# Desperate

Ivan Turgenev

# Table of Contents

# Desperate

## Ivan Turgenev

**Translated from the Russian by Charlotte Adams**

This page copyright © 2001 Blackmask Online.
http://www.blackmask.com



## I.

THERE were eight men of us in the room, and we were discoursing of contemporary events and people.

"I do not understand these gentlemen," remarked A. "They are, as it were, desperate truly desperate. There was never yet anything like it!"

"No there was," interposed P., an already old, gray−haired man; "desperate people have been plentiful before; only they did not resemble the desperate people of to−day. Some one said of the poet Yasicoff that in him was ecstasy, not directed toward anything objectless ecstasy. So it was with those people their despair was objectless. Let me relate to you the history of my cousin's son, Misha Polteff. It may serve as an example of the desperation of those days. He appeared in God's world in the year 1828, on the ancestral estate of his father, in one of the most obscure corners of an obscure province of the steppes. Misha's father, Andreï Nikolaevitch Polteff, I still remember well. He was a true landowner of the old school, a pious, serious man, sufficiently well educated for that time. To tell the truth, he was a little crazy and suffering from epilepsy. But these are old−school and aristocratic maladies. With andreï Nikolaevitch, the paroxysms were mild, and they generally resolved themselves into sleep and melancholy. He was good−hearted, affable, and not without a certain haughtiness. The whole life of Andreï Nikolaevitch was passed in the prompt performance of all the ceremonies established from remote times, in strict conformity with all the customs of the ancient, orthodox, holy Russian existence. He rose and went to bed, ate and drank and bathed, was merry or angry (though the second, in truth, rarely happened), even smoked his pipe and played cards (two great innovations!), not as it occurred to him to do after his own fashion, but after the law and ordinance of his fathers exactly and formally. He was of high stature, well−formed and fleshy; he had a soft and somewhat hoarse voice, as is often the case with worthy Russians; he observed neatness in his linen and dress, wore white cravats and tobacco− colored, long−skirted surtouts but his noble blood always showed itself; no one would have taken him for a priest's son or a shopkeeper. Always, upon all possible occasions and meetings, Andreï Nikolaevitch invariably knew how to act, what to say, and precisely what expressions to use; he knew when he ought to doctor himself, and exactly wiopkeeper. Always, upon all possible occasions and meetings, Andreï Nikolaevitch invariably knew how to act, what to say, and precisely what expressions to use; he knew when he ought to doctor himself, and exactly with what—in which omens he ought to believe, and which might be left unnoticed; in a word, he knew everything that it was proper to do. For to

old men everything is foreseen and ordained. One does not merely imagine it for one's self. And the essential thing is, 'Without God, not over the threshold.' It must be confessed a mortal dullness reigned in his house, in those low, warm and dark rooms, so often resounding with vesper hymns and Te Deums, and pervaded with the almost irremovable odor of incense and lenten food.

"Andreï Nikolaevitch, when no longer in his first youth, married a poor gentlewoman, a neighbor of his, a very nervous and sickly person, educated at a boarding−school. She played on the piano not badly, she spoke French after the boarding−school manner. She willingly abandoned herself to ecstasy, and still more willingly did she give herself up to melancholy and even to tears. In a word, her character was the reverse of tranquil. Accounting her life unhappy, she could not love her husband, who 'assuredly' did not understand her; but she respected and tolerated him, and being a perfectly honorable and passionless creature, she never once even thought of another 'object.' Besides, she was constantly absorbed by cares firstly, for her own really feeble health; secondly, for the health of her husband, whose paroxysms always inspired her with a superstitious terror, and lastly, forher only son, Misha, whom she educated herself with great zeal. Andreï Nikolaevitch did not interfere with his wife's training of Misha, upon the condition that under no pretext whatever should a departure be made from the order, once for all determined, in which all should proceed in his house.

## II.

"I REMEMBER this Misha at thirteen years of age. He was a very pretty boy, with rosy cheeks and soft lips (indeed, he was quite soft and plump all over), with somewhat prominent, humid eyes; he was carefully combed and brushed, caressing and modest—a perfect little girl. Only one thing in him did not please me; he laughed rarely, but when he did laugh, his teeth, large, white, and pointed, like those of a wild beast, were unpleasantly displayed, and in the laugh itself sounded something sharp and even fierce, almost like a wild beast, and through his eyes ran evil sparks. His mother praised him because he was so obedient and polite, and did not love to associate with wanton boys, but attached himself more and more to the society of women. 'A milksop!' his father, Andreï Nikolaevitch, said of him. 'A mamma's baby, but he goes willingly to the Lord's temple, and this rejoices me.' One old man, a neighbor, a former police commissioner, said once before me of Misha, 'By your leave, he will be a rebel,' and this speech, I remember, then very much astonished me. The former police commissioner truly saw the rebel everywhere.

"Precisely such an exemplary youth did Misha remain until the eighteenth year of his age, up to the very death of his parents, whom he lost almost on one and the same day. Living constantly at Moscow, I heard nothing of my young relative. It is true, a person who came from his province assured me that Misha had sold his paternal estate for a song, but this news appeared to me incredible.

"Suddenly, one autumn morning, a barouche entered the courtyard of my house, drawn by an excellent pair of trotters, with a monstrous coachman on the box; and in the barouche, wrapped in a cloak of military cut, with two arsheen of otter fur collar, with his traveling−cap worn on one side in a devil−may−care fashion, sat Misha! Seeing me (I stood at the window of the drawing−room, and gazed with astonishment at the entering equipage), he began to laugh his sharp laugh, and lightly throwing aside the ends of the cloak, jumped from the barouche and ran into the house.

"'Misha! Mikhaïl Andreëvitch!' I began. 'Is this you?'

"'Call me "thou" and "Misha,"' he interrupted me. 'Yes, this is I—in my own person. I have appeared in Moscow, to look at the people, and to show myself! and so I drove to you. What trotters, eh!' he again began to laugh.

"Although seven years had passed since I had last seen Misha, I recognized him immediately. His face had remained quite youthful, and was, as before, charming; even the mustache had not yet pierced through, only there was a puffiness in his cheeks, under his eyes, and from his mouth came the odor of wine.

"'And have you been long in Moscow?' I asked. 'I supposed that you were managing your estate.'

"'Ah! the estate I immediately put one side. As soon as my parents (may the kingdom of heaven be theirs!) died (Misha crossed himself, simply, without the slightest mockery), I immediately, without the least delay—one—two—three—ha! ha! It slipped off cheaply—trickery! The rascal so insinuated himself! O well, it is all the same. At least, I live to my satisfaction, and I amuse others. But why do you stare at me so? Was it possible for me to drag the thing along any further? Little dove of a cousin, can not one have a glass?'

"Misha spoke with extreme rapidity, and at the same time as if half asleep.

"'Misha! For Heaven's sake! Fear God! Whom do you resemble—with such a look? And asking for a glass! And to sell so fine an estate for nothing!'

"'I always fear and remember God,' he replied. 'And really he is good—God—to pardon. And I also am good. I never yet in my life harmed any one. And a little glass is also good. It harms no one. Little uncle, do you wish me to spin round the table with a cord, whip out the ace with my last? Or shall I dance a little?'

"'Pray spare me! What, dance here! You would better sit down.'

"'I will sit down. But why do you say nothing to me about my grays? Look, they are really lions. Until now I have hired them, but I shall undoubtedly buy them, together with the coachman. And I really had the money; yes, I let it slip yesterday at the gambling−table. It is nothing! We shall revenge ourselves tomorrow. Uncle, how about the little glass!'

"'By your leave, I could no longer contain myself. Misha, how old are you? Not with horses, not with card−playing, should you busy yourself, but should enter either the university or the army.'

"Misha at first again began to laugh, then whistled protractedly. 'Well, uncle, I see you are now in a melancholy frame of mind. I will drop in another time. Here is something for you. Drive out in the evening to the "Falconer." There is a tent erected for me. The gipsies sing. Will you? Only observe, and on the tent is a pennon, and on the pennon in magical gold letters is written "Chorus of Polteff Gipsies!" The pennon curves itself like a snake—the letters are golden—it is enticing to every one to read. Refreshments for whoever wishes it; I refuse nothing. The dust has gone all over Moscow. My respects! Will you come? And— there is with me there such an—aspic! Black as a boot—wicked as a dog—and eyes—coals! It is impossible to tell whether she will kiss or bite. Will you come, uncle? Well, until we meet!'

"And suddenly embracing me and slapping me on the shoulder, Misha hurried into the court and into the barouche, waved his traveling−cap above his head, gave a yell, and the monstrous coachman squinted at him across his beard, the trotters tore off, and all disappeared.

"On the following day I, sinful man, drove out to the 'Falconer,' and actually saw the tent with the pennon and inscription.

"The skirts of the tent were raised; noise, tumult, yells proceeded thence. The people crowded around; on the ground, on a spread carpet sat gipsy men and women, who sang and beat kettledrums; and in the midst of them, with guitar in his hands, in a red silk shirt and wide velvet trousers, whirled Misha, turning a pirouette. 'Gentlemen! Your reverences! We ask your mercy! The performance will begin immediately. Gratis,' cried he, in a cracked voice. 'Hollo! Champagne! Clap! On the forehead! On the floor!'

"Luckily he did not see me, and I hastened to withdraw.

"I will not, gentlemen, enlarge my astonishment at the sight of such an alteration. And indeed, how could this gentle and modest boy have changed suddenly into a drunken wag? Is it possible that all this lurked in him in childhood, and showed itself as soon as the pressure of parental authority was removed from him? And that 'dust went from him over Moscow,' as he expressed himself, there was certainly no longer any kind of doubt. I led a wild life at his age, but here appeared something frenzied, a certain madness of self−destruction, a desperation.

## III.

"THIS amusement lasted two months. I stood again at the window of the drawing−room and looked out on the court. A novice− monk entered the gate with a slow step. A conical cap was drawn down on his forehead, his hair fell scattered right and left under it—he wore a long cassock with a leathern girdle. Could it be Misha? It was he.

"I went to the stairway to meet him. 'What is this masquerade?' I asked.

"'It is not a masquerade, uncle,' Misha answered me, with a deep sigh; 'but as I have spent my fortune to the last copeck, and as powerful repentance has taken possession of me, I have decided to set off for the Sergius monastery of the Holy Trinity to pray for my sins. For what asylum now remains to me? And I have come to take leave of you, uncle, as a prodigal son.'

"I looked steadfastly at Misha. His face was as rosy and fresh as ever (for that matter, it did not change to the last), his eyes were humid and kind, somewhat languid, his small hands were white—but, he smelt of wine.

"'Well?' I said at length; 'the affair is good if there be no other way out! But why do you smell of wine?'

"'Old leaven,' answered Misha, and suddenly began to laugh, but immediately recollecting himself, he bent low and straight in a monastic salute and added, 'If you pleasesomething—a little luck−greeting for the journey. I am really going on foot to the monastery.'

"'When?'

"'To−day—directly.'

"'Why, then, are you in such a hurry?'

"'Uncle! My motto has always been—"Faster! Faster!"'

"'And what is your motto now?'

"'It is the same also now—only faster to the—good!'

"So Misha went away, leaving me to meditate over the vicissitudes of human destinies. But he soon reminded me of his existence. Two months after his visit, I received from him a letter, the first of those letters with which he subsequently favored me. And mark the singularity! I have rarely seen a neater and more legible handwriting than this scatterbrained fellow possessed. And the style of his letter was very correct, slightly oratorical. Invariable demands for assistance alternated with promises of reform, with honorable speeches and vows. All this seemed, and possibly was, sincere. Misha's scrawl under the letter, was continually accompanied by peculiar flourishes, dashes, periods, and a great many exclamation−marks. In this first letter, Misha informed me of the new 'turn of his fortunes.' Subsequently he called these turns 'plunges,' and he 'plunged' often. He was going out to the Caucasus to serve 'with his breast,' his tsar and country in the capacity of a cavalry subaltern. And although a certain benevolent aunt came to the relief of his distressed condition and sent him a small sum, he asked my assistance in equipping himself. I acceded to his demand, and heard nothing of him again for the space of two years. I confess, I strongly doubted whether he had gone to the Caucasus. But it appeared that he had gone thither, that through patronage he had entered the T——− regiment as an under−officer, and served in it these two years. The wildest stories were afloat concerning him. They were related to me by an officer of his regiment.

## IV.

"I LEARNED much of a kind that I had not expected from him. It did not astonish me, assuredly, that as a military man, as an ardent soldier, he should show himself inferior, even, frankly, worthless; but what I did not expect was this: that personal bravery was not remarked in him, that in battle he wore a melancholy and drooping look, now bored, now alarmed. All discipline oppressed him, inspired him with sadness; he was bold to madness when the matter concerned only himself personally; there was no wager so foolish that he would refuse to accept it; but to injure another—to kill—to fight—this he could not do; it might have been because his heart was good, and it might have been because his 'cotton−wool education,' as he expressed it, had made him effeminate. He was always and forever ready to destroy himself, but others—no. 'The devil will take him away,' his companions remarked of him. 'He is withered up! A clout! And a desperate one! Truly, a confirmation−child!'

"Subsequently I asked Misha how this evil report got about— what obliged him to drink deep, to risk his life, and so forth? He had always the same answer—'grief.'

"'How, if you please, grief?'

"'One comes thus to one's self—one regains one's senses—one falls to meditating over poverty—over injustice—over Russia! Well—it is done! Immediately—grief—as if there were a bullet in one's forehead. One begins to debauch, in spite of one's self.'

"'What made you drag yourself back hither to Russia?'

"'Only this! I am afraid to think of it.'

"'All this grief of yours comes from inactivity.'

"'But I do not know how to do anything, uncle—cousin. To wager even my life at cards, to play parole, to give a crack on the collar—this I know how to do. You, here, tell me how I can risk my life for something.'

"'But why not live a simple life? Why risk it?'

"'I can not—you say I act without reflection. One begins to reflect—and at once riot ferments in one's head. Only these Germans reflect.'

"How could one manage to talk with him? Desperate— completely!

"Among the number of Caucasian stories which I mentioned I shall relate to you two or three. Once, in a company of officers, Misha began to boast of a bartered saber—a genuine Persian blade. The officers expressed a doubt as to its genuineness.Misha began to argue. 'Well,' exclaimed he, at length, 'they say in the matter of blades the first connoisseur is Abdulka the Crooked. I will go to him and inquire.'

"The officers were astonished. 'Who is this Abdulka? The one who lives in the hills—not the tributary, Abdul Khan?'

"'He himself!'

"'He will arrest you as a spy and put you in prison, provided he does not cut off your head with this very sword. And how shall you reach him? They will kill you immediately.'

"'All the same I will go to him.'

"'A wager that you do not go. A wager!'

"And Misha immediately saddled his horse and rode off to Abdulka. Three days passed. All were convinced that he had come to the end predicted. Behold, he returned—somewhat intoxicated, and with a saber—only not that which he had taken away. They began to question him. 'It is nothing,' he said. 'Abdulka is a good man. At first, truly, he ordered my feet to be fettered and prepared to impale me. I explained to him why I had come, and showed him the saber. "Do not detain me," and "do not expect a ransom for me. I have not a copeck to my name, and I have no relations." Abdulka was astonished; he gazed at me with his solitary eye. "Now," he says, "you rogue, you! Ought I to believe you?" "Believe me," I said: "I never lie" (and really Misha never lied). Again Abdulka gazed at me. "Do you know how to drink wine?" "I know how," I said. "I will drink as much as you will give me." Again Abdulka was astonished, called upon Allah. And hereupon he bade his little daughter (very pretty, only with a look like a jackal) to drag in the wineskin. And I fell to work. "But your saber," said he, "is counterfeit—here, take a genuine one. Now we are friends." And you have lost your wager, gentlemen. Pay!'

"The second legend of Misha is of like nature. He loved cards passionately, but as money was not abundant

with him, and he did not pay card−debts (although a cheater he never was), no one would play with him. He once began to urge one of his fellow−officers— he really must play with him.

"'And if you lose, you will not pay.'

"'I will not pay with money, but I will shoot myself through the left hand with this very pistol.'

"'And what advantage will there be to me in this?'

"'No advantage, but all the same it will be interesting.'

"This conversation took place after a drinking−bout, before witnesses. Misha's proposition did appear interesting to the officer. The cards were brought, the game began. Misha was in luck—he won a hundred roubles.

"Hereupon his adversary struck himself on the forehead. 'What a booby I am!' he exclaimed. 'What a snare I have fallen into! If you had lost, you would have shot yourself through the hand—but now you hold your pistol−pocket fast.'

"'You have lied,' replied Misha. 'I have won, and I will shoot myself through the hand.' He seized the pistol. Pop! The ball passed through, and a week later the wound was completely healed.

"Still another time Misha was riding along a road at night with his companions. And they saw by the side of the road yawn a narrow ravine, yawning—dark, very dark—the bottom not visible.

"'Here,' said one of his comrades, 'desperate as Misha is, he will not jump into this ravine.'

"'No, I will jump.'

"'No, you will not jump, because it is ten sajens deep, and it is certain to break one's neck.'

"'But all the same I shall jump. Do you want a bet?'

"'Ten roubles.'

"'Good!'

"And his comrade had not finished uttering this word when Misha was off his horse, at the ravine, and had begun to rattle down among the stones. All were benumbed. A full minute passed and they heard, borne up as it were from the bowels of the earth, the sound of Misha's voice.

"'I have fallen on sand. But I flew a long time! Ten roubles from you.'

"'Climb out!' his companions began to cry.

"'Yes—climb out,' retorted Misha. 'I should say so! You must go for ropes and lanterns, and meanwhile, so that I do not get tired waiting, throw me down the flask.'

"Misha sat five hours in the bottom of the ravine, and when they dragged him out his shoulder was dislocated—but this did not disturb him in the least. On the following day, the bonesetter from the blacksmith's set his shoulder, and he handled him as if nothing were the matter.

## V.

"FROM the Caucasus he again appeared in Moscow, in Circassian costume, with cartridge−boxes on his breast, a dagger in his girdle, a high fur cap on his head. He did not part with this costume until the end, although he was no longer in the military service, being expelled on account of his non−appearance at drill. He made a short call on me, borrowed a little money, and began another course of 'plunges' by begging. Beautifully written letters were scattered abroad, addressed to all possible persons, beginning with the metropolite and ending with the riding−masters and professional nurses. Visits were made to acquaintances and strangers. But in making his visits he was neither servile nor importunate. On the contrary, he bore himself decorously and even with a cheerful mien, although a chronic odor of wine accompanied him everywhere, and his Oriental costume by degrees became transformed into tatters. 'If you give, God will reward you, although I do not deserve it. If you do not give, you will be quite right and I will not be at all angry. I feed myself, thanks to God! For there are people poorer than I and much more worthy of assistance—much, very much.'

"During his impecunious travels he reached his paternal nest, sold by him for a trifle to a well−known speculator and usurer. The speculator was at home, and hearing of the arrival of the former possessor, transformed into a vagrant, he gave orders that he should not be admitted into the house, and in case of need should even be thrust out by the neck. Misha declared that he would not go into the house contaminated by the presence of the rogue, and he set off for the graveyard to pray over the dust of his parents. In the graveyard he was joined by an old man, a house−servant, who had once been his nurse. The speculator had deprived the old man of his monthly allowance and driven him away from the manor−house. The latter had found a refuge in the corner of a peasant's hut. Misha had not left behind him an especially good memory; but when the old servant learned of the arrival of his young lord, he immediately ran to the graveyard, found Misha sitting on the ground between the tombstones, asked of him for old memories' sake his little hand, and shed tears upon the tatters with which were clothed the once daintily attired limbs of his nursling. Misha gazed long and silently at the old man.

"'Timotheï,' said he, at length.

"Timotheï shuddered. 'What is your pleasure?'

"'Have you a shovel?'

"'It is possible to procure one. But what do you want a shovel for, Mr. Mikhaïl Andreïtch?'

"'I wish to dig a little grave for myself here, Timotheï—yes, and to lie here forever and ever between my parents. Truly, only one little place is left to me in the world. Bring the shovel.'

"'I obey,' said Timotheï. He went and brought it. And Misha immediately began to dig the earth and Timotheï stood near, supporting his chin on his hand, and repeating, 'Only you and I are left, lord.' And Misha dug and dug, from time to time inquiring, 'It is really not worth while to live, is it, Timotheï?' 'It is not worth while, little father.' The grave had already become tolerably deep. The people saw Misha's work, and ran to report upon it to the new possessor. The speculator was at first angry and wished to send for the police—this, then, is sacrilege! But afterward, probably considering that to have an affair with this madman would be inexpedient and might result in scandal, he went to the graveyard and, approaching Misha, who was working for dear life, politely saluted him. The latter continued to dig, as if not remarking his successor.

"'Mikhaïl Andreïtch,' began the speculator, 'permit me to learn what you are doing here.'

"'Don't you see—I am digging a grave for myself.'

"'Why is this?'

"'Because I do not wish to live any longer.'

"The speculator raised his hands. 'You do not wish to live?'

"Misha looked menacingly at the speculator.'Does this astonish you? Are you not the cause of all—are you not? Did you not, Judas, rob me, taking advantage of my youth? Did you not tear the skin from the peasants? Did you not deprive this decrepit man here of his bread? Did you not? O Lord! Everywhere only injustice, and oppression, and wickedness. Perish—it means—all. I do not wish to live—I do not—to live any longer in Russia!' And the shovel began to move still more rapidly in Misha's hands.

"'The devil knows what this all is,' thought the speculator; 'really, in truth, he will bury himself. Mikhaïl

Andreïtch,' he began again, 'listen; I am indeed guilty before you. They did not so speak of you to me.' Misha dug. 'But why this desperation?' Misha went on digging, and threw the earth on the feet of the speculator. 'Will it not please you to come to my house to eat a bite and rest a little?'

"Misha slightly raised his head. 'And will there be some drinking?'

"'If you like. Why should there not?'

"'And you invite Timotheï?'

"'Why not? Him, too.'

"Misha began to reflect. 'Only, look you, you thrust me out into the world. Do not think to escape with one little bottle.'

"'Do not be uneasy. There shall be as much as you like of everything.'

"Misha rose and threw down the shovel. 'Well, Timotheï,' he turned to the old man−nurse, 'let us respect the master. Let us go.'

"'I obey,' answered the old man. And all three repaired to the house.

"The speculator knew with whom he had to deal. Misha, it is true, at first made him promise that he would bestow upon the peasants immunity from all imposts; but an hour later that same Misha, together with Timotheï, both drunk, danced a gallopade in those very rooms in which still lodged the God−fearing phantom of Andreï Nikolaevitch, and an hour later, the heavily− sleeping Misha, lying in the telega together with his high fur cap and his dagger, set off for the city, twenty−five versts distant, and was lodged there under a shed. As for Timotheï, who still stood on his feet and only hiccoughed, he was put out. One does not get rid of a gentleman in the same way as of a servant.

## VI.

"AGAIN some time passed and I heard nothing of Misha. God knows whither he had disappeared. Here, once, sitting by the samovar in the station of the T——− highway waiting for horses, I suddenly heard, under the open window of the waiting−room, a hoarse voice, saying in French, 'Sir! sir! take pity on a poor ruined gentleman.' I raised my head and looked. A mangy fur cap, broken cartridge−boxes on the torn Circassian coat, a dagger in a cracked sheath, a swollen but yet rosy face, disheveled but still thick hair—my God! Misha! He had begun to ask alms on the highway. I involuntarily cried out. He recognized me, shuddered, turned away. I detained him, but what was to be said to him—read him a moral lecture? In silence I held out to him a five−rouble bank−note; he as silently took it, with his still white and plump, though trembling and dirty little hand, and disappeared round the corner of the house. They were slow in bringing up the horses, and it troubled me that I had so coldly allowed him to go away. I drove on farther, and at half a verst from the station I found before me on the road a crowd of people advancing with an odd, as it were, measured step. I overtook this crowd, and what did I see? Twelve beggar−men, with their bags across their shoulders, were walking, two and two, singing and leaping, and in front of them danced Misha, stamping his feet in time, and repeating "Ready and lively! step—step—step!' As soon as my barouche stopped near him and he saw me, he immediately began to cry 'Halt! Right about! Front! Guard the highway!' The beggars caught up his cry and stopped, and he with his customary laugh leaped onto the carriage step, and again cried 'Hurrah!'

"'What is all this?' I asked, in involuntary amazement.

"'This? This is my corps, my army, all little beggars—God's people—comrades, friends. Every one of them, through your kindness, has drunk a little glass; and hereupon we all rejoice and make merry. Uncle, really only with beggars—with God's people—is it possible to live in the world.'

"I answered him nothing, but he seemed to me at this time such a good fellow, hisface expressed such childish ingenuousness, that something, as it were, suddenly flashed upon me, something pricked me in the heart.

"'Sit down by me in the carriage,' I said to him. He was astonished.

"'What! In the carriage?'

"'Sit down! Sit down!' I repeated, 'I wish to make a proposition to you. Sit down! Let us go to my house!'

"'Well, as you command.' He sat down.

"'Now, you dear friends, worthy comrades,' he said, turning to the beggars. 'Good−by, until we meet!' Misha took off his fur cap and bowed low. The beggars were all literally disconcerted. I ordered the coachman to whip up the horses, and the carriage rolled on. The thought had suddenly come to me to take him home to my country−house, at a distance of thirty versts from that station—to save him, or at least to attempt to.

"'Listen, Misha,' I said, 'do you wish to settle down with me? You shall live comfortably, you will be provided with clothes and linen, you shall be suitably equipped, and money will be given you for tobacco, and the like, on one condition—not to drink wine. Are you agreed?'

"Misha was even frightened with joy; he opened his eyes wide, grew purple, and suddenly falling on my shoulder, began to kiss me, and to repeat in a broken voice, 'Uncle—benefactor! God reward you.' He fell into a fit of weeping, and taking off his fur cap, occupied himself with wiping his eyes, nose and lips.

"'Remember the promise—not to drink wine.'

"'And may it be cursed,' he exclaimed, flourishing both arms, still more strongly enveloping me in that spirituous odor with which he was saturated.

"'Really, uncle, if you knew my life—really, if not grief— harsh fate! For that reason, I swear, I swear, I will reform—I will prove. Uncle, I never lied—ask any one. I am an honorable but an unhappy man, uncle. I have received no kindness from any one.' Here he finally broke off. I endeavored to calm him, and succeeded in so far that when we drew up before my house Misha was already sleeping heavily, resting his head on my lap.

## VII.

"HE was immediately given a room to himself, and was put into a bath. All his apparel, his dagger and fur cap and boots full of holes, were carefully laid away in a pantry; clean linen was put on him, slippers, and some of my clothing, which exactly suited his build and height. When he came to table, washed, neat, fresh, he seemed so contrite and happy, he beamed all over with such joyous gratitude, that I was delighted. His face was quite transformed. Boys of twelve years wear such a face on Easter Sunday, when, after communion, heavily oiled, in new jackets and starched collars, they go to keep the festival with their parents. Misha continually felt of himself, cautiously and distrustfully, and repeated all the time, 'What is this? Am I not in heaven?' And on the following day he declared that he could not sleep all night from ecstasy. In my house lived then an old aunt with her niece; they were both extremely disturbed when they learned of the presence of Misha; they did not understand how I could invite him to my house. A very evil report of him was abroad. But I knew that he was always very polite with ladies, and I built hopes on his promise to reform. For the first two days under my roof Misha not only answered my expectations, but surpassed them, and he simply enchanted my ladies. With the old lady he played piquet, he assisted her to unwind her yarn, he showed her two new games of patience; the niece, who had something of a voice, he accompanied on the piano, read to her Russian and French verses; he related to both ladies merry but decorous anecdotes; in a word he rendered them divers services, so that they more than once expressed to me their astonishment, and the old lady even remarked that here could be seen how unjust people sometimes are. There was nothing they did not say—he was so gentle and well−bred—poor Misha! It is true at the table his mouth visibly watered every time he only so much as looked at a bottle. But I had only to threaten him a little with my finger, and he raised his eyes to heaven, and pressed his hand to his heart. 'I have sworn! I am now regenerated,' he assured me.

"'God grant it!' thought I. But this regeneration did not last long.

"Beginning with the third day, he grewsilent; although, as before, he remained near the ladies and entertained them. Now a melancholy, now a thoughtful expression began to flit across his face, and his face itself became pale and apparently thin. 'Are you indisposed?' I asked him. 'Yes,' he replied, 'my head aches a little.'

"On the fourth day he was entirely silent; he sat in the corner, bowing his head, like an orphan, and with his despondent look awakening a feeling of compassion in both ladies, who now, in their turn, endeavored to entertain him. At table he ate nothing, looked at his plate, and rolled bread−balls. On the fifth day, the feeling of pity in the ladies changed to distrust and even fear. Misha grew wild, held aloof from people, and crept along the wall as if thieving, looking suddenly around, exactly as if some one called him. And what had become of the rosy color of his face?

"'Are you not well?' I asked him.

"'No—I am well,' he answered, abruptly.

"'Are you bored?'

"'Bored—with what?' But he turned away and did not look me in the eye. On the following day, my aunt came to me in my study in great agitation, and declared that she would leave my house with her niece, if Misha was to remain in it. 'He is not a man—he is a wolf. He walks—walks—so silent, and so wild. He almost gnashes his teeth. Katia and I are so nervous. At first we were very much interested in him, but now we are afraid of his craziness.' I did not know what answer to make. I could not drive Misha away, for I had invited him to my house. He soon relieved me from the embarrassing position.

"On that same day I suddenly heard a hollow and angry voice, 'Nikolaï Nikolaïtch! Nikolaï Nikolaïtch!' I looked around. Misha stood at the door with a frightful, darkening, distorted countenance.

"'Nikolaï Nikolaïtch,' he repeated (no longer 'Uncle').

"'What is the matter with you?'

"'Let me go, directly. Let me go or I shall do some mischief! I shall set fire to the house or murder some one.' Misha suddenly began to shudder. 'Order my clothing to be returned to me, let them take me in a telega as far as the high−road, and give me a trifle of money.'

"'Are you then dissatisfied?' I began. He began to cry at the top of his voice, 'I can not live in your accursed

gentleman's house. It oppresses me to live so tranquilly. I wonder how you bear it!' 'That is,' I interrupted him, 'you mean you can not live without wine.' 'Well, yes; well, yes,' he began to cry again; 'only let me go to my brothers, to my friends, to the beggars—away from your decorous and contrary nobleman's breed.' I wished to remind him of his sworn promises, but the excited expression of Misha's face, his broken voice, the convulsive trembling of all his limbs, all this was so dreadful that I hastened to escape from him. I declared to him that his clothes would be given to him immediately, that a telega should be harnessed for him, and taking from my drawer a twenty−rouble bank−note, I laid it on table. Misha had already begun to approach me with threats, but here he suddenly controlled himself, his face became contracted, he struck himself on the breast, the tears started from his eyes, and murmuring, 'Uncle! Angel! Really I am a lost man,' he seized the bank−note and ran out.

"An hour later he was already seated in the telega, again dressed in his Circassian coat, again rosy and joyous, and when the horses moved from the place, he chirruped, pulled off his fur cap and waving it above his head, made bow after bow. Just before his departure, he long and closely embraced me and stammered, 'Benefactor! Benefactor! It is impossible to save me.' He even ran to the ladies and kissed their hands over and over again, placed himself on his knees, called upon God and asked forgiveness. Katia I afterward found in tears.

"But the coachman with whom Misha had taken his departure, on his return, reported to me that he had driven him to the first dramshop on the highway, and that there they stopped and began to treat everybody without distinction, and soon was unconsciousness. >From this time on I no longer met Misha, but I learned his final fate in the following manner.

## VIII.

"THREE years later I again found myself on my estate. Suddenly the domestic entered my apartment, and announced that Mrs. Polteva was asking for me. I knew noMrs. Polteva, and the servant making the announcement smiled with inquiring sarcasm. To my interrogative glance, he answered that a lady was asking for me—young, poorly−dressed—and that she had come in a peasant's telega with one horse, and had driven herself. I ordered him to ask Mrs. Polteva to come to me in my study.

"I saw a woman of twenty−five years of age, in the dress of the middle class, with a large handkerchief on her head. Her face was open, round, and not without attractiveness. Her expression was gloomy and somewhat mournful, her movements shy.

"'You are Mrs. Polteva?' I asked.

"'Exactly so,' she answered in a soft voice, refusing to sit down. 'I am the widow of your nephew, Mikhaïl Andreëvitch Polteff.'

"Mikhaïl Andreëvitch is dead? How long? But sit down, I beg of you.'

"She let herself down on a chair.

"'The second month has passed.'

"'And had you been long married?'

"'I had lived with him a whole year.'

"'Where have you come from now?'

"'I am from below Toula. There is a village there—Zuamenskoe Gloushkovo—it may be you would like to know I am the daughter of a sacristan there. We lived there with Mikhaïl Andreëvitch. He settled down with my father. A whole year we lived together there.'

"The young woman's lips began to quiver, and she raised her hand to them. It seemed as though she were about to cry, but she recovered herself, coughing.

"'The late Mikhaïl Andreëvitch,' she continued, 'before his death, instructed me to come to you. "Without fail," he said, "go." And he said to me that I should thank you for all your kindness, and that I should give you—here—this—very—little thing'—she took from her pocket a small packet—'which he always carried about him, and Mikhaïl Andreëvitch said—if it will please you to accept this in memory of him—if you do not disdain it—"nothing else have I to give," said he—that is—you— I can not, I can not—'

"In the little packet was a small silver cup bearing the cipher of Misha's mother. This cup I had often seen in Misha's hands, and once he said to me, speaking of a certain poor fellow, that he was indeed destitute, since he had neither a little cup nor a little lamp, 'and I have this!'

"I thanked her, took the little cup, and asked her of what disease Misha died. 'Probably—' Here, I bit my tongue, but the young woman understood my intimation. She quickly looked at me, then cast down her eyes and mournfully repeated, 'Ah, no; this he forsook from the time that we became acquainted with him. Only what health was his! Quite ruined! As soon as he stopped drinking, directly his sickness came to light. So he became steady, wished to help father in everything—at farming, or in the garden, or whatever came to hand—in vain—for he was of noble race. Only where to get strength? Also, he wished to occupy himself with writing; this, as you know, he could do beautifully, but his hands shook and he could not hold the pen properly. He always reproached himself: "I—a fine gentleman—did no good to any one—I did not help—I did not work." He was very much cast down about this, and he said that our people worked, but we—what— Nikolaï Nikolaïtch, he was a good man, and he loved me— and I, ah—pardon—'

"Here the young woman fell to weeping outright. I would have liked to comfort her, but I did not know how.

"Is there a baby left you?' I asked.

"She sighed. 'No, there is none—and if there had been—' And the tears flowed still more freely.

———–

"This is the end to which Misha was brought," concluded the old man. "You gentlemen, assuredly, are agreed with me that I was right in calling him desperate; but probably you are also agreed upon this, that he did not resemble the desperate people of to−day, although it may be supposed that a philosopher would discover

analogous features between him and them. Here there was a thirst for self−destruction—grief—dissatisfaction, and what all this signifies I leave to the philosopher to judge."

BOUGIVAL, November, 1881.