

# **THE MAN WHO FOUND THE TRUTH**

Leonid Andreyev

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# THE MAN WHO FOUND THE TRUTH

Leonid Andreyev

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## "THE MAN WHO FOUND THE TRUTH"

### CHAPTER I

I was twenty-seven years old and had just maintained my thesis for the degree of Doctor of Mathematics with unusual success, when I was suddenly seized in the middle of the night and thrown into this prison. I shall not narrate to you the details of the monstrous crime of which I was accused there are events which people should neither remember nor even know, that they may not acquire a feeling of aversion for themselves; but no doubt there are many people among the living who remember that terrible case and "the human brute," as the newspapers called me at that time. They probably remember how the entire civilised society of the land unanimously demanded that the criminal be put to death, and it is due only to the inexplicable kindness of the man at the head of the Government at the time that I am alive, and I now write these lines for the edification of the weak and the wavering.

I shall say briefly: My father, my elder brother, and my sister were murdered brutally, and I was supposed to have committed the crime for the purpose of securing a really enormous inheritance.

I am an old man now; I shall die soon, and you have not the slightest ground for doubting when I say that I was entirely innocent of the monstrous and horrible crime, for which twelve honest and conscientious judges unanimously sentenced me to death. The death sentence was finally commuted to imprisonment for life in solitary confinement.

It was merely a fatal linking of circumstances, of grave and insignificant events, of vague silence and indefinite words, which gave me the appearance and likeness of the criminal, innocent though I was. But he who would suspect me of being ill-disposed toward my strict judges would be profoundly mistaken. They were perfectly right, perfectly right. As people who can judge things and events only by their appearance, and who are deprived of the ability to penetrate their own mysterious being, they could not act differently, nor should they have acted differently.

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It so happened that in the game of circumstances, the truth concerning my actions, which I alone knew, assumed all the features of an insolent and shameless lie; and however strange it may seem to my kind and serious reader, I could establish the truth of my innocence only by falsehood, and not by the truth.

Later on, when I was already in prison, in going over in detail the story of the crime and the trial, and picturing myself in the place of one of my judges, I came to the inevitable conclusion each time that I was guilty. Then I produced a very interesting and instructive work; having set aside entirely the question of truth and falsehood on general principles, I subjected the facts and the words to numerous combinations, erecting structures, even as small children build various structures with their wooden blocks; and after persistent efforts I finally succeeded in finding a certain combination of facts which, though strong in principle, seemed so plausible that my actual innocence became perfectly clear, exactly and positively established.

To this day I remember the great feeling of astonishment, mingled with fear, which I experienced at my strange and unexpected discovery; by telling the truth I lead people into error and thus deceive them, while by maintaining falsehood I lead them, on the contrary, to the truth and to knowledge.

I did not yet understand at that time that, like Newton and his famous apple, I discovered unexpectedly the great law upon which the entire history of human thought rests, which seeks not the truth, but verisimilitude, the appearance of truth that is, the harmony between that which is seen and that which is conceived, based on the strict laws of logical reasoning. And instead of rejoicing, I exclaimed in an outburst of naive, juvenile despair: "Where, then, is the truth? Where is the truth in this world of phantoms and falsehood?" (See my "Diary of a Prisoner" of June 29, 18 .)

I know that at the present time, when I have but five or six more years to live, I could easily secure my pardon if I but asked for it. But aside from my being accustomed to the prison and for several other important reasons, of which I shall speak later, I simply have no right to ask for pardon, and thus break the force and natural course of the lawful and entirely justified verdict. Nor would I want to hear people apply to me the words, "a victim of judicial error," as some of my gentle visitors expressed themselves, to my sorrow. I repeat, there was no error, nor could there be any error in a case in which a combination of definite circumstances inevitably lead a normally constructed and developed mind to the one and only conclusion.

I was convicted justly, although I did not commit the crime such is the simple and clear truth, and I live joyously and peacefully my last few years on earth with a sense of respect for this truth.

The only purpose by which I was guided in writing these modest notes is to show to my indulgent reader that under the most painful conditions, where it would seem that there remains no room for hope or life a human being, a being of the highest order, possessing a mind and a will, finds both hope and life. I want to show how a human being, condemned to death, looked with free eyes upon the world, through the grated window of his prison, and discovered the great purpose, harmony, and beauty of the universe to the disgrace of those fools who, being free, living a life of plenty and happiness, slander life disgustingly.

Some of my visitors reproach me for being "haughty"; they ask me where I secured the right to teach and to preach; cruel in their reasoning, they would like to drive away even the smile from the face of the man who has been imprisoned for life as a murderer.

No. Just as the kind and bright smile will not leave my lips, as an evidence of a clear and unstained conscience, so my soul will never be darkened, my soul, which has passed firmly through the defiles of life, which has been carried by a mighty will power across these terrible abysses and bottomless pits, where so many daring people have found their heroic, but, alas! fruitless, death.

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And if the tone of my confessions may sometimes seem too positive to my indulgent reader, it is not at all due to the absence of modesty in me, but it is due to the fact that I firmly believe that I am right, and also to my firm desire to be useful to my neighbour as far as my faint powers permit.

Here I must apologise for my frequent references to my "Diary of a Prisoner," which is unknown to the reader; but the fact is that I consider the complete publication of my "Diary" too premature and perhaps even dangerous. Begun during the remote period of cruel disillusion, of the shipwreck of all my beliefs and hopes, breathing boundless despair, my note book bears evidence in places that its author was, if not in a state of complete insanity, on the brink of insanity. And if we recall how contagious that illness is, my caution in the use of my "Diary" will become entirely clear.

O, blooming youth! With an involuntary tear in my eye I recall your magnificent dreams, your daring visions and outbursts, your impetuous, seething power but I should not want your return, blooming youth! Only with the greyness of the hair comes clear wisdom, and that great aptitude for unprejudiced reflection which makes of all old men philosophers and often even sages.

## CHAPTER II

Those of my kind visitors who honour me by expressing their delight and even may this little indiscretion be forgiven me! even their adoration of my spiritual clearness, can hardly imagine what I was when I came to this prison. The tens of years which have passed over my head and which have whitened my hair cannot muffle the slight agitation which I experience at the recollection of the first moments when, with the creaking of the rusty hinges, the fatal prison doors opened and then closed behind me forever.

Not endowed with literary talent, which in reality is an indomitable inclination to invent and to lie, I shall attempt to introduce myself to my indulgent reader exactly as I was at that remote time.

I was a young man, twenty-seven years of age as I had occasion to mention before unrestrained, impetuous, given to abrupt deviations. A certain dreaminess, peculiar to my age; a self-respect which was easily offended and which revolted at the slightest insignificant provocation; a passionate impetuosity in solving world problems; fits of melancholy alternated by equally wild fits of merriment all this gave the young mathematician a character of extreme unsteadiness, of sad and harsh discord.

I must also mention the extreme pride, a family trait, which I inherited from my mother, and which often hindered me from taking the advice of riper and more experienced people than myself; also my extreme obstinacy in carrying out my purposes, a good quality in itself, which becomes dangerous, however, when the purpose in question is not sufficiently well founded and considered.

Thus, during the first days of my confinement, I behaved like all other fools who are thrown into prison. I shouted loudly and, of course, vainly about my innocence; I demanded violently my immediate freedom and even beat against the door and the walls with my fists. The door and the walls naturally remained mute, while I caused myself a rather sharp pain. I remember I even beat my head against the wall, and for hours I lay unconscious on the stone floor of my cell; and for some time, when I had grown desperate, I refused food, until the persistent demands of my organism defeated my obstinacy.

I cursed my judges and threatened them with merciless vengeance. At last I commenced to regard all human life, the whole world, even Heaven, as an enormous injustice, a derision and a mockery. Forgetting that in my position I could hardly be unprejudiced, I came with the self-confidence of youth, with the sickly pain of a prisoner, gradually to the complete negation of life and its great meaning.

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Those were indeed terrible days and nights, when, crushed by the walls, getting no answer to any of my questions, I paced my cell endlessly and hurled one after another into the dark abyss all the great valuables which life has bestowed upon us: friendship, love, reason and justice.

In some justification to myself I may mention the fact that during the first and most painful years of my imprisonment a series of events happened which reflected themselves rather painfully upon my psychic nature. Thus I learned with the profoundest indignation that the girl, whose name I shall not mention and who was to become my wife, married another man. She was one of the few who believed in my innocence; at the last parting she swore to me to remain faithful to me unto death, and rather to die than betray her love for me and within one year after that she married a man I knew, who possessed certain good qualities, but who was not at all a sensible man. I did not want to understand at that time that such a marriage was natural on the part of a young, healthy, and beautiful girl. But, alas! we all forget our natural science when we are deceived by the woman we love may this little jest be forgiven me! At the present time Mme. N. is a happy and respected mother, and this proves better than anything else how wise and entirely in accordance with the demands of nature and life was her marriage at that time, which vexed me so painfully.

I must confess, however, that at that time I was not at all calm. Her exceedingly amiable and kind letter in which she notified me of her marriage, expressing profound regret that changed circumstances and a suddenly awakened love compelled her to break her promise to me that amiable, truthful letter, scented with perfume, bearing the traces of her tender fingers, seemed to me a message from the devil himself.

The letters of fire burned my exhausted brains, and in a wild ecstasy I shook the doors of my cell and called violently:

"Come! Let me look into your lying eyes! Let me hear your lying voice! Let me but touch with my fingers your tender throat and pour into your death rattle my last bitter laugh!"

From this quotation my indulgent reader will see how right were the judges who convicted me for murder; they had really foreseen in me a murderer.

My gloomy view of life at the time was aggravated by several other events. Two years after the marriage of my fiancée, consequently three years after the first day of my imprisonment, my mother died she died, as I learned, of profound grief for me. However strange it may seem, she remained firmly convinced to the end of her days that I had committed the monstrous crime. Evidently this conviction was an inexhaustible source of grief to her, the chief cause of the gloomy melancholy which fettered her lips in silence and caused her death through paralysis of the heart. As I was told, she never mentioned my name nor the names of those who died so tragically, and she bequeathed the entire enormous fortune, which was supposed to have served as the motive for the murder, to various charitable organisations. It is characteristic that even under such terrible conditions her motherly instinct did not forsake her altogether; in a postscript to the will she left me a considerable sum, which secures my existence whether I am in prison or at large.

Now I understand that, however great her grief may have been, that alone was not enough to cause her death; the real cause was her advanced age and a series of illnesses which had undermined her once strong and sound organism. In the name of justice, I must say that my father, a weak-charactered man, was not at all a model husband and family man; by numerous betrayals, by falsehood and deception he had led my mother to despair, constantly offending her pride and her strict, unbribable truthfulness. But at that time I did not understand it; the death of my mother seemed to me one of the most cruel manifestations of universal injustice, and called forth a new stream of useless and sacrilegious curses.

I do not know whether I ought to tire the attention of the reader with the story of other events of a similar nature. I shall mention but briefly that one after another my friends, who remained my friends from the time when I was

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happy and free, stopped visiting me. According to their words, they believed in my innocence, and at first warmly expressed to me their sympathy. But our lives, mine in prison and theirs at liberty, were so different that gradually under the pressure of perfectly natural causes, such as forgetfulness, official and other duties, the absence of mutual interests, they visited me ever more and more rarely, and finally ceased to see me entirely. I cannot recall without a smile that even the death of my mother, even the betrayal of the girl I loved did not arouse in me such a hopelessly bitter feeling as these gentlemen, whose names I remember but vaguely now, succeeded in wresting from my soul.

"What horror! What pain! My friends, you have left me alone! My friends, do you understand what you have done? You have left me alone. Can you conceive of leaving a human being alone? Even a serpent has its mate, even a spider has its comrade and you have left a human being alone! You have given him a soul and left him alone! You have given him a heart, a mind, a hand for a handshake, lips for a kiss and you have left him alone! What shall he do now that you have left him alone?"

Thus I exclaimed in my "Diary of a Prisoner," tormented by woeful perplexities. In my juvenile blindness, in the pain of my young, senseless heart, I still did not want to understand that the solitude, of which I complained so bitterly, like the mind, was an advantage given to man over other creatures, in order to fence around the sacred mysteries of his soul from the stranger's gaze.

Let my serious reader consider what would have become of life if man were robbed of his right, of his duty to be alone. In the gathering of idle chatterers, amid the dull collection of transparent glass dolls, that kill each other with their sameness; in the wild city where all doors are open, and all windows are open passers-by look wearily through the glass walls and observe the same evidences of the hearth and the alcove. Only the creatures that can be alone possess a face; while those that know no solitude the great, blissful, sacred solitude of the soul have snouts instead of faces.

And in calling my friends "perfidious traitors" I, poor youth that I was, could not understand the wise law of life, according to which neither friendship, nor love, nor even the tenderest attachment of sister and mother, is eternal. Deceived by the lies of the poets, who proclaimed eternal friendship and love, I did not want to see that which my indulgent reader observes from the windows of his dwelling how friends, relatives, mother and wife, in apparent despair and in tears, follow their dead to the cemetery, and after a lapse of some time return from there. No one buries himself together with the dead, no one asks the dead to make room in the coffin, and if the grief-stricken wife exclaims, in an outburst of tears, "Oh, bury me together with him!" she is merely expressing symbolically the extreme degree of her despair one could easily convince himself of this by trying, in jest, to push her down into the grave. And those who restrain her are merely expressing symbolically their sympathy and understanding, thus lending the necessary aspect of solemn grief to the funeral custom.

Man must subject himself to the laws of life, not of death, nor to the fiction of the poets, however beautiful it may be. But can the fictitious be beautiful? Is there no beauty in the stern truth of life, in the mighty work of its wise laws, which subjects to itself with great disinterestedness the movements of the heavenly luminaries, as well as the restless linking of the tiny creatures called human beings?

### CHAPTER III

Thus I lived sadly in my prison for five or six years.

The first redeeming ray flashed upon me when I least expected it.

Endowed with the gift of imagination, I made my former fiancée the object of all my thoughts. She became my love and my dream.

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Another circumstance which suddenly revealed to me the ground under my feet was, strange as it may seem, the conviction that it was impossible to make my escape from prison.

During the first period of my imprisonment, I, as a youthful and enthusiastic dreamer, made all kinds of plans for escape, and some of them seemed to me entirely possible of realisation. Cherishing deceptive hopes, this thought naturally kept me in a state of tense alarm and hindered my attention from concentrating itself on more important and substantial matters. As soon as I despaired of one plan I created another, but of course I did not make any progress I merely moved within a closed circle. It is hardly necessary to mention that each transition from one plan to another was accompanied by cruel sufferings, which tormented my soul, just as the eagle tortured the body of Prometheus.

One day, while staring with a weary look at the walls of my cell, I suddenly began to feel how irresistibly thick the stone was, how strong the cement which kept it together, how skilfully and mathematically this severe fortress was constructed. It is true, my first sensation was extremely painful; it was, perhaps, a horror of hopelessness.

I cannot recall what I did and how I felt during the two or three months that followed. The first note in my diary after a long period of silence does not explain very much. Briefly I state only that they made new clothes for me and that I had grown stout.

The fact is that, after all my hopes had been abandoned, the consciousness of the impossibility of my escape once for all extinguished also my painful alarm and liberated my mind, which was then already inclined to lofty contemplation and the joys of mathematics.

But the following is the day I consider as the first real day of my liberation. It was a beautiful spring morning (May 6) and the balmy, invigourating air was pouring into the open window; while walking back and forth in my cell I unconsciously glanced, at each turn, with a vague interest, at the high window, where the iron grate outlined its form sharply and distinctly against the background of the azure, cloudless sky.

"Why is the sky so beautiful through these bars?" I reflected as I walked. "Is not this the effect of the aesthetic law of contrasts, according to which azure stands out prominently beside black? Or is it not, perhaps, a manifestation of some other, higher law, according to which the infinite may be conceived by the human mind only when it is brought within certain boundaries, for instance, when it is enclosed within a square?"

When I recalled that at the sight of a wide open window, which was not protected by bars, or of the sky, I had usually experienced a desire to fly, which was painful because of its uselessness and absurdity I suddenly began to experience a feeling of tenderness for the bars; tender gratitude, even love. Forged by hand, by the weak human hand of some ignorant blacksmith, who did not even give himself an account of the profound meaning of his creation; placed in the wall by an equally ignorant mason, it suddenly represented in itself a model of beauty, nobility and power. Having seized the infinite within its iron squares, it became congealed in cold and proud peace, frightening the ignorant, giving food for thought to the intelligent and delighting the sage!

## CHAPTER IV

In order to make the further narrative clearer to my indulgent reader, I am compelled to say a few words about the exclusive, quite flattering, and, I fear, not entirely deserved, position which I occupy in our prison. On one hand, my spiritual clearness, my rare and perfect view of life, and the nobility of my feelings, which impress all those who speak to me; and, on the other hand, several rather unimportant favours which I have done to the Warden, have given me a series of privileges, of which I avail myself, rather moderately, of course, not desiring to upset the general plan and system of our prison.



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Thus, during the weekly visiting days, my visitors are not limited to any special time for their interviews, and all those who wish to see me are admitted, sometimes forming quite a large audience. Not daring to accept altogether the assurances made somewhat ironically by the Warden, to the effect that I would be "the pride of any prison," I may say, nevertheless, without any false modesty, that my words are treated with proper respect, and that among my visitors I number quite a few warm and enthusiastic admirers, both men and women. I shall mention that the Warden himself and some of his assistants honour me by their visits, drawing from me strength and courage for the purpose of continuing their hard work. Of course I use the prison library freely, and even the archives of the prison; and if the Warden politely refused to grant my request for an exact plan of the prison, it is not at all because of his lack of confidence in me, but because such a plan is a state secret....

Our prison is a huge five-story building. Situated in the outskirts of the city, at the edge of a deserted field, overgrown with high grass, it attracts the attention of the wayfarer by its rigid outlines, promising him peace and rest after his endless wanderings. Not being plastered, the building has retained its natural dark red colour of old brick, and at close view, I am told, it produces a gloomy, even threatening, impression, especially on nervous people, to whom the red bricks recall blood and bloody lumps of human flesh. The small, dark, flat windows with iron bars naturally complete the impression and lend to the whole a character of gloomy harmony, or stern beauty. Even during good weather, when the sun shines upon our prison, it does not lose any of its dark and grim importance, and is constantly reminding the people that there are laws in existence and that punishment awaits those who break them.

My cell is on the fifth story, and my grated window commands a splendid view of the distant city and a part of the deserted field to the right. On the left, beyond the boundary of my vision, are the outskirts of the city, and, as I am told, the church and the cemetery adjoining it. Of the existence of the church and even the cemetery I had known before from the mournful tolling of the bells, which custom requires during the burial of the dead.

Quite in keeping with the external style of architecture, the interior arrangement of our prison is also finished harmoniously and properly constructed. For the purpose of conveying to the reader a clearer idea of the prison, I will take the liberty of giving the example of a fool who might make up his mind to run away from our prison. Admitting that the brave fellow possessed supernatural, Herculean strength and broke the lock of his room what would he find? The corridor, with numerous grated doors, which could withstand cannonading and armed keepers. Let us suppose that he kills all the keepers, breaks all the doors, and comes out into the yard perhaps he may think that he is already free. But what of the walls? The walls which encircle our prison, with three rings of stone?

I omitted the guard advisedly. The guard is indefatigable. Day and night I hear behind my doors the footsteps of the guard; day and night his eye watches me through the little window in my door, controlling my movements, reading on my face my thoughts, my intentions and my dreams. In the daytime I could deceive his attention with lies, assuming a cheerful and carefree expression on my face, but I have rarely met the man who could lie even in his sleep. No matter how much I would be on my guard during the day, at night I would betray myself by an involuntary moan, by a twitch of the face, by an expression of fatigue or grief, or by other manifestations of a guilty and uneasy conscience. Only very few people of unusual will power are able to lie even in their sleep, skilfully managing the features of their faces, sometimes even preserving a courteous and bright smile on their lips, when their souls, given over to dreams, are quivering from the horrors of a monstrous nightmare but, as exceptions, these cannot be taken into consideration. I am profoundly happy that I am not a criminal, that my conscience is clear and calm.

"Read, my friend, read," I say to the watchful eye as I lay myself down to sleep peacefully. "You will not be able to read anything on my face!"

And it was I who invented the window in the prison door.

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I feel that my reader is astonished and smiles incredulously, mentally calling me an old liar, but there are instances in which modesty is superfluous and even dangerous. Yes, this simple and great invention belongs to me, just as Newton's system belongs to Newton, and as Kepler's laws of the revolution of the planets belong to Kepler.

Later on, encouraged by the success of my invention, I devised and introduced in our prison a series of little innovations, which were concerned only with details; thus the form of chains and locks used in our prison has been changed.

The little window in the door was my invention, and, if any one should dare deny this, I would call him a liar and a scoundrel.

I came upon this invention under the following circumstances: One day, during the roll call, a certain prisoner killed with the iron leg of his bed the Inspector who entered his cell. Of course the rascal was hanged in the yard of our prison, and the administration light mindedly grew calm, but I was in despair the great purpose of the prison proved to be wrong since such horrible deeds were possible. How is it that no one had noticed that the prisoner had broken off the leg of his bed? How is it that no one had noticed the state of agitation in which the prisoner must have been before committing the murder?

By taking up the question so directly I thus approached considerably the solution of the problem; and indeed, after two or three weeks had elapsed I arrived simply and even unexpectedly at my great discovery. I confess frankly that before telling my discovery to the Warden of the prison I experienced moments of a certain hesitation, which was quite natural in my position of prisoner. To the reader who may still be surprised at this hesitation, knowing me to be a man of a clear, unstained conscience, I will answer by a quotation from my "Diary of a Prisoner," relating to that period:

"How difficult is the position of the man who is convicted, though innocent, as I am. If he is sad, if his lips are sealed in silence, and his eyes are lowered, people say of him: 'He is repenting; he is suffering from pangs of conscience.'

"If in the innocence of his heart he smiles brightly and kindly, the keeper thinks: 'There, by a false and feigned smile, he wishes to hide his secret.'

"No matter what he does, he seems guilty such is the force of the prejudice against which it is necessary to struggle. But I am innocent, and I shall be myself, firmly confident that my spiritual clearness will destroy the malicious magic of prejudice."

And on the following day the Warden of the prison pressed my hand warmly, expressing his gratitude to me, and a month later little holes were made in all doors in every prison in the land, thus opening a field for wide and fruitful observation.

The entire system of our prison life gives me deep satisfaction. The hours for rising and going to bed, for meals and walks are arranged so rationally, in accordance with the real requirements of nature, that soon they lose the appearance of compulsion and become natural, even dear habits. Only in this way can I explain the interesting fact that when I was free I was a nervous and weak young man, susceptible to colds and illness, whereas in prison I have grown considerably stronger and that for my sixty years I am enjoying an enviable state of health. I am not stout, but I am not thin, either; my lungs are in good condition and I have saved almost all my teeth, with the exception of two on the left side of the jaw; I am good natured, even tempered; my sleep is sound, almost without any dreams. In figure, in which an expression of calm power and self-confidence predominates, and in face, I resemble somewhat Michaelangelo's "Moses" that is, at least what some of my friendly visitors have told me.

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But even more than by the regular and healthy regime, the strengthening of my soul and body was helped by the wonderful, yet natural, peculiarity of our prison, which eliminates entirely the accidental and the unexpected from its life. Having neither a family nor friends, I am perfectly safe from the shocks, so injurious to life, which are caused by treachery, by the illness or death of relatives let my indulgent reader recall how many people have perished before his eyes not of their own fault, but because capricious fate had linked them to people unworthy of them. Without changing my feeling of love into trivial personal attachments, I thus make it free for the broad and mighty love for all mankind; and as mankind is immortal, not subjected to illness, and as a harmonious whole it is undoubtedly progressing toward perfection, love for it becomes the surest guarantee of spiritual and physical soundness.

My day is clear. So are also my days of the future, which are coming toward me in radiant and even order. A murderer will not break into my cell for the purpose of robbing me, a mad automobile will not crush me, the illness of a child will not torture me, cruel treachery will not steal its way to me from the darkness. My mind is free, my heart is calm, my soul is clear and bright.

The clear and rigid rules of our prison define everything that I must not do, thus freeing me from those unbearable hesitations, doubts, and errors with which practical life is filled. True, sometimes there penetrates even into our prison, through its high walls, something which ignorant people call chance, or even Fate, and which is only an inevitable reflection of the general laws; but the life of the prison, agitated for a moment, quickly goes back to its habitual rut, like a river after an overflow. To this category of accidents belong the above-mentioned murder of the Inspector, the rare and always unsuccessful attempts at escape, and also the executions, which take place in one of the remotest yards of our prison.

There is still another peculiarity in the system of our prison, which I consider most beneficial, and which gives to the whole thing a character of stern and noble justice. Left to himself, and only to himself, the prisoner cannot count upon support, or upon that spurious, wretched pity which so often falls to the lot of weak people, disfiguring thereby the fundamental purposes of nature.

I confess that I think, with a certain sense of pride, that if I am now enjoying general respect and admiration, if my mind is strong, my will powerful, my view of life clear and bright, I owe it only to myself, to my power and my perseverance. How many weak people would have perished in my place as victims of madness, despair, or grief? But I have conquered everything! I have changed the world. I gave to my soul the form which my mind desired. In the desert, working alone, exhausted with fatigue, I have erected a stately structure in which I now live joyously and calmly, like a king. Destroy it and to-morrow I shall begin to build a new structure, and in my bloody sweat I shall erect it! For I must live!

Forgive my involuntary pathos in the last lines, which is so unbecoming to my balanced and calm nature. But it is hard to restrain myself when I recall the road I have travelled. I hope, however, that in the future I shall not darken the mood of my reader with any outbursts of agitated feelings. Only he shouts who is not confident of the truth of his words; calm firmness and cold simplicity are becoming to the truth.

P.S. I do not remember whether I told you that the criminal who murdered my father has not been found as yet.

## CHAPTER V

Deviating from time to time from the calm form of a historical narrative I must pause on current events. Thus I will permit myself to acquaint my readers in a few lines with a rather interesting specimen of the human species which I have found accidentally in our prison.

One afternoon a few days ago the Warden came to me for the usual chat, and among other things told me there

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was a very unfortunate man in prison at the time upon whom I could exert a beneficent influence. I expressed my willingness in the most cordial manner, and for several days in succession I have had long discussions with the artist K., by permission of the Warden. The spirit of hostility, even of obstinacy, with which, to my regret, he met me at his first visit, has now disappeared entirely under the influence of my discussion. Listening willingly and with interest to my ever pacifying words he gradually told me his rather unusual story after a series of persistent questions.

He is a man of about twenty-six or twenty-eight, of pleasant appearance, and rather good manners, which show that he is a well-bred man. A certain quite natural unrestraint in his speech, a passionate vehemence with which he talks about himself, occasionally a bitter, even ironical laughter, followed by painful pensiveness, from which it is difficult to arouse him even by a touch of the hand these complete the make-up of my new acquaintance. Personally to me he is not particularly sympathetic, and however strange it may seem I am especially annoyed by his disgusting habit of constantly moving his thin, emaciated fingers and clutching helplessly the hand of the person with whom he speaks.

K. told me very little of his past life.

"Well, what is there to tell? I was an artist, that's all," he repeated, with a sorrowful grimace, and refused to talk about the "immoral act" for which he was condemned to solitary confinement.

"I don't want to corrupt you, grandpa live honestly," he would jest in a somewhat unbecoming familiar tone, which I tolerated simply because I wished to please the Warden of the prison, having learned from the prisoner the real cause of his sufferings, which sometimes assumed an acute form of violence and threats. During one of these painful minutes, when K.'s will power was weak, as a result of insomnia, from which he was suffering, I seated myself on his bed and treated him in general with fatherly kindness, and he blurted out everything to me right there and then.

Not desiring to tire the reader with an exact reproduction of his hysterical outbursts, his laughter and his tears, I shall give only the facts of his story.

K.'s grief, at first not quite clear to me, consists of the fact that instead of paper or canvas for his drawings he was given a large slate and a slate pencil. (By the way, the art with which he mastered the material, which was new to him, is remarkable. I have seen some of his productions, and it seems to me that they could satisfy the taste of the most fastidious expert of graphic arts. Personally I am indifferent to the art of painting, preferring live and truthful nature.) Thus, owing to the nature of the material, before commencing a new picture, K. had to destroy the previous one by wiping it off his slate, and this seemed to lead him every time to the verge of madness.

"You cannot imagine what it means," he would say, clutching my hands with his thin, clinging fingers. "While I draw, you know, I forget entirely that it is useless; I am usually very cheerful and I even whistle some tune, and once I was even incarcerated for that, as it is forbidden to whistle in this cursed prison. But that is a trifle for I had at least a good sleep there. But when I finish my picture no, even when I approach the end of the picture, I am seized with a sensation so terrible that I feel like tearing the brain from my head and trampling it with my feet. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you, my friend, I understand you perfectly, and I sympathise with you."

"Really? Well, then, listen, old man. I make the last strokes with so much pain, with such a sense of sorrow and hopelessness, as though I were bidding good-bye to the person I loved best of all. But here I have finished it. Do you understand what it means? It means that it has assumed life, that it lives, that there is a certain mysterious spirit in it. And yet it is already doomed to death, it is dead already, dead like a herring. Can you understand it at all? I do not understand it. And, now, imagine, I fool that I am I nevertheless rejoice, I cry and rejoice. No, I

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think, this picture I shall not destroy; it is so good that I shall not destroy it. Let it live. And it is a fact that at such times I do not feel like drawing anything new, I have not the slightest desire for it. And yet it is dreadful. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, my friend. No doubt the drawing ceases to please you on the following day "

"Oh, what nonsense you are prating, old man! (That is exactly what he said. 'Nonsense.')

How can a dying child cease to please you? Of course, if he lived, he might have become a scoundrel, but when he is dying No, old man, that isn't it. For I am killing it myself. I do not sleep all night long, I jump up, I look at it, and I love it so dearly that I feel like stealing it. Stealing it from whom? What do I know? But when morning sets in I feel that I cannot do without it, that I must take up that cursed pencil again and create anew. What a mockery! To create! What am I, a galley slave?"

"My friend, you are in a prison."

"My dear old man! When I begin to steal over to the slate with the sponge in my hand I feel like a murderer. It happens that I go around it for a day or two. Do you know, one day I bit off a finger of my right hand so as not to draw any more, but that, of course, was only a trifle, for I started to learn drawing with my left hand. What is this necessity for creating! To create by all means, create for suffering create with the knowledge that it will all perish! Do you understand it?"

"Finish it, my friend, don't be agitated; then I will expound to you my views."

Unfortunately, my advice hardly reached the ears of K. In one of those paroxysms of despair, which frighten the Warden of our prison, K. began to throw himself about in his bed, tear his clothes, shout and sob, manifesting in general all the symptoms of extreme mortification. I looked at the sufferings of the unfortunate youth with deep emotion (compared with me he was a youth), vainly endeavouring to hold his fingers which were tearing his clothes. I knew that for this breach of discipline new incarceration awaited him.

"O, impetuous youth," I thought when he had grown somewhat calmer, and I was tenderly unfolding his fine hair which had become entangled, "how easily you fall into despair! A bit of drawing, which may in the end fall into the hands of a dealer in old rags, or a dealer in old bronze and cemented porcelain, can cause you so much suffering!" But, of course, I did not tell this to my youthful friend, striving, as any one should under similar circumstances, not to irritate him by unnecessary contradictions.

"Thank you, old man," said K., apparently calm now. "To tell the truth you seemed very strange to me at first; your face is so venerable, but your eyes. Have you murdered anybody, old man?"

I deliberately quote the malicious and careless phrase to show how in the eyes of lightminded and shallow people the stamp of a terrible accusation is transformed into the stamp of the crime itself. Controlling my feeling of bitterness, I remarked calmly to the impertinent youth:

"You are an artist, my child; to you are known the mysteries of the human face, that flexible, mobile and deceptive masque, which, like the sea, reflects the hurrying clouds and the azure ether. Being green, the sea turns blue under the clear sky and black when the sky is black, when the heavy clouds are dark. What do you want of my face, over which hangs an accusation of the most cruel crime?"

But, occupied with his own thoughts, the artist apparently paid no particular attention to my words and continued in a broken voice:

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"What am I to do? You saw my drawing. I destroyed it, and it is already a whole week since I touched my pencil. Of course," he resumed thoughtfully, rubbing his brow, "it would be better to break the slate; to punish me they would not give me another one "

"You had better return it to the authorities."

"Very well, I may hold out another week, but what then? I know myself. Even now that devil is pushing my hand: "Take the pencil, take the pencil."

At that moment, as my eyes wandered distractedly over his cell, I suddenly noticed that some of the artist's clothes hanging on the wall were unnaturally stretched, and one end was skilfully fastened by the back of the cot. Assuming an air that I was tired and that I wanted to walk about in the cell, I staggered as from a quiver of senility in my legs, and pushed the clothes aside. The entire wall was covered with drawings!

The artist had already leaped from his cot, and thus we stood facing each other in silence. I said in a tone of gentle reproach:

"How did you allow yourself to do this, my friend? You know the rules of the prison, according to which no inscriptions or drawing on the walls are permissible?"

"I know no rules," said K. morosely.

"And then," I continued, sternly this time, "you lied to me, my friend. You said that you did not take the pencil into your hands for a whole week."

"Of course I didn't," said the artist, with a strange smile, and even a challenge. Even when caught red-handed, he did not betray any signs of repentance, and looked rather sarcastic than guilty. Having examined more closely the drawings on the wall, which represented human figures in various positions, I became interested in the strange reddish-yellow colour of an unknown pencil.

"Is this iodine? You told me that you had a pain and that you secured iodine."

"No. It is blood."

"Blood?"

"Yes."

I must say frankly that I even liked him at that moment.

"How did you get it?"

"From my hand."

"From your hand? But how did you manage to hide yourself from the eye that is watching you?"

He smiled cunningly, and even winked.

"Don't you know that you can always deceive if only you want to do it?"

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My sympathies for him were immediately dispersed. I saw before me a man who was not particularly clever, but in all probability terribly spoiled already, who did not even admit the thought that there are people who simply cannot lie. Recalling, however, the promise I had made to the Warden, I assumed a calm air of dignity and said to him tenderly, as only a mother could speak to her child:

"Don't be surprised and don't condemn me for being so strict, my friend. I am an old man. I have passed half of my life in this prison; I have formed certain habits, like all old people, and submitting to all rules myself, I am perhaps overdoing it somewhat in demanding the same of others. You will of course wipe off these drawings yourself although I feel sorry for them, for I admire them sincerely and I will not say anything to the administration. We will forget all this, as if nothing had happened. Are you satisfied?"

He answered drowsily:

"Very well."

"In our prison, where we have the sad pleasure of being confined, everything is arranged in accordance with a most purposeful plan and is most strictly subjected to laws and rules. And the very strict order, on account of which the existence of your creations is so short lived, and, I may say, ephemeral, is full of the profoundest wisdom. Allowing you to perfect yourself in your art, it wisely guards other people against the perhaps injurious influence of your productions, and in any case it completes logically, finishes, enforces, and makes clear the meaning of your solitary confinement. What does solitary confinement in our prison mean? It means that the prisoner should be alone. But would he be alone if by his productions he would communicate in some way or other with other people outside?"

By the expression of K.'s face I noticed with a sense of profound joy that my words had produced on him the proper impression, bringing him back from the realm of poetic inventions to the land of stern but beautiful reality. And, raising my voice, I continued:

"As for the rule you have broken, which forbids any inscription or drawing on the walls of our prison, it is not less logical. Years will pass; in your place there may be another prisoner like you and he may see that which you have drawn. Shall this be tolerated? Just think of it! And what would become of the walls of our prison if every one who wished it were to leave upon them his profane marks?"

"To the devil with it!"

This is exactly how K. expressed himself. He said it loudly, even with an air of calmness.

"What do you mean to say by this, my youthful friend?"

"I wish to say that you may perish here, my old friend, but I shall leave this place."

"You can't escape from our prison," I retorted, sternly.

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, I have tried."

He looked at me incredulously and smiled. He smiled!

"You are a coward, old man. You are simply a miserable coward."

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I a coward! Oh, if that self-satisfied puppy knew what a tempest of rage he had aroused in my soul he would have squealed for fright and would have hidden himself on the bed. I a coward! The world has crumbled upon my head, but has not crushed me, and out of its terrible fragments I have created a new world, according to my own design and plan; all the evil forces of life solitude, imprisonment, treachery, and falsehood all have taken up arms against me, but I have subjected them all to my will. And I who have subjected to myself even my dreams I am a coward?

But I shall not tire the attention of my indulgent reader with these lyrical deviations, which have no bearing on the matter. I continue.

After a pause, broken only by K.'s loud breathing, I said to him sadly:

"I a coward! And you say this to the man who came with the sole aim of helping you? Of helping you not only in word but also in deed?"

"You wish to help me? In what way?"

"I will get you paper and pencil."

The artist was silent. And his voice was soft and timid when he asked, hesitatingly:

"And my drawings will remain?"

"Yes; they will remain."

It is hard to describe the vehement delight into which the exalted young man was thrown; naive and pure-hearted youth knows no bounds either in grief or in joy. He pressed my hand warmly, shook me, disturbing my old bones; he called me friend, father, even "dear old phiz" (!) and a thousand other endearing and somewhat naive names. To my regret our conversation lasted too long, and, notwithstanding the entreaties of the young man, who would not part with me, I hurried away to my cell.

I did not go to the Warden of the prison, as I felt somewhat agitated. At that remote time I paced my cell until late in the night, striving to understand what means of escaping from our prison that rather foolish young man could have discovered. Was it possible to run away from our prison? No, I could not admit and I must not admit it. And gradually conjuring up in my memory everything I knew about our prison, I understood that K. must have hit upon an old plan, which I had long discarded, and that he would convince himself of its impracticability even as I convinced myself. It is impossible to escape from our prison.

But, tormented by doubts, I measured my lonely cell for a long time, thinking of various plans that might relieve K.'s position and thus divert him from the idea of making his escape. He must not run away from our prison under any circumstances. Then I gave myself to peaceful and sound sleep, with which benevolent nature has rewarded those who have a clear conscience and a pure soul.

By the way, lest I forget, I shall mention the fact that I destroyed my "Diary of a Prisoner" that night. I had long wished to do it, but the natural pity and faint-hearted love which we feel for our blunders and our shortcomings restrained me; besides, there was nothing in my "Diary" that could have compromised me in any way. And if I have destroyed it now it is due solely to my desire to throw my past into oblivion and to save my reader from the tediousness of long complaints and moans, from the horror of sacrilegious cursings. May it rest in peace!



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### CHAPTER VI

Having conveyed to the Warden of our prison the contents of my conversation with K., I asked him not to punish the young man for spoiling the walls, which would thus betray me, and I, to save the youth, suggested the following plan, which was accepted by the Warden after a few purely formal objections.

"It is important for him," I said, "that his drawings should be preserved, but it is apparently immaterial to him in whose possession these drawings are. Let him, then, avail himself of his art, paint your portrait, Mr. Warden, and after that the portraits of the entire staff of your officials. To say nothing of the honour you would show him by this condescension an honour which he will surely know how to appreciate the painting may be useful to you as a very original ornament in your drawing room or study. Besides, nothing will prevent us from destroying the drawings if we should not care for them, for the naive and somewhat selfish young man apparently does not even admit the thought that anybody's hand would destroy his productions."

Smiling, the Warden suggested, with a politeness that flattered me extremely, that the series of portraits should commence with mine. I quote word for word that which the Warden said to me:

"Your face actually calls for reproduction on canvas. We shall hang your portrait in the office."

The zeal of creativeness these are the only words I can apply to the passionate, silent agitation in which K. reproduced my features. Usually talkative, he now maintained silence for hours, leaving unanswered my jests and remarks.

"Be silent, old man, be silent you are at your best when you are silent," he repeated persistently, calling forth an involuntary smile by his zeal as a professional.

My portrait would remind you, my indulgent reader, of that mysterious peculiarity of artists, according to which they very often transmit their own feelings, even their external features, to the subject upon which they are working. Thus, reproducing with remarkable likeness, the lower part of my face, where kindness and the expression of authoritativeness and calm dignity are so harmoniously blended, K. undoubtedly introduced into my eyes his own suffering and even his horror. Their fixed, immobile gaze; madness glimmering somewhere in their depth; the painful eloquence of a deep and infinitely lonely soul all that was not mine.

"Is this I?" I exclaimed, laughing, when from the canvas this terrible face, full of wild contradictions, stared at me. "My friend, I do not congratulate you on this portrait. I do not think it is successful."

"It is you, old man, you! It is well drawn. You criticise it wrongly. Where will you hang it?"

He grew talkative again like a magpie, that amiable young man, and all because his wretched painting was to be preserved for some time. O impetuous, O happy youth! Here I could not restrain myself from a little jest for the purpose of teaching a lesson to the self-confident youngster, so I asked him, with a smile:

"Well, Mr. Artist, what do you think? Am I murderer or not?"

The artist, closing one eye, examined me and the portrait critically. Then whistling a polka, he answered recklessly: "The devil knows you, old man!"

I smiled. K. understood my jest at last, burst out laughing and then said with sudden seriousness:

"You are speaking of the human face but do you know that there is nothing worse in the world than the human

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face? Even when it tells the truth, when it shouts about the truth, it lies, it lies, old man, for it speaks its own language. Do you know, old man, a terrible incident happened to me? It was in one of the picture galleries in Spain. I was examining a portrait of Christ, when suddenly Christ, you understand, Christ great eyes, dark, terrible suffering, sorrow, grief, love well, in a word Christ. Suddenly I was struck with something; suddenly it seemed to me that it was the face of the greatest wrongdoer, tormented by the greatest unheard-of woes of repentance Old man, why do you look at me so! Old man!"

Nearing my eyes to the very face of the artist, I asked him in a cautious whisper, as the occasion required, dividing each word from the other:

"Don't you think that when the devil tempted Him in the desert He did not renounce him, as He said later, but consented, sold Himself that He did not renounce the devil, but sold Himself. Do you understand? Does not that passage in the Gospels seem doubtful to you?"

Extreme fright was expressed on the face of my young friend. Forcing the palms of his hands against my chest, as if to push me away, he ejaculated in a voice so low that I could hardly hear his indistinct words:

"What? You say Jesus sold Himself? What for?"

I explained softly:

"That the people, my child, that the people should believe Him."

"Well?"

I smiled. K.'s eyes became round, as if a noose was strangling him. Suddenly, with that lack of respect for old age which was one of his characteristics, he threw me down on the bed with a sharp thrust and jumped away into a corner. When I was slowly getting up from the awkward position into which the unrestraint of that young man had forced me I fell backward, with my head between the pillow and the back of the bed he cried to me loudly:

"Don't you dare! Don't you dare get up, you Devil."

But I did not think of rising to my feet. I simply sat down on the bed, and, thus seated, with an involuntary smile at the passionate outburst of the youth, I shook my head good naturedly and laughed.

"Oh, young man, young man! You yourself have drawn me into this theological conversation."

But he stared at me stubbornly, wide eyed, and kept repeating:

"Sit there, sit there! I did not say this. No, no!"

"You said it, you, young man you. Do you remember Spain, the picture gallery! You said it and now you deny it, mocking my clumsy old age. Oh!"

K. suddenly lowered his hands and admitted in a low voice:

"Yes. I said it. But you, old man "

I do not remember what he said after that it is so hard to recall all the childish chatter of this kind, but unfortunately too light-minded young man. I remember only that we parted as friends, and he pressed my hand warmly, expressing to me his sincere gratitude, even calling me, so far as I can remember, his "saviour."

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By the way, I succeeded in convincing the Warden that the portrait of even such a man as I, after all a prisoner, was out of place in such a solemn official room as the office of our prison. And now the portrait hangs on the wall of my cell, pleasantly breaking the cold monotony of the pure white walls.

Leaving for a time our artist, who is now carried away by the portrait of the Warden, I shall continue my story.

### CHAPTER VII

My spiritual clearness, as I had the pleasure of informing the reader before, has built up for me a considerable circle of men and women admirers. With self-evident emotion I shall tell of the pleasant hours of our hearty conversations, which I modestly call "My talks."

It is difficult for me to explain how I deserved it, but the majority of those who come to me regard me with a feeling of the profoundest respect, even adoration, and only a few come for the purpose of arguing with me, but these arguments are usually of a moderate and proper character. I usually seat myself in the middle of the room, in a soft and deep armchair, which is furnished me for this occasion by the Warden; my hearers surround me closely, and some of them, the more enthusiastic youths and maidens, seat themselves at my feet.

Having before me an audience more than half of which is composed of women, and entirely disposed in my favour, I always appeal not so much to the mind as to the sensitive and truthful heart. Fortunately I possess a certain oratorical power, and the customary effects of the oratorical art, to which all preachers, beginning in all probability with Mohammed, have resorted, and which I can handle rather cleverly, allow me to influence my hearers in the desired direction. It is easily understood that to the dear ladies in my audience I am not so much the sage, who has solved the mystery of the iron grate, as a great martyr of a righteous cause, which they do not quite understand. Shunning abstract discussions, they eagerly hang on every word of compassion and kindness, and respond with the same. Allowing them to love me and to believe in my immutable knowledge of life, I afford them the happy opportunity to depart at least for a time from the coldness of life, from its painful doubts and questions.

I say openly without any false modesty, which I despise even as I despise hypocrisy, there were lectures at which I myself being in a state of exaltation, called forth in my audience, especially in my nervous lady visitors, a mood of intense agitation, which turned into hysterical laughter and tears. Of course I am not a prophet; I am merely a modest thinker, but no one would succeed in convincing my lady admirers that there is no prophetic meaning and significance in my speeches.

I remember one such lecture which took place two months ago. The night before I could not sleep as soundly as I usually slept; perhaps it was simply because of the full moon, which affects sleep, disturbing and interrupting it. I vaguely remember the strange sensation which I experienced when the pale crescent of the moon appeared in my window and the iron squares cut it with ominous black lines into small silver squares....

When I started for the lecture I felt exhausted and rather inclined to silence than to conversation; the vision of the night before disturbed me. But when I saw those dear faces, those eyes full of hope and ardent entreaty for friendly advice; when I saw before me that rich field, already ploughed, waiting only for the good seed to be sown, my heart began to burn with delight, pity and love. Avoiding the customary formalities which accompany the meetings of people, declining the hands outstretched to greet me, I turned to the audience, which was agitated at the very sight of me, and gave them my blessing with a gesture to which I know how to lend a peculiar majesty.

"Come unto me," I exclaimed; "come unto me; you who have gone away from that life. Here, in this quiet abode, under the sacred protection of the iron grate, at my heart overflowing with love, you will find rest and comfort. My beloved children, give me your sad soul, exhausted from suffering, and I shall clothe it with light. I shall carry

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it to those blissful lands where the sun of eternal truth and love never sets."

Many had begun to cry already, but, as it was too early for tears, I interrupted them with a gesture of fatherly impatience, and continued:

"You, dear girl, who came from the world which calls itself free what gloomy shadows lie on your charming and beautiful face! And you, my daring youth, why are you so pale? Why do I see, instead of the ecstasy of victory, the fear of defeat in your lowered eyes? And you, honest mother, tell me, what wind has made your eyes so red? What furious rain has lashed your wizened face? What snow has whitened your hair, for it used to be dark?"

But the weeping and the sobs drowned the end of my speech, and besides, I admit it without feeling ashamed of it, I myself brushed away more than one treacherous tear from my eyes. Without allowing the agitation to subside completely, I called in a voice of stern and truthful reproach:

"Do not weep because your soul is dark, stricken with misfortunes, blinded by chaos, clipped of its wings by doubts; give it to me and I shall direct it toward the light, toward order and reason. I know the truth. I have conceived the world! I have discovered the great principle of its purpose! I have solved the sacred formula of the iron grate! I demand of you swear to me by the cold iron of its squares that henceforth you will confess to me without shame or fear all your deeds, your errors and doubts, all the secret thoughts of your soul and the dreams and desires of your body!"

"We swear! We swear! We swear! Save us! Reveal to us the truth! Take our sins upon yourself! Save us! Save us!" numerous exclamations resounded.

I must mention the sad incident which occurred during that same lecture. At the moment when the excitement reached its height and the hearts had already opened, ready to unburden themselves, a certain youth, looking morose and embittered, exclaimed loudly, evidently addressing himself to me:

"Liar! Do not listen to him. He is lying!"

The indulgent reader will easily believe that it was only by a great effort that I succeeded in saving the incautious youth from the fury of the audience. Offended in that which is most precious to a human being, his faith in goodness and the divine purpose of life, my women admirers rushed upon the foolish youth in a mob and would have beaten him cruelly. Remembering, however, that there was more joy to the pastor in one sinner who repents than in ten righteous men, I took the young man aside where no one could hear us, and entered into a brief conversation with him.

"Did you call me a liar, my child?"

Moved by my kindness, the poor young man became confused and answered hesitatingly:

"Pardon me for my harshness, but it seems to me that you are not telling the truth."

"I understand you, my friend. You must have been agitated by the intense ecstasy of the women, and you, as a sensible man, not inclined to mysticism, suspected me of fraud, of a hideous fraud. No, no, don't excuse yourself. I understand you. But I wish you would understand me. Out of the mire of superstitions, out of the deep gulf of prejudices and unfounded beliefs, I want to lead their strayed thoughts and place them upon the solid foundation of strictly logical reasoning. The iron grate, which I mentioned, is not a mystical sign; it is only a formula, a simple, sober, honest, mathematical formula. To you, as a sensible man, I will willingly explain this formula. The grate is the scheme in which are placed all the laws guiding the universe, which do away with chaos, substituting in its place strict, iron, inviolable order, forgotten by mankind. As a brightminded man you will easily

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understand "

"Pardon me. I did not understand you, and if you will permit me I But why do you make them swear?"

"My friend, the soul of man, believing itself free and constantly suffering from this spurious freedom, is demanding fetters for itself to some these fetters are an oath, to others a vow, to still others simply a word of honour. You will give me your word of honour, will you not?"

"I will."

"And by this you are simply striving to enter the harmony of the world, where everything is subjected to a law. Is not the falling of a stone the fulfilment of a vow, of the vow called the law of gravitation?"

I shall not go into detail about this conversation and the others that followed. The obstinate and unrestrained youth, who had insulted me by calling me liar, became one of my warmest adherents.

I must return to the others. During the time that I talked with the young man, the desire for penitence among my charming proselytes reached its height. Not patient enough to wait for me, they commenced in a state of intense ecstasy to confess to one another, giving to the room an appearance of a garden where dozens of birds of paradise were twittering at the same time. When I returned, each of them separately unfolded her agitated soul to me....

I saw how, from day to day, from hour to hour, terrible chaos was struggling in their souls with an eager inclination for harmony and order; how in the bloody struggle between eternal falsehood and immortal truth, falsehood, through inconceivable ways, passed into truth, and truth became falsehood. I found in the human soul all the forces in the world, and none of them was dormant, and in the mad whirlpool each soul became like a fountain, whose source is the abyss of the sea and whose summit the sky. And every human being, as I have learned and seen, is like the rich and powerful master who gave a masquerade ball at his castle and illuminated it with many lights; and strange masks came from everywhere and the master greeted them, bowing courteously, and vainly asking them who they were; and new, ever stranger, ever more terrible, masks were arriving, and the master bowed to them ever more courteously, staggering from fatigue and fear. And they were laughing and whispering strange words about the eternal chaos, whence they came, obeying the call of the master. And lights were burning in the castle and in the distance lighted windows were visible, reminding him of the festival, and the exhausted master kept bowing ever lower, ever more courteously, ever more cheerfully. My indulgent reader will easily understand that in addition to a certain sense of fear which I experienced, the greatest delight and even joyous emotion soon came upon me for I saw that eternal chaos was defeated and the triumphant hymn of bright harmony was rising to the skies....

Not without a sense of pride I shall mention the modest offerings by which my kind admirers were striving to express to me their feelings of love and adoration. I am not afraid of calling out a smile on the lips of my readers, for I feel how comical it is I will say that among the offerings brought me at first were fruit, cakes, all kinds of sweet-meats. But I am afraid, however, that no one will believe me when I say that I have actually declined these offerings, preferring the observance of the prison regime in all its rigidity.

At the last lecture, a kind and honourable lady brought me a basketful of live flowers. To my regret, I was compelled to decline this present, too.

"Forgive me, madam, but flowers do not enter into the system of our prison. I appreciate very much your magnanimous attention I kiss your hands, madam " I said, "but I am compelled to decline the flowers. Travelling along the thorny road to self-renunciation, I must not caress my eyes with the ephemeral and illusionary beauty of these charming lilies and roses. All flowers perish in our prison, madam."

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Yesterday another lady brought me a very valuable crucifix of ivory, a family heirloom, she said. Not afflicted with the sin of hypocrisy, I told my generous lady frankly that I do not believe in miracles.

"But at the same time," I said, "I regard with the profoundest respect Him who is justly called the Saviour of the world, and I honour greatly His services to mankind.

"If I should tell you, madam, that the Gospel has long been my favourite book, that there is not a day in my life that I do not open this great Book, drawing from it strength and courage to be able to continue my hard course you will understand that your liberal gift could not have fallen into better hands. Henceforth, thanks to you, the sad solitude of my cell will vanish; I am not alone. I bless you, my daughter."

I cannot forego mentioning the strange thoughts brought out by the crucifix as it hung there beside my portrait. It was twilight; outside the wall the bell was tolling heavily in the invisible church, calling the believers together; in the distance, over the deserted field, overgrown with high grass, an unknown wanderer was plodding along, passing into the unknown distance, like a little black dot. It was as quiet in our prison as in a sepulchre. I looked long and attentively at the features of Jesus, which were so calm, so joyous compared with him who looked silently and dully from the wall beside Him. And with my habit, formed during the long years of solitude, of addressing inanimate things aloud, I said to the motionless crucifix:

"Good evening, Jesus. I am glad to welcome You in our prison. There are three of us here: You, I, and the one who is looking from the wall, and I hope that we three will manage to live in peace and in harmony. He is looking silently, and You are silent, and Your eyes are closed I shall speak for the three of us, a sure sign that our peace will never be broken."

They were silent, and, continuing, I addressed my speech to the portrait:

"Where are you looking so intently and so strangely, my unknown friend and roommate? In your eyes I see mystery and reproach. Is it possible that you dare reproach Him? Answer!"

And, pretending that the portrait answered, I continued in a different voice with an expression of extreme sternness and boundless grief:

"Yes, I do reproach Him. Jesus, Jesus! Why is Your face so pure, so blissful? You have passed only over the brink of human sufferings, as over the brink of an abyss, and only the foam of the bloody and miry waves have touched You. Do You command me, a human being, to sink into the dark depth? Great is Your Golgotha, Jesus, but too reverent and joyous, and one small but interesting stroke is missing the horror of aimlessness!"

Here I interrupted the speech of the Portrait, with an expression of anger.

"How dare you," I exclaimed; "how dare you speak of aimlessness in our prison?"

They were silent; and suddenly Jesus, without opening His eyes He even seemed to close them more tightly answered:

"Who knows the mysteries of the heart of Jesus?"

I burst into laughter, and my esteemed reader will easily understand this laughter. It turned out that I, a cool and sober mathematician, possessed a poetic talent and could compose very interesting comedies.

I do not know how all this would have ended, for I had already prepared a thundering answer for my roommate when the appearance of the keeper, who brought me food, suddenly interrupted me. But apparently my face bore

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traces of excitement, for the man asked me with stern sympathy:

"Were you praying?"

I do not remember what I answered.

### CHAPTER VIII

Last Sunday a great misfortune occurred in our prison: The artist K., whom the reader knows already, ended his life in suicide by flinging himself from the table with his head against the stone floor. The fall and the force of the blow had been so skilfully calculated by the unfortunate young man that his skull was split in two. The grief of the Warden was indescribable. Having called me to the office, the Warden, without shaking hands with me, reproached me in angry and harsh terms for having deceived him, and he regained his calm, only after my hearty apologies and promises that such accidents would not happen again. I promised to prepare a project for watching the criminals which would render suicide impossible. The esteemed wife of the Warden, whose portrait remained unfinished, was also grieved by the death of the artist.

Of course, I had not expected this outcome, either, although a few days before committing suicide, K. had provoked in me a feeling of uneasiness. Upon entering his cell one morning, and greeting him, I noticed with amazement that he was sitting before his slate once more drawing human figures.

"What does this mean, my friend?" I inquired cautiously. "And how about the portrait of the second assistant?"

"The devil take it!"

"But you "

"The devil take it!"

After a pause I remarked distractedly:

"Your portrait of the Warden is meeting with great success. Although some of the people who have seen it say that the right moustache is somewhat shorter than the left "

"Shorter?"

"Yes, shorter. But in general they find that you caught the likeness very successfully."

K. had put aside his slate pencil and, perfectly calm, said:

"Tell your Warden that I am not going to paint that prison ruffraff any more."

After these words there was nothing left for me to do but leave him, which I decided to do. But the artist, who could not get along without giving vent to his effusions, seized me by the hand and said with his usual enthusiasm:

"Just think of it, old man, what a horror! Every day a new repulsive face appears before me. They sit and stare at me with their froglike eyes. What am I to do? At first I laughed I even liked it but when the froglike eyes stared at me every day I was seized with horror. I was afraid they might start to quack qua-qua!"

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Indeed there was a certain fear, even madness, in the eyes of the artist the madness which shortly led him to his untimely grave.

"Old man, it is necessary to have something beautiful. Do you understand me?"

"And the wife of the Warden? Is she not "

I shall pass in silence the unbecoming expressions with which he spoke of the lady in his excitement. I must, however, admit that to a certain extent the artist was right in his complaints. I had been present several times at the sittings, and noticed that all who had posed for the artist behaved rather unnaturally. Sincere and naive, conscious of the importance of their position, convinced that the features of their faces perpetuated upon the canvas would go down to posterity, they exaggerated somewhat the qualities which are so characteristic of their high and responsible office in our prison. A certain bombast of pose, an exaggerated expression of stern authority, an obvious consciousness of their own importance, and a noticeable contempt for those on whom their eyes were directed all this disfigured their kind and affable faces. But I cannot understand what horrible features the artist found where there should have been a smile. I was even indignant at the superficial attitude with which an artist, who considered himself talented and sensible, passed the people without noticing that a divine spark was glimmering in each one of them. In the quest after some fantastic beauty he light-mindedly passed by the true beauties with which the human soul is filled. I cannot help feeling sorry for those unfortunate people who, like K., because of a peculiar construction of their brains, always turn their eyes toward the dark side, whereas there is so much joy and light in our prison!

When I said this to K. I heard, to my regret, the same stereotyped and indecent answer:

"The devil take it!"

All I could do was to shrug my shoulders. Suddenly changing his tone and bearing, the artist turned to me seriously with a question which, in my opinion, was also indecent:

"Why do you lie, old man?"

I was astonished, of course.

"I lie?"

"Well, let it be the truth, if you like, but why? I am looking and thinking. Why did you say that? Why?"

My indulgent reader, who knows well what the truth has cost me, will readily understand my profound indignation. I deliberately mention this audacious and other calumnious phrases to show in what an atmosphere of malice, distrust, and disrespect I have to plod along the hard road of suffering. He insisted rudely:

"I have had enough of your smiles. Tell me plainly, why do you speak so?"

Then, I admit, I flared up:

"You want to know why I speak the truth? Because I hate falsehood and I commit it to eternal anathema! Because fate has made me a victim of injustice, and as a victim, like Him who took upon Himself the great sin of the world and its great sufferings, I wish to point out the way to mankind. Wretched egoist, you know only yourself and your miserable art, while I love mankind."

My anger grew. I felt the veins on my forehead swelling.



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"Fool, miserable dauber, unfortunate schoolboy, in love with colours! Human beings pass before you, and you see only their froglike eyes. How did your tongue turn to say such a thing ? Oh, if you only looked even once into the human soul! What treasures of tenderness, love, humble faith, holy humility, you would have discovered there! And to you, bold man, it would have seemed as if you entered a temple a bright, illuminated temple. But it is said of people like you 'do not cast your pearls before swine.'"

The artist was silent, crushed by my angry and unrestrained speech. Finally he sighed and said:

"Forgive me, old man; I am talking nonsense, of course, but I am so unfortunate and so lonely. Of course, my dear old man, it is all true about the divine spark and about beauty, but a polished boot is also beautiful. I cannot, I cannot! Just think of it! How can a man have such moustaches as he has ? And yet he is complaining that the left moustache is shorter!"

He laughed like a child, and, heaving a sigh, added:

"I'll make another attempt. I will paint the lady. There is really something good in her. Although she is after all a cow."

He laughed again, and, fearing to brush away with his sleeve the drawing on the slate, he cautiously placed it in the corner.

Here I did that which my duty compelled me to do. Seizing the slate, I smashed it to pieces with a powerful blow. I thought that the artist would rush upon me furiously, but he did not. To his weak mind my act seemed so blasphemous, so supernaturally horrible, that his deathlike lips could not utter a word.

"What have you done?" he asked at last in a low voice. "You have broken it?"

And raising my hand I replied solemnly:

"Foolish youth, I have done that which I would have done to my heart if it wanted to jest and mock me! Unfortunate youth, can you not see that your art has long been mocking you, that from that slate of yours the devil himself was making hideous faces at you?"

"Yes. The devil!"

"Being far from your wonderful art, I did not understand you at first, nor your longing, your horror of aimlessness. But when I entered your cell to-day and noticed you at your ruinous occupation, I said to myself: It is better that he should not create at all than to create in this manner. Listen to me."

I then revealed for the first time to this youth the sacred formula of the iron grate, which, dividing the infinite into squares, thereby subjects it to itself. K. listened to my words with emotion, looking with the horror of an ignorant man at the figures which must have seemed to him to be cabalistic, but which were nothing else than the ordinary figures used in mathematics.

"I am your slave, old man," he said at last, kissing my hand with his cold lips.

"No, you will be my favourite pupil, my son. I bless you."

And it seemed to me that the artist was saved. True, he regarded me with great joy, which could easily be explained by the extreme respect with which I inspired him, and he painted the portrait of the Warden's wife with such zeal and enthusiasm that the esteemed lady was sincerely moved. And, strange to say, the artist succeeded in

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making so strangely beautiful the features of this woman, who was stout and no longer young, that the Warden, long accustomed to the face of his wife, was greatly delighted by its new expression. Thus everything went on smoothly, when suddenly this catastrophe occurred, the entire horror of which I alone knew.

Not desiring to call forth any unnecessary disputes, I concealed from the Warden the fact that on the eve of his death the artist had thrown a letter into my cell, which I noticed only in the morning. I did not preserve the note, nor do I remember all that the unfortunate youth told me in his farewell message; I think it was a letter of thanks for my effort to save him. He wrote that he regretted sincerely that his failing strength did not permit him to avail himself of my instructions. But one phrase impressed itself deeply in my memory, and you will understand the reason for it when I repeat it in all its terrifying simplicity.

"I am going away from your prison," thus read the phrase.

And he really did go away. Here are the walls, here is the little window in the door, here is our prison, but he is not there; he has gone away. Consequently I, too, could go away. Instead of having wasted dozens of years on a titanic struggle, instead of being tormented by the throes of despair, instead of growing enfeebled by horror in the face of unsolved mysteries, of striving to subject the world to my mind and my will, I could have climbed the table and one instant of pain I would be free; I would be triumphant over the lock and the walls, over truth and falsehood, over joys and sufferings. I will not say that I had not thought of suicide before as a means of escaping from our prison, but now for the first time it appeared before me in all its attractiveness. In a fit of base faint-heartedness, which I shall not conceal from my reader, even as I do not conceal from him my good qualities; perhaps even in a fit of temporary insanity I momentarily forgot all I knew about our prison and its great purpose. I forgot I am ashamed to say even the great formula of the iron grate, which I conceived and mastered with such difficulty, and I prepared a noose made of my towel for the purpose of strangling myself. But at the last moment, when all was ready, and it was but necessary to push away the taburet, I asked myself, with my habit of reasoning which did not forsake me even at that time: But where am I going? The answer was: I am going to death. But what is death? And the answer was: I do not know.

These brief reflections were enough for me to come to myself, and with a bitter laugh at my cowardice I removed the fatal noose from my neck. Just as I had been ready to sob for grief a minute before, so now I laughed I laughed like a madman, realising that another trap, placed before me by derisive fate, had so brilliantly been evaded by me. Oh, how many traps there are in the life of man! Like a cunning fisherman, fate catches him now with the alluring bait of some truth, now with the hairy little worm of dark falsehood, now with the phantom of life, now with the phantom of death.

My dear young man, my fascinating fool, my charming silly fellow who told you that our prison ends here, that from one prison you did not fall into another prison, from which it will hardly be possible for you to run away? You were too hasty, my friend, you forgot to ask me something else I would have told it to you. I would have told you that omnipotent law reigns over that which you call non-existence and death just as it reigns over that which you call life and existence. Only the fools, dying, believe that they have made an end of themselves they have ended but one form of themselves, in order to assume another form immediately.

Thus I reflected, laughing at the foolish suicide, the ridiculous destroyer of the fetters of eternity. And this is what I said addressing myself to my two silent roommates hanging motionlessly on the white wall of my cell:

"I believe and confess that our prison is immortal. What do you say to this, my friends?"

But they were silent. And having burst into good-natured laughter What quiet roommates I have! I undressed slowly and gave myself to peaceful sleep. In my dream I saw another majestic prison, and wonderful jailers with white wings on their backs, and the Chief Warden of the prison himself. I do not remember whether there were any little windows in the doors or not, but I think there were. I recall that something like an angel's eye was fixed

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upon me with tender attention and love. My indulgent reader will, of course, guess that I am jesting. I did not dream at all. I am not in the habit of dreaming.

Without hoping that the Warden, occupied with pressing official affairs, would understand me thoroughly and appreciate my idea concerning the impossibility of escaping from our prison, I confined myself, in my report, to an indication of several ways in which suicides could be averted. With magnanimous shortsightedness peculiar to busy and trusting people, the Warden failed to notice the weak points of my project and clasped my hand warmly, expressing to me his gratitude in the name of our entire prison.

On that day I had the honour, for the first time, to drink a glass of tea at the home of the Warden, in the presence of his kind wife and charming children, who called me "Grandpa." Tears of emotion which gathered in my eyes could but faintly express the feelings that came over me.

At the request of the Warden's wife, who took a deep interest in me, I related in detail the story of the tragic murders which led me so unexpectedly and so terribly to the prison. I could not find expressions strong enough there are no expressions strong enough in the human language to brand adequately the unknown criminal, who not only murdered three helpless people, but who mocked them brutally in a fit of blind and savage rage.

As the investigation and the autopsy showed, the murderer dealt the last blows after the people had been dead. It is very possible, however even murderers should be given their due that the man, intoxicated by the sight of blood, ceased to be a human being and became a beast, the son of chaos, the child of dark and terrible desires. It was characteristic that the murderer, after having committed the crime, drank wine and ate biscuits some of these were left on the table together with the marks of his blood-stained fingers. But there was something so horrible that my mind could neither understand nor explain: the murderer, after lighting a cigar himself, apparently moved by a feeling of strange kindness, put a lighted cigar between the closed teeth of my father.

I had not recalled these details in many years. They had almost been erased by the hand of time, and now while relating them to my shocked listeners, who would not believe that such horrors were possible, I felt my face turning pale and my hair quivering on my head. In an outburst of grief and anger I rose from my armchair, and straightening myself to my full height, I exclaimed:

"Justice on earth is often powerless, but I implore heavenly justice, I implore the justice of life which never forgives, I implore all the higher laws under whose authority man lives. May the guilty one not escape his deserved punishment! His punishment!"

Moved by my sobs, my listeners there and then expressed their zeal and readiness to work for my liberation, and thus at least partly redeem the injustice heaped upon me. I apologised and returned to my cell.

Evidently my old organism cannot bear such agitation any longer; besides, it is hard even for a strong man to picture in his imagination certain images without risking the loss of his reason. Only in this way can I explain the strange hallucination which appeared before my fatigued eyes in the solitude of my cell. As though benumbed I gazed aimlessly at the tightly closed door, when suddenly it seemed to me that some one was standing behind me. I had felt this deceptive sensation before, so I did not turn around for some time. But when I turned around at last I saw in the distance, between the crucifix and my portrait, about a quarter of a yard above the floor the body of my father, as though hanging in the air. It is hard for me to give the details, for twilight had long set in, but I can say with certainty that it was the image of a corpse, and not of a living being, although a cigar was smoking in its mouth. To be more exact, there was no smoke from the cigar, but a faintly reddish light was seen. It is characteristic that I did not sense the odour of tobacco either at that time or later I had long given up smoking. Here I must confess my weakness, but the illusion was striking I commenced to speak to the hallucination. Advancing as closely as possible the body did not retreat as I approached, but remained perfectly motionless I

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said to the ghost:

"I thank you, father. You know how your son is suffering, and you have come you have come to testify to my innocence. I thank you, father. Give me your hand, and with a firm filial hand—clasp I will respond to your unexpected visit. Don't you want to? Let me have your hand. Give me your hand, or I will call you a liar!"

I stretched out my hand, but of course the hallucination did not deem it worth while to respond, and I was forever deprived of the opportunity of feeling the touch of a ghost. The cry which I uttered and which so upset my friend, the jailer, creating some confusion in the prison, was called forth by the sudden disappearance of the phantom it was so sudden that the space in the place where the corpse had been seemed to me more terrible than the corpse itself.

Such is the power of human imagination when, excited, it creates phantoms and visions, peopling the bottomless and ever silent emptiness with them. It is sad to admit that there are people, however, who believe in ghosts and build upon this belief nonsensical theories about certain relations between the world of the living and the enigmatic land inhabited by the dead. I understand that the human ear and eye can be deceived but how can the great and lucid human mind fall into such coarse and ridiculous deception?

I asked the jailer:

"I feel a strange sensation, as though there were the odour of cigar smoke in my cell. Don't you smell it?"

The jailer sniffed the air conscientiously and replied:

"No I don't. You only imagined it."

If you need any confirmation, here is a splendid proof that all I had seen, if it existed at all, existed only in the net of my eye.

## CHAPTER IX

Something altogether unexpected has happened; the efforts of my friends, the Warden and his wife, were crowned with success, and for two months I have been free, out of prison.

I am happy to inform you that immediately upon my leaving the prison I occupied a very honourable position, to which I could hardly have aspired, conscious of my humble qualities. The entire press met me with unanimous enthusiasm. Numerous journalists, photographers, even caricaturists (the people of our time are so fond of laughter and clever witticisms), in hundreds of articles and drawings reproduced the story of my remarkable life. With striking unanimity the newspapers assigned to me the name of "Master," a highly flattering name, which I accepted, after some hesitation, with deep gratitude. I do not know whether it is worth mentioning the few hostile notices called forth by irritation and envy a vice which so frequently stains the human soul. In one of these notices, which appeared, by the way, in a very filthy little newspaper, a certain scamp, guided by wretched gossip and baseless rumours about my chats in our prison, called me a "zealot and liar." Enraged by the insolence of the miserable scribbler, my friends wanted to prosecute him, but I persuaded them not to do it. Vice is its own proper punishment.

The fortune which my kind mother had left me and which had grown considerably during the time I was in prison has enabled me to settle down to a life of luxury in one of the most aristocratic hotels. I have a large retinue of servants at my command and an automobile a splendid invention with which I now became acquainted for the first time and I have skilfully arranged my financial affairs. Live flowers brought to me in abundance by my

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charming lady visitors give to my nook the appearance of a flower garden or even a bit of a tropical forest. My servant, a very decent young man, is in a state of despair. He says that he had never seen such a variety of flowers and had never smelled such a variety of odours at the same time. If not for my advanced age and the strict and serious propriety with which I treat my visitors, I do not know how far they would have gone in the expression of their feelings. How many perfumed notes! How many languid sighs and humbly imploring eyes! There was even a fascinating stranger with a black veil three times she appeared mysteriously, and when she learned that I had visitors she disappeared just as mysteriously.

I will add that at the present time I have had the honour of being elected an honorary member of numerous humanitarian organisations such as "The League of Peace," "The League for Combating Juvenile Criminality," "The Society of the Friends of Man," and others. Besides, at the request of the editor of one of the most widely read newspapers, I am to begin next month a series of public lectures, for which purpose I am going on a tour together with my kind impresario.

I have already prepared my material for the first three lectures and, in the hope that my reader may be interested, I shall give the synopsis of these lectures.

### FIRST LECTURE

Chaos or order? The eternal struggle between chaos and order. The eternal revolt and the defeat of chaos, the rebel. The triumph of law and order.

### SECOND LECTURE

What is the soul of man? The eternal conflict in the soul of man between chaos, whence it came, and harmony, whither it strives irresistibly. Falsehood, as the offspring of chaos, and Truth, as the child of harmony. The triumph of truth and the downfall of falsehood.

### THIRD LECTURE

#### THE EXPLANATION OF THE SACRED FORMULA OF THE IRON GRATE

As my indulgent reader will see, justice is after all not an empty sound, and I am getting a great reward for my sufferings. But not daring to reproach fate which was so merciful to me, I nevertheless do not feel that sense of contentment which, it would seem, I ought to feel. True, at first I was positively happy, but soon my habit for strictly logical reasoning, the clearness and honesty of my views, gained by contemplating the world through a mathematically correct grate, have led me to a series of disillusionments.

I am afraid to say it now with full certainty, but it seems to me that all their life of this so-called freedom is a continuous self-deception and falsehood. The life of each of these people, whom I have seen during these days, is moving in a strictly defined circle, which is just as solid as the corridors of our prison, just as closed as the dial of the watches which they, in the innocence of their mind, lift every minute to their eyes, not understanding the fatal meaning of the eternally moving hand, which is eternally returning to its place, and each of them feels this, even as the circus horse probably feels it, but in a state of strange blindness each one assures us that he is perfectly free and moving forward. Like the stupid bird which is beating itself to exhaustion against the transparent glass obstacle, without understanding what it is that obstructs its way, these people are helplessly beating against the walls of their glass prison.

I was greatly mistaken, it seems, also in the significance of the greetings which fell to my lot when I left the prison. Of course I was convinced that in me they greeted the representative of our prison, a leader hardened by experience, a master, who came to them only for the purpose of revealing to them the great mystery of purpose.

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And when they congratulated me upon the freedom granted to me I responded with thanks, not suspecting what an idiotic meaning they placed on the word. May I be forgiven this coarse expression, but I am powerless now to restrain my aversion for their stupid life, for their thoughts, for their feelings.

Foolish hypocrites, fearing to tell the truth even when it adorns them! My hardened truthfulness was cruelly taxed in the midst of these false and trivial people. Not a single person believed that I was never so happy as in prison. Why, then, are they so surprised at me, and why do they print my portraits? Are there so few idiots that are unhappy in prison? And the most remarkable thing, which only my indulgent reader will be able to appreciate, is this: Often distrusting me completely, they nevertheless sincerely go into raptures over me, bowing before me, clasping my hands and mumbling at every step, "Master! Master!"

If they only profited by their constant lying but, no; they are perfectly disinterested, and they lie as though by some one's higher order; they lie in the fanatical conviction that falsehood is in no way different from the truth. Wretched actors, even incapable of a decent makeup, they writhe from morning till night on the boards of the stage, and, dying the most real death, suffering the most real sufferings, they bring into their deathly convulsions the cheap art of the harlequin. Even their crooks are not real; they only play the roles of crooks, while remaining honest people; and the role of honest people is played by rogues, and played poorly, and the public sees it, but in the name of the same fatal falsehood it gives them wreaths and bouquets. And if there is really a talented actor who can wipe away the boundary between truth and deception, so that even they begin to believe, they go into raptures, call him great, start a subscription for a monument, but do not give any money. Desperate cowards, they fear themselves most of all, and admiring delightedly the reflection of their spuriously made-up faces in the mirror, they howl with fear and rage when some one incautiously holds up the mirror to their soul.

My indulgent reader should accept all this relatively, not forgetting that certain grumblings are natural in old age. Of course, I have met quite a number of most worthy people, absolutely truthful, sincere, and courageous; I am proud to admit that I found among them also a proper estimate of my personality. With the support of these friends of mine I hope to complete successfully my struggle for truth and justice. I am sufficiently strong for my sixty years, and, it seems, there is no power that could break my iron will.

At times I am seized with fatigue owing to their absurd mode of life. I have not the proper rest even at night.

The consciousness that while going to bed I may absent-mindedly have forgotten to lock my bedroom door compels me to jump from my bed dozens of times and to feel the lock with a quiver of horror.

Not long ago it happened that I locked my door and hid the key under my pillow, perfectly confident that my room was locked, when suddenly I heard a knock, then the door opened, and my servant entered with a smile on his face. You, dear reader, will easily understand the horror I experienced at this unexpected visit it seemed to me that some one had entered my soul. And though I have absolutely nothing to conceal, this breaking into my room seems to me indecent, to say the least.

I caught a cold a few days ago there is a terrible draught in their windows and I asked my servant to watch me at night. In the morning I asked him, in jest:

"Well, did I talk much in my sleep?"

"No, you didn't talk at all."

"I had a terrible dream, and I remember I even cried."

"No, you smiled all the time, and I thought what fine dreams our Master must see!"

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The dear youth must have been sincerely devoted to me, and I am deeply moved by such devotion during these painful days.

To-morrow I shall sit down to prepare my lectures. It is high time!

### CHAPTER X

My God! What has happened to me? I do not know how I shall tell my reader about it. I was on the brink of the abyss, I almost perished. What cruel temptations fate is sending me! Fools, we smile, without suspecting anything, when some murderous hand is already lifted to attack us; we smile, and the very next instant we open our eyes wide with horror. I I cried. I cried. Another moment and deceived, I would have hurled myself down, thinking that I was flying toward the sky.

It turned out that "the charming stranger" who wore a dark veil, and who came to me so mysteriously three times, was no one else than Mme. N., my former fiancée, my love, my dream and my suffering.

But order! order! May my indulgent reader forgive the involuntary incoherence of the preceding lines, but I am sixty years old, and my strength is beginning to fail me, and I am alone. My unknown reader, be my friend at this moment, for I am not of iron, and my strength is beginning to fail me. Listen, my friend; I shall endeavour to tell you exactly and in detail, as objectively as my cold and clear mind will be able to do it, all that has happened. You must understand that which my tongue may omit.

I was sitting, engaged upon the preparation of my lecture, seriously carried away by the absorbing work, when my servant announced that the strange lady in the black veil was there again, and that she wished to see me. I confess I was irritated, that I was ready to decline to see her, but my curiosity, coupled with my desire not to offend her, led me to receive the unexpected guest. Assuming the expression of majestic nobleness with which I usually greet my visitors, and softening that expression somewhat by a smile in view of the romantic character of the affair, I ordered my servant to open the door.

"Please be seated, my dear guest," I said politely to the stranger, who stood as dazed before me, still keeping the veil on her face.

She sat down.

"Although I respect all secrecy," I continued jestingly, "I would nevertheless ask you to remove this gloomy cover which disfigures you. Does the human face need a mask?"

The strange visitor declined, in a state of agitation.

"Very well, I'll take it off, but not now later. First I want to see you well."

The pleasant voice of the stranger did not call forth any recollections in me. Deeply interested and even flattered, I submitted to my strange visitor all the treasures of my mind, experience and talent. With enthusiasm I related to her the edifying story of my life, constantly illuminating every detail with a ray of the Great Purpose. (In this I availed myself partly of the material on which I had just been working, preparing my lectures.) The passionate attention with which the strange lady listened to my words, the frequent, deep sighs, the nervous quiver of her thin fingers in her black gloves, her agitated exclamations inspired me.

Carried away by my own narrative, I confess, I did not pay proper attention to the queer behaviour of my strange visitor. Having lost all restraint, she now clasped my hands, now pushed them away, she cried and availing herself

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of each pause in my speech, she implored:

"Don't, don't, don't! Stop speaking! I can't listen to it!"

And at the moment when I least expected it she tore the veil from her face, and before my eyes before my eyes appeared her face, the face of my love, of my dream, of my boundless and bitter sorrow. Perhaps because I lived all my life dreaming of her alone, with her alone I was young, with her I had developed and grown old, with her I was advancing to the grave her face seemed to me neither old nor faded it was exactly as I had pictured it in my dreams it seemed endlessly dear to me.

What has happened to me? For the first time in tens of years I forgot that I had a face for the first time in tens of years I looked helplessly, like a youngster, like a criminal caught red-handed, waiting for some deadly blow.

"You see! You see! It is I. It is I! My God, why are you silent? Don't you recognise me?"

Did I recognise her? It were better not to have known that face at all! It were better for me to have grown blind rather than to see her again!

"Why are you silent? How terrible you are! You have forgotten me!"

"Madam "

Of course, I should have continued in this manner; I saw how she staggered. I saw how with trembling fingers, almost falling, she was looking for her veil; I saw that another word of courageous truth, and the terrible vision would vanish never to appear again. But some stranger within me not I not I uttered the following absurd, ridiculous phrase, in which, despite its chilliness, rang so much jealousy and hopeless sorrow:

"Madam, you have deceived me. I don't know you. Perhaps you entered the wrong door. I suppose your husband and your children are waiting for you. Please, my servant will take you down to the carriage."

Could I think that these words, uttered in the same stern and cold voice, would have such a strange effect upon the woman's heart? With a cry, all the bitter passion of which I could not describe, she threw herself before me on her knees, exclaiming:

"So you do love me!"

Forgetting that our life had already been lived, that we were old, that all had been ruined and scattered like dust by Time, and that it can never return again; forgetting that I was grey, that my shoulders were bent, that the voice of passion sounds strangely when it comes from old lips I burst into impetuous reproaches and complaints.

"Yes, I did deceive you!" her deathly pale lips uttered. "I knew that you were innocent "

"Be silent. Be silent."

"Everybody laughed at me even your friends, your mother whom I despised for it all betrayed you. Only I kept repeating: 'He is innocent!'"

Oh, if this woman knew what she was doing to me with her words! If the trumpet of the angel, announcing the day of judgment, had resounded at my very ear, I would not have been so frightened as now. What is the blaring of a trumpet calling to battle and struggle to the ear of the brave? It was as if an abyss had opened at my feet. It was as if an abyss had opened before me, and as though blinded by lightning, as though dazed by a blow, I



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shouted in an outburst of wild and strange ecstasy:

"Be silent! I "

If that woman were sent by God, she would have become silent. If she were sent by the devil, she would have become silent even then. But there was neither God nor devil in her, and interrupting me, not permitting me to finish the phrase, she went on:

"No, I will not be silent. I must tell you all. I have waited for you so many years. Listen, listen!"

But suddenly she saw my face and she retreated, seized with horror.

"What is it? What is the matter with you? Why do you laugh? I am afraid of your laughter! Stop laughing! Don't! Don't!"

But I was not laughing at all, I only smiled softly. And then I said very seriously, without smiling:

"I am smiling because I am glad to see you. Tell me about yourself."

And, as in a dream, I saw her face and I heard her soft terrible whisper:

"You know that I love you. You know that all my life I loved you alone. I lived with another and was faithful to him. I have children, but you know they are all strangers to me he and the children and I myself. Yes, I deceived you, I am a criminal, but I do not know how it happened. He was so kind to me, he made me believe that he was convinced of your innocence later I learned that he did not tell the truth, and with this, just think of it, with this he won me."

"You lie!"

"I swear to you. For a whole year he followed me and spoke only of you. One day he even cried when I told him about you, about your sufferings, about your love."

"But he was lying!"

"Of course he was lying. But at that time he seemed so dear to me, so kind that I kissed him on the forehead. Then we used to bring you flowers to the prison. One day as we were returning from you listen he suddenly proposed that we should go out driving. The evening was so beautiful "

"And you went! How did you dare go out with him? You had just seen my prison, you had just been near me, and yet you dared go with him. How base!"

"Be silent. Be silent. I know I am a criminal. But I was so exhausted, so tired, and you were so far away. Understand me."

She began to cry, wringing her hands.

"Understand me. I was so exhausted. And he he saw how I felt and yet he dared kiss me."

"He kissed you! And you allowed him ? On the lips?"

"No, no! Only on the cheek."

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"You lie!"

"No, no. I swear to you."

I began to laugh.

"You responded? And you were driving in the forest you, my fiancée, my love, my dream! And all this for my sake? Tell me! Speak!"

In my rage I wrung her arms, and wriggling like a snake, vainly trying to evade my look, she whispered:

"Forgive me; forgive me."

"How many children have you?"

"Forgive me."

But my reason forsook me, and in my growing rage I cried, stamping my foot:

"How many children have you? Speak, or I will kill you!"

I actually said this. Evidently I was losing my reason completely if I could threaten to kill a helpless woman. And she, surmising apparently that my threats were mere words, answered with feigned readiness:

"Kill me! You have a right to do it! I am a criminal. I deceived you. You are a martyr, a saint! When you told me is it true that even in your thoughts you never deceived me even in your thoughts!"

And again an abyss opened before me. Everything trembled, everything fell, everything became an absurd dream, and in the last effort to save my extinguishing reason I shouted:

"But you are happy! You cannot be unhappy; you have no right to be unhappy! Otherwise I shall lose my mind."

But she did not understand. With a bitter laugh, with a senseless smile, in which her suffering mingled with bright, heavenly joy, she said:

"I am happy! I happy! Oh, my friend, only near you I can find happiness. From the moment you left the prison I began to despise my home. I am alone there; I am a stranger to all. If you only knew how I hate that scoundrel! You are sensible; you must have felt that you were not alone in prison, that I was always with you there "

"And he?"

"Be silent! Be silent! If you only heard with what delight I called him scoundrel!"

She burst into laughter, frightening me by the wild expression on her face.

"Just think of it! All his life he embraced only a lie. And when, deceived, happy, he fell asleep, I looked at him with wide-open eyes, I gnashed my teeth softly, and I felt like pinching him, like sticking him with a pin."

She burst into laughter again. It seemed to me that she was driving wedges into my brain. Clasp my head, I cried:

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"You lie! You lie to me!"

Indeed, it was easier for me to speak to the ghost than to the woman. What could I say to her? My mind was growing dim. And how could I repulse her when she, full of love and passion, kissed my hands, my eyes, my face? It was she, my love, my dream, my bitter sorrow!

"I love you! I love you!"

And I believed her I believed her love. I believed everything. And once more I felt that my locks were black, and I saw myself young again. And I knelt before her and wept for a long time, and whispered to her about my sufferings, about the pain of solitude, about a heart cruelly broken, about offended, disfigured, mutilated thoughts. And, laughing and crying, she stroked my hair. Suddenly she noticed that it was grey, and she cried strangely:

"What is it? And life? I am an old woman already."

On leaving me she demanded that I escort her to the threshold, like a young man; and I did. Before going she said to me:

"I am coming back to-morrow. I know my children will deny me my daughter is to marry soon. You and I will go away. Do you love me?"

"I do."

"We will go far, far away, my dear. You wanted to deliver some lectures. You should not do it. I don't like what you say about that iron grate. You are exhausted, you need a rest. Shall it be so?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I forgot my veil. Keep it, keep it as a remembrance of this day. My dear!"

In the vestibule, in the presence of the sleepy porter, she kissed me. There was the odour of some new perfume, unlike the perfume with which her letter was scented. And her coquettish laugh was like a sob as she disappeared behind the glass door.

That night I aroused my servant, ordered him to pack our things, and we went away. I shall not say where I am at present, but last night and to-night trees were rustling over my head and the rain was beating against my windows. Here the windows are small, and I feel much better. I wrote her a rather long letter, the contents of which I shall not reproduce. I shall never see her again.

But what am I to do? May the reader pardon these incoherent questions. They are so natural in a man in my condition. Besides, I caught an acute rheumatism while travelling, which is most painful and even dangerous for a man of my age, and which does not permit me to reason calmly. For some reason or another I think very often about my young friend K., who went to an untimely grave. How does he feel in his new prison?

To-morrow morning, if my strength will permit me, I intend to pay a visit to the Warden of our prison and to his esteemed wife. Our prison

## CHAPTER XI

I am profoundly happy to inform my dear reader that I have completely recovered my physical as well as my

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spiritual powers. A long rest out in the country, amid nature's soothing beauties; the contemplation of village life, which is so simple and bright; the absence of the noise of the city, where hundreds of wind-mills are stupidly flapping their long arms before your very nose, and finally the complete solitude, undisturbed by anything all these have restored to my unbalanced view of the world all its former steadiness and its iron, irresistible firmness. I look upon my future calmly and confidently, and although it promises me nothing but a lonely grave and the last journey to an unknown distance, I am ready to meet death just as courageously as I lived my life, drawing strength from my solitude, from the consciousness of my innocence and my uprightness.

After long hesitations, which are not quite intelligible to me now, I finally resolved to establish for myself the system of our prison in all its rigidity. For that purpose, finding a small house in the outskirts of the city, which was to be leased for a long term of years, I hired it. Then with the kind assistance of the Warden of our prison, (I cannot express my gratitude to him adequately enough in words,) I invited to the new place one of the most experienced jailers, who is still a young man, but already hardened in the strict principles of our prison. Availing myself of his instruction, and also of the suggestions of the obliging Warden, I have engaged workmen who transformed one of the rooms into a cell. The measurements as well as the form and all the details of my new, and, I hope, my last dwelling are strictly in accordance with my plan. My cell is 8 by 4 yards, 4 yards high, the walls are painted grey at the bottom, the upper part of the walls and the ceiling are white, and near the ceiling there is a square window 1 1/2 by 1 1/2 yards, with a massive iron grate, which has already become rusty with age. In the door, locked with a heavy and strong lock, which issues a loud creak at each turn of the key, there is a small hole for observation, and below it a little window, through which the food is brought and received. The furnishing of the cell: a table, a chair, and a cot fastened to the wall; on the wall a crucifix, my portrait, and the rules concerning the conduct of the prisoners, in a black frame; and in the corner a closet filled with books. This last, being a violation of the strict harmony of my dwelling, I was compelled to do by extreme and sad necessity; the jailer positively refused to be my librarian and to bring the books according to my order, and to engage a special librarian seemed to me to be an act of unnecessary eccentricity. Aside from this, in elaborating my plans, I met with strong opposition not only from the local population, which simply declared me to be insane, but even from the enlightened people. Even the Warden endeavoured for some time to dissuade me, but finally he clasped my hand warmly, with an expression of sincere regret at not being in a position to offer me a place in our prison.

I cannot recall the first day of my confinement without a bitter smile. A mob of impertinent and ignorant idlers yelled from morning till night at my window, with their heads lifted high (my cell is situated in the second story), and they heaped upon me senseless abuse; there were even efforts to the disgrace of my townspeople to storm my dwelling, and one heavy stone almost crushed my head. Only the police, which arrived in time, succeeded in averting the catastrophe. When, in the evening, I went out for a walk, hundreds of fools, adults and children, followed me, shouting and whistling, heaping abuse upon me, and even hurling mud at me. Thus, like a persecuted prophet, I wended my way without fear amidst the maddened crowd, answering their blows and curses with proud silence.

What has stirred these fools? In what way have I offended their empty heads? When I lied to them, they kissed my hands; now, when I have re-established the sacred truth of my life in all its strictness and purity, they burst into curses, they branded me with contempt, they hurled mud at me. They were disturbed because I dared to live alone, and because I did not ask them for a place in the "common cell for rogues." How difficult it is to be truthful in this world!

True, my perseverance and firmness finally defeated them. With the naivete of savages, who honour all they do not understand, they commenced, in the second year, to bow to me, and they are making ever lower bows to me, because their amazement is growing ever greater, their fear of the inexplicable is growing ever deeper. And the fact that I never respond to their greetings fills them with delight, and the fact that I never smile in response to their flattering smiles, fills them with a firm assurance that they are guilty before me for some grave wrong, and that I know their guilt. Having lost confidence in their own and other people's words, they revere my silence, even as people revere every silence and every mystery. If I were to start to speak suddenly, I would again become

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human to them and would disillusion them bitterly, no matter what I would say; in my silence I am to them like their eternally silent God. For these strange people would cease believing their God as soon as their God would commence to speak. Their women are already regarding me as a saint. And the kneeling women and sick children that I often find at the threshold of my dwelling undoubtedly expect of me a trifle to heal them, to perform a miracle. Well, another year or two will pass, and I shall commence to perform miracles as well as those of whom they speak with such enthusiasm. Strange people, at times I feel sorry for them, and I begin to feel really angry at the devil who so skilfully mixed the cards in their game that only the cheat knows the truth, his little cheating truth about the marked queens and the marked kings. They bow too low, however, and this hinders me from developing a sense of mercy, otherwise smile at my jest, indulgent reader I would not restrain myself from the temptation of performing two or three small, but effective miracles.

I must go back to the description of my prison.

Having constructed my cell completely, I offered my jailer the following alternative: He must observe with regard to me the rules of the prison regime in all its rigidity, and in that case he would inherit all my fortune according to my will, or he would receive nothing if he failed to do his duty. It seemed that in putting the matter before him so clearly I would meet with no difficulties. Yet at the very first instance, when I should have been incarcerated for violating some prison regulation, this naive and timid man absolutely refused to do it; and only when I threatened to get another man immediately, a more conscientious jailer, was he compelled to perform his duty. Though he always locked the door punctually, he at first neglected his duty of watching me through the peephole; and when I tried to test his firmness by suggesting a change in some rule or other to the detriment of common sense he yielded willingly and quickly. One day, on trapping him in this way, I said to him:

"My friend, you are simply foolish. If you will not watch me and guard me properly I shall run away to another prison, taking my legacy along with me. What will you do then?"

I am happy to inform you that at the present time all these misunderstandings have been removed, and if there is anything I can complain of it is rather excessive strictness than mildness. Now that my jailer has entered into the spirit of his position this honest man treats me with extreme sternness, not for the sake of the profit but for the sake of the principle. Thus, in the beginning of this week he incarcerated me for twenty-four hours for violating some rule, of which, it seemed to me, I was not guilty; and protesting against this seeming injustice I had the unpardonable weakness to say to him:

"In the end I will drive you away from here. You must not forget that you are my servant."

"Before you drive me away I will incarcerate you," replied this worthy man.

"But how about the money?" I asked with astonishment. "Don't you know that you will be deprived of it?"

"Do I need your money? I would give up all my own money if I could stop being what I am. But what can I do if you violate the rule and I must punish you by incarcerating you?"

I am powerless to describe the joyous emotion which came over me at the thought that the consciousness of duty had at last entered his dark mind, and that now, even if in a moment of weakness I wanted to leave my prison, my conscientious jailer would not permit me to do it. The spark of firmness which glittered in his round eyes showed me clearly that no matter where I might run away he would find me and bring me back; and that the revolver which he often forgot to take before, and which he now cleans every day, would do its work in the event I decided to run away.

And for the first time in all these years I fell asleep on the stone floor of my dark cell with a happy smile, realising that my plan was crowned with complete success, passing from the realm of eccentricity to the domain of stern

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and austere reality. And the fear which I felt while falling asleep in the presence of my jailer, my fear of his resolute look, of his revolver; my timid desire to hear a word of praise from him, or to call forth perhaps a smile on his lips, re-echoed in my soul as the harmonious clanking of my eternal and last chains.

Thus I pass my last years. As before, my health is sound and my free spirit is clear. Let some call me a fool and laugh at me; in their pitiful blindness let others regard me as a saint and expect me to perform miracles; an upright man to some people, to others a liar and a deceiver I myself know who I am, and I do not ask them to understand me. And if there are people who will accuse me of deception, of baseness, even of the lack of simple honour for there are scoundrels who are convinced to this day that I committed murder no one will dare accuse me of cowardice, no one will dare say that I could not perform my painful duty to the end. From the beginning till the end I remained firm and unbribable; and though a bugbear, a fanatic, a dark horror to some people, I may awaken in others a heroic dream of the infinite power of man.

I have long discontinued to receive visitors, and with the death of the Warden of our prison, my only true friend, whom I visited occasionally, my last tie with this world was broken. Only I and my ferocious jailer, who watches every movement of mine with mad suspicion, and the black grate which has caught in its iron embrace and muzzled the infinite this is my life. Silently accepting the low bows, in my cold estrangement from the people I am passing my last road.

I am thinking of death ever more frequently, but even before death I do not bend my fearless look. Whether it brings me eternal rest or a new unknown and terrible struggle, I am humbly prepared to accept it.

Farewell, my dear reader! Like a vague phantom you appeared before my eyes and passed, leaving me alone before the face of life and death. Do not be angry because at times I deceived you and lied you, too, would have lied perhaps in my place. Nevertheless I loved you sincerely, and sincerely longed for your love; and the thought of your sympathy for me was quite a support to me in my moments and days of hardship. I am sending you my last farewell and my sincere advice. Forget about my existence, even as I shall henceforth forget about yours forever.

A deserted field, overgrown with high grass, devoid of an echo, extends like a deep carpet to the very fence of our prison, whose majestic outlines subdue my imagination and my mind. When the dying sun illumines it with its last rays, and our prison, all in red, stands like a queen, like a martyr, with the dark wounds of its grated windows, and the sun rises silently and proudly over the plain with sorrow, like a lover, I send my complaints and my sighs and my tender reproach and vows to her, to my love, to my dream, to my bitter and last sorrow. I wish I could forever remain near her, but here I look back and black against the fiery frame of the sunset stands my jailer, stands and waits.

With a sigh I go back in silence, and he moves behind me noiselessly, about two steps away, watching every move of mine.

Our prison is beautiful at sunset.