

# Gubin

By

Maksim Gorky

The place where I first saw him was a tavern wherein, ensconced in the chimney-corner, and facing a table, he was exclaiming stutteringly, “Oh, I know the truth about you all! Yes, I know the truth about you!” while standing in a semicircle in front of him, and unconsciously rendering him more and more excited with their sarcastic interpolations, were some tradesmen of the superior sort—five in number. One of them remarked indifferently:

“How should you NOT know the truth about us, seeing that you do nothing but slander us?”

Shabby, in fact in rags, Gubin at that moment reminded me of a homeless dog which, having strayed into a strange street, has found itself held up by a band of dogs of superior strength, and, seized with nervousness, is sitting back on its haunches and sweeping the dust with its tail; and, with growls, and occasional barings of its fangs, and sundry barkings, attempting now to intimidate its adversaries, and now to conciliate them. Meanwhile, having perceived the stranger’s helplessness and insignificance, the native pack is beginning to moderate its attitude, in the conviction that, though continued maintenance of dignity is imperative, it is not worthwhile to pick a quarrel so long as an occasional yelp be vented in the stranger’s face.

“To whom are you of any use?” one of the tradesmen at length inquired.

“Not a man of us but may be of use.”

“To whom, then?” . . .

I had long since grown familiar with tavern disputes concerning verities, and not infrequently seen those disputes develop into open brawls; but never had I permitted myself to be drawn into their toils, or to be set wandering amid their tangles like a blind man negotiating a number of hillocks. Moreover, just before this encounter with Gubin, I had arrived at a dim surmise that when such differences were carried to the point of madness and bloodshed. Really, they constituted an expression of the unmeaning, hopeless, melancholy life that is lived in the wilder and more remote districts of Russia—of the life that is lived on swampy banks of dingy rivers, and in our smaller and more God-forgotten towns. For it would seem that in such places men have nothing to look for, nor any knowledge of how to look for anything; wherefore, they brawl and shout in vain attempts to dissipate despondency. . . .

I myself was sitting near Gubin, but on the other side of the table. Yet, this was not because his outbursts and the tradesmen's retorts thereto were a pleasure to listen to, since to me both the one and the other seemed about as futile as beating the air.

“To whom are YOU of use?”

“To himself every man can be useful.”

“But what good can one do oneself?” . . .

The windows of the tavern were open, while in the pendent, undulating cloud of blue smoke that the flames of the lamps emitted, those lamps looked like so many yellow pitchers floating amid the waters of a stagnant pond. Out of doors there was brooding the quiet of an August night, and not a rustle, not a whisper was there to be heard. Hence, as numbed with melancholy, I gazed at the inky heavens and limpid stars I thought to myself:

“Surely, never were the sky and the stars meant to look down upon a life like this, a life like this?”

**Suddenly someone said with the subdued assurance of a person reading aloud from a written document:**

**“Unless the peasants of Kubarovo keep a watch upon their timber lands, the sun will fire them tomorrow, and then the Birkins’ forest also will catch alight.”**

**For a moment the dispute died down. Then, as it were cleaving the silence, a voice said stutteringly:**

**“Who cares about the significance of the word ‘truth’?”**

**And the words— heavy, jumbled, and clumsy— filled me with despondent reflections. Then again the voices rose—this time in louder and more venomous accents, and with their din recalled to me, by some accident, the foolish lines:**

**The gods did give men water  
To wash in, and to drink;  
Yet man has made it but a pool  
In which his woes to sink.**

**Presently I moved outside and, seating myself on the steps of the veranda, fell to contemplating the dull, blurred windows of the Archpriest’s house on the other side of the square, and to watching how black shadows kept flitting to and fro behind their panes as the faint, lugubrious notes of a guitar made themselves heard. And a high-pitched, irritable voice kept repeating at intervals: “Allow me. Pray, permit me to speak,” and being answered by a voice which intermittently shot into the silence, as into a bottomless sack, the words: “No, do you wait a moment, do you wait a moment.”**

**Surrounded by the darkness, the houses looked stunted like gravestones, with a line of black trees above their roofs that loomed shadowy and cloud-like. Only in the furthest corner of the expanse was the light of a solitary street lamp bearing a resemblance to the disk of a stationary, resplendent dandelion.**

Over everything was melancholy. Far from inviting was the general outlook. So much was this the case that, had, at that moment, anyone stolen upon me from behind the bushes and dealt me a sudden blow on the head, I should merely have sunk to earth without attempting to see who my assailant had been.

Often, in those days, was I in this mood, for it clave to me as faithfully as a dog—never did it wholly leave me.

“It was for men like **THOSE** that this fair earth of ours was bestowed upon us!” I thought to myself.

Suddenly, with a clatter, someone ran out of the door of the tavern, slid down the steps, fell headlong at their foot, quickly regained his equilibrium, and disappeared in the darkness after exclaiming in a threatening voice:

“Oh, I’LL pay you out! I’LL skin you, you damned... !”

Whereafter two figures that also appeared in the doorway said as they stood talking to one another:

“You heard him threaten to fire the place, did you not?”

“Yes, I did. But why should he want to fire it? ”

“Because he is a dangerous rascal.”

Presently, slinging my wallet upon my back, I pursued my onward way along a street that was fenced on either side with a tall palisade. As I proceeded, long grasses kept catching at my feet and rustling drily. And so warm was the night as to render the payment of a

lodging fee superfluous; and the more so since in the neighbourhood of the cemetery, where an advanced guard of young pines had pushed forward to the cemetery wall and littered the sandy ground, with a carpet of red, dry cones, there were sleeping-places prepared in advance.

Suddenly from the darkness there emerged, to recoil again, a man's tall figure.

“Who is that? Who is it?” asked the hoarse, nervous voice of Gubin in dissipation of the deathlike stillness.

Which said, he and I fell into step with one another. As we proceeded he inquired whence I had come, and why I was still abroad. Whereafter he extended to me, as to an old acquaintance, the invitation:

“Will you come and sleep at my place? My house is near here, and as for work, I will find you a job tomorrow. In fact, as it happens, I am needing a man to help me clean out a well at the Birkins' place. Will the job suit you? Very well, then. Always I like to settle things overnight, as it is at night that I can best see through people.”

The “house” turned out to be nothing more than an old one-eyed, hunchbacked washhouse or shanty which, bulging of wall, stood wedged against the clayey slope of a ravine as though it would fain bury itself amid the boughs of the neighbouring arbutus trees and elders.

Without striking a light, Gubin flung himself upon some mouldy hay that littered a threshold as narrow as the threshold of a dog-kennel, and said to me with an air of authority as he did so:

“I will sleep with my head towards the door, for the atmosphere here is a trifle confined.”

**And, true enough, the place reeked of elderberries, soap, burnt stuff, and decayed leaves. I could not conceive why I had come to such a spot.**

**The twisted branches of the neighbouring trees hung motionless athwart the sky, and concealed from view the golden dust of the Milky Way, while across the Oka an owl kept screeching, and the strange, arresting remarks of my companion pelted me like showers of peas.**

**“Do not be surprised that I should live in a remote ravine,” he said. “I, whose hand is against every man, can at least feel lord of what I survey here.”**

**Too dark was it for me to see my host’s face, but my memory recalled his bald cranium, and the yellow light of the lamps falling upon a nose as long as a woodpecker’s beak, a pair of grey and stubbly cheeks, a pair of thin lips covered by a bristling moustache, a mouth sharp-cut as with a knife, and full of black, evil-looking stumps, a pair of pointed, sensitive, mouse-like ears, and a clean-shaven chin. The last feature in no way consorted with his visage, or with his whole appearance; but at least it rendered him worthy of remark, and enabled one to realise that one had to deal with neither a peasant nor a soldier nor a tradesman, but with a man peculiar to himself. Also, his frame was lanky, with long arms and legs, and pointed knees and elbows. In fact, so like a piece of string was his body that to twist it round and round, or even to tie it into a knot, would, seemingly, have been easy enough.**

**For awhile I found his speech difficult to follow; wherefore, silently I gazed at the sky, where the stars appeared to be playing at follow-my-leader.**

**“Are you asleep?” at length he inquired.**

**“No, I am not. Why do you shave your beard?”**

**“Why do you ask?”**

**“Because, if you will pardon me, I think your face would look better bearded.”**

**With a short laugh he exclaimed:**

**“Bearded? Ah, sloven! Bearded, indeed!”**

**To which he added more gravely:**

**“Both Peter the Great and Nicholas I were wiser than you, for they ordained that whosoever should be bearded should have his nose slit, and be fined a hundred roubles. Did you ever hear of that? ”**

**“No.”**

**“And from the same source, from the beard, arose also the Great Schism.”**

**His manner of speaking was too rapid to be articulate, and, in leaving his mouth, his words caused his lips to bare stumps and gums amid which they lost their way, became disintegrated, and issued, as it were, in an incomplete state.**

**“Everyone,” he continued, “knows that life is lived more easily with a beard than without one, since with a beard lies are more easily told—they can be told, and then hidden in the masses of hair. Hence we ought to go through life with our faces naked, since such faces render untruthfulness more difficult, and prevent their owners from prevaricating without the fact becoming plain to all.”**

**“But what about women?”**

**“What about women? Well, women can always lie to their husbands successfully, but not to all the town, to all the world, to folk in general. Moreover, since a woman’s real business in life is the same as that of the hen, to rear young, what can it matter if she DOES cackle a few falsehoods, provided that she be neither a priest nor a mayor nor a tchinovnik, and does not possess any authority, and cannot establish laws? For the really important point is that the law itself should not lie, but ever uphold truth pure and simple. Long has the prevalent illegality disgusted me.”**

**The door of the shanty was standing open, and amid the outer darkness, as in a church, the trees looked like pillars, and the white stems of the birches like silver candelabra tipped with a thousand lights, or dimly-seen choristers with faces showing pale above sacramental vestments of black. All my soul was full of a sort of painful restlessness. It was a feeling as though I should live to rise and go forth into the darkness, and offer battle to the terrors of the night; yet ever, as my companion’s torrential speech caught and held my attention, it detained me where I was.**

**“My father was a man of no little originality and character,” he went on. “Wherefore, none of the townsfolk liked him. By the age of twenty he had risen to be an alderman, yet never to the end could get the better of folk’s stubbornness and stupidity, even though he made it his custom to treat all and sundry to food and drink, and to reason with them. No, not even at the last did he attain his due. People feared him because he revolutionised everything, revolutionised it down to the very roots; the truth being that he had grasped the one essential fact that law and order must be driven, like nails, into the people’s very vitals.”**

**Mice squeaked under the floor, and on the further side of the Oka an owl screeched, while amid the pitch-black heavens I could see a number of blotches intermittently lightening to an elusive red and blurring the faint glitter of the stars.**

**“It was one o’clock in the morning when my father died,” Gubin continued.” And upon myself, who was seventeen and had just finished my course at the municipal school of Riazan, there devolved, naturally enough, all the enmity that my father had incurred during his lifetime. ‘He is just like his sire,’ folk said. Also, I was alone, absolutely alone, in the world, since my mother had lost her reason two years before my father’s death, and passed away in a frenzy. However, I had an uncle, a retired unter-officier who was both a**



sluggard, a tippler, and a hero (a hero because he had had his eyes shot out at Plevna, and his left arm injured in a manner which had induced paralysis, and his breast adorned with the military cross and a set of medals). And sometimes, this uncle of mine would rally me on my learning. For instance, 'Scholar,' he would say, 'what does "tiversia" mean?' 'No such word exists,' would be my reply, and thereupon he would seize me by the hair, for he was rather an awkward person to deal with. Another factor as concerned making me ashamed of my scholarship was the ignorance of the townspeople in general, and in the end I became the common butt, a sort of 'holy idiot.'"

So greatly did these recollections move Gubin that he rose and transferred his position to the door of the hut, where, a dark blur against the square of blue, he lit a gurgling pipe, and puffed thereat until his long, conical nose glowed. Presently the surging stream of words began again:

"At twenty I married an orphan, and when she fell ill and died childless I found myself alone once more, and without an adviser or a friend. However, still I continued both to live and to look about me. And in time, I perceived that life is not lived wholly as it should be."

"What in life is 'not lived wholly as it should be'?"

"Everything in life. For life is mere folly, mere fatuous nonsense. The truth is that our dogs do not bark always at the right moment. For instance, when I said to folk, 'How would it be if we were to open a technical school for girls?' They merely laughed and replied, 'Trade workers are hopeless drunkards. Already have we enough of them. Besides, hitherto women have contrived to get on WITHOUT education.' And when next I conceived a scheme for instituting a match factory, it befell that the factory was burnt down during its first year of existence, and I found myself once more at a loose end. Next a certain woman got hold of me, and I flitted about her like a martin around a belfry, and so lost my head as to live life as though I were not on earth at all—for three years I did not know even what I was doing, and only when I recovered my senses did I perceive myself to be a pauper, and my all, every single thing that I had possessed, to have passed into HER white hands. Yes, at twenty-eight I found myself a beggar. Yet I have never wholly regretted the fact, for certainly for a time I lived life as few men ever live it. 'Take my all—take it!' I used to say to her. And, truly enough, I should never have done much good with my father's fortune, whereas she—well, so it befell. Somehow I think that in those days my opinions must have

been different from now—now that I have lost everything. . . . Yet the woman used to say, ‘You have NOT lost everything,’ and she had wit enough to fit out a whole townful of people.”

“This woman—who was she? ”

“The wife of a merchant. Whenever she unrobed and said, ‘Come! What is this body of mine worth?’ I used to make reply, ‘A price that is beyond compute.’ . . . So within three years everything that I possessed vanished like smoke. Sometimes, of course, folk laughed at and jibed at me; nor did I ever refute them. But now that I have come to have a better understanding of life’s affairs, I see that life is not wholly lived as it should be. For that matter, too, I do not hold my tongue on the subject, for that is not my way—still left to me I have a tongue and my soul. The same reason accounts for the fact that no one likes me, and that by everyone I am looked upon as a fool.”

“How, in your opinion, ought life to be lived?”

Without answering me at once, Gubin sucked at his pipe until his nose made a glowing red blur in the darkness. Then he muttered slowly:

“How life ought to be lived no one could say exactly. And this though I have given much thought to the subject, and still am doing so.”

I found it no difficult matter to form a mental picture of the desolate existence which this man must be leading—this man whom all his fellows both derided and shunned. For at that time I too was bidding fair to fail in life, and had my heart in the grip of ceaseless despondency.

The truth is that of futile people Russia is over-full. Many such I myself have known, and always they have attracted me as strongly and mysteriously as a magnet. Always they have struck me more favourably than the provincial-minded majority who live for food and work alone, and put away from them all that could conceivably render their bread-winning

difficult, or prevent them from snatching bread out of the hands of their weaker neighbours. For most such folk are gloomy and self-contained, with hearts that have turned to wood, and an outlook that ever reverts to the past; unless, indeed, they be folk of spurious good nature, an addition to talkativeness, and an apparent bonhomie which veils a frigid, grey interior, and conveys an impression of cruelty and greed of all that life contains.

Always, in the end, I have detected in such folk something wintry, something that makes them seem, as it were, to be spending spring and summer in expectation solely of the winter season, with its long nights, and its cold of an austerity which forces one for ever to be consuming food.

Yet seldom among this distasteful and wearisome crowd of wintry folk is there to be encountered a man who has altogether proved a failure. But if he has done so, he will be found to be a man whose nature is of a more thoughtful, a more truly existent, a more clear-sighted cast than that of his fellows—a man who at least can look beyond the boundaries of the trite and commonplace, and whose mentality has a greater capacity for attaining spiritual fulfilment, and is more desirous of doing so, than the mentality of his compeers. That is to say, in such a man one can always detect a striving for space, as a man who, loving light, carries light in himself.

Unfortunately, all too often is that light only the fugitive phosphorescence of putrefaction; wherefore as one contemplates him one soon begins to realise with bitterness and vexation and disappointment that he is but a sluggard, but a braggart, but one who is petty and weak and blinded with conceit and distorted with envy, but one between whose word and whose deed there gapes a disparity even wider and deeper than the disparity which divides the word from the deed of the man of winter, of the man who, though he be as tardy as a snail, at least is making some way in the world, in contradistinction from the failure who revolves ever in a single spot, like some barren old maid before the reflection in her looking-glass.

Hence, as I listened to Gubin, there recurred to me more than one instance of his type.

**“Yes, I have succeeded in observing life throughout,” he muttered drowsily as his head sank slowly upon his breast.**

**And sleep overtook myself with similar suddenness. Apparently that slumber was of a few minutes’ duration only, yet what aroused me was Gubin pulling at my leg.**

**“Get up now,” he said. “It is time that we were off.”**

**And as his bluish-grey eyes peered into my face, somehow I derived from their mournful expression a sense of intellectuality. Beneath the hair on his hollow cheeks were reddish veins, while similar veins, bluish in tint, covered with a network his temples, and his bare arms had the appearance of being made of tanned leather.**

**Dawn had not yet broken when we rose and proceeded through the slumbering streets beneath a sky that was of a dull yellow, and amid an atmosphere that was full of the smell of burning.**

**“Five days now has the forest been on fire,” observed Gubin. “Yet the fools cannot succeed in putting it out.”**

**Presently the establishment of the merchants Birkin lay before us, an establishment of curious aspect, since it constituted, rather, a conglomeration of appendages to a main building of ground floor and attics, with four windows facing on to the street, and a series of underpropping annexes. That series extended to the wing, and was solid and permanent, and bade fair to overflow into the courtyard, and through the entrance-gates, and across the street, and to the very kitchen-garden and flower-garden themselves. Also, it seemed to have been stolen piecemeal from somewhere, and at different periods, and from different localities, and tacked at haphazard on to the walls of the parent erection. Moreover, all the windows of the latter were small, and in their green panes, as they confronted the world, there was a timid and suspicious air, while, in particular, the three windows which faced upon the courtyard had iron bars to them. Lastly, there were posted, sentinel-like on the entrance-steps, two water-butts as a precaution against fire.**

**“What think you of the place?” Gubin muttered as he peered into the well. “Isn’t it a barbarous hole? The right thing would be to pull it down wholesale, and then rebuild it on larger and less restricted lines. Yet these fools merely go tacking new additions on to the old.”**

**For awhile his lips moved as in an incantation. Then he frowned, glanced shrewdly at the structures in question, and continued softly:**

**“I may say in passing that the place is MINE.”**

**“YOURS? ”**

**“Yes, mine. At all events, so it used to be.”**

**And he pulled a grimace as though he had got the toothache before adding with an air of command:**

**“Come! I will pump out the water, and YOU shall carry it to the entrance-steps and fill the water-butts. Here is a pail, and here a ladder.”**

**Whereafter, with a considerable display of strength, he set about his portion of the task, whilst I myself took pail in hand and advanced towards the steps to find that the water-butts were so rotten that, instead of retaining the water, they let it leak out into the courtyard. Gubin said with an oath:**

**“Fine masters these—masters who grudge one a goat, and squander a rouble! What if a fire WERE to break out? Oh, the blockheads!”**

Presently, the proprietors in person issued into the courtyard —the stout, bald Peter Birkin, a man whose face was flushed even to the whites of his shifty eyes, and, close behind him, eke his shadow, Jonah Birkin— a person of sandy, sullen mien, and overhanging brows, and dull, heavy eyes.

“Good day, dear sir,” said Peter Birkin thinly, as with a puffy hand he raised from his head a cloth cap, while Jonah nodded. And then, with a sidelong glance at myself, asked in a deep bass voice:

“Who is this young man?”

Large and important like peacocks, the pair then shuffled across the wet yard, and in so doing, went to much trouble to avoid soiling their polished shoes. Next Peter said to his brother:

“Have you noticed that the water-butts are rotted? Oh, that fine Yakinika! He ought long ago to have been dismissed.”

“Who is that young man over there?” Jonah repeated with an air of asperity.

“The son of his father and mother,” Gubin replied quietly, and without so much as a glance at the brothers.

“Well, come along,” snuffled Peter with a drawling of his vowels. “It is high time that we were moving. It doesn’t matter who the young man may be.”

And with that they slip-slopped across to the entrance gates, while Gubin gazed after them with knitted brows, and as the brothers were disappearing through the wicket said carelessly:

**“ The old sheep! They live solely by the wits of their stepmother, and if it were not for her, they would long ago have come to grief. Yes, she is a woman beyond words clever. Once upon a time there were three brothers—Peter, Alexis, and Jonah; but, unfortunately, Alexis got killed in a brawl. A fine, tall fellow HE was, whereas these two are a pair of gluttons, like everyone else in this town. Not for nothing do three loaves figure on the municipal arms! Now, to work again! Or shall we take a rest?”**

**Here there stepped on to the veranda a tall, well-grown young woman in an open pink bodice and a blue skirt who, shading blue eyes with her hand, scanned the courtyard and the steps, and said with some diffidence:**

**“Good day, Yakov Vasilitch.”**

**With a good-humoured glance in response, and his mouth open, Gubin waved a hand in greeting:**

**“Good day to YOU, Nadezhda Ivanovna,” he replied. “How are you this morning? ”**

**Somehow this made her blush, and cross her arms upon her ample bosom, while her kindly, rounded, eminently Russian face evinced the ghost of a shy smile. At the same time, it was a face wherein not a single feature was of a kind to remain fixed in the memory, a face as vacant as though nature had forgotten to stamp thereon a single wish. Hence, even when the woman smiled there seemed to remain a doubt whether the smile had really materialised.**

**“How is Natalia Vasilievna?” continued Gubin.**

**“Much as usual,” the woman answered softly.**

Whereafter hesitantly, and with downcast eyes, she essayed to cross the courtyard. As she passed me I caught a whiff of raspberries and currants.

Disappearing into the grey mist through a small door with iron staples, she soon reissued thence with a hencoop, and, seating herself on the steps of the doorway, and setting the coop on her knees, took between her two large palms some fluttering, chirping, downy, golden chicks, and raised them to her ruddy lips and cheeks with a murmur of:

“Oh my little darlings! Oh my little darlings!”

And in her voice, somehow, there was a note as of intoxication, of abandonment. Meanwhile dull, reddish sunbeams were beginning to peer through the fence, and to warm the long, pointed staples with which it was fastened together. While in a stream of water that was dripping from the eaves, and trickling over the floor of the court, and around the woman’s feet, a single beam was bathing and quivering as though it would fain effect an advance to the woman’s lap and the hencoop, and, with the soft, downy chicks, enjoy the caresses of the woman’s bare white arms.

“Ah, little things!” again she murmured. “Ah, little children of mine!”

Upon that Gubin suddenly desisted from his task of hauling up the bucket, and, as he steadied the rope with his arms raised above his head, said quickly:

“Nadezhda Ivanovna, you ought indeed to have had some children—six at the least!”

Yet no reply came, nor did the woman even look at him.

The rays of the sun were now spreading, smokelike and greyish-yellow, over the silver river. Above the river’s calm bed a muslin texture of mist was coiling. Against the nebulous



heavens the blue of the forest was rearing itself amid the fragrant, pungent fumes from the burning timber.

Yet still asleep amid its sheltering half-circle of forest was the quiet little town of Miamlin, while behind it, and encompassing it as with a pair of dark wings, the forest in question looked as though it were ruffling its feathers in preparation for further flight beyond the point where, the peaceful Oka reached, the trees stood darkening, overshadowing the water's clear depths, and looking at themselves therein.

Yet, though the hour was so early, everything seemed to have about it an air of sadness, a mien as though the day lacked promise, as though its face were veiled and mournful, as though, not yet come to birth, it nevertheless were feeling weary in advance.

Seating myself by Gubin on some trampled straw in the hut ordinarily used by the watchman of the Birkins' extensive orchard, I found that, owing to the orchard being set on a hillside, I could see over the tops of the apple and pear and fig trees, where their tops hung bespangled with dew as with quicksilver, and view the whole town and its multicoloured churches, yellow, newly-painted prison, and yellow-painted bank.

And while in the town's lurid, four-square buildings I could trace a certain resemblance to the aces of clubs stamped upon convicts' backs, in the grey strips of the streets I could trace a certain resemblance to a number of rents in an old, ragged, faded, dusty coat. Indeed, that morning all comparisons seemed to take on a tinge of melancholy; the reason being that throughout the previous evening there had been moaning in my soul a mournful dirge on the future life.

With nothing, however, were the churches of the town of which I am speaking exactly comparable, for many of them had attained a degree of beauty the contemplation of which caused the town to assume throughout— a different, a more pleasing and seductive, aspect. Thought I to myself: "Would that men had fashioned all other buildings in the town as the churches have been fashioned!"

One of the latter, an old, squat edifice the blank windows of which were deeply sunken in the stuccoed walls, was known as the “Prince’s Church,” for the reason that it enshrined the remains of a local Prince and his wife, persons of whom it stood recorded that “they did pass all their lives in kindly, unchanging love.” . . .

The following night Gubin and I chanced to see Peter Birkin’s tall, pale, timid young wife traverse the garden on her way to a tryst in the washhouse with her lover, the precentor of the Prince’s Church. And as clad in a simple gown, and barefooted, and having her ample shoulders swathed in an old, gold jacket or shawl of some sort, she crossed the orchard by a path running between two lines of apple trees; she walked with the unhasting gait of a cat which is crossing a yard after a shower of rain, and from time to time, whenever a puddle is encountered, lifts and shakes fastidiously one of its soft paws. Probably, in the woman’s case, this came of the fact that things kept pricking and tickling her soles as she proceeded. Also, her knees, I could see, were trembling, and her step had in it a certain hesitancy, a certain lack of assurance.

Meanwhile, bending over the garden from the warm night sky, the moon’s kindly visage, though on the wane, was shining brightly; and when the woman emerged from the shadow of the trees I could discern the dark patches of her eyes, her rounded, half-parted lips, and the thick plait of hair which lay across her bosom. Also, in the moonlight her bodice had assumed a bluish tinge, so that she looked almost phantasmal; and when soundlessly, moving as though on air, she stepped back into the shadow of the trees, that shadow seemed to lighten.

All this happened at midnight, or thereabouts, but neither of us was yet asleep, owing to the fact that Gubin had been telling me some interesting stories concerning the town and its families and inhabitants. However, as soon as he descried the woman looming like a ghost, he leapt to his feet in comical terror, then subsided on to the straw again, contracted his body as though he were in convulsions, and hurriedly made the sign of the cross.

“Oh Jesus our Lord!” he gasped. “Tell me what that is, tell me what that is!”

“Keep quiet, you,” I urged.

Instead, lurching in my direction, he nudged me with his arm,

“Is it Nadezhda, think you?” he whispered.

“It is.”

“Phew! The scene seems like a dream. Just in the same way, and in the very same place, did her mother-in-law, Petrushka’s stepmother, use to come and walk. Yes, it was just like this.”

Then, rolling over, face downwards, he broke into subdued, malicious chuckles; whereafter, seizing my hand and sawing it up and down, he whispered amid his exultant pants:

“I expect Petrushka is asleep, for probably he has taken too much liquor at the Bassanov’s smotrini. [A festival at which a fiance pays his first visit to the house of the parents of his betrothed.] Aye, he will be asleep. And as for Jonah, HE will have gone to Vaska Klochi. So tonight, until morning, Nadezhda will be able to kick up her heels to her heart’s content.”

I too had begun to surmise that the woman was come thither for purposes of her own. Yet the scene was almost dreamlike in its beauty. It thrilled me to the soul to watch how the woman’s blue eyes gazed about her—gazed as though she were ardently, caressingly whispering to all living creatures, asleep or awake:

“Oh my darlings! Oh my darlings!”

Beside me the uncouth, broken-down Gubin went on in hoarse accents:

**“You must know that she is Petrushka’s THIRD wife, a woman whom he took to himself from the family of a merchant of Murom. Yet the town has it that not only Petrushka, but also Jonah, makes use of her—that she acts as wife to both brothers, and therefore lacks children. Also has it been said of her that one Trinity Sunday she was seen by a party of women to misconduct herself in this garden with a police sergeant, and then to sit on his lap and weep. Yet this last I do not wholly believe, for the sergeant in question is a veteran scarcely able to put one foot before the other. Also, Jonah, though a brute, lives in abject fear of his stepmother.”**

**Here a worm-eaten apple fell to the ground, and the woman paused; whereafter, with head a little raised, she resumed her way with greater speed.**

**As for Gubin, he continued, unchecked, though with a trifle less animosity, rather as though he were reading aloud a manuscript which he found wearisome:**

**“See how a man like Peter Birkin may pride himself upon his wealth, and receive honour during his lifetime, yet all the while have the devil grinning over his shoulder!”**

**Then he, Gubin, kept silent awhile, and merely breathed heavily, and twisted his body about. But suddenly, he resumed in a strange whisper:**

**“Fifteen years ago—no, surely it was longer ago than that? —Madame Nadkin, Nadezhda’s mother-in-law, made it her practice to come to this spot to meet her lover. And a fine gallant HE was!”**

**Somehow, as I watched the woman creeping along, and looking as though she were intending to commit a theft, or as though she fancied that at any moment she might see the plump brothers Birkin issue from the courtyard into the garden and come shuffling ponderously over the darkened ground, with ropes and cudgels grasped in coarse, red hands which knew no pity; somehow, as I watched her, I felt saddened, and paid little heed to Gubin’s whispered remarks, so intently were my eyes fixed upon the granary wall as, after gliding along it awhile, the woman bent her head and disappeared through the dark blue of the washhouse door. As for Gubin, he went to sleep with a last drowsy remark of:**

**“Life is all falsity. Husbands, wives, fathers, children—all of them practise deceit.”**

**In the east, portions of the sky were turning to light purple, and other portions to a darker hue, while from time to time I could see, looming black against those portions, coils of smoke the density of which kept being stabbed with fiery spikes of flame, so that the vague, towering forest looked like a hill on the top of which a fiery dragon was crawling about, and writhing, and intermittently raising tremulous, scarlet wings, and as often relapsing into, becoming submerged in, the bank of vapour. And, in contemplating the spectacle, I seemed actually to be able to hear the cruel, hissing din of combat between red and black, and to see pale, frightened rabbits scudding from underneath the roots of trees amid showers of sparks, and panting, half-suffocated birds fluttering wildly amid the branches as further and further afield, and more and more triumphantly, the scarlet dragon unfurled its wings, and consumed the darkness, and devoured the rain-soaked timber.**

**Presently from the dark, blurred doorway in the wall of the washhouse there emerged a dark figure which went flitting away among the trees, while after it someone called in a sharp, incisive whisper:**

**“Do not forget. You MUST come.”**

**“Oh, I shall be only too glad!”**

**“Very well. In the morning the lame woman shall call upon you. Do you hear?”**

**And as the woman disappeared from view the other person sauntered across the garden, and scaled the fence with a clatter.**

**That night I could not sleep, but, until dawn, lay watching the burning forest as gradually the weary moon declined, and the lamp of Venus, cold and green as an emerald, came into view over the crosses on the Prince’s Church. Indeed was the latter a fitting place for**

Venus to illumine if really it had been the case that the Prince and Princess had “passed their lives in kindly, unchanging love”!

Gradually, the dew cleared the trees of the night darkness, and caused the damp, grey foliage to smile once more with aniseed and red raspberry, and to sparkle with the gold of their mildew. Also, there came hovering about us goldfinches with their little red-hooded crests, and fussy tomtits in their cravats of yellow, while a nimble, dark, blue woodpecker scaled the stem of an apple tree. And everywhere, yellow leaves fluttered to earth, and, in doing so, so closely resembled birds as to make it not always easy to distinguish whether a leaf or a tomtit had glimmered for a moment in the air.

Gubin awoke, sighed, and with his gnarled knuckles gave his puffy eyes a rub. Then he raised himself upon all-fours, and, crawling, much dishevelled with sleep, out of the watchman’s hut, snuffed the air (a process in which his movements approximated comically to those of a keen-nosed watch-dog). Finally he rose to his feet, and, in the act, shook one of the trees so violently as to cause a bough to shed its burden of ripe fruit, and disperse the apples hither and thither over the dry surface of the ground, or cause them to bury themselves among the long grass. Three of the juiciest apples he duly recovered, and, after examination of their exterior, probed with his teeth, while kicking away from him as many of the remainder as he could descry.

“Why spoil those apples?” I queried

“Oh, so you are NOT asleep?” he countered with a nod of his melon-shaped cranium. “As a matter of fact, a few apples won’t be missed, for there are too many of them about. My own father it was that planted the trees which have grown them.”

Then, turning upon me a keen, good-humoured eye, and chuckling, he added:

“What about that Nadezhda? Ah, she is a clever woman indeed! Yet I have a surprise in store for her and her lover.”

**“Why should you have?”**

**“Because I desire to benefit mankind at large” (this was said didactically, and with a frown). “For, no matter where I detect evil or underhandedness, it is my duty— I feel it to be my duty— to expose that evil, and to lay it bare. There exist people who need to be taught a lesson, and to whom I long to cry: ‘Sinners that you are, do you lead more righteous lives!’”**

**From behind some clouds the sun was rising with a disk as murky and mournful as the face of an ailing child. It was as though he were feeling conscious that he had done amiss in so long delaying to shed light upon the world, in so long dallying on his bed of soft clouds amid the smoke of the forest fire. But gradually the cheering beams suffused the garden throughout, and evoked from the ripening fruit an intoxicating wave of scent in which there could be distinguished also the bracing breath of autumn.**

**Simultaneously there rose into the sky, in the wake of the sun, a dense stratum of cloud which, blue and snow-white in colour, lay with its soft hummocks reflected in the calm Oka, and so wrought therein a secondary firmament as profound and impalpable as its original.**

**“Now then, Makar!” was Gubin’s command, and once more I posted myself at the bottom of the well. About three sazheni in depth, and lined with cold, damp mud to above the level of my middle, the orifice was charged with a stifling odour both of rotten wood and of something more intolerable still. Also, whenever I had filled the pail with mud, and then emptied it into the bucket and shouted “Right away!” the bucket would start swinging against my person and bumping it, as unwillingly it went aloft, and thereafter discharge upon my head and shoulders clots of filth and drippings of water—meanwhile screening, with its circular bottom, the glowing sun and now scarce visible stars. In passing, the spectacle of those stars’ waning both pained and cheered me, for it meant that for a companion in the firmament they now had the sun. Hence it was until my neck felt almost fractured, and my spine and the nape of my neck were aching as though clamped in a cast of plaster of paris, that I kept my eyes turned aloft. Yes, anything to gain a sight of the stars! From them I could not remove my vision, for they seemed to exhibit the heavens in a new guise, and to convey to me the joyful tidings that in the sky there was present also the sun.**

**Yet though, meanwhile, I tried to ponder on something great, I never failed to find myself cherishing the absurd, obstinate apprehension that soon the Birkins would leave their beds, enter the courtyard, and have Nadezhda betrayed to them by Gubin.**

**And throughout there kept descending to me from above the latter's inarticulate, as it were damp-sodden, observations.**

**"Another rat!" I heard him exclaim. "To think that those two fellows, men of money, should neglect for two whole years to clean out their well! Why, what can the brutes have been drinking meanwhile? Look out below, you!"**

**And once more, with a creaking of the pulley, the bucket would descend—bumping and thudding against the lining of the well as it did so, and bespattering afresh my head and shoulders with its filth. Rightly speaking, the Birkins ought to have cleared out the well themselves!**

**"Let us exchange places," I cried at length.**

**"What is wrong?" inquired Gubin in response**

**"Down here it is cold—I can't stand it any longer."**

**"Gee up!" exclaimed Gubin to the old horse which supplied the leverage power for the bucket; whereupon I seated myself upon the edge of the receptacle and went aloft, where everything was looking so bright and warm as to bear a new and unwontedly pleasing appearance.**

**So now it was Gubin's turn to stand at the bottom of the well. And soon, in addition to the odour of decay, and a subdued sound of splashing, and the rumblings and bumpings of the**



iron bucket against its chain, there began to come up from the damp, black cavity a perfect stream of curses.

“The infernal skinflints!” I heard my companion exclaim.

“Hullo, here is something! A dog or a baby, eh? The damned old barbarians!”

And the bucket ascended with, among its contents, a sodden and most ancient hat. With the passage of time Gubin’s temper grew worse and worse.

“If I SHOULD find a baby here,” next he exclaimed, “I shall report the matter to the police, and get those blessed old brothers into trouble.”

Each movement of the leathern-hided, wall-eyed steed which did our bidding was accompanied by a swishing of a sandy tail which had for its object the brushing away of autumn’s harbingers, the bluebottles. Almost with the tranquil gait of a religious did the animal accomplish its periodical journeys from the wall to the entrance gates and back again; after which it always heaved a profound sigh, and stood with its bony crest lowered.

Presently, from a corner of the yard that lay screened behind some rank, pale, withered, trampled herbage a door screeched. Into the yard there issued Nadezhda Birkin, carrying a bunch of keys, and followed by a lady who, elderly and rotund of figure, had a few dark hairs growing on her full and rather haughty upper lip. As the two walked towards the cellar (Nadezhda being clad only in an under-petticoat, with a chemise half-covering her shoulders, and slippers thrust on to bare feet), I perceived from the languor of the younger woman’s gait that she was feeling weary indeed.

“Why do you look at us like that?” her senior inquired of me as she drew level. And as she did so the eyes that peered at me from above the full and, somehow, displaced-looking cheeks bid in them a dim, misty, half-blind expression.

**“That must be Peter Birkin’s mother-in-law,” was my unspoken reflection.**

**At the door of the cellar Nadezhda handed the keys to her companion, and with a slow step which set her ample bosom swaying, and increased the disarray of the bodice on her round, but broad, shoulders, approached myself, and said quietly:**

**“Please open the gutter-slucice and let out the water into the street, or the yard will soon be flooded. Oh, the smell of it! What is that thing there? A rat? Oh batinshka, what a horrible mess!”**

**Her face had about it a drawn look, and under her eyes there were a pair of dark patches, and in their depths the dry glitter of a person who has spent a night of waking. True, it was a face still fresh of hue; yet beads of sweat were standing on the forehead, and her shoulders looked grey and heavy—as grey and heavy as unleavened bread which the fire has coated with a thin crust, yet failed to bake throughout.**

**“Please, also, open the wicket,” she continued. “And, in case a lame old beggar-woman should call, come and tell me. I am the Nadezhda Ivanovna for whom she will inquire. Do you understand?”**

**From the well, at this point, there issued the words:**

**“Who is that speaking?”**

**“It is the mistress,” I replied.**

**“What? Nadezhda? With her I have a bone to pick.”**

**“What did he say?” the woman asked tensely as she raised her dark, thinly pencilled brows, and made as though to go and lean over the well. Independently of my own volition I forestalled what Gubin might next have been going to say by remarking:**

**“I must tell you that last night he saw you walking in the garden here.”**

**“Indeed? “ she ejaculated, and drew herself to her full height. Yet in doing so she blushed to her shoulders, and, clapping plump hands to her bosom, and opening dark eyes to their fullest, said in a hasty and confused whisper as, again paling and shrinking in stature, she subsided like a piece of pastry that is turning heavy:**

**“Good Lord! WHAT did he see? . . . If the lame woman should call, you must not admit her. No, tell her that she will not be wanted, that I cannot, that I must not—But see here. Here is a rouble for you. Oh, good Lord!”**

**By this time even louder and more angry exclamations had begun to ascend from Gubin. Yet the only sound to reach my ears was the woman’s muttered whispering, and as I glanced into her face I perceived that its hitherto high-coloured and rounded contours had fallen in, and turned grey, and that her flushed lips were trembling to such an extent as almost to prevent the articulation of her words. Lastly, her eyes were frozen into an expression of pitiful, doglike terror.**

**Suddenly she shrugged her shoulders, straightened her form, put away from her the expression of terror, and said quietly, but incisively:**

**“You will not need to say anything about this. Allow me.”**

**And with a swaying step she departed—a step so short as almost to convey the impression that her legs were bound together. Yet while the gait was the gait of a person full of suppressed fury, it was also the gait of a person who can scarcely see an inch in advance.**

**“Haul away, you!” shouted Gubin.**

**I hauled him up in a state of cold and wet; whereafter he fell to stamping around the coping of the well, cursing, and waving his arms.**

**“What have you been thinking of all this time?” he vociferated. “Why, for ever so long I shouted and shouted to you!”**

**“I have been telling Nadezhda that last night you saw her walking in the garden.”**

**He sprang towards me with a vicious scowl.**

**“Who gave you leave to do so?” he exclaimed.**

**“Wait a moment. I said that it was only in a dream, that you saw her crossing the garden to the washhouse.”**

**“Indeed? And why did you do that? ”**

**Somehow, as, barelegged and dripping with mud, he stood blinking his eyes at me with a most disagreeable expression, he looked extremely comical.**

**“See here,” I remarked, “you have only to go and tell her husband about her for me to go and tell him the same story about your having seen the whole thing in a dream.”**

**“Why?” cried Gubin, now almost beside himself. Presently, however, he recovered sufficient self-possession to grin and ask in an undertone:**

**“HOW MUCH DID SHE GIVE YOU?”**

**I explained to him that my sole reason for what I had done had been that I pitied the woman, and feared lest the brothers Birkin should do an injury to one who at least ought not to be betrayed. Gubin began by declining to believe me, but eventually, after the matter had been thought out, said:**

**“Acceptance of money for doing what is right is certainly irregular; but at least is it better than acceptance of money for conniving at sin. Well, you have spoilt my scheme, young fellow. Hired only to clean out the well, I would nevertheless have cleaned out the establishment as a whole, and taken pleasure in doing so.”**

**Then once more he relapsed into fury, and muttered as he scurried round and round the well:**

**“How DARED you poke your nose into other people’s affairs? Who are YOU in this establishment?”**

**The air was hot and arid, yet still the sky was as dull as though coated throughout with the dust of summer, and, as yet, one could gaze at the sun’s purple, rayless orb without blinking, and as easily as one could have gazed at the glowing embers of a wood fire.**

**Seated on the fence, a number of rooks were directing intelligent black eyes upon the heaps of mud which lay around the coping of the well. And from time to time they fluttered their wings impatiently, and cawed.**

**“I got you some work,” Gubin continued in a grumbling tone, “and put heart into you with the prospect of employment. And now you have gone and treated me like —”**

**At this point I caught the sound of a horse trotting towards the entrance-gates, and heard someone shout, as the animal drew level with the house:**

**“YOUR timber too has caught alight!”**

**Instantly, frightened by the shout, the rooks took to their wings and flew away. Also, a window sash squeaked, and the courtyard resounded with sudden bustle—the culinary regions vomiting the elderly lady and the tousled, half-clad Jonah; and an open window the upper half of the red-headed Peter.**

**“Men, harness up as quickly as possible!” the latter cried, his voice charged with a plaintive note.**

**And, indeed, he had hardly spoken before Gubin led out a fat roan pony, and Jonah pulled from a shelter a light buggy or britchka. Meanwhile Nadezhda called from the veranda to Jonah:**

**“Do you first go in and dress yourself! ”**

**The elderly lady then unfastened the gates; whereupon a stunted, oldish muzhik in a red shirt limped into the yard with a foam-flecked steed, and exclaimed:**

**“It is caught in two places—at the Savelkin clearing and near the cemetery!”**

**Immediately the company pressed around him with groans and ejaculations, and Gubin alone continued to harness the pony with swift and dexterous hands—saying to me through his teeth as he did so, and without looking at anyone:**

**“That is how those wretched folk ALWAYS defer things until too late.”**

The next person to present herself at the entrance gates was a beggar-woman. Screwing up her eyes in a furtive manner, she droned:

“For the sake of Lord Je-e-esus!”

“God will give you alms! God will give you alms!” was Nadezhda’s reply as, turning pale, she flung out her arms in the old woman’s direction. “You see, a terrible thing has happened —our timber lands have caught fire. You must come again later.”

Upon that Peter’s bulky form (which had entirely filled the window from which it had been leaning), disappeared with a jerk, and in its stead there came into view the figure of a woman. Said she contemptuously:

“See the visitation with which God has tried us, you men of faint hearts and indolent hands!”

The woman’s hair was grey at the temples, and had resting upon it a silken cap which so kept changing colour in the sunlight as to convey to one the impression that her head was bonneted with steel, while in her face, picturesque but dark (seemingly blackened with smoke), there gleamed two pupil-less blue eyes of a kind which I had never before beheld.

“Fools,” she continued, “how often have I not pointed out to you the necessity of cutting a wider space between the timber and the cemetery?”

From a furrow above the woman’s small but prominent nose, a pair of heavy brows extended to temples that were silvered over. As she spoke there fell a strange silence amid which save for the pony’s pawing of the mire no sound mingled with the sarcastic reproaches of the deep, almost masculine voice.

**“That again is the mother-in-law,” was my inward reflection.**

**Gubin finished the harnessing—then said to Jonah in the tone of a superior addressing a servant:**

**“Go in and dress yourself, you object!”**

**Nevertheless, the Birkins drove out of the yard precisely as they were, while the peasant mounted his belathered steed and followed them at a trot; and the elderly lady disappeared from the window, leaving its panes even darker and blacker than they had previously been. Gubin, slip-slopping through the puddles with bare feet, said to me with a sharp glance as he moved to shut the entrance gates:**

**“I presume that I can now take in hand the little affair of which you know.”**

**“Yakov!” at this juncture someone shouted from the house.**

**Gubin straightened himself a la militaire.**

**“Yes, I am coming,” he replied.**

**Whereafter, padding on bare soles, he ascended the steps. Nadezhda, standing at their top, turned away with a frown of repulsion at his approach, and nodded and beckoned to myself,**

**“What has Yakov said to you? “ she inquired**

**“He has been reproaching me.”**



**“Reproaching you for what?”**

**“For having spoken to you.”**

**She heaved a sigh.**

**“Ah, the mischief-maker!” she exclaimed. “And what is it that he wants?”**

**As she pouted her displeasure her round and vacant face looked almost childlike.**

**“Good Lord!” she added. “What DO such men as he want?”**

**Meanwhile the heavens were becoming overspread with dark grey clouds, and presaging a flood of autumn rain, while from the window near the steps the voice of Peter’s mother-in-law was issuing in a steady stream. At first, however, nothing was distinguishable save a sound like the humming of a spindle.**

**“It is my mother that is speaking,” Nadezhda explained softly. “She’ll give it him! Yes, SHE will protect me!”**

**Yet I scarcely heard Nadezhda’s words, so greatly was I feeling struck with the quiet forcefulness, the absolute assurance, of what was being said within the window.**

**“Enough, enough! “ said the voice. “Only through lack of occupation have you joined the company of the righteous.”**

**Upon this I made a move to approach closer to the window; whereupon Nadezhda whispered:**

**“Whither are you going? You must not listen.”**

**While she was yet speaking I heard come from the window:**

**“Similarly your revolt against mankind has come of idleness, of lack of an interest in life. To you the world has been wearisome, so, while devising this revolt as a resource, you have excused it on the ground of service of God and love of equity, while in reality constituting yourself the devil’s workman.”**

**Here Nadezhda plucked at my sleeve, and tried to pull me away, but I remarked:**

**“I MUST learn what Gubin has got to say in answer.”**

**This made Nadezhda smile, and then whisper with a confiding glance at my face:**

**“You see, I have made a full confession to her. I went and said to her: ‘Mamenka, I have had a misfortune.’ And her only reply as she stroked my hair was, ‘Ah, little fool! ‘ Thus you see that she pities me. And what makes her care the less that I should stray in that direction is that she yearns for me to bear her a child, a grandchild, as an heir to her property.”**

**Next, Gubin was heard saying within the room:**

**“Whensoever an offence is done against the law I...”**

**At once a stream of impressive words from the other drowned his utterance:**

**“An offence is not always an offence of moment, since sometimes a person outgrows the law, and finds it too restrictive. No one person ought to be rated against another. For whom alone ought we to fear? Only the God in whose sight all of us have erred!”**

**And though in the elderly lady’s voice there was weariness and distaste, the words were spoken slowly and incisively. Upon this Gubin tried to murmur something or another, but again his utterance failed to edge its way into his interlocutor’s measured periods:**

**“No great achievement is it,” she said, “to condemn a fellow creature. For always it is easy to sit in judgment upon our fellows. And even if a fellow creature be allowed to pursue an evil course unchecked, his offence may yet prove productive of good. Remember how in every case the Saints reached God. Yet how truly sanctified, by the time that they did so reach Him, were they? Let this ever be borne in mind, for we are over-apt to condemn and punish!”**

**“In former days, Natalia Vassilievna, you took away from me my substance, you took my all. Also, let me recount to you how we fell into disagreement.”**

**“No; there is no need for that.”**

**“Thereafter, I ceased to be able to bear the contemplation of myself; I ceased to consider myself as of any value.”**

**“Let the past remain the past. That which must be is not to be avoided.”**

**“Through you, I say, I lost my peace of mind.”**

**Nadezhda nudged me, and whispered with gay malice:**

**“That is probably true, for they say that once he was one of her lovers.”**

**Then she recollected herself and, clapping her hands to her face, cried through her fingers:**

**“Oh good Lord! What have I said? No, no, you must not believe these tales. They are only slanders, for she is the best of women.”**

**“When evil has been done,” continued the quiet voice within the window, “it can never be set right by recounting it to others. He upon whom a burden has been laid should try to bear it. And, should he fail to bear it, the fact will mean that the burden has been beyond his strength.”**

**“It was through you that I lost everything. It was you that stripped me bare.”**

**“But to that which you lost I added movement. Nothing in life is ever lost; it merely passes from one hand to another—from the unskilled hand to the experienced— so that even the bone picked of a dog may ultimately become of value.”**

**“Yes, a bone—that is what I am.”**

**“Why should you say that? You are still a man.”**

**“Yes, a man, but a man useful for what?”**

**“Useful, even though the use may not yet be fully apparent.”**

**To this, after a pause, the speaker added:**

**“Now, depart in peace, and make no further attempt against this woman. Nay, do not even speak ill of her if you can help it, but consider everything that you saw to have been seen in a dream.”**

**“Ah!” was Gubin’s contrite cry. “It shall be as you say. Yet, though I should hate, I could not bear, to grieve you, I must confess that the height whereon you stand is—”**

**“Is what, Oh friend of mine?”**

**“Nothing; save that of all souls in this world you are, without exception, the best.”**

**“Yakov Petrovitch, in this world you and I might have ended our lives together in honourable partnership. And even now, if God be willing, we might do so.”**

**“No. Rather must farewell be said.”**

**All became quiet within the window, except that after a prolonged silence there came from the woman a deep sigh, and then a whisper of, “Oh Lord!”**

**Treading softly, like a cat, Nadezhda darted away towards the steps; whereas I, less fortunate, was caught by the departing Gubin in the very act of leaving the neighbourhood of the window. Upon that he inflated his cheeks, ruffled up his sandy hair, turned red in the face like a man who has been through a fight, and cried in strange, querulous, high-pitched accents:**

**“Hi! What were you doing just now? Long-legged devil that you are, I have no further use for you—I do not intend to work with you any more. So you can go.”**

**At the same moment the dim face, with its great blue eyes, showed itself at the window, and the stem voice inquired:**

**“What does the noise mean?”**

**“What does it mean? It means that I do not intend—”**

**“You must not, if you wish to create a disturbance, do it anywhere but in the street. It must not be created here.”**

**“What is all this? “ Nadezhda put in with a stamp of her foot. “What—”**

**At this point, the cook rushed out with a toasting-fork and militantly ranged herself by Nadezhda’s side, exclaiming:**

**“See what comes of not having a single muzhik in the house!”**

**I now prepared to withdraw, but, in doing so, glanced once more at the features of the elderly lady, and saw that the blue pupils were dilated so as almost to fill the eyes in their entirety, and to leave only a bluish margin. And strange and painful were those eyes—eyes fixed blindly, eyes which seemed to have strayed from their orbits through yielding to emotion and a consequent overstrain— while the apple of the throat had swelled like the crop of a bird, and the sheen of the silken head-dress become as the sheen of metal. Involuntarily, I thought to myself:**

**“It is a head that must be made of iron.”**

**By this time Gubin had penitently subsided, and was exchanging harmless remarks with the cook, while carefully avoiding my glance.**

**“Good day to you, madame,” at length I said as I passed the window.**

**Not at once did she reply, but when she did so she said kindly:**

**“And good day to YOU, my friend. Yes, I wish you good day.”**

**To which she added an inclination of the head which resembled nothing so much as a hammer which much percussion upon an anvil has wrought to a fine polish.**