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Warrior Woman by Nikolai Leskov: An Annotated Translation

by

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Моим бабушкам-воительницам.

-Л. В. А.

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INTRODUCTION

Lev Tolstoi wrote that Nikolai Leskov (1831-1895) "knew language to the point of performing tricks with it."[1] This distinguishes him from other writers of the 19th century for whom words were a means to another end. The materiality of Leskov's language is the substance of his work. His multi-layered and multi-colored words constitute a world of their own. Little has been done to convey the peculiarities of his style in English. In fact, such a task has been deemed both "beyond human reach"[2] and "insuperable"[3] by most of his translators and biographers. But this estimation focuses on the loss of meaning that inevitably accompanies translation rather than on the new possibilities inherent in the new language. Rendering Leskov in English is a balancing act which requires the careful weighing of the word as an independent object and its role in the wider text.

Discussions of the nature of translation, especially those concerning Russian literature, are often centered on a divisive debate between supporters of an extreme literalism and those of a more sense-based translation. This is, though, a false dichotomy. As Jorge Luis Borges said, both are:

> less important than the translator and his literary habits. To translate the spirit is so enormous and phantasmal an intent that it may well be innocuous; to translate the letter, a requirement so extravagant that there is no risk of its ever being attempted.[4]

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[1] As quoted by Hugh McLean, "Nikolai Leskov," in *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, ed. Olive Classe (London/Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2000), 829.
[2] Ibid., 830.
[3] David Magarshack, "Introduction," in *The Amazon and Other Stories* (London: George Allen & Unwin LTD, 1949), viii.
[4] Jorge Luis Borges, trans. E. Allen, S. J. Levine, and E. Weinberger. "The Translators of One Thousand and One Nights," in *Selected Non-Fictions*, ed. Eliot Weinberger (New York: Viking, 1999), 95.

The best translation will always seek to keep these two impossible poles in balance, choosing, at any given moment, to give more weight to the word or to the spirit, as the specific situation in the text and as the differing expressive capabilities of the languages involved dictate. Nonetheless, I have always sought to use, wherever possible, a more literal translation, to reveal the rich linguistic spectrum of Leskov's writing.

Leskov's writing shifts the center of gravity of a work from the plot to the verbal construction itself. Language isn't just for conveying the substance of the story; it *is* the substance of the story. He is a master of spoken, living, and non-standard language. The moment his characters open their mouths, we are able to pinpoint their places in society. Leskov's travels across Russia working as an agent for his uncle's firm familiarized him with different strata of society and provided a wealth of subject matter. Leskov kept extensive notebooks in which he recorded the linguistic oddities, idioms, and misused expressions around him.[5] In an oft-quoted musing, Leskov reflected on the importance of characterization through speech and, at the same time, laid the groundwork for the translation of his work:

> In order to think "figuratively" and write in the same way…each one of the writers' heroes must speak his own language, appropriate to his position. If these heroes use inappropriate language, only the devil can tell who they are and what their social position is. The pitching of the voice consists in the writer's ability to master the voice and language of his hero and not slip from the alto to the bass. In myself I have tried to develop this ability and, it seems, I have achieved the result that my priests speak a spiritual language, my nihilists a nihilist language, my peasants a peasant language…and so on…All of us: my heroes and I, myself, have our own voices...This is an indication of a writer's talent. But working it out is not only a matter of talent, but of great labor. The person lives through words and one must know what words each of us will use at what moment in our psychological lives...This colloquial, vulgar, and florid language which many pages of my works are written in was not invented by me, but overheard from the

[5] See T. S. Karskaiia. "Zametki o iazyke v zapisnykh knizhkakh Leskova," in *Neizdannyi Leskov*, eds. K. P. Bogaevskaia, O. E. Maiorova, and L. M. Rozenblium (Moskva: Nasledie, 1997) for notebook excerpts and analysis.

> peasant, from the half-educated…I spent many years carefully listening in on the phrases and pronunciation of Russian people from different layers of society and social positions. I have everyone speak *in their own way*, rather than in a literary way. It is more difficult for the writer to master the living language as opposed to the bookish language. That is why we have few artists of the word…[6]

Translating Leskov requires a special touch, not only because of the weight he places on language but because of his narrative technique as well. Leskov often wrote in a particular form of *skaz*, in which a narrator, independent of the author, relates a story in which he is also a character.[7] The narrative is placed in the mouth of this character who acts to frame an inner narrative. Unlike works that use the frame narrative as a structural device (for instance, the narrative flashbacks of Virgil's *Aeneid*), the frame narrative in Leskovian *skaz* is given in a linguistic register distinct from that of the author, and is, therefore, used to develop the characters.

In contrast to literary prose, *skaz* gives the impression of oral speech. The comparison has sometimes been made between Leskov's work and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as works that differentiate the frame from inner stories through the use of distinctive speech patterns. *Skaz* is more than just a frame narrative, though; in a work of Leskovian *skaz*, the frame story and the inner story can be differentiated solely by linguistic markers.[8] Both the inner and frame narrator's dialogue are marked by distinct phonetic, lexical, and syntactic stylization. This calls for the translator to attempt to differentiate the various voices, but most of the translations of Leskov that exist have

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[6] Faresov, A. I., *Protiv techeniia*: *N.S. Leskov*; *ego zhizn', sochineniia, polemika i vospominaniia o nem* (St. Peterburg: Tip. M. Merkusheva, 1904), 273. My modification of Hugh McLean's translation.
[7] See B. M. Eikhenbaum, "Leskov i sovremennaia proza," in *Literatura: teoriia, kritika, polemika* (Leningrad: Priboi, 1927), for a discussion of *skaz* in Leskov's writing.
[8] See Hugh McLean, "On the Style of a Leskovian Skaz," in *Harvard Slavic Studies*, 2, ed. H. G. Lunt (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1954), who sets "orality" and "individuation" as the defining features of Leskovian *skaz*.

muffled them, eliminating the heterogeneous voices which are pivotal to Leskov's work.[9] Because Leskov's language is so original, a translation often calls, first, for an initial transformation of his words into standard Russian, whether this process is conscious or not. It is understandable, then, that most translators have fallen into the trap of over-interpretation, constructing a fluid and smoothed-out version of a stylistically radical text.

Leskov's first extended work of *skaz*, *Warrior Woman* (1866), is anything but smooth. The unnamed narrator acquaints us with Domna Platonovna, the half-educated, provincial wielder of "Petersburg circumstances"—it is her sharp tongue that releases the gossip of St. Petersburg in a dazzling stream, rich in earthy colloquialisms, garbled idioms, highfalutin neologisms, and intonational coloration. He retells Domna Platonovna's dramatic fall from villain to literally shrunken victim, her language following suit, running the gamut from animated chatter to pitiful resignation. In the introduction to the only English translation to date, David Magarshack comments, "to the translator, Leskov presents many insuperable problems and any attempt to reproduce Leskov's own mannerisms and extravagances of style is bound to fail…"[10] If the translator sets the goal of conveying only content, the idiosyncrasies of the heroine's speech are lost. Though a departure from "normal" English is warranted in every translation, the inventiveness of Leskov's language makes this particularly necessary.

An effort must be made to maintain the distinctions not only in the language used by Domna Platonovna and the narrator, but within their speech as well. The many styles of speech in *Warrior Woman* deserve a closer look. The frame narrator's attempt at standard literary narration accentuates Domna Platonovna's substandard expression. She

[9] W. B. Edgerton's translations in *Satirical Stories* (New York: Pegasus, 1969) are an exception.

is his specimen, and, in much the same way as we imagine Leskov gathering material for his notebook, the narrator is interested in her misspeaking—when Domna Platonovna says she is "assidruous" in her work, the narrator adopts her phrase in an almost mocking manner. Although he is often more "correct" in his speech than Domna Platonovna, his style is not exactly literary. Aside from falling into Domna Platonovna's colloquial tone when he is conversing with her, his desire to be taken seriously as a neutral storyteller sometimes goes too far, and the result is often absurdly pretentious. For instance, in describing Domna Platonovna's irresistible physical features, the narrator states: "in a word, it was, for a lover of kisses, highly unmisfortunate to kiss Domna Platonovna, not only on an uninhabited island but in a populous city as well." His attempt to elevate his position in society by linguistically setting himself above his subject often leads him into ridiculous turns of phrase.

As the narrator notes, "Domna Platonovna was an artist—she took great pleasure in her own productions... to orchestrate, arrange, concoct…this was most important," and this interpretation of her actions can just as well be applied to her language.[11] Against the backdrop of the narrator's verbosity, Domna Platonovna gets right to the point, and her clipped phrases, although ungrammatically, often paint a clearer picture. She need only say that Lekanida Petrovna "*popshtykalis*"' with her husband and the reader immediately gathers that Lekanida is Polish (judging by the "psh" sound, commonly used by Russian speakers to mimic the sounds of the Polish language) and that their relationship did not come to a peaceful end (a *shtyk* is a bayonet). Unlike the narrator's long-winded

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[10] N. S. Leskov, trans. David Magarshack, *The Amazon and Other Stories* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1949), viii.
[11] See V. Iu. Troitskii, *Leskov—khudozhnik* (Moskva: Nauka, 1974), 174-186 for a discussion of Domna Platonovna's language.

sentences, Domna Platonovna's storytelling is as "abruptive" as her life. Domna Platonovna's telling of Lekanida Petrovna's escape is a case in point: "…with that very word—whoosh to the staircase, without anything, just like she was sitting, and wa-wa-wa: howls with all her might. She humiliated me! I go quick and into my nook; he also goes for his hat and without a trace." There is a speed to her narration; her sentences are incomplete, words are omitted or replaced with onomatopoeias and her thoughts are as jumbled as her work schedule. As Domna Platonovna says, running from one appointment to another, "people are waiting, in seven different places they're waiting." Her personality comes through in her storytelling technique; a fluid translation would suppress the busybody's vigor.

Domna Platonovna is a product of class displacement, and others' patterns are projected onto her own. She is a half-educated and provincial middle-aged woman who has worked her way into the milieu of St. Petersburg high society, living vicariously through its aristocrats. Her speech is as uniquely blended as her background. Although she is clearly uneducated (the phonological mistakes, lanp for lamp [*lanpa* for *lampa*], flurniture for furniture [*nebel'* for *mebel'*], make it clear that speaking rather than reading has been her primary mode of language acquisition), Domna Platonovna's speech spans a wide spectrum: from the vehement denunciations of Lekanida Petrovna which bring out her provincial Mtsensk roots to the highfalutin malapropisms ("I had invited such a grandezvous…") which reveal her social aspirations. Charles Isenberg wrote, "she is the medium through which all social levels are displayed."[12] We see not only an incongruous unification of Mtsensk's artisan class with the capital's aristocracy in one person, but a

[12] Charles Isenberg, "Deconstructing Domna Platonovna," in *Russian Review* 43, no. 4 (1984): 343.

preposterously original sharp tongue which brings these diverse strains of language together. It is important to note that while Domna Platonovna's speech follows established substandard speech patterns, it is interspersed with a language she did not pick up from the Mtsensk merchants—one that is uniquely her own. For this translation, I have made use of equally common colloquial English phrases (boughten, thefted, you ast me) but Domna Platonovna's invented speech also required the creation of entirely new English phrases (swindle you over, ratitude, eyekeepingly). Domna Platonovna's style is inconsistent. It varies from an attempt at standard speech to one that works within the limits of colloquial speech to her own original language that jolts "proper" Russian (and English, in translation).

While I have tried to stay faithful to these distinctions, translation never results in a one-to-one reproduction of the original, nor should it aspire to. When stumbling upon Domna Platonovna's speech distortions, at first glance, the reader may not even notice them. A perfect rendering in English would be equally subtle. But, working within the realms of a new language, a translation cannot always place the same neologism in the same place. Rather than treating this as a loss, the translator can take advantage of the possibilities offered by a new language. The translator must be vigilant for opportunities where a *domnaesque* distortion can be added even when no such distortion exists in the original. Whereas a standard idiom meaning "make sure you don't have regrets" is used in the original, I opt for "don't start spilling your milk"—a mangled version of "there's no use crying over spilled milk," knowing that Domna Platonovna is prone to such turns of phrase. After all, there will always be instances where a particular distortion is untranslatable and, in a sense, the translator works to "make up for this."

Domna Platonovna's manner of speaking is so linguistically rich that only an exhaustive line by line analysis could do justice to the work's intricacies. For the purposes of this translation, I have highlighted some of the representative linguistic distortions in the endnotes. Keeping in mind that endnotes can sometimes distract from the work, this translation is not dependent on them. It can, hopefully, be read either with or without them.

Ultimately, the tale is told by Domna Platonovna, but the narrative must pass through Leskov and the narrator first, both of whom set the stage for her account. Each retelling manipulates and distorts the language of the narrative, while simultaneously giving it the stylized touch that is the substance of the work. Domna Platonovna's retelling of Petersburg circumstances is tinted by her manner of speaking. Benjamin described the oral tradition preserved in Leskov's writing as the "slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers" aiming at revealing the perfect narrative "through the layers of a variety of retellings."[13] The reader is in the company of the many storytellers who have left their mark on the tale. Within this structure, a new translation could, perhaps, be viewed as another linguistic layer.

[13] Walter Benjamin, trans Harry Zohn, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 93.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Nikolai Semionovich Leskov (1831-1895) was born in the village of Gorokhovo in the Orel Province with an unusually diverse ancestral background for the time: his father came from a line of priests and his mother was of impoverished gentry stock. His wide range of social experience set him apart from most Russian writers. Apart from a few years in the Orel Gymnasium which he abandoned at age fifteen, he did not have much of a formal education. After losing his inherited property, Leskov moved to Kiev, where he worked in civil service and took advantage of his contacts to broaden his intellectual horizons. In 1857, working as an agent in his British uncle's firm, he traveled extensively and gained a deep understanding of the Russian people. He later drew on these experiences in his writing. In 1861, he moved to St. Petersburg to begin his career as a journalist and writer.

Despite his popularity with the middle-class intelligentsia, Leskov was largely ignored by the publishers and critics during his lifetime. In the polarized sociopolitical climate following the reforms of the 1860s, he was hurt by his lack of affiliation. Leskov was rejected by the radicals and later broke with the conservatives. Toward the end of his life, his work acquired a satirical bite as he struggled with the censors. The Soviet regime considered him anti-progressive and certainly did not approve of his advocating a personal take on Christianity. Leskov continues to be undervalued in the West, where a dedicated translator is yet to undertake the project of tackling his multi-faceted, colorful language.

Cathedral Folk (1872), *The Sealed Angel* (1873), *The Enchanted Wanderer* (1873), and *Lefty* (1881) are among Leskov's highly esteemed works. *Warrior Woman* (1866) is his first extended work of *skaz* and, following *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* (1865), was originally planned as part of a series on women from the Orel Province.

NOTE ON NAMES, DATES, AND TRANSLITERATION

All dates are in the Julian calendar (Old Style), used widely in Western Europe until roughly the 16th century and in Russia until soon after the Revolution, when the Gregorian (New Style) calendar was officially adopted. In the 19th century, Old Style dates lag twelve days behind their Gregorian equivalent.

In the text of *Warrior Woman*, I have transliterated Russian words and names in the most common anglicized form to facilitate correct pronunciation. In all other parts (including the endnotes to the text), I have used the Library of Congress transliteration system.

Russian names are comprised of a first name, patronymic, and family name. The first name and patronymic are used in combination to refer to and address people in formal situations. The patronymic is formed by taking the father's first name and adding one of two different endings, according to the person's gender. For example, Vera Ivanovna's father was Ivan. If she had a brother named Stepan, he would be addressed as Stepan Ivanovich in formal settings. First names can also be modified to make diminutives (Verochka) or show familiarity (Stepka).

NOTE ON THE TITLE AND TEXT

Voitel'nitsa was first published in 1866 in *Otechestvennye Zapiski* (*Notes of the Fatherland*) under the pseudonym M. Stebnitskii. David Magarshack titled his 1949 translation *The Amazon* and Hugh McLean referred to the work as *Battle-Axe*. Neither option is fitting: the former has unrelated overtones (mythical etc.) and the latter has an unnecessarily pejorative ring. I chose *Warrior Woman* to convey the multiple layers buried in the word *Voitel'nitsa*—the name given to Domna Platonovna by the narrator, who depicts her as both a villain and a victim.

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WARRIOR WOMAN

A Sketch

Hitherto my life has been
A school of morals
And death is but a new lesson.[1]
-A. N. Maykov

CHAPTER ONE

"Hey! Now do me a favor, my dear fellow, and don't go trying to start an argument with me!"

"Since when can't I argue, Domna Platonovna? Come on now, really, have you fallen into the habit of stopping everyone from letting out a single peep against you?"

"No, it's not me, it's all of you who've allowed such a thing to become habit, who're ready to argue about everything! Just hold on a moment, my friend, live as long as I have, then you can go ahead and argue; but if a person has lived little, or doesn't know all the Petersburg circumstances well, then my suggestion to him is to sit and listen to what others, who are a bit older and understand these circumstances, are saying."

Thus my good friend, Domna Platonovna, the lace-seller, would stop me every time I, in any way, disagreed with her opinion about society and people. In the same way, she would stop every one of her acquaintances if one of them dared to even express some observation of their own, that ran contrary to Domna Platonovna's convictions. And Domna Platonovna's social circle was most extensive, even "unbounded," according to her own expression, and many-calibered too. Stewards, counts, princes, butlers, innkeepers, actors, and eminent merchants—in a word, Domna Platonovna had acquaintances of every rank and breed, but when it came to the female sex, well, that just goes without saying. Domna Platonovna never even bothered to brag about the female sex.

"The female sex," she would say when it would come up, "here's how well I know it!"

Saying this, Domna Platonovna would squeeze her fist and display it.

"Here it is," she would say, "here is where I've got the entire female sex, all sitting in the clasp[2] of my hand."

So extensive and diverse was the social circle she had composed in a city like Petersburg, that it was the object of great astonishment for many, and these many would ask with a touch of reverential fear:

"Domna Platonovna! How do you manage, dear?"

"What do you mean?"

"You mean to say you're acquainted with everyone?"

"Yes, my friend, with everyone; almost decidedly everyone."

"But by what circumstance and for what reason…"

"Through my simplicity of character alone, decidedly my simplicity alone," Domna Platonovna would answer.

"As if that could happen through simplicity alone!"

"Yes, my friend, everyone loves me because I'm just remarkably simple, and through my simplicity of character and through my kindity, I've seen all kinds of suffering in this world; I've taken a lot of insults; I've suffered a lot of slander of all sorts and, let me tell you, I was beat up, more than once even, well, not beat up all that much, but, in the end of it all, people love me."

"Well, at least you know the world so well."

“Well, my friend, I know this foul world, I know, most definitely I know it. In my little palm right now, it seems, I can see every scoundrel. But, let me just tell you once again—no…,” Domna Platonovna would add, becoming self conscious and thoughtful.

“What is it now?”

“It’s this, my friend,” she would answer, sighing, “it’s that nowadays they’re always thinking up something new, and every person just becomes more and more sly.”

“In what way and by what means do they become sly, Domna Platonovna?”

“They get so sly that nowadays they, the people, I mean, that one minute you think you got ‘em by the head and they go and come at you with their feet. It’s surprising even, by God, just how many lies and fibs they spread: one goes and makes things up and the other wants to outdo the first.”

“It’s not as though there are only lies in the world, Domna Platonovna, is it?”

“Come on, there’s no point in arguing with me: in your opinion, what’s the current world based on?—on lies and cunning.”

“But, after all, there are good people in this world.”

“In the graveyards, among the parents, maybe there, there are good ones; but, you know, there ain’t no use in ‘em; and what do we get from all the living scum—only one thing: disgust and nothin’ else.”

“Really now, Domna Platonovna, in your opinion, we’ve got one trickster after another and you can’t trust anyone?”

"Well, my dear fellow, it's not prohibit for someone to trust, is it? Do yourself a favor, if you're so inclined, and trust someone. I, well, I trusted the general's wife, Schimmelpfennig; I trusted her to the tune of seven yards[3] of lace, and, so yesterday I come and I say: 'Your Excellency, may I receive that little sum of owed money,' and she says: 'I have already given it to you.' 'Certainly not,' I say, 'I never got this money from you,' and what a scream she leashes out: 'How dare you answer me in that manner, you louse.' she says. 'Out with her!' she says. Right that second, the footman takes me by the arm and out into the sunlight with me, and I even left behind a little piece of lace there (luckily a cheapstake one). That's what you get for trustin' people."

"So what," I said, "that's only one that's like that."

"One! No, my dear fellow, not one, their name, you know, is legion.[4] In olden times, when the noblemen had serfs, in those times, theft was more a thing of the lower classes, but nowadays, since there are no more serfs, turns out the masters themself don't have the least bit of aversion to it. It's plain to everyone who copped[5] the diamond carcanet from the ball…Yes, dearie, yes; nowadays no one loses the chance. Or take Avdotia Petrovna Karaulova,[6] take a good look at her, is she not a fine lady? But she stole a collar from me at the dacha,[7] right in front of my eyes."

"What do you mean she stole?" I said. What are you saying! Dear Domna Platonovna, what are you saying? How could a lady steal?"

"Quite easily: she stole just like anyone else steals. And get this, I see her do it and that very same minute, kindly, politisely[8] I say to her: 'Excuse me, my dear lady, I say, did I let a little collar drop here, because one little collar is missing here,' I say.

Then, in response to these words, she goes bam on my exterior and stamps me. ‘Remove her from my sight!’ she says to the footman; and just like that, they remove me. So I say to the footman: ‘Kind sir! You yourself are a servant,’ I say, ‘judge for yourself, my pet, I say, it’s mine, you see, surely I feel bad!’ And then he gives me this for an answer: ‘So what, you feel bad,’ he says, ‘when it’s a habit she has!’ Well, there you’ve got the tale. With her rank, she allows herself all kinds of habits, but you, a poor person, just stay quiet.”

“And what do you conclude from all this, Domna Platonovna?”

“And what ought I conclude, dear fellow! It’s not my business to conclude anyone when I myself am excluded; but it’s best you don’t start arguing with me about the fact that people are tricksters and have all taken to trickery, because, I, thank God, I just need one quick look at a person nowadays and right away I see what they compose.”

And if you just tried to contradict Domna Platonovna after all that! No, it wouldn’t matter what kind of a dialectician you were, Domna Platonovna would out-argue you anyway; you can’t do anything to convince her. Save one thing, perhaps: if you were to give an order to have her removed, well, then that’s another story, otherwise, she would definitely out-argue you.

CHAPTER TWO

I certainly should acquaint my readers with Domna Platonovna in as much detail as possible. Domna Platonovna is not very tall, not tall at all; actually, she's very short, but everyone takes her for a large person. This optical illusion occurs because Domna Platonovna is, as they say, wider than she is tall, and what she lacks in height, she makes up for in girth. She doesn't boast of good health, although no one recalls her being ill and she strides around looking like a mountain of strength; her bosom alone is frightening, even, but Domna Platonovna herself just complains and complains.

"I'm a full-bodied woman, of course," she says, "but I'm not at all as robust as everyone else and my slumber is a most wretched deep slumber—like Mathusala.[9] It'll blow me out the moment I lie down, and you can take me out and put me up as a scarecrow for the sparrows, I won't feel a thing 'til I've slept my fill."

Domna Platonovna regarded her mighty slumber as one of the ailments of her full body and, as we will see below, she suffered quite a few sorrows and misfortunes as a result.

Domna Platonovna took great pleasure in seeking medical advice and describing her infirmities in detail, but she did not take any medicine, and believed only in Haarlem Drops,[10] calling them "harem drops," and always carried a vial of them in the right pocket of her silk capote. Domna Platonovna's age, according to her own testimony, always hovered around forty-five, but judging by her vigorous appearance, you wouldn't think she was more than forty. Domna Platonovna's hair, at the time of our first acquaintance, was dark brown—there was not a single gray

strand to be found. Her face was white; her cheeks were covered with a healthy blush, which, by the way, Domna Platonovna was not satisfied with, and she'd buy special French blotting paper[11] in the Arcade, in the upper gallery there, which she would use to strengthen her natural color, which had not yet given in to sorrow or the Finnish winds and fogs. Domna Platonovna's eyebrows looked as if they had been laid down with black satin: they were unspeakably black and sparkled with an unnatural sparkle because Domna Platonovna outlined them with black fixative[12] and shaped them with her fingers into thin lines. Her eyes were just like two black plums, sprinkled with invigorating morning dew. One of our mutual friends, the Turk Ispulat, who had been brought here as a captive during the Crimean War, could never calmly behold the eyes of Domna Platonovna. He would shiver as though possessed and exclaim:

"Ah, what Greece eyes, completely Greece!"

Another in Domna Platonovna's place, of course, would consider this opinion an honor; but Domna Platonovna never gave in to this Turkish flattery and would always passionately stand up for her impeccably Russian lineage.

"You lie, you unbaptized swine! You lie, you potbellied frog!—she would merrily answer the Turk. "I'm of the best stock, in fact, Greeks've never been introduced into where I come from and they've never even been there."

Domna Platonovna's nose was not a nose at all but a button, not big in the least, but slender and straight, as sometimes appears only by mistake on the Oka and the Zusha.[13] Her mouth was a little bit oversized: you could see that she used to eat with a round spoon in her childhood; but it was so pleasant, so fresh, the contour was regular, the lips—scarlet, teeth—as if carved out of a young turnip—in a word, it was,

for a lover of kisses, highly unmisfortunate to kiss Domna Platonovna, not only on an uninhabited island but in a populous city as well. But the greatest charm of Domna Platonovna's face was, without a doubt, her peach-like chin and overall expression, which was so soft and childlike, that if, one day, you were overtaken by a desire to ponder how it could be that even while this deep well of simple-heartedness spreads over the face of Domna Platonovna, talk of people's malice and anger never leaves her tongue? Then you would certainly have to say to yourself: why, that's odd, Domna Platonovna, may you be cursed, 'cause the devil knows what kind of problems have already been brought on me by your good graces!

Domna Platonovna's temperament was most sociable, merry, kind, slow to be offended, and naively superstitious. Her character was soft and compliant; her nature, in essence, was honest and fairly direct, though of course, being a Russian person, she had a touch of slyness to her. Hustle and bustle was the sphere that Domna Platonovna never left. She was eternally fussing about, eternally running somewhere, thinking about something, figuring something out, or bringing it to fruition.

"In the world, my lonely little soul lives alone, but all the same, to feed myself, I live the most abruptive life," said Domna Platonovna. "I dash about like a cat let out of a bag; [14] and if not one then another incessantly catches me by the tail."

"But you can't simply wrap up everything all at once," you'd say to her.

"Well, everything or not, what does it really matter," she'd answer, "but even so, I'll tell you, it's all just so terrible, burdensome, really, but, farewell for now—goodbye: people are waiting, in seven different places they're waiting," and she'll actually begin to run, just like that she'll trot off!

Domna Platonovna, more often than not, would herself acknowledge that she did not always labor solely for her own subsistence and that her burdensome labors and her abruptive life could have been significantly eased without any damage to her direct interests; but she simply couldn't contain her need to bustle about.

"I'm assidruous[15] in my work; my heart leaps as soon as I see there's work to be done."

Domna Platonovna was assidruous only in hustles and bustles and not in payment. Her attitude towards her earnings, on the contrary, was sometimes a kind of surprising indifference.

"He cheated me, that barbarian!" or "she cheated me, that ogress!" used to be the only thing you heard from her and then you take a look and there she is again offering her services to that very same barbarian or that very same ogress, already predicting to herself that they would, without a doubt, gyp her again.

Domna Platonovna's hustles and bustles were of the greatest variety. Officially she was only a lace-seller, by which I mean, artisan women and poor wives of merchants and priests "from her own place" would send her a variety of collars, lace, and cuffs. She sold these creations from door to door around Petersburg and around the dachas in the summers, and she would send the collected money, deducting her commission and pluses,[16] "to her own place." But, apart from the sale of lace, Domna Platonovna had other private dealings, in the handling of which, lace and collars played only the most foot-in-the-door kind of role.

Domna Platonovna arranged marriages, matched eligible bachelors to brides, brides to eligible bachelors, found buyers for furniture, for worn women's dresses;

she would raise money with and without collateral; she found placements for all kinds, from governesses to yard-keepers to footmen; she would bring notes to the most well-known salons and boudoirs which the city's post office wouldn't even dare to penetrate, and she would bring answers even from the ladies who had an air of Twelfthtide cold and piety.

But, despite all her adroitness and connections, interestingly enough, Domna Platonovna didn't cover herself with gold and silver. She lived comfortably, dressed, in her own words, "loftily,"[17] didn't refuse herself her mite, but even so, didn't have money because, first of all, she overdid her assidruousness in these dealings and good people often tricked her, and then, strange things would happen with her money itself.

Most importantly, Domna Platonovna was an artist—she took great pleasure in her own productions. Even though she'd say all her labors were for her daily bread, such a claim was not really justified. Domna Platonovna loved her pursuit like an artist: to orchestrate, arrange, concoct, and admire the undertakings of her own hands—this was most important and, as a result, money and other gains were overlooked, which would not have been missed by a more realistic personage for any reason at all.

Domna Platonovna fell into her rut inadvertently. At first she meekly dragged her lace around and didn't even dream of coupling any other enterprise with this trade; but the magical capital transformed the crass dame from the Mtsensk district into the refined factotum that I knew as the precious Domna Platonovna.

Domna Platonovna began to see into every corner and get into everything. It turned out that not to get in wherever possible became even impossible for Domna

Platonovna: always with an embroidered gripsack[18] with lace over her little arm, herself in a new silk capote; on her neck a lace collar with large tapering points, on her shoulders a sky-blue French shawl with white fringe; and in her free hand a Dutch handkerchief—white as froth, on her head either a violet or cerise headdress[19] of *gros de Naples*, well, in a word, a charm of a woman. And her face—meekness and piety itself! Domna Platonovna knew how to control her face any way she pleased.

"Without this," she would say, "it is impossible to go about in our line of business: you can't show any sign that you're an angel or a devil."[20]

What is more, even Domna Platonovna's manner was delicate. Not for anything would she say in a parlor, as others would, "I was, say, in a public bathhouse," but instead, she'd pronounce, "Yesterday, sir, I had the fortune to attend an incorporeal masquerade"; about a pregnant woman, she'd never blurt out, like others, that she is, as they say, pregnant; instead, she'd pronounce: "she's in pursuit of her matrimonial interest," and so on.

In general, this was a lady with quite the manner, and, where appropriate, she knew how to set the tone with her educatedness. But, despite all this, it's necessary to tell the truth: Domna Platonovna never got carried away and was, as they call it, a patriot to her motherland. In keeping with the narrowness of Domna Platonovna's political horizons, her patriotism itself was very narrow, that is, she felt herself obligated to praise the entire Oryol province and to be amicable and display kindness towards every person "from her own place" in every way possible.

"You tell me," she would say, "what does this really mean: I know, after all, that our Orlovians are the biggest robbers and swindlers in the whole entire world;

but, no matter how much of a scoundrel from our own place you are, even if you were worse than the pop-eyed Turk Ispulat, I won't abandon you and I won't be ready to exchange you for the most honest person of another province."

I didn't know how to answer this. We would both simply be surprised:

"Why is this, anyway?"

CHAPTER THREE

My acquaintance with Domna Platonovna began on a trivial pretext. For a time, I rented a room from a colonel's wife who spoke six European languages, not counting Polish, which mixed into all of them. Domna Platonovna knew an unbelievable number of these colonels' wives in Petersburg and arranged very diverse sorts of things for almost all of them: affairs of the heart, or affairs of the purse and, jointly, affairs of the purse-heart type and the heart-purse type. My landlady was, by the way, really a highly educated woman, she knew society, held herself as properly as could be, knew how to show respect for the most basic human virtues in people, read a lot, would go into a genuine state of rapture in reading the poets and loved to declaim lines from Malczewski's *Maria*:[21]

> *Bo na tym świecie śmierć wszystko zmiecie,*
> *Robak się legnie i w bujnym kwiecie.*[*]

I saw Domna Platonovna for the first time at my landlady's. It all started one evening; I was sitting and drinking tea while my landlady was reciting:

> *Bo na tym świecie śmierć wszystko zmiecie,*
> *Robak się legnie i w bujnym kwiecie.*

Domna Platonovna walked in, prayed to God, bowed to every side while still in the doorway (even though there was no one in the room other than the two of us), placed her gripsack on the table and said:

"Well, may peace be with you and may I be with you!"

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[*] Because death will destroy everything in this world,
Even in a splendid flower there nests a worm. [Translation of Leskov's note.]

This time, Domna Platonovna had on a brown silk capote, a collar with lapels, a sky-blue French shawl and a cerise headdress of *gros de Naples*, and, with this, my readers can imagine her entire uniform in their artistic imaginations.

My landlady was very happy to see her, but at the same time, it was as if she blushed a little when she appeared, but nonetheless she received her in a friendly manner, although very tactfully.

"How come you haven't been around in a while, Domna Platonovna?" the landlady asked her.

"Oh, just lots of work, dearie," Domna Platonovna answered, sitting down and looking me over.

"What work do you have!"

"Well, you know, I have this here, then some other client there, and a third, everyone rearin' to go, gotta please everyone, you see, that's how the work is. But the work you ast me about, that one, well, you remember…" Domna Platonovna started, slurping her tea. "The other day I was…and I was talking to…"

I got up, excused myself, and left.

That was the extent of my meeting with Domna Platonovna. It would seem quite difficult for an acquaintance to form based solely on that, but it formed nonetheless.

Once after this meeting, I was sitting at home when I heard a knock, knock, knock on my door.

"Come in," I answered without turning around. I heard something wide crawl in, ruffling about. I glanced over—it was Domna Platonovna.

“Where’s the icon here, my dear sir?” she said.

“There,” I said, “in the nook, above the shutter.”

“Is it a Polish icon or is it our own, Christian?” she asked, quietly starting to raise her hand.

“The icon appears to be Russian,” I answered.

Domna Platonovna, holding her hand over her forehead, scrutinized the icon for a long time, and finally waved her hand as if to say: “who cares!” and prayed.

“And my little bundle,” she said, looking about, “where can I put it?”

“Put it wherever you like,” I said.

“Right here,” she answered, “I’ll put it on the couch here for now.”

She put her gripsack on the couch and sat herself down.

“This dear guest,” I thought to myself, “doesn’t stand on ceremony.”

“Such tiny icons have become so fashionable,” started Domna Platonovna, “that you can’t even make anything out. All those aristocrats’ve got nothin’ but tiny icons. This is no good…no good at all.”

“And what is it you don’t like about them?”

“What else: it means they’re hiding God so that there’s no way to find Him.”

I remained quiet.

“Obviously,” continued Domna Platonovna, “the icon must be of appropriate size.”

“What size, then, Domna Platonovna, is appropriate for an icon?” I said, and suddenly, you see, I began to feel like an old friend of hers.

“What do you mean!” began Domna Platonovna, “just go and take a look for yourself at the merchants, my dear friend: they always have an icon in its proprietous form, an iconical-lamp, shining…all as it ought to be. Noblemen, though, it’s like they’re runnin’ from God, and so God is further and further away from them. Recently, I was at a holy day hosted by a general’s wife…and in front of me her valet comes in and reports that the clergymen have arrived, he says.

“‘Refuse them,’ she says,

“‘Why,’ I say to her, ‘don’t refuse them—it’s a sin.’

“‘I don’t like priests,’ she says.

“Well, that was her will, of course; go ahead, refuse, only you don’t like the one sent to you; then the one who did the sendin’ won’t love you.”

“Look how reasonable you are, Domna Platonovna!” I said.

“But you can’t do without reasoning these days, my friend,” she answered. “So now, what do you pay for this room?”

“Twenty-five rubles.”

“Expensive.”

“It seems that way to me too.”

“So why don’t you move, then?” she said.

“Eh,” I said, “I don’t want to bother.”

“Because the landlady’s pretty?”

“Come on now. Why are you going on about my landlady?” I said.

“Hush! Go and tell someone else, brother, not me; I know what scoundrels you all are.”

"Not bad," I thought, "you express yourself quite nicely, my dear guest."

"They're pretty crafty, those Polish women, by the way," Domna Platonovna yawned and continued while making the sign of the cross over her mouth,[22] "they do this with a purpose."

"You are wrong to think that of my landlady, Domna Platonovna: she's an honorable woman."

"Look here, my friend, it'd be no dishonor to her, she's a young person."

"Your speeches, Domna Platonovna, are smart and correct," I said, "but I have nothing to do with all that."

"Well, so you said, but you're over your head; I know these Petersburg circumstances, so there's no need for you to go on explaining them to me."

"I see, my dear," I thought, "there's no way to dissuade you."

"Go on helping her, go and pay for the apartment," said Domna Platonovna, nearing down closer at me and hitting me lightly on the shoulder.

"Well, how could I not be paying?" I said.

"Just like that—you know, when you men net us women, you put everything on our accounts."

"Come on, what are you saying!" I stopped Domna Platonovna.

"Yes, my friend, our kind of woman's especially Russian, she's so dumb when it comes to love; 'here, my falcon, this is for you,' she's ready to cut the very meat off her bones and give it to him; but your kind, those wastrels, they use her."

"Come on now, Domna Platonovna, how could I be her lover?"

"Now, you take pity on her. If you just take a look at it, she's pitiful, my God, our kind is pitiful, my friend! Oh how our kind should be beaten and torn to pieces so that she'll keep her distance from all you ruffians. And how is it, tell me, that it's created so intricate, that the whole world is filled to the brim with these spionages, these men! Who needs them? And then you take a look again and everything's so boring without them; and sometimes, as if something's missing. Like a hole in the hand, that's how much we need 'em!"[23] Domna Platonovna got angry, spit, and continued: "Once I go visit the colonel's wife, Domukhovskaya…did you ever know her?"

"No," I said, "I didn't."

"A beauty."

"I don't know her."

"One of the Polish girls."

"What are you thinking," I said, "that I know all the Polish girls in Petersburg?"

"But she's not really a Pole, she's baptized to our faith!"

"Who would know this Mrs. Domukhovskaya, who's not really Polish, but of our faith. I don't, Domna Platonovna," I said, "I definitely don't know her."

"Her husband's a doctor."

"But she's a colonel's wife?"

"And does this surprise you or something?"

"Well, whatever," I said, "what's next then?"

"Well, she poleacksed her own husband."

"What do you mean poleacksed?"[24]

"Well, as if you don't know, like when she didn't get her away in something or other and then, axe-axe, and they go their separate ways. That's exactly what this Lekanidka[25] did.

"'He's got quite the character, Domna Platonovna,' she says."

I listened and went on shaking my head.

"'I just can't take his tantrums,' she says to me, 'my nerves can't take it,' she says."

Again I shook my head. "What is this," I think, "they're hysterical chimerical, and how come we don't have these hysterics?"

"And then a month or so has gone by, and I look and look and then I see: her ladyship rented an apartment: 'I'm gonna get some lodgers,' she says.

"'Oh, so that's how it is,' I think, 'well, if you're sick of riding the gravy boat, go jump in with the sharks;[26] didn't know how to live under your husband's tail,[27] then live under your own: you're gonna beg and get egged,[28] and you'll eat it and bless it, even.'

"In a month, I go visit her again, I see that she has a tenant now, he's quite an impressive person too; he's skinny, though, and a little pockmarkered.

"'Ah,' she says, 'Domna Platonovna, look at what a tenant God has sent to me—he's delicate, educated, and so kind, he takes care of all my business.'

"'Well, dearie, all of 'em have learned to delicate themself now, but when he's climbed into all your dealings, what's more lawful than that?'

"I'm making fun of her with this, but I look and, puff-puff, her face flames beet red.

"Well, my judgement's like this: all of 'em do as they know, and if they're kind, then intelligent people won't judge and God'll forgive.

"Then I visited some two more times and every time I find her: sitting in her box-room crying.

"'What is it, mumsie,' I say, 'that made you wash yourself with salt water so early?'

"'Ah, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'my grief is so deep,' and she falls quiet.

"'What is all this grief?' I say, 'Did you swallow a live fish?'

"'No,' she says, 'nothing like that, thank God.'

"'Well, if not,' I say, 'then everything else is nonsense.'

"'I don't have a single half-kopeck.'

"'Well, this is really rotten,' I think, but I know that you shouldn't upset a person at a time like this.

"'There's no money before money,' I say. 'But what about your lodgers?' I ask.

"'One of them paid,' she says, 'but the other two rooms stand empty.'

"'Oh, in your case,' I say, 'this abomination of desolation[29] is worst of all. And your little friend?' You know, I just ask her without ceremony. She stays quiet, crying. I start to pity her: I see she's a weak, senseless woman.

"'What, if he's such an impudent fellow,' I say, 'then out with him.'

"She cries at hearing these words, even nibbing on the ends of her wet handkerchief with her teeth.

"'There's no good in crying,' I say, 'and torturing yourself because of those ruffians is also unworth it, and as for refusing him, there's nothing to talk about, but we'll find you such a man that you'll get both love and help; you'll stop chattering your teeth and torturing yourself.' She starts waving her hands: 'Don't! Don't! Don't!' and throws herself into bed, her head in the pillows, and cries her heart out, almost popping the seam of her dress open. I had an acquaintance at the time who was a merchant (his father owns a store on the Surovskaya line), and he begged me: 'Domna Platonovna,' he said, 'introduce me to a young maiden or even a woman, as long as she's educated. I can't stand the uneducated ones,' he says. And you can believe him, because his father and all the men in the family are married to fools, and this one too has a monstrous fool for a wife—any time you come she's sitting there and eating injure-breads.[30]

"'What could be better to desire and demand,' I think, 'than to suit him up with this Lekanida to him.' But I see she's still stupid so I left her be: let her ripen in the sun!

"I didn't visit her for two months or so. Even though I pitied her, ah well, I thought: when they don't have their own sense and can't make hands or tails of what is going on around 'em, you can't help 'em.

"Anyway, about the Fast of the Assumption,[31] I was at their house; I'd sold a little bit of lace and all a sudden I got the urge for some coffee, and boy, did I want it. So I think, I'll drop in on Lekanida Petrovna Domukhovskaya, I'll get my fill of

coffee there. I'm walking on up the back staircase, I open up the kitchen door—no one there. 'Look at that,' I say, 'they sure do live wide-openly—take what you want, 'cause the samovar and all the pots are in plain sight, standin' there on the shelves.'

"The moment I think that, I walk along the corridor and I hear something go slap-slap, slap-slap. 'Oh dear God! What is it?' I think, 'Please tell me, what is this?' I open the door to her room and he, that kind acquaintance of hers—who was an actor and actually not an insignificant actor—considered an artist; well, he's holding her with one hand by the arm with a Tatar lash[32] in the other.

"'Barbarian! Barbarian!' I start screaming at him, 'what're you doing to this woman, you barbarian!' and myself, you know, I cover myself with my gripsack and between them I go. 'That's what you villains do to our kind!'"

I was silent.

"Well, I unjoint them right there, he stops punishing her in front of me and she even takes to making excuses:

"'Don't you think that, Domna Platonovna,' she says. 'He was just joking.'

"'That's fine, dearie,' I say, 'make sure the sides of your dress weren't burst by his jokery.' Yet, together again; as before, he went on stayin' at her apartment, but that swindler didn't pay her not more than half a kopeck."

"And it ended with that?"

"No, no; in a little while the caroming started up again, he began to wear her out day out and day in, but then, she found herself some lodger—a young lady from a merchant family—and took her in. Ah well, you yourself already know it all, once our merchantwomen wrench themself free from home, they get sucked into these

things. In addition to all I've told you there, he commenced amour with this lodger-lady and such a thing started up that I even stopped going.

"'The heck with you, I think, 'live how you like.'

"Only on the thirteenth of September, right before the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-creating Cross,[33] I went to Znamenskaya,[34] to the all-night vigil.[35] After standing through the entire all-night vigil, I go out, and in the lobby[36] itself, on the church-porch,[37] I see—there's that Lekanida Petrovna herself. I see her kneeling in the corner, all pitiful, wearing a ratty old burnoose and crying. Again, pity overtakes me.

"'Hello, Lekanida Petrovna!' I say.

"'Oh, my sweetheart,' she says, 'Domna Platonovna, you so-and-so, you this-and that! God himself has sent you to me,' she says, overflowing with streams of bitter tears.

"'Well,' I say, 'God did not send me, dearie, because God sends disembodied angels, and I am a person who is fairly sinful myself; but, all the same, don't you cry, let's go find some perch and sit down, tell me about your grief; maybe we'll think something up and help.'

"So we went.

"'What is it? Did your barbarian do something to you again or what?' I ask her.

"'I don't have any…' she says, 'I don't have a barbarian.'

"'And where are you going?' I ask, because her apartment was on Shestilavochnaya but I seen her turning on to Griaznaya.

“Word by word, the entire business became clear. She had no apartment: the only furniture she had was taken away by the owner because of her debt; her little friend had disappeared—and a good thing he did—she lived alone in Avdotia Ivanovna Dislen’s tiny box-room. That vile Avdotia Ivanovna, even though she was a major’s daughter and prided herself on her nobility, she was the vilest of the vile. Once, I almost got thrown in the precinct jail because of that villain, all because of my foolish simplicity. ‘I know that Dislen very well, my friend,’ I say to Lekanida Petrovna, ‘she’s a capital scoundrel.’

“‘What can we do?’ she says, ‘My darling Domna Platonovna, what can we do?’

“I look at her little hands and she’s wringling, wringling them, it was even painful to watch how she was mangling them.

“‘Stop by for a visit,’ she says.

“‘No,’ I say, ‘sure I pity you, sweetheart, but I won’t go visiting you at the Dislen apartment. I was already this close to getting thrown in the precinct jail for that useless woman once; instead, if you got the desire to talk to me, why don’t you stop by my place.’

“She came to my place: I gave her tea, warmed her up, we munched on whatever God had sent for dinner, and I put her to sleep with me. Does that suit you?”

I nodded my head affirmatively.

“Oh, the horror I experienced from her in the night! She lays and lays there, then suddenly bolts right up, sits on the bed, pounding herself on the chest. ‘My darling, Domna Platonovna,’ she says, ‘what am I to do with myself?’

“I notice the hour’s late. ‘Enough of your fits,’ I say, ‘sleep. We’ll think about it tomorrow.’

“‘Oh,’ she says, ‘I can’t sleep, I can’t sleep, Domna Platonovna.’

“But God, how I want to sleep ‘cause my slumber, it’s just unbelievable how deep it is.

“I sleep like that to my fill and then I flip. I flip and I look, she’s sitting on a chair wearing nothin’ but her nightgown, her little legs folded under herself, smoking a cigarette. She’s all white, pretty, and tender—just like feathers in satin.

“‘Do you know how to light the samovar?’ I ask.

“‘I’ll go give it a try,’ she says.

“She puts on a flannelette skirt and goes to the kitchen. But the last thing I want to do here is get up. She brings over the samovar, we sit down to tea, and she says to me: ‘What kind of a crazy thing did I think up, Domna Platonovna?’ she says.

“‘I don’t know, sweetheart,’ I say, ‘you can’t read others’ think-ups.’

“‘I’m going to go to my husband,’ she says.

“‘What’s better than being an honest wife,’ I say, ‘that is, of course, if he’d take you back,’ I say.

“‘I’ve got myself a kind one,’ she says, ‘I see now that he’s the kindest of them all.’

“‘He’s kind,’ I answer her, ‘that’s good that he’s kind; but tell me, was it a long time ago that you left him?’

“‘It’ll be a year soon, Domna Platonovna,’ she says.

"'Well, a whole year's gone by, you see. That's not a short time, my little lady,' I say.

"'What are you saying, Domna Platonovna?' she asks.

"'I dare say, won't some pastry-mistress, pottery-ruineress have taken your place?'

"'I didn't even think of that, Domna Platonovna,' she answers.

"'That's exactly it, mumsie, you *didn't think*. Still, all of you are just like that, not thinking about anything! But you got to think. If you'd only thinked and reasoned, then a lot of things wouldn't of happened to you.'

"Oh, how she got all embarrassed! It racked her little heart, I could see it, she was biting on her little lips and uttering to herself quietly: 'It seems to me,' she says, 'that he wasn't that kind at all.'

"'Oh you,' I thought to myself, 'you cabbage-headed animals! You go jumping like goats in the mountains and even though your love ain't much, others can't look or touch.' You wouldn't believe how mad I get at them every time. 'Pardon me, dearie,' I tell her right up, 'but it's just that your speech here, in my hypothesy, has no basings to it. Who is he, that husband of yours,' I say, 'that he's oh-so-special, that you say *he's not like that*? Never in my life would I never ever believe that. All of 'em, I think, and he's just the same as all of 'em: flesh and bone. And you,' I say, 'well, you best think of it this way, that you, being a woman, didn't keep yourself too carefully,' I say, 'but to him, it's nothing you go to court over,' I say, because, really now, take a look at it this way, my angel: a man is like a falcon: he grabs, spreads his wings, shakes himself off, and off he goes again, wherever his

eye takes him; but our loop is from the stove to the stoop. To you fellows, us women are the same as a bagpipe for a fool: he plays a bit and out it goes. Are you in agreement with this truth?"

I don't object.

But Domna Platonovna, bless her, not waiting for my answer, continued:

"Well, sir, after my words, my dear lady, this Lekanida Petrovna says: 'I will not hide anything from my husband, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'I will take the blame and admit to everything: even if he takes my head off.'

"'Well, this, again,' I answer, 'is no way to go, it seems, because whatever kind of sin there was, what's the point of telling your husband? Let bygones be bygones, and it's not like it'll be a great pleasure for him to hear about it neither. So you, clamp yourself together and don't give a sign.'

"'Oh no!' she says, 'oh no, I don't want to lie.'

"'It don't matter what you don't want!' I say, 'As they say: it's a sin to steal, but it brings us our meal.'

"'No, no, no, I don't want to, I don't want to! Deceiving is a sin.'

"She just keeps goin' at it, and that's all there is to it.

"'First, I'll write it all out, and if he forgives me,' she says, 'I'll get an answer and then I'll go.'

"'Well, do what you want; obviously, you can't be taught, love. I'm puzzled by one thing, though,' I say, 'this new pattern turned up in all of you, that when you sin, you don't consult your husbands, but when it comes to staying quiet about all

your dirty tricks, forgive me lord—you're afraid of sin. Look, little hummingbird,' I say, 'make sure you don't start spilling your milk!'[38]

"Everything went as I said. She wrote a letter in which, who knows how, somehow she explained everything—no answer. She'd come, cry and cry—no answer.

"'I'll go myself,' she says, 'I'll be his servant.'

"I think it over again and approve. She's a good looking one, let him be in a temper for some time at first, but with luck, when she's right in front of him, maybe the spirit that comes in the darkness will mix him up, maybe it'll be forgot. The night cuckoo, you know, will always out-cuckoo the day cuckoo.[39]

"'Yes, go to him,' I say, 'after all, a husband's not a lover, he'll show mercy in no time.'

"'But, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'where can I find money for the trip?'

"And your own,' I ask, 'you don't have any?'

"'Not a half-kopeck,' she says, 'and I already owe the Dislen woman.'

"'Well, darling, it's rough getting money 'round here."

"'Take a look at my tears,' she says.

"'Why the tears, my little friend?' I say, 'tears are tears and even I myself take lots of pity on you, but Moscow doesn't believe in tears, as the saying goes. You won't get money for them.'

"She's crying, and I'm sitting there with her too, and we talk with each other like that, and all a sudden, whoosh, and that colonel walks in the room…what was his name?"

"What does it matter what his name is, the heck with it!"

"Ulansky, or what's he called now? The engineer?"

"The heck with it, Domna Platonovna."

"Seems his surname was Lastochkin, or what, maybe not Lastochkin? Must be some kinda bird last name,[40] maybe it starts with an 'L' or maybe a 'K'…"

"Forget his last name, why don't you."

"Now, I'm able to recall many people for you by their positions all right, but I just can't remember the last name. Soon as this colonel walks in, he begins to joke with me and whispers in my ear:

"'Who is this young lady here?' he says.

"She's actually a married woman but he calls her a young lady: she still had a very youthful look to her.

"I let him know who she is.

"'From the provinces?' he asks.

"'You got it,' I say, 'from the provinces.'

"But he—not like some kind of empty-head or scapegrace—but as a person of such a rank—he wanted a woman, even if she was around only for a short time, not to forget of her shame, to be proprietous; but our Petersburg women, you know what kind of shame they feel, and as to being proprietous, oh, all the more so: a short-haired wench has more hair on her head than they have propriety."

"Well, Domna Platonovna?"

"'Well, do me a favor, Domna Pantaloonovna,' he says. Those regimental people have their own habits, you see: they won't say Platonovna, but

Pantaloonovna. ‘Well, Domna Pantaloonovna,’ he says, ‘I won’t spare anything ‘long as you organize this business into orderliness for me.’

“I, you know, I don’t answer anything definitely, I just point my eyebrows at her and, you understand, I give him a face, that means, you know, ‘difficult.’

“‘Impossible?’ he says.

“‘I’m not going to explain this to you, my good general,’ I say, ‘because this is her soul, it is her will, but though I’m not counting on it, I’ll give it a try for you.’

“And then he goes: ‘There’s no point in speaking with words here, Pantalonia,’ he says; ‘here’s fifty rubles for you, give them all to her now.’”

“And did you give them to her?” I asked.

“Best you don’t run on ahead, and if you want to listen, then listen. So I take this money from him, I reason that although certainly I’ve never had such a conversation with her, where I gave her such a pretext, but, knowing these Petersburg circumstances, I think: ‘Oh, maybe she’ll even be happy, the poor soul!’ I walk out to her into the little room, the one we’d been sitting in, and I say: ‘You,’ I say, ‘Lekanida Petrovna, ought to know, you were born under a lucky star. We’d just spoke about money and here it is,’ I say, and put a bill out right in front of her. She goes: ‘Who? How is this? From where?’ ‘God,’ I say, ‘sent it to you,’ I say to her loudly, while whispering into her ear: ‘That gentleman there,’ I say, ‘he’s sending it to you for your attention only…Take this money at once!’ I say.

“But her tears, I see, stream down her eyes and on to the table, drip-drop, like peas-pods. Only I can’t figure out why she’s crying—from happiness or grief.

"'Put this money away and get on out into that room for a minute while I poke around here…' How do you like how I set everything up wonderful for her unawares?"

I look at Domna Platonovna: she doesn't blink an eyebrow, her mouth doesn't betray any slyness; her entire speech is simple, heartfelt; her face expresses only a kind desire to aid this poor woman and a fear that this sudden unexpected charitable act may fall apart—fear not for herself, but for this unfortunate Lekanida.

"Is that good enough for you? Seems I did all I could for her so far, everything," said Domna Platonovna, jumping up and slamming the table with her hand, her face flushing up and taking on a wrathful expression. "And she, the sleazebag that she is!" exclaimed Domna Platonovna, "with that very word—whoosh to the staircase, without anything, just like she was sitting, and wa-wa-wa: howls with all her might. She humiliated me! I go quick and into my nook; he also goes for his hat and without a trace.[41] I look 'round myself—I see her neckerchief, merino, worn old scarfling—she forgot it. 'Well, just wait right there,' I think, 'you dirty filth! If you come back, you nasty creature, I won't give it to you just like that.' In a day, no, in two, I return to my house, I look—she's graced me with her presence. Though I'm not very angry at her anymore, for I'm only hot-tempered and never stay angry for long, I give her such a look, like I'm terribly angry."

"'Good day,' she says, 'Domna Platonovna.'

"'Good day,' I say, 'dearie! What is it? Did you come here for your kerchief? Here's your kerchief.'

"'I,' she says, 'Domna Platonovna, forgive me, I got so scared then.'

“‘Yes,’ I say to her, ‘I am humbly thankful to you, my darling. For all my affection for you, you have done such things for me that no one could of expected or hoped for anything better.’

“‘I was frightened, Domna Platonovna,’ she says, ‘please forgive me.’

“‘I have nothing to forgive you for, but my house is not the place to go scandalizing, to run from me up and down the stairs, letting out all kinds of shrieks. Respectable lodgers live here,’ I say, ‘not to mention the owner, a pawnbroker, every minute there’re people coming to see him, he won’t stand for such shrieks around here.’

“‘I am guilty, Domna Platonovna. Judge for yourself, such a proposition?’

“‘Are you that special,’ I say, ‘that that proposition offended you so! Everyone’s free to make propositions, since you’re a needly woman; but, really, no one took you by force, so, turns out, you had no reason to go yawning at the top of your lungs.’

“She begs forgiveness.

“So I forgive her and start talking to her and give her a cup of tea.

“‘I have a request for you, Domna Platonovna,’ she says. ‘How can I earn some money to visit my husband?’

“‘How will you earn it, my dear lady? There you had an opportunity, you slipped it, now think for yourself, I’m not about to think anything up. What kind of work can you do?’

“‘I can sew,’ she says, ‘I can make hats.’

"'No, sweetie,' I answer her, 'you best ask me about that; I know these Petersburg circumstances better than you do; with that work, well, apart from that you can't find it anywhere, the work, I mean, well, and those who have done it for a long time, those real sewers, well, even those,' I say, 'they would of been walking around naked a long time ago if it wasn't for how they earn their clothings with sin.'

"'Then what am I to do?' she says, again wringling her hands.

"'That's how it would of been,' I say, 'if only not for your gallywagging; long ago,' I say, 'you would of left for your spouse's the other day.'

"O-o-h, at hearing these words she goes and flushes up again!

"'What is it you're trying to say, Domna Platonovna?' she says. 'Am I really capable of going into such filthy business?'

"You went into it already,' I say, 'didn't ask me about that.'

"She flamed up even more.

"'That was my sin—*infatuation*,' she says, 'but for me to stoop again to such foul means while repenting and preparing myself to visit my husband—never in a million years!'

"'Well, dearie,' I say, 'I don't understand any of your words. I don't see any foulness here. My reasoning is like this,' I say, 'that if a woman wants to go heading herself in the right direction, then she must reject all that.'

"'I do reject that proposition,' she says.

"Such a grand ladyship, you see? Spended a long while there dawdling about with that ginger-face all pointilessly like that, and when it comes to business, to

personal peace—she couldn't take a step to head herself to an honorable life, you know, it minutely became too difficult for her."

I took a look at Domna Platonovna—there was nothing in her to indicate the sort who dedicate themselves to the formation of victims of "the social ill," but a most simple-hearted countrywoman sat in front of me and said her nasty filth with an unruffled certitude in her own goodness and the utter stupidity of madam Lekanidka.

"'This,' I say," continued Domna Platonovna, "'is the capital; here, you get nothing free, dearie, and they won't get out of the way for you neither, let alone to mention money.'

"So we spoke—and she went away. She went away and she wasn't around for two weeks, I think. At the end of it all, my pet appears again, all in tears, and again with her cries and sighs.

"'Sigh, my angel,' I say, 'don't sigh, overstrain your chest, even, but I know the Petersburg circumstances well, and there's isn't nothing that will help your tears.'

"'My Lord!' she says, 'it seems my eyes are popping out from the tears, now my head is cracking, my chest hurts. I already went to the sympathy organizations: I knocked on every door—nothing's worked out.'

"'What're you gonna do, you yourself are guilty,' I say. 'You should have ast me what all those organizations were about. That's exactly why people go there, just to wear their last boots out.'

"'Take a look,' she says, 'what am I? Look at what I've come to.'

"I see,' I answer her, 'I see, my friend, and I'm not the least bit surprised because only a lobster can look good in trouble,'[42] I say, 'but I can't help you out in any way.'

"A whole hour she sat there, at my place, crying the whole time, and, to tell you the truth, I even got sick of her.

"There's no point,' I say to her at the end of it, 'there's no point in crying away: nothing won't be helped by it; but, to put it more smartly, we got to submit to it.'

"I see she's listening through her tears, not angry now.

"'There's nothing you can do, my kind friend,' I say. 'You're not the first and you won't be the last.'

"'Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'If only I could borrow even fifty rubles.'

"'You can't even have fifty kopecks,' I say, 'not to mention fifty rubles—it's not just any old city here, it's the capital. You had exactly fifty rubles in your hands—but you didn't know how to take them, so what're we to do with you?'

"She cried for a bit and left. I remember it happened right on St. Ivan Rilski's Feast Day,[43] and then, exactly two days after, lives the feast day of Our Lady of Kazan.[44] So, on that day, I was terribly under the weather—the evening before, I'd went to visit a merchantwoman in Okhta,[45] and I must've catched a cold on that prisoner's ride—well, and so I see I'm not feeling good; I don't go anywhere: I don't even go to services; I rub my nose with pork fat[46] and sit there in bed. I see my Lekanida Petrovna's paying me a visit, without her burnoose, covering herself only with a kerchief.

"'Hello, Domna Platonovna,' she says.

"'Hello, sweetheart,' I say, 'why are you so unkempt?' I ask.

"'You know, I just ran out for a minute,' she says, and then I see her entire face changes. She's not crying, you know, but she flares then pales up. Then, suddenly, a thought burnt through me like lightning: the Dislen prolly kicked her out, I say to myself.

"'So,' I ask, 'what happened with you and the Dislen?' but she drag-drags on her little lip, I see she wants to say something, she's hesitating.

"'Tell me, tell me, dearie, what is it?'

"'I came to see you, Domna Platonovna.'

"But I stay silent.

"'How are you doing, Domna Platonovna?' she says.

"'Not too bad, my friend,' I say, 'nothing's changed.'

"'And I…,' she says, 'well, I got completely knocked off my feet.'

"'I see,' I say, 'seems nothing's changed for you either?'

"'Nothing's changed,' she says. 'I've darted about everywhere,' she says. 'I've really forgotten all my shame; I went around begging from rich people. They said that on Kuznechny Lane, there's a rich man who helps the poor—I saw him; I also went to Znamenskaya Street.'

"'Well, and did you carry off a lot from them?' I say.

"'Three rubles each.'

"'Even that's a lot,' I say. 'A merchant friend of mine lives at the Five Corners,[47] he gets change for a ruble and gives it out one kopeck at a time on

Sundays. “All the same,” he says, “it’s one hundred good deeds before God.” But I don’t think there’s a single rich person in all of Petersburg who would give you those fifty rubles you need.’

“‘No,’ she says, ‘they say there is.’

“‘Who told you that? Who’s seen such a person here?’

“‘A lady told me that…There, at the rich man’s house, she and I were waiting at Kuznechny together. There’s a Greek, she said, on Nevsky: that one helps a lot.’

“‘How could that be?’ I ask, ‘Do you mean to say he helps for nothing?’

“‘Just like that,’ she says, ‘he helps just like that, Domna Platonovna.’

“‘Well, you best not lie to me about that,’ I say. ‘That’s upright nonsense.’

“‘But what are you arguing for,’ she says, ‘when that lady was telling her own story? It’s already been six years that she hasn’t lived with her husband and every time I go, she says, I get fifty rubles.’

“‘She lies,’ I say, ‘your lady friend lies.’

“‘No,’ she says, ‘she’s not lying.’

“‘Lies, lies, and lies,’ I say, ‘never in my life would I never believe that a man would give a woman fifty rubles for nothing.’

“‘But I affirm you it’s the truth,’ she says.

“‘Do you mean to say that you yourself went there?’ I say.

“And she turns redder and redder, doesn’t know what to do with her eyes.

“‘What are you thinking, Domna Platonovna?’ she says, ‘Please don’t go thinking anything like that! He’s eighty years old. Many women go see him and he doesn’t ask anything of them.’

"'Is that to say that he only gets illuminated by your beauty?'

"'By *yours*? Why are you alleging that again, as though I've been there?' Meanwhile she herself turns all red like a rose.

"'Why shouldn't I allege?' I say, 'Isn't it obvious that you were there?'

"'So what if I was there? Yes, I was.'

"'Well then, I'm really happy for your good fortune to have been in a good household.'

"'There's nothing bad there,' she says. 'I simply walked in to visit that lady, the one who knows him, and I explained my circumstances to her…At first, to be sure, she started making the same propositions everyone else makes…I didn't want to; well, and she says: "Well then, wouldn't you like to visit this rich Greek? He doesn't demand anything and helps out a good many attractive women. I'll give you the address," she says. "His daughter is learning to play the piano, and you'll come in pretending to be a teacher, but you'll go right to him and there won't be anything to embarrass you, she says, but you'll get the money." You understand, Domna Platonovna, he's already older than old.'

"'I don't understand anything,' I say.

"I see she's getting frustrated by my slow-wittedness. Come on now, we all know how witty my slowness is: I understand what she's getting at perfectly well, I just want her to be tortured a bit with embarrassment, to get her conscienceness working a little.

"'How is it that you don't understand?' she says.

"'Just like that,' I say, 'simple, and I don't even want to understand.'

"'And why is that?'

"'Because it's repulsive and repugnant, ugh!' I say. I shame her; but I see she's blink, blink and throwing herself on my shoulders, kissing me, and cryin', she says: 'After all, what will I use to travel?'

"'What do you mean, what will you use? Use that very same money he gave you.'

"'But he gave me a mere ten rubles.'

"'Only ten? How could that be—fifty to everyone else, but only ten for you!'

"'The devil knows!' she says vexedly.

"And her tears even stopped because of her vex.

"'That's exactly it! Clearly, you didn't wow him in some way or another. Oh you,' I say, 'you ladylike ladies, you! Wasn't my suggestion, a simple woman's, truer and better than your noblewoman's?'

"'I see that myself,' she says.

"'You should have saw it sooner,' I say.

"'Well I, Domna Platonovna,' she says, '…I've already made up my mind,' and lowers her eyes to the ground.

"'Made up your mind to do what?' I say.

"'Well,' she says, 'to do like you said… I see that I can't provide for myself. If it were at least a good man…'

"'Well,' I say, so as not to abash her with too many words, 'I'll take your burden on along, take up your case, but watch out and do me a favor, don't be foolish.'

"'No, of course not!'she says. I see she's straining herself but she answers firmly: 'No, do burden yourself, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'I will not make trouble.' Sitting there, I find out from her that the foul Dislen is kicking her out, not just kicking her out, but she took away those ten rubles that the poor soul brought back from the Greek too, and kicked her out for good, and her clothing—nothing but rags and tags—she even took all that for her debt, grabbed her by the tail like a kitten, and out onto the street.

"'Yes, I know that Dislen,' I say.

"'She just wanted to sell me off, Domna Platonovna,' she says.

"'You can't expect anything else from her,' I answer.

"'I've helped her on more than one occasion when I had money, but she treated me like dirt.'

"'Well, sweetie,' I say, 'nowadays, it's best you don't go looking for gratitude in people. Nowadays the more good you do for a person, the readier he is to play tricks on you. When he's drowning, he'll promise you a pig in a poke, but, when you pull him out, he won't even give you a cat in a bag.'[48]

"I'm conferring this with her and do-o-o-n't even think 'bout how that scoundrel herself, Lekanida Petrovna, will express her gratitude for all this."

Domna Platonovna sighed.

"I see she's humming and hawing," Domna Platonovna continued, "and I say: 'What is it that you want to say? Just spill out with it—there're no flies on the walls; no one's going to turn you in.'

"'When will it be?' she asks.

"'No, mumsie,' I say, 'you gotta wait: it's not a snip-snap kinda thing.'

"'I have nowhere to go, Domna Platonovna,' she says.

"Drop by my place some time, then I'll show you, I have this box-room, it's small and all, I keep my things there, the ones I have, and if there's ever a little lady who's looking for a place to stay or awaiting some kind of chance, well, in that case, I give it to her. At that time my box-room was available. 'Come stay,' I say to her, 'and live there.'

"Her move-in was exactly that; what she came in, she stayed in: the Dislen, that louse, took everything for her debt.

"Seeing her poverty, well, I went and gave her a dress right away—a merchant had gave it to me: a wonderful dress, was it crepe machine[49] or shinshifon,[50] it was called something like that, that fabric; the only thing was that it was a little tight in the bodice for me. That seampstress-wretch didn't do her job, and I must admit I don't like fashionable dresses because they're too tight in the chest, so I just go around in capotes like this one.

"Well, I gave her this dress, gave her some lace; she mended the dress, finished it with lace trim in some places, and it turned out to be a wonderful little dress. I went to the Shtinbok Arcade,[51] my good sir, bought her a pair of boottines on heels, with those little tassels, you know, with fringe; I gave her some collars, a chemisette—well, in a word, I dressed the fine girl up like a grand woman; there was no shame in neither looking at her myself nor showing her to other people. I couldn't even hold myself back, I joked: 'You dandy, you! You know how to make everything look flattering.'

"After this, we're living together for one week, another week, everything's going superb: I do my thing, she stays at home. Then all a sudden important business comes my way, having to do not with just some any old madam but a real grand one, and not a young one but a, you know, God forgive me!...an eastern star. She was looking for a student to take in as a tutor for her son. Well, I knowed what kind of student she needed.

"'He should be well groomed,' she says, 'He shouldn't be one of those that gad about—soshowlists—they probably don't even know where to buy soap.'

"'Those good-for-nothings,' I say, 'they're not cut out for anything!'

"'And,' she says, 'he should be of a ripe age and not look like a kid; or else the kids won't listen to him.'

"'Everything's clear.'

"'I found a student: a young boy, but all sly boots and spicked and spanned, understands everything right at the bat. Now I take along this matter to that lady; I give her the address; I say: so and so will be here at this and that time and please look him over, and if something isn't quite right—we'll find another one,' I say and I leave. Soon as I start going down the stairs, the general's coming towards me in the porter's room and there he is, right there. And that very same general, let me tell you, even though he's a civilian,[52] he's very educated. He has such luxury in his house: windows, lanps, gold everywhere, rugs, footmen in gloves, the air's smoked with perfume all around. In a word, it's their own house and they live in their own pleasure; they take up two floors all by themself: he's the first left as you walk in from the porter's; him alone occupies eight rooms, and on the right is another half just

like it, the oldest son lives in that one, also married for about two years now. Married a rich one too and everyone who's in the house praises her a whole lot, they say she's the kindest of ladies, but she must have consumption, she's so thin. Well, and on the top floor, right on the same staircase—wider than wide, all decked in flowers—there, the old woman herself, high on her horse,[53] sits with the smallest children, and those tutors are there too. Well, you know what it is to live on a grand scale!

"The general catches up to me and says: 'Hello, Domna Platonovna!' He's the politest of gentlemen.

"'Hello,' I say, 'Your Excellency.'

"'Were you at my wife's or something?' he asks.

"'Exactly that, Your Excellency' I say, 'I visited your spouse, the generaless; I brought her some antique lace,' I say.

"'Don't you have something nice besides lace?'

"'Why of course, Your Excellency! For good people there is always something good in the world.'

"'Well, let's go and take a walk, then,' he says, 'the air is very fresh now.'

"'The weather's excellent,' I answer, 'it's rare to find it like this.'

"He walks out into the street and I follow him while the carriage follows us down the street. Just like that we walk together down Mokhovaya—I swear to God, it's true. What a most simple-hearted gentleman, I'm telling you!

"'Well,' he asks, 'what do you have to offer today, Domna Platonovna?'

"'I do have something to offer, Your Excellency, something that really is a rare find.'

"'Is that so?' he asks, not believing because he's so experienced—he's always going to the circus and to ballets and always keeping a terribly alertive eye on this subject.

"'Well, I won't brag to you, sir,' I say, 'because, it seems, if you would like to know, I'm not one to cluck lies about the cherry tree,[54] but, at your convenience,' I say, 'you are most welcome. Better see it once than hear it thousands of times.'

"'So you're not lying, Domna Platonovna,' he says, 'it's a worthy thing?'

"'One word, Your Excellency,' I answer him, 'I don't want to talk about it any more. It's not the kind of product that you need to boast about.'

"'Well, we'll see,' he says, 'we'll see.'

"'You are most welcome to come see,' I say. 'When would you like to come?'

"'Some time in the next few days,' he says, 'I will probably stop by.'

"'No, Your Excellency,' I say, 'would you please set a date,' I say, 'and we'll expect you at that time; because I don't sit at home much,' I say, 'the wolf is fed by his legs, they say.'

"'Well, I'll stop by the day after tomorrow, on Friday,' he says, 'from the bureau.'

"'Very good,' I say, 'I'll tell her to wait for you.'

"'Do you have anything nice in your little bundle?' he asks.

"'Yes, I have a little piece of black silk lace, it's excellent. Your spouse,' I lie to him, 'your spouse,' I say, 'took half of it, but the other half is left,' I say, 'exactly twenty rubles worth.'

"'Well, pass that lace to her from my part,' he says, 'tell her that a *kind genie* sent it to her,' he jokes, while at the same time hands me a twenty-five ruble bill and says that he doesn't need change: take it for yourself to buy nuts.

"Not too bad, this present, when he hasn't even laid eyes on her, eh?

"He got into the carriage here by Semyonovsky Bridge and set off, and I took the Fontalka[55] down the embankment and went home.

"'Here it is, Lekanida Petrovna,' I say, 'you've got lucky.'

"'What is it?' she says.

"And I tell her the story in order, praising him, you know, it couldn't be better: even though he's past his prime, but he's a fine figure of a man, portly, wears fine linen, I say, gold glasses; but she goes trembling all over.

"'There's nothing for you to fear in him, my friend,' I say, 'maybe he can frighten someone else by his rank or profession,' I say, 'but your job will be completely special; go and make him kiss your little hands and feet. One Polish lady ordered him about every which way she wished (I was the one to introduce her to him),' I say, 'and she had amanties,'[56] I say, 'and he even gave them excellent positions, she made like they were all her brothers. Count on my word and don't get the least bit afraid of him, 'cause I know him very well. This Polish lady would even raise her hand to him: she'd throw a temper tantrum, and bam his glasses with her hand; and the little shards'd just jingle. And your upbringing is not the least bit worse. And here, for the time being, here's a little present from him,' I take out the lace and put it out in front of her.

“I come back home again in the evening and look—she’s sitting there, darning a stocking for herself, her eyes all cried out; I look and my lace is still in the same place, right where I put it.

“‘Maybe it’s best you put that away,’ I say, ‘over there in my dresser, or something,’ I say, ‘it’s an expensive thing.’

“‘What do I need it for?’ she says.

“‘Oh, if you don’t like it, then I’ll return you ten rubles for it.’

“‘Either way,’ she says. I take that lace, I see that it’s in one piece, fold it like it ought to be, and put it in my gripsack without measuring it.

“‘Here’s what you owe me for the dress,’ I say, ‘I don’t want to overcharge you, let’s put in seven rubles for it, and three rubles for the boottines, here,’ I say, ‘so we’re quits, and we’ll figure the rest out.’

“‘Ok,’ she says, and begins to cry again.

“‘There’s no need for crying now,’ I say.

“And she answers me:

“‘Let me cry out my last tears, please,’ she says. ‘What are you worrying for?’ she says, ‘Don’t be afraid, I’ll please him!’

“‘Why is it that you’re flaring up at me after all my kindness, dearie?’ I say. ‘News to me,’ I say, ‘you feed ‘em, and they go and bite your hand!’

“I go and stop talking to her.

“Thursday passes and I continue the silent treatment. On Friday, I have some tea, walk out and say: ‘Would you please be ready, my dear lady,’ I say, ‘he’s coming today.’

"She bolts right up: 'What do you mean, 'today'? What do you mean?'

"'Just like that,' I say, 'didn't I tell you that he'd be here on Friday, and yesterday was Thursday now, wasn't it?'

"'Darling Domna Platonovna!' she says, gnaws on her fingers and bang, falls at my feet.

"'What are you, crazy or something?' I say.

"'Save me!'

"'From what?' I say, 'What should I save you from?'

"'Protect me! Pity me!'

"'What're you making a ruckus for?' I say, 'Didn't you ask for this yourself?'

"Again, she takes her cheeks in her hands and howls: 'My dear, my dear, let it be tomorrow,' she says, 'or maybe even the day after tomorrow!'

"I see there's no point in listening to that fool, I slam the door and walk away. When he comes, they'll settle it among themself. She's not the first I see like this: they're all pig-heads at first. Why're you looking at me like that? I'm telling you the truth here, believe me: they all go berserk like that."

"Continue, Domna Platonovna," I said.

"So what do you think that slimy woman did?"

"Who knows what the Devil made her do!" spurted out of my mouth angrily.

"You're exactly right, the Devil himself made her do it," answered Domna Platonovna, praising my insight. "She didn't even let such a person, such a grandee like that, step through the door, that little scoundrel! He knocked and knocked, called and called—if she'd only made some sound for him, you see. Look at what a sneak

she is—what she's dared to do! Sitting there locked up, as though there wasn't a trace of her there. I walk in, in the evening to visit him—they let me in right away—and I ask: 'Well,' I say, 'did I lie to you, Your Excellency?' and he's a storm cloud in a storm cloud. He tells me everything about how he was there and how he returned with nothing.

"'One just doesn't act that way in polite company, Domna Platonovna, my dear.'

"'My dear fellow,' I say, 'how could this be! Prob'ly,' I say, 'she walked out somewhere minutely or just didn't hear anything,' while I think to myself: 'Oh, you barbarian! Oh, you're such an evil-doer! You smearface!'

"'Please come tomorrow, Your Excellency,' I ask him. 'I guarantee everything'll go according to as it ought.'

"Left his house, runnin' and runnin.' I get home and yell:

"'You barbarian! Barbarian! What did you do to me, you ogress? You loggerheaded me with such a person? You,' I say, 'your entire kinsfolk and your entire province are not worth a single one of his worn boots! He can reduce you all and your entire administration to dust and ashes with one foot,' I say. 'What're you doing being so modish, you lazybones? Am I feeding you for nothing? I'm a poor woman; right before your eyes, I'm always burdening myself day out and day in; right before your very eyes, I'm leading the most abruptive life, and what's more, you cold-heart,' I say, 'you sponger, you're sucking me dry!'

"You ought of saw how I took to scoldin' her! It was scary how I scolded her heartless—you wouldn't of believed it. I could of scratched her eyes out in my fury."

Domna Platonovna blinked away a tear that had appeared in one eye and said between the lines: "Even now I feel bad when I remember how I insulted her then.

"'You noble dundertramp!'[57] I say to her, 'Get away from me! Get out, don't leave a trace!' and I even threw her towards the door by her sleeve. Look here, take a look at what a person can do out of wrathfulness: I had invited such a grandezvous[58] to see her the next day, while I myself go on kicking her out! Well, and she hears my words and she's ready—and to the door.

"My wrathfulness starts fading while she continues standing there without a word, but when she turns to the door at my last word, I fume up again.

"'Where're you flying off to,' I say, 'you so-and-so?'

"I can't even remember myself what words I used to cuss her out.

"'Stay here,' I say, 'don't you dare leave!'

"'No,' she says, 'I'm going.'

"'What do you mean you're going? How dare you make off?'

"'Ah well, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'since you are angry with me, it's best I leave.'

"'Angry!' I say, 'Angry's not good enough, I'm going to beat you.'

"She cried out, and rushed to the door but I grab her by the arm and drag her back, and right there and then, in my fury, I roll on six smacks.

"'You're a thief,' I say, 'not a lady,' I yell at her; how I thrashed her, and she's standing there in the corner, shaking like a maple leaf, and even here, you'll notice, she feels her noble anbition.

"'What is it that I stole from you?' she says.

"'Tidy up your locks,' I say, 'that mane of yours,' because I messed up her whole hairdo. 'You know what you stole from me?' I say, 'I gave you food and drink for two weeks, you ogress; I gave you clothes and shoes; I burden myself every hour,' I say, 'I lead an abruptive life, and now I got to deny myself a piece of bread 'cause of you, since you've put me at odds with such a person!'

"I look and see she's carefully put her braids in a bun again, taken cold water from the jug—washed up: combed her hair and sat down. She's sitting there calmly by the window, carefully putting the tin mirror up to her cheeks over and over. I make as though I'm not looking at her, lay out the lace on the table, and I myself see that her cheeks go on burning.

"'Oh,' I think, 'what a shame that I upset her so, devil that I am!'

"More I stand over the table, thinking—more I feel worser for her; the longer I stand and think, the worser I feel...

"Oh, what woe my kind heart brings me! I just can't seem to get the better of my heart. It's vexating and I know she's guilty and certain she deserves what she got, but it's a pity.

"I run out into the street for a sec—there's a sweet-shop there at our place, in our building—I take ten sugar pastries and come back; I light up the samovar myself; pour her a cup of tea with a sugar pastry. She takes the cup my hands and the pastry too, takes a bite out of it, and holds it between her teeth. She holds a piece of it and all a sudden she smiles, she's smiling and smiling happy, and the tears drop, drop, drop, gushing just like that; not simply running but gushing, like juice from a lemon, if you squeeze it.

"'Enough,' I say, 'don't get all upset.'

"'No,' she says, 'It's nothing, nothing, nothing…' and how she went at it: 'nothing' and 'nothing,' over and over, enough already.

"'My God!' I think, 'Has her sense been bemuddled?' I sprinkle water on her; quieter and quieter, she calms down: she sits down in the corner on the bed and sits there. But my conscience keeps on striking me that I've hurt her. I pray to God—I read the prayer against the hazing of the mind that the priest taught back in Mtsensk: 'The Holy Mother of the Holy Tsar, purer than pure,' and I take my little capote off, and I walk up to her in my skirt alone and I say: 'Listen here, Lekanida Petrovna! The Scriptures read: 'let not the sun go down upon your wrath;' forgive me for my impudence; let's make up!' I bow down to her to the ground, take her hand and kiss it: there you have it, I swear like I want to see the light of day that I kissed it. So I look, she bows down to me and I see, smooch, she kisses me on the shoulder—and also kisses my hand, and we hug each other and kiss.

"'My friend,' I say, 'I didn't do it out of spite or for my own profit, I did it for your own good!' I tell her and pet her on the head, and she answers, all in a rush: 'Good, good; I thank you, Domna Platonovna, thank you.'

"'He'll come again tomorrow.' I say.

"'Well, well,' she says, 'very good then, let him come.'

"I pet her on the head again, put strands of her hair behind her ears, while she sits there and doesn't blink an eye from the iconical-lamp. The iconic-lamp burns in front of the icons so quiet, the shining of the icons covers her, and I see she suddenly stirs and stirs her lips.

"'What is it, honey?' I ask, 'are you praying to God or something?'

"'No,' she says, 'it's nothing, Domna Platonovna.'

"'What,' I say, 'I thought you were praying, but you're just talking to yourself, my friend, that doesn't do. Only the insane talk to themself.'

"'Oh,' she answers me, 'Domna Platonovna, and myself I think,' she says, 'that perhaps I'm insane. What is it I'm getting into! What am I getting into!' she starts to say all a sudden and hits herself on the chest like that with all her might.

"'What can you do?' I say, 'You have a harsh path set out for you, for sure.'

"'How come this path is set for me?' she says, 'I was an honest girl! I was a faithful wife! My Lord! Lord! Where are you? Where are you, God?'

"'No one has ever looked upon God anywhere, my friend, it's wrote out,' I say.

"'But where are the compassionating, good Christians? Where are they? Where?'

"'Why they're here,' I say, 'the Christians.'

"'Where?'

"'What do you mean *where*? All of Russia is Christian, and we're Christians too.'

"'Yes, yes,' she says, 'we too are Christians…' she utters these words and I see she turns scary in the face. As though she's talking to an invisible.

"'Pah,' I say, 'are you really crazy or something? What're you scarifying me for? Why are you uttering grumblings about our Creator?'

"I look: again, she's come to terms with it, she's crying again and reasoning:

"'Why is it that I'm the one who did this all to myself?' she says, 'What kind of people did I listen to? They broke me up with my husband; told me that he was a tyrant and a barbarian when that wasn't true at all, when I, *I'm the one* who's despicable and terribly capricious, I poisoned his life and didn't comfort it. People! You foul people! You got me off track; you promised me golden mountains here, and didn't tell me about the fiery rivers. Now my husband's left me, he doesn't want to look at me and doesn't read my letters. And tomorrow I…brrr…oh!'

"She began to tremble all over.

"'Mommy!' she began to call, 'Mommy!' If you could see me now, dearest? If you could look at me now from your little grave, my pure little angel? You should have seen how she raised us, Domna Platonovna! How well we lived; we were always clean; everything in our house was just so nice; mother loved flowers; she used to take us by the hand,' she says, 'and the two of us would go far…to the meadows we'd go…'

"And right then, you know, I'm an incredible sleeper—I'm listening to how good she remembers all this and I doze off.

"Now just imagine this: I'm sleeping; I fall to sleep at her place on her bed, like I arrived, fall to sleep right in that skirt, and again I'm telling you, I sleep my time very deep and I never ever have any sorts of dreams 'cept maybe predicting some kinda theft; but here I dream some sort of groves, a front-garden and her, that Lekanida Petrovna. She appears small and pretty: her hair is fair, all in curls, and she holds a wreath in her hands, and there's a dog behind her, a little white one, which goes ruff-ruff, ruff-ruff at me—as if angry, and wants to bite me. As though I'm

curving over to pick up a stick to chase it away, and a monstrous dead hand reaches out of the ground all a sudden: grabs me by this place right here, by the bone. I jump up, I look—I slept overtime at that point and it's plain awful how uncomfortable my hand fell asleep. Well, so I get dressed, pray to God, and drink some tea, but she continues sleeping.

"'It's time to wake up, Lekanida Petrovna,' I say; 'the tea is on the hearth ring and I'm leaving, my friend.'

"'I kiss her on the forehead in bed, I tell you truthful, pitifying her like my own daughter, and while exiting out the door, I take out the key all quiet and put it in my pocket.

"'This way,' I think, 'the matter will go more honest.'

"'I drop in to the general's and say: 'Well, Your Excellency, now the matter is out of my hands. I did my part—go on quickly,' and I pass him the key."

"Well, dear Domna Platonovna," I said, "it didn't end there, did it?"

Domna Platonovna laughed and started swaying her head with an expression that said all people in the whole wide world were funny.

"'I come home late on purpose and look—there's no light.'

"'Lekanida Petrovna!' I call.

"I hear she's moseying from side to side in my bed.

"'Are you sleeping?' I ask; you know, holding my laughter.

"'No, I'm not sleeping,' she answers.

"'Why don't you turn on the light?'

"'What do I need the light for?' she says.

“I light a candle, put on the samovar, and call her to drink tea.

“‘I don’t want to,’ she says, and keeps on swiveling to the wall.

“‘Well,’ I say, ‘at least get up and go on over to your own bed: I got to put my bed right.’

“I see she gets up like a gloomy wolf. Glances over at the candle from under her brows and shields her eyes with her hand.

“‘What are you covering your eyes for?’ I ask.

“‘It hurts to look at the light,’ she answers.

“She goes, and I hear her flop down on the bed, just like she is.

“I get undressed properly, say my prayers, but curiosity just keeps on getting the best of me, what details happened here between them without me? I’m afraid to go to the general: I just don’t want another affront to happen, and it even makes sense to ask her, but she just isn’t letting me. Why not approach sneaky, I think. I walk into her box-room and ask:

“‘Well,’ I say, ‘was there no one here while I was out, Lekanida Petrovna?’

“Silence.

“‘So, mumsie,’ I say, ‘you don’t want to answer me?’

“And she goes in a temper: ‘There’s no reason to interrogate me,’ she says.

“‘How could that be?’ I say, ‘that there’s no reason to interrogate you? I’m the landlady.’

“‘Because,’ she says, ‘you know everything full well without questions,’ and this, I hear, she says in a completely different tone.

“Well, with that, I understand the entire matter, to be sure.

“She just sighs; and until I lie down and go to sleep—she goes on sighing.”

“So, is this the end, Domna Platonovna?” I say.

“This is the end of the first act, my dear sir.”

“And what happened in the second one?”

“In the second, that sleazebag turned against me—that’s what happened in the second.”

“How could that be, Domna Platonovna,” I ask. “It’s very interesting, how could that have happened?”

“Just like that, my dear sir, it happened, the way it happens: a person senses strength in themself and right then turns to swine.”

“And did it happen soon after, that she went and changed on you?”

“That very same moment. The very next day she showed all her goat-like perkiness. The next day I get up as usually, at my time, I put on the samovar myself and sit down for tea next to her bed in the box-room and I say: ‘Go on, Lekanida Petrovna,’ I say, ‘wash up and pray to God, it’s time for tea.’ Without saying a word, she springs up and I see some sort of bill falls out of her pocket. I curve over towards that bill so I can pick it up and, all a sudden, she throws herself towards it like a hawk.’

“‘Don’t you touch!’ she says and, snatch, and it’s in her hand.

“I see it’s a hundred ruble bill.

“‘What’re you growling like that for, dearie?’

“‘I’ll growl if I want to.’

"'Calm down, dearie,' I say, 'I, thank God, am not the Dislen, no one will try to take away your goods in my house.'

"She doesn't give me a word in response: she drinks my tea and doesn't want to look at me; imagine anyone else wearing my shoes—it'd be painful. Well, I let it go, though, thinking that she's still dissaddled, and then, definitely, since the collar on her shirt is wide, then I can see, you know, that her chest is quivering and, like I was telling you, her body itself is peaches and cream, exactly like feathers in satin, and here suddenly, her body appears a little dark to me, and gooslings go jumping up on her bare shoulders, like those goose-bumps, the ones that sprout out in the cold. The first snow is difficult for the pampered sissy. Without a word, I even pitied her, didn't imagine how scheming she was then.

"I come back in the evening: I look—she's sitting in front of the candle, sewing herself a new shirt and on the table, in front of her, there are three more or four shirts lying there already cut out.

"'How much did you pay for that fabric?' I ask.

"And she, quietly quiet, she answers me:

"'I, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'I wished to ask you: leave me alone with your conversations.'

"I look, she has a peacified look to her, as though she is not at all angry. 'Well, dearie,' I think, 'if you're gonna be like that, I'm gonna be different to you too.'

"'Lekanida Petrovna,' I say to her, 'I'm the landlady of my house and I can say anything; and if my conversations are unpleasant, then would you be so kind,' I say, 'as to get out of here.'

"'Don't worry,' she says, 'I'm out.'

"'But before anything else, we've got to settle accounts,' I say. 'Honest people don't move out without settling accounts.'

"'Again,' she says, 'don't worry.'

"'I'm not worrying,' I answer. I was just counting ten rubles for the apartment for a month and half, and fifteen more for everything eaten and drunken, and for the tea, I say, let's put in at least three rubles; again three rubles also for the laundress, thirty-one rubles,' I say. I didn't count the candles there and that I took her to the bathhouse twice, I forgot that too.

"'Very good,' she answers, 'everything will be returned to you.'

"The next day in the evening I'm agetting home again, I catch her sitting there again sewing herself a shirt and on the wall there, 'cross from her, hanging on a nail, there's a burnoose, a black satin one, a good burnoose, with *gros de Naples* lining and eider-down. I start burning up, you know, because she got all this through me, through my obligingess and, on top of that, she's all sort of celebrating there all hush-hush.

"'The burnoose, though,' I say, 'seems to me that you could of waited some to get a hold of it and dealed with your debts first.'

"At hearing these words, she shovels her white little hand into her pocket; pulls out a paper and hands it over. I look at the paper, and in it are thirty-one rubles, precise.'

"I take the money and say: 'I am grateful to you, Lekanida,' I say. I'm using the formal with her on purpose.[59]

"'You're welcome,' she answers, while herself not lifting up her eyes from her work; she goes on sewing and sewing, her needle flying.

"'Stop right there, you little green snake,' I think, 'don't you go swaggering too much now that you've paid me back.'

"'This right here, Lekanida Petrovna,' I say, 'are my expenses that you've returned me, but what are you going to repay me for my troubles?'

"'For what troubles?' she asks.

"'Do I have to go explaining to you?' I say, 'You yourself understand, you know.'

"And she goes on sewing, running her thimble along the seam and saying, without looking: 'Let the one who needed them pay for your dear troubles,' she says.

"'But you're the one who needed them most of all,' I say.

"'No, I didn't need them,' she says. 'But, really, do me a favor and let me be.'

"Just look at that nerve! But I ignore it. I ignore it and let her be, and I keep on not talking to her and not talking.

"Not till the morning, should of been drinking tea, but I look—she's packed up; that shirt that she'd finished sewing at night, she put it on, wrapped the unfinished

ones in a kerchief; I look, she's curving over, pulls a box out from under the bed, gets a hat out… A really pretty little hat…to her taste and all…She puts it on and says:

"'Farewell, Domna Platonovna.'

"Here, I begin to pity her again like my own daughter: 'Stay right there,' I say to her, 'Stay, drink some tea at least!'

"'I thank you humbly,' she answers, 'I will drink tea at my place.'

"You hear that, 'my place!' But God knows I even let this pass in one ear and out the other.

"'Where will you live?'

"'On Vladimirskaya street,' she says, 'In the Tarkhov house.'

"'I know the house,' I say, 'it's marvelous, only the yard-keepers are big rouies.'[60]

"'I have nothing to do with the yard-keepers.'

"'Of course, my friend, of course!' I say. 'What did you do, rent a room for yourself or something?'

"'No,' she answers, 'I got an apartment; I'm going to live with the cook.'

"So that's what it's come to! 'Oh you little sneak!' I say, 'you sneak!' jokingly threatening her with a finger. 'What did you lie to me for when you said you were going to your husband's?'

"'Do you really think I lied to you?'

"'Well,' I answer, 'what's there to think about! If you had a desire to go, then surely you wouldn't go renting apartments here.'

"'Oh, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'how I pity you! You don't understand anything.'

"'Well,' I say, 'don't get sneaky, sweetie! I see you've really got it set up for yourself.'

"'What are you saying!' she says, 'Do sleazebags like me really go home to their husbands?'

"'Oh, mumsie!' I answer, 'what're you sleazing yourself up for so much! Those that are five times sleazier than you live with their husbands.'

"And she, astanding there on the very stoop, smiles all a sudden and says: 'No, forgive me, Domna Platonovna, I was angry at you; but I see that I can't be angry with you, because you are completely dumb.'

"And that's what I get for a farewell! How do you like that? 'Well,' I thought at her parting, 'dumb or not, smarter than you, it seems, because I went and did what I wanted with you, you smarty, you goodie girl.'

"Just like that she moved out, not exactly with a quarrel but with little satisfaction. And I didn't see her since, more than a year I didn't see her. At that time, God gave me little jobs here and there: I matchmaked four merchants; I gave a colonel's daughter in marriage; I also married a court councillor to a merchant's widow, well, and various other matters came my way, and they were also sending merchandise on over from my own place—so the time passed. Only this one incident turned up: one time I went to that very same general, the one I'd introduced Lekanidka to: I dropped in on his daughter-in-law. I'd known his son for a long time: he turned out exactly like his father too. So I arrive at the daughter-in-law's, she

wanted to put up her raw silk mantilla for sale, but she's not there: went to Voronezh, they say, to St. Mitrofan.[61]

"'I'll drop in on the general for old time's sake,' I think.

"I walk in the back entrance, no one there. Carefully, I pitter-patter along, walk past one room, another, and all a sudden, my good sir, I hear Lekanida's voice: 'My *charmant*!'[62] she says, 'I love you; you're my only joy in the world!'

"'Perfect,' I think, 'my Lekanida Petrovna's carrying on romances with both papa and son,' and again I go pitter-patter and, with those same patters, out I go. I'll scout out how she made the acquaintance of the young one, what if that young wife herself took pity on her, got to visiting her on the sly, and all that, you know, pitifying her, because she's supposably some educated and high class lady; but she, that Lekanida, expressed her ratitude no worse than she did to me. Well, that's fine, it's not my business, then; I know and I keep quiet; I'm even covering up that sin of hers, and where I have to, I don't show a sign that I know. Again, least another year passed further. At that time, Lekanidka lived on Kirpichny lane. I was getting ready to fast[63] on the fourth week of Great Lent,[64] so I walk down Kirpichny lane, look at the house and think: it's no good that me and Lekanida Petrovna have been in a fall out for this long; readying up to receive the body and blood—why not drop in and I'll make up with her! I drop in. There's such pomp in the apartment that you couldn't want anything better. The housemaid looks just like a lady.

"'Be a good girl, would you, announce that the lace-seller Domna Platonovna wants to see the mistress?'

"She goes in, comes back, and says: 'Come in.'

"I walk into the parlor; everything's just as grand there, that very same Lekanidka herself sits on the couch and the general's daughter-in-law's with her; both of 'em sippin' their coffee. Lekanidka greets me as though nothing, as though we saw each other just yesterday.

"Me too with all my simplicity: 'you're living nicely, honey; may God give you even better.'

"And all the sudden, she begins chattering on in French. I don't understand a thing in their lingo. I sit there like a fool, eyeing the room, beginning to yawn.

"'Oh,' Lekanida says suddenly, 'would you care for some coffee, Domna Platonovna?'

"'Why not,' I say, 'a cup, if you please.'

"And right then, she rings a little silver bell and orders her gal: 'Dasha,' she says, 'get Domna Platonovna some coffee.'

"I, the fool that I am, don't understand it then right away what *get* meant; I just look and in ten minutes her very same Dasha gal comes in again and reports: 'It's ready, madam,' she says.

"'Good,' Lekanidka answers her and turns to me: 'Go on, Domna Platonovna,' she says, 'she'll get you some coffee.'

"Oh, how I explode at this right then! I'll knock her down, I think to myself, but hold myself back. I get up and say: 'No, Lekanida Petrovna,' I say, 'I'm humbly grateful to you for your reception. I have my own,' I say, 'even though I'm a poor woman, I have my own coffee.'

"'What'd you get so angry for?' she says.

"'It's that,' I look her straight in the eyes and say, 'you went eating my salt with me and now you send me to your parlormaid's: well, to be sure, that's insulting to me.'

"'But my Dasha is an honest girl,' she says; 'her presence could not possibly offend you,' and she herself seems to be smiling.

"'Oh, you snake,' I think, 'I kept you under my wing and now you're writhing along my stomach!' I say, 'I don't demean the honor of this young woman in the least, but it's not for you, Lekanida Petrovna, to sit me at the same table long with your servants,' I say.

"'But why, Domna Platonovna,' she asks, 'is it not for me?'

"'Because take a look around, dearie,' I say, 'and remember who you were and look at who you are and then think to who you're debted for all this.'

"'I remember well that I was an honest woman,' she says, 'and now I'm trash and I'm indebted to you and your kindness for that, Domna Platonovna.'

"'Exactly,' I answer, 'your talk is true, you are nothing but trash. I tell you this in your very house to your very eyes, not afraid of nothing, that you're trash. You were trash, you are trash, and I'm not the one who made you into trash.'

"And myself, you know, I take my gripsack.

"'Farewell, Grand Madame,' I say.

"And this general's consumptive daughter-in-law goes and leaps up, all puny-like: 'How could you?' she says, 'How dare you insult Lekanida Petrovna!'

"'I dare, my dear lady!' I say.

"'Lekanida Petrovna is very kind,' she says, 'and I won't allow her to be insulted in my presence: she is my friend.'

"'And a fine friend at that!' I say.

"There I see Lekanidka leaps up and yells: 'Out!' she says, 'You foul woman!'

"'Ah!' I say, 'I'm a foul woman? I'm foul but I don't carry on romances with others' husbands. Whatever I may be like, I never stooped down to seducing both father and son with my charms! Take a look, my dear lady,' I say, 'here's what a friend you have, a real friend indeed,' I say.

"'You're lying!' she says. 'I will not believe you; you're saying that about Lekanida Petrovna out of spite.'

"'Well, if out of spite,' I say, 'then excuse me now, Lekanida Petrovna; now,' I say, 'I will knock you down.' And all that I'd heard, you know, that Lekanidka was chwittering with her husband, I spilled all those beans and out I went."

"Well, Domna Platonovna?" I say.

"The old man left her after that scandal."

"And the young one?"

"She was hardly getting anything from the young one! With the young one, her love went pour-amour,[65] as they say. Just look at her, such a little riffity-raff, but couldn't breathe without love. Come on now! A commissar can't go without his pants. And now she's gonna manage without love."

"And how do you know that?" I say, "that she's managing?"

"How could I not know! Of course she manages when she lives a life where today there's a prince and tomorrow a count; now an Englishman, tomorrow an Italian or some sort of Shpaniard. Well at that point it's not about love but money. She frenzies about the stores and down Nevsky, riding in one of those reclining trotter-drawn carriages."

"So, you haven't seen each other since then?"

"No. I'm not holding a grudge against her, but I don't visit her. Forget her, for God's sake! This one time on Morskaya this fall, I'm leaving this one lady's and she's coming up onto the porch. I give her the way just like that and say: 'Hello, Lekanida Petrovna!' and suddenly, turning all green, she bows to me from the porch, just like that, all the way to my face and, with a sweet face, she answers:

"'Hello, sleazebag!'"

I couldn't take it and I broke out laughing.

"Honest to God! 'Hello, sleazebag!' she says. And right then I was about to say to her: don't sleaze around, dearie, you yourself are a sleazebag now, but I thought since the footman's there right behind her with a big umbrella in his hands, it's best you pass by, I thought, go away, you French flambé."

CHAPTER FOUR

About five years had passed since the time of Domna Platonovna's telling me the tale of Lekanida Petrovna. In the course of these five years, I often left Petersburg and returned to it again to hear its incessant rumble, look at its pale, preoccupied, and crushed faces, breathe the stench of its fumes, and sulk under the harsh impression of its consumptive white nights—Domna Platonovna always remained the same. She somehow managed to run into me everywhere, she greeted me with friendly kisses and hugs and always tirelessly complained about the crafty intrigues of the human race, which had selected herself, Domna Platonovna, as its favorite victim, as some sort of eternal plaything. Domna Platonovna told me a lot of different stories in these five years in which she was always trampled, insulted, and injured because of her good deeds and cares for human needs.

My kindhearted Domna Platonovna's interesting and ingenuous tales were diverse, strange, and superabundant in all kinds of adventures. I heard a lot from her about different weddings, deaths, inheritances, theft-larcenies and theft-frauds, about every imaginable uncovered and covered-up debauchery, about all kinds of Petersburg mysteries and about you, about your instructive adventures, about you, my dear country-folk of Lekanida Petrovna, who ship from the free-spirited Volga, from the boundless Saratov steppes, from the quiet Oka and from the golden, blessed Ukraine your fresh, healthy bodies, your ardent but sincere hearts, your wildly brave hopes in fate, in chance, in your strength and strivings, which are useless here.

But let's return to our friend, Domna Platonovna. Well, whoever you are, my indulgent reader, let it not offend you that I called Domna Platonovna our mutual

friend. Assuming at least a slight acquaintance with Shakespeare in every reader, I ask him to recall Hamlet's expression: "treat every man after his desert, and you'll find few who don't deserve a good box on the ear."[66] It can be hard to get through to a person's inner sanctum!

And so, Domna Platonovna and I often broke bread together and continued our friendship; she continued visiting me and, eternally needing to rush off on business, would sit in one place for hours. I also visited Domna Platonovna two or three times in her apartment at Znamenskaya and saw that same box-room where Lekanida Petrovna hid before her act of renunciation, I saw that same sweet-shop where Domna Platonovna got a sugar pastry to give her a bite to eat and console her; finally, I saw two freshly-imported "young ladies" who had arrived in Petersburg to look for happiness and ended up at Domna Platonovna's in "Lekanidka's place;" but I could never get out of Domna Platonovna what paths she followed to get to her current state and to her original convictions concerning her own absolute rightness and the universal striving towards all kinds of deception. I really wanted to know what had happened to Domna Platonovna before she charged at me: "Hey! Now do me a favor, my dear fellow, and don't go trying to start an argument with me; I know better than you on this one." I wanted to know what that blessed merchant family from the Zusha was like, the one (that is to say, the family) in which Domna Platonovna grew up so round, whose prayer, and fasting, and her own virtue, which she was so proud of, and pity for people, came together with matchmaking lies, artistic leanings toward the arrangement of short marriages, not for love, but solely for financial interest, and so on. How could it be, I thought, that all this crept into a

single fat little heart and got on in it with such astounding accord that even while one feeling was pushing her hand to unleash ten slaps to the face of the crying Lekanida Petrovna, another was moving her legs to bring her a sugar pastry; that same heart was aching while dreaming about how her mother kept that Lekanida Petrovna tidy, and that very same one was beating calmly, inviting some fat hog to hurry on over and sully this Lekanida Petrovna as quickly as possible, who now had nothing to lock up her body with!

I understood that Domna Platonovna had not pursued this matter in the form of business but did it in the *Petersburg way*, like some kind of irrefutable law that a woman is not to untangle herself from misfortune in any other way but at the expense of her own personal fall. But really, who are you, Domna Platonovna? Who convinced you of all this and led you onto this path? But Domna Platonovna, in spite of all her loquaciousness, could not stand touching on the subject of her past.

Finally, it suddenly happened that Domna Platonovna, completely unintentionally and without any kind of approaches from my side, told me how *simple* she was and how "they" *schooled her* and led her not to *believe anyone even for a blink of an eye*. Don't expect anything coherent in this tale of Domna Platonovna's, my kind reader. It can hardly help someone figure out the process of the mental development of this Petersburg figure. I am passing on to you Domna Platonovna's tale below, in order to amuse you a bit and, perhaps, to give you the opportunity to ponder, yet again, the dull but frightening force of these "Petersburg circumstances," not only the ones that create and develop Domna Platonovna, but also the ones that do in the girls that don't look before they leap, the Lekanidas, to

whom Domna becomes a tyrant here, whereas in any other place she would have felt herself a pariah or even a buffoon in the presence of every one of them.

CHAPTER FIVE

I was sick at the time, living in the Kolomna district[67] of Petersburg. My apartment was "something special," as Domna Platonovna put it. There were two spacious rooms in an old wooden house belonging to the small wife of a wood merchant who had recently buried her pious spouse, taken up usury as a result of her widowed status, and rented out her former bedchamber together with a triple bed and a parlor connected to the bedroom, with a giant glass icon-case before which her deceased would pray daily.

In the so-called "hall" I had: a couch upholstered with real Russian leather; a round table covered with faded purple velveteen with a completely colorless silk fringe; a table clock with a copper figurine of a Moor; a stove with a high-relief figure in the cavity where liqueurs were prepared; a long mirror with very fine glass and a bronze harp on the top plank of the tall frame. On the walls, there was an oil portrait of the late emperor, Alexander I; next to it, in very heavy gold frames under glass, were lithographs depicting four scenes from the life of Queen Genevieve;[68] the emperor Napoleon in the infantry and in the cavalry; some kind of mountaintop; a dog floating on its dog house, and a portrait of a merchant with the order of St. Anna on a ribbon.[69] In the far nook, there stood a tall three-piece icon composed of three big images with dark faces, sternly looking out from their sparkling golden framework; in front of the icon there was an icon-lamp, always carefully lit by my pious landlady, and a little cupboard down under the icons with half-circular doors and a bronze edging in place of the framing. It was as if all of this was not located in Petersburg but in the merchant quarter of Moscow or even in the city of Mtsensk

itself. My bedroom was even more like a Mtsensk one; it even seemed to me that the triple bed with the down-mattress that I sank into, was not a bed but Mtsensk itself, living incognito in Petersburg. All I had to do was bury myself in those downy waves, and it was as if some kind of soporific, poppy-seed bedcover would instantly move over my eyes and cover up all of Petersburg with its merry tedium and tedious merriment. Here, amongst these calming Mtsensk surroundings, I again had the opportunity to chat with Domna Platonovna to my heart's content.

I caught a cold and the doctor ordered me to stay in bed. Once, at about twelve o'clock on a gray March day, I was lying there, already getting better, and having read my fill, I thought: "It wouldn't be bad if someone was to drop in," and I didn't even have a second to think this when the door to my hall creaked, as if fulfilling my desire, and Domna Platonovna's jolly voice could be heard:

"Oh, how wonderful it is here! And the icons and the glow in front of the godly benediction—very, very wonderful, even."

"Dear Domna Platonovna, could that be you?"

"Who else could it be but me, my friend," she answered.

We greeted each other.

"Take a seat!" I asked Domna Platonovna.

She sat down on a little chair across from my bed and placed her hands with her white kerchief on her little knees.

"What are you so sick with?" she asked.

"I have a cold," I said.

"'Cause nowadays lots of people are complaining about their stomachs."

“No, not me, I’m not complaining about my stomach,” I said.

“Well, if you’re not complaining about your stomach, then it’ll pass. You’ve got a nice apartment here.”

“It’s all right, Domna Platonovna,” I said.

“An excellent apartment. I’ve known the owner, Lyubov Petrovna, for a long time. A wonderful woman. Before, she was cursed and use to yell at the top of her lungs but it appears that’s all in the past.”

“I don’t know,” I said, “seems to me I don’t hear it, no yelling.”

“But what grief has come upon me, my friend!” said Domna Platonovna in her sorrowful voice.

“What is it, Domna Platonovna?”

“Oh, my little friend, such grief, such grief that…it’s terrible, you can say, the grief and the misfortune, all at once. You see, look at what I’m carrying my goods in right now.”

I looked, leaning off the bed, and saw Domna Platonovna’s lace on the table, tied up in a black silk kerchief with white fringe.

“You’re in mourning,” I said.

“Oh, dearie, in mourning, and what mourning at that!”

“Well, so where’s your gripsack?”

“That’s it, that’s what I’m mourning, the gripsack. It went and disappeared, my gripsack’s gone.”

“What do you mean,” I said, “disappeared?”

"Just like that, my friend, it disappeared, so that up to these two very days, whenever I remember, then, my lordie, I think, could it be that I'm such a sinner that you're torturating me so? You see how strange it all happened: I have this dream; I see it's like some priest's coming to me, carrying a round loaf, you know, like they bake in our own place from millet kasha. 'Here,' he says, 'here's a round loaf for you, lord's servant. Father,' I say, 'why and what for is this round loaf?' So you see what this round loaf turned out to be for? An omen of a loss."

"How did it happen, Domna Platonovna?" I asked.

"It was very strange, my friend. Do you know the merchantwoman Kosheverova?"

"No," I said, "I don't."

"You don't know her and that's good. We're friends, actually, not really friends because she's a most vemonous woman and actually pretty foul, but, you know, more or less, sort of like with you, we're friends. I dropped by on her in the evening and, misfortunately, outsat there too long. It's all her fault, may she rot, really, oh sit a while, sit a while, Domna Platonovna. Why'd she go flying high on the hog for?[70] Because her husband wasn't jealous of her, but what's to be jealous of when her mug is frightful and her tongue is as huge as a parrot's. Tells stories of her teeth hurting so the doctor ordered a medical leecher to be put to her tooth, but the assistant boy let that leech on her tongue and, ever since, she's had a protruberance there on her tongue. Again, I had business that evening: had to run to a house at the Five Corners, to a merchant—he also wanted to marry, but she, that Koshrover, wouldn't let me go.

"'Hold it right there,' she says, 'let's drink some Kievan liqueur,' she says, 'and Fadey Semyonovich'll come back from night-services, we'll drink some tea: where do you have to rush off to?'

"'What do you mean, mumsie,' I say, 'where?'

"But so I stay, sinner that I am, so it's a little vodka and a little liqueur so that I feel my head even gets bewoozled.

"'Well,' I say to her, 'excuse me, Varvara Petrovna, I'm very grateful to you for your treats, but I just can't drink no more.'

"She pesters me, keeps offering me treats, and I say:

"'It's best you don't offer me more, mumsie. I know my proportion and won't drink any more than that for nothing.'

"'Wait for my companion,' she says.

"'I won't wait for him neither,' I say.

"Stuck to my guns that I'm going, just going. 'Cause, you know, I feel pudding forming in my head. I walk out, my good sir, past the gates, turn onto Razyezhaya and think: I'll get a cab. There's one standing right there on the corner, so I say:

"'Say, young man, would you take me to Our Lady Znamenskaya?'

"'Fifteen kopecks.'[71]

"'No way, not fifteen kopecks!' I answer him, 'Five kopecks.'

"So I go walking along Razyezhaya. It's light everywhere; the streetlamps are lit; the gas is on in the stores; I'll get there on foot, I think, if you won't take five kopecks, you barbarian, to go such a short distance.

"But all of the sudden, my good sir, a flutter, and some guy's in front of me, in a coat, a peaked cap, and galoshes, one word—a gentleman. And then he goes and springs right up in front of me, out of nowhere, for the life of me, I still don't understand how.

"'Tell me, madam,' he says (that rascal even calls me madam), 'tell me, madam,' he says, 'where is Vladimirskaya Street?'

"'Right here, dear sir,' I say, 'when you go straight, there'll be an alley there on your right…' soon as I utter this, picking up my arm, you know, to direct him, clutch, and he goes for my gripsack.'

"'A dozen's a dime but not worth my time,'[72] he says, and, whiz, he's gone.

"'Oh, you barbarian!' I say, 'You scum, you!' I still take this for nothing more'n a prank. But with that word, lo, and my gripsack's gone.

"'Good gracious!' I start hollering with all my might, with my entire lungs. 'Good gracious!' I holler, 'Help me! Catch that barbarian! Catch that villain!' And myself, you know, I run a bumpin', and I'm grabbin' people by the hands, dragging: help me, protect me: some barbarian just got hold of my gripsack! I run and run, till my legs stop, and him, that villain, he's without a trace. Well, what more can I say, how was I, the melon that I am, supposed to catch up with that tattery dog! I turn 'round to the people and scream: 'Barbarians! What are you gaping at! Are you godless or something?' Well, I run, I run, and I stop. Stop and howl. So I'm howling away, like a fool. I sit on a curb-post and howl. A crowd gathers 'round me, figuring: 'She must be drunk.'

"'Oh, you're all such barbarians!' I say. 'You're the ones who're drunk but my gripsack was just thefted right from my hands.'

"Right then, a policeman comes up to me. 'Let's go to the precinct, lady,' he says. "The policeman brings me to the precinct and again I begin to scream.

"I see a police lieutenant's coming out of the doors and he says: 'What are you making all this noise here for, woman?'

"'For pity's sake, your honor,' I say, 'I was just thefted and blah, blah, blah.'

"'Write up a report,' he says.

"They wrote it.

"'Now go with God,' he says.

"So I went.

"I come back in a day: 'What about my gripsack, your honor?' I say.

"'Your papers are being processed,' he says, 'go wait.'

"I await and await; all of a sudden they summon me to the police-station. They bring me into a big room, with heaps of those gripsacks there.[73] The unit major, a polite and handsome man, says, identify your gripsack.

"I looked, and none of them're my gripsack.

"'No, your honor,' I say, 'my gripsack's not here.'

"'Give her a paper,' he orders.

"'What is this paper all about, your honor?' I ask.

"'About that you were thefted, ma'am.'

"'What's this paper to me, your honor?' I announce.

"'Well, really, what else can I do for you, ma'am?'

“They gave me that paper that I was definitely thefted, and go on to the Office of Public Decency, they say. So, then I arrive at the Office of Public Decency, give them the paper; right then some official walks out the door in the outfit of a colonel, leads me into the room, where there are oodles of gripsacks.

“‘Look,’ he says.

“‘I see, your honor; but my gripsack isn’t here.’

“‘Well, just hold on a second,’ he says, ‘now the general will sign your paper.’

“So I sit and I wait and wait, wait and wait, and the general arrives: they give him my paper and, well, he just signs it.

“‘What is it the general signed on my paper?’ I ask the official.

“‘He signed that you were thefted,’ he answers. And so I’m holding on to that paper.”

“Hold on to it,” I said, “Domna Platonovna.”

“You never know.”

“Well, the wiles of the devil are many.”

“Oh, you got it! The wiles are many! If I’d a known, then, I’d a stayed at her place, at the Koshrover’s, spent the night.”

“Or,” I said, “you shouldn’t have skimped on the cabby.”

“Don’t talk about the cabby; the cabby’s a trickster like all the others. All those rascals are in cahoots.”

“Come on now, they can’t all be in one band!” I said, “Are there that few of them or something?”

“Just try and argue! This is how well I know those swindlers!”

Domna Platonovna raised her tightly clenched fist and looked at it with a certain pride.

"A cabby done something much better to me when I was still foolish," she began, lowering her hand. "That rascal drove me tumbling and robbed me."

"How is that, tumbling?"

"Just like that, out I tumbled, and that's it: In the winter I took a trip to the Petersburg side to bring a lace mantilla to the cadet's corpus to one fine lady there. She was such a little ladyship, delicate and all, well, but when it comes to bargaining—she'd scream all over the place, a real prima donna. I leave her place, that ladyship's, and it's already getting dark. You know how in the winter it gets dark all early. I'm rushing and rushing to get to the proshpect in time, and the cabby comes from around the corner, a little man with his hair uptangled. I'll give you a bargain on the ride, he says.

"'Fifteen kopecks to Znamenie,' I give 'em to him."

"How could that be," I interrupted, "how could you pay so little, Domna Platonovna!"

"Well, you see, I could. 'We'll take the shortest road,' he says. It's all the same! I get in the sled—I didn't have my gripsack yet: I carried everything around in a handkerchief. That devilish cabby went and took the shortest road, somewhere past the fortress and off to the Neva, all along the ice and more ice, and all a sudden, just there, just at the shore, right across from Liteinaya, he goes and chucks me into a pothole. You know, like someone went up from below and to my very underside, thwack! And I flied out…flied out on one side, and my bundle, God knows where it

flew to. I get up all grimy-grimed ‘cause there was water in the ruts. ‘You barbarian!’ I yell at him, ‘What have you done to me, you barbarian?’ And he answers: ‘Well, this is the shortcut,’ he says, ‘you can’t go without tumbling here,’ he says. ‘What do you mean you can’t, you tyrant? Is that how you drive people around?’ I say. But he, that rascal, he’s saying his own thing again: ‘Merchantwoman, they’re always a tumbling here; that’s why I took only fifteen kopecks, so that I could go the shortcut.’ Now just try talking to that beast! I’m brushing myself off and looking around; where’s my bundle, I look around, ‘cause we landed crosswise from each other. Suddenly, an officer or some kind of civilian comes out of nowheres with a moustache: ‘Oh you, sluggard! You scum!’ he says, ‘You’re driving around such a portly lady so careless?’ while charging on up to his teeth.

“‘Sit down, madam,’ he says, ‘I’ll strap you in.’

“‘My bundle, dear sir,’ I say, ‘I dropped it when that beast sent me tumbling.’

“‘Here is your bundle,’ he says and hands it to me.

“‘Go on, you rascal, and waatch out!’ he yells to the cabby. ‘And you, ma’am, if he tumbles you out again, then give it to him straight in the mug, without any circumlocutions.’

“‘How can we womens,’ I answer, ‘deal with them, with them bulls.’

“We went off.

“But, you know, soon as he drives out onto Gagarinskaya, I see the cabby snickering about something.

“‘And what are you doing hee-hawin’, you smart fellow?’

"'Oh nothing,' he says, 'yesterday I drove a Jew here so cheap that when I remember it, I can't control myself.'

"'What's there to laugh about?' I say.

"'How could I not laugh?' he says, 'when he gets his mug right in a puddle, leaps up and yells *whoop*, goes on spinnin'.'

"'What was he whooping like that for?' I ask.

"'Just like that,' he says, 'seems like it's part of their religion.'

"Well, here I start to laugh too.

"When I rethink that Jew running around yelling *whoop*, *whoop*, I can't keep from laughing.

"'Their religion is empty-headed after that,' I say.

"We get to my house, I get up and say: 'If only I could punish you, you beast,' I say, 'dock you five kopecks,' I say, 'but I'm just afraid of sin: here are your fifteen kopecks.'

"'Show mercy, ma'am,' he says, 'I'm unblamable here: you can't go the shortcut without a tumble; but it didn't hurt you, dearie,' he says, 'that's how you grow.'

"'Oh, you sluggard!' I say, 'You sluggard! Pity that mister didn't give it to you good in the neck.'

"And he answers: 'Watch out, your highressness,' he says, 'don't drop what goods he did give you,'[74] and with that *giyyap*! To the horse and off he goes.

"I get home, light up the samovar, and go for the bundle: I'm hoping the goods haven't got wet; and when I look in the bundle, I almost die. Die, I tell you, die

completely. I want to yowl my voice but just can't yowl it; I want to walk, but my legs are caving on in."

"Well, and what was there, Domna Platonovna?"

"What? Embarrassing to say what: nothing but filth."

"What kind of filth?"

"Well, we know what kind of filth there is: there were taken-off-trousers, that's what was there."

"But how'd that happen?" I said.

"Now try and go figure how it happened. First off, I was more afraid of this, how he could have taken them off on the Neva and tied them in a knot. I see it and I don't believe my eyes. I run to the precinct and yell: good grief, this bundle ain't mine.

"'We know it's *blind*,'[75] they say, 'tell your story sensibly.'

"I tell it.

"They take me to the criminal investigation department. There, I tell my story again. The detective cracks up.

"'That rascal was probably coming from the bathhouse,' he says.

"The devil knows where he was coming from, but how is it he slipped me that bundle?"

"It's not all that tricky in the dark, Domna Platonovna," I said.

"No, I'm getting at, you know, the cabby goes: don't drop, he says, what goods he did give you! There you have it, what goods he gave you, so now think over what his words were about."

"You should have looked at the bundle right then and there, when you got in the sleigh," I said.

"Well, my friend, you can look at it how you want, but if they get to swindlin' you, then they're gonna swindle you over."

"Well," I said, "that's going too far…"

"Hey! No, now go do yourself a favor: right affront of your eyes they'll make a fool of you. Let me tell you about an incident, about how they flimflam our kind right affront of our eyes. I'm walking—still soon after arriving here from my own place—and I have to go through Apraksin.[76] At that point, it was all crammed there, not like now, after the fire[77]—now it's great how wonderful it is there, but at that time it was terribly vile. So I just go walking along. Then out of nowheres a young fellow appears, all handsome from head to toe: 'Buy a shirt, ma'am,' he says. I look and he's holding a cotton shirt in his hands, a brand new one, and the cotton is most excellent—you wouldn't pay less than sixty kopecks a yard.

"'What do you want for it, then?' I ask.

"'Two fifty.'

"'Come on,' I say, 'would you give me half off?'

"'Which half?'

"'Either one,' I say, 'whichever you want.' Because I know, in bargaining you should always offer half for everything.

"'No, lady,' he answers, 'I see it's not for you to buy quality things,' and, you know, he's pulling the shirt out of my hands.

"'Just give it to me,' I say, 'cause I see the shirt is excellent, it's worth even three rubles to anyone.

"'Take a ruble,' I say.

"'Let go, madam!' he says, he tugs it and I see he's rolling it under the hem of his shirt and looking about. It's obvious, I think, it's stolen; I think it and I go on walking, and, all a sudden, he jumps out from the stands: 'Come on, lady,' he says, 'give me the money quickly. I give up: obvious you're meant to have it.'

"I give him the ruble bill into his hands and he gives me that very same scrunched up shirt.

"'It's yours's, ma'am,' he says, swings back, and leaves.

I put my purse in my pocket while unrolling my purchase and I look—bam, and something falls to my feet. I look—it's old stuffing, the kind you put in flurniture. At that point I still didn't know all the Petersburg circumstances, I marvel: say, what is all this? I give my hands a look and see a shred! Of the very same cotton as the shirt, but just one shred measuring half a yard. But those flea-bag shop assistants, they're roaring: 'Please come to us, ma'am,' they jabber, 'we have,' they say, 'store-galore even the dodo gals will adore.' And another one comes up again: 'ma'am, we have a lovely handy-down shroud for your Worship.' I'm turning a deaf ear to all this: the hell with you. I'm telling you, I'm beat; a fear's overtaken me, what is this shred? It was a shirt but it became a shred. No, my friend, when they want to, they can do anything. Do you know Colonel Egupov?"

"No, I don't."

“But you must know him! He’s real handsome, pot-bellied: an excellent man. They killed ten horses in the war out from under him and he stayed alive: it was wrote up in the papers.”

“Even so, I don’t know him, Domna Platonovna.”

“Do you know what some barbarian done to him and I? I’m telling you, it’s a novel, and what’s more, this novel’s one of a kind—it’s fit for a theatre.”

“My dear,” I said, “don’t you taunt me so, tell me!”

“Well, this tale’s definitely worth telling. Only, what’s it called? There’s this one land surveyor here…Kumoveev, no, Makaveev, he lived in the seventh squadron on Izmailovsky.”

“Honest to God, forget about him.”

“Honest to God? No, not God, but the Devil, that’s more befitting for him.”

“I was just getting at the name.”

“Yes, about the name—well, that could be; the name’s not bad—the name’s simple, but the fact that he himself is a rascal, well, he’s the number one rascal in the capital. Kept nagging me: ‘Marry me off, Domna Platonovna!’

“‘All right,’ I say, ‘I’ll marry you off,’ I say, ‘Why shouldn’t I marry you off? I will.’

“In appearance, he’s such a striking creature, white in the face, wears his moustache all firm and all.

“Well, so I start matchmaking; burdening myself, walking around, and I find him a bride from the merchants—owns a house on the Peski, and she’s a proprietous lady: plump, rosy; even though there in her little nose, on the bridge of her nose, she

has an itty-bitty defect, but it's nothing, 'cause it's from scrofula. I go about taking that rascal with me to see her and our deal's well under way. Here, to be sure, I'm looking after him so well it couldn't be better, course you got to do it eyekeepingly, and there was even a rumor that he was engaged to some young merchant girl and took two hundred silver rubles for himself, for upquipment, and gave them a marriaging note, but the note turned out to be a phony and they couldn't use it on him. Well, knowing such a thing about a person, to be sure, you keep your eyes peeled, drop by occasionally. One time, I drop in on him, my good sir—but he, I gotta tell you, takes up two rooms: one is his bedroom and the other, a kind of hall. I walk on in and I see the door from the hall to the bedroom's shut and there's some sort of gentleman by the window, you got to assume he's a trouper[78] 'cause he's got a munitions belt over his shoulder and he's sitting in the armchair smoking a pipe. That would be that very same Colonel Egupov himself.

"'What is it?' I say, turning to him myself, 'the owner's not home?'

"And in response he shakes his head all stern and says nothing, so then I don't know whether the land surveyor is home or not.

"'Well,' I think, 'maybe he has a madam of some kind in there because, even though he's preparing to get married, but anyway. I sit down there and go on sitting. Well, it's no good, you know, to sit all quiet, 'cause they'll think you don't know how to say a word.

"'The weather,' I say, 'it's most excellent lately.'

"Right then at my words he turns his eyes to me, and, as if out a barrel, goes and roars: 'What is it?' he says.

“‘The weather,’ I repeat, ‘it’s been most excellent.’

“‘You’re wrong,’ he says, ‘it’s just a big cloud of dust.’

“The dust was definitely there, but, all the same, right away, you know, I think, who are you, anyway? Where’d you come from that you’re snarling so angry?

“‘Are you,’ I say to him again, ‘Stepan Matveevich’s family, friend, or just an acquaintance?’

“‘A friend,’ he answers.

“‘An excellent person, that Stepan Matveevich,’ I say.

“‘A capital swindler,’ he says.

“Well, I think, Stepan Matveevich’s surely not home.

“‘Have you, may I ask,’ I say, ‘known him a long time?’

“‘Yes, I have,’ he says, ‘way back when the hag was a maiden.’

“‘My good sir,’ I answer, ‘ever since I got to knowing him, there might’ve been more ‘n one maiden turned hag, but I just don’t want to take the sin upon my soul—I haven’t noticed anything bad from him.’

“And he goes to me, all proud:

“‘What do you have jammed in your attic?’ he says, ‘hay!’

“‘Excuse me, my good sir,’ I say, ‘on my shoulders I still have a head, and not an attic, bless my Creator, and there’s no hay in it, but, all the same that any person has, what God’s intended there.’

“‘Go on!’ he says.

“‘You’re a bumpkin,’ I think to myself, ‘and you’ll always be a bumpkin.’

“And at that point he asks me all of a sudden:

“‘Do you know his brother, Maksim Matveev?’ he says.

“‘Don’t know him, sir,’ I say, ‘and if I don’t know, well, then I won’t lie that I do.’

“‘This one’s a swindler and that one’s even better. He’s deaf.’

“‘What do you mean, deaf?’ I say.

“‘Completely deaf, just like that,’ he says: ‘one ear’s deaf and the other’s dumb, and he can’t hear with either one.’

“‘You don’t say,’ I say, ‘how surprising!’

“‘There’s nothing surprising about it,’ he says.

“‘No, I’m just saying that one brother’s so good looking and the other—deaf.’

“‘Well, yes; but there’s nothing surprising about it; my sister has a red spot on her mug, sitting there just like a frog: so what do I have to do with it!’

“‘Something surely scared the mother while expecting, then?’ I say.

“‘The wench upturned a samovar over her belly,’ he says.

“Here, I politely pitied her.

“‘It’s a short trip to sin for the sharp-eyed ones,’ I say, and he starts up again:

“‘You,’ he says, ‘if only you’re not a complete fool, then put two and two together: the deaf one, his brother, I mean, he’s one to bargain horses.’

“‘Yes, sir,’ I say.

“‘Well, I thought to teach him to break the habit, I swapped in a blind horse for him, one who knocks into fences.’

“‘Ok, sir,’ I say.

"'And so I needed a little bull from him for the breeding, I bought this bull from him and gave him the money; but it turns out, it's not a bull at all, but an ox.'

"'Oh,' I say, 'my God, how unexpected! That won't do,' I say.

"'Of course, if it's an ox,' he says, 'it won't do. And so, look at what a joke I joke to the deaf guy: I have a receipt for his brother, for Stepan Matveevich, for one hundred rubles, but he has no money; so now I'm going to show myself to him.'

"'You can show him for sure,' I say.

"'But you should know,' he says, 'you should know this Maksim Matveevich is a scallywag, and I'll wait on him and, right then, knock him into debtors' prison.'[79]

"'I don't know all his ins and outs, but, finding a match for him, I'm not supposed to deflame him.'

"'You're finding a match for him!' he yells.

"'I am, sir.'

"'Oh you,' he says, 'you're a fool! A fool! Don't you know he's married?'

"'It can't be!' I say.

"'And why not, when he has three kids.'

"'You don't say!' I say. 'Well, Stepan Matveevich,' I think, 'you joked quite a good joke on me!' and I say, that means, I say, as I'm realizing now, that he's quite the double-dealer!

"But he, that colonel Egupov, he says: 'If you want to match someone up, best thing to do—match me up.'

"'Will do.'

"'No,' he says, 'I'm telling you this without any jokes, in all honesty.'

"'Will do,' I say, 'will do!'

"'Looks like you don't believe me?'

"'No, why's that: truly, if a person's looking to excape from the dissipated life, then the first thing he ought to do is marry a good girl.'

"'Or,' he says, 'it could even be a widow, long as she has money.'

"'Yes, or a widow.'

"And we got to talking; he gives me his address, and I begin visiting him. What didn't I suffer with that viper! He's scary big, and all fantastical, he's never in the same mood and understands each person according to his own fantasy. People can have different dispositions for sure, but, by God, don't give a man like Egupov to any wife in the world. He use to get up, boggle his eyes, fill himself up with blood like a bedbug and shout: 'I'll turn you upside down and twist you up. You'll be inside out!' Looking at this, at how he'd rave, you'd think: 'Oh, who insulted him so!' But he's angry just 'cause he got up on the wrong side of the bed. Well, but I matched him up with this merchant's widow. She was all befitting of him, as though baked to order, a hulk of eternally-blessed woman. Well, my good sir, the inspection period's reached its end, and the betrothal's set.

"I get to that betrothal with him, there're lots of guests—relatives from the bride's side and acquaintances, all of a good family, an important one, and I see, among the guests, in a nook, on a chair, sits the land surveyor, Stepan Matveevich.

"Not a good sign that he's there, but I say nothing.

"Maybe, he was prob'ly let out of his debtors' prison and came as a friend of a friend.

"Well, in short, everything's going as it should. The betrothal, the blessing with the icon, everything's fine. Though the bride's uncle, Semyon Ivanovich Kolobov, a merchant, arrives drunk and begins to lie, that it's not a colonel at all, he says, but the son of the bathhouse attendant, Fyodorova. 'Somebody lick his ear with your tongue,' he says, 'he'll react fightin' right away, such's this habit of his. I know him,' he rambles, 'He put on the epaulets so he could showboat, but I'll rip those epaulets right off,' well, course they didn't allow that and, right away, led Semyon Ivanovich to the empty, cold part of the house.

"But out of the blue, during the very blessing, the bride's father holds up the icon, and something goes hum in the hall! Again, he picks up the icon and through the hall, again, hmmmm!—and all a sudden something pronounces distinct:

"'No point singing *Isaiah*, when Emmanuel's in the womb,'[80] it says.

"'Lord! Everyone's plain strucked dumb. The bride's embarrassed; I see Egupov going at me with his boggle-eyes.

"Well, what's with you! Why're you frenzying at me, my dear, like the Devil at a priest?

"And the hum starts up again in the hall: 'The dust in the field flies up in doom, the wife rolls to the wedded groom, to God she prays, flooded in tears.'

"They run this way and that—there's no one there.

"My God, what a commotion! The bride's father puts down the icon, and on to me, beating; and I, seein' my turn's a coming, pickling up my tail, off I go. Egupov swears he hasn't never in his life been married: saying, you can go and inquire, but the voice keeps at it, really so tentively for all to hear: 'Servants, don't give a

maiden[81] into a foul marriage,' it says. The whole business fell apart! Why do you think all that was? Egupov himself drops by a week after this and says: 'You know, Domna,' he says, 'that rascal, the land surveyor, was ventriloquizing all that with his bellybutton!'"

"Well, how could that be, Domna Platonovna," I asked, "with his bellybutton?"

"With his bellybutton or his stomach or something, the devil knows what he was putting on with! I mean, I'm telling you they're all sneaky these days, making things up, one outdoing the other, and you'll see, they'll mess up the entire state and beggarize it, for sure."

On top of everything, I was bewildered upon hearing the entirely surprising expressions of Domna Platonovna, relating to the fate of the Russian state. Domna Platonovna, undoubtedly, noticed this and desired to feast her eyes on the political effect she had produced.

"Yes, it's true, oh lordie!" she continued a note higher. "You just tell me, if you please, how many trickings have come about? One's flying through the air, like only birds are allowed; the other's swimming fishlike and diving to the bottom of the ocean; that one now—like on Admiralteisky Square[82]—eating sulphuric fire; this one talks with his stomach; the other—does something else, something that's unpermissable for people—he does…Lordie! The demon, the sly one himself, even he bows down to them, but all the same, not for good, but for evil. One time it happened to me that I was gave up to the demons for desecration!"

"Dear," I said, "did that really happen too?"

"It did."

"Well, don't drag it out, tell me."

"A long time ago, maybe twelve years or so, I was still young and unexperienced at that time and, turned widow, I thought to go into selling. Well, what can I sell, I think? Nothing better for women than linens 'cause the woman understands most about what goes with what. I'll buy up linens at the market, I think, and I'll sit on a bench by the gates and sell. I go to the market, buy up some linen, and have to turn on back home. I think, how can I turn back home with the linens? And, bang, a troika drives into the coaching inn yard.

"'We've been carrying nuts from Kiev,' he says, 'to the homeland, on seven troikas, but it's just that we got the nuts a bit wet and now,' he says, 'the merchants made deductions from us and we're heading to the farmsteads without any profit.'

"'Where're your companions?' I ask.

"'My companions,' he answers, 'they went about, each their own ways, but I was thinking, maybe I'll find some riders.'

"'And where,' I wonder, 'wherebouts're you from?'

"'I'm a Kurakinite,' he says, 'from the village of Kurakino.'

"That was right where I needed to go, 'Here,' I say, 'here's a ready rider here for you.'

"We talk and decide on a silver ruble so that he'll go 'round the farmsteads and pick up other riders and get going tomorrow in the early afternoon.

"I look and tomorrow all a sudden a person's heading towards us into the farmstead, another, a fifth, an eighth and all of 'em men of the merchants, and such

total sharpies. I see one has a sack, another—a bag, a third—a suitcase and one has a rifle too.

"'How're you gonna jam us all in?' I say to the coachman.

"'It's nothing,' he says, 'you'll fit, the carriage is big, we can carry a hundred poods.'[83] Tell you the truth, I'd a been happy to stay but the ruble's already paid and I've got no one to go with.

"With grief and unsatisfaction, but, still I go. Soon as we get out the gates, one of the riders, right away, he says: 'Stop at the tavern!' They drink a lot there and make the coachman drink too. We set off. We go another verst[84] and I look—another one's yelling: 'Stop,' he says, 'Ivan Ivanovich Elkin[85] lives here,' he says, 'we can't in no way pass him over.'

"They stopped ten times or so, always at their Ivan Ivanovich Elkin's.

"I see it's getting to be night and our coachman's drunk himself drunketty drunk.

"'You,' I say, 'don't you dare drink no more.'

"'Why all this "don't dare?"' he answers. 'Either way I'm not daring,' he says, 'I'm doin' all this don't daringly.'[86]

"'You're nothing but a bumpkin,' I say.

"'So what if I'm a bumpkin!' he says, 'As long as there's vodka.'

"'Why don't you, you blockhead,' I instruct him, 'pity your creature!'

"'Well I,' he says, 'I pity it.' And with that word, whomp with his monster whip and goes a larruping. The wagon just jumps on up. I see we're gonna get tipped right then and there and that'll be the end of our life. And all the while, those

drunkards are merryin' about. One whips out an accordion, the other's roaring a song, third's shootin' a rifle. And I just pray: "'St. Paraskeva,[87] save me and have mercy upon me!'

"We're dashing and dashing full gallop and finally our horses begin to slow on down and we go back to a walk. Twilight's already fell and it's not exactly raining, but more like, so to say, sprinkling fog. Terrible how my hands swallowed up from clinging on and I'm happier than happy that finally we're going along by and by; I sit there without a peep. And at that point, I hear they've got a conversation going: one's saying there're robbers gadding about on the road here and the other answers him that he's not afeared of robbers 'cause he's got a two-shooter rifle. Again, another starts talkin' 'bout dead men: I, he says, have a dead bone and whoever I encircle with this dead bone will fall into a dead sleep and won't get up; another one's bragging that he's got a candle from dead pork fat. I'm listening to all this, and then all of the sudden everything happens like they're pulling wool over my eyes and the hay hit me and, in a minute, I fall sleeping.

"But I just can't in no way fall tight asleep 'cause we're being shook like nuts in a colander and, in my sleep, like I hear someone saying: 'How do we throw this damn broad outta here 'cause you just can't stretch your legs out.' But I go on sleeping.

"Suddenly, my dear sir, I hear a scream, squeal, hullabaloo. What is it? I look—it's night, our carriage is standing there and everyone's circling 'round it, screaming, and what they're screaming—you can't make out.

"'Shirder-dirder, wider-worlder-shirlywide,' one's shouting.

"Our guy, the one who was riding around with the rifle, goes bam out that rifle—the gun pops but no gunfire, bam out the other barrel—the rifle pops again, but no gunfire.

"Suddenly, that one, the yelling one, begins bellowin' out again: 'wider-worlder shirlywide!' With that, he goes grab, takes me under the arms, out the wagon, onto the field, goes circlin' a spinnin'. My God, I think, what is this! I take a look, look 'round myself—nothing but dark ugly mugs all circlin', spinnin' me and yellin': wider-worlder! They take me by the feet, and get to swingin' me about.

"'Good grief!' I pray, first time seein' such a thing happen to me: St. Nikolai of Mtsensk ![88] Immaculate matchmaker of three maidens! Keeper of painstaking purity![89] Don't let them bear eyes on my unworthy nudity!'

"Soon as I utter this in my heart, all a sudden, I feel the quietness 'round me 'come unbounded and it's as if I'm lying in a field, emerald-like greenness, and before me, before my legs, flows a small lake, but most clean, most transparent, and all around, like a thick fringe, young reeds stand and wave quietly.

"Here, I even forget about the prayer and just go looking at the reeds, as though I'd hadn't never saw them before.

"And what do I see then? I see a fog's rising up from this, from the lake, a dove-colored light fog, and just like a real shroud, spreads itself over the field just like that. And here, under the fog, in the very middle of the lake, suddenly, a sort of little circle, as though a fish splashed up, and a person's coming out from that circle, so small, and short of height, no bigger than a rooster; a teeny-tiny face; wearing a blue caftan, and on his head he's got a little green peaked cap.

"'What a surprising person,' I think, 'just like a pretty little doll,' and I continue looking at him, and I don't draw my eyes away from him and I'm not afraid of him in the least, not even a drop of fear.

"But I see he's starting to arise, arise, and he's coming on closer, closer to me, and, finally, when it gets to it, jump, and he plops right on my chest. Not right on it, you know, on the chest, but he's standing over my chest in the air and bowing. All pomprously, he raises his peaked cap and salutes.

"And a terrible laughter takes me: 'Where did you come from,' I think, 'you funny little thing?"

"And right then, slap, he puts his peaked cap back on again and says…just listen what he says!

"'Come on, Domochka,' he says, 'let's create love together!'

"So laughter just bursts me over.

"'Oh you,' I say, 'you're such a ruffian! What kind of love could you possibly possess?'

"And, suddenly, he turns his back to me and starts singing like a young cockerel: cock-a-doodle-doo!

"Suddenly a ring strikes here, suddenly strikes a knock, suddenly strikes a tune: a groan's verberating, I'm telling you. My God, I think, what's going on? Frogs, carpses, breams, crayfish, some of 'em playing vileins, others guitars, some banging the drums; one's dancing, another's galloping, the last's being thrown up in the air!

"'Oh,' I think, 'this is bad! This is absolutely no good! I'll fence myself in with a prayer,' I think, and I want to say: 'God will be resurrected,' but 'stead, I

recite: ‘Twist on up, go on higher,’ and, at that point, I hear boom-booroom-boom, boom-booroom-boom inside my stomach.

“‘What do you think I am: a *torban*[90] or something?’ I look and, really, I’m a *torban*. That little guy from before is standing over me all small and bowing on me.

“‘Oh, good grief,’ I think, ‘saintly souls!’ but he just goes on sawing, sawing on me with a bow and he’s playing such a tune on me, waltzes, all kinds of quandrantilles, and the others are cheering on: ‘Bang it, harder, harder, bang it!’ they yell.

“The stomach pain’s unbearable, I tell you, but I go on humming. And so they went banging on me the whole entire night; the entire night until the sun came up, I, a Christian person, was ‘stead of a *torban* for ‘em; served as conslation for those demons.”

“‘That is terrible,” I said.

“‘Even very terrible, my friend. But it was made even more terrible when, in the morning, after they out-torbaned all this music on me, I look about and see that the place is completely unknown to me: the field, that puddle’s really there, it’s big, like a small lake, and the reeds, and everything like I seen it, and the sun’s scorching from the sky and right over onto all my outsides. I look and here’s my parcel with the linens and purse—all in one piece; and there, not far away, a small village. I get up, drag myself to the village, hire a muzhik and get home by evening.”

“Domna Platonovna, are you sure all of this really happened to you?’’

“What, am I going to lie on myself?”

“No, I’m just saying, did all that really happen just like that?”

"Just like that, just like I'm telling you. And go ahead and marvel about how I didn't expose my nudity to them."

I marveled.

"Yes; and I got the better of the demon but this other time, with a sly person, it turned out different."

"How'd it turn out?"

"Just listen. I buy furniture for this one merchantwoman on Gorokhovaya Street from the people moving out. There are chests, tables, beds, and a children's bed with that kind of intertwineled bottom. I pay thirteen rubles money, put everything out into the corridor and go get a coachman. I get a dray coachman for a ruble forty to take me to Nikola Morskoy and as we're loading away the furniture, the owners, the ones I'd boughten it from, walk out at that point and lock up the apartment. All of the sudden, from out of nowhere, yard-keepers, Tatars, 'halam-balam': they shout, how dare you take those things? I go this and that way—they don't let out. And here's the rain, and here's the coachman who doesn't wanna wait. My God! Effortly, I devise: well, I say, bring me to the precinct, I'm a police officer's wife, and soon as I say that, those folks walk into the courtyard, the ones I bought the furniture from. 'Sold,' they say, 'that furniture was definitely sold to her.' So my coachman says: get in. I think and, course, 'stead of spending on another coachman, I'll sit in the children's bed. They firm it up high there, right on top of the heap, over the chest, but I scramble on up and sit down. And what do you think? I barely get out of the courtyard when I hear, 'long the bottom below me, crackety, crack, crack.

"'Ah,' I think, 'good heavens, it's me falling through!' And with that word I want to get up on my feet, but bang—and I pass through. Astriding, like a gendar, sitting on just the twine. Shame, I'm telling you, shamed to death! My clothing's got all ruffled up, and my bare legs're dangling over the chest; the people're marveling, the yard-keepers yellin': 'Cover up, policeman's wife,' but there's nothing to cover up with. See what a barbarian he is!"

"And who's the barbarian here?" I said.

"The coachman, of course: how come, you tell me, imagine, he's yawning at the horse but not even glancing a look at the passenger. Why, bad enough I'd rided almost all of Gorokhovaya like that, but the policeman, thank him, he stopped us. 'What kind of a nasty thing is this? What you are showing is not permitted!' And that's how I flashed my nakedness."

CHAPTER SIX

"Domna Platonovna!" I said, "so, I've been meaning to ask you for a long time—you were so young after your spouse died, could it be that you've never had your own affair of the heart?"

"What do you mean, of the heart?"

"You know, didn't you fall in love with someone?"

"Stop babbling nonsense!"

"And why is it nonsense?" I said.

"It's nonsense," she answered, "it's fine for those who have followers and mollowers to take part in such affairs, but since I'm alone and I'm always burdening myself, and I'm always leading an abruptive life, this is really off of my mind and out of the way."

"Even off of your mind?"

"And not even an itty bit!" Domna Platonovna struck one nail against the other and added: "And what's more, I'll tell you, all love is hogwash. Soon's a person lets whimsicals take over: 'Oh, I'm dying! I can't live without him or without her!' then that's it. I think it's love when a man helps a woman out as he ought to—now that's love, and that a woman should always be conscience and behave after herself."

"Well," I said, "is that to say that you, Domna Platonovna, are in no way sinful before God?"

"And what are my sins to you? If I was sinful somehow, then my sin is mine, not yours, and you are not my priest to hear confession."

"No, I'm getting at the fact that you were widowed young, Domna Platonovna, and one can see that you were very pretty."

"Good looking or not," she answered, "they didn't count me in with the uglies, though."

"That's it, that's it," I said, "that's still clear today."

Domna Platonovna smoothed her eyebrow and went into deep thought.

"I myself," she began quietly, "reasoned this many a time: tell me, Lord, is there sin upon me? And I couldn't get it out of no one. One time a nun instructed to write out this whole story taken from my words and give it to a priest for confession—so I agreed, the nun wrote it down, but, on my way to church, I dropped everything."

"What sin was that, Domna Platonovna?"

"I can't make it out: sort of a sin, sort of a dream."

"Well, tell me about the dream, at least."

"I gotta start from long, long ago. It was back when I lived with my husband."

"Well, how did you live, darling?"

"We didn't live so bad. Though our house wasn't all that big, but location-wise, it was very 'vantageous 'cause it looked out onto the very bazaar, and our bazaars for household use are frequent, only there's nothing to choose there, that's what the whole point is. We didn't live in big plenties, but not in poverty neither; we sold fish and pork fat and liver and all kinds of goods. My husband, Fyodor Ilyich, was young but sort of a puzzle, he was scraggy but had extraordinary lips. I never even seen lips like that on anyone after him. His character, God rest his soul, was

piercing—an argumenter and a vexater; but I was also a warrior when I was a lass. After getting married, at the start, I acted even very decently, but he didn't in no way adore it, and every day, on an empty stomach, we roariously battled it out. We didn't have much love and just about the same amount of agreement, 'cause we were two warriors joined together, and you couldn't not fight him 'cause it didn't use to matter how much you tender care him, he just went on cawkin' at you, still, we were living not separating and lived eight years. Course we lived not without unpleasantness, but it wasn't often that it got to real scuffles. One time, though, he gave me a smack upside the head, may he rest in peace, but, to be sure, I had some part in this because I took to trimming his hair and went with the scissors—barbered off of a piece of his ear. We had no children ourself, but had friends in the Nizhny City, Praskovya Ivanovna, whose children I held during baptism. They weren't well off, either, they called him a tailor and he had a diplona from the municipality, but as for sewing, he didn't sew anything, but read psalms for dead people and sang in the cathedral, in the kliros.[91] And as for the getting, when it came to getting something for the home, Praskovya Ivanovna would burden herself all the more, because she was a useful woman, she reared up the children and drove off misfortune away from the house.

"One time, in the last year of my husband's life (everything's raising into hell at that point),[92] that friend of mine, Praskovya Ivanovna, goes and has a name-day. She goes and has it and we visit her for the party and the rain keeps us there, a rain like cats and dogs; and at that point my head starts to hurt too 'cause I drunk three punches with grape vodka and nothin's nastier than grape vodka for the head. I go and lay down in the other room on the sofa.

"'You, Praskovya Ivanovna,' I say, 'sit with the guests a while and I'll go lay down here a tad.

"And she: 'Oh, how could you, on this sofa: it's too hard here; go lie down on the bed.'

"So I lay down on the bed and fall to sleep right then and there. Am I to blame here?"

"Not at all," I say.

"So, then listen now. I'm sleeping and sensing that someone's hugging me and, you know, seriously hugging me. I think that it's my husband, Fyodor Ilyich; but almost like it's not Fyodor Ilyich because he was of a spiritual build and all secretive—but I can't wake up. Slept off my time, I get up and look—it's morning and I'm laying on my friend's bed, and my friend's husband's laying next to me. I go whoosh, you know, jump up over him quick, off the very bed, I'm all shaking from fear and I look—my friend's lying on the floor, on the feather bed and my Fyodor Ilyich's with her…I nudge my friend right then, I look—she grips herself together and starts crossing herself.

"'What is this?' I say to her, 'How did this happen?'

"'Oh, my dear!' she says, 'Oh me, I'm a nasty creature! I set this all up myself,' she says, 'cause when they were saying bye to the guests, they sat down to drink some more, and I didn't go waking you up in the dark so I lied down here where the bed was made for you and your husband.'

"I even spit at this.

"'What now,' I say, 'what're we gonna do now?'

"And she answers me: 'We can't do anything but stay quiet about it.'

"And you're the first one I'm telling about all this after so many years, 'cause it's terrible difficult for me and every time I think of it, I'm ready to curse that slumber of mine."

"Domna Platonovna," I said, "don't distress yourself, because this was outside your control."

"How else could it be?" she said. "Either way, I worried and tortured myself a whole lot. Grief followed grief, Fyodor Ilyich went and died soon thereafter, 'cause he didn't die on his own right, but a pile of logs on the shore there collapsed over and sqwushed him. I didn't even have the lightest idear of the Petersburg circumstances, not even how with what to humor myself; but when I use to remember how all this was after his death, I'd sit there in the evening all alone by the window and sing: 'Take all the gold, all the honor back,' and, I'd stream and stream like a river, my eyes almost popping out. It gets so heavy, so terrible, remembering these words that 'your tender friend sleeps in the wet earth,'[93] that you may as well put a rope 'round yourself and go crawl into a noose. I sold everything, rid myself of everything, and left; I thought it's better for my eyes not to see all this and for my ears not to hear."

"This, I believe, Domna Platonovna," I said, "there is nothing more unbearable than melancholy taking over."

"Thank you, dear, you're saying a good word, exactly in truth, that there's nothing more unbearable, and let the Holy Tsarina console you and give you joy because you were able to feel and get all this. But you cannot get my entire melancholy and sadness if I don't open all my real injury up to you, about this one

time they offended me. That my gripsack disappeared or that Lekanida's ungrateful—that's all nothing. But on this earth, I had one day which I was praying to the Lord that he send serpents or even scorpios, so that they drink my eyes out right then and suck out my heart. And who offended me? Ispulat, that heathen, the Turk! And who helped him? My own people, anointed with the Holy Oil."[94]

Domna Platonovna began to cry the bitterest tears.

"One of my acquaintances, a courier woman," she began, wiping her tears, "lived in Lopatin's house on Nevsky, and that captive Turk Ispulat got to annoying her. And she asks me for him: 'Domna Platonovna! Get that devil a placement somewhere!' she says. 'Where can I place a Turk? You can't place him anywhere but as a Moorish doorman,' and I found a doorman position for him. I found it, I go there, and say; 'This and that,' I say, 'go and settle in.'

"So they arranged for us to drink in celebration of my favor, because he'd already rid himself of his rotten belief, now he could cross himself and drink wine.

"'I don't want any,' I say, but, still, I drink. I have such a silly character that I'll always say 'no' first off, but then I drink. Same here: I drink and grow possessed and lay down in bed, with that courier-woman on her bed."

"And?"

"Well that's the long and short of it, and ever since I sew myself up."

"What do you mean, you sew yourself up?"

"Just like that, if I'm made to sleep somewhere disavoidably, then, with my legs and all, I sew myself up like in a bag. And what's more, since I don't rely on my foul slumber the least bit, I even always sew myself up every night now."

Domna Platonovna sighed deeply and lowered her mournful head.

"You'd think I know the Petersburg circumstances by now but look at what I allowed happen to myself!" she pronounced after a long silence thinking, excused herself and went to her place on Znamenskaya.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A few years later, it happened that I had to take a poor man to one of the temporary typhus hospitals. Having laid him on a cot, I looked for someone to entrust him to at least for a little bit of tenderness and attention.

"To the senior attendant," they said.

"Why don't you call for the senior attendant, then," I asked.

A woman with a faded face walked in, with flabby cheeks hanging from her jaws.

"What service can I be to you, my dear fellow?" she said.

"Dear," I exclaimed, "Domna Platonovna?"

"It's me, my dear sir, me."

"Why are you here?"

"God willed it so."

"Please take care of this sick man," I asked.

"I will take care of him like my own."

"How are your sales going?"

"Here're my sales: to sell the earth and to buy heaven. I'm rid of my sales, my friend. Come in," she whispered, "visit me."

I stopped by. The box-room was damp, there was no furniture, no curtains, only a cot and a table with a samovar and a painted little trunk.

"Let's drink tea," she said.

"No," I answered, "I humbly thank you, no time now."

“Well, then come by some other time. I am happy to see you, ‘cause I’m broken, my friend, broken to the last bit.”

“What happened to you?”

“My lips can’t tell the story and my heart is in pain, please, do me a favor, don’t ask.”

“And how did you suddenly get so shrunken?”

“Shrunken! What’s with you, nothing of the sort! I didn’t shrink down not one bit.”

Domna Platonovna hurriedly pulled a small folding mirror out of her pocket, looked at her faded cheeks and began to speak:

“I didn’t shrink in the least, and it’s only the evening now, in the morning I’m usually much fresher.”

I look at Domna Platonovna and can’t understand, what’s wrong with her? I only see that it’s something strange.

It seemed to me that, apart from the fact that her entire face had faded and withered, it was as if she had stuccoed her face a bit and put on a bit of makeup, and then there was also that alarm when I noted she was shrunken. What on earth!

A month hadn’t gone by since this when, suddenly, some soldier from the hospital showed up and persistently demanded for me to go see Domna Platonovna.

I got a cabby and arrived. Domna Platonovna herself greeted me at the very gates and went and threw herself at my chest, crying and sobbing.

“Dearie,” she said, “do me a favor and go to the police-station.”

“What for, Domna Platonovna?”

“Find out about a certain person there, plead for him. With time, God willing, I will help you out.”

“Just stop crying and shaking,” I said.

“I can’t stop shaking,” she answered, “because this is ‘ternal, it’s striking from inside out. And I will never in my life forget this deed of yours, because everyone has left me now.”

“Fine, but who should I plead for and about what?”

The old woman faltered and her faded cheeks started twitching.

“A piano student was arrested there yesterday, Valerochka, Valeryan Ivanov, so find out about him and plead.”

I went to the police-station. There, they told me that there really was an arrested young man by the name of Valeryan Ivanov, that he was a piano master’s student, he robbed his master, was caught red-handed, and would most probably go down the hard Vladimir road.[95]

“And how old is he?” I questioned.

“He just turned twenty-one,” they said.

“What in the world is this,” I thought, “And who is this Valerka to my Domna Platonovna?”

I arrived at the hospital and found Domna Platonovna in her box-room: she was sitting there on the edge of the bed, her hands folded, looking half-dead.

“I know everything,” she said, “do me a favor, don’t tell me more. I sent the orderly to find out and I know everything. My spirit is suppressed with a fiery baptismal before death.”

I see my warrior has lost it completely: she's fallen apart and died down in just one hour.

"My God!" she said, looking at a poor little hospital icon. "Lordie! My dear! Let my prayer come arrowing right up to you: take the soul out of this old fool, and subdue my useless heart."

"What is it that happened to you?" I said.

"To me? I love him, sweetie; I love him desbearably, my angel; mindlessly, senselessly, I love him, old fool that I am. I gave him shoes and clothes, I blew on him, blew the dust off him. Such a theatrical type; use to be melancholied at home; always inclining towards the circus, then the theatre; I'd give him all I had. The only thing I'd do is ask: 'Valerochka, my friend! Holy treasure![96] Don't incline towards this circus; what's this circus to you?' How he'd go stampin' about, screamin' and aimin' his hands at me. There's a circus for you! He didn't let me to speak to him, so, from up far, I'd just look at him and beg: 'Valerochka! My life! Holy treasure! Don't go hobnobbin' with any old person; don't you drink so much.' He despised everything of mine. Maybe I wouldn't know this grief, if only I hadn't hired a yard-keeper to get rumors about him. Lordie! Dear! Lord, what is this? What will come of this?" she cried out and, with those words, fell before the icon on her knees and cried even more bitterly, nodding her gray head.

"That's it," she began to say, getting up on her feet after a few minutes and running her extinguished eyes mournfully along her gloomy cot, "I gave him everything, I don't have anything left. I don't have anything more to give him, to my pet… If only I could go to him…"

"Well," I said, "go…"

"He forbids me to show up there, I don't dare go to him," herself shaking jitters, the poor old woman.

I stayed quiet for a bit, and to sober her up at least a little, I asked:

"How many years have you lived, Domna Platonovna?"

"What is it you said?" she said.

"How old are you?"

"Oh I don't really know how old…last Febrie, I think, I was forty-seven."

"And where did he come from," I asked, "this Valerka? Where did you dig him up to your sorrow?"

"From our own place," she answered, wiping her tears. "He's Praskovya Ivanovna's nephew. My friend sent him to me, to get a placement for him. Tell me, please," the warrior squealed again, crying, "do you pity me, the botchy fool[97] that I am?"

"I am filled with pity," I answered.

"But the people probably don't pity, it's all funny for them, probably. And if anyone finds out about this story some day, they'll all laugh—certainly, they'll laugh instead of pity—but I go on loving, and without happiness, and without any joy. Who cares what they think, people! They can't understand what misfortune this is, when this falls on a person at the wrong time. I went to an ole believer, he says: 'This is the angel of Satan given to you in the flesh… Be humble.' I went to a priest, and I say: 'Father, this and that's going on with me,' I say, 'I don't have control over myself.' Well, the priest scolds me good: read the canon, 'Appease my Sorrow,' servant of

God, he says. And now I read the canon and I purposefully got this position so there wouldn't be any confusion; but, it's just... Valerushka! My chickadee! Holy treasure! What have you done to yourself?"

Domna Platonovna dropped her head to the window and began to pound her forehead on the window sill.

And that's how I left my warrior, in that state of utter grief. A month later, they sent word from the hospital that Domna Platonovna had ended her abruptive life. She died of a fast-developing exhaustion. She lay in her little black coffin, small and shriveled up, as if, in fact, all her ligaments had worn out and her bones had settled down to her joints. Her death was completely painless, peaceful and calm. Domna Platonovna had her last rites with extreme unction and prayed until the last minute, and, upon letting out her last dying breath, ordered them to bring me her little trunk, pillows, and a jar of jam someone had given her, so that I would find the opportunity to give all this to "that person I already know of," that is to say, to Valerka.

NOTES

I am indebted to volume five of the Terra edition of Leskov's complete works (Moscow, 1998) for many of its careful notes.

[1] "Hitherto…a new lesson.": From A.N. Maikov's (1821-1897) lyric drama, *Three Deaths*, the philosopher Seneca's last words.

[2] "clasp": Domna Platonovna's attempt at describing the structure of her hand. A play on the words *sostav* (structure) and *sustav* (joint) in the original.

[3] "seven yards": Seven *arshin* in the original. A unit of measurement used in Russia before the metric system was implemented in 1924. One *arshin* equals ¾ of a yard; it will be equated to one yard for the purposes of this text so the reader can gain a clearer picture of the measurement discussed.

[4] "their name…is legion.": In Russian, "*legion im imia-to skazyvaetsia*." With slangy syntax, referring to Mark 5:9, the Gadarene Swine: "My name is Legion: for we are many" or "*Legion imia mne, potomu chto nas mnogo*." See also Luke 8:30.

[5] "copped": *Sfendril*. Perhaps a distorted version of the colloquial *sper*, to swipe or steal.

[6] "Karaulova": *Karaul* is a shout for help, acting here as the stem of Avdotia Ivanovna's last name.

[7] "dacha": A summer residence outside the city.

[8] "politisely": *Politichno*, politely. From the French, *politesse*.

[9] "like Mathusala.": A reference to the Russian expression, *aredskoe delo*, an insidious, satanic undertaking. The metaphor is misguided since *Ared* possibly relates to Jared, the second oldest man in the Bible (Gen 5:18-20) and usually refers to long life. Domna Platonovna is commenting on both the duration and harm of her deep slumber. The version used in the original, *Arid*, is a non-standard form; likewise, a non-standard spelling of Methuselah is chosen here.

[10] "Haarlem Drops": Dutch drops, a mixture of oil of turpentine with other ingredients, in use since 1672 as a routine preventative of disease. See Fielding Hudson Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine With Medical Chronology, Suggestions for Study and Bibliographic Data* (Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders, 1929), 282.

[11] "French blotting paper": *Papier poudré*, for lifting oil and refreshing the face.

[12] "fixative": From the French *fixer*, to secure. A substance used to strengthen and add shine to hair.

[13] "the Oka and the Zusha.": Oka, a river in central Russia, a tributary of the Volga. Zusha, a tributary of the Oka, navigable from Mtsensk.

[14] "I dash about...out of a bag.": A garbled version of the idiom *mchat'sia kak ugorelaiia koshka* (literally, to run at a mad pace like a burned cat) with *mychius'* replacing *mchat'sia*, a malapropism combining *mychu* (I moo) and *mchus'* (I run at a mad pace), translated here as a misuse of the idiom "to let the cat out of the bag."

[15] "assidruous": "*Zavistna*," a corruption of *zavisit'* (to depend on).

[16] "pluses": Means to say *izlishek* (surplus) but uses *lishki* instead, perhaps influenced by *lishnee* (superfluous).

[17] "loftily": The narrator makes use of Domna Platonovna's own linguistic construction, *povazhno*, meaning well-to-do, originating from the word *vazhno* (important).

[18] "gripsack": *Sakvoiazh*, a leather traveling case. The narrator is using Domna Platonovna's word here. If we consider that such cases were not embroidered along with some clues that follow, it becomes clear that this is her word of choice to describe any bag. This term, originating from the French *sac de voyage*, after all, would not leave a peasant's mouth and, as such, is appropriately socially elevated for her intentions.

[19] "headdress": *Poviazka*, A headdress worn by married non-noble women.

[20] "angel or devil:" Reminiscent of the idiom, *v liudiakh anan'ia, a doma kanal'ia*, where *anan'ia* is god's grace (from ancient Hebrew).

[21] "Malczewski's *Maria*": *Maria* (1825), a poem by the Polish romantic poet, A. Malczewski (1793-1826).

[22] "making the sign…over her mouth": a folk custom performed to prevent evil spirits from entering the body.

[23] "Like a hole…we need 'em!": "*Cherta v stule…nedostaet*," (literally, the devil in the table…is lacking); a mangled form of the idiom, *cherta v stupe ne khvataet* (the devil in the mortar is missing), which Domna Platonovna uses to angrily contradict her previous statements that men maybe of some use.

[24] "poleacksed": *Popshtykalas'*, Domna Platonovna's quirky neologism for the couple's disagreement followed by a parting of ways, combines the sound of the Polish language to the Russian ear with the image of a *shtyk* (bayonet). Rendered here as a combination of pole-axe and Polack.

[25] "Lekanidka": The "ka" ending is usually added to Russian first names to show familiarity. When Domna Platonovna refers to Lekanida Petrovna this way, it sounds contemptuous.

[26] "if you're sick…with the sharks": A series of combined idioms follows, each roughly following the form: "you're sick of A (which was better), then do B (which is far worse)," where A and B originate from unrelated phrases.

[27] "live under your husband's tail": "*Zhit' za muzhnei golovoi*" (live behind your husband's head) is a combination of *zhit' za muzhnei spinoi* (live behind your husband's back) and *dumai svoei golovoi* (use your own head).

[28] "you're gonna…get egged": "*Prigonit nuzha i k poganoi luzhe*" (neediness will get you to a rotten puddle) refers to the idiom, *sest' v luzhu* (to sit in a puddle), to end up in a foolish situation or, have egg on your face.

[29] "abomination of desolation": A biblical turn of phrase found in Matthew 24:15.

[30] "injure-breads": *Pechatanye prianiki* (printed gingerbreads), a malapropism for *pechatnye prianiki*—the name given to a type of gingerbread with imprinted patterns.

[31] "Fast of the Assumption": *Spazhinki or spozhinki* in Russian, the fast from August 1st to the 15th, leading up to the Assumption of Mary and coinciding with the celebration of the end of the Harvest.

[32] "Tatar lash": Made of leather thongs and used for controlling horses.

[33] "Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-creating Cross": Considered one of the great feasts of the Orthodox church year, this day of fasting commemorates Helena of Constantinople's finding the True Cross in 326.

[34] "Znamenskaya Church": The Church of the Sign on Znamenskaya Square, built 1794 to 1804 and later torn down. Colloquially referred to by many names including Znamenskaya.

[35] "all-night vigil": Takes place on the eve of the most honored church holidays.

[36] "lobby": Also known as the narthex of a church, located at its westernmost side away from the main altar, usually blocked off by a wall.

[37] "church-porch": An uncovered landing leading into the narthex, also known as the parvis.

[38] "spilling your milk!": the idiom "*ne kusat' by tebe loktia*." Means make sure you won't have regrets (literally, make sure you won't bite your elbow).

[39] "The night cuckoo will out-cuckoo the day cuckoo.": Translated literally here, this proverbial expression usually refers to a husband's loyalty to his wife over his mother.

[40] "Lastochkin?...bird last name": a *lastochka* is a swallow.

[41] "and without a trace.": *Dat' drala* is a slangy way of saying "to run away." Here, it is reduced to, simply, "*da i drala*." I use a fragmented version of "gone without a trace."

[42] "only a lobster…in trouble.": "*Gore tol'ko odnogo raka krasit*." This common idiom, making use of a lobster turned red after cooking, can be translated literally as "grief only adorns lobsters." The word *krasit'* has "red" in its stem and means both "to adorn" and "to color." Domna Platonovna may be too literally making use of its latter meaning to refer to Lekanida's red face.

[43] "St. Ivan Rilski's Feast Day.": Celebrated on October 19th to commemorate Ivan Rilski, the first hermit of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church and the founder of the Rila Monastery.

[44] "Our Lady of Kazan.": A miracle-working icon found in Kazan in 1579. In 1610 it was carried into battle against the Poles. Peter the Great ordered it to be sent to St. Petersburg in 1710 where it was later moved to the Kazan Cathedral. The feast day is celebrated on October 22nd.

[45] "Okhta": A neighborhood in the eastern outskirts of St. Petersburg in the 19th century.

[46] "pork fat": *Salo*, slabs of pork under skin fat. Popular in Ukraine, eaten salted or brined.

[47] "Five Corners": A crossing of roads in downtown St. Petersburg.

[48] "When he's drowning…a cat in a bag.": "*Tonet, tak topor sulit, a vynyrnet, tak i toporischa zhal'*" (Literally, when he's drowning, he promises you an axe, but when he swims out, he won't even spare the axe handle). Historically, a pig in a poke (a sack) was replaced by a worthless cat and sold to uninformed buyers, giving rise to the expressions "a pig in a poke" and "to let the cat out of the bag."

[49] "crepe machine": *kreproshelevoe*, a garbled version of the French *crêpe de Chine*, a silk fabric used for dresses and blouses.

[50] "shinshifon": *shikshinetenevoe*, perhaps a misspoken variant of chiffon.

[51] "Shtinbok Arcade": A large shopping center built between 1846 and 1848 close to Nevsky Prospect.

[52] "General…he's a civilian": The civil service ranks corresponded to military ranks in The Table of Ranks, instituted by Peter I, which established a hierarchy based on performance and ability.

[53] "high on her horse": The idiom "*kak teteria na tokovische*" (like a grouse on her mating-ground) describes a loud and self-absorbed person.

[54] "I'm not one to…about the cherry tree.": "*Ia popustu vrat' na veter ne okhotnitsa*" is a mix of three set phrases: *popustu govorit'* (babble), *slov na veter brosat'* (to be unreliable), and *mne ne okhota* (I don't feel like it). Take together, it means "I am a reliable person."

[55] "Fontalka": referring to the Fontanka River, the left branch of the Neva River.

[56] "amanties": From the French *amant*, lover.

[57] "You noble dundertramp!": "*Gol'tepa*" an insult-malapropism stemming from *gol'* (a beggar) and *rastepa* (blunderer).

[58] "a grandezvous": A neologism combining the French words *rendez-vous* and *grand*.

[59] "using the formal...on purpose.": Domna Platonovna uses the second person formal *vy* and the appropriate conjugation instead of the informal *ty*.

[60] "rouies": An attempt at roué. In Russian, *povesa* (rake, scapegrace, licentious man).

[61] "St. Mitrofan": the first bishop of Voronezh to win the respect of Peter I for his selflessness and courage. He is commemorated on November 23rd.

[62] "My *charmant*!": French for charming.

[63] "fast": The Russian *govet'* is an Orthodox word that has wider shades of meaning than the translation used here. It refers to the process of fasting and church-going carried out in preparation for confession and communion taken on Easter.

[64] "the fourth week of Great Lent": This week in the Orthodox Church is characterized by the worship of the Holy Cross. It is colloquially referred to as "*sredokrestnaia nedelia*" in the original.

[65] "pour amour": from the French, *pour l'amour*, for the sake of love.

[66] "treat every man…slap in the face.": Hamlet addressing Polonius in Act II, scene two of *Hamlet*. The narrator is rewording N. A. Polevoi's 1837 translation. Hamlet's lines ("Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping?") have also been reworded in this translation.

[67] "Kolomna district": One of the oldest neighborhoods of St. Petersburg, located on the left bank of the Neva River.

[68] "four scenes…Queen Genevieve": referring to scenes from the life of the heroine of the medieval German folk tale, *Genevieve of Brabant*, who was falsely accused of infidelity and spent six years in a cave before being found by her husband. Her story, told in an 18th century book, was popular in Russia.

[69] "St. Anna on a ribbon.": An order established in 1735 by Karl Friedrich, Duke of Holstein-Gottorp, in honor of his wife and Peter the Great's daughter.

[70] "Why'd she…hog for?": Domna Platonovna is commenting on Kosheverova's spoiled attitude. In the original, her phrase "*Vse ved' s zhiru chem-to ubivalas'*" joins the idiom s *zhiru besit'sia* (to be too well off or, literally, to go mad from fat) with the verb *ubivat'sia* (to grieve).

[71] "Fifteen kopecks": In the original "*piatialtynnyi*" or five *altyns*—minted as three kopeck copper coins under Nicholas I in 1839. Discontinued in 1991.

[72] "A dozen's…my time.": A nonsense mockery: "*nashe vam sorok-odno da klanit'sia kholodno*."

[73] "heaps of those gripsacks there.": A room set aside especially for gripsacks is unlikely. Another hint that Domna Platonovna calls any purse a gripsack.

[74] "what goods…give you": The particular form of the verb "to give" (*naklast'*) used in this pun is sub-standard in Russian and has more vulgar meanings (to punch, to defecate) than its English translation.

[75] "this bundle…it's *blind*": In Russian, the pun is on the words "not mine" ("*ne moi*") and "mute" ("*nemoi*").

[76] "Apraksin": Referring to the Apraksin Dvor—a department store between Sadovaya Street and the Fontanka River that originated as a market in the mid-18th century.

[77] "after the fire": The fire that destroyed Apraksin Dvor in 1862. It was rebuilt between 1899 and 1900.

[78] "trouper": *Voiazhnii*, a neologism formed by substituting the French, *voyage*, for the Russian word for solider, *voennii*.

[79] "knock him…prison": "*Seichas ego v iamu*" (get him into a pit) calls to mind the expression *dolgovaia iama* (a debtors' prison, lit. a debt pit).

[80] "No point…in the womb": *Isaiah* is a hymn sung as part of the wedding ceremony.

[81] "maiden": the Russian term, *otrokovitsa*, refers more specifically to a seven to fifteen year old girl.

[82] "Admiralteisky Square": Until 1872, festive gatherings which included performances in show-booths were held in this square for Christmas and Easter.

[83] "a hundred poods.": one pood is equal to thirty-six pounds.

[84] "verst": An obsolete Russian unit of length, one *versta* equals 3500 feet.

[85] "Ivan Ivanovich Elkin": A comic nickname for a tavern in common speech. It was customary to place a pine tree (*elka*) on the roof of a tavern.

[86] "Why all…don't daringly.": Because of the lucky coincidence between the verb "to dare" (*smet'*) and the adjective "daring" (*smelyi*) in Russian and English, the pun here is preserved semantically.

[87] "St. Paraskeva": a revered third-century martyr, popular with the common Russian people. Her feast day is October 28th.

[88] "St. Nikolai of Mtsensk": Domna Platonovna is directing her entreaty toward St. Nicholas. She is recalling a familiar icon of him, which, according to legend, miraculously appeared on a stone cross in the Mtsensk Fortress in 1415.

[89] "Immaculate matchmaker…painstaking purity!": An approximate quote from the akathist dedicated to St. Nikolai Mirlikiiskii (St. Nicholas) who is said to have saved a poor man from humiliation by secretly providing dowry to each of his three daughters, thereby helping them avoid prostitution.

[90] "*torban*": An Eastern European string instrument reminiscent of the Baroque Lute and the psaltery. Probably chosen here for its auditory accord with the verb, *tarabanit'* (to clatter), translated later in this passage as "bang."

[91] "kliros": The part of an Eastern Orthodox church in front of the iconostasis next to the wall reserved for the choir. Either *kliros* or *krylos* in Russian.

[92] "Everything's…at that point": "*Vse uzh tut valilos'*, *kak pered porpast'iu*" (literally, everything was tumbling, as though before a precipice). A version of *provalis' propadom* (go to hell) confused with *propast'* (precipice and to disappear).

[93] "Take all the gold…in the wet earth": An inexact citation from the popular song, "*Sredi doliny rovnyia*" (words by A. F. Merzliakov and music by O. A. Kozlovskii).

[94] "My own…Holy Oil": referring to confirmation—a sacrament, in the Russian Orthodox Church, administered immediately after baptism with consecrated oil.

[95] "Vladimir road": The road leading to the Siberian labor camps.

[96] "Holy treasure!": From the morning prayer to the Holy Spirit.

[97] "botchy fool": "*Nepovitaiia*," may be derived from the expression *nevitalos' komu-to* (didn't live well), in this case, referring to a foolishly wasted life.