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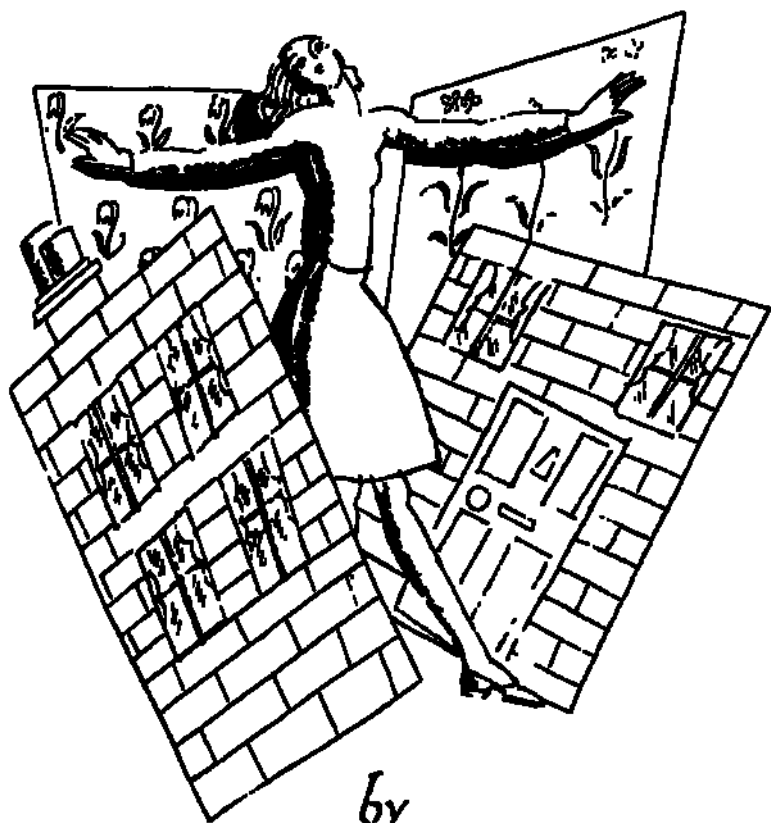
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# OUT OF CHILDHOOD



by

**IRINA ODCEVTZEVA**

*translated and illustrated by*

**DONIA NACHSHEN**

*Constable & Co. Ltd. 70-72 Orange St. London W.C. 2*



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PUBLISHED BY  
*Constable & Company Limited*  
*London W.C.2*

BOMBAY  
CALCUTTA MADRAS

*Oxford University*  
*Press*

TORONTO  
*The Macmillan Company*  
*of Canada, Limited*

NEW YORK  
*Richard R. Smith Inc*

*First published* 1930

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY  
RICHARD CLAY & SONS, LTD.  
*Bungay\ Suffolk*

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# FIRST PART



## CHAPTER I

IT was so hot that the windows were left open all night. Through the garden floated the hot July wind, lifting the dry sand, rustling the leaves of the trees, and clattering the window-shutters. In her sleep it seemed to Louka that it was the rain beating down on the roof. She opened her eyes for a moment. The curtains fluttered in the wind like two black wings. Louka sighed and fell asleep. The damp hair clung to her forehead. She felt hot and languid and stifling. She threw her arms wide open and again opened her eyes. A little round rosy moon rolled through the clouds like a child's ball. The dark wings fluttered at the window. And somewhere quite near, in the very garden, in the very bed, in her very heart, triumphant and disquieting, boomed the sea.

The sea? From where? For there is no sea here. But the waves murmured more and more softly, more and more disquieting.

How melancholy, how good. The pillow is wet with tears. Never was there so strange, so sad a night. Louka stretches out her hand and drinks some water. And again the moon and the noisy wings and the sea, and the tangled stifling dreams.



*The curtains fluttered in the wind like two black wings.*

A grey, pale dawn. Through the open window the cold drifts in. The sky is almost white. From the leaves the dew falls noiselessly. The rose-bushes slowly whiten. A mist is rising and in the sky fly misty clouds.

Louka shivers and wants to draw the sheet up higher, but it is hard to stir. She lies quietly, without moving. How strange, how mysterious everything is around her. The garden and the room. A pale blue dress hangs helplessly from a chair. Some stockings are curled up like snakes on the carpet. By the other wall, on the bed, sleeps Vera. Her mouth is half-opened but her breathing

cannot be heard. It seems as though she is dead. From beneath the red coverlet a little foot sticks out, and the foot also seems dead.

Louka lies without stirring. Never has she felt so sad. In her heart is a light cold trembling, and such emptiness, such weakness.

The leaves glitter with dew. The roses rock quietly to and fro. The gate creaks. In the white mist one cannot see who has come into the garden, one can only hear the sand whispering under someone's feet. Louka stretches out her neck. Here he is under the fir-trees. Arsenin? Yes, it is he. He is wearing a grey suit. His face is sorrowful. His black eyes gaze absently into space. His black hair is smoothly brushed.

And behind his shoulders are huge black wings.

He walks slowly through the garden and without stopping, without turning round, he climbs the terrace and walks into the house.

"Arsenin Nikolaevich!" Louka wants to cry, but she has no voice.

The trees lightly shake from side to side. From the leaves the dew falls noiselessly. Only the garden, only the sky, only silence.

A cold wind blows into the room and stirs the curtains. What was that? . . . What . . . ?

Quiet. It is absolutely quiet, and her eyelids close again. Nothing, it was nothing. Only the mist. . . . Only a dream. . . .

When Louka at last wakes up completely, through the windows she sees just an ordinary sunny morning.

Time to get up. Louka jumps up and throws her nightdress on to the carpet.

"Mamma," she cries suddenly, "Mamma."

The door opens and Ekaterina Lvovna hurries in.

"Louka, what has happened?" . . .

"Mamma," screams Louka, "Fm ill, terribly ill."

"Why, why, what's the matter with you?"

"Fm ill; Fm dying, Mamma."

Ekaterina Lvovna kisses her wet cheeks.

"No, you are not. It's only that you're grown up now, my little Louka."

Here Vera wakes, pulls herself up and sits on the bed.

"Why are you making a noise again, Louka? You never let anyone have a decent sleep."

"I'm ill, Vera; I'm dying."

Vera looks perplexedly at her sister and at her mother, and then laughs loudly, shaking her tousled head.

"You're a fool, Louka. Such a fool! When will you become a little cleverer?"

Ekaterina Lvovna straightens the pillow and strokes Louka's head.

" Well, good-bye, my big daughter. Lie quietly until breakfast-time. Sleep a little if you can. I'll come back soon. Til bring you some sweets."

Vera shrugs her shoulders. She looks like an Esquimau in her wrap with its big hood.

" Are you coming soon, Mamma ? I have to go for my bath at seven. We are at Mont-Dore to take the baths, aren't we ? "

The door closes behind them. Louka is alone. She lies on her back and looks out of the window. Through the window she sees two large bushes of white roses, some fir-trees and the blue sky. The old gardener in his straw hat and long striped apron is trimming the roses with large shears. A brown dog runs across the path. Louka lifts her head, so as to see the pond; it is there, just by the fir-trees. But the pond is not to be seen and she is afraid to get up. She lies listening to that new something that is taking place in her. In her heart is an extraordinary lightness. She wants to get up, to run out there beyond the pond on to the wide road, to climb on to the highest hill, the one with the waterfall.

But to get up is dangerous. She feels so fragile. If she were to fall she would break like a china cup. Her motionless hands lie stretched out on the white coverlet. She must not even move her fingers. Her knees are close together. Mamma said, " Lie quietly." And Mamma also said that Louka was

grownup. Grownup. . . . That means that childhood is over. Well, what of it? Thank goodness. She is not sorry. It is all imagination about "Golden childhood/"

At home in Russia the house was large and old. Beyond the windows lay the white sparkling snow, even in the evenings it made the rooms light. Louka sat in the drawing-room on the cold, slippery floor. The lustres hanging from the chandelier tinkled; a dark empty mirror glimmered} and, beyond the window, in the frozen sky wandered the moon with the stars, like a hen with her chicks. Louka was afraid. She pressed more closely to the cold black foot of the piano. And suddenly the piano was also an enemy, and soon it would rattle its lid, open its mouth and show all its big teeth at her. The door of the dining-room is open. Over the table hangs a lamp, kindly and cosy. Hangs there and peacefully drinks kerosene. A warm yellow circle is thrown on to the table-cloth. At the table Mamma reads a book. It is so easy to get up and to run in there. But Louka sits in the darkness, shivering with fright, and does not answer, even when she is called.

Louka trusted nobody. Grown-ups were cunning, it was no use expecting any kindness from them. Yes, and even things were nearly all tunning and malicious.

Then it became easier, when she understood that

neither the coffee-pot nor the clock, even if they wanted to very much, could do her any harm.

And Mamma said, "Louka is a madcap, she's plucky and jolly. She should have been born a boy."

Louka carefully sighs and carefully moves on to her side.

How good to be grown-up. . . . How good to be in love. . . . Arsenin. . . .

## CHAPTER II

VERA is looking at herself in the mirror.

"Louka, have a look. Is anything sticking out?"

From beneath Vera's lace dress at the back protrudes a comic little pink tail. Louka sees it perfectly well, but just you tell Vera, and she will begin to sew and to undress and to dress again. There would be no getting out of the house under an hour.

"No, nothing is showing."

Louka is carefully tying a large bow. Her hair is short and the bow holds insecurely. She turns round carefully, so that the bow should not fall.

"Why do you hold your head like a circus-horse?" Vera says fretfully. "It looks as though you've used my face-powder again."

"No, I haven't; what are you talking about? My word of honour."

Louka quickly wipes her cheeks and nose. But Vera's thoughts are already far from her. Vera\* is putting on her hat.

"How pretty you are," flatters Louka.

Vera is pleased.

" Well, come along. Mamma, are you ready ? "  
Ekaterina Lvovna comes in wearing a mauve dress. Louka claps her hands.

" Oh, how beautiful! "

Ekaterina Lvovna smiles timidly.

" Is it all right, Verochka ? "

Vera coldly inspects her mother.

" Yes, although . . . I said that lilac would be better. It's too young for you."

Ekaterina Lvovna is quite upset.

" I bought the material in the evening. In artificial light it *is* almost lilac."

" And it's too short again."

" Do you think so, Verochka ? It can be lengthened. The hem is deep."

Louka blushes at hearing this sort of talk to their mother.

" It's not true, Mamma. It's not true. She's only jealous."

" Louka, stop ! What foolishness."

Vera shrugs her shoulders.

" Well, are we going out or not ? "

They sit down at a table in the park. A band is playing not far off. The white and rose-coloured dresses of the women glow like bushes of flowers, and over them, like butterflies, flash little bright sunshades.

Louka holds her head carefully high so that the

bow should not fall off. Because of this, she feels that she looks very serious. That is as it should be. She is grown up now.

Screwing up her eyes Vera inspects the people walking about. "How hot it is," she says crossly.

Louka looks round. "Arsenin Nikolaevich I"

She turns her head so quickly that the bow dances on her hair.

Vera, with studied indifference, stirs the sugar in her cup. "Don't turn round. How many times have you been told?"

Arsenin Nikolaevich walks up to them. His smooth black hair shines like patent leather. His long legs take great sure strides.

Louka's heart beats loudly and at every heart-beat the bow trembles on her hair.

Arsenin Nikolaevich sits down at their table. He smiles calmly. "You know, I'm going away in three days."

"So soon?" . . . . Louka drops her spoon. A clot of strawberry ice-cream falls on her white dress.

Vera raises her cup to her lips. Her hands shake a little. In a minute she will swallow the coffee and choke. But she puts the cup back on to the saucer and looks at Arsenin from beneath her long painted eyelashes and the brim of her rose-coloured hat.

"So soon?" . . . she asks softly and smiles.  
"What a pity!" . . .



*Loathsome Vera ! Why does she deserve such happiness ?*

After the concert they go home to the pension as usual, Vera and Arsenin in front and Louka and her mother behind.

Lucky Vera! she is walking next to Arsenin. She can hear what he says. She can see a part of Vera's cheek and the nape of her neck beneath the rose-coloured hat. Vera's hand in its white glove is plucking at the flounce of her dress. Loathsome Vera I Why does she deserve such happiness ? She does not even appreciate it.

"How you have shot up, Louka," Ekaterina Lvovna is saying, preoccupied. "Will it really be

necessary to have a new coat made for you? . . . Your old one will have to be altered. I wonder whether the sleeves and the hem can be lengthened. Otherwise, where is the money coming from?" . . .

Louka does not answer. She does not even hear. She is looking at Arsenin, at his shining black hair, at his grey coat. On the sand of the path, wet from recent watering, are plainly imprinted the footprints of his white shoes. Louka puts her foot on his footprint. In her throat something beats like an imprisoned bird. In her mouth is a salty taste, and she finds it hard to breathe. In Louka's language this is called "heart in your throat." It has happened to her before, but only from crying. From happiness, this is the first time, Louka stops and seizes her mother's hand.

"Mamma, oh Mammochka. . . . Listen." . . .

"If it's lengthened with blue velvet, it will not be at all bad. What do you think?"

"Yes, all right, with velvet. Certainly with velvet!" cries Louka, hopping on one leg. The bow, finally unfastened, falls to the ground.

"Louka, you're a big girl! People will see you. It's time you remembered."

On the stairs they are saying good-bye. Arsenin lives on the second floor and they live on the first.

"Good-bye until this evening." . . .

The door shuts. They are at home.

Vera throws her hat on to the table. Louka

catches it. " Not on the table. It's a sign that there'll be no money."

Vera tears the hat from Louka's fingers.

" Don't you dare to touch it!" and turns her back to her.

Louka tries to kiss her sister.

" Don't be cross."

Vera stamps her foot.

" Clear out. Do you hear ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna looks at her, astonished.

" Vera, whatever are you angry about ? " . . .

" And what have I to be happy about ? Perhaps you'll tell me ? " . . .

Vera takes off her dress, sits on the bed and kicks off her shoes.

\*' There's another hole in my stocking."

" Whatever's the matter with you, Vera ? " asks Ekaterina Lvovna,

" What's the matter ?" says Vera violently. " You ask what's the matter ? Look at yourself in the glass. Then you will understand."

Ekaterina Lvovna's eyes become round. Her eyebrows go up.

" What are you talking about, Vera ? I don't understand." . . .

" You don't understand ! What do you look like ? Shingled hair, made-up face, hat like a girl's, dress up to the knees. Is that how the mother of a grown-up daughter should look ? "

" Verochka, how can you ? I'm only thirty-nine. It's rather early for me to become an old woman. And you know yourself the little I have seen of life. We lived in the country in Russia. You and Louka were always ailing. Papa . . ."

" Yes, Papa. You should at least remember that Papa was shot by the Bolsheviks."

Ekaterina Lvovna's hands flutter helplessly.

" Vera, how can you say such things ? . . . Don't I honour Papa's memory ? "

" You . . . you interfere with my getting married. That's what you do."

" I ? I interfere ? " Tears are trickling down Ekaterina Lvovna's cheeks.

" But, then, strictly speaking," observes Louka, " if Mother must not look pretty because Papa was shot by the Bolsheviks, you ought not to get married either, or want to,"

" Louka, don't meddle in what does not concern you. Go and play in the garden," says Ekaterina Lvovna severely.

Louka obediently goes out of the room, but the door opens again.

" Old maid! " shouts Louka, and runs as fast as her legs will take her through the corridor. But there is no chase. Vera is busy explaining things to her mother.

" Yes, you do—you interfere with my getting married. What do people take us three for ? And



*Petersburg . . . could she ever forget? . . . Petersburg*



that monkey Louka with her bow in her hair. And when you are at a ball you dance more than I do. You keep off my admirers/'

" Vera, how untruthful you are. Oh God! And I lived only for you two."

Ekaterina Lvovna is crying, her face looks pitiful and old. " God help me ! " she sobs.

Vera sits on the bed, wearily and crossly plucking at her stocking.

" I'm sick of all this. Please stop. If you don't want to help me, then you needn't."

Ekaterina Lvovna wipes her eyes.

" What can I do ? . . . If everyone were as nervous as you before getting married. I was in your position myself once."

" Yes, but you had a dowry."

" Am I to blame that the Bolsheviks . . . ? "

" Nobody is blaming you, but don't interfere."

" All right, Verochka. Don't be angry," says Ekaterina Lvovna, making peace. " I shall try. You will see. In Paris."

But Vera shakes her head.

" No, not in Paris. Here."

" Here ? Why ? What young men are there here ? Douchelle ? . . . , But Frenchmen don't marry girls without money. There is no one else."

Vera seddens.

" What do you mean, no one ? How about Arsenin Nikolaevich ? " . . .

" Him ? . . ." Ekaterina Lvovna frowns.  
" What sort of husband would he make ? "

" Why shouldn't he be a good husband ? "

" If you are talking seriously. . . . Why, we don't even know who he is. I have heard things about him. . . . I cannot repeat them to you." . . .

" Yes, you can. Tell me. Tell me at once ! "

" All right, I will. Don't be so excited. He spends enormously and yet he does no work. I have been told he has in Paris. . . . Some old American woman or other. . . ."

Vera clenches her fists.

" Be quiet. Don't you dare to repeat such things ! It's a lie, a lie ! "

Ekaterina Lvovna looks at her daughter, startled.

" Vera. . . . Can you really . . . ? "

Suddenly Vera throws her thin bare arms round her mother's neck and hides her face on her breast. Her tears trickle down, removing the paint from her eyelashes, and fall in brown stains on the mauve silk.

" Yes, it's true ! . . . I love him . . ." sobs Vera. " I love him, and if he doesn't marry me I'll die."

### CHAPTER III

VERA had gone out with Arsenin to buy some shoes for the dance. They had not taken Louka, because Louka gets in the way. And they are not taking Louka to the dance, also because Louka gets in the way.

It was a misty, windy day. Louka walked quietly round the pond. On to the yellow sand of the path a big black snail had crawled out.

" Little fool! where are you going? You will be crushed here. Go back and live happily." . . .

That snail crawls about and thinks of nothing, and does not know how difficult it is to be a woman. Louka sighed. It isn't so cheerful to be grown up. . . . It's not much fun to be in love. Arsenin is going away in two days.

On the bench sits a grey-haired lady, the wife of Doctor Bartho, and is knitting a dreadful red muffler. Louka wants to walk by unnoticed, but Madame Bartho calls her.

" Sit down next to me." Madame Bartho strokes Louka's fair hair. " How pretty you are."

Louka frowns. She is not a lap-dog that she should be stroked.

" Tell me about Russia."

" I don't remember anything about Russia."

" But still, you're Russian after all."

" I don't remember. I was quite little when we left."

" So you don't remember anything ? . . . Something at least. I am very interested in your unhappy motherland."

Louka shrugs her shoulders.

" In winter in Russia it is cold, and in summer it is hot, and there are many flowers."

" Well, what else, what else ? . . . And Petersburg ? " . . .

But Louka shakes her head. " I don't remember."

" Very well then. Go away, obstinate little girl. If you don't wish to tell me anything." . . . Madame Bartho looks offended. " Go and play."

Louka jumps up. " Thank God she's let me go. Why should she worry me ? "

Louka goes beyond the pond under the dark swaying fir-trees. She docs not like to remind herself of Russia. Does she remember ? How could she forget ? . . . So painful . . . so sad it was. But one could not talk about it to a foolish strange woman. Even without that Louka feels heavy-hearted enough to-day, and here . . . •.

She stops and looks at the low, cloudy sky, at the sleepy water.

Petersburg . . . could she ever forget ? . . .  
Petersburg . . .

And she shuts her eyes.

Clean, white, sparkling snow. Everything is white, and everything sparkles. The streets, the roofs of the houses, the air. And the sky is bright blue and in it is an enormous frosty, rosy sun. Along the wide, straight, snowy streets fly trotting-horses beneath crimson and blue nets. " Look out! " cry the red-cheeked coachmen. In small light sledges sit ladies in sable and ermine coats. Red roses lie on their knees. Red lips smile. Large, dark eyes gaze dreamily into space.

On the pavement walk officers, their swords dangling and their spurs ringing. Tall and handsome and erect. On their brilliant copper helmets horse-tails are waving. The sun plays on their golden epaulettes.

And Louka is also flying in a narrow sledge down the wide, snowy street, breathing the frosty sparkling air, and the sweet scent of the roses and of her aunt's perfume.

" Are you comfortable, Louka ? You're not cold ? " Large grey eyes come nearer to her, warm hands embrace her. The snow flies in lumps from beneath the horses' hoofs. The wind whistles in her ears. DOWN the wide street they fly towards the river.

" This is the Neva," says her aunt. " This is the Neva, Louka."

Louka wants to reply, but she cannot from wonder, from happiness. This is the Neva.

The sun sparkles, the granite sparkles, the transparent blue ice sparkles. And over the blue ice skate little, light elves. On their feet are silver skates. They dance, and push and twirl about, holding each other's hands, and suddenly they run in all directions. They laugh, silver bells tinkle, violins sing.

The sledges stop. Her aunt takes Louka by the hand. And here they are on the blue ice. The elves fly to them, surround them; they are saying something, but the little silver bells tinkle so loudly that it is impossible to make out what they say. A dark-eyed, thin little elf in a three-cornered hat puts Louka on a chair mounted on silver runners and Louka flies with him along the blue ice. Faster and faster. She can hear his breathing and, turning round, she can see his dark, merry eyes. She feels afraid, yet she is in ecstasy. Where are they flying to? . . . Where . . . Perhaps into an ice-hole, perhaps into Paradise. . . .

But she and her aunt are in the narrow sledge again and the snow flies in lumps from beneath the horses' hoofs.

" Did you enjoy it, Louka ? " And again the scent of roses and perfume and the touch of warm hands.

And in the evening Louka stands in a great brightly-lit hall. She is wearing a white dress and her hair is in curls. And around her are elves, the same elves who were skating on the blue ice, though now they are without their silver skates. But the little silver bells are still ringing. The elves are twirling about on the parquet floor and Louka is twirling with them. She is dancing with a dark-eyed elf. He smiles at her, takes her hand and leads her from the hall. They walk through a dark corridor. Again she is afraid. Where is he taking her? . . . Where? . . . But the elf is silent. He pushes open a door. They are in a room full of flowers. Flowers on the tables, on the floor, everywhere. How bright it is, how warm. And birds are singing, little red and yellow birds. The elf and Louka sit down next to each other on a low divan.

"What is your name?" he asks.

"Louka," she answers softly.

"And mine is Arsenin."

"Arsenin," she repeats, still more softly.

He kisses her.

"I love you, Louka."

The birds sing loudly. From the hall floats the sound of tinkling silver bells. She sees only his dark, shining eyes, his dark, shining hair.

"I shall marry you, Louka, when you are grown-

up. Don't forget. My name is Arsenin and you must wait for me." . . .

• • • • •

The wind rocks the fir-trees. In the pond the water glimmers dimly. Louka walks on further.

And perhaps nothing of this happened and she imagined it all. But then she had met Arsenin already. And he, of course, recognised her. For the time being he says nothing and she also says nothing. But it will be quite soon now. One has only to wait quietly. . . .

Louka walks on to the gymnastic ground. On the trapeze sits red-haired Rene, the son of Madame Bartho.

" You can't do this/' he shouts to Louka teasingly. " You're a coward. You're a girl."

" Are you talking to me ? " Louka disdainfully shrugs her shoulders. " I'll show you soon whether I can or not." She tucks up her skirt and climbs the steps.

" Here ! Look ! "

From love, from sorrow, Louka feels extraordinarily brave and agile. It is fun and just a tiny bit dangerous. If you overbalance, you fly down, and that is the end. . . .

She swings herself on the trapeze. The lady with the little dog looks at her through a lorgnette. " How graceful she is," she says to her husband. " How daring."

Rene's face lengthens.

" Oh, that's nothing. Even so, you're only a girl."

" It's nothing, is it ? And what about this ? "

The tops of the fir-trees flash before her eyes, the green earth rocks below. Louka stands up to her full height on the trapeze and, swinging herself up high, flourishing her hands, with a cry she throws herself down head first.

Louka hangs, holding on to the trapeze with one foot, and laughs loudly.

" Well, can you do that ? "

The conquered Rene applauds. The lady also applauds. And Louka is already sitting on the trapeze bowing in all directions.

The gate creaks. That is Vera returning with Arsenin. Very good, she is glad that he saw.

Vera runs up.

" Louka, you're mad. You'll break your neck. Get down ! "

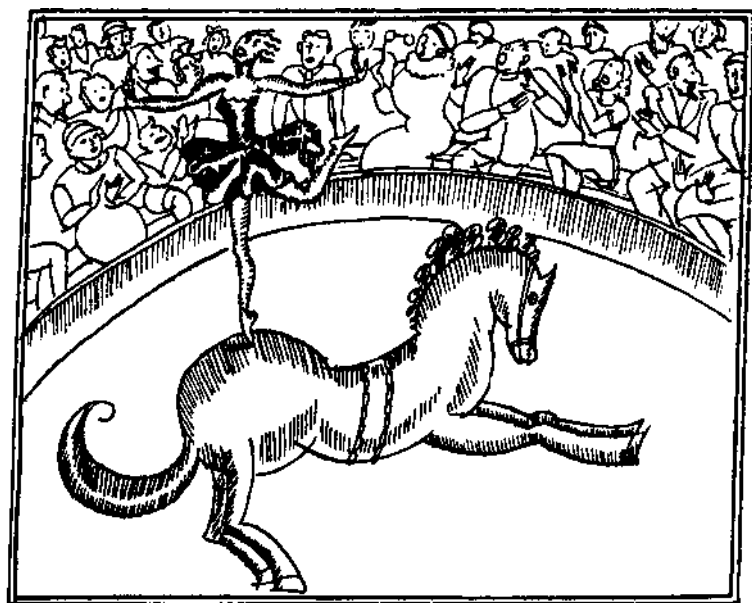
" In a minute." Louka mockingly waves her legs. " Just a little longer. I want to get into practice."

But Vera is angry.

" Loudmilla, get down at once ! "

Nothing to be done about it. Louka slides down the slippery post.

" The performance may now cease," says Vera mockingly. " One would think that you are some ' queen of the air.' "



*"If I don't get married, I'll join a circus and earn my living there"*

Louka looks at her sister benignly.

"It's no use your interfering, Verochka. If I don't get married, I'll join a circus and earn my living there. That's better than catching husbands. Now you could." . . .

But Vera interrupts her.

"Louka, your ears are dirty again. Go back and wash them at once !"

On the table lie six fat envelopes. Ekaterina Lvovna is addressing the last one. Since her Institute days, Ekaterina Lvovna has had a passion for correspondence.

"Well," she asks Vera. "Have you bought them ? "

Vera unties her parcel and lifts the lid of a box.

" Here they are," and triumphantly lifts out some rose-coloured satin shoes.

" Oh, what marvellous ones ! " exclaims Louka.  
" What beauties ! Show me ! Show me ! "

But Vera is already closing the box.

" It isn't your business. They're not yours."

Louka is offended.

" Do you think I'll eat them or what ? Show me."

" I won't. Go away."

Ekaterina Lvovna gathers up the envelopes from the table.

" The shoes really are exquisite. You will see them this evening on Vera, Louka."

Louka hugs her mother.

" And you are taking me to the ball ? I want to go so terribly."

Ekaterina Lvovna looks at Vera.

" What do you think ? Perhaps we could take her. She will just sit quietly. Will you promise, Louka ? "

Vera angrily pushes the chair.

" Either she or I. If we're going with her, then I'm staying at home. Perhaps you would like to go out with a whole brood ? All sizes to suit all tastes ? "

" I don't dance any worse than you do. It's no use giving yourself airs."

" In the first place, you dance like an elephant. In the second place, you're not going just the same. And don't disturb me. I'm reading."

" Yes, quite right. You are still too young, Louka. To-morrow I'll take you instead to the cinema." Ekaterina Lvovna strokes Louka's cheek.

" First you promise, and then you break your word."

" No, to-morrow for certain."

But Louka does not believe her.

" Then give me the money for the tickets first."

Ekaterina Lvovna takes ten francs from her handbag. Louka locks them up. She does not feel so insulted now. She cannot very well sulk after this.

Below, in the hall, the gong is being beaten deafeningly and continuously. Ekaterina Lvovna gets up.

" To-day we must dine a little earlier, so that you should not have to hurry with your dressing, Vera."

" You go," says Louka. " I'm just going to change my dress. This one is all creased. You will not have time to finish your soup before I'm down."

Vera opens the door.

" What vanity. Don't mess about too long. We won't wait for you."

## CHAPTER IV

" V E R A , may I help you ? "

Vera looks at her sister with astonishment.

" You are a strange child, Louka. One moment you're insolent, and the next moment you're so helpful. All right. Sit down quietly, while I wash."

When Louka was a child, it was a fete-day for her when Mamma dressed for a ball.

Louka used to sit in a large arm-chair in the corner and watch with wide-open eyes.

In Mamma's bedroom three lamps were burning, and it smelt quite out of the ordinary—of perfume, powder and woman's hair. Everywhere were ribbons, lace and flowers. On the bed lay a dark red velvet dress. Its long train, like a dragon's tail, unfurled itself on the carpet, and here just by the dragon's tail, like two frightened little birds, stood a pair of bronze shoes.

Mamma, in a rustling petticoat, her white shoulders bare, ran from the dressing-table to the wardrobe, and back again, lifted her arms high and fastened her long plait. The maid in a white apron was heating some curling-tongs over the

spirit-lamp. Mamma was upset. She had spilt some powder on the carpet. Louka breathed more and more evenly. Her eyelids closed, she fell asleep. . . .

Water is running noisily from the nickel tap. Vera, wearing only a chemise, bends over the basin and soaps her shoulders, her neck, wipes her ears. A white froth falls in flakes to the floor. Vera wipes herself with a rough towel. Then she sits down before the dressing-table to do her hair. She smooths her hair at great length, pours brilliantine on her head. Thoughtfully she looks at herself in the mirror.

Louka watches her from the corner.

" Wash yourself, wash yourself, comb your hair, comb your hair. But you haven't got your shoes/"

" Louka, what are you mumbling about ? "

" I ? You imagined it. "

On the nape of Vera's neck a little tuft sticks out. Vera again smooths it down with the hair brush, pours brilliantine on it.

" You should ask Arsenin Nikolaevich what he does to his hair. It is like patent leather/"

Vera irritably waves aside her suggestion.

" Don't interfere." And she ties a white handkerchief round her head with the knot behind, like an old peasant woman. And because of\* this, she suddenly has a round Russian face with a Russian peasant's eyes.

" All you need now, Vera, is to jump into a sarafan and to sing <sup>c</sup> *Ach vi sew, mqyi sent'* " \*

But Vera's thoughts are not on singing. Vera is nervous.

" The chemise. Get me the chemise. No, the other one. The silk one. Oh, how slow you are ! "

Louka bustles about her.

" Open the perfume. Powder my shoulders."

Louka flicks Vera's shoulders with a large swansdown puff. The powder rises like a rosy cloud.

" More evenly, more evenly ! Now on the nape of my neck. Now on my shoulders."

Vera again sits down before the dressing-table and unties the handkerchief.

The shining dark hair seems to be glued on to the small round head. Vera smiles. The rest is simple. She carefully darkens her eyelashes and rouges her lips.

Louka watches her. How pretty she is. What large eyes, what a white neck, what beautifully curved eyebrows. Louka's bosom swells with tenderness and pride. Look at Vera! Look at what kind of sister she has.

And yet she's a witch, Louka remembers suddenly. And all the pride and tenderness immediately vanish. Yes, a witch.

\* Popular Russian folk song.

Vera, smiling dreamily, pulls on her rose-coloured silk stockings.

On the bed, like a pile of whipped cream, lies a white tulle dress. It becomes difficult to breathe the perfume-drenched air. Soon, soon will begin the interesting part.

" Louka, the shoes."

Louka goes to the table.

" They're not here," she says with astonishment. " But you put them on the table before dinner."

" Oh, I don't know. Look for them."

Louka searches the whole room. The shoes are nowhere to be found. Perhaps the maid has been tidying up. They ring for the maid. No, the maid has not seen any box. But she will look for it.

Vera has red spots on her cheeks. Her lips tremble.

" What can have happened ? Where can the shoes have got to ? Look again, Louka."

Louka opens the drawers of the chest, rattles the doors of the wardrobe, throws underlinen and dresses on to the floor, rummages among them, and even crawls under the bed.

" Can't find them anywhere," she sings out cheerfully from under there. " They're lost."

Ekaterina Lvovna comes in wearing a black dress, the décollete filled with lace.

" Is it all right like this, Vera ? I won't dance, I promise."

But Vera does not even look at her.

" The shoes are lost! " she sobs.

" Lost ? Impossible. We'll soon find them. Meanwhile put on your dress."

And again they ransack the room.

" Don't cry, Vera," advises Louka. " You'll look a fright. Your nose will be swollen."

" Nowhere to be found. Never mind. The old shoes are really not so bad," says her mother persuasively.

Vera stands before the mirror in her tulle dress and looks at her feet in despair.

" No, no. I'm not going. The heels are worn down, like a beggar's. Worse than a beggar's."

" Well, don't dance, and when you sit down, hide your feet under the chair," advises Louka.

" It's late. Powder your face and come. Honestly, it's not so noticeable. Don't be so upset." Ekaterina Lvovna re-arranges the flower on Vera's shoulder.

" But perhaps we'll still find them," sighs Vera, " Let's look again."

" I'll move the wardrobe in a minute," offers Louka obligingly. " There's nowhere else. We've searched everywhere."

" I was so delighted. Such pretty ones, and they cost two hundred francs. No, I'm not going."

Someone knocks at the door.

" Not ready yet ? " asks Arsenin Nikolaevich.  
" You know, it's eleven o'clock."

" In a minute, in a minute. Wait a moment."  
Vera quickly powders her face. " Tell me, Louka,  
can you see that I've been crying ? "

" Of course you can see. But not much. One  
might think that you have a cold in the head. Only  
don't forget. Don't dance, and draw your feet  
under the chair."

A noise of feet clattering down the stairs. Three  
shadows, two dark ones and one light one, walk  
across the garden past the white-rose-bushes, past  
the gleaming pond, beneath the tall fir-trees.  
Louka leans out of the window.

" Good-bye ! Enjoy yourselves ! Vera, hide  
your feet, don't forget! "

The gate creaks. They have gone.

Louka stands in the devastated room in the  
midst of dresses, books and linen lying untidily  
on the floor.

" That's what you deserve. That's what you  
deserve. Witch ! "

She quietly goes into the corridor, looks around  
her to make sure that no one can see, carefully lifts  
the lid of the large household chest and lifts out the  
box containing Vera's shoes. Then she returns  
to her room.

" Here you are, little pink shoes. How do you  
do ? " Her fingers travel carefully over the rosy



*" How pretty she is" they whisper from every side.*

satin. " I have disappointed you. You wanted to go to the ball to-night and I stopped you. But anyway, we'll dance a little."

Louka puts on the rose-coloured shoes and twirls about the room, singing. How easy it is to dance. The pink shoes seem to move of their own accord over the floor, like in the story by Andersen. Louka stops to catch her breath, and holds on to the wardrobe mirror. What fun ! From the mirror Louka's face, nearly a woman's face, looks at her with big grey eyes. Such fun !

The rosy ostrich feathers of the fan sway to and

fro. Louka smiles absently, enigmatically, as a woman should smile at a ball. Her wide silk dress rustles softly. Music, flowers, shining parquet. . . . Louka walks through the hall. " How pretty she is, how charming/' they whisper from every side. " She is the queen of the ball." . . .

Oh, what fun. Louka shakes her head and laughs out loud. And Vera is there in her old shoes !

## CHAPTER V

A DARKENING sky and high dark hills. On the right a wood of young saplings and the grass, on the left the cliffs. And from the very highest cliff the waterfall rushes noisily. The cliff appears to be quite lilac. From the waterfall the spray lit by the setting sun rises in transparent columns. The noise of the water mingles with the noise of the motor cars.

Louka sits next to Arsenin on the grass by the roadside. Near by lies his motor-cycle.

" You were not shaken, Louka ? "

" No, not a bit."

Louka strokes her bare knees. Her legs have gone to sleep, but she is ashamed to admit it. Silently she gazes at the wide dusty road.

" Why are you so quiet ? I'm not used to that with you."

" You're going away to-morrow."

" Well, what of it ? "

" I feel sad."

He takes her hand.

" Deaf Louka, it is always sad to part with friends. Believe me, I also feel sad. But what

can one do? One must . . ." He smiles. "I nearly forgot I've bought some chocolate for you."

"Thank you." Louka takes the bar, tears off the silver paper, and puts a little piece of chocolate into her mouth. From the sweet taste her nose begins to itch, her eyelashes twitter. Louka swallows the chocolate. Tears run down her cheeks.

"I feel sad."

"What's this, Louka? Don't cry. You mustn't."

But Louka is already sobbing loudly, hiding her face in her hands.

"I feel sad."

Arsenin looks upset.

"Louka, Louka, stop. Dear little Louka, stop."

Louka raises her head. Her left cheek is smudged with chocolate.

"Kiss me, and I won't cry any more."

He bends towards her, and his lips carefully touch her wet, chocolate-smudged cheek.

"No, not like that. On my mouth. Otherwise, I'll begin crying again." And Louka begins to sob loudly.

"You're out of your mind," he says, startled, and kisses her childish tear-salt lips.

She sighs and shuts her eyes.

"Again, again; put your arms round me."

"You're silly."

Louka puts her head on his shoulder.

" No, I'm not silly. Only I'm grown up now, and yet you take me for a little girl. I'm quite grown up."

" Yes, of course," he agrees, afraid to argue, " You're grown up."

She sighs deeply and presses more closely to him.

" Kiss me once more."

" It's time to go home. They will miss you," he says timidly.

Louka jumps up.

" Yes, it's time to go. I ran off on the sly; there'll be another scandal. But kiss me once more. Listen . . . you said yourself that I'm grown up. I shall wait for you to-night in our room. Come into our garden. I shall come out to you through the window."

He lifts up the motor-cycle.

" Come, Louka."

" I'll wait for you. You will come ? Promise."

She skilfully jumps on to the back of the saddle. The motor-cycle flies along the road, noisily bumping up and down.

" I'll wait for you," shrieks Louka. " Promise." Arsenin turns round to her.

" Don't chatter. You'll bite your tongue." . . .

Louka lies in bed listening to Vera's breathing. Is she asleep ? No, she does not seem to be asleep

yet. And how is she to keep herself from falling asleep? She pinches her hand, widely opens her sleepy eyes. Vera breathes more and more calmly, more and more evenly.

"Vera," Louka calls softly.

There is no reply. Louka cautiously gets out of bed on to the floor. From the hook she takes down Vera's bright silk dressing-gown and bends down to look for Vera's slippers. Then she quietly walks to the window, moves the arm-chair up to it, and arranges the folds of her dressing-gown. The moonlight falls straight on her.

This is how he will see her soon, so exquisite, almost transparent. In the middle of the night, at the open window, bathed in moonlight. . . .

Only it is a pity that she is bobbed and that she cannot let her hair down over her shoulders. It would be even more beautiful, more romantic.

The rose-bushes are dimly white. Beyond them sway the huge black fir-trees. In the pond, love-lorn and sad, sing the frogs. Across the sky, like a flock of wild geese, the clouds fly swiftly.

He will come soon. The gate will rattle noisily, footsteps will crunch on the path. He will walk past the whispering roses and will stand beneath her window. He will stretch out his hands and help her to jump into the garden. What, will he say to her? . . .

Her heart begins to beat. Why did she ask him?



*. . . . why does he not come more quickly ?*

Should she go back to bed, and pretend to be asleep ? No, he will come soon.

Over the moon fly the clouds. Darkness. Nothing can be seen. Perhaps he is already under the window. . . . But the clouds fly away. It is light again and he is not there. Why is he such a long time ? He will come, she does not doubt it. But why does he not come more quickly ?

Gradually both the moon and the sky become paler. The earth melts into the milky mist. From the pond a damp wind drifts across. Louka shivers. Should she wrap herself in the bed-cover ? No, she

must not. She would look like a bale. She wraps the folds of the little dressing-gown more closely around her. No, he must see her beautiful.

The sky becomes lighter and lighter, the moon can hardly be seen, so transparent has it become. Trailing through the garden, the white thin mist rises higher and higher. Silent are the frogs, silent the trees and silent the flowers. Motionless, breathless. So quiet it is, as only the daybreak can be quiet in the unearthly hour between morning and the darkness of the night.

Louka coughs. Startled she turns round. No, Vera is asleep. She does not hear. Why does he not come? . . . Why? . . . But he will come. . . . He cannot fail to come. . . .

In the neighbouring church rings a bell, slowly and rumbling. That means it is six o'clock. That means . . .

Louka quietly gets up, hangs up Vera's little dressing-gown, and lies down in bed.

That means he will not come. . . .

## CHAPTER VI

VERA is shaking Louka by the shoulder.

"Wake up !"

Louka raises a heavy head and rubs her eyes with her fists.

"What's the matter ?"

"We're going. You sleep like a marmot!"

"What's the time?"

"Nine."

"Nine !" . . . Louka sits up in bed, startled. At half-past nine Arsenin is leaving. She jumps out of bed. Where are her shoes ? Where is her dress ? . . . Quicker, quicker. Is it possible that she will not see him ? . . .

She runs through the corridor. From the hall fragments of talk float upwards.

"I hope that you will often visit us in Paris. My daughters have become so friendly with you." . . .

"Thank you; I shall be very glad."

Louka stops. No, she dare not go down. She will cry, out, she will faint and they will all see; they will understand. . . .

Still, she pushes the door. And nothing extra-

ordinary happens. Everything is ordinary, as usual. Arsenin stands in front of Ekaterina Lvovna. He is wearing a blue suit and a red tie. Louka sees everything, notices everything. She does not cry out, she does not faint.

" I was afraid that I would not be able to say good-bye to you, little sleepy-head." Arsenin presses her hand. " Well, grow big and clever. When you come to Paris we simply must go to the circus to see the performing lions."

In the garden in front of the terrace noisily pants the engine of a motor-car. The maid is packing his trunk in his room. Arsenin runs down the steps.

" Good-bye ! Pleasant journey ! . . . "

" Good-bye till Paris ! "

Louka looks at him. In a moment, in one moment, all will end. He will go away, and that will be all. And suddenly, tearing herself away from where she stands, she runs after him.

Arsenin is already sitting in the car.

" You——? " begins Louka hoarsely.

" You . . . did not come and I waited for you," she wants to say, but something in her throat prevents her.

Arsenin shakes her hand again.

" Yes, yes," he says, his white teeth flashing. " I won't forget. We shall go to see the lions, without fail. Good-bye ! "

The car stirs. There it is moving into the road.

There it is turning the corner. Vera waves her handkerchief.

"Gone away/<sup>5</sup> she says slowly. "Gone away. Still, we have to live and take the cure. Come, Mamma."

Louka remains on the terrace. Gone. . . .

What is to be done now? Is it worth doing anything? Where should she go? And why?

She walks slowly into the house and supports herself by the balustrade, climbs up the red-carpeted stairs, and then walks along the corridor. On either side are white doors, and on each door is a black number, 24, 26, 28. In the twenty-eighth—here—lived Arsenin. She tries the door-handle. The door is not locked. Louka stands in a strange room. It is not yet tidied. Everything is as he left it. On the table a pile of newspapers. A red coverlet hangs down from the bed. In the pillow is a hollow, the imprint of his head. The window is shut. It is stuffy in the sun-warmed room. Louka goes up to the bed, smooths the pillow, touches the sheet. Here he slept. She throws off the coverlet and lies down in the bed. The sheets are still warm and the smell of Egyptian tobacco and eau-de-Cologne makes her feel faint—a strange masculine smell. A loud ringing is in her ears. Everything sails gently before her eyes. The sheets lie heavily on her bare knees. Louka throws her arms wide open. Weakness and bliss flow

to her very palms. She sighs deeply and blissfully shuts her eyelids.

" Louka, you are eating nothing. Why are you so red ? Here, let me feel your forehead. Heaven help us! You're feverish! "

" Don't be foolish, Mamma," interrupts Vera. " There is nothing the matter with her. She simply over-ate herself with ice-cream yesterday. Let her take castor-oil. "

But Ekaterina Lvovna is anxious.

" What hurts you, Louka ? "

Louka weakly shakes her head.

" Nothing hurts me. Only there is a ringing in my ears. And something stabs me here. My heart. "

" How can it be your heart, near your shoulder ? It's the lungs. You must have caught cold. "

But Louka shakes her head.

" No, it's the heart. I know. It's the heart. "

Of course it's the heart. It is always the heart that aches from sorrow.

Ekaterina Lvovna does not believe her.

" You must go to bed at once and we must send for the doctor. "

Louka pushes away her chair and with difficulty gets up, holding on to the chair.

" It's the heart. I don't need a doctor. "

Louka is ill from sorrow and from love. The



*The things . . . suddenly become hostile and mocking.*

doctor will understand at once and he will tell them. And everyone will know, and everyone will laugh at her.

"I don't need the doctor. I don't want him. I'm quite well. . . ."

Louka is lying in bed. The doctor says something quietly. Yes, of course, he is saying that Louka is ill from sorrow and from love. And now everyone knows. Everyone.

Mamma goes out with the doctor. Louka is alone. Now everyone knows, even Tom, the ginger house-dog. Even the things in her room.

Yes, the things know. They have suddenly become hostile and mocking. The polished wardrobe shines unpleasantly, the table bends down and titters, the chairs run right up to the bed and scrape their little round feet.

" 111, are you ? . . . And what kind of illness is this, may we ask ? . . ." The little blue and white squares on the wallpaper nudge one another by the corners and laugh with squeaky voices. " She waited. . . . He did not come. . . . She was left with her nose for company. With her nose."

Louka opens her eyes. Through the window the moon is shining. The curtains flutter gently, the roses beneath the window nod quietly. And suddenly over Louka bends Arsenin.

" Arsenin ? . . . But you went away/'

" I came back. I was told that you were ill. I am here. I shall never go away again. Sleep."

And Louka sleeps.

It is morning. Louka half closes her eyes because of the sun.

" Arsenin, are you here ? "

" Yes, yes. Sleep, Louka. I am here. I am with you."

Louka takes his hand.

" Don't go. I feel afraid without you."

" I shall not go anywhere. I shall always stay with you. I love you, Louka. . . ."

Louka is happy, but she is so weak, so helpless. Even to breathe is difficult.

" And I love you . . ." she whispers.

And again it is night.

Louka raises her head. Arsenin is sitting in the armchair near her bed.

" Arsenin, I won't die ? "

" No. You are quite well ! "

" I am afraid I shall die. I am too happy. Kiss me, Arsenin ! "

He sits on the bed, kisses her on the lips. The moonlight falls upon him. His black eyes and his black hair are shining.

" Louka, do you remember in Petersburg ? " . . .

" Yes, I waited for you, Arsenin."

" I shall marry you when you are sixteen years old."

" Such a long time to wait. One and a half years. . . ."

" But aren't you happy ? "

" Yes, I am happy, too happy."

Louka again closed her eyes.

" I'm thirsty," says Louka hoarsely.

" Louka, Loukochka, look at me! Do you know me ? Who am I ? "

" You are Mamma," pronounces Louka slowly.

" She has recognised me! She's conscious," cries Ekaterina Lvovna joyfully.

" Doctor, she'll recover, she'll live ? "

" Yes," says the doctor; " she will improve now," and feels Louka's pulse.

Ekaterina Lvovna is crying. Tears trickle down her tired, pale face.

" Loukochka, my little girl." . . .

Vera walks up to the bed. She also is pale.

" Well, you have given us a fright, Louka."

Vera smiles and strokes her sister's face.

" Get well quickly, chicken."

How good everyone is, how kind. Only where is Arsenin ? . . .

Louka wants to ask, but her tongue still obeys her badly. The door creaks. That is he. But it is only the maid who enters and places a bouquet of roses on the bed-table. Roses, of course, from Arsenin. There is no need even to ask. And he must be asleep. He is so tired. For he was always at her bedside.

Louka smiles. How good it is to get well. How good it is to live. . . .

The window is open on to the garden. Louka sees the dark fir-trees and a fragment of blue sky above them. A huge transparent dragon-fly flies into the room. Vera places her blue silk dress on Louka's bed.

" That's for you, to help you to get well quickly. It's a little narrow for me, but it will be just right for you."

Louka touches the dress. The silk rustles softly beneath her fingers. How beautiful! Louka has always admired it. A real, grown-up dress, not one of those sacks that Louka wears, with holes for the neck and arms.

" In three days you may get up/' says Ekaterina Lvovna, kissing her daughter. " Are you glad, Loukochka ? "

Yes, Louka is glad. Louka is happy. But . . . but Arsenin ? Since she recovered consciousness, she has not seen him. Has he gone away ? . . . If so, why has he not written to her ? And why does neither Mamma nor Vera speak of him ? Louka is waiting for him, night and day, every hour, every minute. She is his bride, she does not worry. And there is no need to ask. But it is becoming so hard to wait. . . .

Louka is sitting in an armchair on the terrace. She looks thin and drawn-out. She is wearing Vera's blue dress and her legs are wrapped in a plaid. The autumn sun shines obliquely on to the garden, the leafless rose-bushes, and the pond. The pension is already empty. Everyone has left. Only on the first floor lives some old lady. No one else.

It is time they went to Paris. They were kept here so long because of Louka's illness. But now Louka, thank God, is well. Yes, Louka is well.

One can tell that. Ekaterina Lvovna no longer looks at her with such rapturous, joyful eyes. Vera has become quarrelsome again. No doubt she is sorry that she gave away her blue dress. Louka would have got better just as well without the dress.

"They will give us a tremendous bill," sighs Ekaterina Lvovna.

Vera nods.

"I should say so. . . . It wouldn't be so bad if we were paying money for something, instead of a whole month's misery." . . .

"Has Louka really been ill a whole month?" . . .

"Yes, of course, Mamma. Don't you remember? She was taken ill on the twelfth of August, on the day Arsenin Nikolaevich went away."

Louka stretches out her neck.

"Has Arsenin Nikolaevich then?" . . .

And without finishing, she helplessly leans back in the armchair and shuts her eyes.

She must not, she must not ask. No, she must not ask about anything.

## SECOND PART



## CHAPTER I

A LARGE dark classroom. Louka feels uncomfortable at the narrow desk. She stretches out her long legs, looks absently at the blackboard, at the map, at the bespectacled teacher. Next to her sits the snub-nosed, fat Yvonne. Yvonne's lips are moving quickly. Louka knows that Yvonne is whispering, " Saint Anthony, grant that I shall not be called out to answer. I shall give you two sous, Saint Anthony." . . . Yvonne never learns her lessons and she is a coward. Louka even envies her a little. Being afraid, after all, is more amusing than just yawning. Louka has nothing to fear. She is a good pupil.

Louka returns home by the Metro. In the station are still those same advertisements of which she is so tired. Two geese in little white bonnets pick, with their beaks, out of a tin box, a pasty made of goose's liver and they utter in praise of it, " Ah ! *que c'est bon I* "

Idiotic geese. Horrible advertisement.

At home in the little crowded flat in Passy it is still more miserable. Two bedrooms, a dining-room and a kitchen. There is hardly room to turn

round, and it is necessary to walk sideways to avoid knocking into the table or the bed.

At dinner, Ekaterina Lvovna, with a sigh, ladles out the soup.

"Everything is going up in price. Really, I don't know what we shall do. We must economise." . . .

And they economise. They do without sweet things, and they do not even go to the cinema. Vera has lost her situation. Whole days are wasted in searching for a new one, and she becomes more and more bad-tempered. In the evening she does cross-stitch embroidery for the Russian shop.

Louka sits next to her beneath the lamp.

"Here, I'll help you."

"Go away and learn your lessons."

"I have finished them. Give it to me. I know how *to* do it. After all, you will gain by it."

"Go away, I tell you. I am not in need of your help."

Louka is silent, and having nothing better to do, counts the stripes on the wallpaper. Fifteen blue and sixteen yellow ones. Indeed, she has counted them so many times that she cannot make a mistake. Then she looks at the advertisements in the newspaper. But here also there is nothing new, "Dental clinic, Zoub, Doctors Spetz and Ribco" and "An apartment to be let immediately in Meudon."

At half-past nine the bell rings. Louka runs into the passage to open the door.

" How do you do, Vladimir Ivanovich ? "

" How do you do, Louka ? Are your people at home ? "

Louka makes a disdainful little grimace.

" Where else should they be ? "

Vladimir Ivanovich takes off his silk-lined coat, straightens his tie and his big horn-rimmed glasses before the mirror. On his wrist Vladimir Ivanovich wears a round gold watch and his cigar-case is also of gold. Louka respects wealth. Vladimir Ivanovich walks into the dining-room.

" I am not interrupting you ? " he asks.

" No, on the contrary. We are very glad to see you."

Vera quickly finishes powdering her face, Vladimir Ivanovich sits down at the table.

" Dreadful weather," he says. " How cosy it is here."

Ekaterina Lvovna makes a face.

" Yes, autumn. . . ."

Then she goes into the kitchen to put on the samovar. Vladimir Ivanovich looks at Vera from under his glasses, at her white hands, at the needle, at the red silk thread and the canvas.

At tea, the conversation lags. Ekaterina Lvovna puts some jam on the table.



*. . . and to-morrow the same thing all over again.*

"I made it myself. This year there was a hot summer and strawberries were plentiful."

Summer . . . white rose-bushes, swaying fir-trees, the pond, the blue sky, and Arsenin. . . .

Louka silently stirs the sugar in her glass, and suddenly raises her head.

"Why doesn't Arsenin Nikolaevich come to see us?"

Vera reddens.

"Stop it, Louka; be quiet."

"Oh, he will come one day. I expect that he is very busy. You know how much he has to do . . ."

" Was the summer just as hot in Russia ? " asks Ekaterina Lvovna quickly.

" Yes, around Moscow." . . .

When the subject of Russia is exhausted, they are silent again, and again Ekaterina Lvovna attempts to revive the conversation.

" Well, Louka, what's the news at the Lycee ? "

Louka shrugs her shoulders. That is the last straw, that at home too they should speak about the Lycee. Really, they can have nothing else to say about anything if they are reduced to asking about such a boring subject.

" She is the best pupil/' boasts Ekaterina Lvovna.

" Remarkable." Vladimir Ivanovich smiles at Louka. " And she is a Russian in a French Lycee. It can't be easy for her."

But Vera interrupts him.

" Does she expect to be lazy ? Money is paid for her. She ought to understand that. She isn't a baby."

At twelve o'clock Vladimir Ivanovich leaves. Now to bed, and to-morrow the same thing all over again.

## CHAPTER II

IT is Thursday. From the quiet trees in the Luxembourg Gardens red leaves are falling.

Louka is sitting on a seat between pretty Jeanne and snub-nosed Yvonne.

" Let's play another game."

Yvonne wipes her forehead with her hand.

" Let's sit a little longer. I'm tired."

" You're fat," says Jeanne contemptuously. " It's no fun playing with you."

The sun shines on the red trees, on the statues, on the flower-beds in front of the palace. Little toy boats swim in the round basin.

The grass is still quite green and the air is warm.

Louka waves her racket to and fro.

" Yes, that's true, Yvonne. You're no fun at all. You don't play tennis, you can't run, and you don't know anything."

" As to that, I know a great deal more than you do."

" You? What do you know ? "

Yvonne proudly straightens herself.

" A great deal. For instance, what you have to do to get babies."

Jeanne laughs uproariously.

" Found something with which to impress us ! I know how not to get babies. If you like, PU tell you." . . .

Jeanne's cheeks redden. Yvonne leans towards her. Her eyes are shining.

" Tell us." . . .

Louka puts her fingers in her ears.

" Don't you dare ! Don't dare ! I don't want to hear. Be quiet, Jeanne." She jumps up from the seat and runs away.

Jeanne catches her up.

" Where are you off to, Princess Touch-me-not ? If you don't want me to tell you, I'll bring you the book. You can read it for yourself. It's very interesting."

" No, I don't want the book either."

" You see," says Yvonne, joining them, " I know more than you do. You have nothing to be proud of. You look like a kid, while I . . ." She proudly passes her hand over her chest.

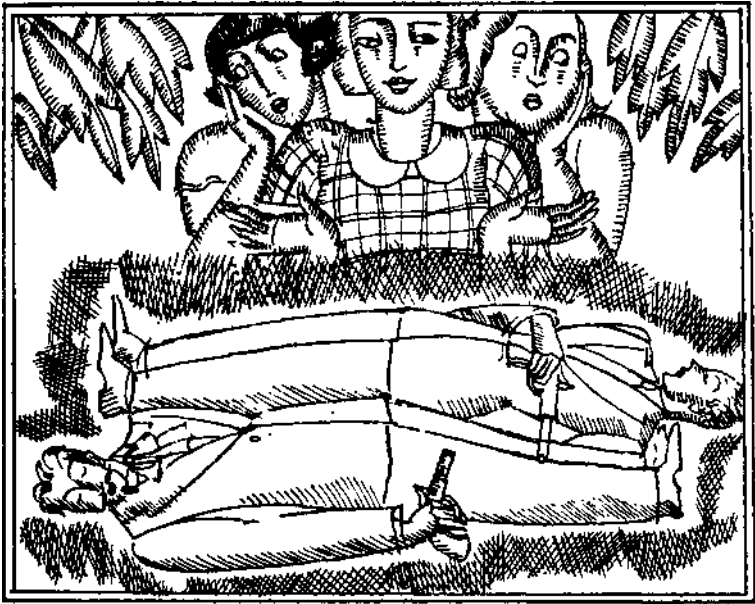
Louka makes a face.

" That's not pretty, and it's not fashionable either."

" Don't be foolish. Men like it ! "

" What do you know about it ? You should see my sister Vera—she's thin and flat and afraid of becoming plump."

" And do many men fall in love with her ? "



*" Two have already shot themselves" improvises Louka.*

" A frightful number. Two have already shot themselves/" improvises Louka.

" Does she love you ? "

" She worships me. She does everything I like and always buys me sweets."

" You're lucky, Louka," sighs Jeanne. " I have a brother who is always tormenting me. He pulls my hair."

Yvonne again passes her hand over her chest.

" Still, men do like it."

" How do you know ? "

" Paul told me."

" Paul ? " . . . asks Louka.

" Why, yes. Paul, my cousin. He comes to us on Sundays. And in the corridor . . . "

" What happens in the corridor ? " . . .

Yvonne stops impressively.

. " Well ? well ? " Louka shakes her by the shoulder. " What happens in the corridor ? "

" In the corridor he . . . " Yvonne stops again.

" Well ? " cries Jeanne.

" He is big," says Yvonne dreamily. " He is eighteen. He's a student."

" But what happens in the corridor ? " . . .

" In the corridor he puts his arms round me . . . and kisses me."

" Really," says Jeanne, horrified. " And you allow it ? "

" What's the use of not allowing it ? He's strong."

" Where does he kiss you ? On your lips ? "

" Yes, on my lips, on my neck. And my knees."

Louka blushes.

" On the knees ? "

" Yes. At first I was afraid, but now . . . "

" And if someone came in ? "

" Then there would be a scandal," says Yvonne calmly. " But what can I do ? He's strong."

Jeanne looks sideways at Yvonne.

" You're not lying ? "

Yvonne becomes vehement.

" My word of honour. If you like I'll bring him here on Sunday."

" Yes, bring him; do bring him."

Yvonne feels herself a heroine. " Well, and you, Jeanne ? Has no one ever kissed you ? "

Jeanne sadly shakes her pretty head.

" No, no one. And you, Louka ? "

Louka shrugs her shoulders.

" I could tell a good deal. And it would be more interesting than what Yvonne has told us. But not to you. You are too silly."

" Of course you're the only clever one," says Yvonne, snappishly. " You're just ashamed that you have nothing to tell."

Yvonne again shrugs her shoulders.

" If you like. But there *is* something, though not for your ears."

They walk along the avenue, and the red leaves rustle beneath their feet. In the distance they can see the wide gates.

" Who'll get to the railings first ? " cries Louka. " One, two, three! " and rushes ahead. In a moment Jeanne is running level with her, shoulder to shoulder. Then the pattering of her feet becomes slower, she lags behind.

" First! I'm first," shrieks Louka, holding on to the iron bars. " You are tortoises."

Along the road by the gardens a taxi glides by.

Arsenin. . . . Could it really be Arsenin and

Vera ? . . . Or did she only imagine it ? . . . Louka stands at the park gate and watches the fast-disappearing taxi. Could it really be Arsenin ? . . .

Jeanne tugs Louka by the hand.

" Why don't you answer ? Do you want to play at Lindbergh ? "

### CHAPTER III

T H E samovar is humming on the white tablecloth. Next to the jar of strawberry jam lie skeins of red, blue and yellow silk. Vera sews in silence, bending down her dark, smooth head. Vladimir Ivanovich looks at her lovingly.

" To-day the weather has been beautiful. Did you go out for a walk, Vera Alexeievna ? "

" Yes, I went out." Vera carefully counts the stitches and does not raise her head.

Louka puts a cup on its saucer.

" I was in the Luxembourg Gardens. Tell me, Vera, did you ride by in a taxi ? With Arsenin Nikolaevich ? "

" I . . . " Vera abruptly turns to her sister. The scissors drop on the floor noisily. " I with Arsenin Nikolaevich ? . . . You must be mad."

" What are you angry about ? From a distance I imagined it was you. The hat was pale blue, exactly like yours."

Vera blushes deeply.

" Is there only one pale blue hat in Paris ? I didn't even go out to-day."

" But you just said that you went out for a walk."





*There is a cold wind in her hair. And suddenly a noise of wings over her head*

" I didn't go for a walk. I went to the shop for some work. I haven't seen Arsenin Nikolaevich since the summer. And what business is it of yours ? " . . .

" I didn't mean to . . . I only imagined. . . . A pale blue hat exactly like yours. And . . . "

" Go away. How dare you worry me, you little spy ! " . . .

Vera gets up, noisily pushes aside her chair and goes out, slamming the door. The key creaks in the lock of the bedroom.

" There you are," says Vladimir Ivanovich in distress. " How badly the pleasant day has ended."

Ekaterina Lvovna tries to appear calm.

" Vera is so highly strung. You must excuse her, please. Sometimes I really don't know what is the matter with her."

" It must be her nerves and anaemia. And Vera Alexeievna works too much."

Louka shakes her head.

" She ? She does nothing for days at a time. This is the second week that she's embroidering the same blouse."

" Louka, don't be tiresome. Isn't it enough that you have upset Vera ? "

" She upset herself. I didn't say anything, Mamma. I only imagined." . . .

" Do you know the saying, <sup>c</sup> When you imagine

something, make the sign of the cross' ? You chatter too much."

Louka is sulky.

" Very well Now I'll be quiet."

Vladimir says good-bye.

" Where are you off to so early ? " Ekaterina Lvovna tries to keep him. " Vera will soon come back. Verochka," she calls, going into the passage, " Vladimir Ivanovich wants to go."

But there is no reply. Vladimir Ivanovich looks at the bedroom door indecisively, then he sighs.

" No, I'd better go. It's time. Please say good-bye for me."

Louka accompanies him to the outer door. Vladimir Ivanovich puts on his coat.

" It isn't right to offend your sister, Louka."

" Offend her ? She offends everyone herself. Good-night."

" Good-night, Louka."

Louka returns to the dining-room. Ekaterina Lvovna sits at the table under the lamp, her head resting on her arms.

" Mammochka, darling ! What's the matter ? Are you unhappy ? " . . .

" Oh, Louka, do you think it makes me happy to see all this ? " . . .

Louka does not understand what she means by " all this," but her heart aches with pity.

"Mammochka, it will all pass. You will see how everything will come right/'

"Mamma/' cries Vera from behind her door, "I don't want that serpent to sleep with me. Let her sleep where she can. I won't let her in."

"Very well, I shall take Louka into my room. But let me in, Verochka. I want to say good-night."

"I'm in bed already. I'm too tired to get up. Good-nidit."

Louka claps her hands.

"How lovely! I'm going to sleep with you, Mammochka." . . .

Louka is lying on the divan in her mother's room. The divan is hard and narrow and her sides ache, but Louka is in heaven. With mamma one can talk a little. Mamma does not bark at one like Vera.

"And when they had killed her, they cut her up into pieces and threw her into the Seine. . . . Are you listening, Mamma?"

"Go to sleep," answers Ekaterina Lvovna sleepily. "It's late."

It is dark and quiet and warm. A little red lamp twinkles before the ikon. An oval mirror glimmers dimly over the divan. The striped couch in the corner looks like a convict from New Guinea.



*He holds his breath . . . and tPaits to spring.*

He holds his breath, crouches and waits to spring with his knife at someone's throat.

"Mamma, listen."

Louka draws up her cold knees, turns on to the other side and sighs.

"Mamma, are you asleep?"

The sheets rustle on the bed.

"What's the matter, Louka?" asks a sleepy voice.

"Mamma, listen, don't go to sleep. . . . Tell me, do you know? . . . Are these lines from Lermontov's 'Angel of Death'? Don't you remember?"

" What lines are you worrying about ? Go to sleep." . . .

" Oh, Mamma/' whispers Louka intensely. " I keep on thinking of them and I can't fall asleep."

" Don't be foolish. Make the sign of the cross and go to sleep. As for Lermentov, you can get the book from the Russian library to-morrow and then you can read it. But now go to sleep."

Louka is silent for a moment.

" Mamma," she begins again, " Mamma, have you ever seen anyone die ? " . . .

" Be quiet, Louka. . . . Why must you talk about such horrors at night ? Bless yourself and go to sleep."

Silence. Between the dark window curtains falls a greenish ray from the street lamp. Louka raises her head from the pillow and looks into the mirror over the divan. Shadows of the street swimming confusingly together and apart slide over the dark mirror. It is frightening. Louka presses her hands to her heart. Who is that in the depths ? . . . Who ? . . . The blood slowly and painfully drips away from her heart and her fingers become cold. Who is it ? . . . Can it be he ? . . .

" Mamma," whispers Louka. " Mamma, did you see them shoot Papa ? "

" Louka ! " cries Ekaterina Lvovna, and clicks on the light. " Louka, what are you saying ? "

Louka is sitting up in bed with wide-open eyes,

staring at the mirror. Her thin shoulders are shivering beneath the nightdress.

" Why did you put on the light ? Why ? Another minute and I would have seen him. "

" Whom ? . . . What are you talking about, Louka ? What's the matter with you ? Drink some water. "

Ekaterina Lvovna leans over her, but Louka hides her face in the pillow.

" Leave me alone. I nearly saw him. And now everything is lost ! Lost ! "

## CHAPTER IV

ON death, Louka has old and complicated ideas. When she was five years old, she used to listen to stories about the ghosts and fairies, pressing herself close to her mother's knees.

" Mamma, will all this happen again ? Will the fairies come on earth again like when you were young ? " she asked, and her face was anxious.

" When I am grown-up and you are dead ? Yes ? "

And Mamma smiled sadly.

" Do you want me to die, then ? "

" Oh, no ! But you see, grandmother is dead already. That means, it's your turn next. But still, you live on, please. Without you I'd be very lonely."

Louka slipped away from Mamma's warm knees, and ran through the large unlit house until she came to a long corridor. From the corridor there was only one place to go to—although forbidden—the kitchen. Louka timidly pushed open the door and stood still. In the kitchen it was warm. The hearth blazed with red coals. In the saucepans and on the frying-pans something was boiling and frying. A blue teapot was jumping up and down, its lid clattering. The water in it bubbled unpleasantly and mockingly. Louka turned round.

Better not look at it. She carefully made her way to the fat cook and tugged at her apron.

" Axenia, tell me about the devils."

And the cook, stirring something in the saucepan with a wooden spoon, began at once.

" This happened, Miss Louka, long ago, before you came into the world. And I was then not as I am now, but a beauty, stared at, plaits to my feet, eyes like stars, and a skin that was red and white. One day I went out for a walk. I had hardly left the village, when I saw, just by the forest, a troika standing, with little bells ringing, a coachman with a long feather in his hat, and fleet horses. In the sledge sits a barin,\* dark-skinned, with\* a pointed beard, wearing a fur-coat among a thousand, and a beaver cap. He waves his hand to me.

"<sup>c</sup> Eh, you beauty, come and sit down. I'll give you a drive/

" I already have one foot in the sledge, when along comes a breeze, and off flies the barin's cap. And beneath the cap, two little horns stick out of his curly hair. Well, I tell you, I flew, crossing myself. But only the snow rose in clouds, there was neither the barin nor the troika. If I had sat in the sledge, he would have taken me straight to hell, into the burning pitch, and flung me by my feet into the frying-pan. <sup>c</sup> Fry away like a pancake/ he'd say, <sup>c</sup> and let the devils enjoy themselves/ "

\* Russian nobleman.

" But now, Axenia, there are no more devils ? "

" Not now. They have all disappeared. Instead there are the Bolsheviks. The Bolsheviks, they say, will be even worse than devils." . . .

One morning they got up with frightened faces, ran about the house, packed trunks and cases. They must fly, to-morrow it would be too late. . . .

Louka had a little Angora kitten. Louka loved him very much and her first thought was " What about Stoupka ? "

" Mamma, can't Stoupka come with us ? "

" No, a cat will be in the way. We shall buy you a new one there."

" Mamma, please let us take Stoupka. I don't know what I'll do without Stoupka."

But Mamma to her surprise suddenly became angry.

" No, you have been told. Stoupka will stay behind. Don't worry me. Even without you my head is going round."

" So Stoupka will not come with us ? . . . "

" No. And don't get in the way. Go and play."

Louka did not cry. She took the kitten in her arms and went into the garden. It was quiet and cold and sad. The white autumn sun shone through the bare branches. The sand crunched beneath her feet. Louka sat on a swing, pressing Stoupka to her heart.

" My Stoupka, Stoupochka. What will you do without me, Stoupka ? " . . .

She pushed off with her foot and began to swing gently. The rhythmical swinging made her feel still sadder, still more hopeless.

" My Stoupka. . . ." Louka kissed his soft fur. " Stoupochka/<sup>5</sup> The swing stopped. Louka looked at the birch-trees, at the clumsily flying crow, at the roof of the house. The kitten was tired of lying still, and scratched Louka's dress with his paws, trying to free himself, but Louka pressed him more closely to her heart and got up.

" My Stoupka. I shall not give you to anybody. I shall not leave you."

She walked through the house and gently climbed the narrow steps to the loft. The loft was large and low. All around her stood cases, old chairs, divans, wardrobes. Cobwebs hung from the ceiling. Through the little round windows shone a dust-laden sunny ray. Louka shut the door, walked into a corner behind a wardrobe, and kneeling down, began to dig into a pile of rubbish. The kitten meow-ed piteously.

" In a minute, in a minute, Stoupochka; wait a little."

Louka picked up a rope from the floor and got up. Then she made a loop in the rope and kissed the kitten straight on the mouth. The kitten sniffed discontentedly and pushed his little rough tongue on her lips.

" Stoupka, my Stoupka, good-bye." . . .

She tied one end of the rope to the high back of a chair and put the kitten's neck through the loop. The kitten hung in the air, helplessly moving his paws. Louka shut her eyes so that she should not see. When she looked at the kitten, all was over. He hung on the rope, swinging to and fro like a pendulum. His paws were spread out, his mouth wide open. His round glassy eyes gazed straight in front of him.

" Stoupka, Stoupka." Louka began to weep loudly. And suddenly she heard the sound of wings and something flew in through the window. Louka drew her head down into her shoulders and, with a cry, threw herself behind the wardrobe. The wings, clapping above her head, flew further, to where Stoupka was hanging. Louka crept as far into the corner as she could, cold with fright. That was the Angel of Death flying in for Stoupka's soul. Louka knew, he always came for souls.

Her heart beat loudly and her knees shook. Louka stood a long time, her body pressed to the wall. Then at last, she carefully peeped out from behind the wardrobe. It was quiet, as before, dusty and empty. The kitten hung quite motionless now, his wide-open glassy eyes still staring straight in front of him, his paws hanging as helplessly as before. A large grey dove sat on the window-sill, his head on one side. But Louka knew that it was not the dove. It was the Angel of Death who had



*Suddenly she heard the sound of wings.*

flown in for Stoupka's soul. The Angel of Death, not the dove.

"Louka, Louka!" they were calling down below. "Dress yourself quickly, we are going at once!" ... In the carriage Ekaterina Lvovna remembered.

"And where is your kitten?"

Louka said sadly, "The kitten was taken by the Angel."

But no one took any notice of her reply. Their thoughts were elsewhere. And no one asked again about Stoupka.

And after a few days Louka was walking along

the shore of the warm Black Sea and wondering why it was called "black" when it was so blue. The round, red, huge sun sank slowly into the blue waves.

"Mamma," said Louka anxiously. "The sun has fallen into the sea. Won't the fishes eat it during the night?" . . .

White seagulls, clapping their wings, circled over their heads. Louka shut her eyes and it seemed to her it was the Angel of Death flying for Stoupka's soul, and her heart beat loudly with fear and ecstasy. . . .

## CHAPTER V

A G A I N day followed day. The Lycee, afterwards dinner, and in the evening the samovar, Vladimir Ivanovich, Vera's cross-stitch and conversation about Russia.

" To-day I walked in the Champs Elysees," says Ekaterina Lvovna. "It was so beautiful, the arch of the trees stretching out into the distance; and the sky was quite extraordinary, as it is only in Paris, transparent and high. So beautiful. And yet, as I walked, I thought, ' It were better that I should never see this. Better that I should be unhappy in Russia than happy here/ " . . .

Vera raises her head and looks thoughtfully into the coals.

" Yes," she sighs. " And it is so easy to walk on Russian ground. There is snow in Russia now." . . .

Louka shrugs her shoulders.

" But how would you manage, Vera, without the Galleries Lafayette ? Where would you buy your little ribbons and where else could you change one pair of gloves ten times ? "

But Vera sews on without answering, bending over the canvas. • . .



*Conversation about Russia.*

At twelve o'clock they go to bed. Louka sleeps with Vera again. Vera takes a long time washing and brushing her hair. Then she puts out the light.

"Good-night, Verochka," says Louka sweetly.

"Go to sleep," says Vera shortly.

Vera is still just as nervous. She must not be put out.

Louka shuts her eyes. Louka sleeps.

. . . She dreams that she is lying on a wide, low, silk divan. She is naked, and she feels embarrassed, ashamed. She would like to cover herself, but there is nothing, no sheet, no coverlet, no pillow. The

divan is low, the silk cold and slippery. Louka moves uneasily. The room is quite empty, no chairs, no table, not even a carpet on the floor. Through the wide window, stretching across a whole wall, can be seen only the transparent blue sky and a large round moon. The moon gazes into the room. Its light falls right on Louka's feet. Louka presses her knees together and wants to hide herself, to run away from the moon. But there is nowhere to go. The moonlight floods her feet, flows between her knees, over her stomach, her breast, her throat, and into her mouth, and on the tip of her tongue is its taste, the cool, moist taste of moonlight. And there is nowhere to go, nowhere to hide from the moon. How shameful, how heavenly.

Over the moon flies a great black cloud. It is quite dark. She can see nothing. Louka shrinks. She draws her knees up to her chin. There is a cold wind in her hair. And suddenly a noise of wings over her head. She screws up her eyes. She cannot breathe and her heart does not beat, her eyes open without her will, through terror.

Huge black wings. . . . Black shining eyes. . . . Their gaze drains away the blood from her body. Now, instead of blood light cold air flows through her veins, and within her breast there is no heart, there is no life.

" Azrael! " sighs Louka faintly.

Black wings, black eyes bend down over her.

Cold light hands stroke he\* breast, her knees. How cold, how blissful, how terrible. In a moment her soul will be torn away. It holds only by a thin, thin thread. In a moment it would be torn away and would fly out of the wide window into the dark sky. . . . But why is it so dark ? . . . She cannot see him. Only the black shining eyes, only the huge black wings. . . .

Azrael. . . .

Icy lips slowly and agonisingly touch her mouth. Darkness. Silence. And her eyelids droop with happiness, with ecstasy, with terror.

Azrael. . . .

Louka wakes up. This is their bedroom. Vera is breathing peacefully in the next bed. On the chairs lie their clothes, on the carpet are thrown their shoes. This is their bedroom and everything is as usual. But at the foot of Louka's bed, with huge black wings folded, sits Azrael, and his black eyes shine in the darkness.

She stretches out her arms to him.

" Azrael. Will you fly to me ? "

" Yes. Every night . . . every night." . . .

## CHAPTER VI

LOUKA goes to the Lycee, dines, does her lessons, as usual. And no one knows what has happened to her and no one notices anything. Louka has not changed, she is only a little paler, a little more absent-minded than before.

History lesson. Louka yawns. Plow tired she is ! And her back aches. And after history there is still algebra.

" Azrael," she writes in ink on the desk, and wipes it off with her sleeve, so that no one should see. The sleeve is all black, and so are her hands.

" Listen." Fat Yvonne prods her with her elbow. " He is coming to-morrow."

Louka absently raises her head.

"He? Who?"

" He, Paul, of course. How slow you are."

" Where will he come ? "

" Have you forgotten already ? Didn't I promise to show him to you ? He will come to-morrow to the Luxembourg. Do you hear, Jeanne ? "

Jeanne's pretty little face reddens deeply.

" That Paul who kisses you ? "

" Why, yes. To-morrow at half-past two."

Jeanne and Louka walk up and down the wide avenue in the Luxembourg Gardens. Jeanne is wearing a new dress and gloves.

" Why are you all dressed up like this ? " Louka mockingly examines her.

" To-day is Sunday, and we are going to meet a young man." . . .

Louka laughs, shaking her head, her fair hair flying.

" You should have put on a hat at least," suggests Jeanne. " What will he think ? "

Louka throws up her beret and catches it.

" Not likely. We do him quite enough honour as it is by waiting for him."

The red leaves crunch noisily under their feet. The trees raise their bare, black twigs to the sky. In the cold transparent atmosphere the statues seem alive and the flowers seem artificial. The gardens can be seen right to their depths.

Through the gates walks Yvonne with her long-legged Paul in a student's cap.

Yvonne is radiant. Jeanne and Louka stop and wait. To go to meet them is not the right thing to do.

" This is Paul," introduces Yvonne. " And these are my friends Jeanne and Louka."

Paul smiles. His teeth are full of stoppings. He presses their hands. His palms are wet with perspiration.

" How pretty your friends are," he says, quite at ease. " Only thin, like macaroni. But still, they're lovely."

They sit down on a bench, Louka in the corner, next to Paul, then Jeanne. Yvonne gives up her place next to Paul.

" Well, little girls, tell me something amusing," he says.

But they are silent. Suffocating with laughter, Yvonne kicks Jeanne.

" What are you doing ? Stop ! " whispers Jeanne confused.

Paul looks at Louka's bare knees.

" Quite a little girl. In socks. How old are you ? " . . .

Louka, offended, bites her lip.

" In a month I shall be fifteen."

" Oh, how old ! " He moves his hand towards Louka's knees.

" May I touch ? "

Louka jumps up, red and angry.

" Don't dare ! We have seen enough of each other. Good-bye."

She turns round and walks quickly towards the gates. Yvonne catches her up.

" Why are you off? Where are you going? He'll be offended."

" Let him be offended."

" But how can you ? . . . You are being quite rude."



" *She's mad, that girl Louka.*"

" Clear off." Louka is almost running.

" Don't you like him, then ? "

" I like him awfully. Terribly. And he suits you perfectly."

" There you are. You see . . . "

" Good-bye."

Yvonne, uncomprehending, watches Louka walk away. Then she returns to Paul and Jeanne.

" *She's mad, that girl Louka.*"

Louka is walking on the pavement.

" How disgusting. His hands perspire, and he is loathsome altogether—and he kisses that goose

And she, Louka, ran to see him. She to whom flies Azrael. . . ."

Louka frowns. How shameful. He nearly held her knee. To calm herself and to kill time, Louka goes on foot. It is a long way to walk from Montparnasse to Passy. But she is not lonely. She walks with measured strides, keeping time with her recitation.

" There is an Angel of Death in the terrible hour  
Of the last torment, when, taking leave of the world,  
He puts his arms lovingly around us,  
But icy is his kiss."

It is four o'clock and at eleven she can go to bed.

" He puts his arms lovingly around us,  
But icy is his kiss."

Louka sits before a plate of soup and looks straight in front of her, smiling at the wallpaper.

" Louka, what are you looking at ? "

" What ? " stammers Louka in confusion.

" What are you smiling at ? "

" I ? Was I smiling ? "

Vera looks at her sister suspiciously.

" You are somehow strange altogether. Sleepy. With dark rings round your eyes."

Louka blushes.

" I ? There's nothing the matter with me. . . . I remembered something that happened in the Lycee. . . ."

Could they have guessed ? Could they have seen him ? . . . Her hands become cold with terror.

" You're not ill, Louka ? " asks Ekaterina Lvovna anxiously.

" No, I'm quite well. I became too hungry."

Louka, choking, swallows the hot soup and coughs.

Vera bangs her on the back.

" Don't eat so greedily ! No one will take it away from you ! "

## CHAPTER VII

A 2 R A E L. . . . How heavenly. . . .

And suddenly the electric light, intolerably bright, hits her in the face. Vera is standing before the bed.

" I knew it! I knew it! "

" What? What's the matter? "

" It's no use pretending. . . . Don't you understand? Don't you know? Little naive child. Then I'll tell you."

" No, no! " cries Louka terrified. " I don't want you to. Don't! I don't want to know that."

And she stops her ears.

But Vera roughly pulls away her hands.

" No, you must listen. That's enough. You didn't know, then you will know now." . . .

Vera presses Louka's hands together until they hurt, and bending down her pale face, quickly, quickly speaks of all that is most shameful, most terrible.

" Vera! For God's sake, Vera! " . . .

" What on earth are you doing? " . . .

In the doorway stands Ekaterina Lvovna, startled.

" There! " Vera shakes Louka by the arm

" There, admire your daughter! . . ."

" Vera, what are you saying ? Be quiet/\* whispers Ekaterina Lvovna. " Aren't you ashamed of yourself ? "

" Ashamed ? It is she who should be ashamed." Louka lies with her head buried in the pillow. Ekaterina Lvovna bends over her.

" Loukochka."

Louka suddenly raises her head, looks at her mother with hunted eyes.

" Go away from me, devils ! " she says hoarsely.

It is quiet again. Ekaterina Lvovna has gone to her room. Vera has calmed down and is asleep. Louka lies, her arms thrown wide apart. How loathsome. . . . Her head burns. And now everything is clear. She knows everything. . . . Everything is clear, loathsome, gross and frightful. And is it really true ? Is it possible ? And how do people live, is it possible to live, if it is true ? . . .

Louka throws her arms still wider apart, so as not to touch herself. Loathsome, everything is loathsome, and the most loathsome of all is she herself. . . .

Louka is ashamed. Louka is nauseated. She would like to lie like this all day in darkness, so that she might see nothing, hear nothing. . . .

But she must get up. Vera will soon wake. Oh, how loathsome everything is, how loathsome. How shameful to look at her chemise, to pull on her stockings, to wash herself.



*But in the street, too, everything is loathsome.*

Louka walks quietly out of the house while everyone is still asleep. But in the street, too, everything is loathsome. She cannot look at the people—they, all of them, also. . . . And even the horses . . . Louka becomes muddled. What beastliness. To calm herself she examines the motor-cars. They have four wheels, a motor and a steering wheel. There is a little Citroen and there is a Renault. Yes, the motor-cars still bear thinking about. Also trees, waterfalls and the wind.

But in the Lycee again everything is loathsome. Fat Yvonne, who kisses Paul. . . . And Jeanne, and

all the pupils and the teacher. And even the flies. Why, even the flies also. . . . Louka sits, red, with burning lips.

"Are you ill?" asks the form-mistress. "Perhaps you would like to go home?"

"No, no," says Louka, startled. "I don't want to go."

"Do you know what Paul said about you?" whispered Yvonne.

Louka clenches her fists.

"Be quiet! Don't dare to speak to me! Or else I'll give you such a hiding."

"You're mad, you know."

After school, Louka roams the streets a long time. Her head is going round. She has eaten nothing. She must get thoroughly tired, then she will not be able to think of anything.

At half-past nine Louka opens the front door.

"Louka!" cries Ekaterina Lvovna. "Darling, where did you get to? How anxious I've been. I have been looking for you everywhere; I have telephoned to everyone we know, and to the Lycee."

Vera shrugs her shoulders.

"I told you there was nothing to be frightened about, Mamma. Instead of kissing her, you should give her a good smacking."

Ekaterina Lvovna wants to put her arms round Louka, who gently frees herself and walks into the bedroom.

" Leave me alone, Mamma. I'm very tired. I want to sleep. I had dinner at Yvonne's. I'll tell you to-morrow."

Vera is putting the cups out on the table and clatters the saucers.

" She's only acting. It's too despicable to laugh at. It doesn't matter. Let her go hungry. It will do her good."

## CHAPTER VIII

A Z R A E L does not fly to her any more. Louka does not even think of him. And everything is as before—the Lycee, dinner, homework, tea. Louka plays with Yvonne as usual, and laughs. What can she do? One must live, and every day. Even if it is very hard. Louka imagines that she is very unhappy, but perhaps it is not so at all.

The samovar has stopped boiling long ago. Louka yawns, putting both her elbows on the table. Vladimir Ivanovich looks lovingly at Vera, his spectacles shining. The needle flashes quickly in and out of Vera's fingers.

"I shall sew until I have finished. Even if it takes till morning/" says Vera.

"It is already half-past twelve." Ekaterina Lvovna turns to Vladimir Ivanovich with a smile, "You will miss the last Metro/"

"Oh, I assure you it doesn't matter," he answers quickly.

"Yes, but it is impossible to find a taxi here at night. And you have a long way to go."

"I can walk. For the happiness of being another five minutes with Vera Alexeievna I am prepared . . ."



*" It's time for you to go to bed, Louka. Come."*

Vladimir Ivanovich reddens. He should not have said that. No, he should not have said that.

But Ekaterina Lvovna is still smiling at him.

" Well, it's not so terrible. Your legs are young. . . . But it is time for you to go to bed, Louka. Come."

Ekaterina Lvovna takes Louka away. The bedroom door closes. Vera and Vladimir Ivanovich are alone.

Vera bends her head still lower over the canvas. Vladimir says nothing. The round clock on the wall ticks loudly.

" Vera Alexeievna. . . . "

Vera raises her head, her eyes look at him, just a little afraid, and expectation floods her face.

" What ? " she says quietly.

" Aren't you tired ? "

" No. " . . . Over her cheeks slide the shadows of her downcast lashes.

She threads a piece of red silk into her needle and bites off the end.

" This—doesn't this tire you ? "

" Why, of course.<sup>5</sup> She raises her eyebrows impatiently. " Of course it tires me, but what can **I do ? "**

" Vera Alexeievna . . . I . . . forgive me. It is all very simple. . . . If you . . . if you become my wife . . . "

Vera puts the canvas on the table and looks at him fixedly and attentively. And now there is no fear in her gaze, only triumph.

" Yes, " she says calmly. " I knew that you loved me, but . . . "

He bends over the table and quickly takes her hand.

" No, no, for God's sake ! Don't dismiss me at once. . . . Wait a little. . . . "

Vera smiles at him softly.

" Foolish person ! I didn't want to dismiss you, I only wanted to say . . . "

" No, no, you needn't say anything. . . . First

decide and then telephone me. I shall wait for it. I shall not go out. And meanwhile, good-bye. Now that you know that I love you . . ."

He kisses Vera's hand and quickly walks into the passage. Vera sees him put on his coat and take his hat.

" Good-night, Vladimir Ivanovich."

He bows silently. Vera stands alone in the empty dining-room.

Out of the bedroom runs Louka in one shoe and throws herself on Vera's neck.

" Congratulations ! Congratulations ! Congratulations I " she cries, tucking up her bare foot.

Vera frees herself.

" You are too early. Much too early. I don't know yet whether I shall marry him."

" You will be a fool if you don't," decides Louka. " He's rich."

" You don't understand anything. He looks like a ram."

" A lot that matters ! Pushkin also looked like a sheep."

" Don't prattle, Louka," Ekaterina Lvovna cuts her short. " Of course it is a splendid match and it would be a great pity if you . . . "

" Oh, Mamma," sighs Vera wearily, " I don't know. . . I'll decide later. To-morrow. How sad I feel]. . . Oh, how sad I feel."

## CHAPTER IX

VERA gives Louka ten francs.

" Here, take them. Go to the cinema."

" To the cinema ? . . ." asks Louka, astonished. Is it possible that Vera should want to give her pleasure ? No. There must be something else.

Louka puts the money in her pocket.

" Thank you, you're a dear. How lucky! To-morrow they are showing a very good film."

" No, not to-morrow. Go to-day."

" I have a lot of homework. I won't have time to finish it."

" Don't be silly. If you can't finish, then I'll write you a note for the school. Now run away ! "

" Still, I would rather go to-morrow. . . ."

But Vera becomes angry.

" Get out this minute ! Do you hear ? Go at once! Horrible girl! Always changing your mind."

" Verochka, why are you angry ? " Louka is already putting on her coat. " Just give me another franc to take the Metro home."

Vera throws two francs on the table.

" Hurry up. You'll be late."

Louka runs down the stairs. It would be

interesting to keep watch, to see for whom Vera is waiting. But then she really would be late. . . .

Vera, much perturbed, walks about the dining-room.

" He will come soon, Mamma. I know it's no use. Still, for the last time I want it to be here, in our house. But you, please don't go out."

" Very well, Verochka. But you are torturing yourself for nothing. It will be of no use."

" Well, yes, yes, yes, I know. But still. Perhaps I have made a mistake, and he really does love me."

The door bell rings. Vera rapidly smooths her perfectly smooth hair.

" Mamma, go away. It is he," and runs to open the door.

Ekaterina Lvovna shuts the door into the dining-room. In her stockinged feet she walks to the couch, sits down, takes a book. But the letters jump about and run into one another.

" He proposed to me. . . ."

" And of course you refused. . . ."

" No. I did not refuse. I wanted to ask you. . . ."

Ekaterina Lvovna turns over a page and reads the same sentence a few times. She does not want to listen, but they are so near the wall.

She presses her hand to her heart—Poor Vera, how she is suffering! And she, her mother, cannot, is unable to help her.

The voices drop to a whisper. Impossible to make out what they are saying. This is still harder to bear. Ekaterina Lvovna goes right up to the door and puts her ear to the key-hole. . . . This is what she has come to. Spying.

All is quiet, when suddenly . . . what is that? . . . it sounds like sobbing. Ekaterina Lvovna already has her hand on the door-knob. She must quieten Vera, she must calm her. No, she may not. She can do nothing for her daughter. She can only listen, only weep. As if her weeping could make it easier for Vera.

Behind the door the whispering goes on.

"What? What? To be your mistress?" . . .

Impossible to make out the reply.

"You . . . go! Go at once! I never want to see you again!"

"But Vera . . ."

"Go out of the house!" Vera is already screaming. "Will you go? Mamma, Mamma, drive him out! Drive him. . . ."

The outer door slams.

Ekaterina Lvovna comes into the dining-room. Tears are streaming down her cheeks, she stretches out trembling hands to her daughter.

"Verochka . . ."

But Vera looks coldly at her mother. Her face is quite calm, only a little paler than usual.

"Mamma, I am going to marry Vladimir Ivano-

vich. I am going down to telephone him. Are you pleased ? "

She walks into the passage, but on the way she stops.

" And perhaps it isn't worth it ? " . . . and she looks over her shoulder at her mother as calm as ever. . . . " Perhaps it would be better if I threw myself out of the window ? What do you think ? "

" Vera, what are you talking about ? God have mercy on us ! "

Vera laughs mirthlessly.

" I was joking. My word of honour. I won't throw myself out of the window. I'm a coward. . . . I shall get married. Although that perhaps is still more dangerous."

Ekaterina Lvovna remains alone in the dining-room. What she wished has happened. Vera is engaged to be married. But how sad she feels, how heavy-hearted. She wipes her tears and makes the sign of the cross. Then she quickly puts the cups out on the table. Her hands are still trembling and the cups clatter pitifully. Why is she doing this ? Who needs these cups ? Are they going to drink tea then ? . . .

Vera returns.

" Mamma, he is coming at once. He was so delighted. It was quite comic. Foolish person. He thinks . . . happiness! He thinks . . .

love! And in reality . . ." Vera shrugs her shoulders. "Come, Mamma. Help me to dress. I want to meet him in a white dress, like a real bride."

In a quarter of an hour arrives Vladimir Ivanovich, delighted and confused.

Ekaterina Lvovna lets him in.

"I am so glad," she says, kissing his forehead.

His eyes are shining behind his spectacles.

"This is the happiest day of my life!"

"I hope that now you will always be happy. Verochka! . . . It is your fiancee."

"My fiancee . . ." Vera stands before the mirror in a full white dress. Her eyes look sorrowful and surprised, her mouth seems quite innocent, and her hands hang helplessly.

"My fiancee . . ." she repeats. "I'm a bride." . . . She smiles at herself in the mirror. "How do you do, bride?" . . . And of him, of Arsenin, she will not think any more. Of course, she has a fiancee. But her heart compresses painfully, and the pain runs from her heart to her feet, to her hands, to her throat, and she wants to scream with misery. But she must not. There, behind the wall, is her fiancee. He must not know. No one must know. . . .

She comes into the dining-room, stretching out her hand.

"Volodia . . ." \*

\* Familiar for Vladimir

Her voice sounds quiet and tender and her face becomes rosy with confusion.

" You may kiss me."

His lips touch her cheek and he closes his eyes.  
" God, how happy I am ! "

They are silent. " What else shall I say to him ? "  
Vera wonders.

Ekaterina Lvovna looks alarmed. The round clock ticks loudly.

Vladimir Ivanovich suddenly becomes jolly and noisy.

" You'll see what I'll be like now," he says, striding about the little dining-room. " You'll see ! I want you to be proud of your husband, Verochka. I shall turn the whole world round ! "

Vera laughs.

" Yes, of course you will turn it round."

" You know in our factory they think such a lot of me, I . . ."

Vera smiles without listening. This is the kind of person he is, and she did not know. Talkative\* and conceited about something. She thought that he was timid and quiet. But he is like this.

She becomes bored.

" Listen, Volodia. Let us go somewhere to supper. A Russian place where there are gypsy singers. Will you ? " . . .

" What are you talking about, Verochka ? How can you go to restaurants and gypsies ? You have to be blessed. And you want to go to the gypsies ! "

" We'll get blessed as well if it's necessary, Mother. But I expect that you don't know yourself how they give the blessing. Let us go to the restaurant now as quick as we can. We'll go to the priest afterwards. I want to be gay to-night! "

The restaurant. Champagne. Women in light evening dresses. And everyone is laughing, everyone is gay. Only Vera is sad and has no strength to pretend. She put her elbows on the table. She is a little giddy, and everything about her seems confused and strange.

The gypsies are on the platform. Old gypsies, in bright shawls. What thick legs they have ! Gypsies should be straight and young.

" Day follows after day  
The heart wears itself out with pain  
Tearing away at a thin thread/ "

they sing gutturally and passionately.

" How sad," sighs Vera. " And I wanted to be gay. Why did we come here ? "

" If you don't care for it we can go somewhere else. To some French place. It'll be jollier there."

But Vera shakes her head.

" No, we'll stay. They sing well. And is there a place, then, where I can be gay ? . . . Can you find me such a place ? "

" Verochka, you are drinking too much."

" Oh stop, Mamma! Pay attention to the singing."



*" Let the mist roll by,  
Let the guitars sing out,  
And let me live to-day I "*

Vera drinks, tipping back her head, and puts the empty glass on the table.

*" Let the mist roll by,  
Let the guitars sing out,  
And let me live to-day ! "*

" Let me live to-day," she repeats slowly. " But no one is preventing me. No one. And yet I cannot live. It would be better for me to die ! "

" Vera, what are you saying ? " whispers Ekaterina Lvovna. " Don't, please, drink any more."

" You think I'm drunk ? No. And perhaps I

|

*it*

-A..

*A great fear of this difficult, incomprehensible, horrible life*



am drunk. I don't know. Let the mist roll by. Do you see how the mist rolls by? Or is it the smoke from your cigarettes? Why don't you say something, Volodia? Are you sad too? If you like, we shall drink to calling each other 'thou.' A Russian young man and his bride always say 'thou' to each other."

She passes a glass to him and touches it with hers.

"I must say something unpleasant," she thinks, and looks straight into his eyes. "I do not love you, and I shall never love you."

He drops his glass. The champagne runs over the tablecloth on to Vera's white dress.

"Silly," she laughs, drinking. Her hair falls over her forehead. "How silly you are! I said it on purpose!"

He wipes her knees with a table-napkin.

"You were only joking?" . . .

"Why, of course, of course" . . .

"Let the mist roll by,  
Let the guitars sing out,  
And let me live to-day!"

sing the gypsies.

Vera listens, and again her face becomes sad.

"Of course, I was joking. But listen. I don't know. . . . Perhaps, may be, you will be unhappy with me. Almost certainly you will be unhappy. I am very sorry for you, Volodia. . . . But what can I do?" . . .

" Vera, don't drink any more ! "

" Oh, Mamma, leave me alone ! Don't drink yourself if you don't like it. And I am not bound to listen to you any more now that I am engaged." She laughs. " Your power over me has come to an end. Hasn't it, Volodia ? " . . .

The gypsies go away. Now, instead of them, there are negroes on the platform. Their Hawaiian guitars twang sadly, oppressively.

" Whatever is that ? " Vera turns round in confusion. " As if on purpose ! I want to forget, to laugh I And on purpose they turn my heart inside out."

From the tables couples get up, twirl round, and are slowly lost in the dance.

" Verochka, come and dance."

" Dance ? " she asks, surprised. " Is it possible to dance, when one's heart is being torn to pieces ? One must sit quietly and listen. Give me a cigarette. And still . . ."

She put a warm palm on his hand.

" I shall try to be a good wife to you, Volodia."

He kisses her fingers.

" Look ! " she says suddenly, stretching out her neck, " look at her fur coat, that dark girl's by the window. I have hardly ever seen such a beautiful one. Oh ! " . . . Her eyes become narrow with envy. " Oh ! what a magnificent fur."

Vladimir Ivanovich bends towards her.

" Do you like it very much, Verochka ? "

" I should say I do ! What a question ! Look how soft and downy it is ! "

" If you like it so much, I must get you one just like it."

" For me ?" . . . Her eyebrows rise up in surprise. " And do you know how much it costs ? "

" No matter, if you like it."

" You . . . you're serious ? "

" Of course. To-morrow morning we'll go to choose one."

But still she does not believe him.

" You're laughing at me. I never dreamt . . . Why, the fur on my coat is rabbit. . . ."

" And to-morrow you will have an ermine. The very best. Anyone you like."

" To-morrow ? . . . . A big one like that, with a huge collar, and with a brocade lining ? Really ? Oh ! how happy I am. What a dear you are ! " She claps her hands.

" Verochka, don't be so noisy." Ekaterina Lvovna tries to calm her. " People are looking at us."

" Let them look ! Let them. Just think, Mamma. . . . To-morrow morning we are going to buy it. Oh, Volodia, now I know that you love me. And I am very, very happy. And what I said is all nonsense. We shall certainly be happy together."

" I want to dance, Volodia. Oh, how happy I am ! How happy. . . ."

## CHAPTER X

" M A M M A ! " cries Louka from the entrance-door.  
" Mamma ! "

Louka turns on the light. In the dining-room on the sideboard is a note, " Don't wait for us." And there is not even any tea. Louka walks into the kitchen. On the table are some dirty plates, a piece of cold veal, some roast potatoes, frozen in their fat.

Louka puts one into her mouth, then spits it out—nasty taste . . . and returns to the dining-room.

" What can have happened ? Where can they have got to ? This is why Vera sent me away."

It is hard for Louka to be alone, she feels sad. In the cinema she cried, it was so much like her own life.

A young man had just jilted his betrothed, just as Arsenin had jilted her. And Louka pictured the film all again. It is true that everything came right in the end. But then it always does in the cinema. And how can everything come right in Louka's affair ? So far nothing has happened. Except inflammation of the lungs.



*In the cinema she cried\ it was so much like her own life.*

Louka looks at the yellow stripes on the wall-paper. Stripes, like the bars of a cage. Louka feels like a bird shut up in a cage.

"I must go to bed." She undresses slowly. How quiet it is. How sad. Even a little frightening. Suddenly the door will open. Louka turns round quickly. No, the door is shut and no one can come in. She must sleep. She puts out the light and lies down. The curtains are not closely drawn, and a green ray from the street-lamp falls on the floor. Better not look at it. She must close her eyes and sleep. And she must not think of Arsenin. But it is so quiet, so sad. . . .

Louka presses her cheek to the pillow. Her tears fall quickly, and she cannot stop them. She will cry like this until she is consumed by tears, and will die of love, tenderness and pity for herself. She draws up her legs and kisses her knees.

" Poor Louka, poor girl, oh, poor girl," she whispers.

" Quietly, Vera, quietly. You will wake Louka. Don't make a noise."

Louka, through her sleep, hears light footsteps and the rustle of silk. She opens her eyes.

" Vera, it's you ? "

Vera stands in the middle of the room, all in white. The light of the street-lamp falls on her.

"Verochka . . ."

The silk rustles. The dress falls to the floor in a white circle. With a clatter the shoes fly to the corner.

Vera walks up to Louka's bed.

" Move up."

Louka moves to the wall.

" Verochka, it's such a long time since you have slept with me."

Vera lifts the coverlet, lies down next to her sister, and puts her arms round her.

" How warm it is here."

Louka puts a wet cheek on Vera's shoulder.

" You're crying, Louka ? " . . .





*But it is easy to run down, and she is not afraid*

" In my sleep. I had a bad dream."

" Here, take it." Vera pushes something cold and rough into her hand. " I've brought you a pear."

" Thank you."

Her tears fall on to the pear, and the pear has a salty taste.

" Listen." Vera kisses Louka's wet lips. " Listen. I'm getting married."

" To Vladimir ? "

" Yes. And just think, he's going to buy me an ermine coat to-morrow."

" Ermine ? "

" I'm so happy. I'll be rich, and I'll give you anything you like."

" Congratulations," whispers Louka, tears still falling from her eyes. " I should like some shoes with white soles. But they're expensive. A hundred and fifty francs."

" That's nothing. I'll buy them for you. And you will be able to take music lessons."

" Oh, I can manage without the lessons."

Vera presses more closely to her sister. She smells of perfume and wine.

" I'm so happy."

" And are you in love, Vera ? In love ?" whispers Louka in her ear.

" Oh, I don't know. I'm happy. I was sad, but now . . ."

Vera sighs lightly and Louka answers her sister's sigh with a sigh as light as hers. . . . She too was very sad, but now . . . Should she tell Vera about Arsenin ? No, she had better not. And perhaps all would come right as it did in the cinema.

Louka presses more closely to her sister, and with sleepy lips she kisses her sister's shoulder.

" Are you comfortable, Verochka ? "

" Yes."

Their sleepy eyes close.

" Go to sleep, Louka."

" I'm asleep."

## CHAPTER XI

ON the table in a vase is a large bouquet of white roses. They are from Vladimir.

Vera is sitting on the divan. On her knees lies the new fur' coat. She strokes it, pressing her cheek to the fur.

" You know, Mamma, it seems to be alive, it seems to feel. He is so soft, so warm, dear animal. And his name is Moorzik. Of course he is alive. Here, give me your hand. Stroke him. Can you feel how the fur presses itself to the palm? It is Moorzik caressing you."

Vera buries her face in the fur.

" You dear. And how beautifully he smells, of fir-cones, almonds, and leather. My Moorzik."

Ekaterina Lvovna laughs.

" Now it's almonds.<sup>55</sup>

" Mamma, play something, and Moorzik and I shall listen. In a bride's house there should always be music—music and flowers."

" I must fry some cutlets," Ekaterina Lvovna pleads weakly. " Louka will be home to dinner soon."

" Mamma, one must not refuse a bride."

Ekaterina Lvovna sits down at the piano. Vera makes herself more comfortable on the divan.

"How well you play, Mammochka. Why, now I feel like a real bride. So cheerful, almost happy."

The bell rings. Ekaterina Lvovna goes to open the door. Into the passage walks a tall, pale woman, no longer young.

"I should like to see Vera Alexeievna Vishnevskaya."

Beneath the short veil her eyes are red with crying and her hands in the white gloves tremble a little.

"Come in, please. Verochka! Someone to see you."

"To see me?" asks Vera, surprised, and lazily stands up. The fur coat falls from the divan and curls up on the floor like a huge white cat.

"I came. . . . Excuse me," says the visitor in confusion. "You are Vera Alexeievna Vishnevskaya?"

Vera nods.

"Please sit down."

But the lady remains standing.

"Forgive me. I don't know where to begin." . . .

She stands at the window. The sun falls tight on her face, a tired pretty face with lines round the mouth, and eyes red with tears.

" I don't know whether you will understand me. Vladimir Ivanovich." . . .

Vera quickly raises her head.

" Oh, that's what it is. Vladimir Ivanovich . . . "

" Yes, he is in love with you. He told me so himself. And I . . . I came to ask you, to beg you, to refuse him. For God's sake ! You are so pretty—so young. . . . And I have nothing but him." . . . She stretches out to Vera her trembling hands in the white gloves. " For God's sake ! pity me ! "

Vera shrugs her shoulders.

" What have I to do with it ? You should have spoken to him. . . . If he prefers you . . . "

" Oh no. He is in love with you. He imagines that he is tired of me. But if you refuse him he will come back to me. . . . Why, for ten years we have been . . . "

Vera shakes her head.

" No, I will not refuse him. I cannot help you in any way."

The eyelashes tremble under the dark veil. Tears run down her pale cheeks. . . .

" How hard you are ! In place of a heart, you have a stone." . . .

" Good-day," says Vera.

" Good-bye. I wanted to ask you something else. . . . But that is useless too. Yet still, try not to make him too unhappy."

Vera laughs and settles herself comfortably on the couch.

" Well. That depends only on him and myself. . . ."

Ekaterina Lvovna silently accompanies the guest to the door.

Vera lifts the fur coat from the floor.

" What impertinence ! Yes, Mamma, it *is* an impertinence. To force herself like that on people she doesn't know. . . ."

" Verochka, I'm so sorry for her."

" Oh, stop, please. It's comic. So old. And yet she still wants to love. . . ."

" But she is unhappy, Verochka."

" Is she the only unhappy person in the world ? . . . What business is it of mine ? I feel so contented to-day. Play something else, Mammochka."

Vera presses her cheek to the fur again and half closes her eyes, listening to the music.

## CHAPTER XII

" I TOLD you, Vera, that you ought to buy a pink bedspread. And here you have a mauve one, like a funeral pall."

" Oh, stop, Mamma. I like it. And why should it be only pink? I am not a German to go in for sentiment like that."

" Just as you wish," agrees Ekaterina Lvovna. " And what kind of wallpaper? Also mauve? "

" Do have a wallpaper with chrysanthemums," Louka chimes in. " Mauve and white ones. And birds. Yellow birds with long tails. It's frightfully pretty. I know where you can buy it."

" Oh no, I can't bear birds. I'd dream at night that they were clawing me. It's nine o'clock already. Volodia will come soon."

Vera is doing her hair in the bedroom.

" No, a mauve bedspread is very pretty. I must buy a mauve rug."

The bell rings. The parquet creaks beneath masculine footsteps. Vera listens, smiling.

" I guess who is there. . . . Isn't it my fiance? "

" Isn't it my fiance? " . . . Oh, whatever Vladimir is like, even if he does wear spectacles,

even if he is plain, all the same he is her fiance. Is it not permissible that she should be a little, ever so little, in love with her fiance ?

" Vera, Vera," calls Ekaterina Lvovna, " come here at once."

Vera arranges without haste the folds of her dress, and, trying to walk exceedingly lightly and gracefully, comes into the dining-room.

" How are you, Volodia ? Why, what's the matter with you ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna looks startled and agitated.

" Vera, that lady who came here this morning has poisoned herself," she almost screams.

Vera sits down on the couch, arranges the wide dress, and raising her head, asks, still smiling, " Did she die ? " . . .

" Vera, for God's sake ! How can you . . . ? " cries Ekaterina Lvovna.

" No, no," says Vladimir Ivanovich hurriedly. " She's alive. It was possible to save her. She poisoned herself with veronal. . . . She took too much." . . .

Vera listens with interest.

" Yes, of course. They are all like that. Either they take too much or too little to die."

" But she nearly died. . . . The doctor said . . ."

Vera interrupts him.

" Nearly doesn't count. If she had really poisoned herself, she would have died. And

please, Volodia, that's enough about her. I don't care to hear any more."

Ekaterina Lvovna presses her hands to her heart.

"God have mercy on us! How wicked you are, Vera! Whom do you take after?" . . .

"Oh, Mamma, stop. I'm not wicked at all. But what business is it of mine? . . . Let her live and be healthy."

Vera sits on her mother's bed, clasping her thin knees.

"Mamma," she says quickly, looking at her mother in surprise. "Mamma, how did it happen? Tell me. Why, it is not a week since I waited for Arsenin and suffered tortures. And now I am in love with Volodia! Yes, in love, although it's funny. In love. Especially to-day, when that idiot poisoned herself. But how did it happen?"

"Why, Verochka, it's easy to understand. He is your fiance. When you are his wife you will love him more and more."

"Oh, Mammochka, it's not a bit like that. When I am his wife I shall probably fall out of love. You don't understand anything. It must be from expectation, because I kiss him. But I *am* in love," she repeats impatiently and offended. "And I wish the wedding were sooner. It's hard to wait. Often it is hard even to breathe, as if my heart were swollen."

She is silent for a moment.

" Listen, Mamma," she asks suddenly. " And you. . . . How can you ? "

" How can I what ? What are you talking about, Verochka ? "

" Why, how can you ? " impatiently continues Vera. " How can you . . . sleep alone ? Don't you find it difficult ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna raises her eyebrows and reddens.

" Vera, what are you saying ! You forget that I am your mother."

" Well, what of it ? What if you are my mother ? Must you be respected and feared ! No, no." Vera laughingly embraces her mother and kisses her neck. " I love you, I love you terribly; that is all. And I am so sorry for you. Yes, sorry for you."

" Stop, stop ! You'll suffocate me."

" Nobody kisses you. Then I will at least. My beautiful young mother."

Very much confused, Ekaterina Lvovna moves away from her daughter's side.

" No, really, that's enough ! Do try to calm yourself. Lie down quietly for a while. You're worse than Louka ! "

Vera stretches herself out on the bedspread next to her mother.

" Yes, seriously, I'm sorry for you, Mammochka. You must certainly marry again. You have such

shoulders, such eyes, such lips. You must not remain a widow."

"That's all foolishness, Verochka. How nervous you are!"

"No, I'm not at all nervous. I'm in love, I am happy, and I want everyone to be happy, and you most of all."

Vera kisses her mother again.

"Mammochka, my dearest. Mamma—rabbit. Mamma—peach. Mamma—nightingale. Do you remember what I used to call you when I was little?"

Ekaterina Lvovna tenderly strokes the dark hair.

"You are a strange girl. So affectionate, and yet you really have no heart, and you love no one. Like a cat. Now go to bed. Come here. I'll make the sign of the cross over you. It's very late."

"Good-night, my nightingale."

Vera kisses her mother again, and sliding off the bed, runs laughing to her room.

Louka is not yet asleep. She is lying in the darkness with closed eyes, her hands folded on the sheet.

Vera quietly walks by her, the bed creaks a little, the sheets rustle.

"Vera," calls out Louka, "Vera, listen."

"Aren't you asleep, Louka? It's late."

"Listen, Vera."

"Well, what is it?"

" I am lying here thinking of you all the time and I can't fall asleep/

Vera laughs softly.

" Give up thinking. You know the turkey also thought." . . .

" Vera, don't laugh. Vera, aren't you afraid of getting married ? "

" Afraid ? What are you imagining now ? "

" Have you forgotten ? Why, you told me yourself. . . . And all that will happen to you. Think of it. . . ."

" Oh, what a thing to think about." Vera yawns. " You'd better go to sleep."

The sheets rustle again.

" But, Vera," whispers Louka, troubled. " It's so frightful, so frightful." . . .

" Be quiet. Let me sleep. And don't worry yourself, please. You are still young, you don't understand. I am not at all afraid. I am very happy. Go to sleep, Louka."

Louka is quiet for a moment.

" Vera," she calls again. " Vera . . ."

But there is no reply.

Louka draws up her cold knees higher, covers herself with the bedspread up to the chin and sighs. Vera is laughing and does not want to listen. Can she really not understand what awaits her ?

Louka shuts her eyes, with a great fear of this difficult, incomprehensible, horrible life, and at once falls asleep.

## CHAPTER XIII

EKATERINA LVOVNA was unpacking the purchases which had just been brought from the shop. Vera, meanwhile, sat on the divan and gazed out of the window.

" The lace is very good, but the silk is too thin, it will wash badly. But what is the matter, Verochka ? You're not even looking, as if all this were not for you."

" I'm bored."

Louka ran into the dining-room holding Vera's new fur coat.

" You ought to be ashamed of being so sulky. You make us sick with your boredom. Look, even Moorzik has become sad." Louka raised the fur up high. " You see how he's hanging his sleeves. Smile at Moorzik, Vera, or he will be offended."

" Oh, stop, Louka."

" How wicked you are ! You hear what Moorzik says ? Is it for this that I cost fifteen thousand, that no one should even want to look at me ? Is it for this that I am so soft and warm ? Now, smile ! Otherwise Moorzik will be offended. Can it be possible that you don't love him any more ? "

" What is there to love, do you think ? It's only a fur coat, that's all."

Louka, screwing up her eyes, looked at her sister.

" And what do you expect a fur coat to be ? The Saint Isaac Cathedral ? "

Vera laughed.

" Don't be silly, Louka. Here, come and help me dress. And drag along Moorzik. Would you like to come with me and Volodia to have tea in the Bois de Boulogne ? "

Louka jumped up. The sleeves of the fur coat waved in the air.

" Hurrah! Don't be cross. Don't be cross. Only instead of tea we'll have chocolate. Won't we ? "

## CHAPTER XIV

ON the day before the wedding Aunt Varia came up from Bordeaux, and now she was sitting in the dining-room.

Louka examined her carefully. Mamma's sister, but not at all like her. So fat, so self-confident. Only three years older, but she looked quite an old woman.

"It's a good thing," Aunt Varia was saying, "that she's getting married. It will be easier for you. Yes, and you'll feel easier in your mind too. It doesn't take much to persuade the present generation to live in sin. I'm very glad that I have a son, not a daughter. Now you must hurry up and get Louka settled."

"Why, Louka is still a child." . . .

"I don't say, at once. When she is sixteen. Where is that Vera all this time? To-morrow is the wedding day, and she will not even have time to have a good sleep. It's not at all correct."

Ekaterina Lvovna smiled.

"And are you still just as particular about everything being correct?"

"Why not?" said Aunt Varia, surprised. And putting her elbows on the bright table-cloth, she

re-arranged the pins in her hair. " Everything must be correct—not as it is here. In this house everything is in disorder. Yes, and in your life, too, there was always disorder. You never knew what you wanted. And that is how you have brought up your daughter. Does she love her fiance, at least ? "

" She seems to love him."

" Seems ! You're a mother and yet you don't know ? Oh, you," she said contemptuously, shaking her head. " Although what the present generation call love——"

" Oh, Varia, don't upset yourself," Ekaterina Lvovna calmed her. " Here, taste this jam. I made it myself." . . .

" Katia, you can't silence me with jam." . . .

Vera, who has been dining out and dancing, comes home about one in the morning. She throws her fur coat on the divan and takes off her shoes.

" Even my feet have begun to ache ! Louka, bring in the sledges."

Louka runs for the sledges, Vera's slippers.

" It was so funny," cries Vera. " Some long-legged fellow kept looking at me, and Volodia became angry."

" Did you take the communion last Sunday, Vera ? " asks Aunt Varia severely.

" No. Should I have done ? "

Aunt Varia clasps her hands together.

" Goodness! How dreadful! "

" It's nothing. It's nothing. There'll be too much babbling as it is. Don't you worry about it, aunt. Oh, how tired I am ! "

" But at least you have thought seriously about the fact that you are now beginning a new life ? "

" What is there to think about ? Everything has been thought already. I'm going to bed. Well, good-night! "

Vera gets up and walks into the bedroom, undoing the belt of her dress on the way. Louka runs after her. Vera sits down on the bed.

" To-morrow I shall not be here." . . .

Louka, crouching on her heels, pulls off Vera's stocking. Vera kicks her legs.

" Stop ! It tickles ! "

" Oh, let me, let me. It's the last time."

Louka sniffs the air.

" What a lovely smell! Why do you put perfume on your knees ? "

Vera smiles.

" Because . . . "

" No, tell me why." . . . Louka bends forward and kisses Vera's smooth rosy knee. Vera laughingly pushes her in the chest with her foot. Louka falls on her back on to the carpet.

" You have killed me, killed me ! " cries Louka, folding her hands on her breast.

" No, I don't believe you ! Those who are dead wave their legs and sing ' God save the Tzar!' "

" God save the Tzar ! " sings Louka loudly.

Aunt Varia pushes her head through the doorway.

" What is happening here ? "

" An outburst of patriotic feeling ! " cries Vera, suffocating with laughter.

" Mercy on us ! And this on the eve of your wedding! " Aunt Varia shuts the door indignantly.

Vera continues laughing, buried in the pillow.

" And now I must sleep," she says, suddenly becoming serious. " To-morrow night will be spent in the train."

" Lucky girl," sighs Louka. " You'll see Nice. There are palms there. You'll be able to pick bananas from them yourself."

" What bananas ? I'll catch a monkey by its tail and bring it home to you as a present. Now, go to sleep. Don't chatter any more. I'm putting out the light."

Vera turned to the wall and put her hand under her cheek.

" To-morrow is my wedding day," she thought sadly. " If not with Volodia, suppose it was with Arsenin ? Oh, it's all the same. It's all right like this too. I shall be married. And rich." She shut her eyes. " Let everything that will happen to me come before me to-night in my sleep," she

whispered. " I think one is supposed to shake the little finger of the left hand ? " . . .

But her hands had become heavy and disobedient and she had no strength to move them.

Vera slept. She dreamed that she was walking along an unfamiliar street, wearing her old brown dress. She gets into an omnibus and rides away somewhere. Then again she is walking past shops and houses. The door of the church is open. It is empty and quiet. And there is neither bridegroom nor priest. Vera waits. On the altar is placed an ikon. The candles burn brightly before it. Vera takes the ikon, looks round, and runs out of the church. She runs through the streets clasping the ikon to her breast. She is being chased—" Stop her ! Stop her ! Verochka ! " Vera runs more and more quickly until she comes to the edge of a steep declivity. She would break into pieces. It does not matter. She would not care if she did, as long as they did not catch her. But it is easy to run down and she is not afraid. The sand moves away from under her feet. Here she is at the bottom. On the hill stand Louka, Ekaterina Lvovna and Vladimir. " Vera ! Vera ! " they cry. Vera raises her head and looks at them. How high they are. . • . And in her arms instead of the ikon is the dining-room clock. The hands point to ten o'clock. How late !

The faint sound of knives tapping against plates

drifted in from the kitchen, and from Louka's empty bed the coverlet hung down.

Vera folded her hands beneath her head. "What a bad dream. Bad. But why 'bad'? It was merely silly. No, bad." And suddenly there poured into her mind some explanations of dreams that she had once heard. To be in a church signified unhappiness. To run down a hill was also bad. "Foolishness, foolishness." She calmed herself. "Rubbish. I don't believe in any dreams. There!"

She got up from the bed, walked to the window and opened the shutters. Fine, thin rain tapped against the window-pane. The sky was grey and low. "Rain on a wedding day is a good omen. But that also is rubbish. Just as much rubbish as dreams."

Vera threw on her little dressing-gown and went into the dining-room. Everything was clean and tidy already. The parquet shone. On the table stood a large basket of white roses. Wedding flowers. She sat on the divan. Wedding. To-day was her wedding day, and the day was so funereal. She looked at the grey sky, at the wet umbrellas passing by.

"My God, how sad! How painful! What is painful?" she quickly asked herself. "Nothing, nothing. Nothing is painful. There is no pain, and there is even no sadness. It is merely boring.

And afterwards it will be boring too. Arsenin ..."  
No, she must not think of Arsenin.

Out of the kitchen ran Louka, all smudged with flour.

" Verochka, you're up already? Mamma asks whether she should put some Madeira into the sauce? "

" What? In the sauce? "

" Why, yes. In the sauce. It tastes better with Madeira. But it costs twenty francs a bottle/ "

Vera moved her shoulders impatiently.

" Oh, do as you like. What do I know about it? "

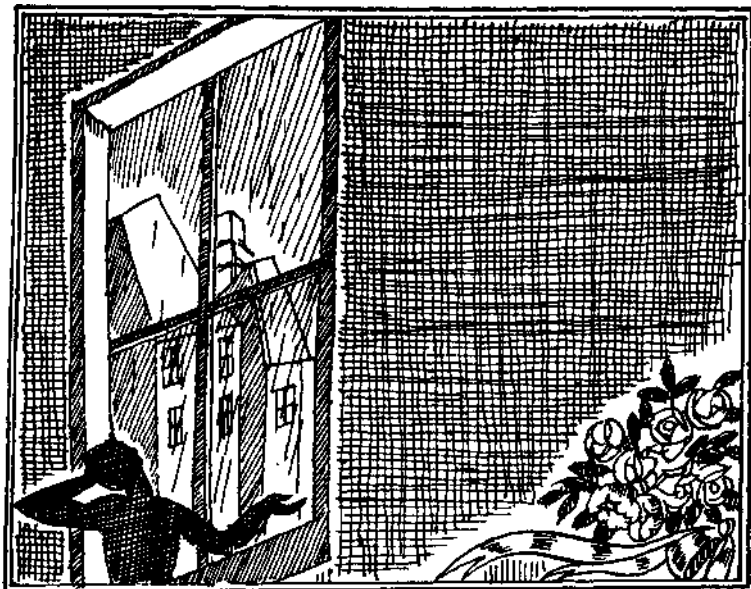
" She said, 'Pour in still more/ " Louka's voice floated across from the kitchen. " She said, ' It doesn't matter about it costing twenty francs, even fifty francs, as long as it should taste well/ "

The rain taps quietly on the glass. The flowers glimmer dimly white. Vera shuts her eyes. If only she could sit like this. And do nothing. Nothing. To sit like this and to know that everything is over and that there will be nothing else, except this grey, wet window and these white, useless flowers.

" Vera, are you here? " busily cried Aunt Varia from the corridor. " Dress yourself. It's almost time to go to church. "

Again Louka ran out.

" Vera, go to the kitchen. They have just



*. . . . there will be nothing else, except this grey, wet window and these white, useless flowers.*

brought a crab. Such a sympathetic-looking one, black, and he moves his whiskers. Otherwise they'll cook him in a minute. Come."

Vera feebly waves her hand.

"Go away."

"But he's pretty. You really should see him."

"Go away; my head aches. Shut the door quite tight. I can smell roasting."

"That's the duck," joyfully explains Louka, running off.

Again it became quiet and empty. And the rain beat on the glass as before. So quiet, so sad. A

wedding. Were they really preparing for a wedding in the house? It did not seem like it. It was more like a funeral.

From the white flowers streamed a sweet perfume. "Like incense," she thought, and suddenly she remembered her dream, and the church, and how she ran down the hill pressing the ikon to her heart. And for some reason she became frightened.

Ekaterina Lvovna came into the room.

Vera took her hand.

"Stay a little, Mamma. Sit down here."

Ekaterina Lvovna hastily and timidly sat down on the divan.

"Mamma," Vera looked straight into her mother's eyes. "Tell me, is it too late to refuse now?"

Ekaterina Lvovna's eyebrows drew together startled.

"To refuse?"

"Why, yes, to have the wedding."

Two red stains suddenly appeared on Ekaterina Lvovna's cheeks.

"I am afraid it is too late, Verochka," she said seriously and calmly.

"Then it is too late," replied Vera seriously. "Don't let us talk any more." She shook her head vigorously. "Kiss me, Mamma, and I'll go and dress."

Her little white shoes confidently standing on

the carpet, her thin fingers tightly holding the candle, and her smile, all said, "I am doing this of my own free will. I wanted it myself. I am very happy."

Blaze of candles. . . . Voices of the choir. . . .

A high window.

Through the white veil hanging over her eyes everything seemed somehow strange, bewitched, almost comic.

The best man placed the wreath firmly on Vladimir's head, making him look like the sultan on the tobacco-boxes. Louka, on her long thin legs, looked just like a heron, and her head with the large bow of ribbon, in profile, looked just like a hare. Heron-hare, or hare-heron. . . . Vera laughed quietly, covering her face with her hands.

"Crying," whispered Aunt Varia, satisfied. "Even she feels that a wedding is a solemn thing."

Vera smiled absently out of the window of the train, holding in her hands her wedding bouquet.

"Write every day," implored Ekaterina Lvovna.

"Enjoy yourself!" shouted Louka. "Send some fruit! "

Ekaterina Lvovna touched Vladimir's sleeve.

"I beg you to take care of her. It's silly, I know. All mothers say that. But you will, won't you? Vera is so delicate."

Vladimir kissed her hand.

" You may set your mind at rest."

It became boring. There was nothing left to say. At last the train began to move.

" Hurrah ! " called out the best man.

" Hurrah ! " repeated the rest and waved their handkerchiefs.

Louka ran after the train.

" Louka! Look out! You'll fall under the wheels ! " screamed Vera.

Ekaterina Lvovna made the sign of the cross over the departing train.

Vera stood at the window a little longer, waving her handkerchief. But she could see nothing more.

" We're off," said Vladimir.

Vera entered the compartment, took off her new travelling coat and her little hat and sat down. Vladimir sat opposite her and smiled.

" You're my wife now."

" He need not have said that," she thought, arranging her hair. " Well, what ? What next ? "

She looked at him impatiently and said agitatedly, " I didn't travel first-class from Russia." And she stroked the red velvet upholstery.

" When shall we be in Nice ? "

" To-morrow at three."

He sat opposite her and was talking so quietly and with such reserve, like an ordinary acquaint-

ance. He had not kissed her even once after the ceremony.

"What is this?" she thought anxiously. "What is this?"

"I think you will like Nice. We'll go down to Monte Carlo to play roulette. Are you a gambler?"

"I don't know. I have never played."

"Not even cards?"

"Not cards either."

"Then you'll certainly win. Beginners are always lucky."

They were silent again. The carriage jerked slightly up and down. The wheels ran noisily.

"You must be tired," he said, getting up. "You must lie down. It's late."

He spread out the plaid. Vera saw that his hands were trembling. "That means that he is also nervous," she thought triumphantly. "Not only I. He is too."

"I don't want to sleep yet."

"But it's late."

"Oh, very well." She stretched out on the seat and put a little leather cushion under her head.

"Good-night. I'm asleep."

"You won't be comfortable like that. You should undress. I'll wait in the corridor." He went out, closing the door behind him.

Vera jumped up, quickly opened the new suitcase, took out a bottle of perfume and began to

pour the perfume on the upholstery, on the plaid, and on the cushion. Then she took off her dress, put on a dressing-gown and soft travelling slippers, powdered her face before the mirror on the wall, rouged her lips, perfumed herself and then sniffed.

She had rather overdone it. It was impossible to breathe.

From the wine that she had drunk at lunch there was still a buzzing in her head. She closed the suit-case.

" Soon ? . . . Or must I wait until tomorrow ? . . . My God, how in love I am," she suddenly said out loud and laughed softly. " And he is afraid. What a funny person." She put out the light and lay down, covering herself with the plaid. The blood beat noisily in her left ear.

" I'm in love, in love, in love, and soon my husband will come to me." . . .

She stretched out her legs. Why so long ? But he was already knocking at the door.

" Are you lying down ? May I come in ? "

" You may."

He came in, and although it was almost dark she noticed that he was very pale.

" What is it that smells so ? " he asked absently.

" I accidentally spilt some perfume."

" We must open the window or we'll be suffocated."

" No, no, leave it," she said, startled. " It's only 'Fol Arome.' It can't do any harm."

" As you like. I was only anxious about you."

In the warm, perfumed, dark compartment the bluish little lamp flickered faintly.

On the pillow Vera's face gleamed whitely. Vladimir carefully made his way to his seat and stopped.

She saw how he lifted his hand and took off his horn-rimmed spectacles. The glass shone darkly and the spectacles fell to the table with a slight noise. Now Vladimir's face looked quite different. Rather kind and absent-minded. But somehow Vera felt afraid.

" Vera," he said softly.

" What ? " she answered still more softly.

He walked up and sat next to her.

" Good-night." And she moved away from him a little.

He bent down and kissed her cheek.

" What a strong perfume it is ! Truly it's a maddening smell."

Vera was silent.

" You're my wife," he said again.

" I have already heard that," she thought, mockingly, as was always her way, and at that moment she felt that her teeth were chattering.

" Are you comfortable ? " . . . He re-arranged

her pillow, and, bending down, he looked at her closely with his short-sighted, prominent eyes.

What was this ? . . . how disconcerting. . . .

Vladimir re-arranged the plaid. His hand lay on her naked knee.

" How cold your hands are," was all she said. And they were silent again.

" Oh, no ! no ! " she cried suddenly. " You mustn't. Not here. Not in the train. To-morrow. In Nice. I beg you, please, Volodia, Volodia . . ."

The wheels ran noisily. The train jerked slightly up and down. Vera opened her eyes. Through the blue blinds struggled a bluish, trembling light. Vera breathed in the warm, perfumed, heavy air, lifted her head, and everything swam before her eyes. On her finger there shone dimly a thin gold ring. Vera could not tear her eyes off it. Then she sat on the seat, her legs hanging.

On the other seat slept Vladimir, her husband. He lay on his back, red, with half-opened mouth. At his feet lay his jacket. His braces had fallen to the floor. Vera turned away so that she should not see. She felt giddy. It was the perfume. She must go out into the corridor. She threw off the plaid and quickly wrapped her dressing-gown over her torn chemise.

On the little table next to the spectacles lay her

wedding bouquet. And even the flowers were loathsome.

The corridor was empty. It was quite light now. A rosy, radiant, sparkling sun slowly swam out of the transparent clouds. Vera looked at the low, round hillocks, at the low, dusty trees. A cold morning wind blew in through the window. She shivered and wrapped the dressing-gown more closely around herself. " So rose the sun at Austerlitz," she thought, mockingly, as was always her way. " So rises the sun on my new life."

Her shoulders shivered, she pressed her head to the cold glass.

" I am so unhappy," she sobbed suddenly. " I am so unhappy. But why ? "

She lifted her head impatiently, angry with herself. " Why am I unhappy ? " . . .

The train jerked badly, and again she pressed her head helplessly to the window. Her tears, like drops of rain, trickled down the glass.

" I am unhappy because I am wicked. Yes. Because I am wicked."

## THIRD PART



## CHAPTER I

THAT evening the electric light had fused in the house. Ekaterina Lvovna was already asleep. Her head ached and she had gone to bed early.

Owing to the pale unaccustomed light of the candles everything in the room looked somehow extraordinary, mysterious. And it was too quiet. If only someone would slam the door. If only she could hear someone's voice. But no one would come and Mamma is asleep.

By the bare wall where lately stood Vera's white bed, there is now a couch, and on it sits Vasska, the ginger cat. An ordinary cat, but his huge black shadow on the wall looks like a tiger's. Louka does not like him, but since Vera went away she takes him to her room at night. At any rate he is alive. She has a companion, at least, she is not alone.

Louka undresses and throws back the coverlet.

"Puss, puss, puss! Mister Vasska, please come here!"

But the cat does not obey her. Without moving he looks fixedly at the candle.

"What do you see there, silly? Come and sleep here."

The cat continues to gaze at the flame with round, green, unblinking eyes.

Louka becomes uneasy. She waves her hand in front of the cat.

" Puss ! "

But the cat remains, sitting motionless.

" Oh, so this is what you're like ? Then, just wait ! I'll burn your whiskers off."

Louka moves the candle right up to the cat's mouth. The round, glassy eyes gaze straight into the flame, straight into her face. And suddenly something stabs her heart, her cold fingers straighten and drop the candle.

" Stoupka ! "

The candlestick falls to the ground. It is dark. Dark, and she cannot breathe from fright. But at that moment Ekaterina Lvovna comes in with a lamp.

" What was that noise, Louka ? "

" I dropped the candle. Don't go away. I'm frightened."

Her knees still tremble. Louka lies down in bed and shuts her eyes.

" Bless me, Mamma."

Ekaterina Lvovna makes the sign of the cross over her.

" Mamma, is Stoupka—no, what am I saying—is Vasska still sitting here ? " . . .

" Vasska ? Why, is he here ? "



*The round, glassy eyes gaze straight into the flame.*

"He's on the couch," whispers Louka, startled.

"What's the matter with you, Louka? There's no Vasska here,"

"Then he's under the couch. Look for him, Mammochka."

Ekaterina Lvovna bends down, looks beneath the couch, beneath the bed.

"He's not here. You must have imagined it."

"He was here just now," says Louka agitatedly.  
"Where is he then? Find him."

"He must be in the kitchen."

Ekaterina Lvovna goes out of the room.

" Why, of course, he's asleep on the hearth. Shall I bring him to you ? "

" Oh, no, no! Don't let him come in here ! And lock him in the kitchen. Lock him in. "

" What is this foolishness ? Why do you want the poor thing locked up ? "

" Oh, please, Mamma. "

The lock creaks.

" And please, to-morrow give him away *to* someone. "

" Very well, " Ekaterina Lvovna agrees indifferently. " I said that there is no sense in keeping him. There are no mice here. . . . Go to sleep, Louka. "

Louka lies in the darkness, pressing a little cold cross to her heart.

" Lord, deliver and guard. " . . .

Behind the wall, in the kitchen, the water drips into the sink and the floor creaks quietly. There the window is uncurtained and the moon wanders freely about the kitchen, examines the shining pots, points a narrow ray at the knives. . . . And he is not asleep. He walks from the window to the hearth and back again. That is why the floor creaks. But who is he ? Vasska ? Or Stoupka ?

Or ?

## CHAPTER II

L o u K A stands in the corridor, leaning against the wall. To-day she will certainly be called to answer in geography. She must look at the lesson again.

From behind the door of the little room where the old desks and blackboards are piled together she hears a rustling noise. What is in there? Beetles? Louka is afraid of beetles, but she is curious. And a beetle would hardly jump at her. She quietly opens the door.

In the narrow, dusty, half-dark room, right on the dirty floor. . . . Louka gases, her heart beating painfully, her eyes wide open. What are they doing? Why?

She would like to slam the door, to run away, to refuse to admit, even to herself, what she saw. Yet she stands on the threshold and looks, for she cannot tear herself away.

" What are you doing ? " suddenly cries Louka, loudly in a startled voice.

Jeanne jumps up first, dishevelled and red.

" What were you doing ? " repeats Louka, startled.

Yvonne pushes Louka outside.

Louka runs down the corridor, clenching her fists. Coming towards her is the little round form-mistress nick-named " the Sphere."

" Why are you here ? The lesson has begun."

Louka curtsies.

" Excuse me, I'll be there immediately."

" And where are Yvonne and Jeanne ? They are not there either."

" They cannot have returned from lunch yet."

" Yes, they have. I have seen them. Perhaps they are in there ? " The Sphere stretches out her short arm and points to the little room.

" No, no." Louka shakes her head. " They're not there. There's no one there. My word of honour."

Anything to prevent her going there, from seeing them. If she finds them, there will be a scandal. They would be expelled from the Lycee.

" I shall go and look for them downstairs."

The form-mistress turns back, Louka sighs with relief. " Thank God ! She's walked past." . . .

Jeanne and Yvonne come in half-way through the lesson.

" Where have you been ? " asks the Sphere.

Yvonne reddens and says nothing.

" We went for a walk," says Jeanne.

" Very well. . . . You will stay in for an hour after school."

Yvonne sits down in her place next to Louka.

" This is your doing, you rotter."

Louka shrugs her shoulders contemptuously.

" After the lesson," she says, showing her fist.

The bell rings. They all jump up from their seats. The desks clatter noisily.

" Ladies ! " cries Louka, standing on the seat.

" T challenge Yvonne to a boxing match ! "

" I accept," Yvonne nods phlegmatically. " It's no use your taking me on. I'll knock you into mincemeat." . . .

Everyone crowds round. They choose the seconds. The boxers take off their overalls and roll up their sleeves. Louka walks into the ring first.

" Champion of Russia ! " introduces Jeanne, the referee.

Louka bows.

" Champion of France ! "

Yvonne also bows.

The boxers shake hands. The public claps and becomes excited.

" Yvonne is five kilos heavier."

" But Louka is quicker on her feet."

" Yvonne is stronger. I back Yvonne. Five to one."

" I'm for Louka."

" You'll lose. Yvonne . . ."

" Start."

Louka screws up her eyes and, waving her fists like a windmill, throws herself at Yvonne. Yvonne gives her a blow on the chest. With difficulty Louka retains her foothold.

" Bravo, Yvonne ! That's the stuff to give her ! That's right ! "

Louka throws herself again at Yvonne. She does not feel the blows. She hears nothing, sees nothing. Only one thing she knows—she must win.

Yvonne is retreating. She is breathing rapidly and is already tired. Her eyes are startled. Louka continues to attack.

" Stick it, Yvonne ! Bravo, Louka ! That's right ! And again ! . . . Bravo, Louka ! "

For a moment the boxers become entangled.

<sup>c</sup> " She's scratching ! " cries Louka.

The whistle. " Break, break, Yvonne ! Disgraceful ! "

Louka attacks. Blood is trickling from her scratched cheek.

" Bravo I Bravo, Louka ! "

Now Yvonne is merely dodging the blows, covering her face with her hands. She looks round for a way of escape. But the public stands in a compact circle, shoulder to shoulder.

" You've got cold feet, but you won't get away ! " cries Louka, in Russian now.

" That's enough ! " suddenly sobs Yvonne. " I can't go on any more ! "

" Do you admit that you're beaten ? "

" Yes," sobs Yvonne.

Jeanne rings the little bell.

" The Champion of Russia has won in one round." . . .

The boxers again shake hands. The public carry round Louka on their shoulders.

" Careful! Be careful! You'll drop her ! You'll kill her ! "

Louka, who is not yet quite herself, looks round with happy, mischievous eyes.

" You see, I beat her."

Again they applaud. Someone wipes her scratched cheek.

Someone pushes her.

" I won ten francs on you. I'll treat you to pastries to-morrow."

Louka goes home happy and proud. Her left shoulder aches a little and so does the scratch on her cheek. Yvonne will not forget her in a hurry. Yet the pedestrians hurry by her, push her, and no one knows that she has won.

It is already dark. The street lamps are lit. The air is cold and damp. Louka walks through the Trocadero, stops for a moment, and from the steps she looks at Paris. The Eiffel Tower is dissolved in white mist, and below, beneath the shimmer of lights and the trees, lies the Champ de

Mars. Louka walks down the steps, walks slowly by the cast-iron rhinoceros and the slumbering fountains.

She bends down and picks up from the ground a brown, folded leaf, and puts it on her palm. "Like a message," thinks Louka. "A note . . . from where? From the sky?"

The bare trees murmur disquietingly over her head. Through the lacery of twigs, the lighted lamps look like stars. From the moist black earth rises the sweet, heady smell of rotting leaves. And suddenly, a gust of wind, and between the trees appear huge black wings.

Azrael. . . .

But now there is nothing. Only the evening. Only the lamps and the whispering twigs.

Louka walks along, startled and dazed. What was it? . . . No, there was nothing. Does she still remember then? She has not altogether forgotten? . . .

Louka feels sad. And how tired she is. She can hardly move her legs. Here at last is their street. Beneath the lamp, before the very entrance of their house, someone is standing. He stands with his back to her. He must be waiting for someone, but what business is it of hers? Her heart is still throbbing from the noise of the black wings. What was it? . . . Could it really be Azrael again?

"Good evening, Louka."



*She must have drunk too much*



Louka puts a cold hand in his palm. " No, I am only imagining it," she says, frightening herself. " Only imagining." . . .

And yet she says :

" Good evening, Arsenin Nikolaevich. . . ."

" How do you do, Louka ? "

" Very well, thank you." Better lean against the lamp-post, so as not to fall.

She sees his face indistinctly. And his voice seems to come from a distance. . . . It is the mist . . . and the excitement.

" How pale you are. Have you been ill ? "

" No."

" How is Ekaterina Lvovna ? And Vera Alexeievna ? "

" Vera is married. She is in Nice."

" Is she coming home soon ? " he asks abruptly.

" Next week. She sent some flowers yesterday."

He takes off his hat.

" Well, good-bye, Louka. Give my regards to Vera Alexeievna. Don't forget."

" No."

" How big you have grown ! Do you work hard at school ? Well, don't forget to give my regards to Vera Alexeievna. Good-bye."

He walks away quickly. Louka looks absently after him.

Was it really he ? The street was empty **and** one **could** hardly imagine that he had just **been**

standing beneath the lamp and speaking to her. . . . Louka walks quietly into the house, climbs the stairs, and in the passage throws herself on her mother's neck.

"Mamma, Mamma . . . and I can't understand/' she sobs—or perhaps she laughs.

Ekaterina Lvovna pushes her away a little.

"Perhaps you will tell me now what is the matter with you?" And she sees the red scratch on Louka's cheek.

"Good heavens! Did you fall?"

"No, no, I'm wounded." Louka is already laughing loudly. "I fought with Yvonne and I beat her."

Louka runs quickly into the dining-room.

"You should be ashamed of yourself, fighting." . . .

"I won!" shouts Louka. "I won! Just think! She is five kilos heavier, and I won!"

From excitement Louka cannot stay in one place and runs from one room to the other, slamming the doors deafeningly.

"Louka, do stop. You're giving me a headache."

But it is absolutely vital to Louka to have as much noise, clatter and laughter as possible. She lies down on her back on the divan, waves her legs and, turning a somersault, lands on the floor.

"Louka, you mad creature! You'll break your back."

But Louka is already jumping from chair to chair.

" Don't stop me, Mamma. I simply can't help it. I should like to do as Charlie Chaplin did in ' The Gold Rush/ to let the feathers out of all the cushions and to swing about on a walking-stick hanging from the ceiling. Oh, Mamma . . . "

Louka runs to her room. For about five minutes the noise she makes can be heard in the little flat. Then everything is quiet. . . .

Ekaterina Lvovna laid the table and brought a bowl of soup from the kitchen.

" Louka, come and have your dinner."

But Louka did not reply. She did not even hear. She sat on her bed, and, tightly clasping her knees, gazed into the corner, smiling absurdly, blissfully. A yellow ring of light on the pavement. Arsenin. He was wearing a blue coat and a grey hat. She noticed that well. And his collar was up. " How big you have grown," he said, and smiled. And what about a walking-stick. . . . Was there a walking-stick? She rubbed her forehead. Yes, a cane hung on his arm. And grey gloves. And his hair shone when he raised his hat.

" Louka, what are you doing? Come and have your dinner! "

" In a minute. I'm doing my homework."

Again she tried to picture Arsenin before her.

But now, instead of him, she saw herself. Tousled

hair, a scratch on her cheek, in her old beret—a fright. And inky hands. And he could hardly have noticed that her shoes had white soles, because it was dark. And she had been so silly—afraid to say anything. Only " Yes " and " No." Like a deaf-mute. The word " deaf-mute " seemed to be the most humiliating and the most suitable.

" Like a deaf-mute," she repeated in self-contempt, and went up to the mirror and put out her tongue at herself.

" Oh, you ghastly fright I " . . .

" Louka, the soup will get cold ! "

" I'm coming, I'm coming. You don't give me a chance to solve my sums."

Louka sat at the table and put the table napkin on her knees.

" And what new idea is this, for girls to fight ? In our Institute . . . "

" You were dressed-up dolls in your Institute."

" It isn't nice for girls to fight. And how do you fight ? Tell me."

Louka shrugged her shoulders.

" You wouldn't be interested."

" Could I find it uninteresting ? "

" We simply fight with our fists. We box and try to punch each other in the jaw so that it should hurt as much as possible. Or in the pit of the stomach—although that's forbidden."

" Good heavens ! Are you really serious ? Like drunken coachmen." . . .



" Good heavens ! Are you really serious ? >

Louka again shrugged her shoulders.

" Well, I told you that you wouldn't like it. You're not a sport. You don't understand." . . .

After dinner Louka went back to her room again. She must remember everything, everything in detail.

Louka sighs, presses her hands to her heart and sees . . . yes, actually sees, Arsenin. Every eyelash, every feature of his face, every seam in his coat. He stands in the corner and looks at her with shining, dreamy eyes, and the yellow light of the lamp falls on his grey hat.

## CHAPTER III

IN the morning a letter arrived.

Vera wrote " Meet us on Thursday at a quarter to eleven. I'm frightfully glad to return to Paris, Mammochka, and that the honeymoon month is over. Oh, that honeymoon ! "

Thursday. That meant to-morrow.

" Louka, Louka! " cries Ekaterina Lvovna.  
" To-morrow morning ! "

Louka runs into the dining-room.

" Verochka is coming back," Ekaterina Lvovna continued with difficulty, and tears trickled down her cheeks. " To-morrow morning.

" Oh, Louka," sobbed Ekaterina Lvovna. " You don't know. It's so hard for me to be without Vera." She draws Louka towards her. " Only you, my little daughter, comforted me. I don't know what I should have done without you. Thank you."

" No, Mamma, don't." . . . Louka hides her face, red with shame, on her mother's breast. Comfort? . . . A lot of comfort she gives at home ! She is like a stranger. Does not say anything day or night and thinks only of Arsenin.

. . . That could not be called " comfort." Poor Mamma,

Louka is also crying, hugging her mother. Ekaterina Lvovna kisses her wet cheek,

" My dear little girl. How happy I am to have such good daughters ! "

It is six o'clock and quite dark, as if it were night.

Louka stretches sleepily. The electric light shines yellowly and unpleasantly beneath the ceiling.

" Put on your new dress, Louka."

Ekaterina Lvovna anxiously inspects herself in the mirror. Is it all right so ? Will Vera like it ? She must not let them be ashamed of her and Louka. Should she pin some flowers to her coat ? . . .

" Mamma, hurry up ! I'm ready."

Ekaterina Lvovna turns round.

" You are wearing your old beret. Take it off at once. It should have been thrown away long ago. And where are your gloves ? "

" I don't wear gloves."

" No, that I cannot allow. Here, take mine."

" They're so clean. I'll make them dirty."

" Pull up your stockings. Tuck in your scarf. There's no sense in trying to imitate your movie hero, because you are, well, just a little girl."

At last they went out. They had to go to Vera's apartment to see that everything was as it should be.

The sleepy maid opened the door. A spacious entrance-hall, and everything so smart and new. Not like their apartment. Louka walks from room to room, touches things, sits on the chairs. That's how she would like to live. That's how she would like to live with Arsenin. . . .

Ekaterina Lvovna is excited.

" I ordered a chicken for lunch. Verochka will be hungry after the journey. Put the violets on the bed-table, but see that you don't break the vase. And for dessert, chestnuts and whipped cream. What do you think ? "

They arrived at the station early. Ekaterina Lvovna walks impatiently up and down the platform.

" Louka, don't crush the flowers, remember. And give them to Vera at once. Don't forget. They're for luck."

At last the train comes in. Vera comes out of the carriage, smiling and elegant.

" Here she is ! Here she is ! " cries Louka and runs towards her sister. Vera has already seen them, and pushing Louka a little out of the way, quickly walks up to Ekaterina Lvovna.

" Mammochka ! "

Ekaterina Lvovna throws her arms around Vera's neck and, with an almost painful tenderness, presses her lips to Vera's cheek. Vera's long lashes tremble.

Louka looks at her sister. How should she begin talking to her? How should she begin talking to this beautiful strange lady? . . . First of all she must give her the flowers.

But Vera, leaving Ekaterina Lvovna, turns impetuously to her sister.

" Louka ! " And three times, somehow extraordinarily greedily, she kisses Louka on the lips.

Well, give her the flowers.

" Thank you, how sweet of you ! "

Without taking her eyes off Louka, she laughs.

" And why do you blush? Have you forgotten me? I seem strange to you? And I missed you, chicken." . . .

To greet Vladimir Ivanovich was simpler.

" Hallo, Volodia."

" How you have shot up, Louka. You'll soon be taller than I am."

They rode home to Vera's in a taxi. Louka sat opposite her sister and looked closely into her face. She had changed. No, she was just the same, only a little more excited. . . .

" And there are no bananas on the palms, Louka." Vera speaks quickly, her big grey eyes shining. " And the palms are ragged. One gets frightfully tired of them. And it's not so wonderful. The sea is very blue, and it's boring, much more boring than here."

At home, when they had taken off their coats,

they began to kiss each other again, and Louka, no longer shy, hung on her sister's neck.

Then Vera shut herself up in the bath-room with Ekaterina Lvovna and whispered there with her.

And Louka put her ear in vain in every position behind the door, trying to find a place where she could hear better. She could make out nothing above the sound of running water.

They were very jolly at lunch.

"Verochka, you look tired/" said Vladimir Ivanovich anxiously. " You should lie down."

Vera shrugged her shoulders.

" Lie down yourself if you are tired."

" But you slept badly in the train. I thought . . ."

" You think too much."

Vera spoke to her husband curtly and irritably, just as she used to speak to Louka, once. But now she turns to her sister and smiles sweetly.

" Well, Louka, let's go and unpack. Perhaps we'll find something for you there."

Louka understood. Times had changed. It was carnival now in Louka's street.

They spent the whole day together. They were somehow extraordinarily tender with each other, almost in love.

" And you are happy," Louka wanted to ask, but " happy " did not seem to be the right word.



*... sees her mother as she was twenty-two years ago ...*



" And are you pleased ? " she asked.

Vera nods absently.

" Of course, of course."

But Louka was already going into raptures over the presents.

" Are all these for me ? The sweets, and the stockings, and the handbag. . . . And you're not sorry to part with them ? "

It was late when they got ready to go home, and in the hall they took a long time saying good-bye, as though they were parting for several months.

" You will come to us to-morrow, Verochka ? "

" Surely I will. And I do wish you weren't going. You know what, Mamma ? Leave Louka here until to-morrow. You are not afraid to sleep alone."

" Afraid ? " repeated Ekaterina Lvovna, surprised. " No, but she must go to school. As it is she didn't go to-day."

" And she won't go to-morrow. What does it matter ? . . . Would you like to stay with me, Louka ? "

" I should say so."

" Well, good-bye, Mother. Let her stay."

Louka waltzed round the hall.

Vladimir Ivanovich closed the door after Ekaterina Lvovna.

" Where will Louka sleep ? "

" Why, with me in my bedroom, of course."

" And I ? "

" You'll sleep in the study on the divan."

Vladimir Ivanovich said nothing in reply.

" Now, Louka, hurry up. I'm dead tired."

The mauve bedspread is turned back. The sheets and pillow-cases are trimmed with lace and on the little table are violets.

Vera takes off her dress.

" No, no, let me. I'll undress you, Vera."

Louka sits down on the carpet.

" Give me your feet. I'll take your shoes off."

And then she raised her head in surprise.

" What's this ? Why don't you smell of perfume ? "

" Because," answers Vera.

" Again ' because.' You use perfume ' because,' and you don't use perfume ' because.' Why ? "

" Because . . . there's no reason to do so."

Louka opens her eyes wide.

" That's the truth, there's no reason."

Louka has already pulled off Vera's stockings.

" I don't understand."

" You don't understand ? " Vera sits on the bed waving her bare legs. " There's no one to do it for."

" Why ? I thought that when one is married . . ."

" It doesn't matter what you thought."

Louka rubs her cheek on Vera's smooth knee.

" I like it so much when you are perfumed. Perfume yourself. Oh, do, for me, please."

Vera laughingly jumps down, holding her chemise over her breast, and goes up to the dressing-table

" Isn't she exacting ! Perhaps you will order me to rouge my lips."

" Yes, rouge your lips, so that you will look altogether beautiful. Oh, how lovely you are ! "

Louka, waving her hand, throws herself into bed, and pulls up the mauve coverlet.

Such a wide bed, cold and smooth. And suddenly, for a moment, Louka feels the sensation of that night when Azrael flew to her for the first time. The same alarming lightness in her blood, and she can even taste again the moonlight on the tip of her tongue.

Louka stretches herself.

" How good. . . . Vera . . . "

Someone knocked quietly at the door.

" What's the matter now ?" Vera irritably went to see. In the corridor stood Vladimir Ivanovich in pyjamas.

" What do you want, Volodia ? "

" Verochka, I must speak to you."

" Well, what of it ? You can tell me to-morrow."

" Listen, it's the first night in our new home."

" Oh, stop that silly talk for goodness' sake. And even if it is——"

" Very well, very well. Don't be cross, Ver-ochka. Good-night."

Vera closed the door. Louka stretched out her arms to her.

" Hurry up. I feel cold without you."

Vera lifted the coverlet and lay down beside her sister.

" Well, here I am. Put out the light, Louka."

" No. Wait a little. I want to look at you. Put your head on the pillow. Shut your eyes. Yes, just so."

Vera laughs.

" Oh, Louka. I have spoilt you and now I have to suffer for it. Well, have you had a good look ? Put out the light."

Louka in the darkness pressed close to Vera's warm, perfumed shoulder.

" I'm so glad that you have come back."

Vera embraced her tightly.

" My little Louka, what a darling you are. You're nothing but bones, my chicken."

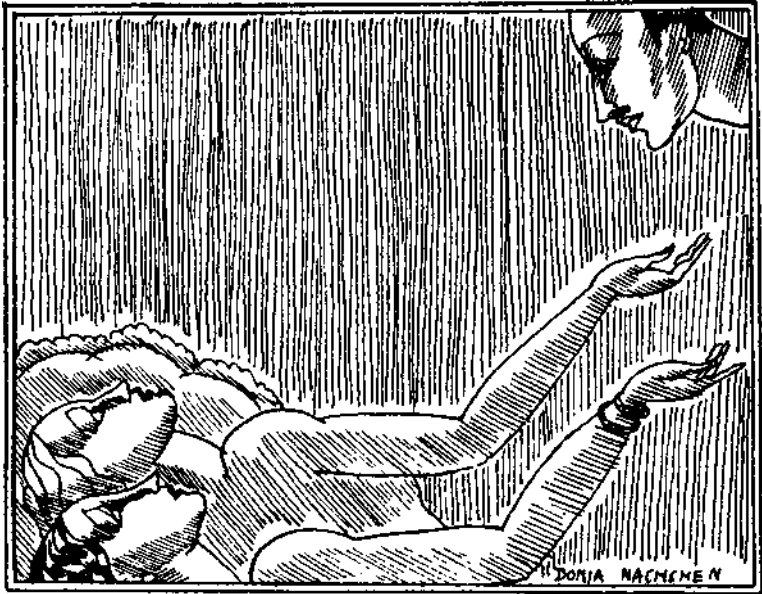
Louka shivered with happiness.

" How good . . . how good." . . .

" Listen," Vera suddenly whispers in her ear. " Tell me. . . . Tell. . . . Have you seen anyone we know since I have been away ? "

Louka's heart began to beat.

" Whom have you seen ?" Vera whispers again.



*His black eyes gazed straight at them. But Vera could not see at whom. At her or at Louka.*

"Arsenin Nikolaevich," replies Louka, almost inaudibly.

It became quite quiet. She should not have spoken of that. It did not interest Vera. Vera had fallen asleep.

But Vera moved up closer to her.

"Where did you see him? What did he say?"

"Near our house. Last week. He asked whether you were returning soon. He sent his regards to you."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing else."

And again it became quiet. . . .

" Well, go to sleep . . . enough chattering . . . go to sleep."

Louka screwed up her eyes. She should not have said anything about Arsenin. It only made Vera fall asleep. And it was so lovely before. . . . She sighed.

" Aren't you asleep, Louka ? "

" No."

" Do you love me, Louka ? "

" Yes."

" More than anything in the world ? "

Louka thought a moment. She must be honest.

"Nearly." . . .

More than anything in the world she loves Arsenin.

" And you, Vera ? "

" And I . . . nearly." . . . Vera opened her sleepy eyes and saw before her the face of Arsenin. His black eyes gazed straight at them. But Vera could not see at whom. At her or at Louka.

" More than anything in the world, I love *you*," she whispered to him, falling asleep.

## CHAPTER IV

L I F E became a jolly affair. There was lots of money, and Vera had promised Louka a bicycle for the spring. Louka had never dreamt that there could be such a pleasant, easy life. And Vera was jolly. She became jollier every day.

Thus a month went by. But Louka could not believe that it could last. Could it really stay like this for a long time? Always? And she fearfully waited for something, something which would break up everything, destroy everything, and which would make things still worse than before. She tried to comfort herself. Perhaps she was frightened needlessly.

But it appeared that she was not frightened needlessly. The *something* did begin, and it began like this.

Louka returned from the Lycee on a windy February day. It was still cold. But the Spring wind blew gently. Louka walked slowly and smiled. How good. The sky was light and Spring-like. Everything was so light, and her feet were light and her heart was light. Everything was so light. It seemed that everything was

motionless, but in reality everything was flying and could be heard. Louka listened and heard the faint noises of the trams, of the wind, of voices and the faint sound of her heart in her breast. How good. . . .

Yesterday Louka took Jeanne to the circus and paid for her. She is rich now. She can do these things. Jeanne is even a little ingratiating with her.

Louka opens the entrance-door. "Mamma!" But there is no reply.

In the dining-room, on the table, is a note. "I am at Vera's. Come there." Splendid. Louka has not seen her sister for three days. Vera is always going somewhere. One can never catch her. Splendid. Splendid. And they always have a good dinner at Vera's, not like at home.

Louka throws her satchel with the books on the floor, and goes bounding down the stairs.

At Vera's the maid answers the door. And at once, even in the hall, she can feel something strange, something disquieting.

"What has happened?"

The maid looks startled.

"I don't know. I think that madame is ill."

Vladimir is sitting on the divan in the study.

"How do you do, Louka? Sit with me a little. No, you can't see Vera."

"Why?"

Vladimir gazes at the carpet and does not seem to hear Louka's question.

Louka sits on the divan, stretches out her legs and looks at her beige shoes.

It is hardly amusing to sit there saying nothing. And why may she not go to Vera? Vladimir looks upset and pale.

" Well, how's the Lycee, Louka? Were you called out to answer? "

" Yes, in Algebra."

From behind the closed door could be heard Ekaterina Lvovna's voice.

" Try and be calm. Don't give way like that. Nothing is certain yet." And the sound of sobbing.

" Why is Vera crying? "

Vladimir Ivanovich raises his head.

" Well, well. Were you called out to answer? "

" In Algebra."

And from behind the door.

" Did you take quinine? "

" Yes. It doesn't help." The sobbing becomes louder.

Louka stretches out her neck.

" Is Vera ill? "

" She must have caught cold." He tries to speak with indifference.

And again from behind the door:

" I don't want it! I'd rather die."

" But, Verochka. Even if . . . It's not at all dangerous."

" No, I don't want it! It's loathsome, it's hideous. I'd rather die."

For the moment peace, and then suddenly they hear Vera's voice pitiful and high-pitched :

" In God's name, why ? "

Louka feels that tears are very near. Why is she not allowed to see Vera ? She would comfort her. Divert her. She would tell her about the seals she saw yesterday.

" Is she infectious then ? "

Vladimir looks at her.

" Is who infectious ? "

" Why, Vera, of course. Why can't I go in to her ? "

" Don't worry me, Louka."

In the bedroom the wardrobe door slams.

" Which dress shall I take out ? "

" It doesn't matter. Any one."

" Put on woollen stockings. And a fur coat. You mustn't catch cold after your bath."

The noise of a chair being moved.

" Powder your face, Verochka."

" Oh, please be quiet. It doesn't matter. Where's my hat ? Well, come along then."

The key turns in the lock. Vera walks into the dining-room. Her eyes are red, her hair hangs untidily beneath the crooked hat. What is the matter with her ?

Louka's heart is torn with pity and tenderness.

" Verochka."

But Vera waves her away and walks quickly into the hall. Louka seizes her by the sleeve of her fur coat.

" Vera."

" Don't bother me," says Vera shortly, biting her lips so as not to cry.

" Don't worry her, Louka. You see that Vera is unwell." Ekaterina Lvovna hurries after her daughter. " Have dinner without us and then go home."

Vera is already going downstairs.

" Hurry up, Mamma."

" In a minute, in a minute."

Louka opens the door of the bedroom.

The blinds are down over the windows. The bed is unmade. On the carpet lies a nightdress and next to it some slippers. The wardrobe is open. On the bed-table are some powders. Louka sniffs the air like a fox-terrier. A smell of iodine. No, she cannot make it out.

Louka sits down opposite Vladimir Ivanovich. After all this anxiety she feels very hungry.

Vladimir Ivanovich looks at the white table-cloth absently and says nothing.

Louka pours out some wine for herself.

While eating the roast meat Vladimir Ivanovich remembers her.

" You're eating nothing, Louka. This won't do."

" Mm-m-m," is all that Louka answers, her mouth full.

But it seems that he remembers that he must entertain her.

" Well, how's the Lycee ? Were you called out ? "

" Mm-m-m," again she answers, continuing to chew.

The conversation is over.

Louka pours out her third glass of wine. How pleasant it is here with Volodia. She can drink as much as she likes; he doesn't interfere. And plums and cream for dessert. She would like to dine like this every day.

Louka gets up.

" Thank you, Volodia."

" Now you go home and do your lessons. Take an orange to eat on the way."

" Thank you, Volodia. Good-bye."

In the street it is raining and this surprises her.

She must have drunk too much if she is surprised. Yes, she has drunk too much, and that is why everything looks so strange around her. Every object has a kind of reflection in her head, like a second impression. Here is the lamp. Lamp. It stands like a lamp and gives a miserable light. Old, rather crooked, with the paint peeling off. But Louka does not see it, but an illusion of a lamp. A lamp, just as it was first conceived, a

sun shining in the night on a high post, driving away murderers and the darkness, a dazzling lighthouse to help honest folk to find their way home along the dark, dangerous road.

A striped cat had run out on to the pavement. She meets a black cat, they stand together for a moment muzzle to muzzle, and quickly dart into the open door of the dairy. Louka knows what they have decided. "Come, we'll buy some milk and have a jolly good time!"

She laughed out loud. Drops of rain trickle down her beret, on to her cheeks, on to her coat. She thrusts her hands deeper into her pockets. On the pavement shines a ray of light. Louka steps right on top of it. Splashes fly up on to her checked socks and bare knees. Well, now her legs are wet. Now everything is in harmony. She laughs again. And then suddenly she becomes dismal. She sighs. What is she so jolly about? What is she laughing at? She would like to cry, so unhappy she feels, so alone. She is terribly sorry for herself. "Poor Louka, poor thing/" she whispers. "Nobody loves you, and yet you laugh."

Arsenin. . . . Whenever Louka is sad she thinks of him. Arsenin. . . . Her heart begins to ache a little and in her mouth is the familiar, salty taste. This also comes when she is sad.

Arsenin. . . . She walks on slowly with her

head bent. The rain falls inside her collar and trickles down her spine. Let it, it makes her feel still sadder, still more hopeless. So sad she feels, that she almost enjoys it, she does not even want to be happy again.

Arsenin. . . . Anyhow, she has some memories. That meeting. . . . It was not long ago, not two months. . . . That meeting, it actually did take place. . . .

That evening she was walking just as sadly as now, and she had felt no presentiment. And just as now, she was going home. And just there, under that lamp in the corner, there was a man standing just as now. Only this one has an umbrella, because it is raining. . . . So she walked, nearer and nearer, just as she is doing now. She stops, her knees begin to tremble. And if it is he there under the lamp? And if it is he, waiting for her? "Rubbish!" She tries to calm herself. It could not be he. . . . Such things do not happen.

The man is no longer standing under the lamp. He is walking towards her. Better not look at his face. Because it is not he. She turns away.

"How do you do, Louka?"

Louka shivers. It cannot be true. What is this? What? . . . What? . . .

In front of her, under the umbrella, is Arsenin.

"You're all wet, Louka. Come here under my umbrella. You will catch cold."

He takes her arm. She is next to him. Her shoulder presses against his sleeve.

"In such a downpour/' he says, "it's easy to catch cold. And tell me, by the way, is your sister well?" . . .

"Yes—that is, no. She's ill."

"Ill?" he asks. "What's the matter with her?"

"She has a sty on her eyelid," Louka decides suddenly.

Why, of course, Vera has a sty. . . . Why did she not guess before?

"A sty? Did she tell you so herself?"

"No. But I know. She was crying because it was hideous, and Mamma calmed her by saying that it wasn't dangerous. It's a sty. What else could it be? Hideous and not dangerous. I had the same thing."

She looked up into his face. How pale he is. Or is it the shadow of the umbrella?

"Give Vera Alexeievna my regards. You won't forget?"

"No, no."

"Come, I'll take you up to your door, or you'll get wet through."

"Thank you."

His brown-shod feet stride next to her beige shoes. She would like to walk like this all her life, under the umbrella.

" Well, here is your house. Don't forget to give my regards."

He presses her hand and looks at her absently.

" You say that she was crying."

" Who ? "

" Your sister."

" Yes, Vera cried. And I heard her scream, ' I'd rather die.' " . . .

" Give her my regards and say . . . No, don't say anything. . . . But whatever you do don't forget to give her my regards. And you, how big you have become, quite a young lady. Do you study hard at school ? Good-bye."

He raises his hat and walks away quickly.

Louka climbs the stairs, but when she reaches the landing she turns back and runs down the stairs.

" Arsenin Nikolaevich! " she cries, panting.  
" Arsenin Nikolaevich ! "

The street is empty. Just in front of the house the lamp glows yellowly. The rain patters noisily on the pavement.

" Arsenin Nikolaevich ! "

Louka runs to the corner, looks to the left, to the right. The streets are quite empty. " Where has he gone ? In the other direction ? . . . Or in this one ? No, she could not find him now, she could not catch him up. . . .

She returns again, slowly climbs the stairs, opens

the door, and, without taking off her coat, sinks down and presses her head to the wall. The wet skirt clings heavily to her bare knees. It is cold and hard on the floor. Tears run quickly down her cheeks. Dark, and cold, and hopeless. But that is how it should be; that is how it should be. . . .

At last, after crying for a long time, she gets up, throws off her coat, turns on the light, and, still shivering from her tears and the cold, goes into the dining-room. She has only herself to blame. She did not dare. She should have asked him to come in. It would have been so wonderful, just the two of them. . . . This may have been the only chance. The only chance in her life. And it would have been so wonderful.

He would have sat here, next to her on the divan. She would have peeled her orange for him.

"Your hair is wet/" he would have said, wiping her head with his white silk handkerchief.

"How big you have become, Louka. Quite grown-up."

"Yes, at Christmas I was fifteen."

"Are you really fifteen already?"

He would have looked at her long and attentively.

"How pretty you are, Louka."

She would have said nothing in reply, and perhaps she would even have blushed a little.

" You are fifteen years old, Louka. Now you are big and I can tell you . . ."

" What ? " she would have asked softly.

" Don't you really understand ? . . . Don't you know why I waited for you then and why I waited for you now in the rain ? " . . .

She would have shaken her head.

" No, I don't know." And she would have become frightened, still more frightened, still more deliriously happy than she had been under the umbrella.

" Louka." He would have taken her hand, and turning it over would have kissed the palm. The palm of her hand, not the back.

" Louka, I love you. I have always loved you. I was only waiting until I could tell you."

He would have bent over her closely. " Even in Petersburg, even in Mont-Dore. I have always loved you." . . .

## CHAPTER V

A DOCTOR'S waiting-room.

"Don't be nervous," whispers Ekaterina Lvovna. "He won't be long now. It's our turn next."

Vera looks at the engravings on the walls. A pale blue marquis embraces a mauve marquise. On another engraving a shepherd kisses a shepherdess and white sheep are lying at their feet. Vera, revolted, makes a grimace—they kiss and embrace so that afterwards they should suffer as she is suffering now.

Vera looks at them and it seems to her that the marquise and the shepherdess are beginning to change. Their slim waists thicken, the stomachs swell out beneath their skirts, and their lips, instead of smiling, fold into suffering grimaces. And the sheep become enormous, with blown-out flanks, round, like globes.

Vera turns away. By the wall stands a curved cupboard. What an ugly one. . . . It too looks as though . . .

She shrugs her shoulders, sick with disgust. Everything, everything, reminds her. Wherever she looks. And she turns to her mother.

" What is it, Verochka ? "

In Ekaterina Lvovna's large, grey eyes there is an expression of love and fear. And her face looks just as it appeared on the old photographs taken twenty-two years ago.

" I was expecting you then, Vera," said Ekaterina Lvovna once while showing Vera the photograph. " And the dress was charming. The bodice was sewn all over with little tassels. And the hat was of straw. It was hardly noticeable yet." . . . And suddenly Vera distinctly sees her mother as she was twenty-two years ago. In a hat like a little boat, in the bodice with the tassels, with a fringe on her forehead, her stomach as yet only slightly rounded, pretty and young. Expectant. Expecting Vera, her, herself. Vera—she who is sitting here on the rose-coloured couch and is reflected in the mirror. But how could it be she ? She is still there beneath the striped skirt and the bodice with the little tassels, in that warm, rounded stomach. Vera wants to scream, but she has no voice. She continues to gaze, in a heavy kind of torpor, at her expectant mother and at herself in the mirror.

Something thick and sticky flows into her blood; it rises higher and higher, and she can neither move nor breathe nor shut her eyes. There is a heavy-throbbing in her temples.

She finds it revolting to see her expectant mother, and most revolting of all is the fact that her mother

was expecting her, Vera. And to see herself in the mirror is also revolting, herself grown up and also expectant.

The sticky torbidness has reached her heart. Oh, how revolting ! If only she could scream, or break the vase—anything to dispel the image. That she might not see the rounded stomach, the hat like a little boat, the bodice with the little tassels. . . .

" It was a difficult birth. You were taken out with forceps." . . .

Forceps. . . . And *her* body, too, they would tear with forceps.

A numbness born of horror grips her body. Vera beats her head with her hands, strikes the nape of her neck on the back of the couch. And suddenly it all disappears. Ekaterina Lvovna sits there in her worn, cheap fur coat, sad, and no longer young.. Vera makes an effort, gets up, and walks to the table.

" What is the matter ? " asked Ekaterina Lvovna anxiously.

On the table lies a book. Vera wants to pick it up. She must calm herself, must read a little. But quickly, as though from a toad, she draws away her hand. On the yellow cover is printed in large black letters " L'fiternel Amour. "

" Amour, " and her lips draw back in revulsion. " Amour " . . . and she puts her handkerchief to her mouth.

" Mamma, I feel ill. "

But at that moment the door is thrown wide open, and a tall, grey-haired old man in a white hospital coat gives them a tired, kind smile, and invites them to go in. " If you please. "

And through the doorway, behind his back, can be seen the surgical couch, and, on the table, shining ghastly nickel instruments.

Vera and her mother are on their way home.

- " You should be happy, not miserable, Verochka. "

" Happy ? Then why are you crying ? "

" Oh, Verochka, I'm sorry for you. But to have a child is such happiness. " . . .

Without replying, Vera looks through the window, dry-eyed.

" It will be such a warm, helpless thing. You will adore it. And so pretty. Why, you and Louka were exquisite; people in the street turned round to look at you. Tell me, would you like a girl or a boy ? "

" I don't want either. "

" But still . . . still . . . A boy or a girl ? "

" I suppose a girl would be better. "

" There now, you see, you see, " says Ekaterina Lvovna quickly and joyfully. " It will certainly be a little girl. Imagine—fair hair and light eyes, "

" No, " interrupts Vera. " Black eyes. "

" But where would she get black eyes from ? All of us and Volodia have grey eyes."

" No, black. She will have black eyes. Don't argue. I know. They must be black."

" Very well, very well then. Let them be black. She will grow up so quickly. She will run about the rooms. She will put her little arms round your neck and call you ' Mamma-puss.' "

" Mamma-puss," repeats Vera softly, and smiles for the first time during that wretched day.

" Well, there you are," whispers Ekaterina Lvovna, and tears run down her cheeks again. " There you are, you love her already. And how we shall dress her ! " . . .

Vladimir Ivanovich meets them in the hall.

" What did the doctor say ? " he asked anxiously.

" Yes, yes, yes," says Vera brusquely, and without looking at her husband, quickly goes into the bedroom.

" But . . . I don't understand," he whispers, perplexed, " how it could have happened."

Vera turns her pale wrathful face to him. " You don't understand ?—How can one understand you ? " and slams the door behind her.

" Mamma," she cries, throwing her coat to the floor, " I don't want it. No, no, no. I'd rather die, Mamma."

" Verochka, Verochka. What are you saying ? "

" Mamma, it's terrible. It's loathsome, hideous !

I don't want it. What for? I'm so sorry for myself, so sorry ! " she cries loudly, hiding her face on her mother's shoulder.

" It's not at all dangerous, Verochka. Not at all dangerous. And then, you will have such happiness afterwards."

" No, no, I don't want it. I don't want the baby. What's the use of it to me ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna strokes her head.

" There, there, don't worry so."

" Mamma "—Vera raises her tear-stained face—  
" is it possible . . . is it still possible to get rid of it ? Is it still possible ? "

" Yes, of course," says Ekaterina Lvovna, startled.  
" But it . . . "

But Vera throws herself on the bed and puts her hands over her ears.

" No, don't talk about it, don't talk about it. It's horrible. It's still more frightful. I'm afraid, afraid. I don't want it ! No, I'd rather die ! "

## CHAPTER VI

LOUKA must go to lunch at Vera's. Ekaterina Lvovna has been there since the morning.

When she arrived, she was conscious, as she was last time, of a feeling of alarm. And Vera, the same as last time, was in her bedroom and would see no one. Nevertheless, Louka knocks at her door.

" Verochka, let me in. "

" No. Go away. "

" Let me in. I have a message for you. " . . .

Yes, she must give Arsenin's regards to her. She had promised him. But Vera's thoughts, of course, were not at the moment of kind regards. She would become angry and drive Louka out of the room.

The key turns in the lock. Vera, wrapping her dressing-gown round her, returns to the bed and sits down. Her untidy hair sticks out in all directions, her face is yellow, her eyes are swollen.

" Verochka, what's the matter with you ? "

" Don't worry me. Tell me the message quickly and go away. "

Louka's heart sinks.

" I must give you . . . I . . . Yesterday—yesterday I met Arsenin, " she says and reddens. " He asked me to give you his regards. " She

turns away so that Vera should not notice her blushes. But Vera does not see her. Vera is looking at her stockings, which are thrown on the carpet, and her lips tremble.

" What else did he say ? "

" He said that the rain . . . and that many people became ill . . . and he asked whether you were well."

" And what else ? "

" Nothing else."

He had only said, " Don't catch cold—How big you are, Louka, quite a young lady—Are you studying hard ? " And also they had walked beneath the umbrella. But that was Louka's own treasure, and she was not obliged to share it with anyone.

" And how did he look ? Sad ? "

" Yes, I think he looked sad—I mean no, he looked rather cheer——"

" Good heavens, Louka ! What a muddler you are ! You can't tell anything sensibly. You're not a baby."

" Isn't it just the same to you, whether he was cheerful or sad ? "

" Why, of course, it's just the same. I just asked. What a funny girl you are ! Come and kiss me." Vera, laughing, put her arms around her sister and kissed the nape of her neck. " Oh, what a funny Louka. You see, you have cheered me up, and I felt so bad." . . .

Louka jumps about the room in ecstasy.

" I told them yesterday that they should let me see you. I knew. Just wait, and I'll tell you about the seals. You'll roar with laughter."

" Well, you'll tell me about the seals later. And now go to the kitchen and order an omelette for me. You see, you have even made me want to eat. That's the kind of Louka you are ! "

At lunch they are almost cheerful. Vera smiles. Ekaterina Lvovna and Vladimir look at her lovingly.

" It's all Louka's doing. Had it not been for her, I would not have got up to-day."

Louka swells with pride.

" I cried so much." Vera looks at her husband.  
" You must buy me a new dress to comfort me."

" Of course, of course." He immediately takes five hundred francs out of his wallet.

" It's not too little ? "

" No, it will be enough." Vera puts the money under her plate.

Louka's heart beats rapidly. Suppose she forgets it.

But Vera gets up and puts the money in her handbag.

" Will you come with me, Mamma ? You'll help me to choose."

" And I, and I , " begs Louka.

" And we'll take you too. And then I'll treat you to ice-cream. Come along and help me to dress."

Vladimir Ivanovich puts his hand on Louka's shoulder.

" Thank you, Louka, for Vera."

" Oh, there's no need." Louka modestly lowers her eyes.

" Get me the stockings, the grey ones, those with the border, you know, and the grey velvet dress," commands Vera from the bath-room. The water runs noisily from the tap, and it is difficult to hear, but she cannot ask her to repeat it. Vera would get cross.

" A chemise with lace—and perfume everything."

Vera comes out of the bath, rosy and fresh, not at all like that girl who was sitting here on the bed a little while ago. Vera powders her shoulders, her arms and her breast.

" Why do you do that ? "

" Why do you want to know ? You don't have to powder."

The fine light powder flies about the room. Louka coughs.

" And your legs too ? "

" And my legs," answers Vera mockingly, " Well, hurry up and give me my chemise."

" Is all this business for the benefit of the dress-maker ? "

" Yes."

Louka arranges Vera's dress.

" How beautiful you look ! "

Vera shakes her head sadly. The little grey feathers on her hat tremble.

" Not for long now."

" What is not for long ? "

But Vera is carefully rouging her lips before the mirror.

" Mamma, I'm ready. Let's go. Tell me, how long will it be before it's noticeable ? "

" About five months. Even six."

" My God! What a little time is left! Oh, how I must hurry up and live."

Vladimir kisses her hand.

" Good-bye, Verochka."

" I expect that I shall be late for dinner. You know how it is, in the shops, at the dressmaker's. . . . "

" It doesn't matter, Verochka. I'll wait."

The three go downstairs. But in the street, Vera suddenly stops.

" Look here," she says, confused. " I have changed my mind. I had better go alone."

" Very well, very well, Verochka," agreed Ekaterina Lvovna quickly. " I think so too. We shall only be in the way."

" Come in the evening, Mamma."

" But, Vera, what about the ice-cream ? "

Vera, without listening to her, stops a taxi. Louka runs up to her.

" I'll tell the chauffeur the address while you get in."

Vera looks at her angrily.

" Why are you spying on me, you little wretch ? Drive straight on," she says to the chauffeur and slams the door.

Louka is baffled.

" Why did she become angry again ? "

" Don't take any notice, Louka. Vera is nervous. It will pass."

" And what about the ice-cream ? Vera promised."

" It's time you went to the Lycee, Louka."

## CHAPTER VII

ON the table were two bottles of wine, dates, a smoked herring, a box of chocolates, text-books and exercise books.

Jeanne has come to pay Louka a visit. Louka pours out some wine for her and offers her dates. Ekaterina Lvovna, as usual, is at Vera's.

. . . " She lived alone in a large house. It was dangerous to live alone. She was rich and she was always afraid that someone would kill her. She trusted nobody," Louka related in a monotone. " She was afraid, and she was killed. In the morning they found her in the kitchen with her throat cut and the whole wall covered with blood. It happened just on Mardi Gras, and the masked revellers came in to see. And in the evening, in the house opposite, they found the other old lady murdered. And they thought that she was the murderess. This one had killed the other—you understand? . . . and then herself. . . . On the evening of Mardi Gras. Under the windows pierrots were dancing and playing with paper trumpets. And the neighbours told how, on the night before, the old woman had knocked at the door. And she

hid under an umbrella, so that she should not be recognised. Under an umbrella although it was not raining. And the other woman looked down from the balcony. 'Is it you? Why haven't you been to see me for so long?' And she opened the door herself! . . ."

"Under an umbrella, and it was not raining," repeated Louka. How pleasant! Even in her throat there was a queer sensation. An umbrella, a big umbrella. Two can walk under it. Louka becomes thoughtful for a moment. "But still, they saw. . . The umbrella didn't help. She cut her throat with a razor—otherwise it would have been cut under the guillotine."

Jeanne looks at her, frightened.

"Did you make that up?"

"No. I read it in the newspaper. Would you like me to tell you some more?"

"No, no. Please don't. I'm afraid. I'll dream about it to-night."

Louka laughs.

"Coward." And she adds seriously, "I'm also afraid at night sometimes, but not of murderers. Why don't you drink? Isn't it nice?"

Jeanne drinks, then suddenly, heavily and helplessly, she lays her head on the table and begins to cry.

"Oh, Louka."

Louka shakes her by the shoulder.

"Why, Jeanne, what's the matter with you?"

Would you like some water ? Eat some chocolate and it will pass."

But Jeanne only cries all the more.

" Oh, I'm so unhappy."

" You ? " asks Louka, astonished, and looks at her friend with curiosity\*

" 1, 1 . . ." sobs Jeanne, " I love him so much. . . . And he, and they . . . "

" Who do you mean by ' he ' and ' they ' ? "

" Paul. Paul and Yvonne . . . "

" Oh—is that all? " . . . Louka shakes her head.

" No, don't laugh. I love him terribly, terribly, terribly."

" And he ? "

" He doesn't love me at all. It is just the same to him. I or Yvonne."

Louka looks at the pretty weeping Jeanne and is sorry for her. Owing to the wine which she has drunk, she seems somehow to understand everything very clearly—Jeanne's sorrow, and the chime of the clock, and the dining-room, and the whole of life.

" Listen." She shakes Jeanne by the shoulder. " Don't cry. You're unhappy. Well, I am also unhappy. That is how it is arranged. At first everything is miserable, and then one marries and becomes rich and lives happily ever after. I know. That's how it was with Vera. And that's how it will be with us. One must just wait. I am waiting



*Louka does not understand how anyone can fall in love with Paul.*

too. It's just that we are still a little too young, that's all."

Jeanne raises her face.

"Is that true, Louka?"

"Why, of course it's true if I say so."

"And Paul will marry me?"

Louka does not understand how anyone can fall in love with Paul. His hands perspire and his teeth are full of stoppings. But if Jeanne is crying, then . . .

"Yes, yes, he'll marry you," whispers Louka persuasively. "I know."

Jeanne wipes her eyes with her fist and smiles a blissful and drunken smile.

" And what will happen to Yvonne ? "

" Yvonne will burst with envy."

"What! Will she really burst?" Jeanne is laughing already.

" Yes, absolutely. All her seams will go ' pop/ They'll have to collect the pieces in order to put them in the grave. I know. And we shall be happy." . . .

Louka pours out wine for Jeanne and herself.

" Well, let's drink to our happiness. We'll be happy. I know. . . . Only we must wait a little. . . And we'll be happy. My word of honour,"



## FOURTH PART



## CHAPTER I

AT the beginning of July they went away for their holidays. Louka was not pleased. And she had reason. Was this a place for a holiday ? An hour's journey from Paris, and no sea, not even a hill. They ought to be ashamed to go to such a place. But Vera must be near Paris to visit the doctor, and Vladimir Ivanovich must be near Paris to go to the factory. So here they stay.

In the garden was a flower-bed with Virginia stock and two jasmine bushes. The path was too white and too clean. Like a picture-postcard. Everything was made to please. And here was Louka, not at all pleased. On the contrary, she found it repulsive. And the summer-house in the corner of the garden was so useless. Who would go there to talk ? And if they went, what was there to talk about ?

It would have been better to have remained in Paris. Jeanne was there at least, it was not so dull there. And they would have had a little rest from Verochka.

Louka settled down more comfortably on the parapet, swinging her sandalled feet.

It was hot. She was bored. They had only

arrived that morning and she was bored already. And they would have to stay there two whole months.

On the terrace, stepping carefully, and nearly over-balancing, comes Vera. She is wearing a thin white dress and a pink shawl thrown over it. Louka turns away. Louka has known for quite a long time now that Vera has not a sty. Vera swells every day. Her stomach is already beneath her nose.

Vera comes quite near and puts her arms round Louka.

"What are you doing, perched up here like a sparrow?"

"It's hot."

Louka looks at Vera's legs in the silk stockings. What beautiful, slim legs. It seems strange that they are as pretty as before, that they have not changed.

"Why don't you run about? Have you explored everything?"

Louka yawns widely.

"I'm bored."

"It's no use being peevish. Let's go for a walk. They say that there is a magnificent forest here."

"Well, let there be."

"Come," persuades Vera. "You know, there must be a confectioner's here. And ice-cream. Well, what do you say?"

Louka gets down.

" Of course, if there's ice-cream. . . . But first the ice-cream and then the forest."

She will not go to the forest at all. She will run away from the confectioner's. What does she need a forest for ?

" Come on then."

Vera walks down heavily into the garden. Louka runs after her, looking at her back.

She waddles like a duck, but even uglier. Found time to have a baby !

" Our first piece of business is at the confectioner's." Louka opens the gate and stops.

Just by the fence stands Arsenin.

" Arsenin Nikolaevich," cries Vera, in what seems a very loud voice.

Louka silently presses her hand to her heart.

" How do you do, Vera Alexeievna ? How do you do, Louka ? What a coincidence ! "

" We are staying here."

" Really ? And so am I. . . . That is my house. That pink one at the corner. We are neighbours again, as we were at Mont-Dore."

Vera smiles.

" It is such a long time since we saw each other. Mamma will be so pleased. Do come in."

Louka runs in front to tell the news, rushes through the garden and runs panting into the house.

" Mamma, Mamma ! Where are you ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna comes out, holding in her hands a little knitted bonnet.

" What's the matter ? "

" Mamma, Arsenin Nikolaevich. He's here. He is staying next door to us," says Louka, almost choking.

" Really."

Ekaterina Lvovna is hardly surprised.

" Mamma, he's coming here ! "

" Well, very good, let him come. But there's no need to scream like this."

Louka is confused.

" I—I'll go and wash my hands," and she runs upstairs.

In her room Louka sits down on the floor and rolls from side to side.

" He's here, he's here, he's here." . . . Then she jumps up and looks out of the window.

Arsenin and Vera are walking through the garden. And all around, the jasmine, the stocks, the grass, the trees and the sky, all suddenly change. Everything becomes enchanted, whispering and flying. And even Vera, heavy duck-Vera, looks like an airy white butterfly. Everything goes round. The garden slowly flows before her eyes. Louka takes a deep breath of the warm air and sits down again on the floor.

From below she can already hear voices.



*But no one takes any notice of her.*

"How splendid. And now we shall not let you go. During the whole winter you did not come to see us even once."

"I am also very glad, believe me." . . .

Louka gets up and washes her face and hands. Why? Just the same she will not dare to go down. While she combs her hair, she looks at herself in the glass and shakes her head so as to make her hair untidy again. Otherwise, it looks as though a cow's tongue had licked it into place. No, just the same, she will not go down. . . .

From below the voice of Ekaterina Lvovna floats up.

" Louka ! Where are you ? "

" In a minute, Mamma. "

Louka becomes red and her heart begins to beat noisily. How can she go down like that ? Everyone would understand at once.

But no one takes any notice of her. On the brightly-coloured tablecloth stand some light blue cups. A big bumble-bee circles over the vase of jasmine. The samovar is shining. Everything is ordinary, as usual. . . .

## CHAPTER II

ARSENIN NIKOLAEVICH is reading out loud from a book which has just arrived from Russia. Vera is sewing, her little round head bent sideways. In Ekaterina Lvovna's thin fingers flash long yellow knitting-needles. A ball of pink wool falls softly from the table and rolls along the floor.

Pink—because it would certainly be a little girl. Little girls always wear pink.

Louka sits in the corner on a cane chair and looks attentively at Arsenin. She is not listening. What business is it of hers? How can she be interested in some stranger's life, when her own life beats loudly in her breast, when she feels deafened and blinded with it, and is afraid of only one thing—how to prevent herself dying of happiness. . . ? Louka clasps her knees tightly with her thin hands.

It is he. It is Arsenin. He is here, and he was here yesterday, and he will come to-morrow. "Are you satisfied, Louka?" she asks herself, screwing up her eyes. The sun is shining on her. The damp hair clings to her forehead. "Wonderful days are beginning for us, heart, oh my heart," she remembers

a line from some poem. " Wonderful days are beginning for us, for me and for you, Louka/' . . .

" Forgive me, comrade." . . .

Louka screws up her eyes still more. Comrade ?  
What " comrade " ? Why " comrade " ?

Arsenin really says, " I love you, Louka."

" So, comrade, the whole civil war . . . "

But that means, " Do you really not understand, Louka, that I love you ? "

The bees buzz noisily in the warm air. How the stocks smell!

" That's enough." Vera gets up. " I'm tired. We'll finish to-morrow."

Arsenin obediently puts the book on the table.

" Do you like it ? "

" Very interesting," Vera says absently. " But it's time I went for a walk."

Arsenin turns to Louka.

" Here is someone who has been listening attentively. I was quite surprised. Do you like it, Louka ? "

" I like it awfully."

" Are you sorry for Meichik ? "

Who's Meichik ? Louka blushes and lowers her eyes.

" Very, very sorry."

" Louka, didn't you cry ? Here's an attentive girl! Not like me. I could hardly make out what it was all about."

Vera picks up her hat.

"Come, Arsenin. Come to the forest. It isn't so hot there."

Louka jumps up.

"And I. And I want to go with you too."

"No." Ekaterina Lvovna stops her. "You will remain at home."

"Why?"

"Vera is tired and you do nothing but chatter and jump about. You make everyone's head ache."

"Let her come if she likes. I don't mind," says Vera, but Louka can see by her eyes that she is not pleased.

"No, I need Louka here." Ekaterina Lvovna takes her daughter by the hand. "You will stay with me."

Arsenin says nothing. He might have put in a good word for Louka. But he walks behind Vera, with a plaid on his arm, in case Verochka should like to sit down in the forest, and with the sunshade, in case Verochka should get tired of the sun.

Louka watches them from behind. Gone. . . .

"Mamma, do you need me?"

Ekaterina Lvovna goes on knitting.

"Fourteen, fifteen," she counts the stitches.

"But you said that you needed me?"

"Go and play in the garden."

"But you said . . ."

Ekaterina Lvovna raises her eyes from her work.

" Well, and if I did say so. . . . What will you do to me ? You're a big girl. I think that you should understand that Verochka must not be irritated. Let her have a little rest from you occasionally."

" A little rest ? "

Ekaterina Lvovna again casts on stitches.

" Go and play, Louka. Don't worry me."

Louka walks down into the garden.

Vera needs a rest from her. And Arsenin too. Of course, she irritates them. They are glad to get rid of her. You see, they have left her at home. Worse than a dog ! A dog they would have taken for a walk. Worse than a sunshade ! The sunshade they took with them. And her, Louka, they have left at home. What do they need her for ?

Louka is heartsore and downcast. She walks up and down the white path, walks up to the fence and opens the gate. The road is long with a narrow footpath. On either side is a fence and trees. The air is dusty. The sun blazes down. Not one motor-car is visible, not one pedestrian. Heavens, what heat ! Heavens, what boredom !

Louka walks along by the fence. Here is Arsenin's house. Small, one-storied, bright pink, like a strawberry cake, and the little garden is full of flowers, white, red, pink and mauve. And the house and the garden are quite out of the ordinary, unlike any other.



*Heavens, what boredom !*

Over the flowers circle butterflies and bees. The sunny, misty air is filled with the sound of buzzing. The flowers open wide their shameless petals and the bees hide in them lovingly. A butterfly alights on a red carnation and the stalk bends gently and submissively beneath her. From the warm earth and from the flowers rises a heavy irritating scent.

Louka looks at the flowers, and suddenly blushes. Yes, everything here is quite out of the ordinary, in love, shameless. And her heart, in love and shameless, beats strangely.

Louka pushes open the gate. How many times had his feet trodden on the path? Through the thin soles of her shoes she could feel the hot earth. And, together with the sensation of heat, through her feet rises a burning tenderness which floods her whole body. Never had she felt so much in love, so shameless. Ecstasy flows to her palms, her knees become weak.

Louka walks slowly to the pink house. The doors on to the balcony are locked. No, not all. Louka pushes aside the pink shutters. Behind them, the window is only closed. She looks in. It is dark. . . . That is all. Is she to go away without discovering anything? The window is low. She has only to grip the window sill harder and . . . so. Louka jumps to the floor. It is the dining-room. A sideboard and brightly-coloured plates. The chairs have high backs. On the wall, a hare with his mother and father. Uninteresting. Louka pushes open the door. She is in a large, dark room. The dusty light falls in bands on to the open door. Quiet . . . so quiet, as it is only in an absolutely empty house. And suddenly she feels afraid. It seems to her that someone is there, behind her back, moving in the corner. Louka turns round. In the corner, in the depths of a narrow mirror, her dress is reflected yellow and dim. Her fair hair and startled face form a mysterious blur. Louka cries out and pushes open the

shutters. Now, the room is full of sunshine, and the mirror shows a clear, rosy Louka, exactly as she really is. Even to the hole in her skirt. What is there to be frightened about then? . . .

By the wall is a writing-table, and on it are four ten-franc notes. Louka looks at them, stretches out her hand, touches them. "Quite new, they crackle . . . with forty francs one can do quite a lot.

Louka pulls out the drawer of the table. On the top lies a half-written letter. She picks it up and reads it.

"MY LITTLE GIRL,

"To-day I again spent the whole day with you, but I could not tell you how I love you. It tortures me. Your mother, your sister——"

Louka holds the sheet in her hand, her hand trembles and her legs give way. She sits down on the couch, shuts her eyes, and presses the letter to her heart.

"My little girl, I love you."

At last, at last. How long she had waited! "My little girl." But she knew, she knew, even in the winter under the umbrella, even in Mont-Dore. . . .

"My little girl, I love you." . . .

Louka presses the letter still more closely to her heart. It beats so happily, so peacefully. Quite

lightly, quite quietly, no louder than the clock on the wall. Here it is, here is happiness. . . .

Louka kisses the letter, puts it back into the drawer, gets up slowly, and smiles, shaking her head. " Oh, how happy I am ! " Then she runs to the window, jumps out into the garden and closes the pink shutters. But she pushes her hand into the room again and the four ten-franc notes fall rustling to the floor.

### CHAPTER III

L o u K A sits at supper before a plateful of fruit pancakes. On the left sits Vera. Opposite sit Vladimir Ivanovich and Arsenin, on the right, Ekaterina Lvovna. The pancakes are made with cherries, they are delicious, but it is difficult to swallow, her throat seems compressed, it is so narrow that the pancake cannot get through. And it is not worth trying. She will choke herself.

" Louka, why don't you eat ? "

" I don't feel like it. My head aches."

" You have been running about in the sun again without a hat. How pale you are, you have dark rings round your eyes," says Ekaterina Lvovna anxiously.

Louka pushes aside her chair and gets up.

" I had better go and lie down. Good-night."

Her mother and Vera kiss her. Arsenin shakes her hand.

" I hope you'll feel fit to-morrow, Louka."

His palm is dry and rather rough. His eyes look at her quite coolly. How can he pretend so well ? But she knows. " My little girl, I love you." . . .

" Good-night, Arsenin Nikolaevich. Good-night, Volodia."

Louka goes upstairs, but instead of going to her room, she quickly walks into Vera's. It is dark, but she must not put on a light—they might see from below. And it is not so dark after all; the moon is shining through the window. Louka walks up to the wardrobe. The doors of the wardrobe creak. In its gloomy depths, sadly and helplessly, hang the dresses, like the seven hanged wives of Blue Beard. Louka seizes the girdle of a white dress and pulls it down. With a plaintive silken sigh it drops to the floor. Louka picks it up. Now stockings. But she cannot pull out the drawer of the cupboard. Locked. What burglars are they afraid of? And how can she manage without long stockings? Never mind, the dress is long. From the dressing-table she takes powder, perfume, a little box containing eyelash darkener, a red lipstick. Everything. Now she must go to her room.

The key turns in the lock. Louka puts on the light, takes off her dress, perfumes her chest, shoulders and knees. That is what Vera does, it is all necessary. Then before the glass she darkens her eyes and rouges her lips. Is this really she, Louka? This woman with the large, grey eyes, with bare shoulders, in the long, wide dress? Her face looks quite different, excited and happy. "How beautiful! Exquisite!" says Louka out loud. She can quite understand Arsenin falling in love with her. How could one help falling in love with such a girl?

She walks slowly through the room. Let the chairs look at her, the bed, the books, and the flowers on the wallpaper. They have never seen anyone so beautiful, so happy. Is there anyone in the world more beautiful and happier than she is? She looks at herself again in the mirror. Everything is right. Now she has only to wait.

She puts out the light and sits down on the couch before the open window. In the garden the black trees rock quietly to and fro. The stars in the torn clouds shine like fishes caught in a net.

From behind the summer-house rises a large, round, green moon.

Below, from the terrace, voices drift upwards.

"Let us play one more game, Arsenin Nikolae-vich."

"Haven't we played enough? It's late."

A noise of chessmen falling into a box.

"Vera, sing something."

"I'm tired, Volodia."

"Vera Alexeievna, do sing, please." . . .

Vera can be heard sitting down at the piano.

Louka is annoyed at that and she fidgets on the couch—"Now they'll go on for hours. They'll be ages now. And I have to wait here." . . .

Vera sings. Her voice floats about the garden. So tender, so touching. Louka listens, pressing her hands to her heart, and suddenly she forgets everything, her expectation, her anxiety, and what

awaits her to-night. " How well Vera sings, how well . . . "

Vera's voice flies higher and higher, over the dark trees, beneath the green moon. No, it is not Vera's voice, but she, Louka, who is flying. She feels so light, so blissful, so terrified. Higher and still higher, past the clouds, past the stars in the glistening air, and now she cannot breathe any more, and her eyes can see nothing but the enormous, green, transparent moon.

The singing is suddenly torn away.

" I'm tired," says Vera plaintively.

The piano-lid clatters.

Louka sighs and drops her hands. What was it ? . . . She weeps. She quickly wipes her cheeks. No, the paint from her eyelashes has not come off.

Below, chairs are scraping. They are saying good-night. . . . Soon, soon . . .

From anxiety Louka puts her hands over her ears. The blood beats noisily in her temples. Soon, soon. Everyone would go to bed and then . . .

Vera climbs heavily up the stairs.

" Quietly, Volodia; you will wake Louka."

Vera's room is next to hers, and she can hear through the wall.

" Are you going to Paris to-morrow ? "

" Yes. I have to go. I'll return in the evening."

" Sit next to me, Volodia, until I fall asleep. I feel sad."

" But, Verochka, why do you feel so sad ? You mustn't . . . "

" Oh, I don't know. I'm afraid. I feel so sad, so frightened. You know . . . " and then whispering.

Louka waves her legs impatiently.

Will they ever settle down ? At last it is quiet. The house sleeps.

Louka carefully unlocks the door, stops, waits. . . . But it is as quiet as before. She runs down the stairs in her socks, holding on to the balustrade. It is dark—if she were to fall—to make a noise—she would wake the whole house. But it was quite simple on the stairs. Now, in the dark room, how is she to find the window ? Louka gropes with outstretched hands as though she were blind. Whatever she does, she must not knock against a chair. The window should be here on the right. Where on earth has it got to ? The whole night will pass if she goes on like this. But her hand touches cold glass. Here it is.

Louka pushes aside the shutters and, lifting her long dress, jumps into the garden. The window is high. She falls on the ground. It does not matter. Louka runs. The bushes become entangled in her long dress. Black shadows tremble on the path, black twigs whisper over her head. She is afraid. And what will happen after ? Shall she go back ? . . .

No . . . not for anything.

Louka runs through the empty street. Here is his house. If the gate is locked, she will have to climb over the fence. But the gate is open. Now it will be quite soon, soon. She must calm herself. What will he say ? . . . How her heart is beating. . . . He is not asleep yet, there is a light in the window. Louka taps on the shutters and the window opens.

" Who is there ? " asks Arsenin, looking into the darkness. He is without a coat and his collar is unfastened.

" It's me," says Louka softly.

" You . . ." His voice trembles with happiness. " I didn't expect you. I'll open the door." . . .

Louka runs to the balcony. Of course he did not expect her. But he is glad. . . .

The locks creaks. From the movement, the knocker jumps. The door opens.

He stands in the lighted hall. He stretches out his hands to her.

" How did you manage to get out ? " And suddenly he steps back, startled.

" Louka ? You ? What has happened ? Vera ? " . . .

Louka shakes her head.

" Nothing has happened." And suddenly everything becomes incomprehensible and muddled, as in a dream. What is Arsenin saying ?



" *Why are you here, Louka?* "

" Why are you here, Louka ? "

" I have come to you." Why, he was so delighted just now.

"<sup>C</sup>But why ? "

" I have come to you." . . . Her head begins to go round. She had better lean against the wall so as not to fall. " I was here during the day."

" You were here ? "

" Yes, and . . . I read the letter, which was in the drawer," she says softly.

" You read it ? That means that you know ? "

She nods.

" Yes, I know." . . .

She is so heavy-hearted, so sad. And why does he ask ? Is it not quite clear ? And perhaps nothing of this is actually happening, perhaps she is only dreaming about it all—the half-dark balcony and the open door and the lamp on the table.

" Louka." Arsenin takes her hand. " You're a nice girl, aren't you ? You're a good girl, I know. And you won't tell anyone ? Give me your word of honour that you won't tell anyone."

Why need he say this ? And whom could she tell ?

" Well, give me your word."

" My word of honour," she says quietly.

Everything is incomprehensible. She did not expect anything like this.

" Remember, Louka, that if you break your word, you will cause the most frightful unhappiness. I believe you. You won't tell anyone, do you hear ? Not even Vera herself."

" Why, of course. If I'm not to tell anyone, then of course that means not Vera either."

He drops her hand. " Then remember—no one." And he smiles reassured. " And to read other people's letters is disgraceful, Louka. Especially for a nice little girl like you. But you won't do it again, will you ? And now run home."

What? Run home? . . . He is sending her home? . . .

"I came," she says hoarsely, gathering her last ounce of courage, "because I love you too. I wouldn't have told you if I hadn't read the letter."

"You love me?" . . . His eyes became big and astonished. "And what has my letter to do with it?"

"Oh, why do you pretend?" Louka stamps her foot. "I know. I have read the letter. You love me."

He looks at her closely in astonishment. "So this is how it is?" he says thoughtfully. And only now does he notice her long dress, her rouged lips and darkened eyes. This is how it is, and again he takes her hand.

"So that is how it is? You love me, little Louka? And from the letter you understood that I love you too?"

"Well, of course; yes, I do." Louka is nearly in tears.

"And you came to me?"

"Yes." . . .

"And to please me you dressed up like this?" . . .

Louka nods silently. Her fingers tremble in his hand.

"You are shivering. Are you cold?"

She shakes her head.

" No."

The moon lights up the balcony, and the moonlight falls on Louka, on her white silk dress, on her fair hair, on her startled face.

" How pretty you are, Louka. How is it that I have never noticed it before ? But still, why did you come ? "

" So that you should know that I love you/' she says miserably.

" At night ? "

" I thought that when people are in love they always want to be together at night." . . .

He laughs,

" Oh, I see that you are experienced," and he leads her into the room. " Don't be afraid. I won't do anything to you."

" I'm not afraid."

He leads her to the divan.

" Sit down, Louka."

She sits down submissively. The door is open on to the garden. It is dark and full of flowers. The divan is wide and littered with many cushions. Arsenin examines her with curiosity. How funny she looks, and how pretty. And her lips are rouged.

" So you love me ? "

" Yes, I love you," answers Louka in a sad, tired voice.

" Since when ? "

" Always."

" And you won't tell, Louka ? "

" I have already given you my word of honour."

" No, swear, Louka, that you won't tell. If anyone should find out . . . especially Vera. Swear."

" Why should I tell Vera ? She wouldn't be interested." . . .

" Swear that you won't tell her."

" I swear, no one . . ."

" And now . . ." He bends towards her. Black shining hair, black shining eyes, and his lips are so near. For this moment she has waited all her life.

" So you love me, Louka ? "

" I love you," she breathes.

He puts his arm round her bare shoulders and draws her towards him.

" You love me ? " and he kisses her lips.

Louka sighs deeply. Like a frightened bird, she sits on the very edge of the divan. From beneath the ball-dress, her legs in their short child's socks peep out comically.

He kisses her bare, perfumed knees. His lips are cold. The silk dress rustles. She sighs softly, shuts her eyes and falls back helplessly on to the soft cushions. . . .

It is so quiet, she can hear only the beating of her heart, the rustling of the silk beneath her fingers. Silence, agony, bliss. . . .

But all this has happened before. . . . These icy

lips and the tender hands and this agonising, blissful terror. But where ? When ? Louka opens blissful, heavy eyes. Tears are running down her cheeks. Why is she crying? For she is so happy. . . . This has happened before. And this weakness. . . . And this moonlight. . . . But where ? When ? . . .

"Azrael," she suddenly remembers, "Azrael . . ."

Black eyes bend down over her.

"What are you saying, Louka ?"

"Azrael," she repeats. "No, not Azrael. You—Arsenin."

## CHAPTER IV

A NOISE in her ears wakes Vera up. It is her heart. She must lie on her right side, so that it should not interfere. She turns over carefully. No, the noise continues, just the same. And to lie on her right side is still more uncomfortable, still more difficult. She is so tired, but she will not fall asleep now. . . .

"Are you afraid?" asks a high-pitched voice right in her ear.

"Yes, terribly," answers another voice. "Here the walls are five centimetres thick and there are beetles without teeth."

"Yes, a horrible house." . . .

Vera shudders and opens her eyes. No one is there. It is quiet.

Through the half-closed shutters the moon shines palely. In the darkness everything looks tremendous and angular.

Vera raises herself on her elbow and looks around. Where has she got to? . . . Where is she? She feels her face, her hair, the pillow. She sits up, throwing off the coverlet. The greenish light of the moon falls on her white legs hanging

down from the bed. And as usual, in the night and in the darkness, she thinks of death.

" I shall die. I shall die soon."

She stretches out her legs and moves her toes. The greenish moonlight falls straight on them.

" My little feet, my poor little feet. I shall lie in the ground and worms will eat my poor little feet." She strokes her knees tenderly.

She feels so sad. She is so sorry for herself.

" I shall die. Perhaps I am dead already ? "

But her heart beats loudly and her palms are warm and her knees are also warm and smooth.

" No, I'm alive. I am still alive."

She lies down and shuts her eyes. " I am still alive, but how sad, how difficult, how terrible it is to be alive."

## CHAPTER V

ARSENIN accompanies Louka to the gate. It is dark and the moon is pale in the sky, weak and tired. Weak and tired, like Louka.



*With her twirl the chairs, the flowers on the wallpaper.*

Arsenin kisses her for the last time.

"Run along. I'll come to-morrow, the first thing in the morning."

"Oh," sighs Louka, hanging on to his arm.

" I can't. I don't want to. How can I be alone now ? Without you ? How ? "

Yet, without looking round, she runs off. The window has not been closed. Louka is at home. She runs quickly up the dark stairs and goes into her room.

The shutters are open. The tired, feeble moon weakly lights the room. Louka looks round. Here lived the previous Louka. What a long time ago that was ! Was it really only to-day that she heard Vera's singing ? . . . And now there has returned an altogether different, new Louka,

She twirls quietly round the room. And the long, wide dress floats out like a crinoline. With her twirl the chairs, the flowers on the wallpaper and the pale moon. Louka stops, holding on to the bed. " Oh, I'm tired, tired, tired," she breathes. " Oh, I'm happy, happy, happy." . . .

And, taking off her dress and shoes, she throws herself into bed. And her head, heavy as a stone, sinks into the very depths of sleep.

## CHAPTER VI

VERA wakes up alone in her white bedroom. Quite a girl's room, more suitable for Louka than for her. Everything so fresh, so naive. And on the bed-table are marguerites and a little plush bear.

Ekaterina Lvovna in her stockinged feet goes in to her daughter and kisses her.

"Awake already, Vera? Did you sleep well? Stay in bed a little longer. I'll bring up some coffee for you."

Vera shakes her head.

"I mustn't be lazy. It's bad for *her*."

She yawns, disentangles her foot from under the coverlet, and puts it down on the carpet.

"The right foot first," she says, smiling, "to be happy all day, but if the left foot steps out first . . ."

Ekaterina Lvovna helps her to dress.

"Mamma, I think that since yesterday I have become still fatter."

"You look very well, Verochka. It's hardly noticeable."

Vera waves her away, laughing.

"Don't, Mamma. Can't I see in the mirror?"

She goes into the bathroom. The water runs noisily from the nickel tap. Through the wide window she can see the flower-beds with the stocks, the tall silvery fir-trees and, at the bottom of the garden, the white summer-house. The air is fresh and transparent. Vera soaps the sponge. The cold water trickles down and tickles her back. She shivers, smiling. How good, how pleasant. Everything. The delicate white lather, and the water, and the view from the window.

Vera sighs. How light she feels. It seems to her that if she were to wave her hands, she would fly through the garden right into the sky. Maybe she would even begin singing like a lark. How light.

On the wall over the washbasin hangs a mirror. Vera looks at herself in it.

"How can you fly? . . . Heavy, clumsy, enormous. You should be ashamed. Yes, you should. You should. And yet . . ." And she smiles again. . . .

And yet . . . and yet she feels content. . . . She feels light. She is happy. And quite different from the rest of the people on earth. And she is living—somewhere—perhaps not on this earth, but somewhere above in the clouds. And everything is so pleasant, so light and clear. She feels neither terror, nor malice, nor sadness. The further she is, the nearer to //, the easier it becomes.

She washes a long time, then she puts on her white dress. She must look nice. Now every day was a fete-day, every day counted. Can she know how many are still left? . . . But she is not afraid, not at all afraid, except at night. During the day she is brave, *it* is all right during the day. She must get out a belt. She opens the wardrobe. A newspaper falls out and Vera picks it up. "Le Matin" June 12th, 1923. What an old one! Vera was quite a little girl then, and she knew no one, neither Arsenin nor Vladimir. She turns over the newspaper. How amusing.

"Verochka, would you like some ham?"

Ekaterina Lvovna carries in the coffee. After her runs Louka with a plate of strawberries.

Vera is crying, her head on the table. Ekaterina Lvovna holds the tray with difficulty.

"For God's sake, why?" . . .

Vera points to the newspaper.

"Mammochka," she sobs. "I can't help it. Oh, I can't help it. I'm so sorry. . . . I've just read here. . . . An Arab was condemned to death, and he saluted and thanked the court and . . . and he said," she sobs violently, "'I have always been unhappy. In my childhood I ate grass. Goat's cheese was not for me. I ate grass.' Oh, Mamma, I'm so sorry for him." . . .

Ekaterina Lvovna puts the tray on the table and embraces her daughter. "But it was so long ago."

" And why was he sentenced to death ? " asks Louka, interested.

" Oh, Mamma," Vera weeps, " I can't help it. What a cruel life! What unhappy people ! I'm sorry for them, sorry for everyone. For you and Arsenin and Volodia and Louka and for her, my future daughter. I am sorry for everyone. Oh, I can't bear it. "

" Vera"—Louka presses her sister's hand—" don't cry, and please don't be so compassionate, or you will melt like butter in the sun. I'm serious. You mustn't be like that. If you cry, and love everyone and pity everyone, you will melt with kindness. "

Vera throws her arms round Louka.

" But what shall I do, Loukochka ? My darling Loukochka. Kiss me. "

Louka lightly touches Vera's cheek. She finds it unpleasant when Vera presses her to herself. Through her dress she can feel her large stomach. She finds it repulsive.

" I'll call her Loudmilla," says Vera dreamily, calm already. " In honour of you, so that she should be as jolly and as pretty as my Louka. "

Louka gently frees herself.

" Well, go and play in the garden. Do you like it here ? You remember when we came, you were sulky. It is pleasant here, isn't it, Louka ? "

" Very pleasant. I think that it couldn't be better. "

Vera kisses her again and Louka runs off. Vera, of course, is to be pitied, but it is very boring to be with her now.

In her room Louka sits down at the table. She must share with someone. The best thing would be to write Jeanne a letter.

"My dear Jeanne," she writes in close, uneven script, "you remember, I told you, but you did not believe me. You have only to wait a little and you will be happy. I have waited, and happiness has already come to me. Now it is your turn. And it will come quickly, I know. I am very happy. Last night——"

Louka becomes thoughtful and wonders how she should describe what happened last night, and whether it were possible to describe it . . . and then in reality there was nothing. . . . This was not that about which Vera spoke, that other thing. . . .

She looks thoughtfully through the window. Along the road walks Arsenin, he opens the gate and walks into the garden. Louka jumps down from the chair and runs to meet him. The letter remains as it is, unfinished.

On the couch by the window, Vera is sewing a little jacket. In the room it is cool and quiet. It is too hot in the garden, the heat does not agree with Vera. She threads a piece of white cotton

into the needle and sews with little stitches. The seams must not be felt at all, they must not rub.

In the garden through the trees flashes Louka's yellow dress next to Arsenin. Vera smiles. It is pleasant that he should be in the garden quite near her, pleasant to sit alone like this and to sew a little jacket. It is not at all necessary that he should always be next to her. It is pleasant to say nothing and to think of him. Let him chatter a little with Louka. Then he will not get tired of her.

Vera sews, smiling.

A white butterfly flies through the window. Sparrows hop about the path. The warm wind whispers in the jasmine bushes, blows through her hair and down her bare back. It will be quite soon now. And afterwards. . . . They will live like this in the country. And in just such a garden, perhaps in this very garden, she, her daughter, will play. Vera sleepily closes her eyes. Here she is, her little Loudmilla, sitting on a heap of sand, and with a shining spade she puts the sand into a little red bucket. She has fair hair like Louka, but her eyes are black. The wind rustles in the garden. No, it is not the wind, it is the sound of her daughter's little feet running down the path.

"Mamma-Puss," calls a highly-pitched little voice.

Vera opens her eyes. And suddenly at that



*Vera . . . listens to the tiny sound.*

moment she feels that something moves in her. It is her daughter giving her a sign, telling her "I'm here, I'm here." . . .

Vera puts her hand on her stomach, and deeply moved, listens to the tiny sound. It is her Loud-millochka, her little girl. . . .

Vera gets up, and, treading heavily, carefully walks down into the garden. She must tell Arsenin. But where is he ?

The garden is empty. Only the trees, the blue sky, and the sun. The heat makes Vera feel languid, she would like to sit down on the bench

and rest. But she must find Arsenin. She must tell him.

"Louka!" she calls. "Arsenin Nikolaevich!"

There is no reply. Vera stands beneath a tree. She feels that she must see him at once. She turns back to the house, and walks past the summer-house. Perhaps they are sheltering from the sun? Holding on to the rail, she climbs the steps. Only five steps, but she is tired. Smiling, she opens the door. Darkness. After the brilliant light outside, it is difficult to make out anything. But they are here. She can hear a noise. And, peering hard, she looks round. And suddenly she sees them. Louka is lying on the short divan, her bare legs hanging to the floor. Arsenin is kneeling and his head rests on Louka's bare knees. What? . . . What is this? . . . Vera does not understand. Cannot, does not wish to understand.

"Arsenin!" she cries.

Arsenin quickly turns towards her; his eyes are wild and cruel. Now there is no doubt about it.

Vera raises her hands to shut out that look, takes a pace backwards towards the steps and, with her whole weight, leans on the rail. The thin rail breaks. And the last thing she sees is the intolerably blue, glassy sky above her head. And suddenly the glassy sky splinters across and large pieces of blue glass fly down, cracking and crashing to the earth, on to Vera. . . .

## CHAPTER VII

THEY had carried Vera into the house. She lies on the divan in the same room where she has just been sewing, and on the table by the window lies the little white jacket, and in the back of the couch sticks a needle with a long, fluttering thread.

Louka stands on the threshold and looks at her sister. Vera's open eyes are senselessly gazing straight up at the ceiling, her face is white and motionless, her dry lips half-opened. "A-a-a-a," and not for a moment does the noise cease. Is that really Vera screaming? Is it impossible to quieten her?

Ekaterina Lvovna and the maid move about quickly. Arsenin has run for the doctor.

Vera is still screaming.

"In a minute, in a minute, Verochka. Wait, in a minute for God's sake!" Ekaterina Lvovna is unfastening Vera's dress and she bathes her forehead with cold water. "In a minute, Verochka. How did it happen, Louka? How . . . ?"

"I don't know," says Louka in a troubled voice. "I think she wanted to come into the summer-house and lost her footing. . . . I don't know."

" Verochka, Verochka, for God's sake, don't scream so ! "

At last the doctor has arrived. The door into the drawing-room is closed. No one may go in. Louka sits on the divan and waits. Arsenin, his face pale and tortured, strides from one corner of the room to the other. Louka presses her hands to her heart.

" Arsenin, what happened ? "

But he only waves her aside without answering.

The screaming continues all the time. A maid runs through with some towels.

" Arsenin," asks Louka, " Arsenin, I don't understand. Vera . . . "

Arsenin stops in front of her and looks at her with hatred.

" Stop," he says between his teeth. " It's all through you, through you . . . "

Again the maid runs across the room, carrying pillows and sheets. And suddenly all becomes quiet. Louka stretches out her neck. Nothing can be heard except a faint groaning.

Louka carefully opens the door. On the floor are a basin of water and towels. The doctor has on a white hospital coat, and on the white pillows lies Vera's pale face. Her feverish burning eyes rest on Louka.

" Curse you ! " Vera's voice rings out hoarsely, " Curse you ! Curse you both ! "

" Verochka ! " cries Ekaterina Lvovna, horrified.

" Curse you! Curse you ! " feebly and persistently repeats Vera.

" Verochka!"

" Drive her away, Mamma! " suddenly cries Vera. " Don't let her in. And don't let her come up to the bier. She will tear out my dead eyes, curse her ! "

" Go away, go away." Ekaterina Lvovna, terrified, pushes Louka out and slams the door.

" Mamma," screams Vera. " It is they who have killed me. She and he, curse them ! Drive him away ! "

" In a minute, in a minute, Verochka. Don't excite yourself so. Doctor, tell her that it is dangerous for her to get excited."

The door opens again.

" I beg of you," Ekaterina Lvovna's lips tremble, " to go away at once. And never . . . never . . ." She gasps for air like a fish on the sand, and cannot finish.

" I obey." Arsenin bows to her, and goes out on the terrace.

" Mamma . . ."

But Ekaterina Lvovna does not turn her head, as if Louka is not even there.

" Curse you ! Curse you ! " the torn, hoarse voice continues. " Curse you ! Curse you." . . .

A car stops in front of the gate. Another doctor

has come from Paris. Again the door is opened and shut, again the maid runs through the room with linen and hot water.

The groans have died down and Vera's voice can no longer be heard. From underneath the door drifts a sweetish, unpleasant smell. It leaves a brassy taste in the mouth, the tongue somehow swells strangely, and the sky has become brassy too, and retreats higher and higher. "Chloroform," guesses Louka, and, with repugnance, covers her mouth and nose with her handkerchief.

And again a car. It is Volodia. He runs stumbling through the garden.

"Vera," he pants. "Vera . . . alive?"

And the door closes behind him.

Louka sits on the divan. Her legs have gone to sleep and her head aches from the chloroform. And she is afraid to get up, afraid to move. She stares at the white door and cannot tear her eyes away from it. But she should stare at it. She must. And not for a moment may she shut her eyes. What time is it now? It must be late. She is hungry, but how can one even think about eating as things are!

There, in Vera's room, they have turned on the light. From beneath the door Louka can see a bright, narrow, yellow band. Louka sits in the darkness on the divan. On the right, the window is faintly visible. And behind it, pressed to the glass, is someone's face. Louka shudders. She is

afraid. She tries to calm herself—she is only imagining it. No. Black shining eyes gaze straight into the room, straight at her, and the lips are moving and utter one word, "Louka." It is Arsenin. But Louka pretends not to see him. He lifts his hand and taps quietly on the glass. How pale and frightened his face looks. Louka turns away so as not to see it.

Vladimir comes in.

"Louka, Louka, you're here?" . . .

Louka gets up. Her numb legs obey her badly and her back aches.

"Volodia, I'm here. Give me your hand."

"Louka," he whispers in the darkness, pressing her fingers. "Louka, we must pray. Let us pray. You're still a child, you have a clean heart. God will hear you. Let us pray, Louka, and she will not die."

Louka kneels down next to him.

"Our Father," begins Louka, and when she has finished, she gets up.

"More, more. Not like that! From your heart, Louka. You are still a child. God will hear you. Pray."

"Our Lady, Virgin full of pity and tenderness . . ." Louka's voice trembles. It is dark. Vladimir is crying, pressing his head to the floor. And if she turns round, behind the glass are those terrified, shining eyes.

"Hail Mary, Our Lord is with thee . . ."



" *Louka, we must pray* "

" Our Lord is with thee," softly repeats Vladimir,  
" I don't know any more prayers." . . .

" Say them again. Again. God will hear you.  
But with your whole heart, Louka. With your  
whole heart, and she will not die."

" Volodia," calls Ekaterina Lvovna. " Vera is  
conscious."

Vladimir gets up quickly. Louka is alone again  
in the darkness, with only the pale, terrified face  
behind the window.

And suddenly Vera's weak voice.

" Give her to me, give her to me. It is a girl,

isn't it? Yes? I knew that it was a girl, give her to me.

"In a moment, Verochka. We are just wrapping her up. In a moment." . . .

"And are her eyes light? Light, like yours, Volodia. My daughter. Where is she? Oh, give her to me," pleads Vera plaintively.

"In a minute. Soon. Wait, Verochka. I'll bring her to you in a moment."

"Volodia, the three of us will go to the sea. Yes?" says Vera quickly. "You, I and she. We shall swim. You know, I'm a splendid swimmer. And she will lie in the sun, on the sand. Mamma, why are you crying? Why, you're a grandmother now. How funny—you're a grandmother. Oh, give her to me. Wrap her up here. It is my daughter. Mamma, Mamma, how unkind you are. Bring her here, bring her."

"Soon, Verochka, soon."

"Where have you hidden her? Oh, give her to me," sobs Vera, and again her voice can be heard, but now the words are indistinct. Only a rapid whispering and sobbing.

Louka leans back on the divan and shuts her eyes. It is quiet, absolutely quiet. She cannot hear even the whispering. Louka is asleep.

The lights above her head are burning brightly. Louka, startled, rubs her eyes with her fists. A tall, grey-haired old man is taking off his white coat.

" *Voire saur est morte*" he says.

Louka looks at him. It is a dream. She must wake up.

Vladimir walks in. From beneath his spectacles tears are streaming down, but he does not wipe them away.

" Louka . . . go in; take your last leave of your sister."

Louka gets up. So it is true. It is not a dream. In the doorway stands Ekatekina Lvovna.

" Louka, you mustn't go in. Afterwards. Tomorrow."

Louka is afraid to look at her mother. Vera had said, " Don't let her come up to my bier. She will tear out my dead eyes."

" No, you mustn't. The room must be cleared first," agrees Vladimir, and he sits down suddenly on the divan. His shoulders shiver.

Louka goes up to her room. It is already quite light. The window is open. It is cold. She must close it. She walks up to the window and leans out. Arsenin is still standing below.

" Listen, you," Louka cries to him. " Vera has died."

" Died?" he repeats, perplexed. But she is already shutting the window.

" And the child? The child?"

Louka does not answer. Child? . . . There is no child.

Now she must lie down. She stretches out her hand and sweeps a sheet of paper off the table. Circling quietly, it falls to the floor. And for some reason, she bends down to pick it up. It is her letter to Jeanne. The large black letters jump in front of her eyes. " I am very happy."

## CHAPTER VIII

IN the mirrors, queerly cut off, somehow, at the top and bottom, was reflected the image of the candles, the flowers, the bier, and the blue smoke floating beneath the ceiling. Over the flowers could be seen only the thin, dead, folded hands.

The requiem. . . . Ekaterina Lvovna in a black dress stands by the bier. The candle shakes in her hands and the grease falls in drops to the floor, she is crying, her face is lined and yellow. Louka looks at her. Can this old woman be her mother? And next *to* her stands Volodia. He too is in black, and he too is crying. But Louka stands a long way off. Behind everyone. In her yellow dress. No one has troubled about her mourning clothes. No one has even thought of her these last two days. Ekaterina Lvovna does not notice her. Vladimir sees nothing.

Soon they will go up for the last leave-taking. Then they will close the lid, they will take the coffin to the cemetery in Paris. Soon they will go up. . . . Louka has not even once gone up to Vera. Louka is afraid.



. . . and behind his shoulders, enormous, black wings.

" And don't let her come to the bier. She will tear out my dead eyes."

Louka does not pray. She dare not pray, she dare not cry.

Now, soon, soon. . .

Ekaterina Lvovna goes up first to the bier. Vladimir supports her.

" Verochka ! " she cries. " Vera."

Then she puts her head on Vladimir's shoulder and becomes quiet.

Now it is Louka's turn, but Louka hides behind the backs of the strangers.

"Go," says some lady. "That's right. First the family."

Louka goes up slowly. Her heart has stopped beating and she cannot breathe. Candles . . . mauve chrysanthemums. . . .

And among them Vera's dead, wilful face. The pale folded lips still whisper, "Curse you!" . . .

Louka stops. No, she dare not. And suddenly behind her is a whisper.

"Who let him in? . . . What insolence."

Louka turns her head. The candle-flames flicker a little in the blue atmosphere. In the doorway stands Arsenin. His black shining eyes look straight at Vera. In his hands are roses. And behind his shoulders, enormous, black wings.

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