PYETUSHKOV

Ivan Turgenev

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I

IN the year 182− . . . there was living in the town of O—— the lieutenant Ivan Afanasiitch Pyetushkov. He was born of poor parents, was left an orphan at five years old, and came into the charge of a guardian. Thanks to this guardian, he found himself with no property whatever; he had a hard struggle to make both ends meet. He was of medium height, and stooped a little; he had a thin face, covered with freckles, but rather pleasing; light brown hair, grey eyes, and a timid expression; his low forehead was furrowed with fine wrinkles. Pyetushkov's whole life had been uneventful in the extreme; at close upon forty he was still youthful and inexperienced as a child. He was shy with acquaintances, and exceedingly mild in his manner with persons over whose lot he could have exerted control. . . .

People condemned by fate to a monotonous and cheerless existence often acquire all sorts of little habits and preferences. Pyetushkov liked to have a new white roll with his tea every morning. He could not do without this dainty. But behold one morning his servant, Onisim, handed him, on a blue−sprigged plate, instead of a roll, three dark red rusks.

Pyetushkov at once asked his servant, with some indignation, what he meant by it.

"The rolls have all been sold out," answered Onisim, a native of Petersburg, who had been flung by some queer freak of destiny into the very wilds of south Russia.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Ivan Afanasiitch.

"Sold out," repeated Onisim; "there's a breakfast at the Marshal's, so they've all gone there, you know."

Onisim waved his hand in the air, and thrust his right foot forward.

Ivan Afanasiitch walked up and down the room, dressed, and set off himself to the baker's shop. This establishment, the only one of the kind in the town of O——, had been opened ten years before by a German immigrant, had in a short time begun to flourish, and was still flourishing under the guidance of his widow, a fat woman.

Pyetushkov tapped at the window. The fat woman stuck her unhealthy, flabby, sleepy countenance out of the pane that opened.

"A roll, if you please," Pyetushkov said amiably.

"The rolls are all gone," piped the fat woman.

"Haven't you any rolls?"

"No."

"How's that?—really! I take rolls from you every day, and pay for them regularly."

The woman stared at him in silence. "Take twists," she said at last, yawning; "or a scone."

"I don't like them," said Pyetushkov, and he felt positively hurt.

"As you please," muttered the fat woman, and she slammed to the window−pane.

Ivan Afanasiitch was quite unhinged by his intense vexation. In his perturbation he crossed to the other side of the street, and gave himself up entirely, like a child, to his displeasure.

"Sir!" . . . he heard a rather agreeable female voice; "sir!"

Ivan Afanasiitch raised his eyes. From the open pane of the bakehouse window peeped a girl of about seventeen, holding a white roll in her hand. She had a full round face, rosy cheeks, small hazel eyes, rather a turn−up nose, fair hair, and magnificent shoulders. Her features suggested good−nature, laziness, and carelessness.

"Here's a roll for you, sir," she said, laughing, "I'd taken for myself; but take it, please, I'll give it up to you."

"I thank you most sincerely. Allow me . . ." Pyetushkov began fumbling in his pocket

"No, no! you are welcome to it."

She closed the window−pane.

Pyetushkov arrived home in a perfectly agreeable frame of mind.

"You couldn't get any rolls," he said to his Onisim "but here, I've got one, do you see?"

Onisim gave a bitter laugh.

The same day, in the evening, as Ivan Afanasiitch was undressing, he asked his servant, "Tell me, please, my lad, what's the girl like at the baker's, hey?"

Onisim looked away rather gloomily, and responded, "What do you want to know for?"

"Oh, nothing," said Pyetushkov, taking off his boots with his own hands.

"Well, she's a fine girl!" Onisim observed condescendingly.

"Yes. . . . she's not bad−looking," said Ivan Afanasiitch, also looking away. "And what's her name, do you know?"

"Vassilissa."

"And do you know her?"

Onisim did not answer for a minute or two.

"We know her."

Pyetushkov was on the point of opening his mouth again, but he turned over on the other side and fell asleep.

Onisim went out into the passage, took a pinch of snuff, and gave his head a violent shake.

The next day, early in the morning, Pyetushkov called for his clothes. Onisim brought him his everyday coat—an old grass−coloured coat, with huge striped epaulettes. Pyetushkov gazed a long while at Onisim without speaking, then told him to bring him his new coat. Onisim, with some surprise, obeyed. Pyetushkov dressed, and carefully drew on his chamois−leather gloves.

"You needn't go to the baker's to−day," said he with some hesitation; "I'm going myself. . . . it's on my way."

"Yes, sir," responded Onisim, as abruptly as if some one had just given him a shove from behind.

Pyetushkov set off, reached the baker's shop, tapped at the window. The fat woman opened the pane.

"Give me a roll, please," Ivan Afanasiitch articulated slowly.

The fat woman stuck out an arm, bare to the shoulder—a huge arm, more like a leg than an arm—and thrust the hot bread just under his nose.

Ivan Afanasiitch stood some time under the window, walked once or twice up and down the street, glanced into the courtyard, and at last, ashamed of his childishness, returned home with the roll in his hand. He felt ill at ease the whole day, and even in the evening, contrary to his habit, did not drop into conversation with Onisim.

The next morning it was Onisim who went for the roll.

II

SOME weeks went by. Ivan Afanasiitch had completely forgotten Vassilissa, and chatted in a friendly way with his servant as before. One fine morning there came to see him a certain Bublitsyn, an easy−mannered and very agreeable young man. It is true he sometimes hardly knew himself what he was talking about, and was always, as they say, a little wild; but all the same he had the reputation of being an exceedingly agreeable person to talk to. He smoked a great deal with feverish eagerness, with lifted eyebrows and contracted chest—smoked with an expression of intense anxiety, or, one might rather say, with an expression as though, let him have this one more puff at his pipe, and in a minute he would tell you some quite unexpected piece of news; at times he would even give a grunt and a wave of the hand, while himself sucking at his pipe, as though he had suddenly recollected something extraordinarily amusing or important, then he would open his mouth, let off a few rings of smoke, and utter the most commonplace remarks, or even keep silence altogether. After gossiping a little with Ivan Afanasiitch about the neighbours, about horses, the daughters of the gentry around, and other such edifying topics, Mr. Bublitsyn suddenly winked, pulled up his shock of hair, and, with a sly smile, approached the remarkably dim looking−glass which was the solitary ornament of Ivan Afanasiitch's room.

"There's no denying the fact," he pronounced, stroking his light brown whiskers, "we've got girls here that beat any of your Venus of Medicis hollow. . . . Have you seen Vassilissa, the baker girl, for instance?" . . . Mr. Bublitsyn sucked at his pipe.

Pyetushkov started.

"But why do I ask you?" pursued Bublitsyn, disappearing in a cloud of smoke,—"you're not the man to notice, don't you know, Ivan Afanasiitch! Goodness knows what you do to occupy yourself, Ivan Afanasiitch!"

"The same as you do," Pyetushkov replied with some vexation, in a drawling voice.

"Oh no, Ivan Afanasiitch, not a bit of it. . . . How can you say so?"

"Well, why not?"

"Nonsense, nonsense."

"Why so, why so?"

Bublitsyn stuck his pipe in the corner of his mouth, and began scrutinising his not very handsome boots. Pyetushkov felt embarrassed.

"Ah, Ivan Afanasiitch, Ivan Afanasiitch!" pursued Bublitsyn, as though sparing his feelings. "But as to Vassilissa, the baker girl, I can assure you: a very, ve−ry fine girl. . . . ve−ry."

Mr. Bublitsyn dilated his nostrils, and slowly plunged his hands into his pockets.

Strange to relate, Ivan Afanasiitch felt something of the nature of jealousy. He began moving restlessly in his chair, burst into explosive laughter at nothing at all, suddenly blushed, yawned, and, as he yawned, his lower jaw twitched a little. Bublitsyn smoked three more pipes, and withdrew. Ivan Afanasiitch went to the window, sighed, and called for something to drink.

Onisim set a glass of kvas on the table, glanced severely at his master, leaned back against the door, and hung his head dejectedly.

"What are you so thoughtful about?" his master asked him genially, but with some inward trepidation.

"What am I thinking about?" retorted Onisim; "what am I thinking about? . . . it's always about you."

"About me!"

"Of course it's about you."

"Why, what is it you are thinking?"

"Why, this is what I'm thinking." (Here Onisim took a pinch of snuff) "You ought to be ashamed, sir—you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"Ashamed?"

"Yes, ashamed. . . . Look at Mr. Bublitsyn Ivan Afanasiitch. . . . Tell me if he's not a fine fellow, now."

"I don't understand you."

"You don't understand me. . . . Oh yes, you do understand me."

Onisim paused.

"Mr. Bublitsyn's a real gentleman—what a gentleman ought to be. But what are you, Ivan Afanasiitch, what are you? Tell me that."

"Why, I'm a gentleman too."

"A gentleman, indeed!" . . . retorted Onisim, growing indignant. "A pretty gentleman you are! You're no better, sir, than a hen in a shower of rain, Ivan Afanasiitch, let me tell you. Here you sit sticking at home the whole blessed day . . . much good it does you, sitting at home like that! You don't play cards, you don't go and see the gentry, and as for . . . well. . . ."

Onisim waved his hand expressively.

"Now, come . . . you really go . . . too far . . ." Ivan Afanasiitch said hesitatingly, clutching his pipe.

"Too far, indeed, Ivan Afanasiitch, too far, you say! Judge for yourself. Here again, with Vassilissa . . . why couldn't you. . . ."

"But what are you thinking about, Onisim," Pyetushkov interrupted miserably.

"I know what I'm thinking about. But there—I'd better let you alone! What can you do? Only fancy . . . there you. . . ."

Ivan Afanasiitch got up.

"There, there, if you please, you hold your tongue," he said quickly, seeming to be searching for Onisim with his eyes; "I shall really, you know . . . I . . . what do you mean by it, really? You'd better help me dress."

Onisim slowly drew off Ivan Afanasiitch's greasy Tartar dressing−gown, gazed with fatherly commiseration at his master, shook his head, put him on his coat, and fell to beating him about the back with a brush.

Pyetushkov went out, and after a not very protracted stroll about the crooked streets of the town, found himself facing the baker's shop. A queer smile was playing about his lips.

He had hardly time to look twice at the too well−known "establishment," when suddenly the little gate opened, and Vassilissa ran out with a yellow kerchief on her head and a jacket flung after the Russian fashion on her shoulders. Ivan Afanasiitch at once overtook her.

"Where are you going, my dear?"

Vassilissa glanced swiftly at him, laughed, turned away, and put her hand over her lips.

"Going shopping, I suppose?" queried Ivan Afanasiitch, fidgeting with his feet.

"How inquisitive we are!" retorted Vassilissa.

"Why inquisitive?" said Pyetushkov, hurriedly gesticulating with his hands. "Quite the contrary. . . . Oh yes, you know," he added hastily, as though these last words completely conveyed his meaning.

"Did you eat my roll?"

"To be sure I did," replied Pyetushkov: "with special enjoyment."

Vassilissa continued to walk on and to laugh.

"It's pleasant weather to−day," pursued Ivan Afanasiitch: "do you often go out walking?"

"Yes."

"Ah, how I should like . . ."

"What say?"

The girls in our district utter those words in a very queer way, with a peculiar sharpness and rapidity. . . . Partridges call at sunset with just that sound.

"To go out walking, don't you know, with you . . . into the country, or . . ."

"How can you?"

"Why not?"

"Ah, upon my word, how you do go on!"

"But allow me . . ."

At this point they were overtaken by a dapper little shopman, with a little goat's beard, and with his fingers held apart like antlers, so as to keep his sleeves from slipping over his hands, in a long−skirted bluish coat, and a warm cap that resembled a bloated water−melon. Pyetushkov, for propriety's sake, fell back a little behind

Vassilissa, but quickly came up with her again.

"Well, then, what about our walk?"

Vassilissa looked slily at him and giggled again.

"Do you belong to these parts?"

"Yes."

Vassilissa passed her hand over her hair and walked a little more slowly. Ivan Afanasiitch smiled, and, his heart inwardly sinking with timidity, he stooped a little on one side and put a trembling arm about the beauty's waist.

Vassilissa uttered a shriek.

"Give over, do, for shame, in the street."

"Come now, there, there," muttered Ivan Afanasiitch.

"Give over, I tell you, in the street. . . . Don't be rude."

"A . . . a... ah, what a girl you are!" said Pyetushkov reproachfully, while he blushed up to his ears.

Vassilissa stood still.

"Now go along with you, sir—go along, do."

Pyetushkov obeyed. He got home, and sat for a whole hour without moving from his chair, without even smoking his pipe. At last he took out a sheet of greyish paper, mended a pen, and after long deliberation wrote the following letter.

"DEAR MADAM, VASSILISSA TIMOFYEVNA!—

Being naturally a most inoffensive person, how could I have occasioned you annoyance? If I have really been to blame in my conduct to you, then I must tell you: the hints of Mr. Bublitsyn were responsible for this, which was what I never expected. Anyway, I must humbly beg you not to be angry with me. I am a sensitive man, and any kindness I am most sensible of and grateful for. Do not be angry with me, Vassilissa Timofyevna, I beg you most humbly.—I remain respectfully your obedient servant,

IVAN PYETUSHKOV."

Onisim carried this letter to its address.

III

A FORTNIGHT passed. Onisim went every morning as usual to the baker's shop. One day Vassilissa ran out to meet him.

"Good morning, Onisim Sergeitch."

Onisim put on a gloomy expression, and responded crossly, "Morning."

"How is it you never come to see us, Onisim Sergeitch?"

Onisim glanced morosely at her.

"What should I come for? you wouldn't give me a cup of tea, no fear."

"Yes, I would, Onisim Sergeitch, I would. You come and see. Rum in it, too."

Onisim slowly relaxed into a smile.

"Well, I don't mind if I do, then."

"When, then—when?"

"When . . . well, you are. . . ."

"To−day—this evening, if you like. Drop in."

"All right, I'll come along," replied Onisim, and he sauntered home with his slow, rolling step.

The same evening in a little room, beside a bed covered with a striped eider−down, Onisim was sitting at a clumsy little table, facing Vassilissa. A huge, dingy yellow samovar was hissing and bubbling on the table; a pot of geranium stood in the window; in the other corner near the door there stood aslant an ugly chest with a tiny hanging lock; on the chest lay a shapeless heap of all sorts of old rags; on the walls were black, greasy prints. Onisim and Vassilissa drank their tea in silence, looking straight at each other, turning the lumps of sugar over and over in their hands, as it were reluctantly nibbling them, blinking, screwing up their eyes, and with a hissing sound sucking in the yellowish boiling liquid through their teeth. At last they had emptied the whole samovar, turned upside down the round cups—one with the inscription, "Take your fill"; the other with the words, "Cupid's dart hath pierced my heart"—then they cleared their throats, wiped their perspiring brows, and gradually dropped into conversation.

"Onisim Sergeitch, how about your master . . ." began Vassilissa, and did not finish her sentence.

"What about my master?" replied Onisim, and he leaned on his hand. "He's all right. But why do you ask?"

"Oh, I only asked," answered Vassilissa.

"But I say"—here Onisim grinned)—"I say, he wrote you a letter, didn't he?"

"Yes, he did."

Onisim shook his head with an extraordinarily self−satisfied air.

"So he did, did he?" he said huskily, with a smile. "Well, and what did he say in his letter to you?"

"Oh, all sorts of things. 'I didn't mean anything, Madam, Vassilissa Timofyevna,' says he, 'don't you think anything of it; don't you be offended, madam,' and a lot more like that he wrote. . . . But I say," she added after a brief silence: "what's he like?"

"He's all right," Onisim responded indifferently.

"Does he get angry?"

"He get angry! Not he. Why, do you like him?"

Vassilissa looked down and giggled in her sleeve.

"Come," grumbled Onisim.

"Oh, what's that to you, Onisim Sergeitch?"

"Oh, come, I tell you."

"Well," Vassilissa brought out at last, "he's . . . a gentleman. Of course . . . I . . . and besides; he . . . you know yourself . . . ."

"Of course I do," Onisim observed solemnly. "Of course you're aware, to be sure, Onisim Sergeitch." . . . Vassilissa was obviously becoming agitated.

"You tell him, your master, that I'm . . . say, not angry with him, but that . . ." She stammered.

"We understand," responded Onisim, and he got up from his seat. "We understand. Thanks for the entertainment."

"Come in again someday."

"All right, all right."

Onisim approached the door. The fat woman came into the room.

"Good evening to you, Onisim Sergeitch," she said in a peculiar chant.

"Good evening to you, Praskovia Ivanovna," he said in the same sing−song.

Both stood still for a little while facing each other.

"Well, good day to you, Praskovia Ivanovna," Onisim chanted out again.

"Well, good day to you, Onisim Sergeitch," she responded in the same sing−song.

Onisim arrived home. His master was lying on his bed, gazing at the ceiling.

"Where have you been?"

"Where have I been?" . . . (Onisim had the habit of repeating reproachfully the last words of every question.) "I've been about your business."

"What business?"

"Why, don't you know? . . I've been to see Vassilissa."

Pyetushkov blinked and turned over on his bed.

"So that's how it is," observed Onisim, and he coolly took a pinch of snuff. "So that's how it is. You're always like that. Vassilissa sends you her duty."

"Really?"

"Really? So that's all about it. Really! . . . She told me to say, Why is it, says she, one never sees him? Why is it, says she, he never comes?"

"Well, and what did you say?"

"What did I say? I told her: You're a silly girl—I told her—as if folks like that are coming to see you! No, you come yourself, I told her."

"Well, and what did she say?"

"What did she say? . . . She said nothing."

"That is, how do you mean, nothing?"

"Why, nothing, to be sure."

Pyetushkov said nothing for a little while.

"Well, and is she coming?"

Onisim shook his head.

"She coming! You're in too great a hurry, sir. She coming, indeed! No, you go too fast." . . .

"But you said yourself that . . ."

"Oh, well, it's easy to talk."

Pyetushkov was silent again.

"Well, but how's it to be, then, my lad?"

"How? . . . You ought to know best; you're a gentleman."

"Oh, nonsense! come now!"

Onisim swayed complacently backwards and forwards.

"Do you know Praskovia Ivanovna?" he asked at last.

"No. What Praskovia Ivanovna?"

"Why, the baker woman!"

"Oh yes, the baker woman. I've seen her; she's very fat."

"She's a worthy woman. She's own aunt to the other, to your girl."

"Aunt?"

"Why, didn't you know?"

"No, I didn't know."

"Well . . ."

Onisim was restrained by respect for his master from giving full expression to his feelings.

"That's whom it is you should make friends with."

"Well, I've no objection."

Onisim looked approvingly at Ivan Afanasiitch.

"But with what object precisely am I to make friends with her?" inquired Pyetushkov.

"What for, indeed!" answered Onisim serenely.

Ivan Afanasiitch got up, paced up and down the room, stood still before the window, and without turning his head, with some hesitation he articulated:

"Onisim!"

"What say?"

"Won't it be, you know, a little awkward for me with the old woman, eh?"

"Oh, that's as you like."

"Oh, well, I only thought it might, perhaps. My comrades might notice it; it's a little . . . But I'll think it over. Give me my pipe. . . . So she," he went on after a short silence— "Vassilissa, I mean, says then . . ."

But Onisim had no desire to continue the conversation, and he assumed his habitual morose expression.

IV

IVAN AFANASIITCH'S acquaintance with Praskovia Ivanovna began in the following manner. Five days after his conversation with Onisim, Pyetushkov set off in the evening to the baker's shop. "Well," thought he, as he unlatched the creaking gate, "I don't know how it's to be." . . .

He mounted the steps, opened the door. A huge, crested hen rushed, with a deafening cackle, straight under his feet, and long after was still running about the yard in wild excitement. From a room close by peeped the astonished countenance of the fat woman. Ivan Afanasiitch smiled and nodded. The fat woman bowed to him. Tightly grasping his hat, Pyetushkov approached her. Praskovia Ivanovna was apparently anticipating an honoured guest; her dress was fastened up at every hook. Pyetushkov sat down on a chair; Praskovia Ivanovna seated herself opposite him.

"I have come to you, Praskovia Ivanovna, more on account of . . ." Ivan Afanasiitch began at last—and then ceased. His lips were twitching spasmodically.

"You are kindly welcome, sir," responded Praskovia Ivanovna in the proper sing−song, and with a bow. "Always delighted to see a guest."

Pyetushkov took courage a little.

"I have long wished, you know, to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, Praskovia Ivanovna."

"Much obliged to you, Ivan Afanasiitch."

Followed a silence. Praskovia Ivanovna wiped her face with a parti−coloured handkerchief; Ivan Afanasiitch continued with intense attention to gaze away to one side. Both were rather uncomfortable. But in merchant and petty shopkeeper society, where even old friends never step outside special angular forms of etiquette, a certain constraint in the behaviour of guests and host to one another not only strikes no one as strange, but, on the contrary, is regarded as perfectly correct and indispensable, particularly on a first visit. Praskovia Ivanovna was agreeably impressed by Pyetushkov. He was formal and decorous in his manners, and moreover, wasn't he a man of some rank, too?

"Praskovia Ivanovna, ma'am, I like your rolls very much," he said to her.

"Really now, really now."

"Very good they are, you know, very, indeed."

"May they do you good, sir, may they do you good. Delighted, to be sure."

"I've never eaten any like them in Moscow."

"You don't say so now, you don't say so."

Again a silence followed.

"Tell me, Praskovia Ivanovna," began Ivan Afanasiitch; "that's your niece, I fancy, isn't it, living with you?"

"My own niece, sir."

"How comes it . . . she's with you?" . . .

"She's an orphan, so I keep her."

"And is she a good worker?"

"Such a girl to work . . . such a girl, sir . . . ay . . . ay . . . to be sure she is."

Ivan Afanasiitch thought it discreet not to pursue the subject of the niece further.

"What bird is that you have in the cage, Praskovia Ivanovna?"

"God knows. A bird of some sort."

"H'm! Well, so, good day to you, Praskovia Ivanovna."

"A very good day to your honour. Pray walk in another time, and take a cup of tea."

"With the greatest pleasure, Praskovia Ivanovna."

Pyetushkov walked out. On the steps he met Vassilissa. She giggled.

"Where are you going, my darling?" said Pyetushkov with reckless daring.

"Come, give over, do, you are a one for joking."

"He, he! And did you get my letter?"

Vassilissa hid the lower part of her face in her sleeve and made no answer.

"And you're not angry with me?"

"Vassilissa!" came the jarring voice of the aunt; "hey, Vassilissa!"

Vassilissa ran into the house. Pyetushkov returned home. But from that day he began going often to the baker's shop, and his visits were not for nothing. Ivan Afanasiitch's hopes, to use the lofty phraseology suitable, were crowned with success. Usually, the attainment of the goal has a cooling effect on people, but Pyetushkov, on the contrary, grew every day more and more ardent. Love is a thing of accident, it exists in itself, like art, and, like nature, needs no reasons to justify it, as some clever man has said who never loved, himself, but made excellent observations upon love.

Pyetushkov became passionately attached to Vassilissa. He was completely happy. His soul was aglow with bliss. Little by little he carried all his belongings, at any rate all his pipes, to Praskovia Ivanovna's, and for whole days together he sat in her back room. Praskovia Ivanovna charged him something for his dinner and drank his tea, consequently she did not complain of his presence. Vassilissa had grown used to him. She would work, sing, or spin before him, sometimes exchanging a couple of words with him; Pyetushkov watched her, smoked his pipe, swayed to and fro in his chair, laughed, and in leisure hours played "Fools" with her and Praskovia Ivanovna. Ivan Afanasiitch was happy. . . .

But in this world nothing is perfect, and, small as a man's requirements may be, destiny never quite fulfils them, and positively spoils the whole thing, if possible. . . . The spoonful of pitch is sure to find its way into the barrel of honey! Ivan Afanasiitch experienced this in his case.

In the first place, from the time of his establishing himself at Vassilissa's, Pyetushkov dropped more than ever out of all intercourse with his comrades. He saw them only when absolutely necessary, and then, to avoid allusions and jeers (in which, however, he was not always successful), he put on the desperately sullen and intensely scared look of a hare in a display of fireworks.

Secondly, Onisim gave him no peace; he had lost every trace of respect for him, he mercilessly persecuted him, put him to shame.

And . . . thirdly. . . . Alas! read further kindly reader.

V

ONE day Pyetushkov (who for the reasons given above found little comfort outside Praskovia Ivanovna's doors) was sitting in Vassilissa's room at the back, and was busying himself over some home−brewed concoction, something in the way of jam or syrup. The mistress of the house was not at home. Vassilissa was sitting in the shop singing.

There came a knock at the little pane. Vassilissa got up, went to the window, uttered a little shriek, giggled, and began whispering with some one. On going back to her place, she sighed, and then fell to singing louder than ever.

"Who was that you were talking to?" Pyetushkov asked her.

Vassilissa went on singing carelessly.

"Vassilissa, do you hear? Vassilissa!"

"What do you want?"

"Whom were you talking to?"

"What's that to you?"

"I only asked."

Pyetushkov came out of the back room in a parti−coloured smoking−jacket with tucked−up sleeves, and a strainer in his hand.

"Oh, a friend of mine," answered Vassilissa.

"What friend?"

"Oh, Piotr Petrovitch."

"Piotr Petrovitch? . . . what Piotr Petrovitch?"

"He's one of your lot. He's got such a difficult name."

"Bublitsyn?"

"Yes, yes . . . Piotr Petrovitch."

"And do you know him?"

"Rather!" responded Vassilissa, with a wag of her head.

Pyetushkov, without a word, paced ten times up and down the room.

"I say, Vassilissa," he said at last, "that is, how do you know him?"

"How do I know him?. . . I know him . . . He's such a nice gentleman."

"How do you mean nice, though? how nice? how nice?"

Vassilissa gazed at Ivan Afanasiitch.

"Nice," she said slowly and in perplexity. "You know what I mean."

Pyetushkov bit his lips and began again pacing the room.

"What were you talking about with him, eh?"

Vassilissa smiled and looked down.

"Speak, speak, speak, I tell you, speak!"

"How cross you are to−day!" observed Vassilissa.

Pyetushkov was silent.

"Come now, Vassilissa," he began at last; "no, I won't be cross. . . . Come, tell me, what were you talking about?"

Vassilissa laughed.

"He is a one to joke, really, that Piotr Petrovitch!"

"Well, what did he say?"

"He is a fellow!"

Pyetushkov was silent again for a little.

"Vassilissa, you love me, don't you?" he asked her.

"Oh, so that's what you're after, too!"

Poor Pyetushkov felt a pang at his heart. Praskovia Ivanovna came in. They sat down to dinner. After dinner Praskovia Ivanovna betook herself to the shelf bed. Ivan Afanasiitch himself lay down on the stove, turned over and dropped asleep. A cautious creak waked him. Ivan Afanasiitch sat up, leaned on his elbow, looked: the door was open. He jumped up—no Vassilissa. He ran into the yard—she was not in the yard; into the street, looked up and down—Vassilissa was nowhere to be seen. He ran without his cap as far as the market—no, Vassilissa was not in sight. Slowly he returned to the baker's shop, clambered on to the stove, and turned with his face to the wall. He felt miserable. Bublitsyn . . . Bublitsyn . . . the name was positively ringing in his ears.

"What's the matter, my good sir?" Praskovia Ivanovna asked him in a drowsy voice. "Why are you groaning?"

"Oh, nothing, ma'am. Nothing. I feel a weight oppressing me."

"It's the mushrooms," murmured Praskovia Ivanovna—"it's all those mushrooms."

O Lord, have mercy on us sinners!

An hour passed, a second—still no Vassilissa. Twenty times Pyetushkov was on the point of getting up, and twenty times he huddled miserably under the sheepskin. . . . At last he really did get down from the stove and determined to go home, and positively went out into the yard, but came back. Praskovia Ivanovna got up. The hired man, Luka, black as a beetle, though he was a baker, put the bread into the oven. Pyetushkov went again out on to the steps and pondered. The goat that lived in the yard went up to him, and gave him a little friendly poke with his horns. Pyetushkov looked at him, and for some unknown reason said "Kss, Kss." Suddenly the low wicket−gate slowly opened and Vassilissa appeared. Ivan Afanasiitch went straight to meet her, took her by the hand, and rather coolly, but resolutely, said to her:

"Come along with me."

"But, excuse me, Ivan Afanasiitch . . . I . . ."

"Come with me," he repeated.

She obeyed.

Pyetushkov led her to his lodgings. Onisim, as usual, was lying at full length asleep. Ivan Afanasiitch waked him, told him to light a candle. Vassilissa went to the window and sat down in silence. While Onisim was busy getting a light in the anteroom, Pyetushkov stood motionless at the other window, staring into the street. Onisim came in, with the candle in his hands, was beginning to grumble . . . Ivan Afanasiitch turned quickly round: "Go along," he said to him.

Onisim stood still in the middle of the room.

"Go away at once," Pyetushkov repeated threateningly.

Onisim looked at his master and went out.

Ivan Afanasiitch shouted after him:

"Away, quite away. Out of the house. You can come back in two hours' time."

Onisim slouched off.

Pyetushkov waited till he heard the gate bang, and at once went up to Vassilissa.

"Where have you been?"

Vassilissa was confused.

"Where have you been? I tell you," he repeated.

Vassilissa looked round . . .

"I am speaking to you . . . where have you been?" And Pyetushkov raised his arm . . .

"Don't beat me, Ivan Afanasiitch, don't beat me," Vassilissa whispered in terror.

Pyetushkov turned away.

"Beat you. . . . No! I'm not going to beat you. Beat you? I beg your pardon, my darling. God bless you! While I supposed you loved me, while I . . . I . . ."

Ivan Afanasiitch broke off He gasped for breath.

"Listen, Vassilissa," he said at last. "You know I'm a kind−hearted man, you know it, don't you, Vassilissa, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," she said faltering.

"I do nobody any harm, nobody, nobody in the world. And I deceive nobody. Why are you deceiving me?"

"But I'm not deceiving you, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"You aren't deceiving me? Oh, very well! Oh, very well! Then tell me where you've been."

"I went to see Matrona."

"That's a lie!"

"Really, I've been at Matrona's. You ask her, if you don't believe me."

"And Bub—— what's his name . . . have you seen that devil?"

"Yes, I did see him."

"You did see him! you did see him! Oh you did see him!"

Pyetushkov turned pale.

"So you were making an appointment with him in the morning at the window—eh? eh?"

"He asked me to come."

"And so you went. . . . Thanks very much, my girl, thanks very much!" Pyetushkov made Vassilissa a low bow.

"But, Ivan Afanasiitch, you're maybe fancying . . ."

"You'd better not talk to me! And a pretty fool I am! There's nothing to make an outcry for! You may make friends with any one you like. I've nothing to do with you. So there! I don't want to know you even."

Vassilissa got up.

"That's for you to say, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"Where are you going?"

"Why, you yourself . . ."

"I'm not sending you away," Pyetushkov interrupted her.

"Oh no, Ivan Afanasiitch. . . . What's the use of my stopping here?"

Pyetushkov let her get as far as the door.

"So you're going, Vassilissa?"

"You keep on abusing me."

"I abuse you! You've no fear of God, Vassilissa! When have I abused you? Come, come, say when?"

"Why! Just this minute weren't you all but beating me?"

"Vassilissa, it's wicked of you. Really, it's downright wicked."

"And then you threw it in my face, that you don't want to know me. 'I'm a gentleman,' say you."

Ivan Afanasiitch began wringing his hands speechlessly. Vassilissa got back as far as the middle of the room.

"Well, God be with you, Ivan Afanasiitch. I'll keep myself to myself, and you keep yourself to yourself."

"Nonsense, Vassilissa, nonsense," Pyetushkov cut her short. "You think again; look at me. You see I'm not myself. You see I don't know what I'm saying. . . . You might have some feeling for me."

"You keep on abusing me, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"Ah, Vassilissa! Let bygones be bygones. Isn't that right? Come, you're not angry with me, are you?"

"You keep abusing me," Vassilissa repeated.

"I won't, my love, I won't. Forgive an old man like me. I'll never do it in future. Come, you've forgiven me, eh?"

"God be with you, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"Come, laugh then, laugh."

Vassilissa turned away.

"You laughed, you laughed, my love!" cried Pyetushkov, and he capered about like a child.

VI

THE next day Pyetushkov went to the baker's shop as usual. Everything went on as before. But there was a settled ache at his heart. He did not laugh now as often, and sometimes he fell to musing. Sunday came. Praskovia Ivanovna had an attack of lumbago; she did not get down from the shelf bed, except with much difficulty to go to mass. After mass Pyetushkov called Vassilissa into the back room. She had been complaining all the morning of feeling dull. To judge by the expression of Ivan Afanasiitch's countenance, he was revolving in his brain some extraordinary idea, unforeseen even by him.

"You sit down here, Vassilissa," he said to her, "and I'll sit here. I want to have a little talk with you."

Vassilissa sat down.

"Tell me, Vassilissa, can you write?"

"Write?"

"Yes, write?"

"No, I can't."

"What about reading?"

"I can't read either."

"Then who read you my letter?"

"The deacon."

Pyetushkov paused.

"But would you like to learn to read and write?"

"Why, what use would reading and writing be to us, Ivan Afanasiitch?"

"What use? You could read books."

"But what good is there in books?"

"All sorts of good. . . . I tell you what, if you like, I'll bring you a book."

"But I can't read, you see, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"I'll read to you."

"But, I say, won't it be dull?"

"Nonsense! dull! On the contrary, it's the best thing to get rid of dulness."

"Maybe you'll read stories, then."

"You shall see to−morrow."

In the evening Pyetushkov returned home, and began rummaging in his boxes. He found several odd numbers of the Library of Good Reading, five grey Moscow novels, Nazarov's arithmetic, a child's geography with a globe on the title−page, the second part of Keydanov's history, two dream−books, an almanack for the year 1819, two numbers of Galatea, Kozlov's *Natalia Dolgorukaia*, and the first part of *Roslavlev*. He pondered a long while which to choose, and finally made up his mind to take Kozlov's poem, and *Roslavlev*.

Next day Pyetushkov dressed in haste, put both the books under the lapel of his coat, went to the baker's shop, and began reading aloud Zagoskin's novel. Vassilissa sat without moving; at first she smiled, then seemed to become absorbed in thought . . . then she bent a little forward; her eyes closed, her mouth slightly opened, her hands fell on her knees; she was dozing. Pyetushkov read quickly, inarticulately, in a thick voice; he raised his eyes . . .

"Vassilissa, are you asleep?"

She started, rubbed her face, and stretched. Pyetushkov felt angry with her and with himself . . .

"It's dull," said Vassilissa lazily.

"I tell you what, would you like me to read you poetry?"

"What say?"

"Poetry . . . good poetry."

"No, that's enough, really."

Pyetushkov hurriedly picked up Kozlov's poem, jumped up, crossed the room, ran impulsively up to Vassilissa, and began reading. Vassilissa let her head drop backwards, spread out her hands, stared into Ivan Afanasiitch's face, and suddenly went off into a loud harsh guffaw . . . she fairly rolled about with laughing.

Ivan Afanasiitch flung the book on the floor in his annoyance. Vassilissa went on laughing.

"Why, what are you laughing at, silly?"

Vassilissa roared more than ever.

"Laugh away, laugh away," Pyetushkov muttered between his teeth.

Vassilissa held her sides, gasping.

"But what is it, idiot?"

But Vassilissa could only wave her hands. Ivan Afanasiitch snatched up his cap, and ran out of the house. With rapid, unsteady steps, he walked about the town, walked on and on, and found himself at the city gates. Suddenly there was the rattle of wheels, the tramp of horses along the street. . . . Some one called him by name. He raised his head and saw a big, old−fashioned wagonette. In the wagonette facing him sat Mr. Bublitsyn between two young ladies, the daughters of Mr. Tiutiurov. Both the girls were dressed exactly alike, as though in outward sign of their immutable affection; both smiled pensively, and carried their heads on one side with a languid grace. On the other side of the carriage appeared the wide straw hat of their excellent papa; and from time to time his round, plump neck presented itself to the gaze of spectators. Beside his straw hat rose the mob−cap of his spouse. The very attitude of both the parents was a sufficient proof of their sincere goodwill towards the young man and their confidence in him. And Bublitsyn obviously was aware of their flattering confidence and appreciated it. He was, of course, sitting in an unconstrained position, and talking and laughing without constraint; but in the very freedom of his manner there could be discerned a shade of tender, touching respectfulness. And the Tiutiurov girls? It is hard to convey in words all that an attentive observer could trace in the faces of the two sisters. Goodwill and gentleness, and discreet gaiety, a melancholy comprehension of life, and a faith, not to be shaken, in themselves, in the lofty and noble destiny of man on earth, courteous attention to their young companion, in intellectual endowments perhaps not fully their equal, but still by the qualities of his heart quite deserving of their indulgence . . . such were the characteristics and the feelings reflected at that moment on the faces of the young ladies. Bublitsyn called to Ivan Afanasiitch for no special reason, simply in the fulness of his inner satisfaction; he bowed to him with excessive friendliness and cordiality. The young ladies even looked at him with gentle amiability, as at a man whose acquaintance they would not object to. . . . The good, sleek, quiet horses went by Ivan Afanasiitch at a gentle trot; the carriage rolled smoothly along the broad road, carrying with it good−humoured, girlish laughter; he caught a final glimpse of Mr. Tiutiurov's hat; the two outer horses turned their heads on each side, jauntily stepping over the short, green grass . . . the coachman gave a whistle of approbation and warning, the carriage disappeared behind some willows.

A long while poor Pyetushkov remained standing still.

"I'm a poor lonely creature," he whispered at last . . . "alone in the world."

A little boy in tatters stopped before him, looked timidly at him, held out his hand . . .

"For Christ's sake, good gentleman."

Pyetushkov pulled out a copper.

"For your loneliness, poor orphan," he said with effort, and he walked back to the baker's shop. On the threshold of Vassilissa's room Ivan Afanasiitch stopped.

"Yes," he thought, "these are my friends. Here is my family, this is it. . . And here Bublitsyn and there Bublitsyn."

Vassilissa was sitting with her back to him, winding worsted, and carelessly singing to herself; she was wearing a striped cotton gown; her hair was done up anyhow. . . . The room, insufferably hot, smelt of feather beds and old rags; jaunty, reddish−brown "Prussians" scurried rapidly here and there across the walls; on the decrepit chest of drawers, with holes in it where the locks should have been, beside a broken jar, lay a woman's shabby slipper. . . . Kozlov's poem was still where it had fallen on the floor. . . . Pyetushkov shook his head, folded his arms, and went away. He was hurt.

At home he called for his things to dress. Onisim slouched off after his better coat. Pyetushkov had a great

desire to draw Onisim into conversation, but Onisim preserved a sullen silence. At last Ivan Afanasiitch could hold out no longer.

"Why don't you ask me where I'm going?"

"Why, what do I want to know where you're going for?"

"What for? Why, suppose some one comes on urgent business, and asks, 'Where's Ivan Afanasiitch?' And then you can tell him, 'Ivan Afanasiitch has gone here or there.'"

"Urgent business. . . . But who ever does come to you on urgent business?"

"Why, are you beginning to be rude again? Again, hey?"

Onisim turned away, and fell to brushing the coat.

"Really, Onisim, you are a most disagreeable person."

Onisim looked up from under his brows at his master.

"And you're always like this. Yes, positively always."

Onisim smiled.

"But what's the good of my asking you where you're going, Ivan Afanasiitch? As though I didn't know! To the girl at the baker's shop!"

"There, that's just where you're wrong! that's just where you're mistaken! Not to her at all. I don't intend going to see the girl at the baker's shop any more."

Onisim dropped his eyelids and brandished the brush. Pyetushkov waited for his approbation; but his servant remained speechless.

"It's not the proper thing," Pyetushkov went on in a severe voice—"it's unseemly. . . . Come, tell me what you think?"

"What am I to think? It's for you to say. What business have I to think?"

Pyetushkov put on his coat. "He doesn't believe me, the beast," he thought to himself.

He went out of the house, but he did not go to see any one. He walked about the streets. He directed his attention to the sunset. At last a little after eight o'clock he returned home. He wore a smile; he repeatedly shrugged his shoulders, as though marvelling at his own folly. "Yes," thought he, "this is what comes of a strong will. . . ."

Next day Pyetushkov got up rather late. He had not passed a very good night, did not go out all day, and was fearfully bored. Pyetushkov read through all his poor books, and praised aloud one story in the Library of Good Reading. As he went to bed, he told Onisim to give him his pipe. Onisim handed him a wretched pipe. Pyetushkov began smoking; the pipe wheezed like a broken−winded horse.

"How disgusting!" cried Ivan Afanasiitch "where's my cherrywood pipe?"

"At the baker's shop," Onisim responded tranquilly.

Pyetushkov blinked spasmodically

"Well, you wish me to go for it?"

"No, you needn't; don't go . . . no need, don't go, do you hear?"

"Yes, sir."

The night passed somehow. In the morning Onisim, as usual, gave Pyetushkov on the blue sprigged plate a new white roll. Ivan Afanasiitch looked out of window and asked Onisim:

"You've been to the baker's shop?"

"Who's to go, if I don't?"

Pyetushkov became plunged in meditation.

"Tell me, please, did you see any one there?"

"Of course I did."

"Whom did you see there, now, for instance?"

"Why, of course, Vassilissa."

Ivan Afanasiitch was silent. Onisim cleared the table, and was just going out of the room . . .

"Onisim," Pyetushkov cried faintly.

"What is it?"

"Er . . . did she ask after me?"

"Of course she didn't."

Pyetushkov set his teeth. "Yes," he thought, "that's all it's worth, her love, indeed. . . ." His head dropped. "Absurd I was, to be sure," he thought again. "A fine idea to read her poetry. A girl like that! Why, she's a fool! Why, she's good for nothing but to lie on the stove and eat pancakes. Why, she's a post, a perfect post; an uneducated workgirl."

"She's never come," he whispered, two hours later, still sitting in the same place, "she's never come. To think of it; why, she could see that I left her out of temper; why she might know that I was hurt. There's love for you! And she did not even ask if I were well. Never even said, 'Is Ivan Afanasiitch quite well?' She hasn't seen me for two whole days—and not a sign. . . . She's even again, maybe, thought fit to meet that Bub——Lucky fellow. Ouf, devil take it, what a fool I am!"

Pyetushkov got up, paced up and down the room in silence, stood still, knitted his brows slightly and scratched his neck. "However," he said aloud, "I'll go to see her. I must see what she's about there. I must make her feel ashamed. Most certainly . . . I'll go. Onisim! my clothes."

"Well," he mused as he dressed, "we shall see what comes of it. She may, I dare say, be angry with me. And after all, a man keeps coming and coming, and all of a sudden, for no rhyme or reason, goes and gives up coming. Well, we shall see."

Ivan Afanasiitch went out of the house, and made his way to the baker's shop. He stopped at the little gate, he wanted to straighten himself out and set himself to rights. . . . Pyetushkov clutched at the folds of his coat with both hands, and almost pulled them out altogether. . . . Convulsively he twisted his tightly compressed neck, fastened the top hook of his collar, drew a deep breath. . . .

"Why are you standing there?" Praskovia Ivanovna bawled to him from the little window. "Come in."

Pyetushkov started, and went in. Praskovia Ivanovna met him in the doorway.

"Why didn't you come to see us yesterday, my good sir? Was it, maybe, some ailment prevented you?"

"Yes, I had something of a headache yesterday. . . ."

"Ah, you should have put cucumber on your temples, my good sir. It would have taken it away in a twinkling. Is your head aching now?"

"No, it's not."

"Ah well, and thank Thee, O Lord, for it."

Ivan Afanasiitch went off into the back room. Vassilissa saw him.

"Ah! good day, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"Good day, Vassilissa Ivanovna."

"Where have you put the tap, Ivan Afanasiitch?"

"Tap? what tap?"

"The wine−tap . . . our tap. You must have taken it home with you. You are such a one . . . Lord, forgive us. . . ."

Pyetushkov put on a dignified and chilly air. "I will direct my man to look. Seeing that I was not here yesterday," he pronounced significantly. . . .

"Ah, why, to be sure, you weren't here yesterday." Vassilissa squatted down on her heels, and began rummaging in the chest. . . .

"Aunt, hi! aunt!"

"What sa−ay?"

"Have you taken my neckerchief?"

"What neckerchief?"

"Why, the yellow one."

"The yellow one?"

"Yes, the yellow, figured one."

"No, I've not taken it."

Pyetushkov bent down to Vassilissa.

"Listen to me, Vassilissa; listen to what I am saying to you. It is not a matter of taps or of neckerchiefs just now; you can attend to such trifles another time."

Vassilissa did not budge from her position; she only lifted her head.

"You just tell me, on your conscience, do you love me or not? That's what I want to know, once for all."

"Ah, what a one you are, Ivan Afanasiitch. . . . Well, then, of course."

"If you love me, how was it you didn't come to see me yesterday? Had you no time? Well, you might have sent to find out if I were ill, as I didn't turn up. But it's little you cared. I might die, I dare say, you wouldn't grieve."

"Ah, Ivan Afanasiitch, one can't be always thinking of one thing, one's got one's work to do."

"To be sure," responded Pyetushkov; "but all the same . . . And it's improper to laugh at your elders. . . . It's not right. Moreover, it's as well in certain cases . . . But where's my pipe?"

"Here's your pipe."

Pyetushkov began smoking.

VII

SEVERAL days slipped by again, apparently rather tranquilly. But a storm was getting nearer. Pyetushkov suffered tortures, was jealous, never took his eyes off Vassilissa, kept an alarmed watch over her, annoyed her horribly. Behold, one evening, Vassilissa dressed herself with more care than usual, and, seizing a favourable instant, sallied off to make a visit somewhere. Night came on, she had not returned. Pyetushkov at sunset went home to his lodgings, and at eight o'clock in the morning ran to the baker's shop. . . . Vassilissa had not come in. With an inexpressible sinking at his heart, he waited for her right up to dinner−time. . . . They sat down to the table without her. . . .

"Whatever can have become of her?" Praskovia Ivanovna observed serenely. . . .

"You spoil her, you simply spoil her utterly!" Pyetushkov repeated, in despair.

"Eh! my good sir, there's no looking after a girl!" responded Praskovia Ivanovna. "Let her go her way! So long as she does her work. . . . Why shouldn't folks enjoy themselves? . . ."

A cold shudder ran over Pyetushkov. At last, towards evening, Vassilissa made her appearance. This was all he was waiting for. Majestically Pyetushkov rose from his seat, folded his arms, scowled menacingly. . . . But Vassilissa looked him boldly in the face, laughed impudently, and before he could utter a single word she went quickly into her own room, and locked herself in. Ivan Afanasiitch opened his mouth, looked in amazement at Praskovia Ivanovna. . . . Praskovia Ivanovna cast down her eyes. Ivan Afanasiitch stood still a moment, groped after his cap, put it on askew, and went out without closing his mouth.

He reached home, took up a leather cushion, and with it flung himself on the sofa, with his face to the wall. Onisim looked in out of the passage, went into the room, leaned his back against the door, took a pinch of snuff, and crossed his legs.

"Are you unwell, Ivan Afanasiitch?" he asked Pyetushkov.

Pyetushkov made no answer.

"Shall I go for the doctor?" Onisim continued, after a brief pause.

"I'm quite well. . . . Go away," Ivan Afanasiitch articulated huskily.

"Well? . . . no, you're not well, Ivan Afanasiitch. . . . Is this what you call being well?"

Pyetushkov did not speak.

"Just look at yourself. You've grown so thin, that you're simply not like yourself. And what's it all about? It's enough to turn one's brain to think of it. And you a gentleman born, too!"

Onisim paused. Pyetushkov did not stir.

"Is that the way gentlemen go on? They'd amuse themselves a bit, to be sure . . . why shouldn't they . . they'd amuse themselves, and then drop it. . . . They may well say, Fall in love with Old Nick, and you'll think him a beauty."

Ivan Afanasiitch merely writhed.

"Well, it's really like this, Ivan Afanasiitch. If any one had said this and that of you, and your goings on, why, I would have said, 'Get along with you, you fool, what do you take me for?' Do you suppose I'd have believed it? Why, as it is, I see it with my own eyes, and I can't believe it. Worse than this nothing can be. Has she put some spell over you or what? Why, what is there in her? If you come to consider, she's below contempt, really. She can't even speak as she ought. . . She's simply a baggage! Worse, even!"

"Go away," Ivan Afanasiitch moaned into the cushion.

"No, I'm not going away, Ivan Afanasiitch. Who's to speak, if I don't? Why, upon my word! Here, you're breaking your heart now . . . and over what? Eh, over what? tell me that!"

"Oh, go away, Onisim," Pyetushkov moaned again. Onisim, for propriety's sake, was silent for a little while.

"And another thing," he began again, "she's no feeling of gratitude whatever. Any other girl wouldn't know

how to do enough to please you; while she! . . . she doesn't even think of you. Why, it's simply a disgrace. Why, the things people are saying about you, one cannot repeat them, they positively cry shame on me. If I could have known beforehand, I'd have. . . . ."

"Oh, go away, do, devil!" shrieked Pyetushkov, not stirring from his place, however, nor raising his head.

"Ivan Afanasiitch, for mercy's sake," pursued the ruthless Onisim. "I'm speaking for your good. Despise her, Ivan Afanasiitch; you simply break it off. Listen to me, or else I'll fetch a wise woman; she'll break the spell in no time. You'll laugh at it yourself, later on; you'll say to me, 'Onisim, why, it's marvellous how such things happen sometimes!' You just consider yourself: girls like her, they're like dogs . . . you've only to whistle to them. . ."

Like one frantic, Pyetushkov jumped up from the sofa . . . but, to the amazement of Onisim, who was already lifting both hands to the level of his cheeks, he sat down again, as though some one had cut away his legs from under him. . . . Tears were rolling down his pale face, a tuft of hair stood up straight on the top of his head, his eyes looked dimmed . . . his drawn lips were quivering . . . his head sank on his breast.

Onisim looked at Pyetushkov and plumped heavily down on his knees.

"Dear master, Ivan Afanasiitch," he cried, "your honour! Be pleased to punish me. I'm a fool. I've troubled you, Ivan Afanasiitch. . . . How did I dare! Be pleased to punish me, your honour. . . . It's not worth your while to weep over my silly words . . . dear master. Ivan Afanasiitch . . . ."

But Pyetushkov did not even look at his servant; he turned away and buried himself in the corner of the sofa again.

Onisim got up, went up to his master, stood over him, and twice he tugged at his own hair.

"Wouldn't you like to undress, sir . . . you should go to bed . . you should take some raspberry tea . . . don't grieve, please your honour. . . It's only half a trouble, it's all nothing . . . it'll be all right in the end," he said to him every two minutes. . . .

But Pyetushkov did not get up from the sofa, and only twitched his shoulders now and then, and drew up his knees to his stomach. . . .

Onisim did not leave his side all night. Towards morning Pyetushkov fell asleep, but he did not sleep long. At seven o'clock he got up from the sofa, pale, dishevelled, and exhausted, and asked for tea.

Onisim with amazing eagerness and speed brought the samovar.

"Ivan Afanasiitch," he began at last; in a timid voice, "your honour is not angry with me?"

"Why should I be angry with you, Onisim?" answered poor Pyetushkov. "You were perfectly right yesterday, and I quite agreed with you in everything."

"I only spoke through my devotion to you, Ivan Afanasiitch."

"I know that."

Pyetushkov was silent and hung his head.

Onisim saw that things were in a bad way.

"Ivan Afanasiitch," he said suddenly.

"Well?"

"Would you like me to fetch Vassilissa here?"

Pyetushkov flushed red.

"No, Onisim, I don't wish it. ("Yes, indeed! as if she would come!" he thought to himself.) One must be firm. It is all nonsense. Yesterday, I . . . It's a disgrace. You are right. One must cut it all short, once for all, as they say. Isn't that true?"

"It's the gospel truth your honour speaks, Ivan Afanasiitch."

Pyetushkov sank again into reverie. He wondered at himself, he did not seem to know himself. He sat without stirring and stared at the floor. Thoughts whirled round within him, like smoke or fog, while his heart felt empty and heavy at once.

"But what's the meaning of it, after all," he thought sometimes, and again he grew calmer. "It's nonsense, silliness!" he said aloud, and passed his hand over his face, shook himself, and his hand dropped again on his knee, his eyes again rested on the floor.

Intently and mournfully Onisim kept watch on his master.

Pyetushkov lifted his head.

"Tell me, Onisim," he began, "is it true, are there really such witches' spells?"

"There are, to be sure there are," answered Onisim, as he thrust one foot forward. "Does your honour know the non−commissioned officer, Krupovaty? . . . His brother was ruined by witchcraft. He was bewitched to love an old woman, a cook, if your honour only can explain that! They gave him nothing but a morsel of rye bread, with a muttered spell, of course. And Krupovaty's brother simply lost his heart to the cook, he fairly ran after the cook, he positively adored her—couldn't keep his eyes off her. She might tell him to do anything, he'd obey her on the spot. She'd even make a joke of him before other people, before strangers. Well, she drove him into a decline, at last. And so it was Krupovaty's brother died. And you know, she was a cook, and an old woman too, very old. (Onisim took a pinch of snuff.) Confound the lot of them, these girls and women−folk!"

"She doesn't care for me a bit, that's clear, at last; that's beyond all doubt, at last," Pyetushkov muttered in an undertone, gesticulating with his head and hands as though he were explaining to a perfectly extraneous person some perfectly extraneous fact.

"Yes," Onisim resumed, "there are women like that."

"There are," listlessly repeated Pyetushkov, in a tone half questioning, half perplexed.

Onisim looked intently at his master.

"Ivan Afanasiitch," he began, "wouldn't you have a snack of something?"

"Wouldn't I have a snack of something?" repeated Pyetushkov.

"Or may be you'd like to have a pipe?"

"To have a pipe?" repeated Pyetushkov.

"So this is what it's coming to," muttered Onisim. "It's gone deep, it seems."

VIII

THE creak of boots resounded in the passage, and then there was heard the usual suppressed cough which announces the presence of a person of subordinate position. Onisim went out and promptly came back, accompanied by a diminutive soldier with a little, old woman's face, in a patched cloak yellow with age, and wearing neither breeches nor cravat. Pyetushkov was startled; while the soldier drew himself up, wished him good day, and handed him a large envelope bearing the government seal. In this envelope was a note from the major in command of the garrison: he called upon Pyetushkov to come to him without fail or delay.

Pyetushkov turned the note over in his hands, and could not refrain from asking the messenger, did he know why the major desired his presence, though he was very well aware of the utter futility of his question.

"We cannot tell!" the soldier cried, with great effort, yet hardly audibly, as though he were half asleep.

"Isn't he summoning the other officers?" Pyetushkov pursued.

"We cannot tell," the soldier cried a second time, in just the same voice.

"All right, you can go," pronounced Pyetushkov.

The soldier wheeled round to the left, scraping his foot as he did so, and slapping himself below the spine (this was considered smart in the twenties), withdrew.

Pyetushkov exchanged glances with Onisim, who at once assumed a look of anxiety. Without a word Ivan Afanasiitch set off to the major's.

The major was a man of sixty, corpulent and clumsily built, with a red and bloated face, a short neck, and a continual trembling in his fingers, resulting from excessive indulgence in strong drink. He belonged to the class of so−called "bourbons," that's to say, soldiers risen from the ranks; had learned to read at thirty, and spoke with difficulty, partly from shortness of breath, partly from inability to follow his own thought. His temperament exhibited all the varieties known to science: in the morning, before drinking, he was melancholy; in the middle of the day, choleric; and in the evening, phlegmatic, that is to say, he did nothing at that time but snore and grunt till he was put to bed. Ivan Afanasiitch appeared before him during the choleric period. He found him sitting on a sofa, in an open dressing−gown, with a pipe between his teeth. A fat, crop−eared cat had taken up her position beside him.

"Aha! he's come!" growled the major, casting a sidelong glance out of his pewtery eyes upon Pyetushkov, and not stirring from his place. "Sit down. Well, I'm going to give you a talking to. I've wanted to get hold of you this long while."

Pyetushkov sank into a chair.

"For," the major began, with an unexpected lurch of his whole body, "you're an officer, d' ye see, and so you've got to behave yourself according to rule. If you'd been a soldier, I'd have flogged you, and that's all about it, but, as 'tis, you're an officer. Did any one ever see the like of it? Disgracing yourself—is that a nice thing?"

"Allow me to know to what these remarks may refer?" Pyetushkov was beginning. . .

"I'll have no arguing! I dislike that beyond everything. I've said: I dislike it; and that's all about it! Ugh—why, your hooks are not in good form even;—what a disgrace! He sits, day in and day out, at the baker's shop; and he a gentleman born! There's a petticoat to be found there—and so there he sits. Let her go to the devil, the petticoat! Why, they do say he puts the bread in the oven. It's a stain on the uniform . . . so it is!"

"Allow me to submit," articulated Pyetushkov with a cold chill at his heart, "that all this, as far as I can make out, refers to my private life, so to say. . . ."

"No arguing with me, I tell you! Private life, he protests, too! If it had been a matter of the service I'd have sent you straight to the guard−room! Alley, marsheer! Because of the oath. Why, there was a whole birch copse, maybe, used upon my back, so I should think I know the service; every rule of discipline I'm very well up in. And I'd have you to understand, I say this just for the honour of the uniform. You're disgracing the uniform . . . so you

are. I say this like a father . . . yes. Because all that's put in my charge. I've to answer for it. And you dare to argue too!" the major shrieked with sudden fury, and his face turned purple, and he foamed at the mouth, while the cat put its tail in the air and jumped down to the ground. "Why, do you know . . . why, do you know what I can do? . . . I can do anything, anything, anything! Why, do you know whom you're talking to? Your superior officer gives you orders and you argue! Your superior officer . . . your superior officer. . . ."

Here the major positively choked and spluttered, while poor Pyetushkov could only draw himself up and turn pale, sitting on the very edge of his chair.

"I must have" . . . the major continued, with an imperious wave of his trembling hand, "I must have everything . . . up to the mark! Conduct first−class! I'm not going to put up with any irregularities! You can make friends with whom you like, that makes no odds to me! But if you are a gentleman, why, act as such . . . behave like one! No putting bread in the oven for me! No calling a draggletail old woman auntie! No disgracing the uniform! Silence! No arguing!"

The major's voice broke. He took breath, and turning towards the door into the passage, bawled, "Frolka, you scoundrel! The herrings!"

Pyetushkov rose hurriedly and darted away, almost upsetting the page−boy, who ran to meet him, carrying some sliced herring and a stout decanter of spirits on an iron tray.

"Silence! No arguing!" sounded after Pyetushkov the disjointed exclamations of his exasperated superior officer.

IX

A QUEER sensation overmastered Ivan Afanasiitch when, at last, he found himself in the street.

"Why am I walking as it were in a dream?" he thought to himself. "Am I out of my mind, or what? Why, it passes all belief at last. Come, damn it, she's tired of me, come, and I've grown tired of her, come, and . . . What is there out of the way in that?"

Pyetushkov frowned.

"I must put an end to it, once for all," he said almost aloud. "I'll go and speak out decisively for the last time, so that it may never come up again."

Pyetushkov made his way with rapid step to the baker's shop. The nephew of the hired man, Luka, a little boy, friend and confidant of the goat that lived in the yard, darted swiftly to the little gate, directly he caught sight of Ivan Afanasiitch in the distance.

Praskovia Ivanovna came out to meet Pyetushkov.

"Is your niece at home?" asked Pyetushkov.

"No, sir."

Pyetushkov was inwardly relieved at Vassilissa's absence.

"I came to have a few words with you, Praskovia Ivanovna."

"What about, my good sir?"

"I'll tell you. You comprehend that after all . . . that has passed . . . after such, so to say, behaviour (Pyetushkov was a little confused) . . . in a word . . . But, pray, don't be angry with me, though."

"Certainly not, sir."

"On the contrary, enter into my position, Praskovia Ivanovna."

"Certainly, sir."

"You're a reasonable woman, you'll understand of yourself, that . . . that I can't go on coming to see you any more."

"Certainly, sir," Praskovia Ivanovna repeated slowly.

"I assure you I greatly regret it; I confess it is positively painful to me, genuinely painful . . ."

"You know best, sir," Praskovia Ivanovna rejoined serenely. "It's for you to decide, sir. And, oh, if you'll allow me, I'll give you your little account, sir."

Pyetushkov had not at all anticipated such a prompt acquiescence. He had not desired acquiescence at all; he had only wanted to frighten Praskovia Ivanovna, and above all Vassilissa. He felt wretched.

"I know," be began, "this will not be disagreeable to Vassilissa; on the contrary, I believe she will be glad."

Praskovia Ivanovna got out her reckoning beads, and began rattling the counters.

"On the other hand," continued Pyetushkov, growing more and more agitated, "if Vassilissa were, for instance, to give an explanation of her behaviour . . . possibly. . . . Though, of course . . . I don't know, possibly, I might perceive that after all there was no great matter for blame in it."

"There's thirty−seven roubles and forty kopecks in notes to your account, sir," observed Praskovia Ivanovna. "Here, would you be pleased to go through it?"

Ivan Afanasiitch made no reply.

"Eighteen dinners at seventy kopecks each; twelve roubles sixty kopecks."

"And so we are to part, Praskovia Ivanovna."

"If so it must be, sir. Things do turn out so. Twelve samovars at ten kopecks each. . . ."

"But you might just tell me, Praskovia Ivanovna, where it was Vassilissa went, and what it was she. . . ."

"Oh, I never asked her, sir. . . . One rouble twenty kopecks in silver."

Ivan Afanasiitch sank into meditation. "Kvas and effervescing drinks," pursued Praskovia Ivanovna, holding

the counters apart on the frame not with her first, but her third finger, "half a rouble in silver. Sugar and rolls for tea, half a rouble. Four packets of tobacco bought by your orders, eighty kopecks in silver. To the tailor Kuprian Apollonov . . . ."

Ivan Afanasiitch suddenly raised his head, put out his hand and mixed up the counters.

"What are you about, my good man?" cried Praskovia Ivanovna. "Don't you trust me?"

"Praskovia Ivanovna," replied Pyetushkov, with a hurried smile, "I've thought better of it.

I was only, you know . . . joking. We'd better remain friends and go on in the old way. What nonsense it is! How can we separate—tell me that, please?"

Praskovia Ivanovna looked down and made him no reply.

"Come, we've been talking nonsense, and there's an end of it," pursued Ivan Afanasiitch, walking up and down the room, rubbing his hands, and, as it were, resuming his ancient rights. "Amen! and now I'd better have a pipe."

Praskovia Ivanovna still did not move from her place. . . .

"I see you are angry with me," said Pyetushkov. "I've offended you, perhaps. Well! well! forgive me generously."

"How could you offend me, my good sir? No offence about it. . . . Only, please, sir," added Praskovia Ivanovna, bowing, "be so good as not to go on coming to us."

"What?"

"It's not for you, sir, to be friends with us, your honour. So, please, do us the favour . . ."

Praskovia Ivanovna went on bowing.

"What ever for?" muttered the astounded Pyetushkov.

"Oh, nothing, sir. For mercy's sake. . . ."

"No, Praskovia Ivanovna, you must explain this! . . ."

"Vassilissa asks you. She says, 'I thank you, thank you very much, and from my heart; only for the future, your honour, give us up.'"

Praskovia Ivanovna bowed down almost to Pyetushkov's feet.

"Vassilissa, you say, begs me not to come?"

"Just so, your honour. When your honour came in to−day, and said what you did, that you didn't wish, you said, to visit us any more, I felt relieved, sir, that I did; thinks I, Well, thank God, how nicely it's all come about! But for that, I should have had hard work to bring my tongue to say it. . . . Be so good, sir."

Pyetushkov turned red and pale almost at the same instant. Praskovia Ivanovna still went on bowing. . . .

"Very good," Ivan Afanasiitch cried sharply. "Good−bye."

He turned abruptly and put on his cap.

"But the little bill, sir. . . ."

"Send it . . . my orderly shall pay you."

Pyetushkov went with resolute steps out of the baker's shop, and did not even look round.

X

A FORTNIGHT passed. At first Pyetushkov bore up in an extraordinary way. He went out, and visited his comrades, with the exception, of course, of Bublitsyn; but in spite of the exaggerated approbation of Onisim, he almost went out of his mind at last from wretchedness, jealousy, and ennui. Conversations with Onisim about Vassilissa were the only thing that afforded him some consolation. The conversation was always begun, "scratched up," by Pyetushkov; Onisim responded unwillingly,

"It's a strange thing, you know," Ivan Afanasiitch would say, for instance, as he lay on the sofa, while Onisim stood in his usual attitude, leaning against the door, with his hands folded behind his back, "when you come to think of it, what it was I saw in that girl. One would say that there was nothing unusual in her. It's true she has a good heart. That one can't deny her."

"Good heart, indeed!" Onisim would answer with displeasure.

"Come, now, Onisim," Pyetushkov went on, "one must tell the truth. It's a thing of the past now; it's no matter to me now, but justice is justice. You don't know her. She's very good−hearted. Not a single beggar does she let pass by; she'll always give, if it's only a crust of bread. Oh! And she's of a cheerful temper, that one must allow, too."

"What a notion! I don't know where you see the cheerful temper!"

"I tell you . . . you don't know her. And she's not mercenary either . . . that's another thing. She's not grasping, there's no doubt of it. Why I never gave her anything, as you know."

"That's why she's flung you over."

"No, that's not why!" responded Pyetushkov with a sigh.

"Why, you're in love with her to this day," Onisim retorted malignantly. "You'd be glad to go back there as before."

"That's nonsense you're talking. No, my lad, you don't know me either, I can see. Be sent away, and then go dancing attendance—no, thank you, I'd rather be excused. No, I tell you. You may believe me, it's all a thing of the past now."

"Pray God it be so!"

"But why ever shouldn't I be fair to her, now after all? If now I say she's not good−looking—why, who'd believe me?"

"A queer sort of good looks!"

"Well, find me,—well, mention anybody better−looking . . ."

"Oh, you'd better go back to her, then! . . ."

"Stupid! Do you suppose that's why I say so? Understand me. . . ."

"Oh! I understand you," Onisim answered with a heavy sigh.

Another week passed by. Pyetushkov had positively given up talking with his Onisim, and had given up going out. From morning till night he lay on the sofa, his hands behind his head. He began to get thin and pale, eat unwillingly and hurriedly, and did not smoke at all. Onisim could only shake his head, as he looked at him.

"You're not well, Ivan Afanasiitch," he said to him more than once.

"No, I'm all right," replied Pyetushkov.

At last, one fine day (Onisim was not at home) Pyetushkov got up, rummaged in his chest of drawers, put on his cloak, though the sun was rather hot, went stealthily out into the street, and came back a quarter of an hour later. . . . He carried something under his cloak. . . .

Onisim was not at home. The whole morning he had been sitting in his little room, deliberating with himself, grumbling and swearing between his teeth, and, at last, he sallied off to Vassilissa. He found her in the shop. Praskovia Ivanovna was asleep on the stove, rhythmically and soothingly snoring.

"Ah, how d' ye do, Onisim Sergeitch," began Vassilissa, with a smile; "why haven't we seen anything of you for so long?"

"Good day."

"Why are you so depressed? Would you like a cup of tea?"

"It's not me we're talking about now," rejoined Onisim, in a tone of vexation.

"Why, what then?"

"What! Don't you understand me? What! What have you done to my master, come, you tell me that."

"What I've done to him?"

"What have you done to him? . . . You go and look at him. Why, before we can look round, he'll be in a decline, or dying outright, maybe."

"It's not my fault, Onisim Sergeitch."

"Not your fault! God knows. Why, he's lost his heart to you. And you, God forgive you, treated him as if he were one of yourselves. Don't come, says you, I'm sick of you. Why, though he's not much to boast of, he's a gentleman anyway. He's a gentleman born, you know. . . . Do you realise that?"

"But he's such a dull person, Onisim Sergeitch . . . ."

"Dull! So you must have merry fellows about you!"

"And it's not so much that he's dull: he's so cross, so jealous."

"Ah, you, you're as haughty as a princess! He was in your way, I dare say!"

"But you yourself, Onisim Sergeitch, if you remember, were put out with him about it; 'Why is he such friends?' you said; 'what's he always coming for?'"

"Well, was I to be pleased with him for it, do you suppose?"

"Well, then, why are you angry with me now? Here, he's given up coming."

Onisim positively stamped.

"But what am I to do with him, if he's such a madman?" he added, dropping his voice.

"But how am I in fault? What can I do?"

"I'll tell you what: come with me to him."

"God forbid!"

"Why won't you come?"

"But why should I go to see him? Upon my word!"

"Why? Why, because he says you've a good heart; let me see if you've a good heart."

"But what good can I do him?"

"Oh, that's my business. You may be sure things are in a bad way, since I've come to you. It's certain I could think of nothing else to do."

Onisim paused for a while.

"Well, come along, Vassilissa, please, come along."

"Oh, Onisim Sergeitch, I don't want to be friendly with him again . . ."

"Well, and you needn't—who's talking of it? You've only to say a couple of words; to say, Why does your honour grieve? . . . give over. . . . That's all."

"Really, Onisim Sergeitch . . ."

"Why, am I to go down on my knees to you, eh? All right—there, I'm on my knees . . ."

"But really . . ."

"Why, what a girl it is! Even that doesn't touch her! . . ."

Vassilissa at last consented, put a kerchief on her head, and went out with Onisim.

"You wait here a little, in the passage," he said to her, when they reached Pyetushkov's abode, "and I'll go and let the master know . . . ."

He went in to Ivan Afanasiitch. Pyetushkov was standing in the middle of the room, both hands in his pockets, his legs excessively wide apart; he was slightly swaying backwards and forwards. His face was hot, and his eyes were sparkling.

"Hullo, Onisim," he faltered amiably, articulating the consonants very indistinctly and thickly: "hullo, my lad. Ah, my lad, when you weren't here . . . he, he, he . . ." Pyetushkov laughed and made a sudden duck forward with his nose. "Yes, it's an accomplished fact, he, he, he. . . . However," he added, trying to assume a dignified air, "I'm

all right." He tried to lift his foot, but almost fell over, and to preserve his dignity pronounced in a deep bass, "Boy, bring my pipe!"

Onisim gazed in astonishment at his master, glanced round. . . . In the window stood an empty dark−green bottle, with the inscription: "Best Jamaica rum."

"I've been drinking, my lad, that's all," Pyetushkov went on. "I've been and taken it. I've been drinking, and that's all about it. And where've you been? Tell us . . . don't be shy . . . tell us. You're a good hand at a tale."

"Ivan Afanasiitch, mercy on us!" wailed Onisim.

"To be sure. To be sure I will," replied Pyetushkov with a vague wave of his hand. "I'll have mercy on you, and forgive you. I forgive every one, I forgive you, and Vassilissa I forgive, and every one, every one. Yes, my lad, I've been drinking. . . . Dri−ink−ing, lad. . . . Who's that?" he cried suddenly, pointing to the door into the passage; "who's there?"

"Nobody's there," Onisim answered hastily: "who should be there? . . . where are you going?"

"No, no," repeated Pyetushkov, breaking away from Onisim, "let me go, I saw—don't you talk to me,—I saw there, let me go. . . . Vassilissa!" he shrieked all at once.

Pyetushkov turned pale.

"Well . . . well, why don't you come in?" he said at last. "Come in, Vassilissa, come in. I'm very glad to see you, Vassilissa."

Vassilissa glanced at Onisim and came into the room. Pyetushkov went nearer to her. . . . He heaved deep, irregular breaths. Onisim watched him. Vassilissa stole timid glances at both of them.

"Sit down, Vassilissa," Ivan Afanasiitch began again: "thanks for coming. Excuse my being . . . what shall I say? . . . not quite fit to be seen. I couldn't foresee, couldn't really, you'll own that yourself. Come, sit down, see here, on the sofa . . . So . . . I'm expressing myself all right, I think."

Vassilissa sat down.

"Well, good day to you," Ivan Afanasiitch pursued. "Come, how are you? what have you been doing?"

"I'm well, thank God, Ivan Afanasiitch. And you?"

"I? as you see! A ruined man. And ruined by whom? By you, Vassilissa. But I'm not angry with you. Only I'm a ruined man. You ask him. (He pointed to Onisim.) Don't you mind my being drunk. I'm drunk, certainly; only I'm a ruined man. That's why I'm drunk, because I'm a ruined man."

"Lord have mercy on us, Ivan Afanasiitch!"

"A ruined man, Vassilissa, I tell you. You may believe me. I've never deceived you. Oh, and how's your aunt?"

"Very well, Ivan Afanasiitch. Thank you."

Pyetushkov began swaying violently.

"But you're not quite well to−day, Ivan Afanasiitch. You ought to lie down."

"No, I'm quite well, Vassilissa. No, don't say I'm not well; you'd better say I've fallen into evil ways, lost my morals. That's what would be just. I won't dispute that."

Ivan Afanasiitch gave a lurch backwards. Onisim ran forward and held his master up.

"And who's to blame for it? I'll tell you, if you like, who's to blame. I'm to blame, in the first place. What ought I to have said? I ought to have said to you: Vassilissa, I love you. Good—well, will you marry me? Will you? It's true you're a working girl, granted; but that's all right. It's done sometimes. Why, there, I knew a fellow, he got married like that. Married a Finnish servant−girl. Took and married her. And you'd have been happy with me. I'm a good−natured chap, I am! Never you mind my being drunk, you look at my heart. There, you ask this . . . fellow. So, you see, I turn out to be in fault. And now, of course, I'm a ruined man."

Ivan Afanasiitch was more and more in need of Onisim's support.

"All the same, you did wrong, very wrong. I loved you, I respected you . . . what's more, I'm ready to go to church with you this minute. Will you? You've only to say the word, and we'll start at once. Only you wounded me cruelly . . . cruelly. You might at least have turned me away yourself—but through your aunt, through that fat female! Why, the only joy I had in life was you. I'm a homeless man, you know, a poor lonely creature! Who is there now to be kind to me? who says a kind word to me? I'm utterly alone. Stript bare as a crow. You ask this . . ." Ivan Afanasiitch began to cry. "Vassilissa, listen what I say to you," he went on: "let me come and see you as before. Don't be afraid. I'll be . . . quiet as a mouse. You can go and see whom you like, I'll—be all right: not a word, no protests, you know. Eh? do you agree? If you like, I'll go down on my knees." (And Ivan Afanasiitch

bent his knees, but Onisim held him up under the arms.) "Let me go! It's not your business! It's a matter of the happiness of a whole life, don't you understand, and you hinder . . ."

Vassilissa did not know what to say.

"You won't . . . Well, as you will! God be with you. In that case, good−bye! Good−bye, Vassilissa. I wish you all happiness and prosperity . . . but I . . . but I . . ."

And Pyetushkov sobbed violently. Onisim with all his might held him up from behind . . . first his face worked, then he burst out crying. And Vassilissa cried too.

XI

TEN years later, one might have met in the streets of the little town of O—— a thinnish man with a reddish nose, dressed in an old green coat with a greasy plush collar. He occupied a small garret in the baker's shop, with which we are familiar. Praskovia Ivanovna was no longer of this world. The business was carried on by her niece, Vassilissa, and her husband, the red−haired, dim−eyed baker, Demofont. The man in the green coat had one weakness: he was over fond of drink. He was, however, always quiet when he was tipsy. The reader has probably recognised him as Ivan Afanasiitch.

1847.