

WHITE NIGHTS

A Sentimental Love Story
(From the Memoirs of a Dreamer)

TRANSLATED BY DAVID MAGARSHACK

And was it his destined part
Only one moment in his life
To be close to your heart? . . .

—Ivan Turgenev

First Night

It was a lovely night, one of those nights, dear reader, which can only happen when you are young. The sky was so bright and starry that when you looked at it the first question that came into your mind was whether it was really possible that all sorts of bad-tempered and unstable people could live under such a glorious sky. It is a question, dear reader, that would occur only to a young man, but may the good Lord put it into your head as often as possible! . . . The mention of bad-tempered and unstable people reminds me that during the whole of this day my behaviour has been above reproach. When I woke up in the morning I felt strangely depressed, a feeling I could not shake off for the better part of the day. All of a sudden it seemed to me as though I, the solitary one, had been forsaken by the whole world, and

that the whole world would have nothing to do with me. You may ask who "the whole world" is. For, I am afraid, I have not been lucky in acquiring a single acquaintance in Petersburg during the eight years I have been living there. But what do I want acquaintances for? I know the whole of Petersburg without them, and that, indeed, was the reason why it seemed to me that the whole world had forsaken me when the whole town suddenly arose and left for the country. I was terrified to be left alone, and for three days I wandered about the town plunged into gloom and absolutely at a loss to understand what was the matter with me. Neither on Nevsky Avenue, nor in the park, nor on the embankment did I meet the old familiar faces that I used to meet in the same place and at the same time all through the year. It is true I am a complete stranger to these people, but they are not strangers to me. I know them rather intimately, in fact; I have made a very thorough study of their faces; I am happy when they are happy, and I am sad when they are overcast with care. Why, there is an old gentleman I see every day on the Fontanka Embankment with whom I have practically struck up a friendship. He looks so thoughtful and dignified, and he always mutters under his breath, waving his left hand and holding a big knotty walking-stick with a gold top in his right. I have, I believe, attracted his attention, and I should not be surprised if he took a most friendly interest in me. In fact, I am sure that if he did not meet me at a certain hour on the Fontanka Embankment he would be terribly upset. That is why we sometimes almost bow to one another, especially when we are both in a good humour. Recently we had not seen each other for two days, and on the third day, when we met, we were just about to raise our hats in salute, but fortunately we recollected

ourselves in time and, dropping our hands, passed one another in complete understanding and amity. The houses, too, are familiar to me. When I walk along the street, each of them seems to run before me, gazing at me out of all its windows, and practically saying to me, “Good morning, sir! How are you? I’m very well, thank you. They’re going to add another storey to me in May”; or, “How do you do, sir? I’m going to be repaired tomorrow”; or, “Dear me, I nearly got burnt down, and, goodness, how I was scared!” and so on and so on. Some of them are great favourites of mine, while others are my good friends. One of them is thinking of undergoing a cure with an architect this summer. I shall certainly make a point of coming to see it every day to make sure that its cure does not prove fatal (which God forbid!). And I shall never forget the incident with a pretty little house of a pale pink hue. It was such a dear little house; it always welcomed me with such a friendly smile, and it looked on its clumsy neighbours with such an air of condescension, that my heart leapt with joy every time I passed it. But when I happened to walk along the street only a week ago and looked up at my friend, I was welcomed with a most plaintive cry, “They are going to paint me yellow!” Fiends! Savages! They spared nothing, neither cornices, nor columns, and my poor friend turned as yellow as a canary. I nearly had an attack of jaundice myself, and even to this day I have not been able to screw up my courage to go and see my mutilated friend, painted in the national colour of the Celestial Empire!

So now you see, dear reader, how it is that I know the whole of Petersburg.

I have already said that until I realised what was the trouble with me, I had been very worried and upset for three whole

days. In the street I felt out of sorts (this one had gone, that one had gone, and where on earth had the other one got to?), and at home I was not my old self, either. For two evenings I had been racking my brains trying hard to discover what was wrong with my room. What was it made me so peevish when I stayed there? And, greatly perplexed, I began examining my grimy green walls and the ceiling covered with cobwebs which Matryona was such a genius at cultivating. I went over my furniture and looked at each chair in turn, wondering whether the trouble lay there (for it upsets me to see even one chair not in its usual place); I looked at the window—but all to no purpose: it did not make me feel a bit better! I even went so far as to call in Matryona and rebuke her in a fatherly sort of way about the cobwebs and her untidiness in general. But she just gave me a surprised look and stalked out of the room without saying a word, so that the cobwebs still remain cheerfully in their old places. It was only this morning that at last I discovered the real cause of my unhappiness. Oh, so they are all running away from me to the country, are they? I'm afraid I must apologise for the use of this rather homely word, but I'm not in the mood now for the more exquisite refinements of style, for everybody in Petersburg has either left or is about to leave for the country; for every worthy gentleman of a solidly-prosperous and dignified position who hails a cab in the street is at once transformed in my mind into a worthy parent of a family who, after his usual office duties, immediately leaves town and, unencumbered by luggage, hastens to the bosom of his family—to the country; for every passer-by now wears quite a different look, a look which almost seems to say to every person he meets, "As a matter of fact, sir, I'm here by sheer chance, just passing through, you understand, and in a few hours I shall be on

the way to the country.” If a window is thrown open and a most ravishing young girl, who at a moment ago had been drumming on it with her lovely white fingers, pokes out her pretty head and calls to the man selling pots of plants in the street, I immediately jump to the conclusion that the flowers are bought not for the purpose of enjoying the spring and the flowers in a stuffy old flat in town, for very soon everybody will anyway be leaving for the country and will take even the flowers with them. Why, I’ve got so far in my new discovery (quite a unique discovery, you must admit) that I can tell at once, just by looking at a man, in what sort of a cottage he lives in the country. The residents of the Stone and Apothecary Islands can be recognised by their studied exquisiteness of manners, their smart summer clothes, and their wonderful carriages in which they come to town. The inhabitants of Pargolov and places beyond “inspire” your confidence at the first glance by their solidly prosperous position and their general air of sobriety and common sense; while the householder of Krestovsky Island is distinguished by his imperturbably cheerful look. Whether I happen to come across a long procession of carters, each walking leisurely, reins in hand, beside his cart, laden with whole mountains of furniture of every description—tables, chairs, Turkish and non-Turkish divans, and other household chattels—and, moreover, often presided over by a frail-looking cook who, perched on the very top of the cart, guards the property of her master as though it were the apple of her eye; or whether I look at the barges, heavily laden with all sorts of domestic junk, sailing on the Neva or the Fontanka, as far as the Black River or the Islands—both carts and barges multiply tenfold, nay, a hundredfold in my eyes. It really seems as though everything had arisen and set off on a journey

as though everything were moving off in caravan after caravan into the country; it seems as though the whole of Petersburg were about to turn into a desert, and it is hardly surprising that in the end I am overwhelmed with shame, humiliation, and sadness. For I have no possible excuse for going to the country; neither have I any country cottage I can go to. I am willing to leave with every cart or every gentleman of respectable appearance who hails a cab; but no one, absolutely no one, invites me to go with him, as though they had all forgotten me, as though I were no more than a stranger to them!

I walked for hours and hours, and, as usual, had for some time been completely oblivious of my surroundings, when I suddenly found myself near the toll-gate. I felt cheerful at once, and, stepping beyond the bar, walked along the road between fields of corn and meadows of lush grass, unconscious of any fatigue, and feeling with every breath I drew that a heavy weight was being lifted from my heart. All the travellers I met looked so genially at me that it seemed that in another moment they would most assuredly bow to me. All of them seemed to be happy about something, and every one of them without exception smoked a cigar. And I, too, was happy as never before in my life. As though I had suddenly found myself in Italy—so strong was the impact of nature upon me, a semi-invalid townsman who had all but been stifled within the walls of the city.

There is something indescribably moving in the way nature in Petersburg, suddenly with the coming of spring, reveals herself in all her might and glory, in all the splendour with which heaven has endowed her, in the way she blossoms out, dresses up, decks herself out with flowers. . . . She reminds me somehow rather forcibly of that girl, ailing and faded, upon whom

you sometimes look with pity or with a certain compassionate affection, or whom you simply do not notice at all, but who in the twinkling of an eye and only for one fleeting moment becomes by some magic freak of chance indescribably fair and beautiful; and, stunned and fascinated, you ask yourself what power it was that made those sad and wistful eyes blaze forth with such a fire? What caused the rush of blood to her pale and hollow cheeks? What brought passion to that sweet face? Why did her bosom heave so wildly? What was it that so instantaneously suffused the face of the poor girl with life, vigour, and beauty? What forced it to light up with so brilliant a smile? What animated it with so warm, so infectious a laugh? You look round; you wonder who it could have been; you begin to suspect the truth. But the brief moment passes, and tomorrow perhaps you will again encounter the same wistful and forlorn gaze, the same wan face, the same resignation and diffidence in her movements, and, yes, even remorse, even traces of some benumbing vexation and despondency for that brief outburst of passion. And you feel sorry that the beauty, so momentarily evoked, should have faded so quickly and so irrevocably, that she should have burst upon your sight so deceptively and to so little purpose—that she should not have given you time even to fall in love with her. . . .

But all the same my night was much better than the day! This is how it happened:

I came back to town very late, and, as I was approaching the street where I lived, it struck ten. My way lay along a canal embankment where not a single living soul could be seen at that hour. It is true, I live in a very remote part of the town. I was walking along and singing, for when I am happy I always hum

some tune to myself like every happy man who has neither friends nor good acquaintances, and who has no one to share his joy with in a moment of happiness. Suddenly I became involved in a most unexpected adventure.

A little distance away, leaning against the railing of the canal, a woman was standing with her elbows on the rail; she seemed to be engrossed in looking at the muddy water of the canal. She wore a most enchanting yellow hat and a very charming black cloak. "She's young," I thought, "and I'm sure she is dark." She did not seem to hear my footsteps, for she did not stir when I walked past her with bated breath and a thumping heart. "Funny!" I thought, "she must be thinking about something very important." Suddenly I stopped dead, rooted to the spot. The sound of suppressed weeping reached me. No, I was not mistaken. The girl was crying, for a minute later I distinctly heard her sobbing again. Good gracious! My heart contracted with pity. And timid though I am with women, this was too good a chance to be missed! . . . I retraced my steps, walked up to her, and in another moment would have certainly said "Madam!" if I had not known that that exclamation had been made a thousand times before in all Russian novels of high life. It was that alone that stopped me. But while I was searching for the right word with which to address the girl, she had recovered her composure, recollected herself, lowered her eyes, and darted past me along the embankment. I immediately set off in pursuit of her, but she must have guessed my intention, for she left the embankment and, crossing the road, walked along the pavement. I did not dare to cross the road. My heart was fluttering like the heart of a captured bird. But quite an unexpected incident came to my assistance.

A gentleman in evening dress suddenly appeared a few yards away from the girl on the other side of the street. He had reached the age of discretion, but there was no discretion in his unsteady gait. He was walking along, swaying from side to side, and leaning cautiously against a wall. The girl, on the other hand, walked as straight as an arrow, quickly and apprehensively, as girls usually walk at night when they do not want any man to offer to accompany them home. And the reeling gentleman would most certainly not have caught up with her, if my good luck had not prompted him to resort to a stratagem. Without uttering a word, he suddenly set off in pursuit of the girl at an amazing speed. She was running away from him as fast as her legs would carry her, but the staggering gentleman was getting nearer and nearer, and then caught up with her. The girl uttered a shriek and—I have to thank my good genius for the excellent knobbly walking-stick which, as it happened, I was at the time clutching in my right hand. In less than no time I found myself on the other side of the street, and in less than no time the unwelcome gentleman took in the situation, took into account the undeniable fact of my superior weapons, grew quiet, dropped behind, and it was only when we were far away that he bethought himself of protesting against my action in rather forceful terms. But his words hardly reached us.

“Give me your arm,” I said to the girl, “and he won’t dare to molest you any more.”

She silently gave me her arm, which was still trembling with excitement and terror. Oh, unwelcome stranger! How I blessed you at that moment! I stole a glance at her—I was right! She was a most charming girl and dark, too. On her black eyelashes there still glistened the tears of her recent fright or her recent

unhappiness—I did not know which. But there was already a gleam of a smile on her lips. She, too, stole a glance at me, blushed a little, and dropped her eyes.

“Well, you see, you shouldn’t have driven me away before, should you? If I’d been here, nothing would have happened.”

“But I didn’t know you. I thought that you too . . .”

“But what makes you think you know me now?”

“Well, I know you a little. Now why, for instance, are you trembling?”

“So you’ve guessed at once the sort of man I am,” I replied, overjoyed that the girl was so intelligent (this is never a fault in a beautiful girl). “Yes, you’ve guessed at once the sort of man I am. It’s quite true, I’m afraid, I’m awfully shy with women, and I don’t want to deny that I’m a little excited now, no less than you were a moment ago when that fellow scared you. Yes, I seem to be scared now. It’s as though it were all happening to me in a dream, except that even in a dream I did not expect ever to be talking to any woman.”

“How do you mean? Not really?”

“Yes, really. You see, if my arm is trembling now, it’s because it has never before been clasped by such a pretty little hand as yours. I’ve entirely lost the habit of talking to women. I mean, I never really was in the habit of talking to them. You see, I’m such a lonely creature. Come to think of it, I don’t believe I know how to talk to women. Even now I haven’t the faintest idea whether I’ve said anything to you that I shouldn’t. Please tell me frankly if I ever do. I promise you I shan’t take offence.”

“No, I don’t think you’ve said anything you shouldn’t. And if you really want me to be frank with you, I don’t mind telling you that women rather like shy men like you. And if you want

me to speak more frankly, I like it too, and I promise not to send you away till we reach my home.”

“I’m afraid,” I began, breathless with excitement, “you’ll make me lose my shyness at once, and then goodbye to all my schemes!”

“Devices? What schemes, and what for? I must say that isn’t nice at all.”

“I beg your pardon. I’m awfully sorry. It was a slip of the tongue. But how can you expect me at this moment not to wish. . . .”

“To make a good impression, you mean?”

“Well, yes. And do, for goodness’ sake, be fair. Just think—who am I? At twenty-six—yes, I’m twenty-six—I’ve never really known anyone. So how can you expect me to speak well, cleverly, and to the point? You, too, I think, would prefer us to be straightforward and honest with each other, wouldn’t you? I just can’t be silent when my heart is moved to speak. Well, anyway . . . I know you’ll hardly believe me, but I’ve never spoken to any woman, never! Never known one, either! I only dream that some day I shall meet someone at last. Oh, if only you knew how many times I’ve fallen in love like that!”

“But how? Who with?”

“With no one, of course. Just with my ideal, with the woman I see in my dreams. I make up all sorts of romantic love stories in my dreams. Oh, you don’t know the sort of man I am! It’s true I have known two or three women—you can’t help that, can you?—but what sort of women were they? They were all so mercenary that . . . But let me tell you something really funny, let me tell you how several times I longed to talk to a society lady in the street, I mean, talk to her when she was alone, and

without any formality. Very humbly, of course, very respectfully, very passionately. Tell her how horribly depressed I am by my lonely life; ask her not to send me away; explain to her that I have no other way of knowing what a woman is like; suggest to her that it is really her duty as a woman not to reject the humble entreaty of an unhappy man like me; finally, explain to her that all I want of her is that she should say a few friendly words to me, say them with sympathy and understanding, that she should not send me away at once, that she should believe my protestations, that she should listen to what I had to tell her, laugh at me by all means, if she wanted to, but also hold out some hope to me, just say two words to me, and then we need not see each other again! But you're laughing. . . . Well, as a matter of fact, I only said that to make you laugh. . . ."

"Don't be cross with me. I'm laughing because you are your own enemy, and if you had tried you would, I'm sure, have perhaps succeeded, even though it all happened in the street. The simpler, the better. Not one kind-hearted woman, provided, of course, she was not a fool, or angry at something at the time, would have the heart to send you away without saying the two words you were so humbly asking for. But I may be wrong. She would most likely have taken you for a madman. I'm afraid I was judging by myself. I know very well, I assure you, how people live in the world!"

"Thank you," I cried, "thank you a thousand times! you don't know how much I appreciate what you've just done for me!"

"All right, all right! Only tell me how did you guess I'm one of those women with whom . . . well, whom you thought worthy . . . of your attention and friendship. I mean, not a mer-

canary one, as you call it. What made you decide to come up to me?"

"What made me do that? Why, you were alone, and that fellow was much too insolent. It all happened at night, too, and you must admit it was my duty. . . ."

"No, no! I mean before. On the other side of the street. You wanted to come up to me, didn't you?"

"On the other side of the street? Well, I really don't know what to say. I'm afraid I . . . You see, I was so happy today. I was walking along and singing. I had spent the day in the country. I don't remember ever having experienced such happy moments before. You were . . . However, I may have been mistaken. Please, forgive me, if I remind you of it, but I thought you were crying, and I—I couldn't bear to hear it—I felt miserable about it. But, goodness, had I no right to feel anxious about you? Was it wrong of me to feel a brotherly compassion for you? I'm sorry, I said compassion . . . Well, what I meant was that I couldn't possibly have offended you because I had an impulse to go up to you, could I?"

"Don't say anything more, please," said the girl pressing my hand and lowering her head. "I'm to blame for having started talking about it. But I'm glad I was not mistaken in you. Well, I'm home now. I live in that lane, only two steps from here. Goodbye and thank you."

"But shall we never see each other again? Surely, surely, you can't mean it. Surely, this can't be our last meeting?"

"Well, you see," the girl said, laughing, "at first you only asked for two words, and now. . . . However, I don't think I'd better make any promises. Perhaps we'll meet again."

"I'll be here tomorrow," I said. "Oh, I'm sorry, I seem to be already making demands. . . ."

“Yes, you are rather impatient, aren’t you? You’re almost making demands. . . .”

“Listen to me, please, listen to me!” I interrupted. “You won’t mind if I say something to you again, something of the same kind, will you? It’s this: I can’t help coming here tomorrow. I am a dreamer. I know so little of real life that I just can’t help reliving such moments as these in my dreams, for such moments are something I have very rarely experienced. I am going to dream about you the whole night, the whole week, the whole year. I’ll most certainly come here tomorrow. Yes, here, at this place and at this hour. And I shall be happy to remember what happened to me today. Already this place is dear to me. I’ve two or three places like this in Petersburg. Once I even wept because I remembered something, just as you—I mean, I don’t know of course, but perhaps you too were crying ten minutes ago because of some memory. I’m awfully sorry, I seem to have forgotten myself again. Perhaps you were particularly happy here once. . . .”

“Very well,” said the girl, “I think I will come here tomorrow, also at ten o’clock. And I can see that I can’t possibly forbid you to come, can I? You see, I have to be here. Please don’t imagine that I am making an appointment with you. I hope you’ll believe me when I say that I have got to be here on some business of my own. Oh, very well, I’ll be frank with you: I shan’t mind at all if you come here too. To begin with, something unpleasant may happen again as it did today, but never mind that . . . I mean, I’d really like to see you again to—to say two words to you. But, mind, don’t think ill of me now, will you? Don’t imagine I’m making appointments with men so easily. I wouldn’t have made it with you, if. . . . But let that be my secret. Only first you must promise. . . .”

“I promise anything you like!” I cried, delighted. “Only say it. Tell me anything beforehand. I agree to everything. I’ll do anything you like. I can answer for myself. I’ll be obedient, respectful. . . . You know me, don’t you?”

“Well, it’s because I know you that I’m asking you to come tomorrow,” said the girl, laughing. “I know you awfully well. But, mind, if you come it’s on condition that, first (only you will do what I ask you, won’t you?—You see, I’m speaking frankly to you), don’t fall in love with me. That’s impossible, I assure you. I’m quite ready to be your friend. I am, indeed. But you mustn’t fall in love with me. So please, don’t.”

“I swear to you . . .” I cried, seizing her hand.

“No, no. I don’t want any solemn promises. I know you’re quite capable of flaring up like gunpowder. Don’t be angry with me for speaking to you like this. If you knew. . . . You see, I haven’t got anyone, either, to whom to say a word, or whom to ask for advice. Of course, it’s silly to expect advice from people one meets in the street, but you are different. I feel I know you so well that I couldn’t have known you better if we’d been friends for twenty years. You won’t fail me, will you?”

“You can depend on me! The only thing is I don’t know how I shall be able to survive for the next twenty-four hours.”

“Have a good sleep. Good night, and remember I’ve already confided in you. But, as you expressed it so well a few minutes ago, one hasn’t really to account for every feeling, even for brotherly sympathy, has one? You put it so nicely that I felt at once that you’re the sort of person I could confide in.”

“For goodness’ sake, tell me what it is. Please do.”

“No, I think you’d better wait till tomorrow. Let it remain a secret for the time being. So much the better for you: at least

from a distance it will seem more like a romance. Perhaps I'll tell you tomorrow, perhaps I won't. I'd like to have a good talk to you first, get to know you better. . . ."

"All right, I'll tell you all about myself tomorrow. But, good Lord, the whole thing is just like a miracle! Where am I? Tell me, aren't you glad you weren't angry with me, as some other women might well have been? Only two minutes, and you've made me happy for ever. Yes, happy. Who knows, perhaps you've reconciled me with myself, resolved all my doubts. Perhaps there are moments when I . . . But I'll tell you all about it tomorrow. You shall know everything, everything. . . ."

"All right, I agree. I think you'd better start first."

"Very well."

"Goodbye!"

"Goodbye!"

And we parted. I walked about all night. I couldn't bring myself to go home. I was so happy! Till tomorrow!

Second Night

"Well, so you have survived, haven't you?" she said to me, laughing and pressing both my hands.

"I've been here for the last two hours. You don't know what I've been through today!"

"I know, I know—but to business. Do you know why I've come? Not to talk a lot of nonsense as we did yesterday. You see, we must be more sensible in future. I thought about it a lot yesterday."

“But how? How are we to be more sensible? Not that I have anything against it. But, really, I don’t believe anything more sensible has ever happened to me than what’s happening to me at this moment.”

“Oh? Well, first of all, please don’t squeeze my hands like that. Secondly, let me tell you I’ve given a lot of thought to you today.”

“Have you? Well, and what decision have you come to?”

“What decision? Why, that we ought to start all over again. For today I’ve come to the conclusion that I don’t know you at all, that I’ve behaved like a child, like a silly girl, and of course in the end I blamed my own good heart for everything. I mean, I finished up, as everybody always does when they start examining their own motives, by passing a vote of thanks to myself. And so, to correct my mistake, I’ve made up my mind to find out all about you to the last detail. But as there’s no one I can ask about you, you’ll have to tell me everything yourself. Everything, absolutely everything! To begin with, what sort of man are you? Come on, start, please! Tell me the story of your life.”

“The story of my life?” I cried, thoroughly alarmed. “But who told you there was such a story? I’m afraid there isn’t any.”

“But how did you manage to live, if there is no story?” she interrupted me, laughing.

“Without any stories whatsoever! I have lived, as they say, entirely independently. I mean by myself. Do you know what it means to live by oneself?”

“How do you mean by yourself? Do you never see anyone at all?”

“Why, no. I see all sorts of people, but I’m alone all the same.”

“Don’t you ever talk to anyone?”

“Strictly speaking, never.”

“But who are you? Please explain. But wait: I think I can guess. You’ve probably got a grandmother like me. She’s blind, my granny is, and she never lets me go out anywhere, so that I’ve almost forgotten how to talk to people. And when I behaved badly about two years ago and she saw that there was no holding me, she called me in and pinned my dress to hers—and since then we’ve sat pinned to one another like that for days and days. She knits a stocking, blind though she is, and I have to sit beside her sewing or reading a book to her. It’s a funny sort of situation to be in—pinned to a person for two years or more.”

“Good gracious, what bad luck! No, I haven’t got such a grandmother.”

“If you haven’t, why do you sit at home all the time?”

“Look here, do you want to know who I am?”

“Yes, of course!”

“In the strict meaning of the word?”

“Yes, in the strictest meaning of the word!”

“Very well, I’m a character.”

“A character? What kind of a character?” the girl cried, laughing merrily, as though she had not laughed for a whole year. “I must say, you’re certainly great fun! Look, here’s a seat. Let’s sit down. No one ever comes this way, so no one will overhear us. Well, start your story, please! For you’ll never convince me that you haven’t got one. You’re just trying to conceal it. Now, first of all, what is a character?”

“A character? Well, it’s an original, a queer chap,” I said, and, infected by her childish laughter, I burst out laughing myself. “It’s a kind of freak. Listen, do you know what a dreamer is?”

“A dreamer? Of course I know. I’m a dreamer myself! Sometimes when I’m sitting by Granny I get all sorts of queer ideas into my head. I mean, once you start dreaming, you let your imagination run away with you, so that in the end I even marry a prince of royal blood! I don’t know, it’s very nice sometimes—dreaming, I mean. But, on the whole, perhaps it isn’t. Especially if you have lots of other things to think of,” the girl added, this time rather seriously.

“Fine! Once you’re married to an emperor, you will, I think, understand me perfectly. Well, listen—but don’t you think I ought to know your name before starting on the story of my life?”

“At last! It took you a long time to think of it, didn’t it?”

“Good lord! I never thought of it. You see, I was so happy anyway.”

“My name’s Nastenka.”

“Nastenka! Is that all?”

“Yes, that’s all. Isn’t it enough for you, you insatiable person?”

“Not enough? Why, not at all. It’s more than I expected, much more than I expected, Nastenka, my dear, dear girl, if I may call you by your pet name, if from the very first you—you become Nastenka to me!”

“I’m glad you’re satisfied at last! Well?”

“Well, Nastenka, just listen what an absurd story it all is.”

I sat down beside her, assumed a pedantically serious pose, and began as though reading from a book:

“There are, if you don’t happen to know it already, Nastenka, some very strange places in Petersburg. It is not the same sun which shines upon all the other people of the city that looks in there, but quite a different sun, a new sun, one specially ordered for those places, and the light it sheds on everything is also a different, peculiar sort of light. In those places, dear Nastenka, the people also seem to live quite a different life, unlike that which surges all round us, a life which could only be imagined to exist in some faraway foreign country beyond the seven seas, and not at all in our country and in these much too serious times. Well, it is that life which is a mixture of something purely fantastic, something fervently ideal, and, at the same time (alas, Nastenka!), something frightfully prosaic and ordinary, not to say incredibly vulgar.”

“My goodness, what an awful introduction! What shall I be hearing next, I wonder?”

“What you will be hearing next, Nastenka (I don’t think I shall ever get tired of calling you Nastenka), is that these places are inhabited by strange people—by dreamers. A dreamer—if you must know its exact definition—is not a man, but a sort of creature of the neuter gender. He settles mostly in some inaccessible place, as though anxious to hide in it even from the light of day; and once he gets inside his room, he’ll stick to it like a snail, or, at all events, he is in this respect very like that amusing animal which is an animal and a house both at one and the same time and bears the name of tortoise. Why, do you think, is he so fond of his four walls, invariably painted green, grimy, dismal and reeking unpardonably of tobacco smoke? Why does this funny fellow, when one of his new friends comes to visit him (he usually ends up by losing all his friends one by

one), why does this absurd person meet him with such an embarrassed look? Why is he so put out of countenance? Why is he thrown into such confusion, as though he had just committed some terrible crime within his four walls? As though he had been forging paper money? Or writing some atrocious poetry to be sent to a journal with an anonymous letter, in which he will explain that, the poet having recently died, he, his friend, deems it his sacred duty to publish his verses? Can you tell me, Nastenka, why the conversation between the two friends never really gets going? Why doesn't laughter or some witty remark escape the lips of the perplexed caller, who had so inopportunistically dropped out of the blue, and who at other times is so fond of laughter and all sorts of quips and cranks? And conversations about the fair sex. And other cheerful subjects. And why does the visitor, who is most probably a recent acquaintance and on his first visit—for in this case there will never be a second, and his visitor will never call again—why, I say, does this visitor feel so embarrassed himself? Why, in spite of his wit (if, that is, he has any), is he so tongue-tied as he looks at the disconcerted face of his host, who is, in turn, utterly at a loss and bewildered after his herculean efforts to smooth things over, and fumbles desperately for a subject to enliven the conversation, to convince his host that he, too, is a man of the world, that he too can talk of the fair sex? The host does everything in fact to please the poor man, who seems to have come to the wrong place and called on him by mistake, by at least showing how anxious he is to entertain him. And why does the visitor, having most conveniently remembered a most urgent business appointment which never existed, all of a sudden grab his hat and take his leave, snatching away his hand from the clammy grasp of his

host, who, in a vain attempt to recover what is irretrievably lost, is doing his best to show how sorry he is? Why does his friend burst out laughing the moment he finds himself on the other side of the door? Why does he vow never to call on this queer fellow again, excellent fellow though he undoubtedly is? Why at the same time can't he resist the temptation of indulging in the amusing, if rather far-fetched, fancy of comparing the face of his friend during his visit with the expression of an unhappy kitten, roughly handled, frightened, and subjected to all sorts of indignities, by children who had treacherously captured and humiliated it? A kitten that hides itself away from its tormentors under a chair, in the dark, where, left in peace at last, it cannot help bristling up, spitting, and washing its insulted face with both paws for a whole hour, and long afterwards looking coldly at life and nature and even the bits saved up for it from the master's table by a sympathetic housekeeper?"

"Now, look," interrupted Nastenka, who had listened to me all the time in amazement, opening her eyes and pretty mouth, "look, I haven't the faintest idea why it all happened and why you should ask me such absurd questions. All I know is that all these adventures have most certainly happened to you, and exactly as you told me."

"Indubitably," I replied, keeping a very straight face.

"Well," said Nastenka, "if it's indubitably, then please go on, for I'm dying to hear how it will all end."

"You want to know, Nastenka, what our hero did in his room, or rather what I did in my room, since the hero of this story is none other than my own humble self? You want to know why I was so alarmed and upset for a whole day by the unexpected visit of a friend? You want to know why I was in

such a flurry of excitement, why I blushed to the roots of my hair, when the door of my room opened? Why I was not able to entertain my visitor, and why I perished so ignominiously, crushed by the weight of my own hospitality?"

"Yes, yes, of course I do," answered Nastenka. "That's the whole point. And, please, I do appreciate the beautiful way in which you're telling your story, but don't you think perhaps you ought to tell it a little less beautifully? You see, you talk as if you were reading from a book."

"Nastenka," I said in a very grave and solemn voice, scarcely able to keep myself from laughing, "dear Nastenka, I know I'm telling my story very beautifully, but I'm afraid I can't tell it any other way. For at this moment, Nastenka, at this moment, I am like the spirit of King Solomon when, after being imprisoned for a thousand years in a jar under seven seals, all the seven seals have at last been removed. At this moment, dear Nastenka, when we've met again after so long a separation—for I've known you for ages, dear Nastenka, for I've been looking for someone for ages and that's a sure sign that it was you I was looking for and, moreover, that it was ordained that we two should meet now—just at this very moment, Nastenka, a thousand floodgates have opened up in my head and I must overflow in a cataract of words, or I shall burst. So I beg you to listen to me like a good and obedient girl and not to interrupt me, Nastenka, or I shan't say another word."

"No, no, no! Please go on. You mustn't stop. I shan't say another word, I promise."

"Well, to continue. There is, Nastenka, my dear, dear friend, one hour in my day which I love exceedingly. It is the hour when practically all business, office hours and duties are at an end, and

everyone is hurrying home to dinner, to lie down, to have a rest, and as they walk along they think of other pleasant ways of spending the evening, the night, and the rest of their leisure time. At that hour our hero—for I must ask your permission, Nastenka, to tell my story in the third person, for one feels awfully ashamed to tell it in the first—and so at that hour our hero, who has not been wasting his time, either, is walking along with the others. But a strange expression of pleasure plays on his pale and slightly crumpled-looking face. It is not with indifference that he looks at the sunset which is slowly fading on the cold Petersburg sky. When I say he looks, I'm telling a lie: he does not look at it, but is contemplating it without, as it were, being aware of it himself, as though he were tired or preoccupied at the same time with some other more interesting subject, being able to spare only a passing and almost unintentional glance at what is taking place around him. He is glad to have finished till next day with all tiresome *business*. He is happy as a schoolboy who has been let out of the classroom and is free to devote all his time to his favourite games and forbidden pastimes. Take a good look at him, Nastenka: you will at once perceive that his feeling of joy has had a pleasant effect on his weak nerves and his morbidly excited imagination. Look! he is thinking of something. Of dinner perhaps? Or how he's going to spend the evening? what is he looking at like that? At the gentleman of the solidly prosperous exterior who is bowing so picturesquely to the lady who drives past in a splendid carriage drawn by a pair of mettlesome horses? No, Nastenka, what do all those trivial things matter to him now? He is rich beyond compare with his *own individual* life; he has become rich in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, and it was not for nothing that the farewell ray of the setting sun

flashed so gaily across his vision and called forth a whole swarm of impressions from his glowing heart. Now he hardly notices the road on which at any other time every trivial detail would have attracted his attention. Now 'the Goddess of Fancy' (if you have read your Zhukovsky, dear Nastenka) has already spun the golden warp with her wanton hand and is at this very moment weaving patterns of a wondrous, fantastic life before his mind's eye—and, who knows, maybe has transported him with her wanton hand to the seventh crystalline sphere from the excellent granite pavement on which he is now wending his way home. Try stopping him now, ask him suddenly where he is standing now, through what streets he has been walking, and it is certain he will not be able to remember anything, neither where he has been, nor where he is standing now, and, flushing with vexation, he will most certainly tell some lie to save appearances. That is why he starts violently, almost crying out, and looks round in horror when a dear old lady stops him in the middle of the pavement and politely asks him the way. Frowning with vexation, he walks on, scarcely aware of the passers-by who smile as they look at him and turn round to follow him with their eyes. He does not notice the little girl who, after timidly making way for him, bursts out laughing as she gazes at his broad, contemplative smile and wild gesticulations. And still the same fancy in her frolicsome flight catches up the old lady, the passers-by, the laughing little girl, and the bargees who have settled down to their evening meal on the barges which dam up the Fontanka (our hero, let us suppose, is walking along the Fontanka Embankment at that moment), and playfully weaves everybody and everything into her canvas, like a fly in a spider's web. And so, with fresh food for his fancy to feed on, the queer

fellow at last comes home to his comfortable little den and sits down to his dinner. It is long after he has finished his meal, however, when, after clearing the table, Matryona, the pre-occupied and everlastingly melancholy old woman who waits on him, gives him his pipe, that he recovers from his reverie and is shocked to find that he has had his dinner, although he has no recollection whatever how it has all happened. It has grown dark in the little room; he feels empty and forlorn; his castle in the air comes crumbling noiselessly around him, without a sound, and it vanishes like a dream, without leaving a trace behind, and he cannot remember himself what he was dreaming of. But a vague sensation faintly stirs his blood and a perturbation such as he has known many times before agitates his breast. A new longing temptingly tickles and excites his fancy, and imperceptibly conjures up a whole swarm of fresh phantoms. Silence reigns in the little room; solitude and a feeling of indolence enfold his imagination in a sweet embrace; it catches fire, burning gently at first, simmering like the water in the coffee-pot of old Matryona, who is moving placidly about her kitchen, making her execrable coffee. Very soon it begins flaring up fitfully, and the book, picked up aimlessly and at random, drops out of the hand of my dreamer, before he has reached the third page. His imagination is once more ready for action, excited, and in a flash a new world, a new fascinating life, once more opens up enchanting vistas before him. A new dream—new happiness! A new dose of subtle, voluptuous poison! Oh, what is there in our humdrum existence to interest him? To his corrupted mind, our life, Nastenka, yours and mine, is so dull, so slow, so insipid! To his mind we are all so dissatisfied with our fate, so tired of our life! And, to be sure, Nastenka, how cold, gloomy, and, as it

were, out of humour everything about us is at the first glance! 'Poor things!' my dreamer thinks. And it is not surprising that he should think so! Look at those magical phantoms which so enchantingly, so capriciously, so vastly, and so boundlessly, are conjured up before his mind's eye in so magical and thrilling a picture, a picture in which, needless to say, he himself, our dreamer, in his own precious person, occupies the most prominent place! Look what an amazing sea of adventures, what a never-ending paradise of ecstatic dreams! You will perhaps ask me what is he dreaming of? But why ask? He is dreaming of everything—of the mission of the poet, first unrecognised, then crowned with laurels, of St. Bartholomew's Night, of Diana Vernon, the heroine of 'Rob Roy', of what a heroic role he would have played at the taking of Kazan by Ivan Vassilyevich, of Walter Scott's other heroines—Clara Mowbray and Effie Deans, of the Council of the Prelates and Huss before them, of the rising of the dead in 'Robert the Devil' (remember the music? It smells of the churchyard!), of the Battle of Berezina, of the poetry reading at Countess Vorontsova-Dashkova's, of Danton, of Cleopatra *i suoi amanti*, of Pushkin's 'Little House in Kolomna', of his own little home and a sweet creature beside him, who is listening to him, with her pretty mouth and eyes open, as you are listening to me now, my dear little angel. . . . No, Nastenka, what can he, voluptuous sluggard that he is, what can he find so attractive in the life which you and I desire so much? He thinks it a poor, miserable sort of life, and little does he know that some day perhaps the unhappy hour will strike for him too, when he will gladly give up all his fantastical years for one day of that miserable life, and give them up not in exchange for joy or happiness, but without caring what befalls him in that hour of affliction,

remorse, and unconstrained grief. But so long as that perilous time is not yet—he desires nothing, for he is above all desire, for he is sated, for he is the artist of his own life, which he re-creates in himself to suit whatever new fancy he pleases. And how easily, how naturally, is this imaginary, fantastic world created! As though it were not a dream at all! Indeed, he is sometimes ready to believe that all this life is not a vision conjured up by his overwrought mind, not a mirage, nor a figment of the imagination, but something real, something that actually exists! Why, Nastenka, why, tell me, does one feel so out of breath at such moments? Why—through what magic? through what strange whim?—is the pulse quickened, do tears gush out of the eyes of the dreamer? Why do his pale, moist cheeks burn? Why is all his being filled with such indescribable delight? Why is it that long, sleepless nights pass, as though they were an infinitesimal fraction of time, in unending joy and happiness? And why, when the rising sun casts a rosy gleam through the window and fills the gloomy room with its uncertain, fantastic light, as it so often does in Petersburg, does our dreamer, worn out and exhausted, fling himself on the bed and fall asleep, faint with the raptures of his morbidly overwrought spirit, and with such a weary, languorously sweet ache in his heart? No, Nastenka, you can't help deceiving yourself, you can't help persuading yourself that his soul is stirred by some true, some genuine passion, you can't help believing that there is something alive and palpable in his vain and empty dreams! And what a delusion it all is! Now, for instance, love pierces his heart with all its boundless rapture, with all its pains and agonies. Only look at him and you will be convinced. Can you, looking at him, Nastenka, believe that he really never knew her whom he loved so dearly in his frenzied

dream? Can it be that he has only seen her in ravishing visions, and that his passion has been nothing but an illusion? Can it be that they have never really spent so many years of their lives together, hand in hand, alone, just the two of them renouncing the rest of the world, and each of them entirely preoccupied with their own world, their own life? Surely it is she who at the hour of their parting, late at night, lies grieving and sobbing on his bosom, unmindful of the raging storm beneath the relentless sky, unmindful of the wind that snatches and carries away the tears from her dark eyelashes! Surely all this is not a dream—this garden, gloomy, deserted, run wild, with its paths overgrown with weeds, dark and secluded, where they used to walk so often together, where they used to hope, grieve, love, love each other so well, so tenderly and so well! And this queer ancestral mansion, where she has spent so many years in solitude and sadness with her morose old husband, always silent and ill-tempered, who frightened them, who were as timid as children, and who in their fear and anguish hid their love from each other. What misery they suffered, what pangs of terror! How innocent, how pure their love was, and (I need hardly tell you, Nastenka) how malicious people were! And why, of course, he meets her afterwards, far from his native shores, beneath the scorching southern sky of an alien land, in the wonderful Eternal City, amid the dazzling splendours of a ball, to the thunder of music, in a *palazzo* (yes, most certainly in a *palazzo* flooded with light, on the balcony wreathed in myrtle and roses, where, recognising him, she hastily removes her mask, and whispering, 'I'm free!' breaks into sobs and flings herself trembling in his arms. And with a cry of rapture, clinging to each other, they at once forget their unhappiness, their parting, all their sufferings,

the dismal house, the old man, the gloomy garden in their far-away country, and the seat on which, with a last passionate kiss, she tore herself away from his arms, numbed with anguish and despair. . . . Oh, you must agree, Nastenka, that anyone would start, feel embarrassed, and blush like a schoolboy who has just stuffed in his pocket an apple stolen from a neighbour's garden, if some stalwart, lanky fellow, a fellow fond of a joke and merry company, opened your door and shouted, 'Hullo, old chap, I've just come from Pavlovsk!' Good Lord! The old count is dying, ineffable bliss is close at hand—and here people come from Pavlovsk!"

Having finished my pathetic speech, I lapsed into no less pathetic a silence. I remember I wished terribly that I could, somehow, in spite of myself, burst out laughing, for I was already feeling that a wicked little devil was stirring within me, that my throat was beginning to tighten, my chin to twitch, and my eyes to fill with tears. I expected Nastenka, who listened to me with wide-open, intelligent eyes, to break into her childish and irresistibly gay laughter. I was already regretting that I had gone too far, that I had been wasting my time in telling her what had been accumulating for so long a time in my heart, and about which I could speak as though I had it all written down—because I had long ago passed judgment on myself, and could not resist the temptation to read it out loud, though I admit I never expected to be understood. But to my surprise she said nothing, and, after a pause, pressed my hand gently and asked with timid sympathy:

"Surely you haven't lived like that all your life, have you?"

"Yes, Nastenka, all my life," I replied, "all my life, and I'm afraid I shall go on like that to the very end."

“No, you mustn’t do that,” she said, “that must not be, for if it were so, I too might spend all my life beside my granny. Don’t you think it’s just too awful to live like that?”

“I know, Nastenka, I know,” I cried, unable to restrain my feelings any longer. “More than ever do I realise now that I’ve been wasting the best years of my life. I know that, and the realisation of it is all the more painful to me now that God has sent me you, my good angel, to tell me that and to prove it to me. Sitting beside you and talking to you now, I feel terrified to think of the future, for in my future I can discern nothing but more loneliness, more of this stale and unprofitable life. And what is there left for me to dream of now that I’ve been so happy beside you in real life and not in a dream? Oh, bless you, bless you a thousand times, my dear, for not having turned away from me at first, for making it possible for me to say that for at least two evenings in my life I have really lived!”

“Oh, no, no,” Nastenka cried, and tears glistened in her eyes, “it can’t go on like that! We shan’t part like that! What are two evenings in a man’s life?”

“Oh, Nastenka, Nastenka, do you realise that you’ve reconciled me to myself for a long, long time? Do you know that I shall never again think so ill of myself as I have sometimes done in the past? Do you know that I shall never again accuse myself of committing a crime and a sin in the way I live, for such a life is a crime and a sin? And for goodness’ sake don’t imagine I’ve exaggerated anything. Please, don’t imagine that, Nastenka, for there are moments when I’m plunged into such gloom, such a black gloom! Because at such moments I’m almost ready to believe that I shall never be able to start living in earnest; because the thought has already occurred to me often

that I have lost all touch with life, all understanding of what is real and actual; because, finally, I have cursed myself; because already after my fantastic nights I have moments of returning sanity, moments which fill me with horror and dismay! You see, I can't help being aware of the crowd being whirled with a roaring noise in the vortex of life, I can't help hearing and seeing people living real lives. I realise that their life is not made to order, that their life will not vanish like a dream, like a vision; that their life is eternally renewing itself, that it is eternally young, that not one hour of it is like another! No! Timid fancy is dreary and monotonous to the point of drabness. It is the slave of every shadow, of every idea. The slave of the first cloud that of a sudden drifts across the sun and reduces every Petersburg heart, which values the sun so highly, to a state of morbid melancholy—and what is the use of fancy when one is plunged into melancholy! You feel that this *inexhaustible* fancy grows weary at last and exhausts itself from the never-ending strain. For, after all, you do grow up, you do outgrow your ideals, which turn to dust and ashes, which are shattered into fragments; and if you have no other life, you just have to build one up out of these fragments. And meanwhile your soul is all the time craving and longing for something else. And in vain does the dreamer rummage about in his old dreams, raking them over as though they were a heap of cinders, looking in these cinders for some spark, however tiny, to fan it into a flame so as to warm his chilled blood by it and revive in it all that he held so dear before, all that touched his heart, that made his blood course through his veins, that drew tears from his eyes, and that so splendidly deceived him! Do you realise, Nastenka, how far things have gone with me? Do you know

that I'm forced now to celebrate the anniversary of my own sensations, the anniversary of that which was once so dear to me, but which never really existed? For I keep this anniversary in memory of those empty, foolish dreams! I keep it because even those foolish dreams are no longer there, because I have nothing left with which to replace them, for even dreams, Nastenka, have to be replaced by something! Do you know that I love to call to mind and revisit at certain dates the places where in my own fashion I was once so happy? I love to build up my present in harmony with my irrevocably lost past; and I often wander about like a shadow, aimlessly and without purpose, sad and dejected, through the alleys and streets of Petersburg. What memories they conjure up! For instance, I remember that exactly a year ago, at exactly this hour, on this very pavement, I wandered about cheerlessly and alone just as I did today. And I can't help remembering that at the time, too, my dreams were sad and dreary, and though I did not feel better then I somehow can't help feeling that it was better, that life was more peaceful, that at least I was not then obsessed by the black thoughts that haunt me now, that I did not suffer from these gloomy and miserable qualms of conscience which now give me no rest either by day or by night. And you ask yourself—where are your dreams? And you shake your head and murmur: how quickly time flies! And you ask yourself again—what have you done with your time, where have you buried the best years of your life? Have you lived or not? Look, you say to yourself, look how everything in the world is growing cold. Some more years will pass, and they will be followed by cheerless solitude, and then will come tottering old age, with its crutch, and after it despair and desolation. Your fantastic world will fade away,

your dreams will wilt and die, scattering like yellow leaves from the trees. Oh, Nastenka, what can be more heartbreaking than to be left alone, all alone, and not have anything to regret even—nothing, absolutely nothing, because all you’ve lost was nothing, nothing but a silly round zero, nothing but an empty dream!”

“Don’t,” said Nastenka, wiping a tear which rolled down her cheek, “please don’t! You’ll make me cry if you go on like that. All that is finished! From now on we shall be together. We’ll never part, whatever happens to me now. You know, I’m quite an ordinary girl, I’m not well educated, though Granny did engage a teacher for me, but I do understand you, for I went through all that you’ve described when Granny pinned me to her dress. Of course, I could never have described it as well as you,” she added diffidently, for she was still feeling a sort of respect for my pathetic speech and my high-flown style, “because I’m not educated; but I’m very glad you’ve told me everything about yourself. Now I know you properly. And—do you know what? I’d like to tell you the story of my life too, all of it, without concealing anything, and after that you must give me some good advice. You’re so clever, and I’d like to ask your advice. Do you promise to give it me?”

“Oh, Nastenka,” I replied, “though I’ve never given any advice to anyone before, and though I’m certainly not clever enough to give good advice, I can see now that if we always lived like this, it would be very clever of us, and we should give each other a lot of good advice! Well, my sweet Nastenka, what sort of advice do you want? I’m now so gay, happy, bold, and clever that I’m sure I shan’t have any difficulty in giving you the best advice in the world!”

“No, no,” Nastenka interrupted, laughing, “it isn’t only good advice that I want. I also want warm, brotherly advice, just as though you’d been fond of me for ages!”

“Agreed, Nastenka, agreed!” I cried with enthusiasm. “And if I’d been fond of you for twenty years, I couldn’t have been fonder of you than I am now!”

“Your hand!” said Nastenka.

“Here it is!” I replied, giving her my hand.

“Very well, let’s begin my story!”

Nastenka’s Story

“Half my story you know already, I mean, you know that I have an old grandmother.”

“If the other half is as short as this one——” I interrupted, laughing.

“Be quiet and listen. First of all you must promise not to interrupt me, or I shall get confused. Well, please listen quietly.

“I have an old grandmother. I’ve lived with her ever since I was a little girl, for my mother and father are dead. I suppose my grandmother must have been rich once, for she likes to talk of the good old days. It was she who taught me French and afterwards engaged a teacher for me. When I was fifteen (I’m seventeen now) my lessons stopped. It was at that time that I misbehaved rather badly. I shan’t tell you what I did. It’s sufficient to say that my offence was not very great. Only Granny called me in one morning and saying that she couldn’t look after me properly because she was blind, she took a safety-pin and pinned my dress to hers. She told me that if I didn’t mend

my ways, we should remain pinned to each other for the rest of our lives. In short, at first, I found it quite impossible to get away from her: my work, my reading, and my lessons had all to be done beside my grandmother. I did try to trick her once by persuading Fyokla to sit in my place. Fyokla is our maid. She is very deaf. Well, so Fyokla took my place. Granny happened to fall asleep in her arm-chair at the time, and I ran off to see a friend of mine who lives close by. But, I'm afraid, it all ended most disastrously. Granny woke up while I was out and asked for something, thinking that I was still sitting quietly in my place. Fyokla saw of course that Granny wanted something, but could not tell what it was. She wondered and wondered what to do and in the end undid the pin and ran out of the room. . . .”

Here Nastenka stopped and began laughing. I, too, burst out laughing with her, which made her stop at once.

“Look, you mustn't laugh at Granny. I'm laughing because it was so funny. . . . Well, anyway, I'm afraid it can't be helped. Granny is like that, but I do love the poor old dear a little for all that. Well, I did catch it properly that time. I was at once told to sit down in my old place, and after that I couldn't make a move without her noticing it.

“Oh, I forgot to tell you that we live in our own house, I mean, of course, in Granny's house. It's a little wooden house, with only three windows, and it's as old as Granny herself. It has an attic, and one day a new lodger came to live in the attic. . . .”

“There was an old lodger then?” I remarked, by the way.

“Yes, of course, there was an old lodger,” replied Nastenka, “and let me tell you, he knew how to hold his tongue better than you. As a matter of fact, he hardly ever used it at all. He

was a very dried up old man, dumb, blind and lame, so that in the end he just could not go on living and died. Well, of course, we had to get a new lodger, for we can't live without one: the rent we get from our attic together with Granny's pension is almost all the income we have. Our new lodger, as it happened, was a young man, a stranger who had some business in Petersburg. As he did not haggle over the rent, Granny let the attic to him, and then asked me, 'Tell me, Nastenka, what is our lodger like—is he young or old?' I didn't want to tell her a lie, so I said, 'He isn't very young, Granny, but he isn't very old, either.'

"Is he good-looking?' Granny asked.

"Again I didn't want to tell her a lie. 'He isn't bad-looking, Granny,' I said. Well, so Granny said, 'Oh dear, that's bad, that's very bad! I tell you this because I don't want you to make a fool of yourself over him. Oh, what terrible times we're living in! A poor lodger and he would be good-looking too! Not like the old days!'

"Granny would have liked everything to be like the old days! She was younger in the old days, the sun was much warmer in the old days, the milk didn't turn so quickly in the old days—everything was so much better in the old days! Well, I just sat there and said nothing, but all the time I was thinking, Why is Granny warning me? Why did she ask whether our lodger was young and good-looking? Well, anyway, the thought only crossed my mind, and soon I was counting my stitches again (I was knitting a stocking at the time), and forgot all about it.

"Well, one morning our lodger came down to remind us that we had promised to paper his room for him. One thing led to another, for Granny likes talking to people and then she told me to go to her bedroom and fetch her accounts. I jumped

up, blushed all over—I don't know why—and forgot that I was pinned to Granny. I never thought of undoing the pin quietly, so that our lodger shouldn't notice, but dashed off so quickly that I pulled Granny's armchair after me. When I saw that our lodger knew all about me now, I got red in the face, stopped dead as though rooted to the floor, and suddenly burst into tears. I felt so ashamed and miserable at that moment that I wished I was dead! Granny shouted at me, 'What are you standing there like that for?' But that made me cry worse than ever. When our lodger saw that I was ashamed on account of him, he took his leave and went away at once!

"Ever since that morning I've nearly fainted very time I've heard a noise in the passage. It must be the lodger, I'd think, and I'd undo the pin very quietly just in case it was he. But it never was our lodger. He never came. After a fortnight our lodger sent word with Fyokla that he had a lot of French books, and that they were all good books which he knew we would enjoy reading, and that he would be glad to know whether Granny would like me to choose a book to read to her because he was sure she must be bored. Granny accepted our lodger's kind offer gratefully, but she kept asking me whether the books were *good* books, for if the books were bad, she wouldn't let me read them because she didn't want me to get wrong ideas into my head."

"What wrong ideas, Granny? What's wrong with those books?"

"Oh," she said, 'it's all about how young men seduce decent girls, and how on the excuse that they want to marry them, they elope with them and then leave them to their own fate, and how the poor creatures all come to a bad end. I've read a great

many such books,' said Granny, 'and everything is described so beautifully in them that I used to keep awake all night, reading them on the quiet. So mind you don't read them, Nastenka,' she said. 'What books has he sent?'

"They're all novels by Walter Scott, Granny.'

"Walter Scott's novels? Are you certain, Nastenka, there isn't some trickery there? Make sure, dear, he hasn't put a love letter in one of them.'

"No, Granny,' I said, 'there's no love letter.'

"Oh, dear,' said Granny, 'look in the binding, there's a good girl. Sometimes they stuff it in the binding, the scoundrels.'

"No, Granny, there's nothing in the binding.'

"Well, that's all right then!'

"So we started reading Walter Scott, and in a month or so we had read through almost half of his novels. Then he sent us some more books. He sent us Pushkin. And in the end I didn't know what to do if I had no book to read and I gave up dreaming of marrying a prince of royal blood.

"So it went on till one day I happened to meet our lodger on the stairs. Granny had sent me to fetch something. He stopped. I blushed and he blushed. However, he laughed, said good morning to me, asked me how Granny was, and then said, 'Well, have you read the books?' I said, 'Yes, we have.' 'Which did you like best?' I said, 'I liked *Ivanhoe* and Pushkin best of all.' That was all that happened that time.

"A week later I again happened to meet him on the stairs. That time Granny had not sent me for anything, but I had gone up to fetch something myself. It was past two in the afternoon, when our lodger usually came home. 'Good afternoon,' he said. 'Good afternoon,' I said.

“‘Don’t you feel awfully bored sitting with your Granny all day?’ he said.

“The moment he asked me that, I blushed—I don’t know why. I felt awfully ashamed, and hurt, too, because I suppose it was clear that even strangers were beginning to wonder how I could sit all day long pinned to my Granny. I wanted to go away without answering, but I just couldn’t summon enough strength to do that.

“‘Look here,’ he said, ‘you’re a nice girl, and I hope you don’t mind my telling you that I’m more anxious even than your Granny that you should be happy. Have you no girl friends at all whom you’d like to visit?’

“I told him I hadn’t any. I had only one, Mashenka, but she had gone away to Pskov.

“‘Would you like to go to the theatre with me?’ he asked.

“‘To the theatre? But what about Granny?’

“‘Couldn’t you come without her knowing anything about it?’

“‘No, sir,’ I said. ‘I don’t want to deceive my Granny. Goodbye.’

“‘Goodbye,’ he said, and went upstairs without another word.

“After dinner, however, he came down to see us. He sat down and had a long talk with Granny. He asked her whether she ever went out, whether she had any friends, and then suddenly he said, ‘I’ve taken a box for the opera for this evening. They’re giving *The Barber of Seville*. Some friends of mine wanted to come, but they couldn’t manage it, and now the tickets are left on my hands.’

“‘*The Barber of Seville!*’ cried my Granny. ‘Why, is it the same barber they used to act in the old days?’

“‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘it’s the same barber,’ and he glanced at me.

“Of course I understood everything. I blushed and my heart began thumping in anticipation.

“‘Oh,’ said Granny, ‘I know all about him! I used to play Rosina myself in the old days at private theatricals.’

“‘Would you like to go today?’ said the lodger. ‘My ticket will be wasted if nobody comes.’

“‘Yes, I suppose we could go,’ said Granny. ‘Why shouldn’t we? My Nastenka has never been to a theatre before.’

“My goodness, wasn’t I glad! We started getting ready at once, put on our best clothes, and went off. Granny couldn’t see anything, of course, because she is blind, but she wanted to hear the music, and, besides, she’s really very kind-hearted, the old dear. She wanted me to go and enjoy myself, for we would never have gone by ourselves. Well, I won’t tell you what my impression of *The Barber of Seville* was. I’ll merely mention that our lodger looked at me so nicely the whole evening, and he spoke so nicely to me that I guessed at once that he had only meant to try me out in the afternoon, to see whether I would have gone with him alone. Oh, I was so happy! I went to bed feeling so proud, so gay, and my heart was beating so fast that I felt a little feverish and raved all night about *The Barber of Seville*.

“I thought he’d come and see us more and more often after that, but it turned out quite differently. He almost stopped coming altogether. He’d come down once a month, perhaps, and even then only to invite us to the theatre. We went twice to the theatre with him. Only I wasn’t a bit happy about it. I could see that he was simply sorry for me because I was treated so abominably by my grandmother and that otherwise he wasn’t

interested in me at all. So it went on till I couldn't bear it any longer: I couldn't sit still for a minute, I couldn't read anything, I couldn't work. Sometimes I'd burst out laughing and do something just to annoy Granny, and sometimes I'd just burst into tears. In the end I got terribly thin and was nearly ill. The opera season was over, and our lodger stopped coming down to see us altogether, and when we did meet—always on the stairs, of course—he'd just bow to me silently, and look very serious as though he did not want to talk to me, and he'd be out on the front steps while I'd still be standing halfway up the stairs, red as a cherry, for every time I met him all my blood rushed to my head.

“Well, I've almost finished. Just a year ago, in May, our lodger came down to our drawing-room and told Granny that he had finished his business in Petersburg and was leaving for Moscow where he would have to stay a whole year. When I heard that I went pale and sank back in my chair as though in a faint. Granny did not notice anything, and he, having told us that he was giving up his room, took his leave and went away.

“What was I to do? I thought and thought, worried and worried, and at last I made up my mind. As he was leaving tomorrow, I decided to make an end to it all after Granny had gone to bed. I tied up all my clothes in a bundle and, more dead than alive, went upstairs with my bundle to see our lodger. I suppose it must have taken me a whole hour to walk up the stairs to the attic. When I opened the door of his room, he cried out as he looked at me. He thought I was a ghost. He quickly fetched a glass of water for me, for I could hardly stand on my feet. My heart was beating very fast, my head ached terribly, and I felt all in a daze. When I recovered a little, I just put my bundle on his

bed, sat down beside it, buried my face in my hands, and burst into a flood of tears. He seemed to have understood everything at once, and he stood before me looking so pale and gazing at me so sadly that my heart nearly broke.

“‘Listen, Nastenka,’ he said, ‘I can’t do anything now. I’m a poor man. I haven’t got anything at present, not even a decent job. How would we live, if I were to marry you?’

“We talked for a long time, and in the end I worked myself up into a real frenzy and told him that I couldn’t go on living with my grandmother any more, that I’d run away from her, that I didn’t want to be fastened by a pin all my life, and that, if he liked, I’d go to Moscow with him because I couldn’t live without him. Shame, love, pride seemed to speak in me all at once, and I fell on the bed almost in convulsions. I was so afraid that he might refuse to take me!

“He sat in silence for a few minutes, then he got up, went to me, and took me by the hand.

“‘Listen to me, darling Nastenka,’ he began, also speaking through his tears, ‘I promise you solemnly that if at any time I am in a position to marry, you are the only girl in the world I would marry. I assure you that now you are the only one who could make me happy. Now, listen. I’m leaving for Moscow and I shall be away exactly one year. I hope to settle my affairs by that time. When I come back, and if you still love me, I swear to you that we shall be married. I can’t possibly marry you now. It is out of the question. And I have no right to make any promises to you. But I repeat that if I can’t marry you after one year, I shall certainly marry you sometime. Provided of course you still want to marry me and don’t prefer someone else, for I cannot and I dare not bind you by any sort of promise.’

“That was what he told me, and the next day he left. We agreed not to say anything about it to Granny. He insisted on that. Well, that’s almost the end of my story. A year has now passed, exactly one year. He is in Petersburg now, he’s been here three days, and—and——”

“And what?” I cried, impatient to hear the end.

“And he hasn’t turned up so far,” said Nastenka, making a great effort to keep calm. “I haven’t heard a word from him.”

Here she stopped, paused a little, lowered her pretty head, and, burying her face in her hands, suddenly burst out sobbing so bitterly that my heart bled to hear it.

I had never expected such an ending.

“Nastenka,” I began timidly, in an imploring voice, “for goodness sake, Nastenka, don’t cry! How can you tell? Perhaps he hasn’t arrived yet. . . .”

“He has, he has!” Nastenka exclaimed. “I know he’s here. We made an arrangement the night before he left. After our talk we went for a walk here on the embankment. It was ten o’clock. We sat on this seat. I was no longer crying then. I felt so happy listening to him! He said that immediately on his return he would come to see us, and if I still wanted to marry him, we’d tell Granny everything. Well, he’s back now, I know he is, but he hasn’t come, he hasn’t come!”

And once more she burst into tears.

“Good heavens, isn’t there anything we can do?” I cried, jumping up from the seat in utter despair. “Tell me, Nastenka, couldn’t I go and see him?”

“You think you could?” she said, raising her head.

“No, of course not,” I replied, checking myself. “But, look here, why not write him a letter?”

“No, no, that’s impossible!” she replied firmly, but lowering her head and not looking at me.

“Why is it impossible? What’s wrong with it?” I went on pleading with her, the idea having rather appealed to me. “It all depends what sort of a letter it is, Nastenka. There are letters and letters, and—oh, Nastenka, believe me it’s true. Trust me, Nastenka, please! I wouldn’t give you bad advice. It can all be arranged. It was you who took the first step, wasn’t it? Well, why not now——?”

“No; it’s quite impossible! It would look as if I was thrusting myself on him. . . .”

“But, darling Nastenka,” I interrupted her, and I couldn’t help smiling, “believe me, you’re wrong, quite wrong. You’re absolutely justified in writing to him, for he made a promise to you. Besides, I can see from what you’ve told me that he is a nice man, that he has behaved decently,” I went on, carried away by the logic of my own reasoning and my own convictions. “For what did he do? He bound himself by a promise. He said that he wouldn’t marry anyone but you, if, that is, he ever married at all. But he left you free to decide whether or not you want to marry him, to refuse him at any moment. This being so, there’s no reason on earth why you shouldn’t make the first move. You’re entitled to do so, and you have an advantage over him, if, for instance, you should choose to release him from his promise. . . .”

“Look, how would you have written——?”

“What?”

“Such a letter.”

“Well, I’d have started, ‘Dear Sir. . . .’”

“Must it begin with ‘Dear Sir?’”

“Of course! I mean, not necessarily. . . . You could. . . .”

“Never mind. How would you go on?”

“Dear Sir, you will pardon me for . . .’ No, I don’t think you should apologise for writing to him. The circumstances themselves fully justify your letter. Write simply: ‘I am writing to you. Forgive me for my impatience, but all the year I have lived in such happy anticipation of your return that it is hardly surprising that I cannot bear the suspense even one day longer. Now that you are back, I cannot help wondering whether you have not after all changed your mind. If that is so, then my letter will tell you that I quite understand and that I am not blaming you for anything. I do not blame you that I have no power over your heart: such seems to be my fate. You are an honourable man. I know you will not be angry with me or smile at my impatience. Remember that it is a poor girl who is writing to you, that she is all alone in the world, that she has no one to tell her what to do or give her any advice, and that she herself never did know how to control her heart. But forgive me that doubt should have stolen even for one moment into my heart. I know that even in your thoughts you are quite incapable of hurting her who loved you so much and who still loves you.’”

“Yes, yes, that’s exactly what I was thinking!” Nastenka cried, her eyes beaming with joy. “Oh, you’ve put an end to all my doubts. I’m sure God must have sent you to me. Thank you, thank you!”

“What are you thanking me for? Because God has sent me to you?” I replied, gazing delighted at her sweet, happy face.

“Yes, for that too.”

“Oh, Nastenka, aren’t we sometimes grateful to people only because they live with us? Well, I’m grateful to you for having

met you. I'm grateful to you because I shall remember you all my life!"

"All right, all right! Now listen to me carefully: I arranged with him that he'd let me know as soon as he came back by leaving a letter for me at the house of some people I know—they are very nice, simple people who know nothing about the whole thing; and that if he couldn't write me a letter because one can't say all one wants in a letter, he'd come here, where we had arranged to meet, at exactly ten o'clock on the very first day of his arrival. Now, I know he has arrived, but for two days he hasn't turned up, nor have I had a letter from him. I can't possibly get away from Granny in the morning. So please take my letter tomorrow to the kind people I told you of, and they'll see that it reaches him. And if there is a reply, you could bring it yourself tomorrow evening at ten o'clock."

"But the letter! What about the letter? You must write the letter first, which means that I couldn't take it before the day after tomorrow."

"The letter . . . ?" said Nastenka, looking a little confused. "Oh, the letter! . . . Well——"

But she didn't finish. At first she turned her pretty face away from me, then she blushed like a rose, and then all of a sudden I felt that the letter which she must have written long before was in my hand. It was in a sealed envelope. A strangely familiar, sweet, lovely memory flashed through my mind.

"Ro-o-si-i-na-a!" I began.

"Rosina!" both of us burst out singing. I almost embraced her with delight, and she blushed as only she could blush and laughed through the tears which trembled on her dark eyelashes like pearls.

“Well, that’s enough,” she said, speaking rapidly. “Goodbye now. Here’s the letter and here’s the address where you have to take it. Goodbye! Till tomorrow!”

She pressed both my hands warmly, nodded her head, and darted away down her side-street. I remained standing in the same place for a long time, following her with my eyes.

“Till tomorrow! Till tomorrow!” flashed through my mind as she disappeared from sight.

Third Night

It was a sad and dismal day today, rainy, without a ray of hope, just like the long days of my old age which I know will be as sad and dismal. Strange thoughts are crowding into my head, my heart is full of gloomy forebodings, questions too vague to be grasped clearly fill my mind, and somehow I’ve neither the power nor the will to resolve them. No, I shall never be able to solve it all!

We are not going to meet today. Last night, when we said goodbye, the sky was beginning to be overcast, and a mist was rising. I observed that the weather did not look too promising for tomorrow, but she made no answer. She did not wish to say anything to cloud her own happy expectations. For her this day is bright and full of sunshine, and not one cloud will obscure her happiness.

“If it rains,” she said, “we shan’t meet! I shan’t come!”

I thought she would not pay any attention to the rain today, but she never came.

Yesterday we had met for the third time. It was our third white night. . . .

But how beautiful people are when they are gay and happy! How brimful of love their hearts are! It is as though they wanted to pour their hearts into the heart of another human being, as though they wanted the whole world to be gay and laugh with them. And how infectious that gaiety is! There was so much joy in her words yesterday, so much goodness in her heart towards me. How sweet she was to me, how hard she tried to be nice to me, how she comforted and soothed my heart! Oh, how sweet a woman can be to you when she is happy! And I? Why, I was completely taken in. I thought she—

But how on earth could I have thought it? How could I have been so blind, when everything had already been taken by another, when nothing belonged to me? Why, even that tenderness of hers, that anxiety, that love—yes, that love for me was nothing more than the outward manifestation of her happiness at the thought of her meeting with someone else, her desire to force her happiness upon me too. When he did not turn up, when we waited in vain, she frowned, she lost heart, she was filled with alarm. All her movements, all her words, seemed to have lost their liveliness, their playfulness, their gaiety. And the strange thing was that she seemed doubly anxious to please me, as though out of an instinctive desire to lavish upon me what she so dearly desired for herself, but what she feared would never be hers. My Nastenka was so nervous and in such an agonising dread that at last she seemed to have realised that I loved her and took pity upon my unhappy love. It is always so: when we are unhappy we feel more strongly the unhappiness of others; our feeling is not shattered, but becomes concentrated. . . .

I came to her with a full heart; I could scarcely wait for our meeting. I had no presentiment of how I would be feeling now.

I little dreamt that it would all end quite differently. She was beaming with happiness. She was expecting an answer to her letter. The answer was he himself. He was bound to come; he had to come running in answer to her call. She arrived a whole hour before me. At first she kept on laughing at everything; every word of mine provoked a peal of laughter from her. I began talking, but lapsed into silence.

“Do you know why I’m so happy?” she said. “Do you know why I’m so glad when I look at you? Do you know why I love you so today?”

“Well?” I asked, and my heart trembled.

“I love you so, because you haven’t fallen in love with me. Another man in your place would, I’m sure, have begun to pester me, to worry me. He would have been sighing, he would have looked so pathetic, but you’re so sweet!”

Here she clasped my hand with such force that I almost cried out. She laughed.

“Oh, what a good friend you are!” she began a minute later, speaking very seriously. “You’re a real godsend to me. What would I have done if you’d not been with me now? How unselfish you are! How truly you love me! When I am married, we shall be such good friends. You’ll be more than a brother to me. I shall love you almost as I love him! . . .”

Somehow I couldn’t help feeling terribly sad at that moment. However, something resembling laughter stirred in my soul.

“Your nerves are on edge,” I said. “You’re afraid. You don’t think he’ll come.”

“Goodness, what nonsense you talk!” she said. “If I hadn’t been so happy, I do believe I’d have burst out crying to hear

you express such doubts, to hear you reproaching me like that. You've given me an idea, though. And I admit you've given me a lot to think about, but I shall think about it later. I don't mind telling you frankly that you're quite right. Yes, I'm not quite myself tonight. I'm in awful suspense, and every little thing jars on me, excites me, but please don't let us discuss my feelings! . . ."

At that moment we heard footsteps, and a man loomed out of the darkness. He was coming in our direction. She almost cried out. I released her hand and made a movement as though I were beginning to back away. But we were both wrong: it was not he.

"What are you so afraid of? Why did you let go of my hand?" she said, giving me her hand again. "What does it matter? We'll meet him together. I want him to see how we love one another."

"How we love one another?" I cried.

"Oh, Nastenka, Nastenka," I thought, "how much you've said in that word! Such love, Nastenka, at certain moments makes one's heart ache and plunges one's spirit into gloom. Your hand is cold, but mine burns like fire. How blind you are, Nastenka! How unbearable a happy person sometimes is! But I'm afraid I could not be angry with you, Nastenka!"

At last my heart overflowed.

"Do you know, Nastenka," I cried, "do you know what I've gone through all day?"

"Why? What is it? Tell me quickly! Why haven't you said anything about it before?"

"Well, first of all, Nastenka, after I had carried out all your commissions, taken the letter, seen your good friends, I—I went home and—and went to bed."

“Is that all?” she interrupted, laughing.

“Yes, almost all,” I replied, making an effort to keep calm, for I already felt foolish tears starting to my eyes. “I woke an hour before we were due to meet. But I don’t seem to have really slept at all. I don’t know how to describe the curious sensation I had. I seemed to be on my way here. I was going to tell you everything. I had an odd feeling as though time had suddenly stopped, as though one feeling, one sensation, would from that moment go on and on for all eternity, as though my whole life had come to a standstill. . . . When I woke up it seemed to me that some snatch of a tune I had known for a long time, I had heard somewhere before but had forgotten, a melody of great sweetness, was coming back to me now. It seemed to me that it had been trying to emerge from my soul all my life, and only now——”

“Goodness,” Nastenka interrupted, “what’s all this about? I don’t understand a word of it.”

“Oh, Nastenka, I wanted somehow to convey that strange sensation to you,” I began in a plaintive voice, in which there still lurked some hope, though I’m afraid a very faint one.

“Don’t, please don’t!” she said, and in a trice she guessed everything, the little rogue.

She became on a sudden somehow extraordinarily talkative, gay, playful. She took my arm, laughed, insisted that I should laugh too, and every halting word I uttered evoked a long loud peal of laughter from her. I was beginning to feel angry; she suddenly began flirting.

“Listen,” she said, “I’m really beginning to be a little annoyed with you for not being in love with me. What am I to think of you after that? But, sir, if you insist on being so strong-minded,

you should at least show your appreciation of me for being such a simple girl. I tell you everything, absolutely everything. Any silly old thing that comes into my head.”

“Listen, I think it’s striking eleven!” I said, as the clock from some distant city tower began slowly to strike the hour.

She stopped suddenly, left off laughing, and began to count.

“Yes,” she said at last in a hesitating, unsteady voice, “its eleven.”

I regretted at once that I had frightened her. It was brutal of me to make her count the strokes. I cursed myself for my uncontrolled fit of malice. I felt sorry for her, and I did not know how to atone for my inexcusable behaviour. I did my best to comfort her. I tried hard to think of some excuse for his failure to come. I argued. I reasoned with her. It was the easiest thing in the world to deceive her at that moment! Indeed, who would not be glad of any word of comfort at such a moment? Who would not be overjoyed at the faintest glimmer of an excuse?

“The whole thing’s absurd!” I began, feeling more and more carried away by my own enthusiasm and full of admiration for the extraordinary clarity of my own arguments. “He couldn’t possibly have come today. You’ve got me so muddled and confused, Nastenka, that I’ve lost count of the time. Why, don’t you see? He’s scarcely had time to receive your letter. Now, suppose that for some reason he can’t come today. Suppose he’s going to write to you. Well, in that case you couldn’t possibly get his letter till tomorrow. I’ll go and fetch it for you early tomorrow morning and let you know at once. Don’t you see? A thousand things may have happened: he may have been out when your

letter arrived, and for all we know he may not have read it even yet. Anything may have happened.”

“Yes, yes!” said Nastenka. “I never thought of that. Of course anything may have happened,” she went on in a most acquiescent voice, but in which, like some jarring note, another faintly perceptible thought was hidden away. “Yes, please do that. Go there as soon as possible tomorrow morning, and if you get anything let me know at once. You know where I live, don’t you?”

And she began repeating her address to me.

Then she became suddenly so sweet, so shy with me. She seemed to listen attentively to what I was saying to her; but when I asked her some question, she made no reply, grew confused, and turned her head away. I peered into her eyes. Why, of course! She was crying.

“How can you? How can you? Oh, what a child you are! What childishness! There, there, stop crying please!”

She tried to smile, to compose herself, but her chin was still trembling, and her bosom still rising and falling.

“I’m thinking of you,” she said to me after a minute’s silence. “You’re so good that I’d have to have a heart of stone not to feel it. Do you know what has just occurred to me? I was comparing the two of you in my mind. Why isn’t he you? Why isn’t he like you? He’s not as good as you, though I love him more than you.”

I said nothing in reply. She seemed to be waiting for me to say something.

“Of course it’s probably quite true that I don’t know him very well. No, I don’t understand him very well. You see, I seemed always a little afraid of him. He was always so serious, and I couldn’t help thinking proud as well. I realise of course

that he merely looked like that. I know there's more tenderness in his heart than in mine. I can't forget the way he looked at me when—you remember?—I came to him with my bundle. But all the same I seem to look up to him a little too much, and that doesn't seem as if we were quite equals, does it?"

"No, Nastenka, no," I replied. "It does not mean that you are not equals. It merely means that you love him more than anything in the world, far more than yourself even."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," said Nastenka. "But do you know what I think? Only I'm not speaking of him now, but just in general. I've been thinking for a long time, why aren't we all just like brothers to one another. Why does even the best of us seem to hide something from other people and keep something back from them? Why don't we say straight out what's in our hearts, if we know that our words will not be spoken in vain? As it is, everyone seems to look as though he were much harder than he really is. It is as though we were all afraid our feelings would be hurt if we revealed them too soon."

"Oh, Nastenka, you're quite right, but there are many reasons for that," I interrupted, for I knew that I myself was suppressing my feelings at that moment more than ever before.

"No, no!" she replied with great feeling. "You, for instance, are not like that. I really don't know how to tell you what I feel. But it seems to me, for instance—I mean I can't help feeling that you—that just at this moment you're making some sacrifice for me," she added shyly, with a quick glance at me. "Please forgive me for telling you that. You know I am such a simple girl. I haven't had much experience of the world and I really don't know sometimes how to express myself," she added in a voice that trembled from some hidden emotion, trying to smile at the

same time. "But I just wanted to tell you that I'm grateful, that I'm aware of it too. . . . Oh, may God grant you happiness for that! I feel that what you told me about your dreamer is not true, I mean it has nothing to do with you. You are recovering, you're quite different from the man you described yourself to be. If you ever fall in love, may you be happy with her. I don't need to wish her anything, for she'll be happy with you. I know because I'm a woman myself, so you must believe me when I tell you so."

She fell silent and pressed my hand warmly. I was too moved to say anything. A few minutes passed.

"Yes, it seems he won't come tonight," she said at last, raising her head. "It's late."

"He'll come tomorrow," I said in a very firm, confident voice.

"Yes," she added, looking cheerful again, "I realise myself now that he couldn't possibly come till tomorrow. Well, goodbye! Till tomorrow! I may not come, if it rains. But the day after tomorrow I shall come whatever happens. You'll be here for certain, won't you? I want to see you. I'll tell you everything."

And later, when we said goodbye to each other, she gave me her hand and said, looking serenely at me—

"Now we shall always be together, shan't we?"

Oh, Nastenka, Nastenka, if only you knew how terribly lonely I am now!

When the clock struck nine, I could remain in my room no longer. I dressed and went out in spite of the bad weather. I was there. I sat on our seat. I went to her street, but I felt ashamed and went back when I was only a few yards from her house without even looking at her windows. What a day! Damp and dreary. If it had been fine, I should have walked about all night.

But—till tomorrow, till tomorrow! Tomorrow she'll tell me everything.

There was no letter for her today, though. However, there's nothing surprising in that. They must be together by now. . . .

Fourth Night

Good Lord, how strangely the whole thing has ended! What a frightful ending!

I arrived at nine o'clock. She was already there. I noticed her a long way off. She was standing, leaning with her elbows on the railing of the embankment, just as she had been standing the first time I saw her, and she did not hear me when I came up to her.

"Nastenka!" I called her, restraining my agitation with difficulty.

She turned round to me quickly.

"Well?" she said. "Well? Tell me quickly!"

I looked at her utterly bewildered.

"Well, where's the letter? Haven't you brought the letter?" she repeated, gripping the railing with her hand.

"No, I haven't got any letter," I said at last. "Hasn't he come?"

She turned terribly pale and stared at me for a long time without moving. I had shattered her last hope.

"Well, it doesn't matter," she said at last in a strangled voice. "If he leaves me like that, then perhaps it's best to forget him!"

She dropped her eyes, then tried to look at me, but couldn't do it. For a few more minutes she tried to pull herself together,

then she turned away from me suddenly, leaned on the railing with her elbows, and burst into tears.

“Come, come,” I began, but as I looked at her I hadn’t the heart to go on. And, besides, what could I have said to her?

“Don’t try to comfort me,” she said, weeping. “Don’t tell me he’ll come—that he hasn’t deserted me so cruelly and so inhumanly as he has. Why? Why did he do it? Surely there was nothing in my letter, in that unhappy letter of mine, was there?”

Here her voice was broken by sobs. My heart bled as I looked at her.

“Oh, how horribly cruel it is!” she began again. “And not a line, not a line! If he’d just written to say that he didn’t want me, that he rejected me, but not to write a single line in three days! How easy it is for him to slight and insult a poor defenceless girl whose only fault is that she loves him! Oh, what I’ve been through these three days! Lord, when I think that it was I who went to him the first time, when I think how I humiliated myself before him, how I cried, how I implored him for a little love! And after that! . . . But, look here,” she said, turning to me, and her black eyes flashed, “there’s something wrong! There must be something wrong! It’s not natural! Either you are mistaken or I am. Perhaps he didn’t get my letter. Perhaps he still doesn’t know anything. Tell me, for heaven’s sake, explain it to me—I can’t understand it—how could he have behaved so atrociously to me. Not one word! Why, people show more pity to the lowest creature on earth! Perhaps he has heard something, perhaps someone has told him something about me,” she cried, turning to me for an answer: “What do you think?”

“Listen, Nastenka, I’ll go and see him tomorrow on your behalf.”

“Well?”

“I’ll try and find out from him what the position is. I’ll tell him everything.”

“Well? Well?”

“You write a letter. Don’t refuse, Nastenka, don’t refuse! I’ll make him respect your action. He’ll learn everything, and if—”

“No, my friend, no,” she interrupted. “Enough! Not another word, not another word from me, not a line—I’ve had enough! I don’t know him any more, I don’t love him any more, I’ll f-f-forget him.”

She did not finish.

“Calm yourself, calm yourself, my dear! Sit here, Nastenka,” I said, making her sit down on the seat.

“But I am calm. I tell you this is nothing. It’s only tears—they’ll soon dry. You don’t really think I’m going to do away with myself, drown myself, do you?”

My heart was full: I tried to speak, but I couldn’t

“Listen,” she said, taking my hand, “you wouldn’t have behaved like this, would you? You wouldn’t have abandoned a girl who had come to you of her own free will, you wouldn’t have made a cruel mockery of her weak foolish heart, would you? You would have taken care of her. You would have reminded yourself that she had nobody in the whole world, that she was so inexperienced, that she could not prevent herself from falling in love with you, that she couldn’t help it, that it wasn’t her fault—no, it wasn’t her fault!—that she had not done anything wrong. Oh, dear God, dear God. . . .”

“Nastenka,” I cried, unable to restrain myself any longer, “this is more than I can endure! It’s sheer torture to me! You

wound me to the heart, Nastenka! I can't be silent! I must speak! I must tell you of all the anguish in my heart!"

Saying this, I raised myself from the seat. She took my hand and looked at me in surprise.

"What's the matter?" she said at last.

"Listen to me, Nastenka," I said firmly, "listen to me, please! What I'm going to say to you now is all nonsense. It is foolish. It cannot be. I know it will never happen, but I cannot remain silent. In the name of all that you're suffering now, I beseech you beforehand to forgive me!"

"Well, what is it? What is it?" she demanded, and she stopped crying and looked intently at me, a strange gleam of curiosity in her startled eyes. "What is the matter with you?"

"It's out of the question, I know, but—I love you, Nastenka! That is what's the matter with me. Now you know everything!" I said, with a despairing wave of my hand. "Now you can judge for yourself whether you ought to go on talking to me as you did just now, and—what is perhaps even more important—whether you ought to listen to what I'm going to say to you."

"Well, what about it?" Nastenka interrupted. "Of course I knew long ago that you loved me, only I always thought that—well, that you loved me in the ordinary way, I mean that you were just fond of me. Oh dear, oh dear! . . ."

"At first it was in the ordinary way, Nastenka, but now—now I'm in the same position as you were when you went to him with your bundle that night. I'm in a worse position Nastenka, because he wasn't in love with anyone at the time, and you—you are."

"Goodness, what are you saying to me! I really can't understand you. But, look, what has made you—I mean, why did

you—and so suddenly too! Oh dear, I'm talking such nonsense! But you——”

And Nastenka got completely confused. Her cheeks were flushed. She dropped her eyes.

“What's to be done, Nastenka? What can I do about it? It's entirely my fault, of course. I've taken an unfair advantage of— But no—no, Nastenka, it isn't my fault. I know it isn't. I feel it isn't because my heart tells me I'm right, because I could never do anything to hurt you, because I could do nothing that you would ever take offence at. I was your friend? Well, I still am your friend. I have not been unfaithful to anyone. You see, I'm crying, Nastenka. But never mind. What if tears do run down my cheeks? Let them. They don't hurt anyone. They'll soon dry, Nastenka.”

“But sit down, do sit down, please,” she said, making me sit down on the seat. “Oh dear, oh dear!”

“No, Nastenka, I shan't sit down. I can't stay here any longer. You'll never see me again. I'll say what I have to say and go away. I only want to say that you'd never have found out that I loved you. I'd never have told my secret to a living soul. I'd never have tormented you with my egoism at such a moment. Never! But I could not bear to be silent now. It was you who began talking about it. It's your fault, not mine. You just can't drive me away from you.”

“But I'm not—I'm not driving you away from me!” Nastenka said, doing her best, poor child, not to show how embarrassed she was.

“You are not driving me away? No—but I meant to run away from you myself. And I will go away. I will. Only first let me tell you everything, for, you see, when you were talking to me here,

I couldn't sit still; when you cried here, when you tormented yourself because—well, because (I'd better say it, Nastenka)—because you were jilted, because your love was slighted and disregarded, I felt that in my heart there was so much love for you, Nastenka, so much love! And I so bitterly resented not being able to do anything to help you with my love that—that my heart was bursting and I—I couldn't be silent any longer, Nastenka. I had to speak!"

"Yes, yes, tell me everything, do speak to me like that!" said Nastenka with a gesture that touched me deeply. "It may seem strange to you that I should be speaking to you like this, but—do say what you have to say! I will tell you afterwards. I'll tell you everything!"

"You are sorry for me, Nastenka. You're just sorry for me, my dear, dear friend! Well, what's done is done. No use crying over spilt milk, is it? Well, so you know everything now. At any rate, that's something to start with. All right. Everything's fine now. Only, please, listen. When you were sitting here, when you were crying, I thought to myself (Oh, do let me tell you what I was thinking!), I thought that (I know of course how utterly impossible it is, Nastenka)—I thought that you—that you somehow—I mean quite apart from anything else—that you no longer cared for him. If that is so, then—I already thought of that yesterday, Nastenka, and the day before yesterday—then I would—I most certainly would have done my best to make you care for me. You said yourself, Nastenka—you did say it several times, didn't you?—that you almost loved me. Well, what more is there to tell you? That's really all I wanted to say. All that remains to be said is what would happen if you fell in love with me—that's all—nothing

more! Now listen to me, my friend—for you are my friend, aren't you?—I am of course an ordinary sort of fellow, poor and insignificant, but that doesn't matter (I'm afraid I don't seem to be putting it very well, Nastenka, because I'm so confused), what matters is that I'd love you so well, so well, Nastenka, that even if you still loved him and went on loving the man I don't know, my love would never be a burden to you. All you'd feel, all you'd be conscious of every minute, is that a very grateful heart was beating at your side, Nastenka, an ardent heart which for your sake—Oh, Nastenka, Nastenka, what have you done to me?"

"Don't cry, I don't want you to cry," said Nastenka, rising quickly from the seat. "Come along, get up, come with me. Don't cry, don't cry," she said, drying my tears with her handkerchief. "There, come along now. Perhaps I'll tell you something. Well, if he has really given me up, if he has forgotten me, then though I still love him (and I don't want to deceive you)—But, listen, answer me! If, for instance, I were to fall in love with you—I mean, if only I—Oh, my friend, my friend, when I think, when I only think how I must have offended you when I laughed at your love, when I praised you for not falling in love with me! Oh dear, why didn't I foresee it? Why didn't I foresee it? How could I have been so stupid? But never mind, I've made up my mind now. I'm going to tell you everything."

"Look here, Nastenka, do you know what? I'll go away. Yes, I'll go away! I can see that I'm simply tormenting you. Now you're sorry you've been making fun of me, and I hate to think—yes, I simply hate to think that in addition to your own sorrow—Of course, it's all my fault, Nastenka, it's all my fault, but—goodbye!"

“Stop! Listen to me first, please. You can wait, can’t you?”

“Wait? What should I wait for? What do you mean?”

“You see, I love him, but that will pass. It must pass. It’s quite impossible for it not to pass. As a matter of fact, it’s already passing. I can feel it. Who knows, maybe it’ll be over today, for I hate him! Yes, I hate him because he has slighted me, while you were weeping with me. I hate him because you haven’t let me down as he has, because you love me, while he has never really loved me, because—well, because I love you too. Yes, I love you! I love you as you love me. I’ve told you so before, haven’t I? You heard me say it yourself. I love you because you’re better than he is, because you’re more honourable than he is, because he—”

She stopped crying at last, dried her eyes, and we continued our walk. I wanted to say something, but she kept asking me to wait. We were silent. At last she plucked up courage and began to speak.

“Look,” she said, in a weak and trembling voice, in which, however, there was a strange note which pierced my heart and filled it with a sweet sensation of joy, “don’t think I’m so fickle, so inconstant. Don’t think that I can forget him so easily and so quickly, that I can be untrue to him. I have loved him for a whole year, and I swear I have never, never for a moment, been untrue to him even in thought. He has thought little of that, he has scorned me—well, I don’t mind that. But he has also hurt my feelings and wrung my heart. I don’t love him because I can only love what is generous, what is understanding, what is honourable, for I’m like that myself, and he’s not worthy of me. Well, let’s forget about him. I’d rather he behaved to me like that now than that I was disappointed later in my expectations and found out the sort of man he really was. Anyway,

it's all over now. And, besides, my dear friend," she went on, pressing my hand, "who knows, perhaps my love for him was nothing but self-deception, nothing but imagination. Perhaps it started just as a joke, just as a bit of silly nonsense because I was constantly under Granny's supervision. Perhaps I ought to love another man and not him, quite a different man, a man who'd have pity on me, and—and—anyway," Nastenka broke off, overcome with emotion, "don't let's speak of it. Don't let's speak of it. I only wanted to tell you—I wanted to tell you that even if I do love him (no, did love him), even if in spite of this you still say—or rather feel that your love is so great that it could in time replace my love for him in my heart—if you really and truly have pity on me, if you won't leave me alone to my fate, without consolation, without hope, if you promise to love me always as you love me now, then I swear that my gratitude—that my love will in time be worthy of your love. Will you take my hand now?"

"Nastenka," I cried, my voice broken with sobs, "Nastenka! Oh, Nastenka!"

"All right, all right!" she said, making a great effort to speak calmly. "All right! That's enough! Now everything's been said, hasn't it? Hasn't it? Well, you are happy now, aren't you? And I too am happy. So don't let's talk about it any more. Just wait a little—have patience—spare me! Talk of something else, for God's sake!"

"Yes, Nastenka, yes! Of course don't let's talk about it. Now I'm happy. Well, Nastenka, do let's talk of something else. Come on, let's. I don't mind."

But we did not know what to talk about. We laughed, we cried, we said a thousand things without caring whether they

made sense or not. One moment we walked along the pavement, and the next we suddenly turned back and crossed the road, then we stopped and crossed over to the embankment again. We were like children. . . .

"I'm living alone, now, Nastenka," I began, "but tomorrow——You know, of course, Nastenka, that I'm poor, don't you? I've only got twelve hundred roubles, but that doesn't matter."

"Of course not, and Granny has her pension, so that she won't be a burden to us. We'll have to take Granny, of course."

"Of course we'll take Granny! Only——there's Matryona——"

"Goodness, I never thought of that! And we've got Fyokla!"

"Matryona is a good soul, only she has one fault: she has no imagination, Nastenka, none whatever! But I don't suppose that matters!"

"It makes no difference. They can live together. You'll move to our house tomorrow, won't you?"

"How do you mean? To your house? Oh, very well, I don't mind."

"I mean, you'll take our attic. I told you we have an attic, didn't I? It's empty now. We had a woman lodger, an old gentlewoman, but she's left, and I know Granny would like to let it to a young man. I said to her, 'Why a young man, Granny?' But she said, 'Why not? I'm old and I like young people about. You don't think I'm trying to get a husband for you, do you?' Well, I saw at once of course that that was what she had in mind."

"Good Lord, Nastenka!"

And we both laughed.

"Oh, well, never mind. But where do you live? I've forgotten."

I told her I lived near a certain bridge in Barannikov's house.

"It's a very big house, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a very big house."

"Oh, yes, I know it. It's a nice house, but I still think you ought to move out of it and come and live with us as soon as possible."

"I'll do so tomorrow, Nastenka, tomorrow. I'm afraid I'm a little behindhand with my rent, but that doesn't matter. I shall be getting my salary soon and—"

"And you know I could be giving lessons. Yes, why not? I'll learn everything myself first and then give lessons."

"That's an excellent idea, Nastenka, an excellent idea! And I'll be getting a bonus soon. . . ."

"So tomorrow you'll be my lodger. . . ."

"Yes, and we'll go to *The Barber of Seville*, for I believe they're going to put it on again soon."

"Oh yes, I'd love to," said Nastenka, laughing. "Perhaps not *The Barber*, though. We'd better see something else."

"Oh, all right, something else then. I don't mind. I suppose something else would be better. You see, I didn't think—"

Talking like this, we walked along in a sort of a daze, in a mist, as though we did not know ourselves what was happening to us. One moment we would stop and go on talking in one place for a long time, and the next we would be walking again till we would find ourselves goodness knows where—and more laughter, more tears. Then Nastenka would suddenly decide that she ought to be going back home, and I would not dare to detain her, but would insist on accompanying her to her house. We would start on our way back, and in

about a quarter of an hour would find ourselves on the embankment by our seat. Then she would sigh, and tears would come into her eyes again, and I would be plunged into despair and a chilly premonition of disaster would steal into my heart. But she would at once press my hand and drag me off again to walk, talk, chatter. . . .

"It's time—time I went home now," Nastenka said at last. "I think it must be awfully late. We've been behaving like children long enough!"

"Yes, of course, Nastenka. Only I don't suppose I shall be able to sleep now. No, I won't go home."

"I don't think I shall sleep, either. Only see me home, will you?"

"Of course, I'll see you home. . . ."

"On your word of honour? Because, you see, I must get back home some time, mustn't I?"

"On my word of honour!" I replied, laughing.

"All right, let's go."

"Let's go. Look at the sky, Nastenka, look! It'll be a lovely day tomorrow! What a blue sky! What a moon! Look, a yellow cloud is drifting over it. Look! Look! No, it has passed by. Look, Nastenka, look!"

But Nastenka did not look. She stood speechless, motionless. A minute later she clung somewhat timidly close to me. Her hand trembled in mine. I looked at her. She clung to me more closely.

At that moment a young man passed by us. He suddenly stopped, looked at us intently for a moment, and then again took a few steps towards us. My heart missed a beat.

"Nastenka," I said in an undertone, "who is it Nastenka?"

“It’s him!” she replied in a whisper, clinging to me still more closely, still more tremulously.

I could hardly stand up.

“Nastenka! Nastenka! It’s you!” we heard a voice behind us, and at the same time the young man took a few steps towards us.

Lord, how she cried out! How she started! How she tore herself out of my hands and rushed to meet him! I stood and looked at them, utterly crushed. But no sooner had she given him her hand, no sooner had she thrown herself into his arms, than she suddenly turned to me again, and was at my side in a flash, faster than lightning, faster than the wind, and before I could recover from my surprise, flung her arms round my neck and kissed me ardently. Then, without uttering a word, she rushed back to him again, clasped his hands, and drew him after her.

I stood a long time, watching them walking away. At last both of them vanished from my sight.

Morning

My nights came to an end with a morning. The weather was dreadful. It was pouring, and the rain kept beating dismally against my windowpanes. It was dark in the room; it was dull and dreary outside. My head ached. I felt giddy. I was beginning to feel feverish.

“A letter for you, sir,” said Matryona, bending over me. “Came by the city post, it did, sir. The postman brought it.”

“A letter? Who from?” I cried, jumping up from my chair.

“I don’t know, sir, I’m sure. I suppose whoever sent it must have signed his name.”

I broke the seal: the letter was from her!

“Oh, forgive me, forgive me!” Nastenka wrote to me. “I beg you on my knees to forgive me! I deceived you and myself. It was all a dream, a delusion. I nearly died today thinking of you. Please, please forgive me!

“Don’t blame me, for I haven’t changed a bit towards you. I said I would love you, and I do love you now, I more than love you. Oh, if only I could love both of you at once! Oh, if only you were he!”

“Oh, if only he were you!” it flashed through my mind. “Those were your own words, Nastenka!”

“God knows what I would do for you now. I know how sad and unhappy you must be. I’ve treated you abominably, but when one loves, you know, an injury is soon forgotten. And you do love me!

“Thank you, yes! thank you for that love. For it remains imprinted in my memory like a sweet dream one remembers a long time after awakening. I shall never forget the moment when you opened your heart to me like a real friend, when you accepted the gift of my broken heart to take care of it, to cherish it, to heal it. If you forgive me, I promise you that the memory of you will always remain with me, that I shall be everlastingly grateful to you, and that my feeling of gratitude will never be erased from my heart. I shall treasure this memory, I’ll be true to it. I shall never be unfaithful to it, I shall never be unfaithful to my heart. It is too constant for that. It returned so quickly yesterday to him to whom it has always belonged.

“We shall meet. You will come and see us. You will not leave us, will you? You’ll always be my friend, my brother. And when you see me, you’ll give me your hand, won’t you? You will give it to me because you’ve forgiven me. You have, haven’t you? You love me *as before*, don’t you?”

“Oh, yes, do love me! Don’t ever forsake me, because I love you so at this moment, because I am worthy of your love, because I promise to deserve it—oh, my dear, dear friend! Next week I’m to be married to him. He has come back as much in love with me as ever. He has never forgotten me. You will not be angry with me because I have written about him, will you? I would like to come and see you with him. You will like him, won’t you?”

“Forgive me, remember and love your Nastenka.”

I read this letter over and over again. There were tears in my eyes. At last it dropped out of my hands, and I buried my face.

“Look, love, look!” Matryona called me.

“What is it, Matryona?”

“Why, I’ve swept all the cobwebs off the ceiling. Looks so lovely and clean, you could be wed, love, and have your wedding party here. You might just as well do it now as wait till it gets dirty again!”

I looked at Matryona. She was still hale and hearty, quite a *young-looking* old woman, in fact. But I don’t know why all of a sudden she looked old and decrepit to me, with a wrinkled face and lustreless eyes. I don’t know why, but all of a sudden my room, too, seemed to have grown as old as Matryona. The walls and floors looked discoloured, everything was dark and grimy,

and the cobwebs were thicker than ever. I don't know why, but when I looked out of the window the house opposite, too, looked dilapidated and dingy, the plaster on its columns peeling and crumbling, its cornices blackened and full of cracks, and its bright brown walls disfigured by large white and yellow patches. Either the sun, appearing suddenly from behind the dark rain-clouds, had hidden itself so quickly that everything had grown dark before my eyes again, or perhaps the whole sombre and melancholy perspective of my future flashed before my mind's eye at that moment, and I saw myself just as I was now fifteen years hence, only grown older, in the same room, living the same sort of solitary life, with the same Matryona, who had not grown a bit wiser in all those years.

But that I should feel any resentment against you, Nastenka! That I should cast a dark shadow over your bright, serene happiness! That I should chill and darken your heart with bitter reproaches, wound it with secret remorse, cause it to beat anxiously at the moment of bliss! That I should crush a single one of those delicate blooms which you will wear in your dark hair when you walk up the aisle to the altar with him! Oh no—never, never! May your sky be always clear, may your dear smile be always bright and happy, and may you be for ever blessed for that moment of bliss and happiness which you gave to another lonely and grateful heart!

Good Lord, only a *moment* of bliss? Isn't such a moment sufficient for the whole of a man's life?