his sister-in-law's affectionateness; he looks at her in astonishment. Is it possible that this withered old woman in the faded dress is really the Barbe Jeliagin formerly celebrated for the luxuriance of her toilets, the exotic unusualness of her entertainments, his wife's sister, the arrogant "Princess Barbe," who had never ceased to regard her sister's marriage to the violinist as a *mésalliance*?

"My poor sister! You know that she refused Pierre Trubezkoy. We were horrified at her marriage. Lensky is really a great genius!" He knew that she used to say this to all her distinguished acquaintances. He had heard her say it himself once, and now---

"Was I right with regard to the Jeliagins?" Nikolai asks his father, when, an hour later, they leave the pretty house.

"Yes," replied Lensky, thoughtfully. He did not tell his son that Barbara had made use of the first moment when she was alone with him to ask him for money, but he murmured frequently to himself: "Things have gone down with Barbe. Who would have thought it? Life has not used her tenderly!" He remembered his son's words, who had boldly asserted that Mascha could nowhere be worse taken care of than with this good-natured, characterless woman, who turned with the wind, and who was completely without will opposed to her daughter's arrogance. "Not worse!" repeated Lensky. Now that was exaggeration. Still he must try to seek another home for Mascha. But where, then, where? On the whole, Colia's plan was not so bad. In spite of the extravagant generosity which he had always shown to his family, in spite of the unlimited benevolence which would have put many princes to shame, his means sufficed to make Mascha's life as happy, as comfortable as the vain little thing could wish. And how delightful it would be to have this charming little being always about him, to be able to pet her from morning to evening! That was his manner of loving a child! But that would be all the same if it did not happen to-day or to-morrow. No; only this one more last time would he loose the reins, satiate himself with the mad, gipsy life.

The virtuoso tour which Herr Braun had planned for him lasted into June. That was not much longer, scarcely six months. With that he would finish, in order to then found a calm, quiet home somewhere.

VIII.

If any one had ventured to tell Nikolai that he would fall in love at first sight with a girl with whom he had not exchanged a word, he would really have laughed in the person's face.

In love with an unknown, he, Nikolai, the prudent Nikolai Lensky, doubly prudent from opposition to his easily excited father, giving way unresistingly to every momentary impression? Nonsense! And still he could not deny it. For a week he had thought of nothing but Nita.

Besides, it must be said that fortune seemed to have given herself the task of exciting into uproar his power of imagination, of fanning into a flame the slight fire within him, by continually letting her appear before him like a lovely *Fata Morgana*, without granting him an opportunity of meeting her.

The day after the concert he had presented himself at the two young ladies' studio, to inquire after Nita's health. He had not seen Nita, only Sophie, who told him that her friend had kept her room on account of a severe headache.

Dear, good Sophie! How glad she was to see him, so heartily, so truly. She had grown much prettier in this last year; he told her so to her face, at which she blushed charmingly. Then he asked about all kinds of things: how she liked the modern Babylon, where she had learned to know her friend, what kind of a person she was. That he naturally did only in the interest of his little adopted sister. He must convince himself whether association with the young Austrian was desirable for her.

Sophie did not need to be urged to tell him of her idolized friend. The harshness, and at the same time the boundless goodness, of her nature she described to him, the strange mixture of man-like strength of decision and the charming loveliness with which she could make good her vexing roughness. She repeated to him Nita's gay *traits d'esprit*, she showed him Nita's studies.

An hour, an hour and a half he remained in the studio. Sophie made him a cup of tea, told him of Nita's family, that she had a cousin in Paris whose name was Count Bärenburg, *attaché* to the Russian embassy, a very good-looking man, and very amusing in conversation, without much depth. He often visited Nita in the studio. Nikolai must know him.

Yes, Nikolai said he knew him, and Sophie talked on until at length twilight fell. Nikolai accompanied her to the house-door in the Rue Murillo, and assured her that for a long time nothing had so truly pleased him as to see her again.

What conclusions Sonia might draw from this unusual warmth of her cousin he did not for a moment consider.

Two days later, at the opera--he sat in the parquet--he heard some Paris dandies whispering of the beauty of a new apparition. These young men's opera-glasses all aimed at the same front row box. He looked up. There, near an old lady whom he had seen as a child in St. Petersburg with his mother, and had recently met again in Paris, Lady Bärenburg, he saw Nita. She wore a white

low-neck dress, and a few red roses on her breast.

Meanwhile the representation of "L'Africaine" went on with all the effect which is given to a Meyerbeer opera in Paris. Nikolai scarcely noticed it. Unchangedly he looked up and observed the young girl, each characteristic movement, the incessantly changing expression of her face, on which light and shade seemed to chase each other.

She attracted him as everything mysterious attracts one. Why did she affect this mocking coldness? he asked himself. Why did she conceal the most beautiful part of herself?

At the close of the performance, he stood at the edge of the broad stairs to see her pass by. From afar he discovered her gold-lit hair. Now she came by him. She was leaning on Bärenburg's arm. She was wrapped in a white wrap whose fur border came up to her ear tips and concealed half her face.

His look met that of the young girl. Before he had time to remove his hat Nita had turned away her head with a short, repellent gesture.

The sweetness of fresh roses passed by him with her. He stood there as if rooted to the ground. Why had she avoided his greeting? What had he done? Rage gnawed at his heart; no longer would he trouble himself about this arrogant girl; it was indeed scarcely worth the trouble to rack his brains as to what secret lay hidden in her cold gray eyes.

The next day he met her again unexpectedly on the Boulevard de Courcelles. She wore the same simple dress in which he had seen her the first time at the concert, and walked very quickly without looking to the right or the left, like some one who has a significant aim and a fixed time before her.

A little child, frightened by a large dog, slipped and fell down on the sidewalk, crying loudly. Nikolai wished to pick it up. Nita was before him. She picked up the child and asked if she had hurt herself. She had only scratched her hands and chin a little, but she was very dirty. She soiled Nita's dress while she leaned close up to her in her four-year-old sobbing, childish fear. But Nita did not seem to notice that, or, at least, to pay any attention to it, and calmed her with all kinds of caressing talk. Then she wiped the child's face with her handkerchief, kissed her, and finally she took one of her hands, red with cold, in hers, and quite unembarrassed, pursued her way with the poorly dressed little thing to a cake-shop.

There she seated the child at a table. The child drank chocolate from a large, thick cup which she had to hold with both hands; then she set down the cup with a sigh of deep satisfaction, and consumed a cake with the thoughtful slowness of a child unaccustomed to the enjoyment of such luxuries, who seeks to prolong it as long as possible, while Nita looks at her pleasantly, nothing less than sentimental.

Nikolai's heart beat loud. He left his post as listener from fear that she would discover him at his lover's watch. For he was in love, that he now knew himself; he no longer denied it, for he knew better; he knew very well that the girl with the pale face and the brilliant eyes held the happiness of his life in her hands, that great, warm happiness for which his care-laden youth longed in vain.

IX.

There is a great uneasiness in the ladies' studio in the Avenue Frochot. In spite of its being merely the beginning of December, already many of the students have begun to think of the great yearly exhibition of sending to the Salon.

Nita's sanctum has not caught the fever of acute striving for effect in the adjoining room.

Sophie still paints with the same conscientious industry and touching lack of skill at a skull, and Nita--Nita is quite sunk in the study of a new model, over which she is unusually enthusiastic. The model is none other than the brown-curled child whose acquaintance she recently made on the sidewalk when Nikolai watched her. Just now she has gone to look at the different attempts in the adjoining school, when she hears a short scream, and a rattling, banging noise in her room.

"Pardon me, ladies," says she, while she turns her head and listens; "if I am not mistaken something has come to grief in my room, probably my little Lucca della Robbia. What is it?" says she, opening the door of her studio. A memorable sight meets her eyes then. In the middle of the studio, her little hands clutching her temples with horror, stands a young girl with the face of

Ribera's Maria Egyptiaca, and stares down at a skull which, broken in two pieces, lies at her feet.

"It is only my Cousin Mascha, who is afraid of the skull; she even threw it on the floor," says Sophie, in her wonderfully phlegmatic manner, and with that she stoops down for the pieces to fit them together and put them in their place again.

"Oh! how can you touch the horrid thing?" says Mascha, holding her hands over her eyes, and tapping her foot. "Oh, oh!"

"Poor little thing, how she trembles!" says Nita, compassionately, while she goes up to Mascha. "Throw your stupid skull in the fire, Sophie. You see that the child cannot bear the sight of it."

"That is very foolish; one should be over that at seventeen. It is very hard to get skulls," replies Sophie, vexedly.

But Nita does not notice that. She has taken Mascha in her arms, and caresses her like a mother who would calm an excited child. "So, dear heart, the ugly thing is gone. You can open your pretty eyes. Poor little soul!"

"Fräulein von Sankjéwitch is very good to you," now calls a young man's voice.

Nita looks up and perceives Nikolai. Evidently the little beauty is his sister. He bows, and turning to Mascha once more, he says: "And now tell Fräulein von Sankjéwitch that you are sorry to have been so ill-bred."

Mascha has wiped the tears from her eyes; she looks at Nita touchingly, thankfully; then smiling, with the tender roguishness which adds so much to the charm of her little personality, she says: "I am not sorry. You would not have been so kind to me if I had been polite, would you?" And with that she lays her arm somewhat shyly around Nita's neck and presses her soft lips to the young artist's smooth cheeks. "I was beside myself," says she. "Ah! I am so afraid of death! If only there was no dying!"

"It is a peculiarity of hers. One must have a little patience with her in that direction," explains Nikolai.

"Give us some tea, Sophie. That will give the child something else to think of," says Nita, without noticing Nikolai's remark.

To-day, also, she is strikingly stiff and cold to him, so that he asks himself: "What has she against me?" Nevertheless, she warms somewhat in the course of conversation. The young man visibly gains ground with her.

He is decidedly very agreeable in intercourse. He has the quiet manners, easily adapting themselves to circumstances, of a true gentleman. He talks well, without tasteless chattering. Nita listens to him with interest, asks him all kinds of questions about Russia, and, on the whole, treats him with the indifferent kindness of a fifty-year-old woman to a boy.

The ladies in the next room have long left their work; twilight falls. Still they talk. Sophie is quiet for the most part, listens, comfortably and idly reclining in her easy-chair, to the conversation of the two persons who are dearest to her, and wonders at them both silently.

But Maschenka, whose mood has completely changed, and who has now become immoderately gay, is not at all content to play the *rôle* of silent listener. Every moment her trilling, childish laugh, or some strange little remark, interrupts Nita and Nikolai's earnest conversation, so that finally Nikolai, who is always afraid that his sister will be misunderstood, remarks:

"My little sister has lately been with relatives who were a little too cold and formal to understand her exaggeration. One must not be astonished if she is at times a little bit wild; she is like a little brook, long held captive by winter, which, after a little bit of sunshine has set it free, now doubly laughs and chatters and foams, because it is so happy to be free of the heavy, oppressive ice. Are you not, little goose?" And he takes Mascha by the chin.

"Do not make excuses because you have a charming sister," Nita hereupon answers him. "I shall be glad if you will bring her to see me very soon again."

If Nikolai's vexation at his sister's flight from Arcachon very soon lost itself in tender emotion, on the contrary, the horror which Sergei Alexandrovitch felt at this headlong self-will was of a much more enduring quality. The tender, repentant letter with which Maschenka begged the uncle from whose house she had fled to pardon her over-haste, Sergei left unanswered. To Nikolai's note which, joined in his sister's request, tried to excuse Mascha's fault a little, and asked whether he might, after his father had left Paris, again bring the child to Arcachon, the old bureaucrat replied that there would be no talk of that. The condition of his nerves would not permit him a second time to undertake the oversight of such an unreliable being as Mascha. In his opinion the best thing would be to send her to boarding-school.

This was also Nikolai's opinion under the circumstances. For the present a stay in an ordinarily strict school seemed to him decidedly more desirable for Mascha than a continued existence with the Jeliagins.

He even succeeded in winning his father to this view, but when Mascha learned what they planned for her future, she rebelled angrily, desperately, and with anxious, touching tenderness for so long that Lensky, in spite of all his son's representations, gave way to her. He could not bear to see the little one unhappy. He formally begged her pardon, with caresses and endearing words, that he had proposed anything which had excited and vexed her. Nikolai shrugged his shoulders and was powerless. But Mascha laughed gayly, happy at her victory.

How happy she was at that time--from morning till evening, happy! Except for the little tear intermezzo, she had never been so happy as in the three weeks which passed between her arrival and her father's departure from Paris.

Every morning he passed at his sister-in-law's house; usually he remained to lunch. He sent his pretty daughter all the wonderfully beautiful floral tributes which enthusiasts sent him, and besides that, indulged her with imprudent, immoderate generosity. Again and again he turned to Nikolai with the same: "Get me something for the child; she is so bewitching when she is pleased. She rejoices like a gipsy!"

"I have something for you, Puss," said he, when he went to see her, after she had greeted him, and handed her a package done up in paper, usually an ornament that was much too costly for her youth.

"Ah! give it to me, papa," and then she tore off the wrapping with the active impatience of a young, playful kitten, and opened the parcel. Lensky watched her good-naturedly with smiling expectation, like a great child that every day rejoices in playing the same trick--a sparkle of two dark blue eyes, a gay, penetrating cry of joy, and two soft, warm arms are thrown round his neck. But he presses his lips to the great, wonderfully beautiful eyes again and again, and murmurs something tender, incomprehensible, to the girl's curly hair.

"Really, do you love me much, papa?" said she once, and looked at him in astonishment piercingly at his moved face.

"Have you ever doubted it?"

"Yes, often," she nodded, earnestly. "I thought to love mutually with all one's heart was only for ordinary people like we others; but a great genius like you only tolerates one love, and sometimes is pleased without really returning it. But no; you really like me!"

"Oh! you foolish little monkey!" murmured he, and kissed each separate dimple in her soft, white, child's hands.

Sometimes he came at ten o'clock in the morning. At that time he frequently saw Barbara in a spotted morning dress, creeping about the house armed with a duster, polishing and putting everything to rights. He never saw Anna at such an early hour; at most, he heard her sharp voice wounding her mother by some sharp, insulting expression. Not only did she never help her mother in her domestic activity, no, she shut herself up in her room in order not to see Barbara about it.

But whom Lensky very often found busy about the house with Madame Jeliagin, was Mascha. Enveloped in a large blue apron, she appeared now here, now there, as zealously as gayly trying to assist her poor, sickly aunt; and what a capable, vigorous assistance! Her firm young fingers arranged things quite differently from Barbara's trembling hands. She climbed up on the furniture to remove cobwebs from the picture frames, she polished the mirrors and dusted the ornaments, practical and active as a housemaid by profession, and still laughing with gay, fairy-like grace, as a little princess, as if it were all a joke.

All the servants worshipped her; even the weary, stupid, tormented old Aunt Jeliagin learned to love her. It would be hard not to love this quick, lively, impetuous, but always kind-hearted little girl; only the intolerable Anna did not.

But if one, on the one hand, could think of nothing more enchanting than the girl, glowing with happy, tender young life, on the other hand, one could hardly imagine anything more touching and noble than Lensky in the hours passed with his little daughter.

If he now, as soon as his nature was aroused, lost all restraint, and then the worst part of him showed itself rougher, and less vaguely than formerly--rougher than could be understood in a civilized man--on the other hand, as long as the evil in him slept, he showed himself nobler, more blameless than formerly in his best moments.

What had formerly been united in him was now separated. Nikolai, who frequently accompanied him to the Avenue Wagram, observed him in astonishment.

This was not the same man who in the evening, greedily eating, and with cynical, twinkling eyes, sat between some pair of hysterical enthusiasts, to whom he permitted himself to say all

that was coarse and familiar--the man with the hard, joyless laugh, the two-sided wit, the shameless scorn of men, and especially women.

No; the Lensky who in the morning took his pretty little daughter in his arms, was a pale, somewhat weary and sad man, a man with a hoarse but soft and rather low voice, a man who spoke little, but listened pleasantly, who was always ready to interest himself in the most foolish childishness.

After lunch he usually remained an hour or so, and played with Mascha. Even his art he involuntarily changed for love of her. The wild fire with which he enslaved his concert audiences was perhaps lacking, but how tender, how delicate, how noble, became his playing if he felt the gaze of the child's eyes filled with tears and enthusiasm resting upon him.

She might accompany him! Ah! how proud she was if he called out a hearty word of praise to her in the midst of his playing! And there was no lack of opportunity to applaud her.

Frequently he let her play to him alone on the piano, listened to her with the greatest patience, yes, with true pleasure. He made little conscientious corrections, mingled with jests--really troubled himself seriously with her instruction.

Nikolai, as child and youth, had in vain tormented himself musically, only at length to separate *à l'aimable* from the piano, the violin, and the 'cello. Mascha, on the contrary, was incredibly talented in music. What others attained by weary study, she had inherited. The flexibility of her wrists, the smoothness of her touch, were something at which Lensky could not cease to marvel.

How they rejoiced in each other, father and child!

The only hours of those three weeks disturbed by unrepulsable melancholy were, for Mascha, those which she passed at her father's concerts. Naturally, she never missed one; but, very pretty and tastefully dressed, sat now with Colia, at other times with her aunt, in an especially good place, which was reserved for her, and listened attentively to every tone. In the hall there was no one--no, not even among the many professional violinists who envied him his triumphs--who had more plainly remarked the great change which began to take place in the genial virtuoso than his idolizing daughter. She felt it every time that he played falsely. She could have wept, her breath failed her, she looked around the hall, frightened and yet defiantly.

But unconfusedly the Parisians raved over even the falsest tones with the same enthusiasm. One kindled another with the same madly expressed animation, until at length Mascha persuaded herself that she must have heard falsely from anxiety for her father, and, carried away by the noise, forgot all her grief.

X.

"They have come from Félix with the dress for mademoiselle--oh, a wonder of a dress! The girl is waiting up-stairs," the maid calls out to Mascha, who has just returned with Nikolai from a walk in the Champs Elysées.

It is the last day before Lensky's departure. Maschenka is very depressed. She has almost cried her eyes out over the approaching separation, and Nikolai has taken her out-doors to distract her, and also so that she may not disfigure herself for the evening. An important event is before her for this evening. Mascha is for the first time to appear in society as a young lady, for the first time to wear a real evening dress, a Félix evening dress.

Madame Jeliagin gives a *soirée* in Lensky's honor. She hopes that the charm which the great artist for the moment has for Parisian society will suffice to at last once more fill her empty rooms.

"Yes, a dress, a true wonder of a dress," the maid had called out to Mascha, and although the girl's eyes yet shone with recent tears, she cried out with joy at this message. Throwing gay kisses to her brother, she runs quickly up the stairs, and bursts open the door of her room.

"Where is the dress--where? Ah!!"

Indeed, a lovely dress, and how it fits! No, not quite; a little alteration must be made, declares the girl who brought it. "When one has the fortune to work for any one who has such a beautiful figure as mademoiselle, one must not be careless."

Beautiful figure!

No one had ever yet told Mascha that she had a beautiful figure. She turns her head on all sides to look at herself in the glass. For the first time she finds the mirror over her toilet table too small. Her eyes dance, her finger-tips twitch for joy. Incessantly she turns over the dress, discovering new beauties. "Ah, it is superb! But will the seamstress finish the alteration in time?" she asks, anxiously.

Now all is arranged. The maid has thrown a red scarf of India cashmere around Mascha's shoulders. She hurries down the stairs, bursts into the room, and throwing away the scarf, hurries up to her father and Nikolai.

"*Eh bien!*" says she, and turns slowly around like a figure in a shop. "*Eh bien!*"

They are alone in the drawing-room, the two Lenskys and the young girl. What joy to let herself be admired by father and brother without being at the same time submitted to Anna's icy, depressing criticism!

"I am quite ready on this side," she declares importantly, and points to her right arm, which is enveloped to the shoulder in a tan-colored glove, while the left is still bare.

"So! Well, I prefer the other side," says Lensky, laughing. And in truth one can think of nothing more charming than this bare, round, slender arm, not statuesque, white as the arm of a married woman of thirty--no, even a trifle red on the upper part, but with such a bewitching dimple at the elbow, with such tiny blue veins around the wrist.

"Yes; I decidedly prefer it," repeated Lensky, and pushes his daughter somewhat from him in order to observe her more particularly. Nikolai also looks attentively at his sister, tries to make the necessary remarks, to criticise a little. But as she stands before him in her artistically simple white dress, her little fingers twitching with embarrassment, and with her large, anxious eyes seeking approval in his face which she awaited so securely and now cannot find, it really seems to him that never in his life has he met a lovelier young girl than Mascha. What shoulders, what a figure, so beautifully rounded, without the immature thinness of other seventeen-year-old girls. And what is most charming in this unusual little being, on these plump, dazzling shoulders rests such a sweet, pale, little childish face, with such a tender, innocent mouth, with such indescribably pure eyes, looking out boldly and fearlessly at the world, so that the contrast is really painful. One feels that the girl has been desecrated by no grovelling curiosity, no passionate dreams; that she is perfectly unconscious of her physical maturity.

"You are not as beautiful as your mother was," says Lensky after awhile.

"No one else is as beautiful; but that is not necessary," says Mascha, now really troubled. "But-but do I not, then, please you at all?"

"You foolish little goose, do you believe that?" says Lensky, drawing his daughter to him. "We will not tease you any longer, eh, Colia? We will at last tell her quite simply that she looks charming. Yes," he repeated, holding her head down on his shoulder and stroking it, "you are charming, my little dove. You will certainly hear it often enough to-day, and later. Why should I not enjoy the pleasure of being the first to say it to you? You are still a little bit tear-stained," adds he very gently. "Poor little heart, poor angel! But it is becoming to you!"

For the moment, Mascha is so filled with childish desire for praise that she has no sense left for what is the dearest thing in the world for her--the tenderness of her father.

"If I only had a cheval glass in my room," sighed she. "I really have not seen myself yet." And, exhilarated by her father's praise, she climbs up on a stool, and, turning her head to all sides, she tries to see herself as well as possible in the glass over the chimney.

The chandelier sheds a golden light over her dark hair; the reflection of the fire flickers over her white dress. "Father, Colia," asks she, somewhat hesitatingly, "do you think that any one could ever fall in love with me?"

Just then "Herr Graf Bärenburg," calls the servant, and opens the door.

Blushing to the roots of her hair, Mascha springs down from the stool. Bärenburg has only had time to wonder at a pair of very white shoulders in the fullest light, then to see a pair of tiny feet appear from a fragrant cloud of valenciennes and muslin, and jump down to the ground.

"Well, what do you say to my vain daughter, Count Bärenburg?" asks Lensky, gayly, to help Mascha over her embarrassment.

Bärenburg shrugs his shoulders with an approving expression, and replies: "That I have never seen a pair of smaller feet, that is all." Lensky laughs, Nikolai frowns, and Maschenka, with a quick gesture, picks up the formerly discarded red cashmere scarf from the ground and wraps herself in it. Her bare shoulders suddenly annoy her. She is ashamed.

"Only so that you will not take cold," jokes Lensky, and teasingly draws the red scarf together

under her chin. "She appears in the world to-day for the first time as a young lady," says he, turning to Bärenburg, and looks at him significantly. Does the conceited Austrian really remark how charming his little girl is?

The conceited Austrian notices it only too well. "The first evening dress. I congratulate you," says he, bowing respectfully to Mascha.

"I had no idea--" now begins Mascha.

"That you would have the misfortune to be obliged to endure me at dinner to-day," Bärenburg completes her sentence. "Mademoiselle Jeliagin wrote me asking, if I were not engaged, to dine *en famille* at her mother's. I was already engaged"--with a side glance at Mascha--"but I excused myself. Have I perhaps made a mistake in the date?"

"Oh, no!" replies Mascha. "Now I remember, Anna told me some gentleman would come to dinner, and I was vexed that my last dinner with papa would be spoiled."

"Mascha!" says Nikolai, shocked.

And Lensky says, half vexed, half laughingly: "My daughter looks like a grown girl; really, she is, I believe, twelve years old at the most."

"Papa!" says Mascha, blushing hotly. "I did not know that it was to be Count Bärenburg when I was vexed."

"So, and that alters the case," laughs Bärenburg.

"It seems so," replies Nikolai.

But Mascha, observing that they are making merry over her *naïveté*, suddenly becomes very dignified and says: "It stands to reason that a man who has saved my brother's life should not be a mere casual acquaintance to me." Then, becoming defiant from embarrassment, she slips her little hand in Nikolai's arm and adds: "I love my brother dearly."

Then the Jeliagins enter the room, the temperature falls a couple of degrees, the atmosphere becomes icy.

They look strangely: Barbara in her faded lilac dress and imitation diamonds. As for Anna, she is, in her cold, blond manner, without doubt very handsome, and her black tulle gown becomes her somewhat too tall and slender figure wonderfully. But although she is but twenty-six, her appearance has already that not to be described sharpness, pointedness, dryness, the sign of girls whose bloom begins to wither before it has yet found opportunity to fully unfold.

But without criticising her cousin's charms, Mascha only calls out enthusiastically and childishly: "Oh, Anna, how lovely you look--oh, how lovely! What a shame that I am not old enough to wear black!"

"Do not act as if you had never seen a well-dressed woman before," Anna whispers to her impatiently. "You behave like a village girl."

And Mascha blushes and lowers her head. During this skirmish between the two cousins, Madame Jeliagin has welcomed Bärenburg in the most friendly manner; now Anna stretches out her hand with the manner of an empress conferring a favor. "It is very nice in you, Count, to have drawn a mark through our old cotillon quarrel." And turning to the others, she explains: "This autumn in Spaa, at a ball of the Marquise d'Arly, I had no favor left for Count Bärenburg. He--hm!--did me the honor to be mortally offended at it." Bärenburg, who has forgotten the whole affair as completely as the date of Shakespeare's birth, bows deeply, and murmurs something. Suddenly Anna turns critically to her cousin. "But, Marie," she exclaims, looking at the thick string of pearls around Mascha's round throat, "what were you thinking of to adorn yourself with wax pearls like an Indian?"

"Wax pearls?" burst out Mascha, indignantly. "They are the pearls which our dear dead empress gave papa for mamma once when he played at court. They are wonderful pearls!"

"I had already noticed them. I have seldom seen such beautiful ones," says Bärenburg. "My mother possesses a similar string, but only wears them on great occasions."

"My mamma wore them day and night, from the hour when papa hung them around her neck," announces Mascha, cordially. "Mamma told me at first she was frightened at the gift, and said pearls mean tears; then papa kissed the pearls and replied: 'Yes, but tears of joy.' Do you remember, papa?" asks she, looking up at him.

"Yes," says he, shortly.

"And when, two years before her death, she hung the pearls round my neck, she also kissed them, and said, with her dear smile: 'Do not forget, Maschenka, they are tears of joy!' Since then I have never parted with them."

"That is all very pretty and poetic," replies Anna, condescendingly, "but as you cannot tell this touching commentary to your splendor to every one, I would advise you to take off the pearls for this evening. It is absolutely unsuitable for a girl of your age to wear such costly ornaments. You are, without that, dressed absurdly elegantly--*c'est d'un goût douteux!*"

"Take off my pearls!" calls out Mascha, unspeakably vexed at Anna's condescending tone, with a violence which plainly betrays the dangerous vehemence of her nature inherited from her father. "No, never! Never!" she repeats, seizing the necklace with both hands. "I would rather stay in my room the whole evening and not show myself, if you are afraid I might shame you."

A moment before, Lensky felt an almost uncontrollable desire to throw something at Anna's head, but Mascha's burst of rage has a subduing effect on his own excitement. Not for anything in the world would he have his daughter appear to disadvantage.

"But, Maschenka," says he, gently, laying his hand on hers, "collect yourself. Anna does not mean badly. In the end it is quite indifferent whether an insignificant little thing like you has a black or a white neckband on. Restrain yourself, my little dove. Do not forget that you are a guest here." A stern word would, perhaps, have steeled her. Lensky's gentleness spoils everything.

"Ah! I am everywhere only a guest, and no longer at home anywhere," says she. Tears came to her eyes. She tried hard to be mistress of herself, choked down what she could; her unpractised seventeen-year-old self-restraint does not endure, and suddenly bursting into convulsive sobs, she leaves the room. An unpleasant silence follows.

Anna boldly displays her vexation, old Madame Jeliagin smiles sweetly and politely into air, Lensky looks angry, and Colia murmurs excusingly: "She is very over excited. She cannot console herself for the parting from you this time, father."

"Yes, yes, I know," says Lensky. "Poor child! No self-control--no self-control." And turning directly to Bärenburg, he adds: "She lost her mother three years ago, just when she needed her most, and since then she has been, so to speak, left to herself. But she is a good child--a very good child."

"Shall I perhaps go up and look after her?" asks Madame Jeliagin, coaxingly, of her brother-in-law.

"No, no, aunt, let me go," says Colia, hastily preventing. "I know her better than you. I usually succeed quickly in calming her. She really deserves to stay in her room, and she will be ashamed to come down again; but if you will let me, I still will bring her. She has looked forward so to this evening!"

"What would you do if your sister had behaved like Marie?" Anna whispers to Count Bärenburg.

He knits his brows in lazy consideration. "H-m! h-m! The same that Nikolai did--run after her to console her," replies he, slowly. "That is, granted that my sister were as charming as your cousin, which she is not."

XI.

Except for a few trifles, the dinner is prettily served, abundant and good. The mood prevailing leaves so much the more to be desired. Lensky, who is vexed that Maschenka has made a scene before the "stupid, arrogant Austrian," says nothing. Old Madame Jeliagin is consumed with anxiety lest the service be broken. Mascha is awkward and shy as an eight-year-old child who is ashamed of her naughtiness. Only Anna feels thoroughly at ease, for it always has an exhilarating effect upon her to sit between two handsome and polite young men, as to-day between Nikolai and Bärenburg; but the latter looks quite uninterruptedly over at Mascha.

"A charming creature, this Mascha," he thinks to himself. It pleases him to repeat her strange name to himself. "Yes, a charming creature. What a complexion, what a charming little mouth, and what a delightful expression, changing incessantly from petulance to moving tenderness, in her eyes! What shoulders! What a shame!"

Yes, what a shame to marry Marie Lensky. He could not think of it, but--why should he not be a little pleasant to her? What Count Bärenburg understands as being "a little pleasant," others would describe as paying desperate court to a girl. But he sees nothing of the sort, but takes the situation poetically.

"If only this silly Anna would not be so unbearably attentive!" thinks he, and still looks secretly over at Mascha.

She now stands near Lensky, before the mantel, pale, and with a treacherous redness of the heavy eyelids. With a kind but very earnest face, bending down to her, holding one of her small hands between his large ones, her father speaks very gently but impressively to her, evidently reproves her, and in a strange, melodious language, which goes to Bärenburg's heart, although he understands not a word of it, the wonderful Russian tongue which, like no other, contains and reflects the whole character of the people for whom it serves as expression.

After Lensky has finished his admonition, Maschenka, innocently unembarrassed, stretches out her arms to her father, and kisses him.

Bärenburg is thrilled.

Meanwhile, Lensky, gently reproving her, says in French: "And now behave like a sensible being, Mascha. So! Sit up straight, and play something for us, now, before the people come."

"But papa!"

"Yes, no evasions, only play. Rely on me, you may venture it," says Lensky. "I have been enough ashamed of you to-day, and, for a change, would like to be proud of you. Sit down--my heart--I take the risk; it will go!" And with that he raised the piano lid himself. "The A minor rondo of Mozart!"

For one instant she hesitated, then the wish to distinguish herself before Bärenburg, to please her father, comes to her. She plays, and how beautifully she plays!

As if electrified, Bärenburg rises and goes up to the piano. He has a great love for good music. The A minor rondo is his express favorite. In this composition of universal sadness, in which the purest artist soul which ever came down to us from heaven weeps over the frivolity of an entire century, Mascha's still immature but always tender and delicately shaded mastery is especially noticeable.

"That was entrancing," calls out Bärenburg, with true enthusiasm. "You are a God-gifted artist!"

"That is she; I heard her without," suddenly a deep, old woman's voice joins energetically in his praise.

The first of the ladies invited for the evening has appeared.

She is a very handsome old lady, an old lady with gay, mocking, and still good-natured, sparkling blue eyes which betray her Irish origin--a woman whom calumny has never ventured to touch, although she has for thirty years been one of the "influentials" of Europe, one of the two or three women for whom Lensky feels respect, Lady Banbury.

"I congratulate you on your daughter, Lensky," says she, greeting the artist cordially. "So this is the fat little baby whom I used to carry about in St. Petersburg. I am very glad to see you again, my child." And Lady Banbury gives her hand to Mascha. But when Mascha, with a shy courtesy, wishes to draw it to her lips, the old lady says: "I grudge the leather your fresh lips; let me embrace you, that is, if it is not unpleasant for you to kiss an old woman who loved your mother very dearly. Ah! good evening, Nikolai. You here also, Charley?" to Bärenburg. Then, at length, remembering the circumstance that she is really not Lensky's but his sister-in-law's guest, she turns to the latter.

Strange, all the truly distinguished ladies who are present this evening commit the same, perhaps somewhat voluntary, error--they have all come on Lensky's account merely; they come early, in simple toilets. All have a pleasant word for Mascha, tease Lensky with some ancient reminiscence, and Mascha is pleased with their charm, with the gay mood which they have brought with them, with the great respect which they show her father. Sonia comes, but not Nita. It is a great disappointment for Nikolai. He has not yet ceased to inquire of Sophie for her friend's health, when a large, stout, handsome, painted blonde enters, a woman with too bare shoulders and too long train, a woman the sight of whom has the effect of the Medusa's head upon all the other women.

"How does she come here?" ask the other ladies. "How does she come here?" they ask each other oftener and oftener, as, one after the other, a procession of brilliant social ambiguities file in--a cosmopolitan battalion of Lensky enthusiasts, recruited from the highest circles.

Men appear sparsely. They form scarcely a third part of the numerous guests.

Lensky has been playing for more than an hour. The women crowd around him so that he has scarcely room to move his arm. His eyes wander about him. He sees a confusion of bare necks, of brilliant eyes, of half-parted lips. The sight goes to his head. The most insane flatteries are repeated to him. He feels twenty years younger; a triumphant insolence overpowers him.

In a concert hall, where the resonance is better, where the public is more critical, he exerts himself with all the force of his powerful nature; but here, in this narrow room, where nothing can be distinctly heard, surrounded by an audience of musically ignorant women, he plays like an intoxicated person. The air becomes ever more oppressive.

One person is boundlessly unhappy this evening. It is Mascha. Totally ignorant of what her duties as hostess may prescribe, she is incessantly corrected by her cousin, pushed about, has the feeling of being in every one's way, and while she, quite unknown as she is, creeps through the crowd assembled in the adjoining rooms, she hears remarks about her father, his playing, his relations to women, which send the blood to her cheeks, although she only half understands the most.

At length Lensky has laid down his violin. All the respectable women have withdrawn. Maschenka has helped them find their wraps. Most of them were very pleasant; some kissed her good-by, some even asked Nikolai to bring his sister to see them--but not very urgently.

If dear Natalie were still alive, why then they would be delighted to see this charming Mascha, but to be forced to take these unbearable Jeliagins into the bargain--that one must consider!

The Lensky enthusiasts have remained. Madame Jeliagin has invited them to partake of light refreshments. Mascha tried to help her, and had the misfortune to upset a cup of tea, whereupon, for the tenth time this evening, she is bidden to "get out of the way."

Depressed and namelessly unhappy, she stands among the guests, not knowing where to turn, when Bärenburg, coming up to her, remarks: "How pale you look! It must be frightfully fatiguing to be hostess on such occasions, especially if one is not accustomed to the task. Come into the adjoining room, it is cooler there, and rest a little."

He gives her his arm and leads her into the adjacent drawing-room. Many guests have already found the way here; it is not especially secluded here, but enough so that the sympathetic pair can talk apart and undisturbed, if not unobserved.

He leads her to a divan which is partly concealed by a miniature thicket of palms and ferns.

"Will you not have an ice? It will refresh you," says he, and beckons a servant.

Maschenka takes an ice, tastes it, and pushes it away.

"You are evidently very tired," remarks Bärenburg compassionately.

"It is my first evening in society," sighs Mascha. "I looked forward to it so, but if society is always as tedious as to-day--" She sighs inconsolably.

"Great assemblies of people are always disagreeable," he answers. "One can at first not find among the crowd the people one seeks, and must not stay long with them when one has at length found them. At such routs I mostly spend my whole energy in keeping from treading on ladies' trains and being discovered yawning by the hostess. But this evening an exceptional pleasure has been afforded us----"

"Do not speak of it," says Mascha. "My father's playing has given you no pleasure this evening."

Bärenburg pulls his mustache.

"Your father's playing is almost too grand; it has a paralyzing effect in a drawing-room," he murmurs.

"Ah, no, it is not that. You should only hear him play when we are quite alone in the same room. Oh! then it is beautiful enough to move one to tears; but this evening I scarcely recognize him." Maschenka interrupts herself and lowers her head.

He is very sorry for her in her wounded, childish pride. He feels the necessity of distracting her in some manner. A brilliant thought comes to him. "Before I forget it," says he, "would the skin of the identical bear in whose arms Nikolai almost perished, give you any pleasure? I possess it."

"Oh!" says Mascha, jubilant, "an indescribable pleasure!" She gives him her hand. Just then Anna, with two very beautiful and elegant Englishwomen, goes through the room. Bärenburg rises and goes up to them. Mascha waits for him to return to her. No; he gives his arm to one of the Englishwomen, and escorts them out with Anna. Mascha creeps away. She seeks her father, Colia--any one who really cares for her. She looks through the portière into the smoking-room. The whole room is full of smoke; suddenly she hears a laugh which she does not know, rough, harsh.

She looks through the smoke. There sits Lensky in a low chair. Now she sees him plainly, sees him as she had never seen him before. His face is very red. He laughs to himself and strikes his knee with a coarse gesture. He is telling some racy story, and with an unpleasant glance presses the hand of a woman who sits near him. How they all crowd round him!

Mascha turns away.

When Nikolai, who has been very busy assisting his aunt all the evening to do the honors, resting from his labors, stands with Sonia in the vestibule, he hears the light rustle of a silk dress. He looks up. There, up the stairs, with dragging feet, deeply lowered head, and hand resting heavily on the balustrade, goes a little white figure.

"Maschenka," calls Nikolai in Russian, "is anything the matter?"

"No!" answers a voice choked with defiance and grief.

"Will you not at least wait until father goes?" asks Colia.

The little form quivers, a half-suppressed sob escapes her, then she says shortly, violently: "No."

A half-hour later all is quiet, the last guests have vanished, the servants extinguish the lights.

XII.

"Where is Mascha?" asks Lensky, as Nikolai helps him into his overcoat.

"She has retired. Will you go up to her room?"

"No, it is too late," says Lensky, frowning, and adds: "Do you object to walking, Colia? A stroll has charms for me. I never walk in the daytime, for every street boy runs after me; that is vexatious."

Nikolai himself was pleased to breathe some fresh air after the close rooms.

Lensky was in an elevated mood. With head somewhat thrown back, overcoat open, with swinging arms, he walked near his son. Not far from the house two belated wanderers met them. They started at sight of the virtuoso. "Ah, Lensky!" they exclaimed, and stood still. When Lensky looked at them smilingly, although they were not personally acquainted with him, they took off their hats as though he were a crowned head.

Lensky bowed politely, graciously. "It is too absurd," he remarked, walking on. "Not even at two o'clock in the morning can one walk on the street without being recognized. I believe Bismarck and I have the best-known faces in Europe."

Scarcely had he said this when he felt how laughable it was; he is vexed at it, and, as always after his great or small triumphs, now, when the momentary intoxication of it begins to wear off, an embarrassing, suffocating, quite humiliating feeling overcomes him.

All at once he stands still. Nikolai looks at him. He is frightened at the tormented expression of the artist's pale face.

"Are you not well, father?" asks he, taking him by the arm, anxious lest a new attack of giddiness, had overcome him.

"No, no, there is nothing the matter with me."

They had reached the end of the Champs Elysées. "Stop a little," says Lensky. "Sit down on the bench--no, not that one near the light; here in the shadow--and let us talk, that is, if you are not sleepy."

"I? Far from it, father. But you! Remember you leave at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. You should rest."

"No; I can sleep to-morrow on the train. Sit down."

Nikolai does as his father requests. For a while they are both silent, then Lensky begins:

"Now I think of it, what was the matter with the hysterical enthusiast who fainted that time at my concert in Eden? Mascha told me of her. I thought she was invited this evening."

"She was invited," replied Nikolai.

"So!" murmured Lensky. "And she did not think it worth the trouble to come?"

"She was ill."

"Excuse!" says Lensky. After awhile he begins again. "I was vexed that she did not come. I asked after her. Mascha is quite in love with her. Who is she?"

"Fräulein von Sankjéwitch."

"Sankjéwitch, Sankjéwitch? Is she a Pole?"

"No; her father was a Sclavonian, her mother was of a Bohemian family."

"So, h-m! You have seen her often?" He looks penetratingly at Nikolai.

"Yes."

"And are you as charmed with her as our little curly-head?"

"I find her very charming," murmurs Nikolai, softly.

"In what a tone you say that!" Lensky lays his hand on his son's arm. "You are in love, eh?"

Nikolai is silent.

Lensky laughs. "H-m! h-m! It is the first time that I have ever discovered you in any serious enthusiasm. Tell me, now you should be already decided, have you any intentions?"

"What do you mean?" asks Nikolai, hoarsely.

"Just what I say."

In this moment Nikolai feels almost a kind of horror for his father.

"You cannot know of whom you speak," says he, icily; "it is a question of a young girl of very good family."

"I know very well of whom I speak," replies Lensky, vexed at his son's admonition. "It is a question of a young artist who, separated from her family, goes her own way. I cannot possibly expect of such a gifted exception that she will be restrained by the same prejudices as any little goose."

The blood rushes to Nikolai's cheeks. "I would be in despair if I believed that she thought herself above such prejudices," says he.

"Laughable," said the elder, unconvinced. Then looking askance at his son: "H-m! you seem to have taken it greatly to heart. If you carry such views with you through life, I congratulate you; you will have much suffering. But I pain no one willingly. If I had known that you--I would have been silent. I will not deprive you of your illusions; no one should do that for any man. Heavens! what would men be without illusions! They would creep on all fours. I am no longer far from that. But let us not speak of me; it is better that we speak of you. Only rave calmly to the blue air if it pleases you. I envy you the capacity."

"I have not the slightest intention of raving to the air," replies Nikolai, calmly, but still somewhat stiffly and coldly. "I have a fixed purpose before me."

"You wish to marry?" Lensky exclaims.

"Yes," says Nikolai, shortly.

"Marry at your age! Pardon me, but I never thought you so unpractical."

An unpleasant pause follows. Nikolai at length begins in a trembling voice: "Father, when you look back upon your whole life, even now a long one, what is there in it more beautiful than the first years of your marriage?"

Lensky's face twitches with a painful, scarcely to be mastered emotion; he breathes difficultly. Then he murmurs bitterly: "You would be a poor surgeon, Colia. You have a heavy hand, a very heavy hand. It pains."

Nikolai is shocked. He would like to make good his awkward roughness, to say something loving, tender to his father. Nothing occurs to him.

Then Lensky suddenly turns to him and says: "If you should really meet such a girl as your mother was, and she takes you, then hold her fast in your arms and never part from her; carry her over every stone which might bruise her feet, protect her from every too hot ray of sunlight, from every too cold breath of air, which might harm her, and kneel down before her every evening, and thank her for the happiness which she gives you. But I do not believe that you will find her--she is not to be found!"

"I am very sorry that you have not met Fräulein von Sankjéwitch, father," begins Nikolai, in a warmer, changed tone.

"So am I," replies Lensky, shortly. "How does she look? A beauty, naturally--that is, you think her one."

"No, father, no beauty; but so charming, so lovely."

"H-m! and her manner? If a lady of society wanders on Parnassus, she is usually particularly genial. Is she a decided artist?" asks Lensky, lighting a cigarette.

"A--well, yes, a little--not very much, but a little," answers Nikolai, "and only in the best signification of the word. If you learn to know her you will be just as charmed with her as I!"

"So!--h-m! That is a little bit strong," says Lensky. His voice this time sounds decidedly more kindly, and he pulls the young man's ear.

"I am convinced of it," asserts Nikolai, boldly. "You have never seen such a girl, so full of grace in every movement, and still with such an interesting abruptness; peculiar, full of spontaneity; one moment gloomy, repellant almost to rudeness, then again so kindly cordial, so truly womanly and compassionate; all against a background of incurable sadness--in short, charming, and comparable with nothing else in this world!"

"There has never been any one similar," Lensky assures him earnestly, and adds: "See, see how you thaw; you grow quite animated, dreamer." He is silent awhile, then he begins again: "Does she receive much company?"

"No; she sees as few people as possible."

"Ah!" says Lensky, with the triumphant expression of a hunter who has at length found the trace which he has long sought.

"She does not go into society, because conventional society is too tedious, too unmeaning for her," Nikolai hastily assures him.

"They all say that," replies Lensky, shaking his head. "My dear child, as long as I thought that it was only some passing fancy of yours, I was perfectly ready to let you have your way. But when it is a question of something so important as your marriage, I must earnestly beg you to be on your guard, to look into the matter more closely."

"But, father," says Nikolai, horrified, "all that I have told you should certainly prove to you----"

"It proves to me that you are intensely in love," says Lensky, good-naturedly. "For the rest, it points to all sorts of things which you have overlooked."

Once again Nikolai wishes to interrupt his father, but without noticing this, the latter continues:

"From all you say, she is much too interesting, much too attractive, for a girl of good family, who lives alone with an ex-favorite governess. And then, from whence comes the mysterious unsimilarity of her mood, the incurable sadness which forms the fundamental tone of her being? Inquire, Colia. If you come upon any trace of an unhappy love, a sad disappointment, then I will own myself satisfied, then all is explained. But if you discover nothing, then--then, be cautious. On the risk of falling completely from your favor, I would wager that she has secretly experienced some fearful shock--in a word, that she has a past."

"It is not possible!" exclaims Nikolai.

"Do not be so violent," Lensky replies. "You are not the first young man who has asserted that. Besides, I will not condemn her. Not the most faultless are the best. Human nature is not different. I would only be naturally very sorry if you, in spite of such a hateful circumstance, still would persist in your resolution."

"You need not fear, father," bursts out Nikolai, harshly. "I would never resolve to marry a dishonored, degraded girl. I would rather kill myself."

"Those are great words," says Lensky.

"They are words which express my convictions. I should not have let myself be drawn into speaking of my feelings to you. You see all in the same light."

"In the light of my experience, Colia, in the light of truth. I cannot help it if the world is as it is. The depth of our whole nature is mire, and nothing but mire!"

"Do not speak so inconsolably, father; I cannot bear it," says Nikolai, quite supplicatingly. "There is much that is beautiful everywhere, also in your life. Think of your art!"

"Of my art?" says Lensky. "Of my art!" he repeats with indescribably bitter emphasis. "Do you

think that I do not know the condition of that? An art whose highest achievement is to rob a few hysterical women of the miserable remnant of respectability which they had. No; the effect of my art--what is left of it--is not calculated to restore me my lost idealism. I am sorry to have pained you; the last evening we should have passed comfortably together. It vexes me not to have learned to know her. If I had seen her, I could have told you exactly whether she is a wife for you or not."

All the time it is to Nikolai as if a cold, slippery monster which he could not shake off sat upon his breast.

"And have you in your whole life never been mistaken in a woman, never too lowly estimated her virtue?" asks he, somewhat sharply.

Lensky looks thoughtfully before him. Suddenly he shudders, then rising, he says, with the tone of a man who would fain break off a useless and painful conversation: "I am cold, Colia; come home. Why thresh mere straw?"

He takes a few steps, then looking in Colia's face, he stands still. "Heavens, how sad you look! Put everything that I have said to you out of your head--everything. I am mistaken; let us agree that I am mistaken, and that I have a quite false view of life. Roses are not rooted in the earth; angels throw them to us from heaven. Believe all that you will, but show me a gay face for farewell!"

He lays his heavy, warm hand on the young man's shoulder; his voice sounds hoarse and broken, while he continues: "Yes, yes, we will agree that I am mistaken, that something beautiful is before you. See, of the three things which were dearest to me, I have crushed two--your mother and my genius. My children are left to me; I wish to see them happy!"

XIII.

The sunbeam which wakes Mascha every morning lies broad and full on the carpet in her bedroom, creeps caressingly on her pillow, strokes her round white cheeks, but she sleeps soundly and sweetly, like a very young child who sleeps heavily after a great grief.

There is a knock at her door, first gentle, then louder. "Maschenka, my little dove, it is I," calls a dear, well-known voice. She does not hear. Softly Lensky turns the knob, hesitates a moment on the sill. He approaches the little white bed; there she lies sleeping so innocently, so peacefully. A touchingly sad expression is on her slightly swollen eyelids, her red lips. How long and thick are the black lashes resting on her cheeks!

"Maschenka--sluggard--lazy-bones!" calls he, teasingly, and strokes her cheeks.

"Ah!" with the short, soft cry of a bird frightened out of its sleep, she starts up. "You, papa!"

"Yes, I--who else? I have knocked twice at your door without any answer. If one sleeps as soundly as you, my little witch, one should certainly bolt one's door."

"Ah! I am not afraid of thieves, only of ghosts, and they creep through key-holes," says Maschenka, laughing, and he laughs and strokes her cheeks.

"Childish one!" murmurs he.

"How dear, how beautiful that you came!" says she, tenderly, and presses her lips to his hand.

"And did you think that I would go away without taking leave of you?" asked he.

She turns her head slightly away from him. "Ah! I did not know," murmured she. "How should I? Yesterday I no longer knew whether you really loved me. You were so busy with all those insolent women who swarmed around you. Ah! papa, how can you associate with that rabble?"

"That does not concern you at all," says he, looking at her quite harshly, while he this time, as his old custom was, conceals his embarrassment behind defiant obstinacy. Then he notices the significant traces of the difficultly vanquished sadness of the past night in the little childish face, and when Maschenka, frightened at her father's roughness, starts anxiously and shyly, the greatest anxiety overcomes him. "How pale you are, my angel; is anything the matter?"

"No, papa--no--only--I was ragingly unhappy yesterday, and then I dreamed so horribly."

"What then?"

"It was oppressive; and I was followed by a horrible monster, and when I called to you, you were busy with--with other strange men, and did not look round--and in my mortal fear I called to mother--in my dream I had forgotten that she is dead--and then I awoke."

"My poor little dove, my poor, orphaned little dove!" murmurs he. "Who can replace your mother to you? That was a fearful loss. There is no second mother like her."

For a while both are silent, then Mascha asks:

"How long shall you be away?"

"I shall come back to Paris in June."

"Then--then you will be unendingly loving to me again for two days; and after that leave me alone again?"

"No, no; then I give up the wandering life, Mascha. It is the last time. It is only to win a princely dowry for you that I go about the world."

"Father, if you knew how willingly I would resign your wealth!" said she, very softly.

He laughs somewhat constrainedly. "No, no; you must be wealthy. For this time all must remain so; do not make my heart heavy; for believe me that I long greatly for a calm, comfortable home, that it pains me to part with you. You have grown fearfully into my heart, you defiant, tender little curly-head, you! But how long will you stay with me, my little white lamb? Who knows? When I return I will find a dreamy, sentimental Mascha, a quite different----"

"Papa, you will be late!" now calls Nikolai from below.

"Is it time?"

"High time. You will miss the train."

"Adieu, papa!"

He bends over her. She throws both arms round his neck, kisses him, sobbing violently. "Farewell!"

"My heart, my soul," murmurs he. "Write to me very, very often."

He has kissed her again and again; at last he has left her. At the door he turns round to her once more, sees her in the snow-white bed, with her tender, tearful face, with her sun-kissed hair, breathes once more the atmosphere of the room slightly perfumed with violets. Carrying away with him an impression of childish purity and innocence, he goes out.



Two or three days after the elder Lensky's departure, Mascha, who is busy dressing for dinner, is told that a large package has been left for her. Immediately suspecting what it is, she summons the maid to bring it to her.

"It is a huge package," the maid sighs while she drags it in and lays it down before the chimney in Mascha's room.

"Where are the scissors, Lis, please?" Mascha dances with excitement while she cuts the string in all directions. Her suspicion has not deceived her: the skin of a remarkable bear, with immense head and mighty paws, comes to view. In his horrible open jaws the monster holds a bouquet of white roses and a note as follows:

"A disarmed enemy, Fräulein Marie Lensky, for friendly remembrance of an adventure in Katerinowskoe, and

"Your humble servant,

"K. BÄRENBURG."

Beside herself with delight, Mascha immediately hurries into Anna's room, and with sparkling eyes calls out:

"Anna, Anna, please come--see--Count Bärenburg--he has----"

"Well, what about him?" asks Anna, indifferently.

"He has sent me the bear-skin, you know, the skin of the bear which almost strangled Colia. It must have been a splendid bear. It has a head--a head----"

"Ah! that is very nice," replies Anna, without moving. "But I beg you, hurry a little with your dressing, and another time do not run into the hall with floating hair and in your dressing-sack, like a prima donna in the fifth act."

"H-m, she is jealous!" thinks Mascha. And shrugging her shoulders, with a triumphant smile on her fresh lips, she returns to her room, where she first completes her interrupted toilet, then crouches on the floor and sinks herself in contemplation of the bear.

Then Anna comes in to her--Anna, with quite a changed, sweet face. "Vinegar with sugar, we know that," thinks Mascha to herself, without rising from her strange position.

"Ah! that is the skin," says Anna, with condescending interest.

"Yes," says Mascha, slowly rising, with a humorous, quite childish impertinence, which would have forced a laugh from every unprejudiced spectator. "That is the skin, those are the flowers, there is the note."

"And you, indeed, take that for a proof of great admiration?" lisps Anna.

Mascha nods defiantly.

"You are very inexperienced, my little Mascha," says Anna. "You always have such a hostile manner to me that it is unusually hard for me to--h-m! how shall I express myself?--give you the enlightenment which in a certain manner, as your relative, I owe you. You do not know men as I do, dear child."

"Have you had very sad experience in this direction, poor Anna?" sighs Mascha, compassionately.

"I have had no experience, but I have observed," says Anna. "Bärenburg is a man from whom one must guard one's self. He has a new flame every moment, whom he overwhelms with the most poetic attentions until--one day he no longer greets her on the street. I am very sorry to diminish your pleasure, but I must warn you."

"H-m!" says Mascha, in the same tone of humorous impertinence; and copying Anna's glance with photographic exactness, she says: "My dear Anna, would you like very much to marry Count Bärenburg yourself? *Seniores, priores*--I withdraw."

"One cannot speak to you," says Anna, and rises, blushing with anger. But Maschenka holds her back; her impertinence suddenly truly pains her. How indelicate it was to reproach Anna with her age! As if she could help it! "Anna," says she, cordially, "I did not mean badly; I only wanted to laugh. But tell me, I will not repeat it, do you like Count Bärenburg? I will certainly not stand in your way."

Instead of being touched by this childish sacrifice, Anna stares arrogantly at her cousin from head to foot. "I can, perhaps, put up with your rivalry," says she. "Calm yourself, *moutarde après dîner, ma chère!* If I had wished to marry Bärenburg, I could have had him this autumn in Spaa. He is as indifferent to me as that"--with a snap of her fingers. "But show me your hands; *comme vous avez les ongles canailles.* I always tell you you should not practise so much; you already have nails like a professional pianist--*c'est très mal porté.*"

The Jeliagins have paid Mascha a little attention. To-day, at lunch, she found on her plate a box-ticket for the Porte St. Martin. It has long been her most ardent wish to go to the theatre.

"You can invite Sonia and Fräulein von Sankjéwitch. Nikolai will accompany you. It would be better that you dine with Fräulein von Sankjéwitch," proposes her aunt, "if that suits you."

"Oh, it suits, naturally it suits!" cries Mascha, and springs up to embrace her aunt.

"Do not make so much of this trifle," says Madame Jeliagin, a trifle ashamed. "It is not worth the trouble. I rack my brains often enough to think how one can amuse you. But with girls like you, who are too old to play with dolls, too young to go into society, it is hard."

"Am I, then, really too young, auntie? I was seventeen the fifth of last December," says Mascha, looking longingly and coaxingly at Barbara.

Barbara Jeliagin is silent with embarrassment, but Anna speaks. "Your age alone is not the thing. You have no *tenue*, are not sufficiently lady-like. You must accustom yourself to more repose and self-command before one can think of taking you into society without fearing to be embarrassed by you."

This kind remark Mascha receives silently, but with burning cheeks.

Madame Jeliagin, who has learned quite against her will to love Mascha, perhaps because Mascha's obliging lovability is the only bit of sunshine which has warmed her for years, pats her kindly on the shoulder, and says: "It is not so dreadful. To be old and sedate is no art; that comes of itself."

And Mascha wipes the tears from her eyes, and again is happy over her ticket, inquires what she shall wear in honor of this festive occasion, and is only sorry that one visits the Porte St. Martin in street costume.

The box ticket is for the next evening. All arranges itself splendidly.

Nita and Sonia dine with the brother and sister in the Avenue Murillo. The little dinner is excellent and Colia happy. But after the meal, when they are about to break up, Mascha notices that she has left her opera-glass at home. Great despair! Sonia has none, and Nita's is really not enough for three shortsighted persons. They decide to take the roundabout way through the Avenue Wagram and get the glass.

"I will come immediately; I will not keep you waiting a moment," says Mascha, gayly. But scarcely has she entered the hall when she perceives that something unusual is going on. The vestibule is brilliantly lighted, several ladies' wraps and men's overcoats are there. Mascha's large eyes become gloomy. "And I thought they wished to give me a pleasure," thinks she, angrily. "They only got me out of the way because they were ashamed of me." Then, turning to the servant who appears, she asks ruthlessly, directly:

"Who is dining here?"

"The Ladies Anthropos, Count Bärenburg, Monsieur d'Eblis, Prince Trubetzkoy----"

But Maschenka hears no more. "Bärenburg!" her passionate heart beats loudly. "*Moutarde après dîner* it may be; but, in any case, Anna seems not to so lowly estimate my insignificant youthfulness as rival, as she acts thus," thinks she to herself. "But we will see, Anna, we will see!" And Maschenka sets her teeth and clenches her tiny fist.

XV.

The next morning she makes a great scene for her aunt and cousin, reproaches them violently and with bitter tears for that she is unlovingly pushed about and repressed, that she plays the

rôle of a Cinderella in their house; that she cannot endure living with people who do not love her, etc.

Barbara Alexandrovna bows her head with shame at these reproofs. Anna, on the contrary, opposes the anger of her passionate, excited cousin with icy calm.

"Before all," she begins, "I would beg to remark to you that we are not at all obliged to put up with your rudeness. I do not condescend to answer your ill-bred accusations, for I think without that you will be ashamed of them in a calmer frame of mind. But for the rest, I tell you very plainly, if life with us does not suit you, you can take refuge in a boarding-school."

If Mascha had possessed shrewdness enough to declare herself agreed with the plan of boarding-school, it would have placed the Jeliagins in great embarrassment, on account of the pecuniary aid which they received from Mascha's stay with them. But she did not think of that. A boarding-school is for her something horrible--a prison, where she must give up all possibility of seeing Bärenburg again. And so she submits, shyly, shame-facedly.

When they tell her that, for the third time this week, she is to dine alone, she takes it with such sad, helpless submission that it pains her aunt, and she proposes to ask Nikolai to share her solitary meal; perhaps he may be disengaged.

"Yes, that would be nice," says Mascha. And completely reconciled with her fate, she sends a message to her brother, forms the most delightful plans--then comes her brother's answer.

"DEAR HEART:--Just received a despatch from Aunt Katherine. Uncle Sergei is ill, desires me urgently. I must leave by the 3.25 train. Have not even time to take leave of you. Unfortunate for our cosy evening. God keep you, my little dove; be brave and prudent for love of me, and also for your own sake. Write me all that is on your heart, every little annoyance which weighs upon you. If you ever need immediate advice, go to Sonia and Fräulein von Sankjéwitch, who both love you. I kiss and embrace you.

"Your faithful brother,

"COLIA."

"Is there nothing but unpleasantness in the world?" sighs Mascha, upon receiving this note. "But still, what use to torment one's self?"

After she has devoted perhaps fifteen minutes to the deepest sorrow, she runs singing about the house, and makes gay little jokes.

Now it is evening, and they stand in the vestibule and await the carriage--Anna and aunt; Anna with her regal bearing and carelessly trailing draperies; Barbara with her nervous anxiety and scant, short dress.

"What lace is that around your neck?" calls out Anna, angrily, looking at her mother through her *lorgnon*. "Did you buy that fichu on the Campo dei Fiori? It is grotesque! You look like a stage mother."

Barbara pulls uneasily at her fichu and drops her purse.

"Wait, auntie, I have such wonderful lace of mamma's up-stairs," says Mascha, who until now has been sunk in childish admiration of Anna's ice-cold blond beauty and white *crêpe de Chine* splendor. "Only a moment, auntie, I will bring it immediately." And she rushes up-stairs and returns in a minute with sewing utensils and a box smelling of *Peau d'Espagne*. "See, you must put on this scarf, auntie."

"We will call the maid," proposes Madame Jeliagin.

"Ah, no! I will do it myself. You will be beautiful at once, now, auntie," says Mascha, while she removes the shabby ornament condemned by Anna and replaces it with splendid old point lace.

"See, so; mamma wore it so. No, not the old mosaic brooch; here, take my pin." And Mascha drags it from her neck. "Oh, how that becomes you! Look in the glass, and see how pretty you are. Only a few stitches to make it firm. Is it not nice so, Anna?"

"*Mais oui, très bien*," Anna lets fall from her thin lips.

The servant announces the carriage. Madame Jeliagin becomes uneasy. "Now we are ready." And Mascha springs up from the floor, where she has knelt to fasten one end of the lace to her aunt's girdle. Then the servant gives them their wraps, Anna's red embroidered one, another of the unpaid-for articles which her mother has begged from the dressmaker with tears, and Barbara's old-fashioned shabby mantle, and they go.

But at the door Barbara turns round. Her flabby, wrinkled, painted face twitches a little, and taking Maschenka's head between both hands she kisses the girl on the forehead.

"My good child!" murmurs she, "my dear good child, I am very sorry that you must pass your evening alone. We will try to come home soon."

"How you smell of benzine, mamma!" Maschenka hears Anna say, as they get into the carriage.

Maschenka had taken no further notice that the hands which had caressed her were incased in cleaned gloves. It was so lovely to be a little bit caressed.

Mascha has eaten her solitary dinner. Afterward she played a little, improvised all sorts of droll, charming nonsense. About ten o'clock--they have just brought the tea to her--she hears the house-door open. Have they returned already? No; that is a visitor, a well-known voice--he. How unpleasant, just to-day, when no one is at home! Then the maid--a new one who has been engaged for Mascha and works for Anna--opens the door. "Count Bärenburg," she announces, with her insinuating, theatrical smile. "Does mademoiselle receive?"

Before she really knows what she does, Mascha says, "Yes."

Scarcely has she spoken the word when she would like to recall it. She knows that it is not permissible from a social standpoint for her to receive him, but for eight days she has longed so unspeakably to see him again, to thank him for the bear-skin, and then, why was Anna so hateful to her?

He enters, very handsome, very distinguished, very respectful. She forgets all the *traits d'esprit* prepared for him, and as if paralyzed with shyness, she stammers:

"My aunt is not at home; had you perhaps a message for her which I can deliver?" And with a charmingly diffident gesture she stretches out her hand to him. He takes it in his, holds it a moment longer than is absolutely necessary.

"Do you find it absolutely necessary to send me away again?" asks he.

Ah! she feels so happy in his presence. "At least not before I have expressed my thanks for your gift," she stammers.

Bräenburg, to whom it would be indescribably vexatious to be forced to break off his conversation with this strange, interesting little being, seeks some pretext to prolong his visit. His glance falls on the tea apparatus.

"Would your thankfulness go so far as to give me a cup of tea?" he remarks, and adds with genial inspiration: "Perhaps your aunt will return meanwhile."

"Yes; aunt said she would soon return," assured Mascha, gayly. The situation is justified; how happy she is to dare keep him there, were it only for a quarter of an hour.

She gives him his tea, he sits down in an arm-chair near the chimney opposite her. A deep silence follows. In vain does she try to find something suitable to the occasion in her carefully collected hoard of intellectual anecdotes. At length she says simply: "It must have been a splendid bear."

"Yes," replied the count. "It also was Russian boldness to creep into the thicket after the beast. Poor Nikolai, how the brute had cornered him! Really, I owed him the skin; but as I know him, he is always ready to share the best of everything with his little sister."

"Yes; he spoils me very much," says Mascha, moved. "I shall miss him fearfully--fearfully. You know, perhaps, that he has left the city to-day. You cannot think how unpleasant it is for me to be so quite alone."

"Alone?" repeated he.

"That is--well, yes, I am with relatives," Mascha hastens to explain. "Aunt is very good to me, but I cannot warm to my cousin; I do not like her. She is very beautiful, but intolerable. And you, Count Bärenburg, how do you find Anna?"

"She has a very decorative effect," says he, dryly. "She reminds me of an aloe, she is so stiff and pointed. She would do very well on a terrace."

"I am only surprised that she has not yet married," remarks Mascha, very pleased at Bärenburg's cool description of Anna's charms.

"I am not at all surprised," replies he. "I have often noticed that these acknowledged beauties usually marry very late. They are like the too beautiful apples on the dessert dishes, which remain because no one has the courage to reach for them. And then, finally, to kindle a flame one must have somewhere a spark about one; and your cousin is of ice."

"Yes, that is true," laughs Mascha; then, restraining herself, she adds: "But I really should not speak so of my nearest relatives to a stranger. I--I always forget that you are a stranger; you seem to me like--a friend."

He smiles at her, and says softly: "When I so soon feel such warm sympathy for any one as for you, it seems to me as if we had long been good friends in heaven, and had found each other again on the earth."

"Really?"

"Certainly," says he, earnestly. "I can distinctly remember our acquaintance up there. You were a lovely, gay, half-grown little angel, with short, unformed wings, with which you could not yet majestically sail about in the air, but only helplessly flutter a little. But every one loved you, and all the other angels were jealous of you. Then--now the affair becomes considerable; shall I go on?" he smilingly interrupts his improvisation.

"Oh, yes, yes, please," begs she. She looks charming, leaning back in the immense chair, with curious, friendly gay expression in the eyes fixed on him. "Yes, yes, please!" And unconsciously she makes a movement as if she would push the chair nearer the young man.

"Well," Bärenburg continues, "one day the devil presented himself in Paradise and demanded you for himself. He said you were his property, and had only by chance got into Paradise. We did not want to give you up, but as it could not be agreed upon, it was decided to send you back to earth so that you might make a second decisive trial of life and show whose being you were. I was so frightfully bored without you that I hurried down to earth to seek you."

"How droll you are!" says Maschenka, laughing loudly and childishly, and again she makes a movement as if she would draw nearer to him. "And do you think that I will go back to heaven?"

"I hope so." Meanwhile the clock strikes--eleven.

Maschenka suddenly grows red. "How long aunt stays!" murmurs she, and rises.

Bärenburg also rises. "I really cannot longer wait for the ladies," says he in an undertone, and gives her his hand. She sinks her head.

"I--I really should not have received you," stammers she with confusion.

"Why not?" says he, impatiently.

"No, I know it--but--" and suddenly raising her head, she looks at him from a pair of such wonderful, tearfully bright eyes that his senses swam--"but, I so longed to speak to some one who sympathizes with me a little," whispers she.

The whole pitiful neglect of the poor child dawns upon him, and a great compassion overcomes him. "You really need not fear being misunderstood by me," says he. "Oh! if you only had a suspicion of how lovely you are-- Good-night. And if you ever need a man who would go through fire for you, you know where to seek him."

He kisses her hand tenderly, passionately, and goes.

Long after he has gone Maschenka stands on the same spot, frightened, paralyzed, and looks at her hand.

A little later she goes up to her room.

"Has mademoiselle amused herself well?" asks the maid, while she helps her undress. "I was so sorry that, mademoiselle must pass the evening alone. Naturally, I will say nothing of it to madame."

"And why not?" burst out Mascha, violently.

"Oh! as mademoiselle wishes. I only thought---"

"I shall tell aunt myself that Count Bärenburg was here," says Mascha, defiantly. "And now go!"

In the midst of all her tender-heartedness she has fits of harsh, repellant roughness, which, like so much about her, are an inheritance from her father.

With loosened hair, half undressed, she sits before the fire, with her bare feet resting on the bear-skin. "Ah, it was lovely!" A great embarrassment robs her of breath. Again she looks at her hand. "He loves me!" And suddenly an uneasiness, something like dissatisfaction, creeps over her. Why had he not immediately told her that he loved her? Why had he not drawn her to his breast and kissed her?

She kneels down on the bear-skin, draws the shaggy head of the beast to her breast, and kisses it on the forehead.

"Why are you so out of temper; is anything the matter?"

This question Karl Bärenburg hears to annoyance in the days which follow his visit in the Avenue Wagram. And old friend even asked him: "Have you gambling debts? Confide in me."

He looks badly, and his manner is absent-minded.

He does not show himself in the Avenue Wagram. The recollection of the scene with Mascha is painful to him. He repeats to himself incessantly that he has behaved perfectly correctly, that every other man would have taken the situation differently. He would have given his life for a kiss, and—really, she would not have fought against it. To have renounced that was an heroic deed which bordered on quixotism. Why, then, was he not satisfied with himself?

He was not a bad, but only a weak, wavering man, a man without any originality, who, of his own inclination, had courage neither to do anything good nor bad which was not on the fixed programme of life of his companions in rank.

Still, he had fallen desperately in love with this little Russian. It was really fatal, for he could not marry her. In principle he was resolved to marry, to marry soon; he was urged on all sides to marry. What could he wish better than Sylvia Anthropolos? She was beautiful, wealthy, of very good family, and, more than all this, she was wise, practical, and possessed the strength of will which he lacked. She would take the responsibility of his existence upon herself, think for him, act for him, resolve for him. There had formerly been a time when he was one of her most ardent admirers. She had refused him, but that was long ago, full three years, and in the life of a young diplomat that is an eternity. She had done her best to recompense him for her former unkindness and win him back; but the charm was gone. He knew that if he offered her his hand to-day it would not be refused. But never had he felt such a warm feeling for any one as for Mascha. With all her unconventional impulsiveness, her lack of restraint and social routine, her physical and moral personality was yet penetrated by such a subtle refinement! Shame, eternal shame! Well, he did not need to decide to-day or to-morrow. Perhaps it would pass. Before he had made up his mind he courted Sylvia Anthropolos, and in a sympathetic hour, in the Hôtel Meurice, she laughed at him quite unexpectedly, and suddenly resting her large eyes very seductively upon him, she said: "You good, faithful, stupid man! Can you then never find courage to tell me that you love me?"

When, about an hour later, he left the Hôtel Meurice he was betrothed, and carried away with him a comfortable feeling of general satisfaction with himself. At least, all was now settled!

Between his betrothal and the moment when he had murmured to Mascha, "If you ever need a man who would go through fire for you, you know where to seek him!" scarcely five days had elapsed!

XVI.

Among the different returns of attention which the Jeliagins' musicale have brought them, come several invitations to a large charity ball in the Hôtel Continental. Anna is not disinclined to attend it, but has already been invited for the same evening to a dance. But Mascha is going with Madame d'Olbreuse, who, at the last moment, has good-naturedly offered to take her with her.

It is against custom to take such a young girl to this ball; but what is not against custom in Mascha's loveless, unprotected existence?

Mascha, who has passed the last days in feverish expectation of Bärenburg's proposal, looks forward with a kind of feeling between hope and fear to this ball. Perhaps he will be there. "But will he trouble himself about me?" she asks herself.

Ah! what does it concern her? He is quite indifferent to her, she persuades herself—quite, however little she can understand him. Who could? How can one say such feeling words to a girl, look at her with such tender enthusiasm, kiss her hand as he had kissed Mascha's, and then suddenly disappear, and for eight long days let nothing be heard of him? It is incomprehensible. "Perhaps he thinks that with a child like me he can permit himself anything," says she to herself, "but I will show him that he has deceived himself in me. I wish he would be at this ball, only that I might show him how little I think of him, how arrogant I can be!"

Meanwhile she prepares for the ball, and takes the greatest pains about her toilet. As, since Nikolai is gone, no one has time to accompany her, she drives about the boulevards alone, and makes the wildest purchases. In the midst of her preparations she takes a trip to the Avenue Frochot, where she is always a welcome guest in Nita's studio.

With no one is she on such a good footing as with Nita, whom she clings to with a kind of idolatry, and--Nita returns her affection. Sonia is consumed with jealousy when she sees her friend, formerly not at all inclined to exaggeration, caressing the dear little witch.

On the evening of the great event, Mascha puts on the same white dress which she had worn in honor of her social *début*, and places a wreath of loosely fastened pink anemones on her head. That this adornment, which she herself thought of and which became her excellently, was a trifle too picturesque for a young girl of good family she does not suspect, and who should direct her attention thereto? The Jeliagins have already gone their own way, before she had begun to dress, and Madame d'Olbreuse, when she comes to get Mascha, does not leave her carriage, but merely sends her servant to announce that she is waiting.

They have reached the Hôtel Continental. In the vestibule a gentleman comes up to the Countess d'Olbreuse, some vicomte, who is introduced to Mascha, bows to her, and troubles himself no further about her. He offers the Countess his arm; she looks around for a cavalier for Mascha, but finds none.

"Keep by me, dear child," says she, taking the Vicomte's arm. And so, somewhat ashamed and vexed, as an accidental dependant of the Countess, Maschenka enters.

People like the Countess visit such entertainments from curiosity, from a wish to admire the arrangements and criticise the people.

She walks through all the rooms on the arm of her cavalier, and from time to time turns round to Maschenka with a "Are you here, my child?" Whereupon her companion shows her something droll, and she immediately forgets Mascha again.

The heat is stifling, the crowd fearful. At first Maschenka takes pleasure in shyly looking at herself in the mirrors along the walls, then no longer--her eyes meet such a weary, disappointed little face, with such a vexed, gloomy look.

"Now you have shown me enough foolishness. I should like at length to see something beautiful," says the Countess, petulantly, to her companion.

"Do you really wish to see something beautiful--the most beautiful thing ever created?" replies the Vicomte. "A beautiful woman. Then you must come with me into the patronesses' room."

"Oh, clear, no; I know all the ladies; they would immediately take possession of me, and there would be an end of my independence for the rest of the evening."

"At least take a peep through the door," the Vicomte proposes. "There, the lady under the palm near the statue--an Englishwoman, one sees at the first glance--blonde, and in a white gown."

Mascha puts up her *lorgnon*, looks into the room.

There, near the statue, in a white toilet slipping far down from her shoulders, sits Sylvia Anthropos with her imperial diadem of reddish curls, her short, antique upper lip, her large dark eyes, her golden eyelashes, and finely pencilled eyebrows.

The regular faultlessness of her features is to-day warmed by an expression unusual to her. She holds her head somewhat bent back, and looks up--to whom? Mascha feels something like a cold, hard blow on her heart.

There, leaning against the pedestal of the statue, speaking to the beautiful Englishwoman, stands Karl Bärenburg. Now he raises his eyes, discovers Mascha, starts perceptibly, and turns his eyes away from her.

An hour has passed since then.

Maschenka is one humiliation richer. The only man who has asked her to dance was her Italian teacher, Signor Supino. Besides, a wealthy leather dealer has offered her his arm for a promenade. Poor Supino she dismissed with a harshness which later pains her, but her strength and resolution did not suffice to shake off the leather merchant. He had met Mascha a single time in Nita's studio, and treats her as if she were his niece.

At length she is rid of him. With convulsive resolution she clings to an old, white-haired American, whom she knows as the father of one of the scholars in the Sylvain studio. His daughter is waltzing in the ball-room, the Countess d'Olbreuse is waltzing. Maschenka sits with Mr. Cornelius Merryfield in the prettiest room, a winter garden with artificial moonlight and rocks; sits there weary, sad, and lets the old man explain to her the narrow influence of the North American Quakers.

Suddenly she hears a voice near her say: "At last! I have sought you already for half an hour!" It is Bärenburg.

All the blood in her body rushes to her heart. She has but the one thought, not to let him

notice how much she cares for him, to be as indifferent to him as possible.

"Ah, really! Then Miss Anthropos has already left the ball half an hour ago?" says she, slowly, raising her brows, whereupon, turning to Mr. Merryfield, she asks: "Did you know President Lincoln?"

"Have the kindness to introduce me," interrupts Bärenburg, irritably.

"Count Bärenburg--Mr. Merryfield," says she, shortly; and still turned toward Mr. Merryfield, she continues: "I heard once that when an Englishman, in conversation with Lincoln, let fall a French phrase, the latter remarked that he did not understand Greek. Do you think that possible?"

"It may be," says Mr. Merryfield, with an uneasy glance at the door. "I do not understand what keeps my daughter so long; she promised to only dance one waltz. Permit me to go and look after her a little."

"But, Mr. Merryfield, I promised Countess d'Olbreuse to wait here for her," says Maschenka, very excited, and catching him by the sleeve.

The American looks helplessly at Bärenburg. "You see that you must put up with my protection, Fräulein," says the latter, whereupon the two men bow formally, and Mr. Merryfield withdraws.

Then she is alone with him in the green twilight of the winter garden,--as good as alone. Truly, from time to time people pass by the young couple, men with ladies and alone, but they are people who know neither him nor her.

Here, in the pale pseudo-moonshine of the electric lights, her beauty has a quite magical effect. The mixture of pride and sadness in her manner, the poetic unusualness of the arrangement of her hair, the pink wreath, on whose bloom lies already a touch of sad weariness, the dark green background, against which her white child's face stands out--all unite in heightening the charm of her fantastic, peculiar loveliness.

For a while both are silent, he and she. At length he begins: "In my whole life, a week has never passed so slowly as the last."

"Indeed! I find it, on the contrary, very short. In my monotonous life one day follows the other before one perceives it."

"Do you not go out at all?" asks he.

"No; my aunt says I am too young to go out in society; my cousin says I have too bad manners; in consequence of which I stay at home," says she, to a certain extent dropping the superior *rôle* which she childishly and defiantly has planned for herself.

"Your cousin speaks nonsense, and if your aunt really thinks you too young to go out, she should not send you to such a ball as this one."

"Is it an unsuitable ball?" asks Mascha, quickly.

"No; but it is a ball which such a young girl as you does not visit with a superficial chaperon like Countess d'Olbreuse. If one of the patronesses had taken you with her, it would be quite different."

"The patronesses?" Mascha shrugs her shoulders. "The patronesses are great ladies, with whom I have nothing to do; I am no one, only papa's daughter." Her voice trembles a little. "That does not count here in foreign parts; Anna tells me so every day. I did not know it; it was certainly very necessary, but it pained me." She fans herself with her large fan, and smiles as one smiles to keep from weeping.

Bärenburg pulls his mustache.

"And except your cousin, have you no one in Paris who is near to you?" he begins anew.

"Yes, one--one person whom I love with my whole heart," says Mascha, with the exaggeration to which hurt and vexed people are always inclined. "She is sweet to me. It is your cousin, Fräulein von Sankjéwitch."

"Do you ever go to the studio?"

"Yes," says Mascha, shortly.

"H-m! Will you be there to-morrow morning?"

She throws back her little head, looks at him from her dark eyes with unspeakable, reproving pride, and says: "No!"

A longer silence follows. He knows that she was justified in repelling him; knows that he acts unresponsibly to her. This consciousness only assists in robbing him of his self-control. He loves her passionately, unspeakably. He must have her, only her. More and more the recollection of his betrothal shrinks to a purely theoretical hinderance which can and shall be removed.

Then a large, bearded man comes up to Mascha, a man with round shoulders and the insolently careless manner of men of good family who have long moved in dubious circles of society. His eyes are watery, his lips twitch, while bowing to Mascha, he says in French: "Do you remember me, Miss Marie?"

"Prince Orbanoff," replies Mascha, affirmatively, nodding cordially, "from Nice."

Behind the Russians stand two young men who have admired Mascha with unconcealed boldness, and watch the scene.

"May I ask for this waltz?" stammers the Russian.

With the greatest readiness Mascha rises.

"You forget that you are already engaged to me," Bärenburg interposes.

"You are entirely mistaken, Count," replies Mascha arrogantly, and takes a step toward the Russian.

"For Nikolai's sake, listen to me, do not dance," Bärenburg whispers in her ear.

Softly, hastily, and in a strange language as the words were whispered, the prince still has heard them.

"May I ask who the young man is who so insolently wishes to influence your resolve?" he asks Mascha, with still more difficult utterance, and his red face becomes yet redder.

Bärenburg draws out his card and hands it to him; at the same moment the Countess d'Olbreuse comes up to her.

The Russian has disappeared. "Have you entertained yourself well, my child?" says she. "I have danced *comme une perdue*; it is not suitable for a woman of my age. Now we can go, the ball begins to be too amusing."

Silently, laying the extreme tips of her fingers in Bärenburg's offered arm, Mascha follows the Countess and her cavalier into the ante-room.

Suddenly she raises her head. "Why did you prevent me from dancing with the Prince?" she asks in an angry tone.

"First, he was intoxicated; secondly--but that you do not understand-- secondly, he has such a horrible reputation that I would rather see my sister dance with a clown from the circus ring, for example, than with him. To dance with Orbanoff at a public ball when you had not moved your foot before, and at two o'clock in the morning, would be something so fearful, so ambiguous, so--well, I would rather have my right arm cut off than let you do it."

They now stand in the ante-room. Bärenburg takes Mascha's wrap from the servant and lays it about her shoulders. But Mascha's rage flames stronger than ever. More than before she feels the need to pain him, to injure him, to insult him.

"So you would let your right arm be cut off for me! How easily that is said," mocks she. Then looking him full in the face:

"I am very much obliged to you for your good intentions, but I should have preferred that you had not further troubled yourself with my affairs. I have known the Prince longer than you."

Scarcely has she said these impolite words when she would give everything in the world to recall them. It is too late.

"I was wrong; pardon me," says he, shortly. And taking leave with a deep bow, first of her and then of Countess d'Olbreuse, he retires without another word.

"Now, *ma petite*, come!" says the Countess, looking for her *protégée*. Mascha stands there, pale, petrified, and looks at the crowd in which he has disappeared. He did not once notice that, repenting her rudeness, she had stretched her hand out shyly to him; he did not even look at it.

Yes, she has shown him how little she thinks of him, how arrogant she can be. But now that it is over, she has little pleasure in her heroic achievement; on the contrary, torments herself over it, and would take it back at any price. She suddenly knows that she loves him with all her heart; loves him so that she would die to spare him one pang. And this poor, physically mature, mentally still childish little being suddenly longs for one thing only; namely, to see him very, very soon again in order to expiate her harshness and intolerance.

But how should she see him again? she thought, as in the early morning hours she sleeplessly tossed her curly head here and there on the pillow. After her repellent manner, he would scarcely wish to come to the Avenue Wagram. Ah! why had she not simply rejoiced in him, and let herself be so happy and confidential with him!

XVII.

The following day was a Sunday. When Mascha came home from church, Anna had just returned from a ride in the Bois. The Marquis de Lusignan had come for her early with his horses, and accompanied her in the Bois. Several diplomats had there joined her; they had been attentive to her. She was in the best of humors, and so hungry that she did not take time before lunch to take off her habit, but sat down to the table in it.

Anna told of her ride, of the leaps she had taken, of the enthusiasm she had excited, and that she certainly must have a new habit from Wolmerhausen. Maschenka listened with the childish, quite reverential astonishment which the elder cousin always caused in her when she told of the triumphs she had achieved in the great world.

"Did you see Bärenburg at the ball?" asked Anna, suddenly, turning to her.

"Yes."

"Did he dance with you?"

"No; I did not dance at all."

"That is better," said Anna. "Young girls do not dance at such balls. At such bacchanals in honor of charity, all sorts of things are permitted. Have you a suspicion who the young lady was whom Bärenburg was so attentive to?"

"Miss Anthropos."

"Not she, every one knows her; a new beauty whom nobody knows. It must have been one of his Austrian cousins--a very young girl, exquisitely dressed in white, with a wreath of red flowers on her head. It seems that he had a scene on her account with Orbanoff, whom he would not permit to dance with her. Evidently, it must be a girl who is very near to him, one whom he thinks a great deal of, or else he would not have interfered with the old tiger for her sake. As it seems, Orbanoff has challenged him. It is a bad season for duelling; Monteglin told me that three men of our set have already fallen in a duel since autumn. I felt quite upset, especially as they say Orbanoff is the most unconscientious man and the best pistol shot in Paris. He seems very angry with Bärenburg-- But what is the matter? You are deathly pale. Heavens; if you take the fate of every superficial acquaintance so to heart!"

Anna has retired to her room and lain down. She is invited with her mother to a dinner, and spares her complexion. Another solitary evening for Mascha. But she does not think of that. Only of one thing does she think: "He fights for my sake; fights on account of my arrogant, obstinate lack of tact! Why would I not understand him; why did I not let it pass when he said he was already engaged to me for that dance? But no, I would not let him dispose of me as of an unresisting child, and must show him that I thought nothing of him, and now--oh, my God! now perhaps he will die, and it is my fault."

Uneasily she walks up and down, quicker and quicker. She sees nothing in the future but a horrible, cold void, where he will no longer be, and nothing will be left to her heart but the consciousness that she has offended and misunderstood him, and that he died for her. His death has ceased to be a fearful possibility for her; it is something that must come if she does not prevent it. But how can she prevent it? If Colia were here, she would beg him to arrange the affair, to speak to Bärenburg or Orbanoff.

Oh! there must be some way of escape which he could find. But Colia is away. She cannot longer bear her despair. She must confide in some one, ask advice, seek consolation, or, at least, pity.

She goes down in the drawing-room to speak to her aunt. Her aunt has a visitor, an old Russian friend.

With a kind of rage, she closes the scarcely opened door of the drawing-room, and hurries

back to her room.

A half-hour passes, a desolate, endless half-hour. It is half-past four. Before the house still stands the visitor's cab. Ever more restlessly Mascha wrings her poor little white hands; ever more reproachfully every unkind word that she has said to him comes back to her memory; her heart grows heavier. Oh! if she could only see him, at least beg his forgiveness before he dies! No, he shall not die; she cannot let it happen. Colia's farewell words come to her mind: "If you should ever be in any embarrassment, go to Fräulein von Sankjéwitch."

Yes, she will speak with her; Nita is his cousin, she knows his affairs; Nita will advise, will help.

"Hurry, Eliza, you must go out with me," says she, going into the maid's room. But near the maid stands Anna.

"Must you go out just now?" says she, vexedly; "my dress is not ready. Where are you going?"

"To Fräulein von Sankjéwitch."

"Eliza has not time. You can go the few steps alone."

And she goes alone, fairly runs through the Rue de la Prony, through the Parc Monceau. She pants for breath, there is a ringing in her ears. Now she has reached No. 8 of the Avenue Murillo. She hurries up the steps, rings. The maid opens the door. "The ladies have gone out; they will not be back before evening."

Quite crushed, Mascha stands there in the pretty little ante-room.

"Has mademoiselle any message for the ladies?" asks the maid.

"No, no!" sadly Mascha shakes her head. She trembles in her whole body, rests her hand on a little table on which stands a plate with visiting cards.

Her eyes mechanically dwell on one which lies uppermost:

LE COMTE CHARLES DE BÄRENBURG, ATTACHÉ, ETC. *Avenue de Messine, No. ----.*

Then suddenly a new thought comes to her. Roughly she repels it; she cannot make up her mind to do that. But why not? How cowardly, how small she is! Only a few hours before she had longed for an opportunity to prove to him her love by some painful sacrifice, and now, from foolish fear that people might talk, she suddenly hesitates to do something so simple. The accusations which her father used to hurl at cold, calculating wisdom of the heart, and the scorn with which he condemned women who could not once yield to inspiration, comes to her mind. How does she know what he means by that? She creeps down the steps slowly, as if in a dream. Now she is on the street. An empty close cab comes rolling over the pavement. The coachman looks at Mascha. Irresolutely she stands there; he drives up to her, opens the door, looks at her, with lifted hat, questioningly.

"Avenue de Messine, No. ----," murmurs she, and springs into the carriage.

The coachman dismounts and opens the door. Pale, with gloomy but not at all ashamed--rather proud--resolve in her face, Mascha gets out and goes up the steps. She reads the cards on the doors; there it is! She rings loudly, violently. A servant opens. "Is the Count at home?"

"Yes, but he has company," replies the servant, and looks at her in astonishment. It must certainly be his master's sister, he thinks. She is too young for an adventuress of good society, too unembarrassed; she does not even wear a veil.

"If mademoiselle wishes to go in the dining-room, I will tell Monsieur le Comte," says he, and takes her into one of those gloomy Paris dining-rooms, which even by day must be artificially lighted. The curtains are drawn. The light of a hanging lamp falls over a table on which stand the picturesque remnants of a recently left, abundant dessert.

Suddenly a great confusion and even a painful shame overcome Mascha. Perhaps it is all not true! How can one lunch so gayly if one is in mortal danger? Shyly she turns to the door; she would like to escape. Then Bärenburg enters the room.

"Fräulein--you!" comes from his lips. But even in his startled surprise he speaks softly, evidently from prudence.

She stammers something; her voice is so choked with shame and excitement that he scarcely understands her.

The light of the hanging lamp falls on her deathly pale face, the little, soft, childish face with

the great, tender eyes. Bärenburg grows hot and cold. He is in the pleasantly excited mood in which an excellent meal and a couple of bottles of fine wine place men of his kind. Coming up to her, he bends over her, and taking her hand kindly in his, he says warmly: "You are certainly in some great difficulty in which you wish to turn to me. I thank you for your confidence; you know my life is at your disposal."

She comes to herself a little. "Ah, no!" says she. "It is about you, not about me. They told me that through my obstinacy I had put you in a painful position with Prince Orbanoff--that you are to fight a duel with him. Is that true?"

He is silent a moment, then he says calmly: "Yes, it is true."

"Oh, my God!" she cries out, and then is silent, as if petrified by pain.

His eyes rest on her in indescribable surprise.

"Did you come on that account?" murmurs he, warmly, and kisses her hands again and again. "Oh, you dear, lovely being; and you have forgotten the whole world from anxiety for me! I know no second girl who would be capable of such generosity!"

But she scarcely notices these words, which would once have filled her with pride. "So it is true," she murmurs to herself, "it is true! But it shall not happen. You must give up the duel!"

"That is impossible," replies he, and smiles as one smiles at a pretty child who desires the moon. "My life is at your disposal, but not my honor."

"Oh, heavens! And if you fall it is my fault!" cries she, violently. "But no; I must save your life. Now, how foolish it was of me to turn to you. I must go to Orbanoff. I will write to him, I will beg--When is the duel?"

The affair begins to be unpleasant for Bärenburg. He had not considered of what such a warm-hearted little barbarian is capable when he told her that he should fight for her. Why had he told her? It was overhasty--it was more, was tactless, tasteless. He had not even tried to resist the temptation to excite her tender despair to the utmost. He had succeeded. She is beside herself; she does not know what she is about. At the same time her overstrained nerves give way, she trembles in her whole frame, and with a tottering movement she passes her hand over her temples. Her little fur cap falls from her head. How very beautiful she is!

She staggers.

"Drink a drop of wine," says he, really anxious And taking a silver goblet from the sideboard, he fills it with champagne. Thirsting with inward fever, she places it to her lips, without knowing in her excitement whether she drinks water or wine. He lays his arm round her to support her; he does not as yet think of misusing her confidence.

Then he hears a whispering in the adjoining room, then a quick succession of steps; the entrance door opens and closes. His friends have withdrawn discreetly.

His blood burns in every finger-tip. He has forgotten Sylvia Anthropos, all clear idea of life and its duties has left him.

"Mascha, oh, my sweet little angel! Do you suspect how I love you?" whispers he. "Do not reproach yourself, even if I should die for you; it seems to me beautiful to be able to surrender my life for you. But Mascha, my angel, my treasure, do not grudge me one more happy moment before I die. Maschenka, my darling, my love--one kiss!"

Without hesitating, sobbing, beside herself, with a passionate vehemence of which a few minutes before she had had no suspicion, she throws both arms round his neck.

The Jeliagins had gone when Mascha came home. With deeply lowered head, hurriedly, without looking to the right or left, she went up to her room.

The lamp burned. The young Russian's glance was gloomy and defiant. She held her head high. What had happened had happened, she would not be ashamed of it. She loved him, indeed, and he was in mortal danger.

Why did her heart beat so loudly? Why did the light pain her so? Why was it as if she could never raise her eyes to any one? Aimlessly, with weary steps, she crept about her room. She put out the light and got into bed and turned her face to the wall.

And the hours dragged on and would not end. How long the night was!

Toward morning she fell asleep. She dreamed that her mother came to her bed, in a white dress and with large, beautiful wings, and whispered to her:

"Wake up, wake up, long sleeper; have you forgotten that to-day is your wedding-day? I have come down from heaven to dress you and to bless you!" And then she sprung out of her bed, and

her mother dressed her. Ah! how sweet it was to feel the soft, delicate hands once more about her as formerly! All at once her mother grew uneasy. "I cannot find your wreath," she murmured, and wandered round the room seeking the wreath, and wept bitterly.

"Here it is, little mother, there," cried Mascha, and handed her the wreath which she had worn to the ball. Then the mother was frightened and said:

"Oh, no, that is not your wreath, it is torn and red with shame; hide it, Maschenka, hide it. Your wreath must be white as my wings, and like a crown, so round and firm, a crown of thorns concealed under roses; that is the bridal wreath, thus we bind it for you poor mortals in heaven. I will bring you one from above, and will break out all the thorns for you, my treasure, my darling!" And her mother wished to spread out her wings and ascend, but she could not, her wings were broken. And she looked at Mascha with such large, helpless, sad, deathly, frightened eyes, and then turned away.

"Mother!" cries Mascha, in her sleep; "mother!" She awoke. The sunbeam which waked her every morning penetrated the curtains of her bed.

She hid her face in the pillow and wept.

If it had seemed to Bärenburg, on the evening before the duel, that there could be no more endurable hours for him without Mascha, and as if the betrothal with Sylvia Anthropos, which had been forced upon him, must be broken off at the cost of the roughest brutality even, on the day after the duel, when he lay in bed with a wounded shoulder, he had other views.

The recollection of his adventure with Mascha filled him with vexation, almost with rage. If Mascha had formerly been for him the most peculiarly charming being whom he had ever met, she was now in his eyes nothing more than a pretty, badly watched, badly brought up being, whom in his magisterial Austrian manner he described as a true Russian.

The thought of his astonishing experiences with "young girls" in St. Petersburg came to his mind, and did its share in throwing a distorting light on Mascha's exaltation.

He is vexed at what has happened; more than that, he is ashamed of it; but he denies any obligation to expiate his precipitation by a marriage.

XVIII.

It is the Jeliagins' reception day. As usual, Mascha makes the tea. In vain has she begged to be excused from this to-day. Anna, who hates to do it, would hear nothing of this.

Eight days have passed since she went to him; she is wholly without news of him. Only through strangers has she learned he is wounded, slightly, not dangerously.

Mechanically she fulfils her duty. She looks no one in the face; she does not hear if they speak to her.

The opening of a door, the entrance of a visitor, causes her each time a painful excitement. She does not know who comes, nor to whom she gives tea, nor what the people say. She has the same thought, the same feeling of being plunged in a black, miry abyss in which she can find no ground for her feet.

Sophie and Nita have both come to-day. Nita, who has visited Mascha many times already since Lensky's departure, inquires after her health, and why she has not let herself be seen in the last week.

"How troubled you look to-day," whispers she, taking the child's pale face--they are a little apart from the others--between her hands, "and how pale! Do you want anything, my angel? Are you vexed over anything?"

"No, no; I do not know what you mean," replies Mascha, irritably, and frees herself.

New guests come, Madame Jeliagin desires tea for a lady. Mascha again steps to the samovar.

Suddenly she hears Bärenburg's name.

"Have you seen Countess Bärenburg yet, Madame Jeliagin?" asks a certain Mrs. Joyce.

"No; I did not think that she was in Paris."

"She is only here for a short time," continues Mrs. Joyce; "she has come from Vienna."

"To take care of her son?" asks Madame Jeliagin. "As I hear, he was wounded in a duel."

"Ah! that was nothing; he has already recovered. He indeed still carries his arm in a sling, but I met him yesterday in the Bois. The Countess has come here to her son's betrothal. Bärenburg is betrothed to Sylvia Anthropos."

"Since when?" asks Anna, sharply.

"Since about ten days; Sylvia told me to-day," says Mrs. Joyce.

"You know that the Countess Bärenburg is an Englishwoman."

"Yes, Lady Banbury's sister."

"And Lady Emily Anthropos's cousin," says Mrs. Joyce. "She is charmed with the betrothal--an extremely suitable match. Bärenburg has received a furlough. Day after to-morrow he goes with his mother and the Anthropos to England. The wedding is to be in June."

Then a short, crashing sound--a cup has fallen from Mascha's hand and broken to bits.

"You are intolerably awkward," says Anna. "Fortunately, the cup was empty."

Mrs. Joyce looks up; her eyes rest on Mascha, who looks pitiable. Her lips are blue, she trembles in her whole frame.

"You have a chill, poor child," says Mrs. Joyce, compassionately.

But, blushing deeply, Mascha turns away her face.

"I begged you to let me stay up-stairs, Anna," she gasps out. "You know that I am ill." And, tottering, she leaves the room.

"She is laughable," murmurs Anna. The old Madame Jeliagin is confusedly silent.

Nita and Sophie took leave. "Poor child," remarked Sophie; "how could Lensky leave her with these people? They torment her crazy."

"Wait for me a little, I would like to see her," says Nita, and hurries up-stairs to the door of Mascha's room. She opens it without knocking. Mascha crouches in an arm-chair, trembling, her teeth chattering. "What do you want?" asks she of Nita.

"I was worried about you, my heart," says Nita. She kneels down near the child, and puts her arms round the trembling young form. "Mascha," whispers she, holding the girl closely to her, "tell me--with me you can speak as if I were your mother--are you ill only, or is there something else which torments you?"

But Mascha, who used so tenderly to lean on Nita, pushes her roughly and angrily from her. "Leave me," she cries, "I am ill, I wish to be alone--go!"

Without paying the slightest attention to Mascha's repellant rudeness, Nita holds the girl still closer to her breast. "I cannot see you so silently martyr yourself, such a poor mite of seventeen, who has no one on whose breast she can really cry herself out! Confide in me. Your grief is certainly not worth the trouble. It is only because you shut it up so in your heart that it seems great to you, my pretty little mouse, my dear little bird!" And Nita kisses her on her curly hair, on both eyes.

All at once Maschenka begins to sob, but so convulsively, so hoarsely and gaspingly, as Nita has never heard any one sob before. It goes to her heart.

"How stupid I was!" she thinks, suddenly. "It is Karl Bärenburg's betrothal which pains her. Is it really possible that this fiery, generous little heart wounds itself for the superficial dandy? Poor little goose!"

She no longer urges the girl to confess her sorrow, she only silently caresses her; and when she sees that her caresses only excite the unhappy child instead of calming her, she sadly withdraws.

"You can speak to me as if I were your mother!" The words ring through Mascha's soul. And if her own mother still lived, as if she could confess what tormented her! It is not possible! There must be a mistake somewhere. He cannot be so bad; no man can be so bad!

She seats herself at her writing-table, dips her pen in the ink; but the words will not come. No; she must go to him, see him, speak personally with him. She takes her hat and jacket and hurries

out.

However quickly she made and carried out her resolution to visit him the first time, it is hard for her now. She has taken a thick veil with her, loses her way, takes a carriage and bids it wait on the Place Malesherbes. In the carriage she ties the veil over her face. Now she gets out, gives the driver five francs, and does not wait for him to give her back anything. She notices the strange shake of the head with which he looks after her and turns away.

Now she has retched the No. --- of the Avenue Messine. Her feet are weighted to the ground like lead. Five, six steps she ascends--stands still. A cold shudder runs over her. No, she cannot, she cannot meet him. She turns round, is back in the Avenue Wagram before they have missed her.

XIX.

In the beginning of February, the news of the death of Sergei Alexandrovitch Assanow arrived in Paris. Early in March Nikolai returned to Paris as a wealthy young man wholly independent of his father. His uncle had provided for him brilliantly in his will. Anna Jeliagin and Mascha were wholly excluded. Anna was in despair. Mascha cared nothing about it. She no longer cared about anything--poor little Mascha!

"What have you done with my little bird?" Nikolai had exclaimed when he saw her again for the first time after his return to Paris. Instead of the round-faced child whom he had looked forward to seeing, a weary, sad person had come to meet him, who did not fall jubilantly on his neck, as he was accustomed to from his little sister, but only wearily, quite vexatiously gave him her cheek to kiss. When he wished to fathom the cause of her sadness, she grew angry, quite wild, so that, offended and at the same time frightened, he turned from her, and then--it was perhaps half an hour later, at twilight, and he did not know she was in the room--she crept softly up to him and kissed his hand silently and humbly. That went to his heart more than her rudeness. He wished to take her in his arms and caress her, but she escaped and left the room, with a soft, whimpering cry of pain. He inquired of his relatives whether they suspected the cause of the great change. Madame Jeliagin was silent, troubled. But Anna, with a scornful shrug of her shoulders, told him "Mascha had certainly set her hopes on Count Bärenburg, for her lack of spirits dated from his betrothal to Sylvia Anthropos, which really showed a great imagination, for she could boast of no remarkable attentions on his part."

At first Nikolai was relieved by Anna's explanation. "Such a heartache, which is really no heartache, but an imagined affliction, can be cured with a little distraction and much loving patience," he thought. But whatever he tried to amuse his sister failed.

The child grew daily more pale and miserable; her breath was short, she dragged her feet along. Nikolai consulted a physician. After a few superficial questions he prescribed iron and quinine. She took the medicine patiently, without attaining a favorable result, but when Nikolai proposed to her to consult another learned man, she grew painfully excited, and said: "Wait till father comes." So everything was postponed until then. They expected the virtuoso back early in June.

If he had not been so occupied and self-absorbed, the child's condition would have caused Nikolai more anxiety. But like all lovers, he had grown selfish, and his sharp sight was obscured by passion. The only reality in life, the fixed point about which everything revolved, was Nita. Everything else was of secondary consideration to him.

Had he approached his aim? On the whole he was contented. Nita had greeted him cordially when he appeared in her studio for the first time after his return, and since then had daily been more friendly to him.

He came frequently to the studio, was a kind of privileged guest. He did commissions for the ladies at the color dealers, grew very learned in all technical expressions of the trade. He brought them models from places where respectable women can scarcely go. He soon knew all the models by name; they smiled at him on the streets, and spoke to him when they met him.

At first he had often gone for Mascha before he went to the Avenue Frochot, but it became ever more difficult for him to induce the girl to accompany him. Mascha grew daily more gloomy and reserved. She ate nothing, she neglected her dress. Day by day she sat in the library and read--read everything that she could find, she, who formerly, as a thoroughly well brought up girl, had read only what Nikolai had proposed.

She slept badly, and never without being tormented by fearful dreams, from which she awoke always with the same cry for help on her lips which rang out into vacancy, and was always the same tender word, "Mother!"

That was an old custom. She had suffered from bad dreams from childhood, and had then always called her mother. As long as she had been able, Natalie had risen and gone to the child's bed and petted her, told her all sorts of foolish trifles, until at length she had calmly fallen asleep.

But now all that was over. "Oh, if you had only been with me, mother! Why must you leave me?" sobbed Maschenka often. It was the only reproach she uttered during the long, inconsolable months.

And Nikolai, formerly the tenderest brother, now contented himself with from time to time giving his pale little sister a compassionate caress, and had something more important to do than incessantly to ponder whether unfortunate love for a man whom she had only slightly known could really suffice to so completely change his gay little sister. The only one who thought much about the strange change in her little favorite was Nita. But however she tried, by caresses and persuasion, to win Mascha's confidence, all failed. Maschenka even opposed her with a certain hostility; at least, Nita could ascribe her manner to nothing else, so violently and with such gloomy, irritable obstinacy did she repulse all advances.

And at length Nita also grew weary of knocking at a heart which would not open to her. All went its way. The sun shone, spring blossomed, and Nikolai went oftener and oftener to the Avenue Frochot, just as if a poor little girl were not tormenting herself into despair.

Yes, the world went its way, and Nita and Sophie had all sorts of things to do, for it was an important time for artists, the time for sending to the Salon. Nikolai shared the excitement.

Nita was really an unusual being, and about this time others beside those belonging to her intimate circle began to find it out. The picture which she had prepared for the exhibition had not only received the congratulations of all her colleagues, but had induced M. Sylvain to bring to Nita's studio the best-known art lovers and most famous artists in Paris to pass judgment on her picture.

All were surprised at the young Austrian's achievement. But she shook her head quite vexedly at their extravagant praise. It seemed to her that they were mocking her. It was such a simple picture.

Nikolai was there at the studio when a messenger brought Nita, one afternoon, a note from M. Sylvain, which, having scarcely opened, she handed to Sophie, who read it aloud:

"Vous êtes reçue avec acclamation No. 1. Espère une médaille. SYLVAIN."

Nita grew very pale; she trembled in her whole frame, and began suddenly to cry. This triumph, which he had been the first to prophesy, and which made him proud and happy for her, at the same time made Nikolai's heart very heavy. "She is through and through an artist nature," said he to himself as he observed her great excitement; "much more than she herself knows." And in that he was not mistaken.

Naturally, on varnishing day he was at the Palais de l'Industrie. Not without a certain excitement, he wandered up the great steps between painters, journalists, models, and curious ones. Three times he made the rounds through all the rooms seeking her picture, and as yet he had not found it. But there! Was not that the picture almost concealed by a crowd of admirers and critics? Nikolai found his way through and gazed at the picture. It hung on the middle of the wall, on the line.

For Nikolai naturally the whole Salon was a mere trifle to her picture, and if the admiration of others was of no such large dimension, the success of the picture was still great, decisive.

And Nikolai sat down opposite the picture, listened to every word, every enthusiastic expression, and imprinted them upon his memory so as to tell them to her. He waited for her. She would surely come in the course of the day to see her work. The crowd had not diminished. A critic took notes of it, a painter, with nose close to the canvas, made gestures expressive of his delight at the drawing.

Then Nikolai heard a step, looked round--yes, there she was, tall, slender, with the proud carriage of her head, and her never-to-be-forgotten eyes. The gloomy shadow was still in her eyes, the shadow which never left them. Nevertheless, she enjoyed her triumph, and it became her. She bore it modestly, but still as if it were perfectly natural.

Nikolai had never seen her so charming. She wore a simple, soft, clinging woollen dress, a little bonnet fastened under her chin.

He sprang up. "An immense success," cried he to her. She laid her finger on her lips.

"Please hush, I have no wish to assemble a court of journalists and colleagues about me!" said she in Russian. She spoke in Russian sometimes, and it always pleased Colia to hear her attempt his dearly loved mother tongue.

Then one of the men turned round from her picture. He was a famous critic who knew her. "*C'est elle*," whispered he to the others. Bowing deeply, he stepped up to her and asked if he might introduce several of her particular admirers.

She could not refuse. She was surrounded. Nikolai remained respectfully in the background and watched her. At length she freed herself. He came up to her again.

"Why are you laughing?" she asked him, quite vexedly.

"You look so unhappy," he replied. "I have never seen any one who could have received an ovation with such an expression of mere tolerance."

She sighed and shrugged her shoulders. "H-m! And you perhaps think that I am above such flatteries, that they are wearisome to me?" she asked.

"It had that appearance."

"How appearances deceive!" sighed she, humorously. "No one is more susceptible to flattery than I; but, quite aside from the fact that many of these men said coarse things which they considered compliments to me, the expressions of merely two or three of them were agreeable to me. Men artists with us women artists completely ignore that thus far and no further, that atmosphere of apartness, which forms a convenient barrier between a modest woman and a man. What *sans gêner* their conversation requires; they treat us as men, and that is unbearable."

Nikolai smiled still more. He was indescribably pleased at her unvanquishable maidenly sensitiveness.

She thrust her hands thoughtfully in the pockets of her jacket. "Do not ridicule me," sighed she; "but how agreeable it is to associate with a really well-bred man like you, for instance. One feels that first when one is an artist."

"You are a droll artist," said he, and laughed quite heartily.

She shrugged her shoulders comically, and said: "It seems so to me sometimes."

His heart was in his mouth. Was not that the moment? But before he could have said a word, she turned away her head and said: "Ah! there is Sonia."

Sonia perceived her friend. "Ah! there you are at last," cried she, gayly. "I have sought you for an hour. Your picture is splendid; your success indescribable. You cannot imagine how proud I am of you."

Her true, unselfish enthusiasm became her so well that Nikolai could not help pressing heartily her cordially outstretched hand.

"They are closing," said Nita, and they turned to the entrance.

"A true success, a great success," repeated Sophie to her friend as they went out. "Are you not a little glad, you pale sphinx?"

"Certainly," replied Nita, "certainly I am glad; but I cannot understand it. I would like to give myself a treat after all this past anxiety. Suppose we make an excursion to some of the Paris suburbs. Are you of the party, Monsieur Nikolas?"

And Nikolai's head swam with happiness.

XX.

"Adieu, Nikolai! Adieu, Mascha! Thank you many times. I have enjoyed myself wonderfully, splendidly! Good-night."

It is Sonia's voice on the steps of the house in the Avenue Murillo. She had gone to the theatre with Nikolai and his sister. A month has passed since the opening of the Salon, the whole

wonderful month of May.

On the stair landing stands Nita, who, on account of great weariness, had refused to go with them--a lamp in her hand. Nikolai sees her white face, surrounded with light, over an abyss of blackness. "Good-night, Fräulein," calls he. "Good-night," repeats a hoarse, weary little voice--Mascha's.

Then brother and sister depart, and Sonia hurries up the stairs.

"Did you enjoy yourself?" asks Nita, in her sympathetic, motherly way, while she embraces her friend.

"Splendidly; it was charming," says Sonia, enthusiastically.

"What was the play?"

Sonia is silent a moment, confusedly. "*Les deux Orphelines*," murmured she, hesitatingly, ponderingly. Then she corrects herself. "No, no; how stupid I am! '*Les Pilules du Diable*.'"

And Nita strokes her flushed cheeks laughingly, and kisses her on her eyes. "How pretty you are; you grow prettier every day," she whispers to her.

"Nikolai said that to me to-day also," says Sonia, proudly, and blushes deeply.

"So! And did he not say something more significant?" laughs Nita.

"What should he say?" stammers Sonia. "I do not know."

"What droll people you two are!" says Nita, shaking her head. "To think that this moonlight-twilight has lasted since December. Pardon me, Sonia, but Nikolai is a riddle to me. How can one be so nice, so clever, and at the same time so slow and awkward? How can one need so long a time to bring something from the heart to the lips?"

"How do you know what he has in his heart?" replies Sonia, with a frown, but with only half-repressed joy in her voice. "And now, tell me, have you nothing for me to eat? I am fearfully hungry."

"I was prepared for that; come in our cosey corner."

The cosey corner is a little three-cornered room off of the drawing-room. A piano, a chair almost breaking under its load of music, a single sofa, a large arm-chair, and a little Japanese table, all grouped about a Parisian fire-place, form the furniture.

On the miniature table stands a little repast prepared--a dish of strawberries, sandwiches, little cakes, and, amongst all these delicacies, a sensible silver tea-pot.

"Ah, how nice you are!" says Sonia, pleased. "A mother could not care for me better; I cannot bear to think how horrible it was before I was with you! I live as if in Paradise with you!"

"Did poor little Mascha become at all gayer in the course of the evening?" asked Nita, as she poured tea for her friend.

"No; I am sorry for the child. She looks badly, pale, her face so lengthened and aged. I do not understand how she can take the affair so to heart. She scarcely knew Bärenburg. His wedding must be soon."

"Poor midget!" murmurs Nita.

"Nikolai is very anxious about her," goes on Sonia. "It is touching to see her with him. At every funny part of the piece his eyes rested on her face to see if she would laugh, but she never did."

Nita hands her friend a letter. "From Berlin; it is your father's writing," says she.

Sonia opens it. "Yes, from papa. He is coming here in a day or two; he may be here tomorrow."

"And then you will be untrue to me," says Nita, smilingly. "Have you finished your supper? Do you not wish to retire?"

"No, no; I am not sleepy, and it is so nice to talk," replies Sonia. "Come out on the terrace for a little."

Silently Nita follows. The heavens are cloudless. It is bright moonlight.

"Only think whom I saw in the theatre this evening," begins Sonia. "As you do not know the person, my communication will, alas! lack the impressive effect."

"Well?"

"The most singular woman--a certain Njikitjin."

"Marie Petrovna Njikitjin?" says Nita, who until then has been dreamily looking over the terrace railing. "Is she in Paris?"

"Yes. Do you know her?"

"A little," murmurs Nita.

"I know her well," sighs Sonia.

"How so?" asks Nita shortly, quite cuttingly.

"Papa left me with her before he left Paris."

"That is incredible," says Nita, shocked. "He certainly must know--" She hesitates.

"Naturally, I also wondered at this choice of a protector," says Sonia, evenly.

"At first it was all very well; she only seemed a little peculiar and very untidy. She passed the whole morning in a wrapper, nibbling now at *paté de foie gras*, now at bonbons. In the afternoon she slept, and in the evening she by turns wrote letters and played the piano, especially Beethoven's sonatas. But at the full moon she became terribly abnormal. The whole night long she rushed here and there, wringing her hands, threw herself on my bed, demanded promises of friendship from me, which she returned with the most fiery kisses, and finally--you will not believe it, Nita, and you are the first to whom I tell it, but I still remember the petrified horror which seized me at that time--she confessed to me, minutely, it was in vain to wish to restrain her, her love affair with Lensky!"

"Shameless woman!" murmured Nita, angrily.

"Think of my position," continued Sonia. "How could I free myself? I could not repeat her confession. Then she herself helped me out of the difficulty--in what a manner! Three days after the moonlight scene, she told me, in the greatest excitement, Lensky was to give a concert in Berlin, and asked me to travel after him with her. When I refused, she travelled alone. Heavens! how pale you are! My story has angered you. No wonder; I know what an effect the thing had on me! And only think, Njikitjin had the shamelessness to speak to me this evening as we left the theatre. She wishes to visit me; what do you say to that?"

"She dare not cross my threshold," burst out Nita, with flashing eyes. "That is what I say."

"When did you, then, learn to know her?" asks Sonia, confidentially.

"I? As a very young girl in Vienna. I visited her then for a short time," says Nita, tonelessly.

"And have you never met Lensky at her house?"

"Yes, certainly."

"You never told me that," says Sonia astonished. "Why should I?" says Nita, very harshly. "It is no pleasant recollection."

When Sonia again looks round for Nita, she has vanished. She is about to hurry after her. Then she hears a voice from below call: "Good-night, good, good-night!"

"Good-night, Colia," says Sonia, joyfully, as answer.

"Is it you?" calls Nikolai, slowly, disappointedly.

"Whom else should it be?" asks she, frightened, fearfully. And softly whispering, she repeats: "Who--who----"

Yes, it is Nikolai, haunting the Pare Monceau at midnight. After he had taken his sister home, he had returned to the park to look up at Nita's windows.

He stands before a decisive point in his life. The sudden illness of the Russian diplomat in Washington has caused him to be sent there. He is advanced from attaché to second secretary.

Time presses. Affairs must be quickly decided; before his departure he must have spoken to Nita.

But if his happiness should escape him now, at the last moment; if he frightens it away by some foolish, violent word!

On the other hand, if she says yes! His heart beats high. He builds the most fantastic air castles, and, charmed by his own fancies, he says to himself: "How beautiful, ah, how beautiful!"

And around him the spring dies and the blossoms fall--fall--they all fall!

XXI.

It is Sunday. In the midst of the little English Catholic chapel in Paris kneels Nita, her face in her hands. When mass is over, without waiting to greet any acquaintances, she returns home. She looks pale, has evidently slept badly. The shadow in her eyes is darker than ever. Sadly her eyes wander over the park. "Spring is dead," says she. And suddenly--she had thought it long past, but the conversation with Sonia revived the painful remembrance anew--she thinks of that time, six full years ago, when, in a sweet, dreamy May night, quite like yesterday, a sultry hurricane had killed the spring of her young, pure, sensitive life with all its poetic enthusiasm and Heaven-aspiring, jubilant exuberance.

And with this recollection, the old, never fully vanquished horror of life has again awakened in her, that terrible, all-consuming, all-degrading horror which must forever exclude her from every sweet, unconscious, surrendering inclination of the heart.

Wearily she mounts the broad stairs to her apartment. Sonia is not at home. Nita seats herself at her writing-table, as she does every Sunday, unwillingly, but punctually, to make up her weekly accounts.

Then there is a ring without. The maid announces: "Herr Lensky."

"Let him come in," says Nita, and as Nikolai enters, adds indifferently: "Take a seat and amuse yourself as you can. There is a book of Leech's caricatures. Sonia will be back soon; her father unexpectedly arrived, and she has gone to the exhibition with him; but they are to lunch with me. You are also cordially invited if you choose to accept. Meanwhile, permit me to finish my accounts." With pen in hand, she has led him from the drawing-room where the writing-table stands into the pretty little cosey corner, and now wishes to leave him and return to her work. With an imploring glance he withholds her.

"I am not in the mood to look at picture-books," says he. "If you cannot let your accounts wait, I will come another time."

"How sensitive you are! I would have thought that we two were beyond the plane of common politeness, at least as far as I am concerned."

She puts down the pen, and sitting down on the little sofa in the cosey corner, motions him to an armchair.

"I have a confidence for you, Fräulein," murmurs Nikolai.

"I thought so," replies Nita. Over her finely chiselled white face trembles something like a difficultly suppressed smile.

"It is so hard," he continues. "Will you not help me a little?"

"No," says she, energetically. "I have not the slightest wish to assist your awkward circumlocutions." And with friendly playfulness she adds: "How can one find so hard something which is so easy?"

How cordially and unconstrainedly she looks at him!

An uneasy sensation takes possession of him.

"So easy!" murmurs he, hoarsely. "Do you find it so easy to ask a question on whose answer depends the happiness of our whole life?"

"If one can be so sure of the answer," says she, still playfully, mockingly, but very good-naturedly.

"Sure?" His eyes rest penetratingly on her face. Nikolai feels very unpleasantly, but still can no longer be silent.

"I am designated to Washington," stammers he, hastily rushing through the words. "I start to-morrow evening. May I come back in the autumn to--fetch you?"

She starts up. "Me?" cries out she, beside herself. "Me?"

"And who else, then?" he asks, with desperate harshness. "Do you not know that I love you?"

"Me?" she repeats, hesitatingly, and paling.

"Do you then believe that it has seemed to me worth the trouble to look at another girl since I have known you? Oh, love, darling, only one!"

The for years restrained fire of his nature has awakened. Her silence encourages him. He kneels at her feet, draws her hands to his lips. He is no longer the well-bred young diplomat whom Nita had formerly known; he is Lensky's son. More slender, with more finely cut features, his face yet, in the expression, in the kind trace about the mouth, in the violent demand and still tender supplication of his glance, resembles his father's quite mysteriously. It is the same coaxing voice with which Lensky, in his good moods, if he had wished, could have charmed down an angel from heaven; they are the same full, warm lips.

His words she has listened to without moving, but as his lips touch her hands she repulses him with a violent movement.

"Leave me!" she gasps. "Go!"

Dizzily he rises. Such an expression of anxiety, of horror is depicted on her face that his pride is up in arms. "Yet I have said nothing insulting to you," says he, violently, and looks piercingly at her, as if he expected that she would reply something. But as she remains silent, he speaks, with difficulty forcing himself to be calm: "That you refuse my hand is your affair--at heart I was prepared for that; but you shake me off as an impertinent. You extinguish the sun of my life, and do not once tell me that you are sorry for me. Whom, then, have I loved so passionately, so boundlessly? The girl who is capable of such horrible treatment I simply did not know!"

His voice sounds harsh, but his eyes still supplicate her, tenderly, despairingly. He cannot believe that all is over, that she will let him leave her thus. She will yet find a friendly word for him as farewell.

She stands silent, resting her hand on the mantel, her eyes turned from him. She wishes to say something, but it does not pass her lips. Her face is ashy pale; she trembles; dizzily she gropes for a support.

Forgetting all, he makes a step forward to assist her, to support her. As if in deadly fear, she repels him. Her face expresses a kind of horror.

A last time his eyes rest on her longingly, desperately--then he goes.

When Sophie, a little later, returns, she finds Nita deathly pale, stretched on her bed, her hands folded over her breast, "like a corpse in the coffin," said Sophie, when she told of it later.

She wished to steal away on tip-toes, so as not to disturb her friend, but Nita held her back. She looked anxiously, piercingly, in her face. Then Sophie bent over her. "I have just met Nikolai," says she. "I know what has taken place. Oh, Nita, Nita, you have given him up for my sake, and now you are breaking your heart over it!"

"I?"--Nita smiled sadly--"on his account? I am sorry that he suffers, but else--no, no, my poor Sonia, you are mistaken."

"Then I do not understand," says Sophie in astonishment. "What has so shocked you?"

"Me?" Nita holds her hand before her eyes. "A slight heart cramp; I have it at times. I was frightened. It was very foolish, but I cannot help it. It comes over me suddenly sometimes. Poor Sonia, poor, dear little Sonia! Are you not, then, angry with me?"

Sophie had seated herself by her friend's bed; she was pale, but bore up bravely. "What is there to be angry about?" said she, wearily. "I do not understand why I did not long ago notice it. It is natural that he loves you."

"Ah, Sophie, it is only a mistaken idea; he does not know his own heart. It will all pass. He must return to you, learn to love you," assures Nita.

"Never! If you had seen him go down the steps slowly, step for step, as if carrying something wounded, you would not say that. Poor Colia!" And, suddenly raising her voice, quite reproachfully: "It is terrible that he must suffer so. Heavens! do you really not understand what the love of such a man is worth?"

A shudder ran over Nita's slender limbs. "Leave me alone, my dear, brave Sonia; only for a little while," murmured she. "Leave me alone."

XXII.

How he passed this long, terrible Sunday afternoon, what he did during these endless hours, Nikolai could later not have told. He walked--walked without looking round, like a man who has no more aim in the world, who seeks nothing but weariness.

If she had given him a friendly word! But no! He does not understand, does not understand! Somewhere there is a secret.

It is dark when he returns to the Hôtel Westminster. He finds his servant in the middle of his room, on his knees before an open trunk. Clothes hang over all the chair backs. Nikolai remembers that he is to travel to-morrow evening. At first he wishes impatiently to send away the servant, who conscientiously questions him about the packing. Then he draws himself up. Life must still be borne, even if there were no more joy in it. He gives orders as to the arrangement of his things.

The windows of his room are open. A carriage stops before the hotel. That voice! He leans out of the window, but sees nothing but an open cab; from without approaches a step, the door opens, Lensky enters. "Colia!" The musician's rough voice expressed such hearty, violent joy that Nikolai quite forgets his despair. Never before has he had the feeling of close, intimate relationship with his father so warmly as now. With unspeakable joy his gaze rests on the old artist. It seems to him as if there were something new, noble about him. He has grown thin, the furrows in his forehead are deeper, his hair is gray. He has aged greatly. But how well it becomes him! The lovable, benevolent expression of the lips, the patient, one might almost say pardoning, sadness of his gaze.

"Father! You--what a surprise!" fairly rejoices Nikolai, and rushes in the arms which his father stretches out to him. And Lensky, however spoiled he is otherwise, each time rejoices anew when his children show their love for him.

"I came upon the message which you sent me of your transferment. I wished to be with you at least twenty-four hours before you leave. Naturally you have already dined. I have ordered the waiter to bring my supper up here, that is, if I am welcome to my son. Send away your valet," with a glance over his shoulder at the servant; "we will wait on ourselves. We could go downstairs, but then Braun would appear with my travelling accounts, and--and we would like to be alone, my boy, eh?"

The waiter has come and covered a little table and placed upon it tea and cold meat, whereupon he goes. Lensky pours tea. "You will take a cup, Colia? One can always drink tea."

And Nikolai, to whom until then the thought of taking any nourishment to-day had caused a true horror, sets his lips to the cup.

"I hope that you have much to tell me," says Lensky, good-naturedly. "In your letter there was indeed much; I have sufficiently questioned you, have I not? But still not all that I would like to know. Mascha, little rascal, did not write at all. Apropos, what is the matter with the silly girl? I drove to her directly from the station. She is completely changed. I had so looked forward to seeing her. She was fresh and crisp as a moss-rosebud when I left in January, and now she is flabby and yellow as a withered flower left forgotten in a glass. She is no longer even pretty, our little beauty! What is the matter?"

Lensky lays down knife and fork, and looks uneasily, questioningly, at Nikolai. "You wrote me nothing of it," he continues; "and still you must have noticed the change in her."

"What use to write you of it? I consulted a physician; he ordered something for her which had no effect. Her condition is not dangerous, only tediously unpleasant--anæmia in a high degree, nothing else. Why worry you?"

"Anæmia! It is incredible that I should have an anæmic daughter. Poor Mascha!" said Lensky. "Well, I drove to the Avenue Wagram, pleased at the thought of seeing my gay, vivacious darling, like the old child that I am. 'Mademoiselle Lensky at home?' asked I. 'Yes; she is in the garden.' There sits something wrapped in a shawl, shivering and bent over her folded hands; a pale thing, with black circles around her eyes. At first I did not recognize her; then, 'Maschenka,' said I, 'my little dove, my soul!' If you perhaps believe that she rushed in my arms with the little bird-cry which you know--of all the music in the world, that little cry was perhaps the dearest--far from it! She started, quite as if I had frightened her, came very slowly up to me, gave me her cheek. When I wished to inquire the cause of her change, she grew irritable and excited; she was not well, she said; she had a headache--would lie down. But when I prepared to go, she clung to my neck and sobbed, oh! so bitterly. I could not calm her at all. She was alone at home. The Jeliagins were dining out. They must have left her much alone."

He is silent awhile; then, throwing back his head, and in an obstinate tone, as if he wished to cut short some one's argument, he said: "Anæmia! She must have some unhappy love affair. It is too foolish, just like any other girl! And I thought it must need, at least, a Siegfried to unsettle my

daughter. Now I have it!" He pushes the hair back from his temples with both hands, and sighs with humorous exaggeration. "Do you know who is in her mind? She certainly did not wish to confess to me."

"I really did not know," stammered Nikolai, uneasily, "if she had an interest--" He suddenly ceases.

"It is evidently one-sided," said Lensky. "But, even then, it needs a cause. Has no one, then, made love to her?"

"I have noticed nothing," says Nikolai, growing more embarrassed. He knows what a burst of rage against aristocrats the mention of the only reason he could give for Mascha's unhappiness would call forth from his father.

"Poor thing!" grumbles Lensky. "And one must have a pair of such pretty eyes only to attain that!"

"You must not take it so seriously," consoles Nikolai. "A little distraction, one of the water-cures. Aunt Barbara spoke of St. Maurice."

"Ah, yes; and she will probably sacrifice herself," says Lensky, with a grim laugh. "But none of that. I will not leave my poor little dove any longer to strange oversight. If the child must go to St. Maurice, I will go with her. If only these stupid, insolent women would not follow me everywhere! I am so weary of that, so heartily weary. You are astonished! Yes, it has suddenly dawned upon me that it is all over--all--I am old. Ah! how pleasant it is to be old, no longer perpetually to have a storm in one's veins, to be able to calmly rejoice in those whom one loves." He laughs, and takes Nikolai good-naturedly by the arm. "Well, now, about your great affair. When shall I learn to know my daughter-in-law? You are not the only one who raves about her. Lady Banbury swears by no one more than by her. I wrote you it. I knew it would please you. I was very foolish with my mistrust. Why do you say nothing? How do matters stand between you?"

"How do they stand?" murmurs Nikolai, dully, half confused, as one who has suddenly been awakened from a peaceful dream. "How do they stand?"

"Well?" says Lensky, becoming impatient, harshly.

Nikolai passes his hand slowly here and there over the table-cloth, coughs, says nothing. Lensky takes the shade from the lamp, bends down, squints, looks in a pale face with a stiff, unexpressive smile on the lips.

He strikes his fist on the table so that everything rattles. "That is not to be borne!" cries he, springs up, and walks up and down the room. He hums some musical motive to himself, does not finish it, then turns again to Nikolai. "You are not a whit better than Mascha," grumbles he. "So, have I looked forward to that!" He sits down again opposite Nikolai, and vexedly pushes his plate away. "Nothing but unpleasantness! Scarcely had I reached Paris when an acquaintance met me at the station. 'Do you know that your *protégé*, Bulatow, has hanged himself?' cries he, naturally to please me; and then a relation of particulars: the most absolute need; he had eaten nothing for three days; his wife half mad with grief; they were too proud to beg--yes, yes, proud--they were not too proud with me, if I had not shown him the door! I would like to cudgel Braun; as if I were happier for the few hundred rubles which he saved me! Then I hurry to Mascha to enliven me, find a hysteric, leaden-footed, melancholy being, and now--it is enough to make one beside himself! Out with it! Why do you make a face as if chickens had eaten your bread? What about your love affair?"

His tone is rough, quite harsh. He belongs to the men who at times ill-treat their kin from rage at not being able to make them happy.

"She has refused me, to-day, that is all," murmured Nikolai, turning away his head, as if in shame.

"Refused--you!" bursts out Lensky; then uneasy, confused, he draws his chair nearer to Nikolai's. "Refused you! I do not understand it!" Suddenly he takes his son's head between his hands, and looking at him with quite childish pride in his beautiful eyes, he cries out: "But that is absurd, boundlessly absurd! What will she, then, the princess, if my splendid boy is not good enough for her? No; do not think anything of it, my boy. Hold up your head, it was a misunderstanding!"

"Really--certainly! It is only the first time," murmurs Nikolai, with the same stiff smile. Then suddenly, with a gasping sob, which shakes his whole frame, he buries his face in his crossed arms on the table.

"Colia! Nikolinka! Poor boy, poor fellow!" murmurs Lensky, stroking his head very gently. "So it cuts so deep. See, I do not understand it. At first I was only vexed, reviled her because she wounded my paternal pride. But if you really love her so, we will consider the affair more closely. You poor fellow, you are quite beside yourself, and all on account of a woman! I never suffered so. I really cannot feel for you. Truly, if your mother had not wished me at that time in Rome! But she was the only one; except her, they were all alike to me. I always said one woman was only

like the others. You shake your head, you are right; it is nonsense; but one always speaks so when one is vexed. Heavens! if any one permitted himself to tell me that my Mascha is no better than--but that does not belong here; we wish to speak of your affairs. I cannot believe that a girl could refuse you unless there was some one else whom she loved."

"It still seems to be the case," said Nikolai, who now, having mastered his unmanly weakness, calmly listened to his father.

"There must be some misunderstanding," says Lensky, thoughtfully. "Especially as, if your letters told the truth, she did not seem to repel you, but rather encouraged you to repeat your visits to the studio. Tell me--there were always three of you, Sonia was there--what kind of a *rôle* did the little prude play between you?"

"What *rôle*?" Nikolai blushed. "None at all. We were always very pleasant to each other; we love each other quite like brother and sister."

"So! And the other one loves her?"

"She cares for her as the tenderest mother."

"H-m! And she refused you to-day?"

"Yes; how often do you wish to hear it from me? My God, if she had said a kind word to me, but she fairly drove me away!" Nikolai's eyes sparkle quite angrily; then he adds, slowly, heavily, but speaking plainly: "I let myself be so carried away as to kiss her hand, and she shook me off as if she had a horror of me."

"So; did she? The simpleton! Do you really believe that a girl would so rudely refuse a boy like you if she were quite sure of her heart? Torment yourself no more, Colia."

"Father!"

"The thing is plain; she sacrifices herself from friendship for Sonia. You have done a fine thing, you shy lover, you." Lensky laughs. "Never mind, we will set it all right. To-morrow, in the course of the day, I will speak with her, and, if she pleases me--you must grant me that condition, my dear--if she pleases me, then," stretching out both hands to the young man, "what reward shall I obtain if I win your plaything for you?"

Colia did not answer, only buried his long, slender hands in his father's.

"The first kiss of your betrothed, do you hear, the first," jests Lensky. "I will not do it for less. You shall only receive the second."

"Yes, father."

"Fine!" Lensky has risen. "It is almost midnight; go to bed. When do you set out?"

"To-morrow evening at nine, to Calais."

"If I bring you a happy message, will you not concede another twenty-four hours?"

Nikolai only smiles thoughtfully.

"Now be of good courage, you childish fellow; dream the most beautiful dreams, consoled. I will manage my affair well; and I will not tell her that I have seen you weep like a little girl on her account." This he whispers in his ear, while he once more embraces him before retiring.

This evening no one might have dared remind Nikolai of any of the excesses which he had formerly, not without bitterness, reproached his father with. All that had ever offended him in the great artist he had forgotten. To-day he understood the boundless love which his mother, despite all the injuries he had done her, had felt for this man. "What a wonderful man," he murmurs, "what a golden heart!"

He was really a wonderful man in his way, and generously good. Few knew how good he was. Like most prominent men, in the course of his life he had been much calumniated, by no one with more convincing cleverness than by himself. Roused by the flattery which he met everywhere to angry opposition, he ascribed his noblest actions to the lowest motives, and flatly denied every lofty emotion; and, as the Russian national peculiarity of self-depreciation is quite unknown in Western Europe, his listeners took all that he said about himself as plain truth.

But, indeed, he was a thoroughly large-hearted man, and unusually conscientious to his colleagues. One could not charge him with smallness, or any trace of pitiful envy. He had injured few men but himself. He had never crushed a weaker than he in order to take his place, but, on the contrary, was always ready to raise all strugglers and cordially give them his hand.

Bulatow's suicide had deeply concerned him. While Nikolai slept peacefully, Lensky did not close his eyes. Incessantly the thought of the unfortunate whom he had driven from his door the last time he had applied to him for a loan pursued him--the thought of the dead, and of his widow,

half mad with grief.

When he joined Nikolai at breakfast the next morning he looked miserably, and the first that he said to his son was: "I have thought over your affair; everything confirms my suspicion. You need have no fear, my poor boy, but you must have a little patience. With the best will I cannot visit her this morning. I must go to this poor Bulatow and see how things are with her, what she will let me do for her; I cannot bear the thought of her misery."

XXIII.

Monday in Whitsun-week. Blue heavens, with slowly piling up storm-clouds, and in all Paris a close, oppressive heat. Toward two o'clock a cab rolls up the Rue Blanche. In the cab sits Mascha, a large bouquet of white roses on her knees. Her blue eyes are strangely staring.

"Is Fräulein von Sankjéwitch in her studio?" asks Mascha, of the *concierge*, as she leaves the cab.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

Mascha hesitates a moment, as if she were not prepared for that; then she says: "Give her the roses from--" Just then Nita crosses the sill.

"Ah!" cries she, gayly, "you have come again at last. Please come in."

"No, no," replies Mascha, in great haste and excitement. "I cannot stay; I only wished to bring you the roses--for good-by."

"For good-by. How so?"

"Papa came yesterday, and----"

"You are going away with him." Nita completed the sentence. "Well, they are very beautiful, your roses, but still I will not accept them if you do not come in. You owe me a great many visits, little dove; come in," she urges, energetically.

One moment Mascha hesitates, then she accepts the invitation. "Only a moment," she murmurs. "I should like to see your studio once more, a last time, and your new picture. Colia said it is so beautiful."

"See! There it stands on the easel," says Nita, while she arranges the roses in a vase.

Mascha went up to the painting. It represented the corpse of a drowned girl, resting on a bier. Her garments drip with water, and so do the outstretched thin limbs, which make the impression of having been recently taken from the water. All this is painted with wonderfully bold truthfulness, but the charm of the face, the touchingly contented smile of the dead, reconciles the spectator with the painfulness of the subject.

"How did you think of it?" says Mascha, shuddering.

"I saw it in the morgue," explains Nita. "On a Sunday, shortly after the opening of the Salon, we were very gay, Nikolai, Sonia, and I. We went in the morgue, as if in defiance, but when I came out my heart was so full that I felt at once that I would make a picture of it. That is my way of ridding myself of an unpleasant impression."

Mascha stares with wide eyes at the picture. "Who stood model for it?" murmurs she.

"A little seamstress."

"How content she looks. Do you believe that a dead person can look so satisfied?" Mascha speaks as softly and solemnly as if a true corpse were before her.

"The drowned girl in the morgue had this expression. Besides, I have often noticed it in dead people. Have you never seen a corpse?"

"Never!" says Mascha, shaking her head--"never!"

"Not even your mother?"

"Not even she--I would not. I was afraid." And seizing Nita convulsively by the wrist, she asked breathlessly: "Nita, do you believe that there is a second life after this one?"

If anyone else had asked this question of Nita, she would probably have answered all kinds of things. To the child, evidently tormented by anxiety, she only answered earnestly and simply: "Yes," whereupon she added: "And now come away from the horrid picture. I would not have asked you to look at it if I had not forgotten what a nervous little person you are. Now make yourself comfortable. You will spend the afternoon with me." And Nita wished to take her hat.

Mascha pushed her off. "I must go, I must go," she repeated, with the same hasty uneasiness. Suddenly she herself took off her hat. "Only a little while--a little while," she whispered. "Sit down in the arm-chair, Nita, so, and I here." She crouched down on a cushion at her friend's feet; then laying her head down on Nita's knees, she begs: "And now love me a little; be good to me, very good; you can be so well!"

It is very close even here in the large, airy studio. Already Nita believes that Mascha has fallen asleep, when she murmurs: "What do you call it?"

"What?"

"Your picture."

"Martyr."

"Ah! martyr--martyr--and--do you not believe that she killed herself? It is wrong to kill one's self."

Nita says nothing.

"And--do you not think--that she killed herself--because"--Mascha murmurs this softly to the folds of Nita's dress--"because she had done something wrong?"

"But, Maschenka, how do you come by such thoughts?" Nita says it quite reproachfully.

Maschenka is silent, and Nita continues to stroke her hair gently, like a tender mother who lulls her sick child to sleep. After a while Maschenka begins anew. "Nita," whispers she, and her voice sounds so weary and choked that Nita only with difficulty understands her, "could you ever love any one if you knew that he had done something wrong?"

"What do you mean?" asks Nita, and feels that the young being leaning against her trembles as with a violent chill.

"Can you understand that one can do something really wrong, something wholly wrong, without being bad himself?"

For an instant Nita hesitates, then she says: "Yes, I believe so. Yes--but what wrong can you have done?"

"I--oh, nothing; naturally, it is no question of me," assures Mascha, hastily. "Only when one lives so alone, and has no one to whom one can speak, all sorts of thoughts come to one. It is foolish----"

"No!" cries out Nita, hastily. "It is not foolish, it is sad. How could one leave you with those uncongenial people this long, long time?"

Mascha only silently shrugs her shoulders.

"But now it is over. You will be happy. You will again be healthy and happy."

"Yes," murmurs Mascha, scarcely audibly--"happy--healthy!"

"If I only knew you far away from this dusty sultriness," says Nita, "somewhere where it is shady, cool, where fresh roses bloom each day, where the air is almost as fresh in the evening as it is in the morning. You long to be away?"

"Yes," murmured Mascha, "I long to be away--away from the houses, from people, from the heat, far away, anywhere where it is cool, very cool!"

"Poor heart, my poor little darling!"

After a while Mascha whispers: "Do you remember how, the first time I came here, I was afraid of the skull? You were so dear and good to me. I loved you from that moment."

"And I you, my angel. You must not forget me. You must write to me sometimes. Promise me?"

But Mascha says nothing, only kisses repeatedly the young Austrian's slender hands. Suddenly she springs up. "Now the time is past. Adieu!" she cries. "Adieu!" She embraces her friend violently, and then pushes her quickly from her. Quite before Nita perceives it, she has slipped out of the studio and into the cab. From the window she kisses her hand to her. Will Nita ever

forget the staring look which the child gave her?

It has grown quite dark. It is pouring. Further painting is not to be thought of. Nita would really like to go home, but her art dealer has appointed four o'clock to call. He will not come in this storm--there! Is not that a carriage rolling into the yard? There is a ring at her door, she opens. Who is that? She has to hold to a chair not to sink down. Lensky!

In spite of the gloom she sees him plainly--the large frame, with its now slightly stooping broad shoulders, the face surrounded by long, half-curved hair.

She stands with her back to the light. He sees nothing but the dark outline, but this outline pleases him; her carriage, the shape of her little, proudly carried head, has something sympathetic, and the perfume of iris and violets which is about her is pleasant to him. Colia seems to have shown good taste.

If only the ice were broken. It is hard to find the first word!

Slowly, and moving backward, she has reached the middle of the room. She speaks no word of welcome, offers him no chair, does not once ask him what brings him.

"An unbidden guest," he begins constrainedly, but with a smile of heart-winning graciousness. "I do not know if you know me--by sight, I mean?"

She shudders without answering.

"Well, yes, you know me. I am so-and-so, but to you I am now only the father of a poor young man whom you have greatly pained." He pauses as if he expects that she will say something, but she is silent, only retreats a step. It is as if he should speak to a picture or statue. What is the matter with her? Well, he has promised the boy to speak with her. Now she turns her head a little, he perceives her profile; she is charming, it cannot be denied, and what pride and defiance! It will be hard to win her, but it is worth the trouble to try it.

"You evidently find me very impertinent," he begins anew, half-laughingly, "but it cannot be helped; you will not succeed in shaking me off until I have made you speak. I was initiated in Colia's affair, and was rejoiced at the happiness on which I had already begun to count for him, when yesterday he confessed to me his despair, and looked so miserable, and yet bore up so bravely, that I promised him to more accurately fathom your obstinate heart. I really cannot understand that a warm-hearted, fine-feeling being such as you must be, from Nikolai's description, should refuse my son. But what is the matter? Why do you not answer a word? You are evidently defiant, of strong character, will not betray the friend for whom you sacrificed yourself. Have I guessed it, my child? I should like to see your face once." He stretches his head forward and looks at her attentively. "And you are very, very charming; it is worth the pains to conquer you, and I will conquer you." He wishes to take her hand, but she draws it away hastily.

It has grown somewhat lighter. With an angry gesture Nita has turned her face fully to the old artist. Her eyes are full of a repellent pride, which is mixed with horror. He looks at her closely. A horrible misgiving takes possession of him. "Have I not already seen you?" His and her eyes meet. "Great God!" He stamps his foot. A moment he stands as if petrified with horror. "Forgive!" he murmurs, scarce audibly; then, holding his hand over his eyes, he leaves the room.

XXIV.

"Well?" Nikolai cries out to his father.

For an hour he has been sitting in the virtuoso's parlor, impatiently awaiting his return; sits there with a newspaper in his hand, with a high-beating heart, which he tries to persuade that hope is a frivolous deceiver on which one should not rely. One glance at Lensky's face suffices to convince the formerly so obstinate heart.

"It is nothing," murmured Lensky, quite confusedly; "nothing. It cannot be; you must submit; it is never otherwise!" And, as if to cut off all further explanation, he asks: "Was no one here in my absence? No visitor?"

"No one came up here," replies Nikolai. "I thought it would be in vain," stammered he, with difficulty preserving his composure. "But you were so convinced. So, then, nothing--no reason?" And, with a pitiable smile, he adds: "It must be borne! A very good article in the *Times*, on Hector Berlioz; you should read it. How stupid I am, I have torn the sheet. Pardon!" He still rests his

eyes supplicatingly on his father, as if he hoped he would tell him more explicitly how it had all been. But the virtuoso is silent. He only murmurs something to himself, then sits down, with his back to Nikolai, near the chimney, and stares into the dull fire-place.

"Did--did she displease you?" asks Nikolai.

Lensky does not reply.

Meanwhile, there is a loud knock at the door. Every one comes to see Lensky without being announced; that is an acknowledged custom.

"Come in!" calls he, harshly.

A tall, slender man, dressed in the latest fashion, enters. Valerian Kyrillowitch Kasin, Sonia's father.

"What joy to meet you here in Paris!" he says to the virtuoso. "We two have enjoyed life together here in our time, you and I!"

"Yes, very much," murmurs Lensky.

"What an atmosphere!" raves Kasin. "It goes to one's head like champagne. I am intoxicated, fairly intoxicated. Guess whom I found again in Paris--our Senta, from Vienna."

"I have no idea whom you mean," says Lensky, with poorly concealed uneasiness.

"The charming girl whose acquaintance we made at the Njikitjin's in Vienna. We named her Senta, because she fell in love with your picture, Boris, quite like the Wagnerian enthusiast with the picture of the Flying Dutchman. I scarcely knew that she had another name."

"It is unbearably close here," murmurs Lensky, and pulls at his collar. "Please open the window, Nikolai."

Nikolai does so, and remains standing near the window.

"I do not remember," says Lensky.

"Really, you do not remember? But, *à propos*, if it does not inconvenience you, could you lend me one or two thousand francs? I have already telegraphed to St. Petersburg."

"I beg you, Nikolai, take two thousand-franc notes from the desk in my bed room. Here is the key."

Nikolai takes the key and goes in the adjoining room, the door of which, as his father notices not without vexation, he leaves open.

"So you no longer remember her!" goes on Kasin. "That is incomprehensible to me; you were quite wild about her, enthusiastic. I had never seen you thus before about a girl. I met her one evening at Njikitjin's, only one evening, but I remember her very well. She had, indeed, no incense for me; she saw and heard at that time nothing but Lensky. You must remember her. They called her Senta in the Njikitjin set."

"Have you found the money, Colia?" calls Lensky, irritably, to his son.

"At once, father. The lock is rusty. I--I made a mistake in the key."

"Now her name is Fräulein von Sankjéwitch, and she is the most intimate friend of my daughter," explains Kasin. "The strangest of all is that she has never said a word about you to Sonia. Young girls usually tell each other everything. And, as she fainted last winter at one of your concerts, she has evidently not forgotten you. And you, ungrateful one, is it really worth while to please you--to please you thus? All the music-mad ladies were beside themselves with jealousy. Besides--who knows?--if you see her again she will turn your head once more. She is more charming than ever, greatly changed, but grown prettier."

Then Nikolai enters and brings the money. Soon after, Kasin leaves. Nikolai politely accompanies him to the door, which he locks behind him. In what he now has to discuss with his father he does not wish to be disturbed.

"So that was it--that," he says, slowly, as he goes up to Lensky.

"I do not understand what you mean," stammers Lensky, uneasily, but his eyes fall before the accusing glance of his son.

For a short moment deep silence rules. The blood has rushed to the virtuoso's face. He breathes heavily; wishes to say something, but does not bring it out.

"You have guessed!" cries out Nikolai. "But it was only a trifle! It was six years ago--she was a child at that time, a child intoxicated with music, irresponsible from enthusiasm. One must not be too severe! Ah!" with a hoarse groan. "Still, it is all the same, and you were right, and I was a

fool!" He hurries out. Then a heavy hand seizes him by the shoulder.

"Colia, stay!" cries Lensky.

"Father!"

"It is not as you think," says Lensky, slowly, raising his bowed head. He is now deathly pale.

"So it was only mere gossip on Kasin's part?" says Nikolai. "You have never seen her, or, at least, she never pleased you?"

Lensky shakes his massive head. "Yes, she pleased me," said he, hoarsely, "very much; in that Kasin spoke the truth. She pleased me indescribably. There was something unusual about her, something warmer, more natural than the others, and such a peculiar way of looking at one, as you know. I thought--but I was mistaken." He pauses.

"Well, father?" Nikolai urges.

"One evening I found her alone," murmurs Lensky, scarce audibly. "Njikitjin had arranged it so. Oh! the lowness, the commonness of such a woman, who will flatter one at any price! I lost my head. She did not at first understand me--I thought it was affectation. Must you know all?"

"Yes!"

"Well"--Lensky gasps the words more than speaks them--"I was like a wild animal. She cried for help. I heard some one come, fortunately for her. And I was as frightened as a thief, and left. Now, have you heard enough?" he fairly screams, and stamps on the floor.

Lensky is silent. Nikolai's face is ashy, as that of a man whose heart has ceased beating with horror.

"Now I know why she shrank from me," says he, dully, without looking at his father. Then he leaves him.

XXV.

At the same hour Maschenka stands before the clock in her room and counts the strokes--"One, two, three, four, five. It must be now," says she to herself. "It must be now."

It must be. Slowly but surely and overpoweringly has the conviction mastered her. At first it was only an uneasy anxiety, but then an iron command.

She has fought against it with all the wild, rebellious horror which a very young person feels at the thought of death. She will not--she will not! But at length despair and a daily increasing weariness have strengthened the decision. "Yes, it must be."

How shall she accomplish it? Poison? No; she will go out of the world some way so that no one shall ever find her who knew her. And in the short spring nights she matures a plan, slyly carried out as only such a romantic little brain could think of.

All is ready.

She has granted herself the respite until her father's return, and for this reason she is frightened instead of pleased to see him again. It seemed to her that the executioner appeared to her and said: "Come, it is time!"

How good he was to her! What a beautiful future he planned for her! A black wall towers before her--there is no future.

One, two, three, four, five, six! The hour is here. She undresses; not any garment which can be recognized as hers will she keep on, but changes everything for articles which she has gradually purchased.

If she is washed ashore, no one shall suspect that the girl in the plain working-clothes might be the petted daughter of Boris Lensky.

Then she takes her mother's pearls, which she has not worn for a long time, from her jewel box, and kisses them. She kneels down before her holy picture, and prays.

Now she rises; a last time she slowly looks round her pretty room. Her heart beats to bursting.

"Eliza, tell aunt that she need not expect me to dinner to-day," she calls to the maid through the closed door of the adjoining room. "I shall dine with papa."

"*Très bien*, mademoiselle!"

And Mascha goes. On the stairs she suddenly feels a burning thirst. She goes into the dining-room, takes a *carafe* of water from the side-board, and drinks with a kind of eagerness. A red pyramid of fine, fresh raspberries, Mascha's favorite fruit, is piled up on a glass dish. She reaches for the inviting fruit, takes two, three. Suddenly something chokes her, a kind of spasm overcomes her; she hurries out. She has already reached the house-door, she hesitates. It must be! But must it be now? To live one more week, a fortnight; to enjoy the sunshine; to be indulged by her father; to forget all; to be happy! Fourteen happy days are long!

A clock in the house strikes the quarter past six. In a few minutes her aunt will return. She goes.

Now she is on the street. The Avenue Wagram lies behind her. She is in the Champs Elysées. She beckons to an empty cab. "To the nearest landing of the *Swallow*," she says.

The *Swallow*, the pleasure steamer which daily runs between Paris and St. Cloud, is about to start when Mascha reaches the landing. She will wait for the next boat. "*Mais non, ma bonne fille*," says a coal-blackened fireman. "*Montez toujours*," and he helps her on board.

Klip, klap, plash the waves on the ship's wooden sides. Maschenka watches everything very calmly. At times she forgets why she is here, but for not a moment is she free from a hateful cold weight on her mind. Occasionally she involuntarily makes plans for the morrow; then she shudders. To-morrow at this time--where will she be?

On glides the ship.

"Meudon--Meudon!" A little gray city nestling against a green hill.

Every time that the steamer stops, she says: "It must be now." Each time she will land, seek some place between the green, drooping willows, in order undisturbed to carry out what she has undertaken--once more kneel down in the tender spring grass, between the dear young blossoms, confide her weak, child-soul to her dead mother, and then-- Yes; at each station she wishes to land, and yet cannot, and remains sitting as if paralyzed with boundless anxiety of the fearful deed to which she would force herself, and against which every fibre of her warm young life rebels.

"Sèpres!"

All the beauty in this laughing, sunny world passes through her mind. In vain does she try to fix her mind on a glorified eternity, and with all her tormenting thoughts mingles a cowardly fear, not only of death, but of the physical torment which precedes death, of the horrible gasping for breath in the water.

"St. Cloud!" It is the last station. Some one of the ship officials asks her if she wishes to land. She rises. It grows black before her eyes. A cold sweat is on her forehead, dizzily she sinks back on the seat.

Slowly the boat works up the stream to Paris. Around its plump wooden body the waves plash sweetly and soothingly; between the whisper of the trees on the banks one hears the jubilant twittering of the birds who rejoice in the last sunbeams.

Weary, as after a severe illness, Mascha sits there. She no longer comprehends the situation. Why should she kill herself? Her father will pardon, his love is inexhaustible, that she knows; and the others--with something of her old childish defiance, she shrugs her shoulders. Ah! what does she care about the others?

Then, quite suddenly, a sharp wind springs up.

The people leave the deck, flee to the cabin. Only some young men who, smoking and talking, do not care about the storm, have remained above. Mascha observes that they notice her. One of them makes a jest, the others laugh.

Heaven knows what they are laughing at! Mascha imagines they have guessed---

Like a leaping flame she feels permeated from head to foot with newly awakened, consuming, despairing shame. She springs up, bursts open the door of the little gate in the ship's railing. She holds both hands to her eyes. "Mother!" she cries in her death agony.

It is done.

XXVI.

The evening was already far advanced. Lensky sat alone in his sitting-room, a prey to all sorts of feelings. A kind of rage chokes him. "Why did I tell him all that?" he asked himself. Yes, why? Because he has a hatred for all falseness, which amounts to exaggeration; because it seemed to him as if he expiated some of the disgracefulness of his behavior to Nita by the exposure of his own shame.

When he had so suddenly looked into Nita's pure eyes, it had seemed to him as if it had all at once grown unbearably light around him. He saw his whole life so plainly as he had never before seen it, and it was repulsive to him. A short time ago he had sent the waiter to announce to Nikolai that dinner was served. Nikolai had excused himself.

Then Lensky had not even taken his place at the table. As if he were capable of forcing down anything!

The waiter had asked if he should light the lamps, but Lensky had only impatiently motioned him away. What need had he of more light? He saw plainly enough.

A great uneasiness overcame him. If Nikolai should really leave, there was not much more time to delay. He heard Nikolai's trunk carried downstairs. "He will not even come to take leave of me! But I cannot let him go thus," he cried out, "not thus!" He went up to Nikolai's room. Nikolai stood before the fire-place and busied himself with tearing and burning some letters. A new, harsh, stiff expression hardens his features. When he perceives his father, his face expresses uneasiness and astonishment, so that Lensky's heart grows cold. For one moment they stand silently opposite each other. "Colia!" Lensky at length manages to say in an unrecognizable, half-suffocated voice: "You--surely would not leave without having said farewell to me!"

"No; naturally not," replies Colia, mechanically, while he continues to tear up letters.

"Colia!" The artist's voice trembles, he lays his hand on his son's sleeve, he notices that he shrinks at his touch. Then he clutches his temples and stamps on the ground. "That is not to be borne," cries he. "Have you, then, no penetration? Do you not understand how all this torments me--me, who would have brought down the stars from heaven for you? And now that I should be the obstacle to your happiness! What, obstacle! Be sensible, there is no obstacle at all. Nothing has happened. You need not give her up. And if she is at all afraid of meeting me again, I swear to you that she shall never meet me, that I will never burden you with my presence. I will bear everything, only not the thought of having disturbed your existence. Colia--do you not hear me, then?--Colia!" He shakes his son's shoulder; Nikolai turns toward him. His father is frightened at the dull, uninterested glance which falls on him from the eyes formerly so brilliant with enthusiasm of his child.

The waiter enters to announce that the carriage has arrived. Nikolai takes his hat, Lensky holds him back, and at the same time motions to the waiter to leave the room.

"You will write when you have arrived there?" he says.

"As soon as I am settled," replies Nikolai, with the same weary, dull voice.

"Why was not the boy angry, rough even to rudeness, repellent to him?" Lensky asked himself. A violent feeling would have yielded to time, but for what he saw before him there was no more cure. He understood that something in this young man was dead forever; the elasticity of his nature was gone, the sacred fire was extinguished.

"Farewell, Colia!" murmured Lensky, hoarsely. He took his son in his arms, held him convulsively to his breast, kissed him three times in accordance with the Russian custom. He might as well have embraced a corpse, so perfectly irresponsive did Colia remain to his tenderness. Only once before had his lips touched anything so cold, stiff, and that was--when he kissed Natalie in her coffin.

Then Nikolai went down-stairs. Lensky slunk after him to the house door, looked after the carriage which rolled away with him until it was lost in the crowd, whereupon he turned, and with heavy steps returned to his sitting-room.

Perhaps an hour had passed since Nikolai's departure, when there was a knock at Lensky's door. At first he did not hear it; the knocks grew louder, more urgent. Angrily he raised his head; he had left word down-stairs that he wished to receive no one.

"What is it?" he called out, angrily.

"A messenger from Madame Jeliagin."

"Come in! What is it?"

"He left this note for monsieur," said the waiter.

Lensky tore it open.

"A carriage!" he called out to the waiter, who had waited for an answer. "But quickly!"

The waiter left the room; Lensky once more glanced at the note.

"Come at once. BARBARA."

Nothing further. What could have happened? He took his hat, followed quite on the waiter's heels, and sprang in the carriage.

"Avenue Wagram, No. ---," he called to the driver, "as fast as you can."

The cab stops, Lensky plunges out, the house door was open. An unpleasant smell of mire met him.

From the entrance, along the hall, he saw great drops of mud. He noticed it without thinking particularly of it. A feeling of painful discomfort grows in him with every step which he takes, and yet he could not have said what he feared.

He found no one to announce him, to tell him where his sister-in-law, where any one could be found. The whole household is in commotion. Uncertainly he stands still for a moment. Then he notices that these same large, black mud-drops which he has seen in the vestibule had soiled the linen stair-covering.

And suddenly he remembers how he had already seen such a train of muddy spots--in Moscow, on a hot summer night, when they carried a drowned person through the streets. He followed the drops, went up the stairs, still following them to one door; he knew in which room the door opened.

For one moment he hesitates, as if he could not face the horror which awaited him. Then he bursts open the door. The room is dimly lighted. A single candle flickers near the bed, from which the white curtains are remorselessly pushed back, and there on the bed lies something--he cannot exactly decide it. Trembling in her whole frame, Madame Jeliagin stands before it. Great, wet, black drops are on her dress, as if she had handled a mud-covered body.

"Mascha!" he groans, beside himself, seizing his sister-in-law by her thin arm and pushing her away from the bed.

Yes, there lies Mascha, waxy pale, with closed eyes and wet hair clinging to her cheeks.

"She is dead!" he gasps.

"No, no; she lives," assures Madame Jeliagin, but there is no joy in her voice, but uneasiness and discomfort.

Mascha opens her eyes, turns them away from her father, and shudders.

Lensky has seated himself on the edge of the bed near her. One of her little hands lies on the counterpane; he takes it in his, kisses and strokes it.

"How did it happen?" he asks, bent over the child.

"When I came home she was not here," declares Madame Jeliagin, hastily. There is something flattering, dog-like, whining in her tone, as if she feared being blamed. "She had left word with the maid that she would not return to dinner, as she was to dine with you and Nikolai. I sat calmly down to dinner--alone, Anna dines with friends--about half-past ten. I had just sent the servant for Anna; a carriage stopped before the door. I heard a heavy stamping in the vestibule; voices speaking together. The maid said they desired madame. I rush out; then I see two men who carry in the child. They told me--from a steamer--somewhere near Passy--a girl had been seen to fall into the water--Mascha--only at the right time they plunged after her--saved her. Fortunately, there was some one among the passengers who knew her, a servant who sometimes assists here, who brought her here, or else they would have taken her to the police station. It is fearful--an accident, a terrible accident, an imprudence--the gate of the steamer was badly secured she leaned against it--and----"

With deeply bent head Lensky has listened to the simple report. He still rubs and strokes his

daughter's little hand. "What, accident!" murmured he. "How did she come on the ship? She wished to kill herself from grief. Poor little dove! What grief can one have at seventeen? Oh, my petulant, gay darling, my tender, defiant little curly head, who has grieved you so?" Then, again turning to his sister-in-law: "Have you, at least, sent for a physician?" he says, imperiously.

"I did not know," murmurs she, confusedly.

Mascha trembles from head to foot, and drawing her hand away from her father, she hides her face in the pillows and groans: "No--no--no doctor!"

Lensky looks at her more attentively; he has understood! It is no human sound; it is the cry of a wild animal which now escapes his breast; then he rushes upon his daughter, seizes her by the throat, strikes her in the face. "Shameless one!" he screams.

"*Pas de violence*, for God's sake!" stammers Madame Jeliagin, anxiously.

But he does not listen to her.

"Who was it?" he gasps. "Who was it?" he thunders at his sister-in-law.

"I do not know--I had no suspicion--I never noticed the slightest," stammers she.

"So! You never noticed anything," he repeats after her. "Noticed nothing! So! Did you, perhaps, pick up a lover on the streets?" he sneers at Mascha.

Then she opens her eyes, rests them on him with a touchingly sad, supplicating, humble, reproachful glance. It seems to him that something has snapped within him. The anger is gone; only a great pity yet lives in him, and he bends over the child and takes her in his arms, clasps her to his breast, sobs and covers her pale little face with kisses and tears. Meanwhile he notices that Madame Jeliagin still stands near him, that she watches him. He stands up. "What have you to do here now, you--you who did not know how to guard my child? Go!" And imperiously he points to the door.

Still murmuring, explaining, excusing herself, she vanishes.

The door has closed behind her.

"Mascha, how was it possible?" he asks, softly.

She is silent.

"Mascha, for God's sake, say it, or else I shall go mad," he implores. "There must be something which excuses you. How did it happen? who was it?"

"I will not say; it is no use. You will harm him; I do not wish that any harm should happen to him."

In vain does he urge her further; she gives him no answer. Her little face turned to the wall, she lies there motionless and silent, like a corpse. And at length he is weary of questioning her, and sits by her, weary, relaxed, with the confused expression of a man who has been struck on the head. His thoughts wander to indifferent things. He asks himself if he has taken the key out of his trunk; whether the waiter will post the letter which lies on his desk. Then he hears the house-door open, hears the rustle of a silk dress. Anna has returned. Cold shivers run down his back. Now she will hear it, the arrogant creature who has always looked down upon his darling. He would like to go out and close old Jeliagin's mouth, forbid her to speak.

Can he, indeed, close the mouth of all Paris? To-morrow the gossips will tell it to each other before the house-doors in the half light--it will be in all the newspapers.

And he sits there as if petrified, and does not move; listens--listens as if he could hear up-stairs what they say to each other. Sweat is on his brow, the blood burns in his cheeks, and now he really hears something, Anna's thin, icy voice, which cries out: "*Quelle honte, quelle horreur!*"

Mascha holds her hands over her ears. Lensky springs up, hurries to the door which Madame Jeliagin has neglected to close tight behind her. He closes it carefully, draws the portière over it, only that Mascha may not hear anything else offensive. Then he goes up to her bed again, and notices that she is glowing with fever. He passes his hand over her cheeks; she clutches his hand, presses it first to her mouth, and then holds it before her eyes.

"Shall I put out the light?" he asks, gently.

She nods. Then he sits by her in the dark. Ever stronger he has the feeling as if the despotic yoke of a misfortune to which he must bow because he is powerless against it, were weighing down upon him. In all his nerves trembles the fearful shock. It seems to him that he has seen something fall together before him--all that he clung to, the future of his child!

He thinks of his ambitious dreams; of the money he has saved for her--he, who formerly squandered everything. A boundless shame torments him; it is all over--all.

The whole night long, restless, without peace, he seeks only a hand-breadth of blue sky for his child, seeks no great, brilliant happiness such as he has dreamed of for Mascha; no, the most moderate, only a tolerable life--seeks a salvation--in vain--nothing--nothing! His mind is like a captive bird which wounds itself at every beat of its wings against the bars of a too small cage. And yet he is not weary of seeking, of tormenting himself.

The longest night has an end, and the nights in early June are not long. Morning dawns. In ruthlessly plain outlines, all the objects in Mascha's room meet Lensky's eyes. All looks soiled, everywhere the dark spots of mud; there the shawl in which the men had wrapped the suicide after they drew her from the water, there a heap of soiled, wet clothes. It goes to his heart. On that morning when he took leave of his darling, on the same spot lay a dress also, but as white, as pure, as fresh as spring blossoms.

The picture of the light, fragrant room, the dear picture which he had continually carried about in his heart during his last journey, rises in his mind. It is indeed the same room, the same girl. She sleeps as also at that time--no, not as at that time. Her cheeks are flushed with fever, her limbs twitch incessantly. Softly he draws the covers up over her uncovered shoulders. She murmurs something in her sleep; he listens; always the same word: "Mother--mother!"

XXVII.

In the fire-place of Nita's pretty little drawing-room crackles a gay wood fire. Everything in the room is attractive and pretty, as usual. In the midst of these cosy surroundings sits Sonia, shivering, with bent head. Nita enters the room, goes up to her, and lays a hand on her shoulder. Sonia looks up; her eyes meet those of her friend almost anxiously.

"Ah! you know it already?" murmurs she. Nita nods. For a moment they are both silent.

"It is horrible!" says Sonia, dully, and shuddering.

"Yes," says Nita, shortly. She sits down opposite Sonia. "Do they know who it was?" she asks after a while.

"No," replied Sonia. "She will not tell. My father has spoken to Barbara. Nothing can be gotten out of her. When they first asked her, she replied: 'It is no use, and they would harm him.' She does not wish that any harm should happen to him. Now she says nothing at all. She lies the whole time with her face to the wall, silent. Really, there is something generous in her silence."

"How does he bear it?" asks Nita, suddenly, quite startingly.

"Barbara told papa that he--you mean Lensky?--was completely broken. At first, he could have almost killed Mascha from rage; since then, he sits near her, strokes her hands, her hair, and calls her little pet names. But she listens to nothing--lies there silently with set teeth."

Nita lowers her head; then she, absent-mindedly, throws a piece of wood on the fire.

"And we imagined that the child had a fancy for Bärenburg!" says Sonia. "Thus we explained her striking depression; but no, Bärenburg was betrothed. We were evidently on a false track. It must have been one of our exiles--a nihilist with revolutionary moral and political ideas."

"No, no!" Nita shakes her head, and looks thoughtfully before her. "It was Karl!" she cries out. "Do you remember how, that time, at the Jeliagins' reception, when Mrs. Joyce brought the news of Karl's betrothal, Mascha let a cup fall, and tottered out half swooning? It must be Karl!"

"It is not possible!" says Sonia. "He was betrothed. Do you then believe that a half-way respectable man would be capable of such an action? Ah, it is horrible, horrible! Poor Nikolai!"

Nita does not hear her.

"My father insists that I shall go to Vienna with him to-morrow," begins Sophie, whom nothing can long rob of her inward equipoise. "Will you let your maid help me pack?"

Nita does not hear.

After a while Sophie leaves the room,

Nita glows with burning heat. She cannot bear the warm room, and goes out on the terrace. A

sharp breeze sobs in the trees of the park, and has a refreshing effect upon her.

Why can she not forget? She has emerged blameless from the trial. How can the affair further concern her? Another would have simply shaken off the remembrance of this unpleasant experience. But she was not like others. From childhood she had occupied one of those strange positions which cause in all young people left to themselves a tendency to strongly exaggerated feelings.

Her father died young. Her mother never ceased to mourn him, and after his death completely withdrew from the world. Except a few summer months which she regularly passed with her eldest brother, Karl Bärenburg's father, she lived year in and year out in a picturesque villa an hour's journey from Vienna.

Nita grew up solitary, under the influence of such a mother and the instruction of Miss Wilmot. The great passion of her youth was music. She secretly cherished the wish to become an artiste and astonish the world with her performances. Sunk in an enthusiastic study of the art, and reading all that is poetic and unworldly, she grew up without girl friends, without all childish amusements. The great wealth of her stormy young heart remained untouched.

The legendary fame of the devil's violinist penetrated even to her. She saw a picture of him--the strange face that was not handsome, and which one could never forget if one had once seen it, made a deep impression on her young mind. From that time she worshipped the strange musician, whom she had never heard and never seen; thought of him, dreamed of him, wrote enthusiastic childish letters to him--which she never sent--and sang his songs. Her mother, who was still more given to exaggeration than her daughter, and just as little worldly wise, smiled at this enthusiasm and gave Nita Lensky's picture for a birthday gift. Nita placed it on her writing-table and daily garlanded it with fresh flowers as long as she could find one out-doors.

She knew that he was married, and was proud for him that his wife was a princess, and a great beauty, and that she loved him idolatrously. Then she heard other things about him: that his distinguished wife had left him; that he wandered about the world, without rest or peace, bitter and desperate. A warm, deep compassion mingled with her enthusiasm.

Her whole family called her Senta, and did not ascribe the slightest importance to the matter.

Then it was announced that Lensky would give three concerts in Vienna, which he had avoided for some years. A true fever of excitement took possession of Nita. The Baroness Sankjéwitch did her utmost to fulfil her daughter's wish, to take her to one of the concerts. To go to Vienna and return by railroad was out of the question, as the concert took place late in the evening. She decided, therefore, to pass the night with Nita at a hotel.

At last came the concert. He appeared. He had never been handsome, and was no longer young. His hair was gray, and his fifty years were written plainly enough in deep furrows on his face. But he looked different from other men. There was something powerful and attractive in his personality, and a mysterious magnetism which could not be described or explained. Was Nita disappointed? No. She was more interested in him than ever. Only intensely musical natures could sympathize with the rapture amounting to pain with which she listened to the magic tones of his violin.

The next morning they were to return home. But on the same evening, after the concert, in the reading-room of the hotel, they made Madame Njikitjin's acquaintance. She was a still handsome elderly lady, with correct bearing and very charming manners. She won the Baroness' heart at once, and a few acquaintances gave her the best reports of the family of the stranger.

She laughed at Nita's enthusiasm, flattered the young girl, flattered the mother, and finally promised to take Nita with her to Lensky's two other concerts, for which no places were to be had. The Baroness was boundlessly inexperienced. The day after the concert she left Vienna, leaving Nita under the Njikitjin's protection, who had promised to personally escort the young girl back to her mother.

The same day, Nita learned to know her great man at Madame Njikitjin's, who laughingly described to him the young girl's enthusiasm, and called her nothing but Senta. And Nita only looked at him with her clear, childish eyes, and could not say a word. He must have been of stone not to be touched by this pure and deep enthusiasm. He was not of stone. She pleased him--pleased him unusually. No one could be so charming as he if he wished.

With other great men, we have a stiff neck from looking up to their unapproachable loftiness. But nothing of the kind with him. The timidity which had at first oppressed her wholly vanished before the winning heartiness of his manner. How pleasantly he listened to her gay little anecdotes! Sometimes he leaned a little forward in the course of conversation, gazed into her eyes, then suddenly kissed her hand and laughed--laughed without her having the slightest suspicion of what had been so droll in her story. At coming and going he kissed her on the forehead; when he talked with her, he sometimes took her hand in his and stroked it kindly, paternally. She was proud of every little distinction. And while she felt a kind of reverence for him, Lensky's surroundings began to mock and laugh at her enthusiasm. She did not notice it at that time, but later, every significant look came back to her memory, and for a year sent the

blood to her face.

When the day of farewell came, she was unspeakably sad and did not conceal it. Instead of calming her with a pleasant word, he smiled uneasily, constrainedly, at her emotion.

He promised to see her that evening at Njikitjin's, in the hotel. When he came, the Russian was not at home. It did not occur to Nita to ask herself if she should receive him under the circumstances. He was different from usual. He fell into brooding silence; now suddenly seized her hand, then freed it. He sprang up and walked uneasily about the room. Suddenly he sat down near her and took both her hands in his. Something in his face startled her and she drew them away. He seized them and kissed them. Then--then he said something which admitted of but one interpretation. He--to her!

Beside herself, she sprang up to leave the room. But before she had reached the door, he came up to her. Was that really he--the man with the red face and shining eyes? Even to-day the desperate cry of fear which she gave rings in her ears. Steps approached from without; he let her go.

Yes, that was the end of all the touching kindness, of all the heaven-aspiring enthusiasm.

The next day the Njikitjin was to have taken her back to her mother. She did not wait for that. By the earliest train, she secretly hurried from Vienna. A few hours later she lay in bed with a violent fever. When, six weeks later, still very weak, and holding to the furniture for support, she entered her little boudoir, dust lay everywhere thick and gray, even on his picture, so that it was quite unrecognizable. She took the picture and wished to burn it. She could not. As she held it over the coals, it seemed to her as if she would throw something living into the fire--and she only hid it and did nothing further.

For a full year after her recovery she could bear no music. She had liked to draw from childhood, without thinking much of this talent with her passion for music, but in her great depression it served to distract her thoughts. At her urgent request, her mother left Austria and settled in Paris with her daughter, who now devoted herself to painting.

When her mother died, the despair which Nita felt at this loss for the first time completely pushed the old recollection in the background. She had scarcely thought of it until the day when for love of Sonia she had let herself be persuaded to attend Lensky's concert. When she heard him play, when at those wonderful tones the old intoxication overpowered her, then also awoke a horror of the fascination which this man had for her, and with this horror the great hatred which she had felt for years, a boundless loathing. She wished him ill with all her heart; she, who formerly would not have hurt a hair of any one's head, could not think of anything that would be painful enough to sufficiently wound him.

She is revenged; the blow has fallen! But what is that? She looks back, the recollection of the fearful scene makes no impression on her, shrinks together, grows dim--it is gone. She seeks her hatred in her heart, and cannot find it.

XXVIII.

The Jeliagins' trunks have already gone with the maid to the railway station. The carriage which is to take the two ladies already stands waiting. In vain has Barbara represented to her daughter how this precipitate flight will make Mascha's position much worse, how it will be almost impossible to conceal the misfortune.

Not an hour longer than was necessary to arrange her affairs would Anna consent to remain, and, as always, the mother had obeyed her daughter's command. But at the last moment, when she and Anna stood in the vestibule, she, so to speak, broke loose from the chain. "I--I have forgotten something--I must get something." With these words she rushes up the stairs, stumbling, treading on her dress at every step, and knocks at Mascha's door.

"What do you want?" calls out Lensky, harshly, while he comes out to her.

"I would like to see Mascha. I--I would like to give her a kiss before I go," murmured the old woman, and tears are on her wrinkled cheeks. "She was a good child--always very good to me. Please--please let me in to her."

He steps back, lets her in. She bends over the bed, over the girl glowing and trembling with fever. "Maschenka, good-by, my little soul. I love you. I will always love you," murmured she, and

stroked the child and wished to kiss her; but Maschenka hid her face in the pillows, and half mad with shame, repulsed her aunt with an impatient shrug of her shoulders, and suppressed weeping.

"God keep you, Maschenka!" murmured the old woman.

"What shall he keep?" cried out Lensky, pointing to the bed, with horrible bitterness. Then, seizing her roughly by her thin arm, he pushed her out of the room.

Now she has gone; the house has been empty for an hour. He sits near Mascha's bed as he has sat there since yesterday, and she lies there silently, with her face to the wall. It is eight o'clock. The front door bell rings--rings again. It is so long before the door is opened. Who may it be? The kitchen maid knocks at the door.

"What is it?"

"A lady desires to speak with monsieur."

"No one can see me."

"I told her that, but she would not be denied; she desires to see monsieur. It is about something very important, she said."

"Did she, at least, give her name?"

"No, she would not; but she is certainly a distinguished lady."

"So! And she would not be denied." He draws down his mouth, scornfully. "Where is she waiting?"

"In the drawing-room."

"Well, stay here until I come back. Do not leave the room an instant! Do you hear? I will be back immediately."

With that he goes down-stairs.

With an angry, repellent word on his lips, he enters the drawing-room, where the chairs are disarranged and the dust lies untouched on the furniture.

A tall, slender figure comes to meet him, quickly, and at the same time hesitatingly, evidently urged forward by hearty compassion, and yet held back by that oppressing timidity and reverence with which noble natures approach a great pain. Now he sees her more distinctly, starts. "You here?" he cries out. "What do you wish?"

"To help you," says she, simply.

"You?" He looks at her, astonished. At first he would like to deny the affair, to bring forward the fable of contagious illness which Kasin has promised to spread as the cause of the Jeliagins' flight. But Nita's face teaches him that here no deception can avail. "You know?" he murmurs, scarcely audibly, without looking at her.

"Yes."

"And you wish to help me--you?"

The blood rushes to her cheeks. The situation is unbearable for a girl of delicate feelings; but who would be influenced by foolish prudery when it is a question of caring for a sick one whom no one else will care for?

"Has Mascha confessed to you?" she asks, softly.

"No."

"Is she perfectly conscious?"

"I do not know. She has not spoken a word since yesterday; she lies there with her face to the wall. She has a strong fever, but the doctor says it is of no importance; she will recover in two or three days. *And I have not the courage to give her an opiate.*" He says all this in an unnatural, choked voice. "You wish to help me? How will you help me?" he groans defiantly and bitterly.

"Let me speak with her," begs Nita. "We have always loved each other, she and I."

"Yes, you were very good to her, I know; she has spoken to me of you; but you will only needlessly torment her--she will not speak. And of what use is it? Nothing can be done--nothing." He stamps his foot.

"Let me go to her--I have a suspicion, a clew. It sounds trite and foolish to say so, but if any one can help you, it is I."

For a moment he hesitates; then turning to go, he cries out: "Well, come then."

She follows him across the hall, up the mud-covered stairs, to Mascha's room.

"Leave me alone with her," she begs.

And he leaves her alone; meanwhile walks up and down the corridor. Sometimes he stops and listens. At first he hears nothing but a soft, coaxing, persuasive voice; then a sharp, involuntary cry--another---

"She will not speak, why torture her so?" he says to himself. He turns the knob of the door. Then he hears violent weeping, opens the door, sees Nita sitting on the low bed and holding the head of the sobbing child in her lap. She motions to him to withdraw; he does it. He stands before the door and listens as one listens for the heart-beats of a person to convince one's self whether he still lives. He can hear nothing plainly, but still he listens. At first he hears nothing but the same pitiful sobs, hears a calm, caressing voice, soft, sad, compassionate. Now she is silent; he hears hoarse, unrecognizable sounds. Is that Mascha's voice? How long she speaks--at first in short, broken sentences, then fluently; if he could only understand a word of what she says! He still listens--nothing more. Now it is Nita again who speaks, then follows a long pause, a hearty kiss, and Nita comes out in the corridor to him, very tearful, very pale.

"Well, did she confess to you?" asks Lensky, anxiously.

"Yes, but I must swear to her not to betray anything to you. Do not ask, do not torment the child. To-day is Wednesday; next Monday you shall hear from me. Until then she has promised me to make no new attempt to take her life. She will keep her word."

Herewith Nita turns to go. Suddenly she hesitates, turns once more to him: "I will only tell you it was a misfortune, it was very little her fault. I am astonished at the magnanimity which is betrayed in every word of her confession."

"It is very noble of you to think of telling me that," murmured he. "I know it was not her fault, it is only I who am to blame. That does not make the affair better."

"I hope for a good result," murmured Nita embarrassedly.

"I do not," said he, harshly; then detaining her, he adds: "But it was good in you to come. The others have run away, all, as if the pest had broken out in the house; and you, you have come--you! I thank you!"

XXIX.

Mascha's confession had more deeply shocked Nita than she thought. So much touching, childish simplicity spoke from every sad word. Another would have excused herself, would have ascribed her sin to circumstances, to her seducer. This poor little sinner took all upon herself. It had happened, she did not know how; she had lost her head from anxiety and remorse on his account.

Especially the conclusion of the confession had gone to Nita's heart. "Do you see," Maschenka had whispered still more softly than before, "formerly I knew nothing of all this; I had no suspicion; I was quite--quite stupid. But since then I have listened when the 'big people'"--she is still so childish that she speaks of adults as big people--"spoke, and I have read the newspapers and all sorts of books in the endless nights in which I could not sleep. And now I know that I am what people call--an abandoned woman." And as Nita, with consoling caresses, assured her:

"He will do his duty to you--he will--he must!" Mascha had only sobbed more violently, and murmured:

"What duty has one to a girl who runs after one, who throws herself at his head? He was so kind to me--I thought it was love, and I thought love was something so grand, beautiful. It was no love with him; it was only pity at first, and then it was scorn. Why was I so foolish? It is past. Let me put my life out of the world, and everything go on in its usual course. It was fearfully hard for me to jump into the water that time; how long ago is it? Yesterday--really yesterday! I was so afraid of death, and life seemed so beautiful to me in spite of everything. Now that is over too; I no longer understand life."

Nita must promise her not to betray Bärenburg's name to her father. "Of what use? He saved

Colia's life. Colia is weaponless against him; but father--he--he would kill him. I do not wish him to be harmed; why should I? Ah, Nita, you dear, good angel! if I had only found you at home that time!"

Thus closed the little confession.

Nita has long forgotten that at first Mascha's case had caused her disgust. She no longer thinks of Lensky's horrible behavior; her whole heart is filled with pity and the strong, urgent desire to help.

She must go to London, speak with Karl, that is certain. But how to do it? It needs some pondering, but before she retires that evening her plan is ready. She knows that if Mascha's good name is to be restored at all as she plans, the work must proceed as quietly as possible, and no one must suspect the levers which set it in motion. She must travel alone, without her maid. The thought disturbs her not a little. Strange!

She is ready to go through fire for Mascha, to enter into the most painful explanation with her cousin; but to pass a night in a London hotel without sufficient protection, she is not ready.

At last she finds a way. She begs Miss Wilmot to telegraph her arrival to the former's sister-in-law in London, and to claim shelter in her house for her. She knows that she can count on Mrs. Wilmot's hospitality, all the more as Nita had entertained her for a fortnight the past autumn.

The telegram will arrive three or four hours before her; that is sufficient. Then she makes her little travelling preparations, goes to bed, and sleeps as soundly as we sleep when we are wearied by a great moral shock.

About six in the morning she rises, fresh and courageous, with a hopeful heart. Sonia, somewhat pale and tearful, but calm and obliging as usual, gives her her tea, and with great care packs sandwiches in her travelling bag.

"Shall you come back to me when you have had enough of Vichy--you and your father?" Nita asks her friend in the course of conversation.

"In any case I will visit you, to take leave of you, dear; but our dear comrade-life I must, alas! give up," replies Sonia. "Papa is tired of his bachelor-life, and wishes to have a home. I must naturally do as he wishes. It is hard, but what can I do?" She sighs, and at the same time carefully ties up her package of sandwiches.

"And your art?" asks Nita, smiling.

"Ah, my art," repeats Sophie. "That is the most indifferent part of the matter for me. I have not worked by your side for a year in vain, my heart. Less time would have sufficed to teach me how great is the difference between my mediocre skill and your truly great talent. That is over, Nita; I will miss my art a little, but the being with you very painfully."

"I shall also miss you very much, faithless one, but your room shall be ready for you at any time. Another shall never take your place, that I promise you; and when you wish to pass a few weeks in Paris, you know who will receive you with open arms."

"Oh, you dear love! How often I shall remember you. The time I have spent with you will always be the most beautiful part of my life!" sighs Sonia.

"So! Do you think so? We will hope not; I foresee very much happiness for you." And stroking Sophie's hand, Nita adds in a softer tone: "It will all turn out as you wish and as you deserve, you brave little thing, you!"

Meanwhile the carriage was announced.

"I may, at least, accompany you to the station?" begs Sophie. On the steps of the coupé, with the last embrace, she murmurs to her friend, who has concealed the true reason of her sudden departure under a trivial pretext: "I know why you are going to England; I have guessed. God bless you and your undertaking. Farewell!"

As soon as Nita has arrived in London, and going to the light, roomy, comfortable chamber prepared for her, has removed some of the dust of travel, she writes the following note to Bärenburg:

"DEAR KARL:--I beg you to have the kindness to call upon me in the course of the morning at Oakley Lodge, No. 7 Holland Lane. I have something important to speak to you about. If you cannot come in the morning, be so good as to fix an hour at which I can expect you with certainty.

"Your old cousin,

"NITA."

XXX.

Twenty-four hours have passed since her arrival in London. A sleepless night in which she has with difficulty prepared what she will say to her cousin, and never could find the right words, lies behind her. Breakfast is over--lunch. Afternoon begins to lose itself in evening. Bärenburg has not appeared. That he might stay away, might not notice her letter, had never occurred to her.

She had always stood on the best footing with her cousin. From youth he had had a weakness for his charming, talented, only, alas! so "deplorably eccentric, cousin." Never had he refused her any favor she had asked him, and if she had sent for him, he had always come sooner than she expected him. No, never for an instant had she doubted that he would come. If she had felt excited and anxious the whole morning, it was only from dislike of the unpleasant explanation with him. Now she knew very well what she would say to him. She need only describe Mascha's grief to him, her touching fear of exposing him, her eagerness for death.

Hour by hour passes; he does not appear. Then there is a knock at her door. "A letter for you, m'm," says the maid, and hands her a little note. She recognizes Bärenburg's writing; hastily she unfolds it and reads:

"DEAR NITA:--I am very sorry that I could not come today. I will do my utmost to visit you to-morrow. I cannot, alas! say positively, as I leave London to-morrow afternoon, and before then have a fearful amount of business.

"With the truest regret,

"Your faithful cousin,

"KARL."

The note falls from her hands.

He has guessed what it is--he evades her. That is plain from every stiff, awkward line of this forced note. How he could guess it she does not know, but she knows that it has all been lost by her hesitating, prudish delay. She should have appeared before him unexpectedly, before he had had time to steel himself against her.

His fear of meeting her already betrays his irresoluteness. She knows that he is idle, pleasure-loving, and selfish, but yet kind-hearted, easily moved to pity, almost morbidly sensitive. She knows that as long as he can he will avoid an unpleasant situation, but she also knows that he is as--yes, more susceptible to good influences than bad. But all will fail from her pitiful smallness.

Half mad with rage at herself, she would now be ready to defy all prejudices to attain her aim. But one thought holds her back from going to his hotel. At this hour she probably will not find him home, and if she does, as he is evidently suspicious, he will deny himself. She seats herself at her writing-table. The words which she had in vain sought yesterday crowd upon her now--burning, impressive words with which she describes Mascha's position, the inexcusable conduct of the Jeliagins, who, instead of allaying gossip and concealing the affair, cost what it might, rather confirm the worst rumors by their flight; touching words in which she speaks of Mascha's generosity, her fear lest he should be harmed. "This fear of the poor child is the reason that I have turned to you," she concludes. "That the part I take is unpleasant, you have certainly guessed. At first it was not only unpleasant but tormenting. But I will carry it out, and I will attain my aim. I have not only the unfortunate girl's grief, I have your conscience on my side. I know that you are in a hard position. I pity you with all my heart; but together with Mascha's life, all the inward peace of your future existence is at stake. Is it possible that you have no heart for this poor, weak, touching being? I can never forget how, her charming little face hidden in the folds of my dress, she sobbed out her painful confession to me. Her weak, weary, tormented, childish voice will not leave my ears!"

After she had addressed the letter, from fear that the post might not deliver it quickly enough, she gave it to a messenger with the order to deliver it immediately.

The following night she did not close her eyes. She was dressed at six o'clock. She still hoped that he would come, but it struck eleven--twelve. He did not come.

Then suddenly an idea occurred to her. Lady Banbury! If any one could help her it was she.

She might be back in London, although her last letter was dated from Mortimar Castle. Nita dons hat and gloves and hurries out on the street, while she takes the first hansom she sees.

"Manchester Square, No. 34, and make haste!" she cries. She knows Lady Banbury's strong character, knows she can count on her in case she is in London.

The hansom stops; with beating heart Nita asks the servant who opens the door: "Lady Banbury at home?"

The servant answers he does not know, he will see. Nita scratches a few words on her card, and he vanishes.

A few moments she waits, and then he returns and conducts her up-stairs into a large, comfortable room. Here sits Lady Banbury. At Nita's entrance she rises and goes to meet the girl with open arms. "My dear child, what a surprise! How glad I am! What brings you to London--yes, what is it? You are deathly pale. You are struggling against tears."

"Ah, dear Lady Banbury," says Nita, "I come to you in a desperate emergency in which your assistance alone can avail. Please--do not refuse me!"

"Tell me--but first come to yourself, dear child!"

Nita sits down. A load has fallen from her heart. There in the Rembrandt half-light of the old lady's pretty boudoir she unburdens her overflowing heart to Lady Banbury. At first hesitatingly, then more fluently and impressively, she tells the old lady Mascha's story, does what she can to win her for the poor little girl, forgets none of the many little features which are proofs of Mascha's incomparable goodness of heart, and of the blind innocence which led her to her misfortune. Then, as she suddenly, in her enthusiasm, looks up at Lady Banbury, and perceives that her face has grown stiff and stern, in her great despair she throws herself down on the carpet before her, and clasping her knees, she cries: "Oh, I beg you, do not look so severe. I know that it is all horrible. I am no more lenient than you; but one must be sorry for Mascha. I have not found the right words to describe it to you, or else----"

"You misunderstand me," says Lady Banbury, very earnestly. "My severity is not for the child. I am older than you. I know how easily, with such neglect as the poor daughter of my friend Natalie experienced, the like can occur. One has such a crowd of theories--that innocence is the best protection, etc. One lets girls of the best families run about the streets alone, and at the same time they are not permitted to read a modern novel. My hair stands on end when I hear of such insensateness. I am heartily sorry for the poor child. I saw her last winter; she was a charming little thing. Lensky is inexcusable--he and his sister-in-law."

"Yes, certainly," says, shyly, Nita, who has slowly risen. "But that does not alter Maschenka's unhappiness. Do you think that it is still possible to save her?"

Lady Banbury shrugs her shoulders.

"Is there no hope?" sobs Nita.

"I will do what I can to arrange it," says Lady Banbury, "but it is a very unfortunate affair. Men are curious beings; they pardon most hardly the sins which one has committed for their sake."

XXXI.

In the Jeliagins' little sandy garden behind the house sits Lensky with his daughter. It is Sunday afternoon. Upon his gentle, loving persuasion, she has left her bed for the first time. As the maid had left the house with the Jeliagins, the kitchen maid, with her red, swollen, awkward, but kind hands, has dressed her, slowly, as one dresses an invalid who will not or cannot help herself. When she was ready, they could not at first induce her to leave the room. With little steps, trembling and tottering, she dragged herself to the door, leaning on her father's arm; but then she suddenly turned round, and clinging with a wild gesture to the bed-posts, she declared with rigid obstinacy: "No--no--no!" until she at length, half exhausted by opposition, half calmed by her father's tender assurances that she would certainly see no one, with her head hidden on his shoulder, let him carry her down-stairs.

The sight of every object which reminded her of her past life, of the outer world, is indescribably painful to her.

Now they sit together on a hard green bench in the warm summer afternoon. The little garden is quite filled with transparent gray shadows. It is very quiet--Sunday quiet. Lensky's eyes fasten on his child. He uneasily seeks something which he may tell her without humiliating her, without paining her.

"Maschenka!"

"Papa!"

"Listen! do you hear how prettily that bird sings? I would not have thought that a city bird could have such a sweet voice."

She looks up. "Yes, papa," murmurs she, and bows her head anew.

Compassionately his eyes follow every movement of the poor child. They have put a white morning dress on her. She is sallow, her cheeks are sunken. Still her little face is unspeakably, touchingly attractive.

"As soon as you are better, we will play a great deal together," he begins, after awhile.

Mascha does not answer. He repeats his words. Then she looks up, confused, distracted. "What did you say? I--I did not hear," murmured she.

"Of what are you thinking, then, Mascha?"

"Of what? I--I only thought how all will be now," stammered she, and stares at the ground.

Yes, how will it be? He also thinks of that. He does not believe in the success of Nita's undertaking; he would not have let himself be forced to marry in such a case. And what then? Suppose he marries Mascha to some philosopher who surrenders himself for her few groschen? The present would at least be covered thus, but what of the future? Humiliation--ill treatment! No, he will not give his child to that--no, no! He alone will care for her, be all in all to her, recompense her for everything with his love. His pride will not permit him to return to his fatherland with his dishonored child, but he will make a home for her in the most beautiful place in the world, in Sorrento, or somewhere in southern France. He will keep her like a princess, distract her by his art, read with her, teach her, surround her with lovely flowers, with all beautiful objects before which she need not lower her eyes.

With fearful bitterness, he suddenly breaks off this air-castle building. That is all nonsense--sentimental dotage. A moment will yet come when longing for companions will overcome her. Those with whom his daughter should associate will not have anything to do with her; but others, women who are lenient from eccentricity, and others again who have their reasons for it, an hysterically mad, or amusing, dissolute crowd, without every moral restraint, will assemble round the child. And then--Mascha has his blood in her veins; without any healthy amusement, without good examples in her associates, without any urgent reason longer to restrain herself, she will give the reins to her temperament. He will see her sink--she, his darling, his white lamb--sink, sink!

All at once she shudders, springs up. "What is it, Mascha?" he asks, lovingly, holding her back by the hand.

"I heard a window open--there in the house in the rear; people see me from there. I--I want to go back to the house. I cannot bear it, father," whimpers she. She wishes to free herself from him by force. Then there is a ring of the door-bell. Mascha stands still. Who is it? Is not that Nita who asks for her?

Yes! The door leading into the garden opens; Nita enters, pale, weary, but with beaming eyes. She catches the child in her arms. "Maschenka," whispers she, "all is well. I have only come before to prepare you; in a few minutes he is here and begs you for forgiveness."

Maschenka's eyes grow staring. She clutches her temples with both hands.

"Do not faint, my darling; there is no time now for that," whispers Nita, anxiously.

"No--no." Mascha looks shamefacedly at her white wrapper.

Nita unties a black lace fichu from her neck, and binds it round the child's neck; then she smooths her hair.

The house-door opens; a cry, the old, soft bird-cry which Lensky loved so, only stronger than formerly, full of piercing, painful sweetness, with wide, outstretched arms, Mascha rushes past Nita, past her father, into the house.

Nita wishes to go. Lensky holds her back. "You have done that--you--for me," said he, "and you will not even give me time to thank you?"

"I do not deserve any thanks--it all arranged itself!" murmurs she.

"So!" he smiled bitterly. "I know how it would have arranged itself without you."

His voice is warmer, but she steps back from him.

"I understand you," he murmurs. "Go!"

She goes a few steps toward the door; then she suddenly turns, goes up to him, and reaches him her hand.

He looks her full in the eyes. "May I?" he asks.

As she nods affirmatively, he presses her hand, but not to his lips, but lets it sink. He kneels down before the young girl, and kisses the hem of her dress. A wonderfully relieved feeling has come over him. It seems to him that he is freed from a burden--a burden of oppressive scorn of mankind, which, with a breath of relief, he has laid down at the feet of this young, pure, warm-hearted being.

"You are a saint," he murmured. "God pay you my debt!"

Thus they part.

The rescue is accomplished; Mascha is saved.

For a while Lensky remains alone in the garden, then he goes in the house. Fear of disturbing his daughter in her happiness, longing to rejoice in the sight of this happiness, alike agitate him.

From the drawing-room sound voices--very softly, interrupted with long pauses.

The drawing-room door is not tightly closed; Lensky looks through the crack.

Happiness? Where is the happiness? They sit near each other, hand in hand; he embarrassed; she humiliated, shy.

"That cannot remain thus; it is not possible that it should remain thus," Lensky's warm, wild heart cries out. "Take her in your arms," he would like to call to the young man; "bury her shame in your tenderness, raise her broken self-respect by your love!"

It must still happen thus, he must clasp her to his breast, kiss and console her.

Lensky waits, waits breathlessly, fairly spying for a change of affairs; but nothing changes. And suppressing a deep sigh, he turns away.

"That is a rehabilitation, but no happiness!"

XXXII.

A November day--a November day in Venice, and what weather! The plaster wet, the wall smoking with dampness, the water in the canals cloudy, the atmosphere gray and cold, filled with gray mist, and nowhere a sunbeam.

In a large, desolate room, with picturesque bow-windows, sets Mascha at a writing-table. She is reckoning, evidently racking her brains over the great problem how to make ten francs pay for a hundred francs' worth. Sometimes she pauses thoughtfully. Then she pushes the account-book from her, and begins to write a letter. The letter will not come to an end.

She lays aside the pen, and with a quick, angry gesture crumples the sheet. "No, I cannot--I cannot inflict that upon you, father!" she murmurs to herself. She leans her head on her hand; the pen lies unused beside-her.

More than four years have passed since Mascha's marriage to Karl Bärenburg. When at that time the news had first circulated in Austria of the distinguished marriage which the daughter of the Russian violinist was to make, many envious, malicious words fell from the lips of ambitious maidens. But in initiated circles it was known that the existence of the young Countess Bärenburg offered little that was enviable. Her husband's parents denied their daughter-in-law, and cut off all subsidies from their son. Mascha's very large dowry from Lensky made the whole material basis of the young household. Shortly after his marriage, Bärenburg had had himself transferred to Japan; from there to Rio. Now, for almost two years, he had been without a post; led with his family--now in Pau, now in Nice, at length in Venice--the unsteady, incessantly

striving for something better, wandering existence of a man who is no longer at ease in his social relations.

Mascha has cares enough. Three or four photographs of her father, all those which Natalie had formerly loved to have about her, stand on Mascha's writing-desk. She picks up one and looks at it lovingly. How long it is since she has seen him--not since her wedding-day--and how she longs for him! And then she is worried about him; she knows too little of him. He was never a minute letter-writer. Now he writes more seldom than ever. The few lines which he sends her at long intervals are very kind and loving, but he writes nothing of himself. What little she knows of him, she knows through strangers. She knows that for four years he has wholly retired from the world, that he has resumed anew his creative activity, written very much, but published nothing; that of late a fanatic Russian national enthusiasm has developed in him, a passion for hunting up all sort of Slavonian musical chimeras. She knows also that he who was accounted the most atheistic of the men of his time has become more and more wrapped up in that insane and pessimistic mysticism into which the greatest Russians fall on the threshold of old age, while they, instead of calmly accepting the incomprehensibility of creation, drive themselves mad in explaining the inexplicable.

She knows all that; but how he is, whether he is well, happy, she does not know. She would like to have him near her, care for him, pet him, alleviate the feebleness and thousand bitternesses of his age by tender arts; would like to warm herself on his strong heart; find healing for her wounded, weary soul in his tenderness. How plainly she sees him before her! "Why does he not come?" She has so often begged him. Ah, why does he not come?

Through the plashing of the waves which sob at the feet of the old palace is heard the creaking of an approaching gondola. Mascha listens. In her solitary life a visit is an event and seldom a pleasant one. The gondola stops. A rough, deep voice speaks a few words below. Mascha starts up. Is it possible? Surely not; it is a foolish fancy which deceives her. A heavy, awkward step approaches the door. "Father!" cries Mascha, and throws herself on his breast. "Father, how do you come here?--but no, do not answer; what does it matter why you are here, when only I have you! Ah, what happiness!" And she laughs and cries and kisses his deeply furrowed cheeks again and again, and strokes his rough hair.

"Really, really, still the old joy, my soul, my little dove! How dear you are! Do not be so foolish, my angel!" he says. "It is not suitable for a young wife to rejoice so in her old father." He wipes the tears from her cheeks with his handkerchief, and pushing her a little from him, he looks at her with a long, tender, scrutinizing glance. "So!" says he. "Now I can more easily imagine how you look in your normal condition, without eyes red from weeping. You have changed greatly, my angel; you have grown and are stouter, and the old round-cheeked, childish face is no more--you have become a beautiful woman, very beautiful." His glance wanders proudly over her tall, superb figure. "Your husband may be satisfied with you."

"He is always very good to me," assures Mascha, blushing slightly.

"Good to you!" repeats Lensky, bending forward, while his glance becomes more piercing, more attentive. "Yes, yes; you have always praised him greatly in your letters, and you often write me of your happiness. Still, I wished to convince myself of it---"

"I must be the most unthankful woman in the world if I complained," Mascha quickly assured him; "and I think you have long owed us your visit," she adds. "I--that is, both of us, Karl and I--had often begged you to come. You cannot have longed to see us much."

"So, do you think so, little dove?" says Lensky, smiling, and strokes her hair. "Shall I tell you the truth, child? Well, your husband embarrasses me. I am not suited to him. How should such a Russian bear be to such a polished western European dandy? But do not fear, Maschenka; I will put up with him on your account---"

"You will still stay with us, father?" she urges, without further noticing his remark.

"No; I have my quarters in the Europa," replies he. "I will not cause you any inconvenience."

"Inconvenience! How can you speak so?" says Mascha, angrily. "No, you shall not deprive me of the pleasure. We have room enough, that is the cheapest thing in Venice. Ah! what would it be if you lived in a hotel, and would come to me as guest in an especially well-brushed coat, in the afternoons? I must have you the whole day, from the moment you open your eyes. I must bring the children in their night-dresses to your bed. They are so cunning when they rub the sleep out of their eyes. I must show you Natascha in her bath. I must pour you your tea at breakfast, and butter your bread--that is--" The young wife suddenly grows confused. "How foolish I am! Perhaps you do not wish all that? You are much more independent in a hotel. It might be a burden---"

"You foolish Mascha," he interrupts her, touched. "If it really causes you no disturbance, have my luggage fetched immediately from the Europa, and I will spend the few days with you. But now show me my grandchildren; the little pictures of them which you sent me were very nice."

"Harry has gone with the servant to hear the music on the St. Mark's Place, and the little one is asleep. Come and see her."

She took him by the hand and led him through one or two bare and immense rooms to a very neat little chamber, in which stood a cradle, and an Italian nurse in a red dress busied herself with sewing. "There!" whispered Mascha, pushing back the white tulle curtains of the cradle. "Is she not charming?"

A child of perhaps nine months lay among the pillows. It was no longer asleep, but its blue eyes were wide open. When it perceived its mother, it gave a short, clear cry of joy; Mascha raised it from the pillows. It looked very charming in its white night-dress, with its delicate blond head where one could yet see the skin under the golden-brown curls.

"Give grandpa a kiss, Natascha--that is, if you are not afraid of a wet little mouth, papa," said Mascha.

"She is very large for her age," said Lensky, after he had taken the child, who did not show the slightest fear of him, in his arms.

"I believe you," replies Mascha, proudly. "But give her to the nurse. She will bore you, and, besides, she must be dressed."

When the child saw her mother leave the room, she began to cry loudly. Mascha started a little, but meanwhile closed the door behind her.

"She does that every time that I leave her," says Mascha, "and I am so foolish that it always goes to my heart. You do not know how hard it is not to turn back, but I must not spoil her too much."

In the drawing-room Bärenburg came to meet them, his little son beside him. Lensky's face immediately grew gloomy, and even Mascha's looks betokened uneasiness. "A great surprise," she cried out to her husband.

"Oh, no, Marie; I have already heard of it," he replies with the friendly courtesy which was peculiar to him. "Heartily welcome to us, papa." And with that he stretched out his hand to the virtuoso.

Lensky gave him his silently. In vain did he try to force a polite word from his lips. He did not succeed. Bärenburg kissed his young wife, straightened her hair somewhat, raised his little son on his knee, made a few superficial remarks; Lensky answered in monosyllables. With increasing discomfort, Mascha watched the two--her husband, whose condescension was unmistakable; her father, who could not succeed in concealing his hatred. Lensky was right when he asserted that he was ill suited to his son-in-law. Two men could not be worse suited to each other than the old, retired artist and the young, unengaged diplomat.

Bärenburg had not improved in the last years. He had lost the good-for-nothing charm of former days with the frivolity which was the foundation of this charm. His manner betrayed the uneasiness of the *déclassé*; he spoke more rapidly than formerly, while he coughed incessantly, repeated phrases, and incessantly reached out his hands for some near-by object. Still he always had a distinguished look and was particular to dandyism about his dress. And Lensky?

In Mascha's eyes her father had grown wonderfully handsome, now, when the intellectual expression so powerfully predominated in his magnificent old face, and was at the same time united with a trace of sad kindness. What did it matter to her that his hair was still longer and more luxuriant, his clothes shabbier and more slovenly than formerly? The sensual expression which had then disfigured his mouth had wholly disappeared; his lips were thinner, the mouth sunken; in the near-sighted eyes, which only with difficulty perceived the nearest objects, was a look which seemed to gaze into a distance unattainable to us other ordinary mortals.

For Mascha he was something far above the ordinary, almost a God. For Bärenburg he was a badly combed, badly brushed, badly cared for barbarian, an old violinist whom the world began to forget, a shabby celebrity.

He nevertheless tried evidently to be agreeable to his father-in-law. He commanded his little son, of whose uncommon and aristocratic beauty he was evidently proud, and whom he openly spoiled, to kiss his hand to grandpapa, and when the capricious little fellow refused--yes, even staring distrustfully at the old artist, murmured: "Gipsy!"--he gave him a slap, and sent him to kneel in the corner; a punishment to which the droll little mite immediately submitted with a humorous shrug of the shoulders.

Mascha frowned. "You will dine with us?" she turned to Bärenburg.

"I am, alas! already engaged," replied he. "I promised Pistasch Kamenz----"

"I know," said Mascha; "but still, as we for the first time have the pleasure of entertaining papa in our house----"

"Naturally, I will immediately send a regret to Kamenz. After dinner I must certainly go to the Hotel Britannia to take leave of him. But at least I will stay at home to dinner."

His glance turned to the virtuoso, while it involuntarily remained fixed on his not sufficiently clean hands. Lensky noticed it, and with a mixture of embarrassment and anger, he hid his hand.

"For heaven's sake, do not force yourself to anything on my account!" cried he, sharply.

The situation had become painful, and would certainly have led to rough words, if Harry, who had meanwhile begun to weary of his corner, had not suddenly sprung up, in order to now voluntarily offer to his grandfather the caresses which, with the same capriciousness, he had formerly refused him. With such nimbleness did he hop up on the old man's knee, embraced him so tenderly, offered him with such triumphant roguery his fresh lips for a kiss, that Lensky could not but forget his vexation, and yield to the advances of the petted little prince.

XXXIII.

It was not an especially good dinner that Mascha set before her father, and still she had evidently taken pains with it. But the cooking was of that extemporaneous, not well-organized kind which betrays the household where cooking is done for the wife and children only, in consequence of which no especial care is taken, and every culinary luxury forms an exception. The wines, on the contrary, were excellent; the service strikingly correct. Bärenburg appeared in a dress coat, and Mascha also wore evening dress.

In every particular was betrayed the unhomelike one-sidedness of a household in which everything revolves round a spoiled, discontented man who mostly seeks his amusements out of the house.

Bärenburg tried to show his best side. He had all sorts of attentions as host, for his father-in-law, and called Mascha jesting pet names. But still he treated her with the uncertain, tentative tenderness of a man who feels himself in the wrong to his wife, which did not escape Lensky.

About an hour after dinner Bärenburg excused himself after he had offered his father-in-law an especially good cigar, and had kissed his wife's hand and forehead.

Mascha invited her father to play bezique with her. He consented. But they were both so absentminded, played so foolishly, marked so confusedly, that they very soon, teasing each other with their mutual faults, lay down the cards.

Now Lensky absently builds card-houses on the table; Mascha crochets diligently on a child's dress.

"H-m! Your husband goes out often in the evening?" he asks, after a long, thoughtful silence.

"Yes," Mascha answers, calmly.

"And you? Do you go out much?"

"I? I am occupied with the baby."

"The child claims much of your time?"

"Yes," whispers Mascha, and a particularly tender expression creeps over her mouth. "But she is charming--or does she only seem so to me?"

"To me also," assures Lensky. "Just as you looked at her age."

"I hope that she will fare better than I." The young wife lowers her head, blushing deeply, still more over her work, and draws the little dress destined for Natascha to her lips.

Lensky overthrows all his card-houses with an impatient gesture. "You prefer her to Harry?" he asks.

"Yes--I think--she is so loving, so tender, and looks so entirely like our family. I certainly love the boy also, but I cling to the little one, as to Colia and the remembrance of my dead mother."

Lensky drums in silence on the table for a while, then he begins: "Yes, yes, that is all very beautiful; but you are becoming one-sided, Mascha. The consequence is that your husband is too emancipated from you. You will rue that later."

Mascha does not answer a word. Ever more diligently her active fingers busy themselves with

the white wool.

"You trouble yourself too little about him," says he, and looks at her sharply.

She crochets and is silent.

"Or"--with a burst of his old, untamable violence, Lensky strikes the table--"or he troubles himself too little about you."

There must have been some mistake in Mascha's work. She unravels a great piece of it. Her father draws the crochet work from her hand. "Leave that stupid stuff," cries he, angrily. "You cannot deceive me with your awkward, helpless comedy. I will see clearly into this affair. What position do you really occupy with your husband?"

Mascha passes her hand wearily over forehead and temples. Lensky is frightened at the unspeakable sadness which he reads on her pale face, now, when the brilliance of joy at seeing him again is gone from the large eyes.

"What position?" murmured she. "The position of a woman who must be thankful for her life long to her husband, for that he has saved her with the protection of his personality from a horrible shame."

"He ill-treats you?"

"No, no! All roughness is foreign to his nature. I have never had to complain of a harsh word from him since we were married; yes, he is even very tender to me." She pauses. "I am not disagreeable to him--" Then she continues, slowly, with more evident bitterness at every word: "But--but he is ashamed of me."

She rises, and pulls at the lamp-shade. Her father confusedly strokes her hand, then suddenly springing up, he cries out: "You poor child!" and clasps her to his breast. She bursts into fierce, not to be quieted sobs, and yet is happy as she had not been for years. What a feeling of warm security in these strong arms! What happiness to thus lean on a man whose caresses are not embittered for us by their compassionate graciousness, who loves us without criticism, blindly.

"Mascha, it is not to be borne that you torment yourself so," says he. "I will not consent. Leave him, and come to me."

But then she slips out of his arms, and says, firmly: "No, father; I will stay at my post."

She smooths her hair mechanically. After a short pause, she continues: "I often felt urged to tell you what makes my life so sad. Ah! how I longed for your compassion! And I wrote long letters to you, in which I confessed all, and then tore them up again, because, in the last moment, fear of saddening you conquered everything. But now, as you have guessed it, I will once--once--complain of my grief. What I have suffered in my married life, I cannot describe to you. I thought at first it would be better if I had a child. When Harry came I was glad that my husband was proud of him, but I felt that I was not necessary to the child. Sometimes I told myself that I was in my husband's way, that my death would bring about a reconciliation between him and his parents. And once I was so restless and inconsolable that I was within a hair's breadth of running away from him. I would even have left him the boy. But--it was not the moment to run away, and when baby came I knew that I must bear it, that no one could guard my treasure as I. No one can replace a mother to her daughter, and even if Karl left her to me, a separated wife is still only a discredited mother--a mother without authority. And what is the position of the daughter of a separated wife?--and a separated wife in my circumstances? I would rather bear all the bitterness in the world than risk the future of my child."

For a moment he is silent; then he takes her hand and draws it to his lips. "You are right, Mascha!" said he. "Bear your cross patiently. Nothing weighs more heavily upon one than the consciousness to have forfeited the happiness of those whom one loves. All else is only a trifle--all!"

Now he was in his room, the room which Mascha had prepared for him with such loving care. For the first time in years he was in a home. Everything about him was simple but home-like; a few flowers, a few tasteful ornaments, several photographs in pretty little frames. Every article of furniture had a physiognomy which bade him welcome. A feeling of home-like warmth and satisfaction overcame him. He looked about him with emotion. She had taken such pains, poor Mascha! There stood a picture of Colia as a four-year-old boy; there she was herself, as a baby, with bare little arms; and there, everywhere, pictures of Natalie. She had collected everything that could please him. He could have felt so happy if--if--ah! He held his hand before his eyes. How beautiful it might have been, and how horrible it all was! His son he had not seen since that fearful farewell evening in the Hôtel Westminster; all tenderness had vanished from their relations. At regular intervals he received stiff, formal letters from Nikolai, in which the young diplomat related the most important events of his life--that was all. Lensky knew that Nikolai advanced rapidly and brilliantly in his career; he guessed that his son, in spite of all, felt dissatisfied, and his heart remained closed to his father.

Mascha? That was quite different; she had never found anything to criticise in him, her love had ever remained the same. But she was unhappy, miserably unhappy--she, his darling, his idol. And whose fault was it, then?

With the manner of a being weighed down by a burden, he sinks into an arm-chair. What had he done? how was it, really? He had loved them all so boundlessly--Natalie and the children--and still, what had really driven him into this desolate, restless existence which resolved itself into disgust and misery? It had always been the same, even in these last years it had sometimes come over him; but now it was over, his nature had entered upon a new phase, the wild thirst for pleasure was quenched; he was weary--weary unto death.

He sought something supernatural to support him. A mysterious longing tormented him. From without sounded the plashing of the waves, monotonous, sad, hopeless, like the sobs of a rejected human being driven out into the cold.

Had no one knocked on the window? He sprang up, flung open the window. He trembled in every limb, cold sweat stood on his brow. The lamp threw long, trembling, wavering rays of light on the rippling water. As if built of shadows, like the ghosts of a city long dead, rose the palaces in the moonlight, dimmed by drifting clouds. The sirocco brooded over the lagunes. A soft breeze, the gentle warmth of a passing caress, blew over his cheek. He heard the tender sound of a sympathetic human voice close to his ear; it was Natalie's voice, but she spoke a strange language. He did not understand her. His heart stopped beating in breathless listening; he stretched out his arms--it was over, all vanished, all was vacancy!

He closed his lips tightly and groped for a chair. For years, at times, the same alluring, incomprehensible fancy pervaded him. The first time, he had fought against it with the whole strength of his intellect, had ascribed it all to an overexcitement of his nerves; now he firmly believed in a supernatural apparition. She came ever nearer, but he could never reach her. He tried to think of other things. He sought a book, a newspaper, which he might read to distract his mind, but found none. He remembered that he had left a new romance by Daudet, which he had glanced over before dinner, when Mascha had left him to dress, in the drawing-room. With a light in his hand, he went to get the book. He fancied that Mascha had long since retired. To his great astonishment, he heard voices in the drawing-room. He opened the door. There sat the young couple. Bärenburg was very pale. His head was bowed. An expression of deep shame lay on his finely cut face. One saw plainly that this was no bad man, but only a weak one, who, torn from his natural condition of life, could not thrive in strange ground. A thick necklace of pearls lay on the table.

At Lensky's entrance, Mascha, as well as her husband, turned her head. She had evidently been crying, but still tried to take on a pleasant, indifferent expression. It went to Lensky's heart to see how she restrained herself to spare him a pang.

"Do not force yourself to smile," said he, going straight up to her. "It is of no use." He seized the pearl necklace and looked at it with peculiar emotion. "I have understood!"

For a moment there was utter silence, then Bärenburg began, constrainedly: "You must not take the situation so desperately--it is only an inconvenient moment--naturally very painful to me, very----"

Lensky interrupted him. "It is better that we do not speak of it," cried he, crimson with restrained rage, and with hoarse, quite gasping voice; "if I once begin, I would say things to you which a nobleman could not pardon me, and I do not wish to quarrel with you--not on account of my child--but--but--" He grasped his throat with both hands. "No, I shall suffocate; it must out!"

"Father, hush, for God's sake!" cried Mascha. "You do him an injustice. Think how hard it was for him--another in his position--" She leaned against her father, pleadingly, tearfully.

"She is right," he murmured. "Who knows, another would have perhaps been still worse, still worse! But now leave me alone with my child; it would be better."

Bärenburg left the room. "He gambles!" said Lensky, looking Mascha straight in the eyes.

Mascha lowered her eyes. "Only since our marriage," murmured she.

"The miserable fellow!" burst out Lensky.

"Do not be too severe with him," said Mascha. "He is indeed almost as much to be pitied as I. Ah, father, father!" She wrung her hands, then suddenly, with a gesture of unspeakable despair, pushing back the hair from her temples, she cried: "If I only had the courage to hold my Natascha close to my heart and kiss her for a last time, and spring down into the water with her--there--" She points to a window; she has evidently already busied herself with the thought. "But how can I have the courage when she smiles at me, and twitches her little limbs so gayly, and so rejoices in life!"

Lensky laid his arm round the young wife and leaned the head of the unhappy woman on his shoulder. "It will be better; he will change in time. You only must not yield too much to him; you must take the reins in your hand, must have head and character for two. Forget the old story,

demand your right of him; then all will go well, believe me. As for your pecuniary affairs, I will take counsel. Only this--" He took the pearl necklace which had remained on the table and let it slide caressingly through his fingers. "Do not give this away; that you must not inflict upon me--only not that. I will take counsel, do not worry yourself."

XXXIV.

Yes, he would take counsel. It was harder than he thought. By the necessary inquiry into his affairs, it turned out that nothing more of his fortune was left to him. Where had it gone? He had lived so simply these last years, quite like a beggar. Where was the money?

The great sympathy which he had always felt for every living being, for everything that feels pain, had latterly become morbid and exaggerated in character. He gave and gave to every one who turned to him; gave without reckoning, without thinking, assisted every need, every weakness, every burden, in order to alleviate a grief, were it only for an hour. He gave until he had nothing more to give. The only thing that was left him to procure relief for his unhappy child was to again appear before the public. So he took up anew the wanderer's staff.

This time also he allowed his former manager, Herr Braun, to plan his foreign tour. He gave his first concert beyond the frontier in Königsberg. He did not feel anxious about the audience. With the thundering applause which had everywhere fallen to his share at his last concert tour still ringing in his ears, he quite did not comprehend the possibility of a fiasco. Another kind of discomfort tormented him.

In the recently flown years, which he had earnestly and solitarily passed in the effort to listen once more to the inner voices, which had been silenced in the mad whirl of his virtuoso life, but which anew, at first hesitatingly, but then ever more powerfully, more enthusiastically, vibrated through his mind--in these four years of exclusively creative activity, virtuosity had lost its nimbus for him. This kind of triumph seemed to him small, quite degrading. He was really ashamed to appear before the public with his old arts. But--he did it for his child.

But not the slightest doubt that he would be received with rejoicings occurred to him. He was mistaken. When early in February he gave his first concert in Königsberg, the hall was half empty, the audience remained cold. How was that possible?

He thought that the critics would revenge him for the pitiable indifference of the throng, that his colleagues would bring him ovations, would rebuild for him his old pedestal of subjection and flattery. But no. The critics were lukewarm, and the artist world showed itself quite adverse.

How was it, then, that he, by his boundless generosity could win no enduring gratitude, by his astonishing genius could not win respect which should secure him, at his age, from the severity of an objective judgment? How was it that he, a few years after his disappearance from the arena, already was accounted with those to be judged? He had never believed in friendship, and now, as it appeared, he really had no friends.

In his time he had been raved over, adored, flattered, and secretly envied; he had not been loved, and people were not inclined to spare him. He had always been too rough, too ruthless, too arrogant. Always ready to give to every one, he would never accept anything, even thanks. In spite of his outward benevolence, his winning kindness in superficial intercourse, he was at heart very reserved and inaccessible. Except to his wife and children, he had never been intimate with a single being, however much painful compassion he might feel for every misery.

This repellent arrogance of feeling, which always showed upon nearer acquaintance, had something paining and humiliating. People were ashamed to be dependent upon a man who made so little of it.

A number of new, clever virtuosos, who formerly could have won no recognition, had appeared in the foreground, and the public had grown accustomed to them. Indeed none of these new artists equalled Lensky in the might of his talent, but the magnificent splendor which had characterized his art in its zenith was no longer remembered. The faults, on the contrary, which disfigured his performance still more significantly at his last appearances, were remembered only too well. People asked themselves how they could have been so pleased by such arbitrariness, and every form of musical failing. They were happy to have escaped this fame carrying all before it, and near which no other genius could expand.

His reappearance on the musical horizon had the same effect as the sudden apparition among

the living of one for years believed dead. The chasm which his retirement had made was closed; there was no longer a place for him. Instead of defending him, his colleagues triumphantly gave reasons for the repellent bearing of the public.

He felt as if annihilated. It was not possible that his old power had really left him, he told himself. If he had, a short time ago, thought poorly of his virtuoso success, he now longed for it. A consuming, morbid ambition overcame him, a thirst for triumph. He who had formerly hated all exaggerated figures of speech, all flowery phrases, now hungered for great, enthusiastic demonstrations. He rejoiced at every flattery, however tasteless it might be. That fatal giddiness which overcomes great men when they must descend, overcame him.

He clung to everything to win a support. He who had once so roughly held aloof from all advertising, only tolerating about him those journalists who might afford him a passing diversion, or who suited his humor, now stooped for the favor of the most subordinate reporters. He crowded concert-halls, which else would have remained half empty, with free tickets, in order to secure himself a receptive audience. It was all in vain.

A wild defiance overcame him. He everywhere suspected cabals, grew quite foolish and childish in his fancies. They were unfavorable to Russians in Germany. The indifference of the public was a political demonstration.

Before the public he purposely exhibited a haughty, rough manner, but when he knew himself unobserved, then he hid his head in his hands and wept like a little child.

The old pact with the devil was broken. He sought something else which he could not find--a musical expression for the new, elevating charm which had recently enthralled him and for which he forgot his old art.

XXXV.

"DEAR FATHER:--I have a great joy to confide to you. My husband's parents have become reconciled with me. They are here in Venice, where they will pass several weeks. They live in a hotel, but I see them every day, and have already learned to love my mother-in-law dearly. She reminds me a little of Lady Banbury, only she is not quite so magnificent and wise, but she is a very kind and distinguished old lady, and friendly beyond expectation to me. She is indescribably charming with the children.

"You should only see her sitting on the floor building the St. Mark's Church with blocks for Harry. Harry is naturally the favorite; he has the Bärenburg family look.

"But still he has something of my dear, wild father; he prefers to build the Campanile than the St. Mark's Church, because 'it falls together with such a nice noise when it is finished,' he said to me yesterday, and then his eyes sparkled so, and he danced about so that I embraced him for it.

"Naturally my position has changed for the better. My mother-in-law is one of those who do nothing by halves. She has introduced me to many ladies, and already taken me several times 'into society'--the Venetian society as preliminary. Ah, if you knew how hard it was for me to go among people the first time! I could scarcely stand. Now I have almost accustomed myself to it. I still indeed prefer to remain at home, but my mother-in-law may be right when she forces me to 'show myself,' when she tells me that it is an injustice to my family to yield to my selfish preference for solitude. Yes, certainly she is right. The proof of it is the total change which has taken place in my husband since I have won my little place in society, and--I may say it to you without vanity--since I have been made something of, for they are really very good to me. My music comes to my help. Karl is as pleased as a child at my social success, and is not weary of repeating to me the compliments which they pay him about me.

"He suddenly sees me with quite different eyes, and pays court to me like a lover. He asks my advice in everything, and is never weary of saying how pleasant it is to have a clever wife who can think for one.

"And I, at first--I tell this to you only, papa--at first this change filled me with bitterness. I was no worse at that time when others would know nothing of me. But I restrain myself. Do I not fare better, much better, than I ever dared expect? Whatever I can do to make his life pleasant I will do.

"Can you guess who has done all this for me? My old friend, Nita. Soon after you left here she came to Venice to see me, because my letters had made her sad. And she did not rest until, with the powerful help of Lady Banbury, who is, as you know, the sister of my mother-in-law, she had brought about the reconciliation between Karl and his parents. What trouble she took, how many letters she wrote, how she travelled here and there--it is not to be described.

"Ah, what a lovely girl! You should learn to know her more intimately. She is prettier than ever, although she is nearly thirty. Her fame grows daily, and if you perhaps believe that she poses as a muse, and boasts exaggeratedly like any other female celebrity--far from it! There is something so purely womanly, tender, in her manner, and such a charming smile when she raises a child on her knees.

"And now of what lies nearest my heart.

"My husband resumes his career. We leave for Washington in the latter part of April.

"The thought of again putting such a large portion of the globe between me and you makes me sad. When you were with me this autumn I felt so truly how wholly I am knit together with you. I would so love to take you with me into our new home. Oh, how charming a nest I would build for you, how I would pet you, wait on you, amuse you! But you would not consent, even for love of me, and besides there is no continuing place for a great man like you in our little household.

"But still I must see you again before I go. Name some place where it would be agreeable to you to meet us. It is all one to me, from Madrid to Nijey Novogorod. Colia is coming also; he has promised me. And there we will all be together for a few days, only live in each other, and be happy as one can be when tears of parting are already in his eyes, and rejoice in each other as people who know that their time is short can. So, only fix a place--will you not?--and soon.

"I hear a twittering outside the door. It is Natascha who has wakened. Now Annunziata brings her in. I wish you could see her. Such a tousled little golden, curly head, such eyes, and the dear little dimples round her mouth. She is my sunshine! And how she stretches out her arms to me!

"I had to interrupt my letter to take her on my lap. The rogue would not have it otherwise. You would be pleased with her. She is fully five months prettier than when you saw her. She has three new teeth, which look like little pearls. She walks quite nicely already, and also begins to understand much. If I ask her how much she loves grandpa, and show her your picture, she spreads out her little arms as wide as she can and closes her eyes.

"Adieu, papa. *Auf baldiges Wiedersehen!*

"One thing more; I wished to write it at the beginning and could not, but now it must leave the pen. It is fearful to me that you torment yourself for my sake; I really do not need it. With the income which I derive yearly from what is left of my fortune, and with what my husband now receives from his parents, we can live perfectly, perfectly well. Therefore, I beg you, if you give concerts for your own distraction, so be it; but only not for my sake. All greetings from my husband, from me. Well, I kiss you a thousand times, and remain, counting on a speedy meeting,

"Your thankful daughter,

"M."

It was in Vienna that Lensky received his daughter's letter, at breakfast in a hotel, the day after a concert when he had at length received an ovation. He felt electrified, newly animated, ten years younger.

He read the letter twice; but if the first reading had truly pleased him, the second attentive perusal only moderately satisfied him.

"H-m! h-m!" he murmured to himself. "Yes, it is quite good, it is better than I dared expect. Poor woman! He loves her from convenience; she rules him since she no longer deludes herself about him. But still it is fearful for her to be bound for her whole life to this shallow man. She has a fine character, she will do her duty, will fight out her life-conflict honorably from pride, so as not to be reproached by her children, and not to give the malicious world the pleasure of slandering her. She will be a splendid mother. How maternity sanctifies a woman! And Nita--poor Colia!" Suddenly he felt strangely; remembrance had allured him to a dark spot of which he felt a horror. How would the meeting with Colia be? For years he had longed to be reconciled with his son, and still he could not overcome a certain anxiety in this case.

He tried to think of something else. What city should he appoint as the place of the family meeting? He did not wish to cause Mascha any great expense. Venice would have been the most convenient, but the old Bärenburgs vexed him. Well, it would occur to him. Meanwhile he picked up the newspaper. A correspondence from Rome was among the contents. The name Perfection immediately met his eye, the name of the young pianist who had formerly accompanied him on his concert tours. He had never had any special personal liking for Perfection, but yet he looked upon him as his musical apprentice and was interested in his progress.

He looked over the article more closely. The blood rushed to his head. What was it he read there? His name--yes--near Perfection's.

"Two greater contrasts would be hard to name in the musical world than Albert Perfection and Boris Lensky. This is the more striking as they, travelling together for years, formed a musical whole. But while the art of the pianist developed more splendidly with each year, the virtuosity of the violinist crumbled away bit by bit. The public did not suspect at Lensky's last concert tour what is now apparent to the most short-sighted; namely, that the applause which was accorded to Lensky was really only for Perfection's accompanying. Since then Perfection has emancipated himself from the despotism of his musical tyrant--for whom he has, nevertheless, preserved the most touching affection--and now stands alone in his artistic greatness, one of the noblest phenomenal artists of all times. Especially striking is the circumstance that he has been quite uninfluenced by Lensky in his artistic development.

"It is not uninteresting to bring more plainly to view the particulars of the glaring contrast between these

two musical individualities. The principal difference is that Albert Perfection is a civilized genius, while Lensky, even at the height of his achievements, was nothing but a genial barbarian.

"Perfection is just as free as Lensky of old-fashioned virtuoso-pedantry, but he is also free of that distorted Tartar romanticism of which Lensky never knew how to make an end. Without, in so far as his thankless instrument permits, standing behind, in warmth and tenderness, the violinist's performances, his playing is still distinguished by a quite architectural perfection of style which no other virtuoso has attained. He never sins against good taste, against what we might call the higher moral principles of art. A Roman lady remarked recently that Perfection was for her a too well-bred pianist. He lacks the bewitching sinfulness, the demoniac fire which distinguished Lensky in his good days. That may be, but how sadly these bewitching peculiarities of youth degenerate in an old artist we have already unfortunately had occasion to observe in Lensky's last concert tour. And how greatly the symptoms of decay have increased in him since then, every musical report which comes to us from Germany proves. The bewitching sinfulness has become a caricature, and of the demoniac fire nothing more seems to be left than a Berserker rage expressed with the bow over the unvanquishable coldness of the public.

"One remembers in Rome no such success of a virtuoso as that which Albert Perfection attained last month in the Palazzo Caffarelli. He is the lion of the day. When he drives through the streets, the students nudge each other and say: '*Ah, è Perfezione!*' and hats are removed as before a crowned head."

This article was signed Arnold Spatzig. And if, instead of the name, had stood three stars, it would have been the same for Lensky; he would still have known whom he had to thank for this essay. For more than twenty years Arnold Spatzig had made a practice of insulting and vexing him; what wonder that he had become a master in this art? But until now he had confined himself to insulting Lensky the composer; the virtuoso had been too popular for him to venture to attack him before; and now--Lensky looked at the article again. "Nonsense--moral principle in art--lecture on musical morals--caricature--old scoundrel--nonsense! He has only injured Perfection by his partiality. The article is indeed well written, that is the foolishness. Distorted Tartar romanticism--that will please many--very many--" He struck his fist on the table, his throat contracted.

That critics frequently please themselves with thrusts at an old great man in order to pay homage to new ones, he knew. That the time might have already come for him, already now--that had never occurred to him. "What Lensky was--" he repeated. "The donkey treats me like a corpse whom one has forgotten to bury. I will show him that I still live, and that an old eagle is always more than a young sparrow!"

Hereupon the impressario, Herr Braun, entered. "A brilliant success yesterday," said he. "Affairs are coming round; we have great victories before us." He spread out a number of musical criticisms before the virtuoso, and then continued: "We must now consider where we will turn. Perhaps to Paris, and from thence to London. Or shall we first take Brussels?"

"Cut short all preparations in Paris," cried Lensky.

"What do you prefer?"

"Rome."

A momentary confusion takes possession of the agent. "H-m! The moment is not exactly favorable; Perfection has just--in Rome----"

The old violinist started up, he clapped the impressario on the chest; he was beside himself, his face was distorted with rage. "And shall I fear this street-boy?" he gasped. "I tell you, it is to be Rome!"

XXXVI.

Rome! Rome! The word had always had a particular ring for him. The most beautiful happiness of his life he had found in Rome--he had buried it in Rome.

If his great, weary soul, dreading the future, had, after the fashion of weary souls, sought in the past a place of rest, it always stopped at the point where Natalie had entered his life. His thoughts did not willingly wander further back.

His childhood and early youth had been a time of harsh renunciation, amidst rough, immoral surroundings. The impression of immodest jokes, impure habits, petty distrust, ambiguous sneers, hard work, unæsthetic education, was inseparable from this period of his life. He was so

much the more horrified thereat as he knew that the influence of these repulsive details had secretly penetrated through his every pore, that the soil in which he had grown up had forever soiled the roots of his being. He detested the slightest remembrance of his early youth.

All that was beautiful and noble and good in his life had begun with Natalie, in Rome. A strange, urgent longing drove him there. He was convinced that he would there experience something extraordinary, a last brilliant point in his existence, an immense victory and--the ghostly alluring which had formerly only pursued him at long intervals of time now vibrated about him ever oftener, no longer tormenting as formerly, but sweet, mysteriously promising, quite calming. It was now quite near.

Rome! Rome! He said the word often to himself, softly, slowly, as one utters the name of a beloved one. Ever more foolish became the expectations which he centred upon his stay in Rome.

He would grow young again--the dead would arise for him in Rome. His heart beat loudly when the train stopped and the conductor cried out in the clear April air, "Roma--Roma!"

It was in the afternoon, and the sun shone brightly. They had both come to the station, Mascha and Nikolai--Mascha full of happy, tender expectation; Nikolai not without a certain embarrassment. Even now, after nearly five years, it had cost him a certain effort to resolve upon meeting his father. But scarcely had his glance fallen upon Lensky when he forgot all that had separated him from him. When he noticed the slow anxiety with which the old man came up to him, without venturing to stretch out the arms, with which he made frequent twitching, helpless motions, to him, his heart bled for him, and not troubling himself about the tourists and loungers on the platform, he hurried up to his father and embraced him. Lensky laughed convulsively, somewhat childishly, as old men laugh in order not to weep; then he walked through the station between his two children.

Walking heavily, with the forcedly erect carriage of a man who tries to conceal his increasing infirmity, he strode through the crowd. As formerly when he casually showed himself in a public place, he stared straight before him to avoid the curious looks which used to follow him. But today no one looked after him. Only a street-boy pointed out his long hair to another, and laughed at it.

A brilliant blue April sky arched itself over the city. At first Lensky merely exchanged a few remarks with his children and inquired heartily of their affairs. Gradually he grew more silent, ever more silent. Mascha alone maintained the conversation. But Lensky did not hear what she said. His nearsighted eyes wandered uneasily over everything they passed. At times he bent far forward, and then suddenly, as if disappointed, turned away his head.

"What are you seeking, father?" asked Nikolai.

"Rome--I find it no more," murmured Lensky.

"Yes, it has changed very much since eight years ago, since mamma's death."

"I did not see it eight years ago," replied Lensky, roughly. "The Rome that I seek dates much further back."

"The Rome in which you were betrothed to our little mother," whispered Mascha, softly.

He nodded shortly, repellently. All at once his sad face cleared.

"There I still see old acquaintances," he cried, and pointed to two antique columns which, strangely enough, were built into a small house, one of whose tiny windows looked out over their time-blackened magnificence.

"That is just as at that time," cried the old man, animatedly, "even to the particulars of white curtains and red flowers. I remember how your mother once could not laugh enough at the contrast between these freshly washed curtains and the gloomy Roman splendor. Heavens, how she laughed! You can none of you laugh as she. I must show you the house in the Via Giulia, where she lived at that time."

"That has long disappeared," said Colia. "Even eight years ago it no longer existed."

"How do you know that?" burst out Lensky, quite harshly.

"Because she--because mamma sought it then and did not find it."

"Ah! she also sought it," murmured Lensky, and fell into a brooding silence. After a while he raised his head.

"Why did they tear it down?" cried he, angrily. "They had no right to tear it down. It was no trivial, ordinary house, but an old palace, a wonderful old palace, a bit of history. Do not these clowns know that there are relics on which one dare not lay a hand? It brings misfortune to desecrate sanctuaries."

Once more his eyes wander over his surroundings. "No; there is nothing more left of my

Rome," said he, after a pause. Then slowly raising his eyes, he adds: "Nothing but the eternal blue heavens above us."

XXXVII.

All was prepared for a cordial, festive reception in the Hôtel de l'Europe, the same hotel in which Lensky had lived thirty years before, and in which everything had changed, as all Rome.

Natascha had on an embroidered white dress in honor of his arrival. Mascha declared that she recognized him; at any rate, she displayed the utmost friendliness. When he took her in his arms she passed her tiny hands caressingly over his rough, wrinkled cheeks, and the old man rejoiced in the fresh young bud, and could not kiss her enough.

But the family reunion was not so happy and cheerful as Mascha had dreamed. A weight lay on all. Lensky, who formerly had never felt the slightest fatigue from travelling, was to-day so weary that his hands trembled. He left the choicest morsels untouched on his plate, and drank more wine than formerly. He scarcely spoke, often for long moments brooded absent-mindedly, while his deathly pale face took on an intense listening and longing expression which was as weird as mysterious to his children.

When he roused himself, he turned his attention almost exclusively to his son. Incessantly his eyes sought Nikolai's. The young man showed the elder every possible attention, but he could not talk with him.

Meanwhile Mascha did not cease to try to enliven the oppressive mood, whose cause she did not suspect, by all kinds of communications. She told of her Cousin Anna, who had finally married--an American parvenu, whom she treated very badly, and who was very proud of her. He had built her a house in the Champs Elysées, after her personal liking. The house was very large and very handsome. It had room for everything, only not for Anna's mother. Old Madame Jeliagin, who as long as her daughter was unmarried would have spent her last cent to live according to their rank, now begged from one relative to another. "She was with us in Venice for six weeks this winter," said Mascha, "and you will scarcely believe me, I know you are prejudiced against aunt, but I was very happy with her. She is so simple now, and so pitifully modest. She no longer paints, and she ties her cap-strings under her chin. She always jumps up if one wants anything, and waited on my husband as on a Sultan. He was always very good to her, and she admired him immensely. With me and the children she was of such an old-fashioned, clinging tenderness that it warmed my heart. She has still a very strong family feeling, and told me much of my dear mother. Strange, with so many people their good peculiarities only come to light when they are too old to embitter life with vanity." Mascha smiled. It did Lensky good to see, for the first time in so many years, this healthy, happy expression on her face. Meanwhile she continued:

"Still, I have news of some one who will perhaps interest you more than Aunt Barbe. Whom did I meet to-day on the Corso? Sonia, with her father. You perhaps know that he has recently been made inspector--I do not know the title exactly, protector perhaps--of the Choreographic Institute in St. Petersburg. He is still the same, fire and flame for culture and beautiful women. Sonia may have much to endure. She bears it all patiently, as she bears everything. Do you know that she has grown much prettier in these five years, Nikolai?"

Nikolai only murmured distractedly: "So, really?" and crumbled his bread.

"Yes, less stout, her face more expressive. She has more manner, and dresses with much taste."

"I always thought her pretty, and one of the best and most sympathetic girls whom I had ever met," said Nikolai, with the emphasis with which men praise girls with whom they feel themselves in the wrong.

"I asked her to visit us to-day. She said she could not come to-day, she expected a friend--Nita Sankjéwitch."

Nikolai bit his lips. In this moment that vein of loathing for his father rose again in him. Suddenly he felt something peculiar. He raised his eyes and met his father's. A shudder ran over him. So much anxious, supplicating sadness was in this glance.



They were at dessert when a waiter entered and presented a visiting-card to Lensky. Lensky changed color and trembled when he took the card from the salver and read the name.

"What does he want here?" he burst out violently, without restraining himself before the waiter.

"Who is it?" asked Mascha, in Russian.

"Perfection!" Lensky drummed confusedly on the table.

"But, papa, you cannot expect anything else," whispered Mascha, softly. "He has only shown you a politeness which is your due."

Lensky frowned.

Then Nikolai laid his hand on his arm. "Shall I receive Perfection in your place?" asked he. "I will tell him that you are tired from the journey; he might come later."

At his son's touch Lensky started. His gloomy face lightened. "No, no, my boy; best of thanks, Colia, I am going myself. It only vexed me at first to be torn away from our cosy circle. We will make it short-farewell."

With that he went.

Mascha and Nikolai still remained at table. They looked at each other piercingly. Each wished to read the thoughts of the other from the face.

"How do you find him?" asked Mascha at length.

"Very changed."

"Is he not?" Mascha fought back tears. "It is terrible to look on. He is not to be recognized; five months ago he was quite different. If one only could prevent him from playing. I am convinced he will experience something annoying."

"Yes, if one could only prevent him," murmured Nikolai.

Meanwhile Lensky had entered the drawing-room. A correctly dressed, well-bred looking blond man came to meet him, with the exclamation: "Welcome, heartily welcome to Rome!" and stretched out both hands to him.

Lensky negligently took one. Perfection's air of hearty comradeship vexed him. What did this little pianist permit himself? Formerly his accompanist had waited until he gave him his hand. Perfection noticed the old man's vexation. He was ready to pacify him. The news that Lensky would give a concert in Rome had at first caused him some excitement. Now, when he saw him before him, his excitement changed to compassion--the noble garment in which the triumphant ambition of young, aspiring mediocrity prefers to clothe itself to a vanquished great one. The broken old man with the round shoulders and trembling hands could no longer injure him. He suddenly felt the most tender reverence for him, and pressed his hand to his lips like that of a priest.

How repulsive such demonstrations would formerly have been to Lensky! He would have roughly and imperiously rebuffed them. Now this token of submission flattered him. "It was very nice in you to hurry a little to visit me," said he. "H-m--sit down." More he could not say.

"You have no idea what enthusiasm it caused among your adorers when one learned that one might at last greet you again here," began the talkative Perfection.

"Ah! Have you really left me anything?" said Lensky, striking his former accompanist familiarly on the knee.

"Do not humiliate me, master," replied Perfection.

Again Lensky struck him on the knee, and laughed loudly and somewhat constrainedly, although nothing laughable had been said.

"I am very glad--really very glad to see you again," he assured the pianist.

The latter smiled comprehendingly. "It reminds you of old times, *mon maître*."

Lensky's face clouded. "Not wholly--h-m!--I must still congratulate you upon your success. I am proud of you--regard you a little as my musical apprentice. Do you give another concert here?"

"No, not at present. I only remained in Rome on your account, master. You do not know how I long for the sound of your violin. How are you pleased with your pianist?"

Lensky passed his hand over his forehead. "As much as one can be with a pianist with whom one has been associated for six weeks only. He has not yet learned to think with me. For the rest, he is quite a clever man."

"I begin to be jealous!" cried Perfection.

"It is not necessary. With you it went better--finally. At first I tormented myself enough with you. But--one may say what one will--the piano accompaniment remains always a leaden weight for a violinist. With the orchestra it fares better, but that is too ceremonious. If I envy the pianist one thing, it is his independence. The accompanists are none of them worth anything--none of them."

"You discourage me, *mon maître*," cried Perfection. "When I heard of the trouble you had recently with pianists, I wished to place myself at your disposal, at least for your concert here."

Perhaps the offer was really well meant. In any case it was the quintessence of artistic politeness. Instead of thinking of this, Lensky burst out as if Perfection had wished to insult him with his offer, and cried: "So that it might be said the audience at Lensky's performances applauded the accompanist merely, eh?"

An unpleasant silence followed. At last Perfection began with suffocated voice: "As I see, you have read Spatzig's article about me."

"Yes; I even did not grudge you the article from my heart," assured Lensky, cuttingly. "I am glad for you that you stand so well with the critics."

Perfection looked the furious old man full in the face. Offended innocence and insulted dignity spoke from his face.

"You do me bitter injustice by this allusion," said he, quietly, and with emphasis. "I could not help it that that article was written. I had not read it before it appeared. If I had known of it I would never have given my consent to its publication. I found it tasteless and rough, and did not feel at all flattered by it, but ashamed. It has made me many enemies in Germany. In Rome, on the contrary, where it has been translated into French and Italian and printed in different journals, it has been of use to me, of great use, and you, Lensky"--for the first time Perfection called his former patron briefly by his name, which did not escape the latter--"you, Spatzig's *feuilleton* has here--understand me correctly, here in Rome, where you have not been heard for thirty years; here, where they rely on Spatzig's judgment--immeasurably injured. I tell you truly, in the superficial musical world which here forms the decisive part of the audience, a great prejudice against you prevails. The hearty enthusiasm which everywhere else meets you is here limited to one or two hundred of your old admirers in the strangers' colony. So! There you have the situation." Perfection is silent.

Lensky's lips have drawn themselves ever more deeply down at the corners; his nostrils quiver, he passes his hand uneasily over the table between himself and Perfection. "That is all very instructive and very interesting that you tell me," said he, uneasily; "but how does it further concern me?"

"It is in your power to change the situation, and I would like to persuade you to do your part. H-m! it is so hard to speak of it to you, Lensky, you have such passionate prejudices; but, really, it will lead to nothing to further excite Spatzig. If you soothe his vanity, wounded by you, he will immediately write an article about you which will paralyze the effect of the one about me. He will make converts for you, will extol you just as zealously as he has formerly depreciated you."

"And what shall I do to cause this important reverse of affairs?" asks Lensky, with caustic scorn.

Perfection hesitated a moment, then he replied: "Call upon Frau Spatzig."

"So, then, Spatzig has a wife?" asked Lensky. "You surely must know; he has been married for

more than six years."

"I had no suspicion, never troubled myself about Herr Spatzig's private affairs," replied Lensky, arrogantly.

"A former singer, Signora Zingarelli. She spoke with great interest of you; told me that, long years ago, on your first tour in America, she had the pleasure of learning to know you personally, and assured me that she would be very happy to see you again. She laid great stress on it."

"What is the lovely creature's name? Zinga--Zinga----"

"Zingarelli."

"So, Zingarelli!" Lensky laughed to himself. "That is indeed delightful, that is charming, really. The Zingarelli! I remember her distinctly. A Belgian with a pretty white complexion and red hair. I compliment Herr Spatzig. H-m! And I should call upon this lady?"

"It would be to your interest," said Perfection. "If it, nevertheless, would be disagreeable to you, I make you another proposition. I play to-morrow at a soirée at the Spatzigs. Come for my sake, to do me the honor, without having left a card before."

"H-m! To a soirée at Madame Zingarelli Spatzig's! Pardon me, does any one go to her house?"

"All Rome, especially the distinguished foreigners. She entertains a great deal. She brought Spatzig a considerable fortune."

"Yes, yes; she sang third *rôles* in Morelli's troupe in Russia. It is very tolerable to sing third *rôles* in a travelling Italian opera troupe!" Lensky laughed significantly.

Perfection was silent.

"But do not be so sanctimonious," now cried Lensky. "It certainly cannot be unknown to you that Zingarelli was a quite common courtesan."

"I know nothing of that," replied Perfection, coldly, with the suitable dignity with which a man of the world corrects a forward person who dares bring to light his facts of the past, which the man of the world has buried for his convenience. At the same time the pianist had risen from his chair. He took his hat. "Well, will you forget the old grudge, Lensky? May I tell Frau Spatzig that you are coming?"

"You are here in her commission?" cried Lensky, to whom a new reason for Perfection's manner had occurred.

Perfection, who had not found it hard to answer before, remained silent.

"I understand," said Lensky. "She needs me to show me. One knows by what arts such women charm society to their drawing-rooms. It would please her to lead about the old lion by a chain. There may even be a little advantage for him to permit it"--with a sharp glance at Perfection--"but--" He now stood before Perfection, drawn up to his full height, and gloomy. With a gesture which was peculiar to him when greatly excited, he raised his arms and clenched his fists.

"You can tell her," cried he, slowly letting his arms sink--"you can tell her that I would rather stand in the pillory and be stared at by the passers-by than set foot over the threshold of the Spatzig couple. It would seem less degrading to me than to sue for the favor of this pack of idiots."

A minute later Lensky was alone in the room. Perfection has withdrawn with a deep bow. Lensky had the feeling that a misfortune had occurred--a misfortune which was his fault. He did not know what, and could not measure the consequences of what had happened. Suddenly his heart beat loudly and heavily. The sweat of anxiety stood on his brow. Why had he not better governed himself?

But what wonder? He had never been able to govern himself; how should he learn it as an old man?

XXXVIII.

Except that from principle he never touched his bow on the days of his concerts before he

presented himself to the audience, Lensky spent this day just like any other; one perceived no outward excitement about him. This time it was otherwise.

Early in the morning he visited his wife's grave in the pretty churchyard by the Cestius pyramid, at the foot of the Aventine. When he returned his face bore the signs of severe weeping, and he shut himself into his room for many hours. Mascha heard him practise. He incessantly tried passages on his violin as if he would strengthen his memory. At lunch he sat down with his children, but could eat nothing. He complained of weariness in his left arm. Twice the fork fell from his hand.

In the afternoon Mascha proposed a drive, having noticed that he was restless and uneasy. He consented. On the Corso they met Frau Spatzig in her carriage. Lensky was about to remove his hat, then he was ashamed of his cowardice, and turned away his head.

They drove far out in the Campagna. The fairy charm of spring spread the fragrance of its renewed life over the graves and ruins. Dreamily Lensky's eyes wandered over the wide plain. He recognized everything. How often he had driven along this street with Natalie! He felt young again, a feeling of elevating enthusiasm took possession of him.

And suddenly a vibrating and singing began in his soul. He listened breathlessly. What wonderful songs were those? He could have written them down now, immediately.

But did that really all ring through his soul? It seemed to him that he heard the music vibrating down to him from above. He bent forward---

Ever lower, the song sank down to earth, with its consoling, calming compassion, the divine compassion of an angel who understands the pain of a tormented human heart.

Lower, ever lower, softer, fuller--hark! The song had ceased, a rough breeze had blown it away.

Lensky looked up. Near the street stood a white church-yard wall, and tall, dark cypresses rose around it. At the gate stood white-robed monks around a coffin; the black smoke of their red, flickering torches darkened the bright spring air; from their lips sounded a dirge.

The carriage rolled on; the gloomy picture vanished; around ruled the spring. The breath of new life rose from the earth covered with fresh green, and in the hedges the flowers kissed each other.

XXXIX.

"Really, without evasion, what do you think of Lensky?" It is the Countess Löwenskiold, one of the former Lensky enthusiasts, who asks this question of Albert Perfection. She sits in one of the first rows of the Salla Dante, between Perfection and Madame Spatzig, with whom she is quite intimate, and awaits Lensky's appearance on the stage.

"I have such an insurmountable feeling of reverence and gratitude for Lensky that my judgment may not be impartial," replied Perfection, correctly.

"Perfection, *pas de bêtises*, give your true opinion," commands Frau Spatzig in her rough, guttural voice.

"Well, my true opinion is: I regret that with Lensky the summits are so near the abysses," says Perfection. "You must not misunderstand me, honored Countess----"

The Countess laughs and strikes him with her fan. "I understand you very well," cries she. "The epigram is wonderfully descriptive."

"Alas! it is not original with me; it comes from De Sterny--but how unpunctual Lensky is today." Perfection looks at his watch. "Half-past nine."

"And yet he will play all that for us?" says Madame Spatzig, and points to an unusually long programme.

"It is indeed a somewhat tasteless and overladen musical *menu*," murmurs Spatzig, who sits behind the Löwenskiold. "Shall you remain until the end, Countess?"

"Impossible, my friend."

"Still, he should begin," says Madame Spatzig.

"He has surely not become ill?" meanwhile, a few seats away, whispers Mascha to her brother. "Suppose you go and see."

Then Lensky steps on the stage. His face is flushed, he stumbles over a chair, collects himself, and bows. Spatzig looks at him attentively. "H-m! He is nervous as a conservatorist," murmurs he.

He takes up his violin. His programme begins with Beethoven's C minor sonata dedicated to Emperor Alexander.

How wonderfully he played it formerly, with what noble comprehension of the magnificent earnestness of the composition. Now---

A mocking smile appears ever more plainly on Frau Zingarelli Spatzig's face. The critic whispers to Countess Löwenskiöld. "One has seldom heard such poor playing in a public concert," he remarks. One scarcely recognizes the sonata. Quite without taking breath, he springs from one movement to the next. The *scherzo*--formerly it was a masterpiece of grace and poetry. Now--is that really Lensky who chases the bow over the strings with this stumbling, musical insolence?

Mascha's cheeks burn with shame; she looks to the right and left, shyly and anxiously, expecting something terrible. She would like to hold the people's ears, or call to them: "Wait, have patience with him, he will surely come to himself." Before they know it, he has finished the sonata.

A moderate applause accompanies his exit. One shows him the consideration due to a celebrity. Mascha breathes freely, as after a danger passed through. All at once the hushed hand-clapping breaks forth afresh, becomes importunate, immoderate, supported by loud cries of "Bravo!" The couple of hundred young Russians present, students, painters, or archaeologists, pay homage, in their uncomprehending, mistaken national enthusiasm, to their great man.

At first the Romans put up with it. Lensky has appeared upon the stage; he bows solemnly, benevolently. He does not know that he has played badly, and is pleased at the enthusiasm.

Spatzig still whispers to the Countess Löwenskiöld and holds his sides with laughter. The Russians are wild. It is too bad; Madame Spatzig makes a little attempt--only from petulance--behind her fan, so that no one perceives it; she begins to hiss. Then around her through the whole room, louder and louder, resounds the cutting, scornful sound, louder, ever louder.

Lensky stands as if rooted to the ground; then, mechanically raising his hands, he makes the old, proud gesture with which he used to repel too violent applause. But the hissing increases, loud insults are mingled therewith. The horrid noise with which an Italian audience expresses its displeasure and scorn resounds through the sober, cold hall.

Then Perfection springs up. "Silenzio!" he thunders to the excited public--and all is hushed.

Lensky has withdrawn from the stage. A strange feeling prevails. One feels that something terrible has happened. A brilliant fame has been wiped out. A great man has been insulted.

Several people leave the hall. The entertainment is over, why wait? It is not possible that the concert should proceed. Mascha and Nikolai rise to go to him; then a murmur goes through the ranks, some one is coming; one expects a manager, any one, who will announce to the audience that Lensky is ill. Or is the pianist to play his number? No; it is Lensky himself who comes on the stage. He holds himself stiffly, looks neither to the right nor the left; no hand moves to greet him. They really do not understand what he wishes, but they remain seated. They look at him with attention, respect, and remorse. How miserable he looks, and how noble and magnificent! His eyes shine with a supernatural light from his face, which is pale and sunken like that of a corpse.

Already after the first stroke of the bow a touched consideration spreads through the hall. What is he playing? Nobody knows, but no one remains unmoved who hears him, and no one will forget these tones--a melody which no one knows, and which carries all away with it, sublime, wonderful, compassionate, and elevating. It is the great word in art which he has sought in vain during his whole life, and which he has found at last, now--no one has yet ever heard the violin played thus. Every thought of strings and bow vanishes. It is an angel's voice which sings. A shudder creeps over those who listen, a kind of sacred terror, as if something supernatural, spiritual, drew near. Then--all at once he stops. Has a string snapped?

The hand with the bow has sunk down; he bends his head forward--listens. To what does he listen?

His face takes on a glorified, ecstatic expression. He gives a short cry, then stretching out both arms, he falls to the floor. He had grown young again, the dead had arisen for him. He no longer felt the weight of his body, the great soul was set free.

He had indeed known that something wonderful must come in Rome.

They brought him to the hotel, the physician came--two physicians. One did what one could. All attempts at reanimation were in vain. The doctors pronounced it heart failure. At two o'clock in the morning the two children of the deceased remained alone with the corpse.

XL.

On the third day after his death the burial took place, with great pomp and an immense crowd.

Only when one misses a dead man can one fully recognize his greatness, and to the artist world which assembled round Lensky's coffin in Rome it grew plain that they had buried a giant. At first the Russians would not consent that the body of their great man, who had so unspeakably loved his fatherland, should be confided to strange earth, but his children knew that he had wished to be buried near his wife in the strangers' cemetery at the foot of the Aventine, and they respected his last wishes.

Mascha's inner self was wholly shattered. Not only her husband, but also her mother-in-law, had come from Venice to be present at the funeral solemnities, to support, to console the broken young woman. She repelled every consolation.

In spite of her great physical exhaustion, she would not be prevented from accompanying the corpse to the edge of the grave. They were afraid that she would swoon when the body was lowered into the grave, but she stood up erect.

When the mourners returned from the burial to the hotel, the table was laid for them in the drawing-room. Sonia, who had been present in these sad times, and like a warm, mild sunbeam had assisted benevolently and unobtrusively, stood near the samovar. With loathing, Mascha turned away, and hurried to her room, where she shut herself in. She who had borne so much sadness and trouble without complaining, this time knew no bounds to her grief. Bärenburg, Nikolai, her mother-in-law--one after the other knocked at her door to say something loving to her, to console her. She admitted no one.

Stiff and erect, she sat there in the first chair she could find, deathly pale and tearless.

"Console!" said she to herself, bitterly. "Whom will they console?" They, none of whom understand what she has buried with the great, stormy heart that rests at the foot of the Aventine. She has lost the only person who fully understood her, whom she could wholly confide in. The man who has petted and indulged her, and cared for her like a little child who has hurt himself--had wrapped her warmly and securely in his protecting tenderness when the rest of the world turned from her. It seemed to her that life has paused around her. All is hard and cold.

Her husband at last won admittance to her. His flat words of consolation, his attempts to calm her with caresses, excited her almost to madness. She, who had formerly always tolerated him near her with the same even friendliness, repulsed him, no longer mistress of herself, this time with a furious roughness at which a deeper-thinking man would have been frightened. But he explained this violence by overstrained nerves, and withdrew with a last mild, kind word on his lips.

When the door had closed behind him, an indescribably painful feeling overpowered her. Never before had she felt his triteness so plainly as in this moment when her agony tore down, with its tyrannical ruthlessness, all her carefully piled-up deceptions. For the first time she realized the whole irremediable flatness and dryness in which her future must drag on--her future with this man who was a stranger to all her deeper thoughts and feelings.

Her last prop had fallen with her father. For love of him she had at least tried to appear happy; but now, for what purpose--why? She could no longer bear her existence. It was impossible to live longer.

Then she heard the steps of insecure little feet approaching her door; then the soft knocking of two tiny little fists, which wounded themselves on the hard wood; an indistinguishable tender word lisped by soft child's lips.

She started up and opened the door. Without stood Natascha and her nurse. The nurse drew back. The child stared at her mother, whose pale face and long mourning dress seemed strange to her; then she nestled in her dress and began to stroke and caress the black folds violently. The

young wife raised the child in her arms. Natascha did not cease to embrace and kiss her mother with the touching, helpless tenderness of a little being in whom love has awakened before intellect, who suspects a pain which it does not yet understand, and would fain console before it can yet speak.

For the first time Mascha's pain dissolved in tears. Sobbing, she pressed the little girl to her breast. "Bear your cross patiently," she murmured, thinking of the words with which her father in that fearful night in Venice had calmed her heart, rebelling against its oppressive lot. "Bear your cross!"

She kissed the child again and again, and the grief for the dead met in her heart the love for this sweet young life.

And Nikolai?

He bore the great loss calmly, so calmly that Mascha, who suspected nothing of his feelings and who was without the key to them, ascribed utter indifference to him.

Really, his father had died to him before. He had lost him on that hot June day in Paris. He had only buried him in Rome.

While he watched by the coffin through the two mild spring nights, he had sought his pain and could not find it.

But now, after the restlessness which is always bound up with the last solemnities is over, after the dead one has been carried away, and he can fully measure the great chasm which the death of his father has rent in his existence, a sadness increasing with every hour overwhelms him. Weary from watching as he was, he nevertheless did not close his eyes in the night which followed the burial. His thoughts were constantly occupied with the dead as with a great riddle.

He saw the strange, great man before him in all his phases. He saw him as a young man, with his proud bearing, his dark, attractive, expressive face, his quick, energetic earnestness full of fire, and that irresistible gentleness and tenderness of very violent men, who are continually afraid of paining their loved ones by a rough word, a thoughtless wildness. He saw the change which slowly took place in the attractive face, and how it grew coarser, and still something of the old charm remained--yes, with advancing years became more evident--a charm which summarized an expression of unspeakably sad kindness.

There was something fairly startling about this kindness, this rich, unwearying compassion. It was as if destiny had punished him for all that he had done in his wild violence of life, by condemning him to forever bear about with him this great, warm, restless, sympathetic heart.

Nikolai would have so willingly grieved for his father from his whole heart, and thought of only the great and noble in him. He could not. The old, hateful story still tormented him, tormented him so much the more as he reproached himself with thinking of it now, and it seemed to him small and repulsive in every respect to remember any fault of his father after his death.

Early in the morning, before any one else was stirring, he went out, took a carriage, and drove to his father's grave.

He had to walk a long distance through the graveyard before he reached it. At last he discovered the grave. A mountain of wreaths covered it. At the foot kneeled a black form, bowed deeply over her hands, praying.

Was that Mascha? Could she have come before him? He hurried nearer. No, that was not Mascha. Slowly she rose; it was Nita. Her eyes met his. It thrilled him through and through. They were the same wonderfully beautiful eyes, the remembrance of which had followed him across the sea, which he loved so unspeakably, and--which had once so pained him. Some change had taken place in them. The shadow which had formerly darkened them had vanished. Ah! how loving and kind were those eyes now, somewhat sad indeed, but with the sadness of a great compassion, of a hearty forgiveness.

The bitterness of a hateful recollection had no place more in this pure, warmly beating heart.

He lowered his head before Nita's brilliant glance, quite ashamed. What thoughts could he have of his father if she could forgive!

She seemed surprised to see him, but she betrayed no embarrassment at meeting him at the grave of his father. As he silently removed his hat, she came up to him with all her old freedom and gave him her hand. She evidently remembered that she had once caused him pain, and was sorry for it. Then she spoke a few words to him in her sweet, soft voice, in an undertone, as one speaks near the dead; smiled at him, crossed herself once more before the grave, and went.

He looked after her as she moved away among the dark cypresses as lightly as if borne on clouds, ever further, further between the white tombstones; looked after her, astonished, thoughtfully. Then he bent down there, where she had knelt, pushed the flowers a little aside,

and kissed the fresh earth.

All was calm within him. He had finished one great period of his life. It was not only his father whom he had buried there, under the flower-covered mound; it was the last trace of a foolish hope which had, until then, prevented him from turning his eyes from his beautiful youthful dream and looking reality courageously in the face.

He had never ceased to love Nita, he knew that he would always love her, but calmly and undesiringly as one loves a saint or the dead.

When, a half-hour later, he left the graveyard, he bore his head high, and had the earnest, resolute look of a man who has begun a new life.

The perpetual remembrance of his father which he carried with him into this new life was that of the pale, noble face, alienated from all earthly shortcomings of the dead.

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