

Circumstances

Abraham Cahan

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I

TATYANA Markovna Lurie had just received the July number of *Russian Thought*, and was in a flurry. She felt like devouring all the odd dozen of articles in the voluminous book at once; and the patience failing her to cut the leaves, she fell to prying between them on the rocking chair which she had drawn up close to one of the two windows of the best room.

Altogether, the residence of the Luries consisted of three small uncarpeted and scantily furnished apartments, and occupied a fourth of the top floor of a veteran tenement house on Madison Street.

Ultimately, Tatyana Markovna settled on an extensive review of a new translation of Guy de Maupassant's stories. But here again she was burning to glance over the beginning, the middle, and the end of the article simultaneously. And so she sat, feverishly skipping and hopping over the lines, until a thought expressed by the critic, and which struck her as identical with one she had set forth in a recent discussion with her husband, finally fixed her attention and overspread her youthful little face with radiance. She was forerelishing her triumph when, upon Boris's return from work, she would show him the passage; for in their debate he had made light of her contention, and met her irresolute demurrer with the patronizing and slightly ironical tone which he usually took while discussing book questions with her.

But at the thought of Boris she suddenly remembered her soup, and growing pale she put the magazine aside, and darted into the semi-obscurity of the kitchen.

Tatyana, or Tanya, as her husband would fondly call her, was the daughter of a merchant and Hebrew writer in Kieff, who usually lost upon his literary ventures what he would save from his business. It was not long after she had graduated from one of the female gymnasiums of her native city that she met Boris Lurie, then a law student at the University of St. Vladimir.

He was far from being what Russian college girls would call "a dear little soul"; for he was tall and lank, awkwardly nearsighted, and rather plain of feature, and the scar over his left eyebrow, too, added anything but beauty to his looks. But for all that, the married young women of his circle voted him decidedly interesting.

Tanya was attracted by his authoritative tone and rough sort of impetuosity upon discussing social or literary topics; by his reputation of being one of the best-read men at the university, as well as a leading spirit in student "circles," and by the perfect Russian way in which his coal-black hair fell over his commanding forehead. As to him, he was charmed by that in her which had charmed many a student before him: the delicate freshness of her pink complexion, which, by the time we first find her in the Madison Street tenement, had only partially faded; the enthusiastic smile beaming from her every feature as she spoke; and the way her little nose, the least bit retroussé, would look upward, and her beautiful hazel eyes would assume a look of childlike curiosity, while she was listening to her interlocutor.

They were married immediately after his graduation, with the intention of settling in Kremenchug, where he had every prospect of a large practice. But when he presented himself for admission to the bar, as a "private attorney," he encountered obstacle after obstacle. He tried another district, but with no better success. By that time it had become clear that the government was bent upon keeping the Jews out of the forensic profession, although it had not officially placed it upon the list of vocations proscribed to their race.

After a year of peregrination and petitioning he came, a bundle of nerves, to Jitomir to make a last attempt in the province of Volyn.

A high judiciary officer who received him rather politely made, in the course of their interview, the semi-jocular remark that the way to the bar lay through the baptismal font.

"Villain!" Lurie thundered, his fists clenched and his eyes flashing.

Luckily the functionary was a cool-headed old man who knew how to avoid unsavory publicity. And so, when Lurie defiantly started to stalk out of the room, he was not stopped.

A month or two later, Boris and Tanya arrived in New York.

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IT was near seven o'clock when Boris came from the pearl-button factory where he earned, at piecework, from six to seven dollars a week. As Tanya heard his footsteps through the door she sprang to her feet and, with a joyous gleam in her eye, she ran out to meet him at the head of the stairs. In her delight she at once forgot the Maupassant article.

After an affectionate greeting she said, with burlesque supplication: "Don't get angry, Borya, but I am afraid I have flunked on my soup again."

His fatigued smile expanded.

"The worst of it," she pursued, "is the fact that this time my negligence resulted from something which is against you. Yes, I have got something that will show you that Mr. Boris has not monopolized all the wisdom in the world; that other people know something, too. Yes, sir!" she beamingly concluded, in English.

"You must have received the July number, have you?" he burst out, flushing with anticipated delight.

"Not your booseeness" (business), she replied in English, playfully pronouncing the words as in Russian. "You know you can't get it before supper is over; so what is the use asking?" she added, in the tongue of her native country. With which she briskly busied herself about the table and the stove, glowing with happiness, every inch of her a woman in the long-awaited presence of the man she loves.

Boris's shabby working clothes, his few days' growth of beard and general appearance of physical exhaustion vainly combined, as it were, to extinguish the light of culture and intellectuality from his looks; they only succeeded in adding the tinge of martyrdom to them. As to Tatyana, she had got so far habituated to the change that she was only occasionally aware of it. And when she was, it would move her to pity and quicken her love for him. At such moments his poor workaday clothes would appear to her as something akin to the prison garb of the exiled student in Siberia.

"Let me just take a glance at the table of contents," he begged, brokenly, washing himself at the sink.

"After supper."

"Then do you tell me what there is to read. Anything interesting?"

"After supper."

"Or is it that you begrudge me the few minutes' talk we have together?" she resumed more earnestly, after a slight pause. "The whole day I am all alone, and when he comes he plunges into some book or other or falls asleep like a murdered man. All there remains is the half hour at supper; so that, too, he would willingly deprive me of."

It was Tanya's standing grievance, and she would deliver herself of it on the slightest provocation, often quite irrelevantly.

After supper she read to him the passage which she regarded as an endorsement of her view upon Maupassant. When she had finished and turned to him a face full of triumphant inquiry, she was rather disappointed by the lukewarm readiness of his surrender.

"Oh, I see. It is rather an interesting point," he remarked lazily.

He was reclining on the stiff carpet-covered lounge in the front room, while she was seated in the rocker, in front of him. It flashed across her mind that such unusual tractability in him might augur some concession to be exacted from her. She flew into a mild little passion in advance, but made no inquiries, and only said, with good-natured sarcasm: "Of course, once it is printed in *Russian Thought*, it is 'rather an interesting point,' but when it was only Tanya who made it, why then it was mere rubbish."

"You know I never said it was rubbish, Tanya," he returned deprecatingly.

After a slight pause, he resumed listlessly: "Besides, I am sick of these 'interesting points.' They have been the ruin of us, Tanychka; they eat us up alive, these 'interesting points'—the deuce grab them. If I cared less about 'interesting points'—he articulated the two words with venomous relish—"and a little more about your future and mine, I might not now have to stick in a button factory."

She listened to him with an amused air, and when he paused, she said flippantly: "We have heard it before."

"So much the worse for both of us. If you at least took a more sober view of things! Seriously, Tanya, you

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ought to make life a burden to me until I begin to do something to get out of this devilish—of this villainous, unpardonable position."

"You should have married Cecilia Trotzky, then," she said, laughing.

Cecilia Trotzky was the virago among the educated Russo-Jewish immigrants, who form a numerous colony within a colony in the Ghetto of New York. She was described as a woman who had placed her husband in a medical college, then made a point of sending him supperless to bed every time he failed to study his lessons, and later, when he was practicing, fixed the fees with his patients.

"Well, what is the use of joking?" he said gloomily, suppressing a smile. "Every illiterate nonentity," he went on, letting the words filter through his teeth with languid bitterness, every shop clerk, who at home hardly knew there was such a thing as a university in the world, goes to college here; and I am serving the community by supplying it with pearl buttons for six dollars a week. Would this were regular, at least! But it is not. I forgot to tell you, but we may again have a slack season, Tanya. Oh! I will not let things go on like this. If I don't begin to do something at once, I shall send a bullet through my forehead. You may laugh, but this time it is not idle talk. From this day on I shall be a different man. I have a plan; I have considered everything carefully. If we wish to get rid of our beggarly position, of this terrible feeling of insecurity and need," he proceeded, as he raised himself to a sitting posture, his voice gathering energy and his features becoming contorted with an expression of disgust; "if we really mean to free ourselves from this constant trembling lest I lose my job, from these excursions to the pawn shops—laugh away! laugh away!—but, as I say, if we seriously wish to make it possible for me to enter some college here, we must send all literature and magazines and all gush about Russia to the deuce, and do as others do. I have a splendid plan. Everything depends upon you, Tanya."

At this the childlike look of curiosity came into her face. But he seemed in no hurry to come to the point.

"People who hang about pawn shops have no right to 'interesting points' and Guy de Maupassant and that sort of luxury. Poverty is a crime! Well, but from now on, everything will be different. Listen, Tanychka; the greatest trouble is the rent, is it not? It eats up the larger part of my wages—that is, provided I work full time; and you know how we tremble and are on the verge of insanity each time the first of the month is drawing near. If we wish to achieve something, we must be satisfied to pinch ourselves and to put up with some inconvenience. Above all, we must not forget that I am a common workingman. Well, every workingman's family around here keeps a boarder or two; let us also take one. There is no way out of it, Tanya."

He uttered the concluding words with studied nonchalance, but without daring to look her in the face.

"Bor-ya!" she exclaimed, with a bewildered air.

Her manner angered him.

"There, now! I expected as much!" he said irascibly. And continuing in softer accents, he forced her to listen to the details of his project. The boarder's pay would nearly come up to their rent. If they lived more economically than now they could save up enough for his first year's tuition at a New York college, or, as a steppingstone, for a newspaper stand. Free from worry about their rent, he would be in a fitter mood to study English after work. In course of time he would know the language enough to teach it to the uneducated workingmen of the Jewish quarter; and so he would be liberated from his factory yoke, as many an immigrant of his class had been. Dalsky, a friend of theirs, and a former classmate of Boris's, who was studying medicine, earned his living by giving such lessons in English, and, by the way, he was now looking for a lodging. Why should they not offer him their parlor? They could do with the kitchen and the bedroom. Besides, Dalsky would be one of the family, and would have only partial use of the parlor.

As the plan assumed a personified form in her mind—the face of a definite boarder—her realization of its horrors was so keen that she shut her ears and begged Boris to take pity on her and desist. Whereupon he flew into a rage and charged her with nursing aristocratic instincts which in their present position they could not afford. She retorted, tearfully, that she was ready to put up with any amount of additional work and discomfort, but that she did not care to have a "constant cataract on the eye."

"God knows you give me little enough of your company, as it is. I must have tired you capitally, if you seek somebody to talk to and to save you from being alone with me."

"You know it is the rankest nonsense you are saying!" he flamed out. "And what is the use crying like that? As if I took a delight in the whole affair! Cry to our circumstances, not to me. Circumstances, circumstances, Tanya!" he repeated, with pleading vehemence.

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Little by little he relented, however, and eventually he promised never to mention the matter again, although inwardly both of them felt that he would. He sat by her side on the lounge, fondling her little hands and murmuring love, when suddenly bending upon him an imploring face, she said, in a tremulous, tearful voice: "Borinka, dear! I shall also go to some factory. We will get along without boarders," with which she fell upon his shoulder in a fit of heart-rending sobbing.

He clasped her to him, whispering: "You know, my angel, that I would commit suicide before letting you go to work. Don't worry, my joy, we *will* get along without boarders."

"I want no strangers to hang around the house all the time; I want to be with you alone, I want nobody, nobody, nobody else in the world!" she said, pressing him tightly to her heart.

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III

On the following evening, as Boris was musingly trudging on his way home, after work, it suddenly came over him that his manner with the foreman of the shop was assuming a rather obsequious nature. Work was scarce, and the distribution of it was, to a considerable extent, a matter of favoritism. He recalled how the Czech foreman, half tipsy with beer, had been making some stupid efforts at being witty, and how he, Boris Lurie, standing by, in greedy expectation of work, had smiled a broad, ingratiating smile of approbation. At the moment he had been so far merged in the surroundings and in his anxiety about work that he had not been aware of doing anything unnatural. But now, as it all came back to him, with inexorable vividness, and he beheld his own wretched, artificial smile, he was overcome with disgust. "Vil-lain!" he broke out at himself, gnashing his teeth; and at the next moment he was at the point of bursting into tears for self-pity. To think of him, who had not hesitated to call the president of a Russian court "rogue" to his face, simpering like a miserable time-server at every stupidity and nastiness of a drunken brute! Is that what circumstances had made of him?

He reached home out of temper, and before supper was well over he reopened the discussion of his scheme. It again led to a slight quarrel, which was again made up by his surrender, as in the previous instance.

A few days later he was "laid off" for a fortnight.

To eke out their rent they had to forego meat. For several consecutive days they lived on bread and butter and coffee. Boris grew extremely nervous and irritable.

One morning, coming back from the pawn shops, Boris, pale and solemn, quietly laid on the kitchen table the package which he had under his arm.

"They wouldn't take it," he said almost in a whisper. "It is not worth anything, they say."

Tanya only raised at him a meek glance, and went on with her work. Boris fell to pacing the front room. They could not speak.

Presently she stepped up to his side and said, with rueful tenderness: "Well, what is the good of grieving, Borya?"

Their hands clasped tightly, and their eyes fixed themselves forlornly on the floor.

"I have promised Dalsky an answer," he said, after a little.

"Let him move in," she returned lugubriously, with a slight shrug of her shoulder, as if submitting to fate.

IV

It was about nine in the morning, and Dalsky, slowly pacing the front room, *Quiz-Compend* in hand, was reviewing his lesson. He had a certain dignity and nobleness of feature which consorted well with the mysterious pallor of his oval face, and to which, by the way, his moral complexion gave him perfect right. Then, too, his middle-sized form was exceedingly well proportioned. But for the rest, his looks, like everything else about him, presented nothing to produce an impression.

Presently he deliberately closed the book, carefully placed it on his whatnot, and, his eye falling upon the little flowerpot on the window, he noiselessly stepped into the kitchen, where Tanya was ironing some trifles on the dining table.

"What are you looking for, Monsieur Dalsky?" she inquired amiably, turning her flushed face to the boarder, who was then gazing about the kitchen.

"Nothing—do not trouble yourself, Tatyana Markovna—I have got it," he answered politely, resting the soft look of his good gray eyes at her, and showing the enameled cup which he was carrying to the water tap.

"It is high time to give my flowerpot its breakfast; it must have grown hungry," he remarked unobtrusively, retracing his steps to the front room, with the cup half filled with water.

"It gets good board with you, your little flowerpot," Tanya returned, in her plaintive soprano, speaking through the open window, which sometimes served to separate and sometimes to connect the kitchen and the front room. "By the way, it is time for its master to have its breakfast, too. Shall I set the table, Monsieur Dalsky?"

"All rightissimo!" answered the student jestingly, with the remotest suggestion of a chivalrous smile and a bow of his head.

As he ate, she made a playful attempt at reading the portly textbook, which he had brought with him. Whenever she happened to mispronounce an English word, he would set her right, in a matter-of-fact way; whereupon she accepted his correction with a slight blush and a smile, somewhat bashful and somewhat humorous.

Hardly a fortnight had elapsed since Dalsky had installed himself and his scanty effects at the Luries', yet he seemed to have grown into the family, and the three felt as if they had dwelt together all their lives. His presence in the house produced a change that was at once striking and imperceptible. When free from college and from teaching, an hour or two in the morning and a few hours during the afternoon, he would stay at home studying or reading, humming, between whiles, some opera tune, or rolling up a cigarette and smoking it as he paced up and down the floor—all of which he did softly, unobtrusively, with a sort of pleasing fluency. Often he would bring from the street some useful or decorative trifle—a matchbox, a towel-ring, a bit of bric-a-brac for the mantelpiece, a flowerpot. At supper he, Boris and Tanya would have a friendly chat over the contents of the newspapers, or the gossip of the colony, or some Russian book, although Boris was apt to monopolize the time for his animadversions upon the occurrences in the pearl-button shop, which, both Tanya and Dalsky were beginning to think rather too minute and uninteresting. "Poor fellow; the pearl-button environment has eaten him up," the medical student would say to himself, with heartfelt commiseration. As to his own college, he would scarcely ever refer to it. After supper he usually left for his private lessons, after which he would perhaps drop in at the Russian Students' Club; and altogether his presence did not in the least encroach upon the privacy of the Luries' life, while, on the other hand, it seemed to have breathed an easier and pleasanter atmosphere into their home.

"Well, was there any ground for making so much ado?" Boris once said triumphantly. "We are as much alone as ever, and you are not lonely all day, into the bargain."

Dalsky had come to America with the definite purpose of studying and then practicing medicine. He had landed penniless, yet in a little over two years, and before his friends in the colony had noticed it, he was in a position to pay his first year's tuition and to meet all the other bills of his humble, but well-ordered and, to him, gratifying living.

He was a normally constituted and well-regulated young man of twenty-five, a year or two Lurie's junior. There was nothing bright nor deep about him, but he was seldom guilty of a gross want of tact. He would be the last man to neglect his task on account of a ball or an interesting book, yet he was never classed among the

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"grinds." He was endowed with a light touch for things as well as for men, and with that faculty for ranking high in his class, which, as we all know, does not always precede distinction in the school of life. This sort of people give the world very little, ask of it still less, but get more than they give.

As he neither intruded too far into other people's souls, nor allowed others too deep into his own confidence, he was at peace with himself and everybody else in the colony.

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V

Three months more had passed. The button factory was busy. Boris's hard, uncongenial toil was deepening its impress upon him. When he came from work he would be so completely fagged out that an English grammar was out of the question.

He grew more morose every day.

Tanya was becoming irritable with him.

One afternoon after six she was pensively rocking and humming a Russian folksong, one of her little white hands resting on an open Russian book in her lap. Dalsky was out, for it was one of those days when he would stay at college until six and come home at about the same time as Boris.

Presently she was awakened from her reverie by the sound of footsteps. The door opened before she had time to make out whose they were, and as her eye fell upon Boris, a shadow of disappointment flitted across her brow.

Still, at the sight of his overworked face, her heart was wrung with pity, and she greeted him with a commiserating, nervous, exaggerated sort of cordiality.

After a little he took to expounding a plan, bearing upon their affairs, which he had conceived while at work. She started to listen with real interest, but her attention soon wandered away, and as he went on she gazed at him blankly and nodded irrelevant assent.

"What is the use of talking, since you are not listening anyway?" he said, mildly.

She was about to say softly, "Excuse me, Borya, say it again, I'll listen," but she said resentfully, "Suit yourself!"

His countenance fell.

"Any letters from home?" he demanded, after a while, to break an awkward stillness.

"No," she replied, with an impatient jerk of her shoulder.

He gave a perplexed shrug, and took up his grammar.

When Dalsky came he found them plainly out of sorts with each other. Tanya returned his "Good health to you," only partly relaxing the frown on her face. Boris raised his black head from his book; his brusque "Good health, Dalsky!" had scarcely left his lips when his short-sighted eyes again nearly touched the open grammar.

"You must excuse me; I am really sorry to have kept you waiting," the boarder apologized, methodically taking off his overcoat and gently brushing its velvet collar before hanging it up, "but I was unavoidably detained at the lecture, and then I met Stern, and you know how hard it is to shake oneself free from him."

"It is not late at all," Tanya observed, unnecessarily retaining a vestige of the cloud upon her countenance. "What does he want, Stern? Some new scheme again?"

"You hit it there, Tatyana Markovna; and, by the way, you two are to play first violin in it."

"I?" asked Tanya, her countenance suddenly blazing up with confused animation. "What is it?" Boris laid down his book and pricked up his ears.

"He has unearthed some remarkable dialogue in Little Russian—you know everything Stern comes across is remarkable. Well, and he wants the two of you to recite it or act it—that's your business—at the New Year's gathering."

"What an idiotic plan!" was Boris's verdict, which his countenance belied unceremoniously.

"Who else is going to participate?" inquired Tanya.

Fixing his mild gray eyes on his youthful landlady, Dalsky proceeded to describe the prospective entertainment in detail. Presently he grew absent-minded and lost the thread of a sentence. He noticed that, as his listener's eyes met his, her gaze became unsteady, wandering, as though she were looked out of countenance.

She confusedly transferred her glance to his fresh, clean-shaven face and then to his neatly tied scarf and immaculate shirt front.

Boris wore a blue flannel shirt, and, as usual in the middle of the week, his face was overgrown with what he jocosely called underbrush. As he had warmed up to Dalsky's subject and rose to his feet to ply him with questions, the contrast which the broad, leaf-shaped gas flame illuminated was striking. It was one between a worn, wretched workingman and a trim, fresh-looking college student.

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Supper passed in animated conversation, as usual. When it was over and the boarder was gone to his pupils, Boris, reclining on the lounge, took up his *Dombey and Son* and Alexandroff's Dictionary. In a quarter of an hour he was fast asleep and snoring. It attracted the attention of Tanya, who sat near by, reading her Russian novel. She let the book rest on her lap and fell to contemplating her husband. His sprawling posture and his snores at once revolted her and filled her with pity. She looked at the scar over his eyebrow, and it pained her; and yet, somehow, she could not divert her eyes from it. At the same time she felt a vague reminiscence stirring in her mind. What was it? She seemed to have seen or heard or read something somewhere which had a certain bearing upon the painful feeling which she was now nursing, in spite of herself, as she was eyeing the scar over Boris's eyebrow. What could it be?

A strenuous mental effort brought to her mind the passage in Tolstoy's novel where Anna Karenina, after having fallen under Vronsky's charm, is met by her husband upon her return to St. Petersburg, whereupon the first thing that strikes her about him is the uncouth hugeness of his ears.

It was not the first time her thoughts had run in this direction. She had repeatedly caught herself dwelling upon such apparently silly subjects as the graceful trick which Dalsky had in knocking off the ashes of his cigarette, or the way he would look about the cupboard for the cup with which he watered his plant, or, again, the soft ring of his voice as he said, "Tatyana Markovna!"—the thoroughly Russian form of address, not much in vogue in the colony. Once, upon touching his flower on the window sill, she became conscious of a thrill, deliciously disquieting and as if whispering something to her. And yet, as the case of Anna Karenina now came to her mind, as an illustration of her own position, it smote her consciousness as a startling discovery.

"And so I am a married woman in love with another man!" was her first thought; and with her soul divided between a benumbing terror and the sweet titillation produced by a sense of tasting forbidden fruit, she involuntarily repeated the mental exclamation: "Yes, I am a married woman in love with another man!"

And with a painful, savage sort of relish she went on staring at her husband's scar and listening to his fatigued breathing. There was a moment when a wave of sympathy suddenly surged to her heart and nearly moved her to tears; but at the next moment it came back to her that it was at Boris's insistence, and in spite of her sobs, that the boarder had been taken into the house; whereupon her heart swelled with a furious sense of revenge. The image of Dalsky floated past her mental vision and agitated her soul with a novel feeling. When a moment or two after she threw a glance at the looking glass she seemed a stranger to herself.

"Is this Tanya? Is this the respectable, decorous young woman that she has been?" she seemed to soliloquize. "What nonsense; why not? What have I done? Dalsky himself does not even suspect anything." It seemed as if she were listening to the depth of her own soul for a favorable answer to her question, and as if the favorable answer did not come.

She became fearful of herself, and, with another sudden flow of affection for her husband, she stepped up to his side to wake him; but as she came into close contact with him, the wave of tenderness ebbed away and she left the room.

"It is nonsense," she decided; "still, I must invent some pretext for insisting upon his removal. Then I'll forget him, anyway.

Whether she would have had the courage to carry out her resolve or not, is not known, for the task soon became superfluous.

A few days later, as Dalsky was drawing on his overcoat to leave for his lessons, he said, rather awkwardly, addressing himself to both, while looking at Boris: "By the way, I have to tell you something. I am afraid that devilish college will make it impossible for me to live downtown."

Both Boris and Tanya grew pale.

"You see," Dalsky pursued, "the lectures and the work in the dissecting room are so scattered throughout the day that I don't see my way out unless I get a room in the neighborhood of the college." And to talk himself out of the embarrassing position, he went on to explain college affairs with unnecessary detail.

As a matter of fact, however, his whole explanation, although not based on an untruth, was not the real cause of his determination to leave the Luries. He had known Boris in his better days, and now sympathized with him and Tanya keenly. The frequent outbreaks of temper between husband and wife, and the cloud which now almost constantly hung over the house, heavily bore down upon him as a friend, and made his life there extremely uncomfortable. At last he had perceived the roving, nonplussed look in her eyes as their glances met. Once

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become observant in this direction, he noticed a thousand and one other little things which seemed to confirm his suspicion. "Can it be that she is interested in me?" he said to himself. For a moment the thought caressed his vanity and conjured up the image of Tanya in a novel aspect, which lured him and spoke of the possibility of reciprocating her feeling—of an adventure.

It was on the very next day that he announced his intention to move.

VI

The house became so dreary to Tanya that her loneliness during the day frightened her, though the presence of Boris irritated her more than ever. She felt as if some member of the household had died. Wherever she turned she beheld some trace of the student; worse than anything else was the window plant, which Dalsky had left behind him. She avoided looking at it, lest it should thrill her with a crushing sense of her desolation, of her bereavement, as it were. Yet, when she was about to remove it, she had not the heart to do it. She strayed about like a shadow, and often felt as though it were enough to touch her to make her melt away in tears.

One evening, after an unbearable silence, succeeding a sharp altercation, Boris asked, pleadingly: "What has become of you, Tanya? I simply fail to recognize you."

"If you understand, then it is foolish to ask," she retorted, with a smile of mild sarcasm, eyeing the floor.

"I understand nothing." But as the words left his lips, something suddenly dawned upon him which made his blood run cold. An array of situations which had produced an impression upon him, but which had been lost upon his consciousness, now uprose in his mind. He grew ashen pale.

"Well, so much the worse," said she.

"Tell me, and I will know," he rejoined, with studied irony, while in his heart he was praying Heaven that his misgivings might prove baseless.

"Oh! I think you do understand; you are not so blind." Her voice now sounded alien in his ears, and she herself seemed to him suddenly changed—as if she had in one moment become transmuted into an older, wiser, sterner, and more beautiful, fiercely beautiful, woman.

"I swear to you that I do not know anything."

"Very well, then; I shall write it," she said, with a sudden determination, rising to produce paper, pen, and ink.

"All right," he said, in abject cowardice, with a meaningless smile.

She wrote: "I am your best friend in the world. I have been thinking, and thinking, and have arrived at the conclusion that the best thing for us to do is to part for a time. I do not blame anybody but myself, but I cannot help it. I have no moral right to live with you as long as my mind is constantly occupied with somebody else. I have struggled hard to keep out the thoughts of him, but it is of no avail."

The phlegmatic ticking of the cheap alarm clock was singing a solemn accompaniment to the impressive stillness of the surroundings. Boris, gazing at the corner of the room with a faint, stolid smile, was almost trembling. Tanya's face was burning with excitement. She went on: "I repeat, I have only myself to blame, and I am doing my best to struggle out of this state of mind. But while it lasts, my false, my dishonest position in this house aggravates things. I wish to be alone, for a while, at least. Then, under new conditions, I hope I shall soon get over it. For the sake of everything that is good, do not attempt to persuade me to stay. It is all thought out and decided. Nor do you need offer to support me. I have no right to it, and will not accept it under any circumstances. I can work and earn my own living. I am prepared to bear the cross. Besides, shall I be the only Russian college woman to work in an American factory? Above all, do not let anybody know anything—the person to whom I have referred not excluded, *of course*. I am sure he does not suspect anything. Do not let him surmise the cause of it all, if you do not wish to see my corpse. We can invent some explanation."

VII

It was the early part of a bleak wintry evening. The interior of Silberman's shop, crowded with men and women and their sewing machines, every bit of space truckled up with disorderly piles of finished shirts or bundles of stuff, was dappled with cheerless gaslight. The spacious, barn-like loft rang and trembled with a chaos of mournful and merry song, vying with the insolent rattle of the machines. There were synagogue airs in the chorus and airs of the Jewish stage; popular American airs, airs from the dancing schools, and time-honored airs imported from Russia, Poland, Galicia, Roumania, Hungary.

Only Tanya was not singing. Bent upon her machine, in a remote corner, she was practicing a straight stitch upon some cuttings. She was making marked progress, and, flushed with her success, had almost grown oblivious of the heavy lump at her heart, and the pricking pain which seemed to fill her every limb. Presently the girl next her, who had been rapturously singing "I have a girl in Baltimore" in a sort of cross-tune between the song's own melody and the highly melancholy strains of a Hebrew prayer, suddenly switched off into one of the most Russian of Russian folksongs:

By the little brook,
By the little bridge,
Grass was growing

This she sang with such an un-Russian flavor, and pronounced the words with such a strong Yiddish accent, and so illiterately, that Tanya gnashed her teeth as if touched to the quick, and closed her eyes and ears. The surroundings again grew terrible to her. Commencement Day at the Kieff Gymnasium loomed before her imagination, and she beheld herself one of a group of blooming young maidens, all in fresh brown dresses with black aprons, singing that very song, but in sturdy, ringing, charming Russian. A cruel anguish choked her. Everybody and everything about her was so strange, so hideously hostile, so exile-like! She once more saw the little home where she had recently reigned. "How do I happen here?" she asked herself. She thought of Boris, and was tempted to run back to him, to fly into his arms and beg him to establish a home again. But presently came the image of Dalsky, neat, polite, dignified, and noiseless; and she once more fell to her machine, and with a furious cruelty for herself, she went on working the treadle. Whereupon her mind gradually occupied itself with the New Year's entertainment, with the way the crowd would be commenting upon her separation, and above all, with her failure to appear on the platform to recite in Little Russian and to evoke a storm of applause in the presence of Dalsky.

At that time Boris was on his way from work, in the direction of Madison Street. It was the second day after he had cleared the rooms by selling the furniture and cooking utensils to the neighbors, who rushed at them like flies at a drop of molasses. But he still had his books and some other effects to remove. When he entered the rooms, there was light enough from the street to show the unwonted darkness in them. A silvery streak fell upon the black aperture which had the day before been filled with the pipe of a little parlor stove. This and the weird gloom of the rest of the apartment overwhelmed him with distress and terror. He hastened to light the gas. The dead emptiness of the three rooms which so recently had been full of life, the floors littered with traces of Tanya and their life together—every corner and recess had a look of doleful, mysterious reproach.

For the first time he seemed to realize what had befallen him; and for the first time in many years he burst into tears. Hot tears they were, and they fell in vehement drops, as, leaning his wearied form against the doorpost and burying his face in his arm, he whispered brokenly, "Tanychka! Tanychka!"