

PANORAMA

(PART - II)

A Textbook of Additional/S.L.English
for First year degree students
prescribed by

Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded

PANORAMA

(PART TWO)

Additional English (S.L) Textbook prescribed by
SRTM University, Nanded as per CBCS pattern

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PANORAMA

(Part - II)

Additional English (S.L)Textbook
For U.G. First Year

Semester- II

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Courtesy:
NEWMAN

P U B L I C A T I O N

www.newmanpublication.com

E-book created by:

LOGIX TECHNOLOGIES

www.trylogix.com

ISBN: 978-81-942381-1-9

Panorama (Part- II)

An Additional English (S L) book, developed as a textbook as per CBCS Pattern and prescribed by Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded for college students of UG First Year

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First published : 2019

Published by New Man Publication, Parbhani *for*

The Registrar, Swami Ramanad Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded, India Printed at

Snehal Printers and Book Binders, 66, Ramdasnagar, Parbhani- 431401.

Typesetting and Cover Design: Dr Kalyan Gangarde, Parbhani -431401

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E-book created by: Logix Technologies Office No.1, A-Wing, 4th floor, Vishwa Arcade, Bangalore – Mumbai Highway, Narhe, Pune – 411041.

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Unit-IV

A) A CLOCKWORKORANGE

-Anthony Burgess

Introduction:

John Anthony Burgess Wilson (February 25, 1917-November 22, 1963) as an English writer and composer published his works under the pen name Anthony Burgess. He was born at 91 Carisbrook Street in Harpurhey, a suburb of Manchester, England to Catholic parents, Joseph and Elizabeth Wilson who were shopkeepers. He studied English language and Literature at Victoria University of Manchester between 1937 and 1940 and he did his graduation with a Bachelor of Arts. His Malayan trilogy *The Long Day Wanes* (1972) was first published fiction its three books are *Time for a Tiger* (1956), *The Enemy in the Blanket* (1958) and *Beds in the East* (1959). He wrote the screenplays for *Moses the Lawgiver* (1974), *Jesus of Nazareth* (1977). He also co-writer of the script for the TV series *Sherlock Holmes* and *Doctor Watson* (1980) *A Clockwork Orange* is one of the most famous autobiographical dystopian novella was published in the United Kingdom in 1962, a few years after his return to native England following a prolonged stint abroad.

It is an autobiographical novel which concerns a writer whose wife was raped and brutalized by a gang of thugs. It was popularized by the controversial film adaptation made by Stanley Kubrick in 1971. It is narrated by Alex (in flashback) in Nadsat, a Russian version of English. The novella *A Clockwork Orange* begins with the decay of moral dignity and respect of the cultural values among the teenagers Alex, Pete, Georgie and Dim. It is the story of Alex, a young teenager who commits 'ultraviolence'. It portrays its protagonist, a fifteen-year old boy Alex who in collaboration with his friends known and sets out on a diabolical orgy of robbery, rape, torture and murder. Alex represents the disease and backwardness of the British society in the 1960s.

It is concerned with the conflict between the individual and the state, the punishment of young criminals and the possibility or otherwise of redemption. Through the newly emerged youth culture Burgess exposes the dark side of British society. It portrays the disintegration of the traditional British culture and the rise of new youth culture in revolt which produced violence and perversity. The central theme of this novella is the idea of free will and it is also an examination of free will and morality.

Text:

Part One

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

There was me, that is Alex, and my three droogs, that is Pete, Georgie, and Dim. Dim being really dim, and we sat in the Korova Milkbar making up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard thoughdry.

The Ko Part 1 rova Milkbar was a milk-plus mesto, and you may, Omy brothers, have forgotten what these mestos were like, things changing so skorry these days and everybody very quick to forget, newspapers not being read much neither.

Well, what they sold there was milk plus something else. They had no license for selling liquor, but there was no law yet against prodding some of the new veshches which they used to put into the old moloko, so you could peet it with vellocet or synthemesc or drenchrom or one or two other veshches which would give you a nice quiet horrorshow fifteen minutes admiring Bog And All His Holy Angels and Saints in your left shoe with lights bursting all over your mozg. Or you could peet milk with knives in it, as we used to say, and this

would sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one, and that was what we were peeting this evening I'm starting off the story with.

Our pockets were full of deng, so there was no real need from the point of view of crasting any more pretty polly to tolchock some old veck in an alley and viddy him swim in his blood while we counted the takings and divided by four, nor to do the ultra-violent on some shivering starry grey-haired ptitsa in a shop and go smecking off with the till's guts. But, asthey say, money isn'teverything.

The four of us were dressed in the height of fashion, which in those days was a pair of black very tight tights with the old jelly mould, as we called it, fitting on the crotch underneath the tights, this being to protect and also a sort of a design you could viddy clear enough in a certain light, so that I had one in the shape of a spider, Pete had a rooker (a hand, that is), Georgie had a very fancy one of a flower, and poor old Dim had a very hound-and-horny one of a clown's litso (face, that is). Dim not ever having much of an idea of things and being, beyond all shadow of a doubting thomas, the dimmest of we four. Then we wore waisty jackets without lapels but with these very big built-up shoulders ('pletchoes'we called them) which were a kind of a mockery of having real shoulders like that. Then, my brothers, we had these off-white cravats which looked like whipped-up kartoffel or spud with a sort of a design made on it with a fork. We wore our hair not too long and we had flip horrorshow boots forkicking.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

There were three devotchkas sitting at the counter all together, but there were four of us malchicks and it was usually like one for all and all for one. These sharps were dressed in the heighth of fashion too, with purple and green and orange wigs on their gullivers, each one notcosting less than three or four weeks of those sharps' wages, I should reckon, and make-up to match (rainbows round the glazzies, that is, and the rot painted very wide). Then they had long black very straight dresses, and on the groody part of them they had little badges of like silver with different malchicks'names on them - Joe and Mike and suchlike. These were supposed to be the names of the different malchicks they'd spattd with before they were fourteen. They kept looking our way and I nearly felt like saying the three of us (out of the corner of my rot, that is) should go off for a bit of pol and leave poor old Dim behind, because it would be just a matter of kupetting Dim a demi-litre of white but this time with a dollop of synthemesc in it, but that wouldn't really have been playing like the game. Dim was very very ugly and like his name, but he was a horrorshow filthy fighter and very handy with the boot.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

The chelloveck sitting next to me, there being this long big plushy seat that ran round three walls, was well away with his glazzies glazed and sort of burbling slovos like "Aristotle wishy washy works outing cyclamen get forficulate smartish".

He was in the land all right, well away, in orbit, and I knew what it was like, having tried it like everybody else had done, but at this time I'd got to thinking it was a cowardly sort of a veshch, O my brothers. You'd lay there after you'd drunk the old moloko and then you got the messel that everything all round you was sort of in the past. You could viddy it all right, all of it, very clear - tables, the stereo, the lights, the sharpsand the malchicks - but it was like some veshch that used to be there but was not there not no more. And you were sort of hypnotized by your boot or shoe or a finger-nail as it might be, and at the same time you were sort of picked up by the old scruff and shook like you might be a cat. You got shook and shook till there was nothing left. You lost your name and your body and yourself and you just didn't care, and you waited until your boot or finger-nail got yellow, then yellower and yellower all the time. Then the lights started cracking like atomics and the boot or finger-nail or, as it might be, a bit of dirt on your trouser-bottom turned into a big big big mesto, bigger than the whole world, and you were just going to get introduced to old Bog or God when it was all over. You came back to here and now whimpering sort of, with your rot all squaring up for a boohoo. Now that's very nice but very cowardly. You were not put on this earth just to get in touch with God. That sort of thing could sap all the strength and the goodness out of achelloveck.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

The stereo was on and you got the idea that the singer's goloss was moving from one part of the bar to another, flying up to the ceiling and then swooping down again and whizzing from wall to wall. It was Berti Laski rasping a real starry oldie called 'You Blister My Paint'. One of the three ptitsas at the counter, the one with the green wig, kept pushing her belly out and pulling it in in time to what they called the music. I could feel the knives in the old moloko starting to prick, and now I was ready for a bit of twenty-to-one. So I yelped: "Out out out out!" like a doggie, and then I cracked this veck who was sitting next to me and well away and burbling a horrorshow crack on the ooko or earhole, but he didn't feel it and went on with his "Telephonic hardware and when the farfarculule gets rubadubdub". He'd feel it all right when he came to, out of the land.

"Where out?" said Georgie.

"Oh, just to keep walking," I said, "and viddy what turns up, O my little brothers."

So we scatted out into the big winter nochy and walked down Marghanita Boulevard and then turned into Boothby Avenue, and there we found what we were pretty well looking for, a malenky jest to start off the evening with. There was a dodderly starry schoolmaster type veck, glasses on and his rot open to the cold nochy air. He had books under his arm and a crappy umbrella and was coming round the corner from the Public Biblio, which not many lewdies used these days. You never really saw many of the older bourgeois type out after nightfall those days, what with the shortage of police and we fine young malchickiwicks about, and this prof type chelloveck was the only one walking in the whole of the street. So we goolied up to him, very polite, and I said: "Pardon me, brother."

He looked a malenky bit poogly when he viddied the four of us like that, coming up so quiet and polite and smiling, but he said: "Yes? What is it?" in a very loud teacher-type goloss, as if he was trying to show us he wasn't poogly. I said:

"I see you have books under your arm, brother. It is indeed a rare pleasure these days to come across somebody that still reads, brother."

"Oh," he said, all shaky. "Is it? Oh, I see." And he kept looking from one to the other of we four, finding himself now like in the middle of a very smiling and polite square.

"Yes," I said. "It would interest me greatly, brother, if you would kindly allow me to see what books those are that you have under your arm. I like nothing better in this world than a good clean book, brother."

"Clean," he said. "Clean, eh?" And then Pete skvatted these three books from him and handed them round real skorry.

Being three, we all had one each to viddy at except for Dim.

The one I had was called 'Elementary Crystallography', so I opened it up and said: "Excellent, really first-class," keeping turning the pages. Then I said in a very shocked type goloss:

"But what is this here? What is this filthy slovo? I blush to look at this word. You disappoint me, brother, you do really."

"But," he tried, "but, but."

"Now," said Georgie, "here is what I should call real dirt.

There's one slovo beginning with an f and another with a c."

He had a book called 'The Miracle of the Snowflake.'

"Oh," said poor old Dim, smotting over Pete's shoulder and going too far, like he always did, "it says here what he done to her, and there's a picture and all. Why," he said, "you're nothing but a filthy-minded old skitebird."

"An old man of your age, brother," I said, and I started to rip up the book I'd got, and the others did the same with the ones they had. Dim and Pete doing a tug-of-war with 'The Rhombohedral System'. The starry prof type began to creech: "But those are not mine, those are the property of the municipality, this is sheer wantonness and vandal work," or some such slovos. And he tried to sort of wrest the books back off of us,

which was like pathetic. "You deserve to be taught a lesson, brother," I said, "that you do." This crystal book I had was very tough-bound and hard to razrez to bits, being real starry and made in days when things were made to last like, but I managed to rip the pages up and chuck them in handfuls of like snowflakes, though big, all over this creeching old veck, and then the others did the same with theirs, old Dim just dancing about like the clown he was. "There you are," said Pete. "There's the mackerel of the cornflake for you, you dirty reader of filth and nastiness."

"You naughty old veck, you," I said, and then we began to filly about with him. Pete held his rookers and Georgie sort of hooked his rot wide open for him and Dim yanked out his false zoobies, upper and lower. He threw these down on the pavement and then I treated them to the old boot-crush, though they were hard bastards like, being made of some new horrorshow plastic stuff. The old veck began to make sort of chumbling shooms - "wuf waf wof" - so Georgie let go of holding his goobers apart and just let him have one in the toothless rot with his ringy fist, and that made the old veck start moaning a lot then, then out comes the blood, my brothers, real beautiful. So all we did then was to pull his outer platties off, stripping him down to his vest and long underpants (very starry; Dim smecked his head off near), and then Pete kicks him lovely in his pot, and we let him go. He went sort of staggering off, it not having been too hard of a tolchock really, going "Oh oh oh", not knowing where or what was what really, and we had a snigger at him and then riffled through his pockets, Dim dancing round with his crappy umbrella meanwhile, but there wasn't much in them.

There were a few starry letters, some of them dating right back to 1960 with "My dearest dearest" in them and all that chepooka, and a keyring and a starry leaky pen. Old Dim gave up his umbrella dance and of course had to start reading one of the letters out loud, like to show the empty street he could read. "My darling one," he recited, in this very high type goloss, "I shall be thinking of you while you are away and hope you will remember to wrap up warm when you go out at night." Then he let out a very shoomny smeck - "Ho ho ho"-pretending to start wiping his yahma with it. "All right," I said. "Let it go, O my brothers." In the trousers of this starryveck there was only a malenky bit of cutter (money, that is) -not more than three gollies - so we gave all his messy little coin the scatter treatment, it being hen-korm to the amount of pretty polly we had on us already. Then we smashed the umbrella and razrezed his platties and gave them to the blowing winds, my brothers, and then we'd finished with the starry teacher type veck. We hadn't done much, I know, but that was only like the start of the evening and I make no appy polly loggies to thee or thine for that. The knives in the milk plus were stabbing away nice and horrorshownow.

The next thing was to do the sammy act, which was one way to unload some of our cutter so we'd have more of an incentive like for some shop-crasting, as well as it being a way of buying an alibi in advance, so we went into the Duke of New York on Amis Avenue and sure enough in the snug there were three or four old baboochkas peeting their black and suds on SA (State Aid). Now we were the very good malchicks, smiling good evensong to one and all, though these wrinkled old lighters started to get all shook, their veiny old rookers all trembling round their glasses, and making the suds spill on the table. "Leave us be, lads," said one of them, her face all mappy with being a thousand years old, "we're only poor old women." But we just made with the zoobies, flash flash flash, sat down, rang the bell, and waited for the boy to come. When he came, all nervous and rubbing his rookers on his grazzy apron, we ordered us four veterans - a veteran being rum and cherry brandy mixed, which was popular just then, some liking a dash of lime in it, that being the Canadian variation. Then I said to the boy: "Give these poor old baboochkas over there a nourishing something. Large Scotchmen all round and something to take away." And I poured my pocket of deng all over the table, and the other three did likewise, O my brothers. So double firegolds were bought in for the scared starry lighters, and they knew not what to do or say. One of them got out "Thanks, lads," but you could see they thought there was something dirty like coming. Anyway, they were each given a bottle of Yank General, cognac that is, to take away, and I gave money for them to be delivered each a dozen of black and suds that following morning, they to leave their stinking old cheenas' addresses at the counter. Then with the cutter that was left over we did purchase, my brothers, all the meat pies, pretzels, cheese-snacks, crisps and chocbars in that mesto, and those too were for the old sharps. Then we said: "Back in a minoota," and the old ptitsas were still saying: "Thanks, lads," and "God bless you, boys," and we were going out without one cent of cutter in ourcarmans.

"Makes you feel real doobby, that does," said Pete. You could viddy that poor old Dim the dim didn't quite pony all that, but he said nothing for fear of being called gloopy and a domeless wonderboy. Well, we went off now round the corner to Attlee Avenue, and there was this sweets and cancers shop still open. We'd left them alone near three months now and the whole district had been very quiet on the whole, so the armed millicents or rozz patrols weren't round there much, being more north of the river these days. We put our maskies on - new jobs these were, real horrorshow, wonderfully done really; they were like faces of historical personalities (they gave you the names when you bought) and I had Disraeli, Pete had Elvis Presley, Georgie had Henry VIII and poor old Dim had a poet veck called Peebee Shelley; they were a real like disguise, hair and all, and they were some very special plastic veshch so you could roll it up when you'd done with it and hide it in your boot - then three of us wentin.

Pete keeping chasso without, not that there was anything to worry about out there. As soon as we launched on the shop we went for Slouse who ran it, a big portwine jelly of a veck who viddied at once what was coming and made straight for the inside where the telephone was and perhaps his well-oiled pooshka, complete with six dirty rounds. Dim was round that counter skorry as a bird, sending packets of snoutie flying and cracking over a big cut-out showing a sharp with all her zoobies going flash at the customers and her groodies near hanging out to advertize some newbrand of cancers. What you could viddy then was a sort of a big ball rolling into the inside of the shop behind the curtain, this being old Dim and Slouse sort of locked in a death struggle. Then you could slooshy panting and snoring and kicking behind the curtain and veshches falling over and swearing and then glass going smash smash smash. Mother Slouse, the wife, was sort of froze behind the counter. We could tell she would creech murder given one chance, so I was round that counter very skorry and had a hold of her, and a horrorshow big lump she was too, all nuking of scent and with flipflop big bobbing groodies on her. I'd got my rooker round her rot to stop her belting out death and destruction to the four winds of heaven, but this lady doggie gave me a large foul big bite on it and it was me that did the creeching, and then she opened up beautiful with a flip yell for the millicents. Well, then she hadto be tolchocked proper with one of the weights for the scales, and then a fair tap with a crowbar they had for opening cases, and that brought the red out like an old friend. So we had her down on the floor and a rip of her platties for fun and a gentle bit of the boot to stop her moaning. And, viddying her lying there with her groodies on show, I wondered should I or not, but that was for later on in the evening. Then we cleaned the till, and there was flip horrorshow takings that nochy, and we had a few packs of the very best top cancers apiece, then off we went, mybrothers.

"A real big heavy great bastard he was," Dim kept saying. I didn't like the look of Dim: he looked dirty and untidy, like a veck who'd been in a fight, which he had been, of course, but you should never look as though you have been. His cravat was like someone had trampled on it, his maskie had been pulled off and he had floor-dirt on his litso, so we got him in an alleyway and tidied him up a malenky bit, soaking our tashtooks in spit to cheest the dirt off. The things we did for old Dim. We were back in the Duke of New York very skorry and I reckoned by my watch we hadn't been more than ten minutes away. The starry old baboochkas were still there on the black and suds and Scotchmen we'd bought them, and we said: "Hallo there, girlies, what's it going to be?" They started on the old "Very kind, lads, God bless you, boys," and so we rang the collocol and brought a different waiter in this time and we ordered beers with rum in, being sore athirst, my brothers, and whatever the old ptitsas wanted. Then I said to the old baboochkas: "We haven't been out of here, have we?

Been here all the time, haven't we?" They all caught on real skorry and said: "That's right, lads. Not been out of our sight, you haven't. God bless you, boys," drinking.

Not that it mattered much, really. About half an hour went by before there was any sign of life among the millicents, and then it was only two very young rozzes that came in, very pink under their big copper's shlemmies. One said: "You lot know anything about the happenings at Slouse's shop this night?"

"Us?" I said, innocent. "Why, what happened?"

"Stealing and roughing. Two hospitalizations. Where've you lot been this evening?"

"I don't go for that nasty tone," I said. "I don't care much for these nasty insinuations. A very suspicious nature all this betokeneth, my littlebrothers."

"They've been in here all night, lads," the old sharps started to creech out. "God bless them, there's no better lot of boys living for kindness and generosity. Been here all the time they have. Not seen them move we haven't."

"We're only asking," said the other young millicent. "We've got our job to do like anyone else." But they gave us the nasty warning look before they went out. As they were going out we handed them a bit of lip-music: brrrrzzzzrrrr. But, myself, I couldn't help a bit of disappointment at things as they were those days. Nothing to fight against really. Everything as easy as kiss-my-sharries. Still, the night was still very young.

When we got outside of the Duke of New York we viddied by the main bar's long lighted window, a burbling old pyahnitsa or drunkie, howling away at the filthy songs of his fathers and going blerp blerp in between as though it might be a filthy old orchestra in his stinking rotten guts. One veshch I could never stand was that. I could never stand to see a moodge all filthy and rolling and burping and drunk, whatever his age might be, but more especially when he was real starry like this one was.

He was sort of flattened to the wall and his platties were a disgrace, all creased and untidy and covered in cal and mud and filth and stuff. So we got hold of him and cracked him with a few good horrorshow tolchocks, but he still went on singing. The song went: And I will go back to my darling, my darling, When you, my darling, are gone.

But when Dim fisted him a few times on his filthy drunkard's rot he shut up singing and started to creech: "Go on, do me in, you bastard cowards, I don't want to live anyway, not in a stinking world like this one." I told Dim to lay off a bit then, because it used to interest me sometimes to slooshy what some of these starry decreps had to say about life and the world. I said: "Oh. And what's stinking about it?"

He cried out: "It's a stinking world because it lets the young get on to the old like you done, and there's no law nor order no more." He was creeching out loud and waving his rookers and making real horrorshow with the slovos, only the odd blurp blurp coming from his keeshkas, like something was orbiting within, or like some very rude interrupting sort of a moodge making a shoom, so that this old veck kept sort of threatening it with his fists, shouting: "It's no world for any old man any longer, and that means that I'm not one bit scared of you, my boyos, because I'm too drunk to feel the pain if you hit me, and if you kill me I'll be glad to bedead."

We smecked and then grinned but said nothing, and then he said: "What sort of a world is it at all? Men on the moon and men spinning round the earth like it might be midges round a lamp, and there's not more attention paid to earthly law nor order no more. So your worst you may do, you filthy cowardly hooligans." Then he gave us some lip-music - "Prrrrzzzzrrrr" - like we'd done to those young millicents, and then he started singing again: Oh dear dear land, I fought for thee And brought thee peace and victory - So we cracked into him lovely, grinning all over our litsos, but he still went on singing. Then we tripped him so he laid down flat and heavy and a bucketload of beer-vomit came whooshing out. That was disgusting so we gave him the boot, one go each, and then it was blood, not song nor vomit, that came out of his filthy old rot. Then we went on ourway.

It was round by the Municipal Power Plant that we came across Billyboy and his five droogs. Now in those days, my brothers, the teaming up was mostly by fours or fives, these being like auto-teams, four being a comfy number for an auto, and six being the outside limit for gang-size. Sometimes gangs would gang up so as to make like malenky armies for big night-war, but mostly it was best to roam in these like small numbers. Billyboy was something that made me want to sick just to viddy his fat grinning litso, and he always had this von of very stale oil that's been used for frying over and over, even when he was dressed in his best platties, like now. They viddied us just as we viddied them, and there was like a very quit kind of watching each other now. This would be real, this would be proper, this would be the nozh, the oozy, the britva, not just fisties and boots. Billyboy and his droogs stopped what they were doing, which was just getting ready to perform something on a weepy young devotchka they had there, not more than ten, she creeching away but with her platties still on. Billyboy holding her by one rooker and his number-one, Leo, holding the other. They'd probably just been doing the dirty slovo part of the act before getting down to a malenky bit of ultra-violence.

When they viddied us a-coming they let go of this boo-hooing little ptitsa, there being plenty more where she came from, and she ran with her thin white legs flashing through the dark, still going "Oh oh oh". I said, smiling very wide and droogie: "Well, if it isn't fatstinking billygoat Billyboy in poison. How art thou, thou globby bottle of cheap stinking chip-oil? Come and get one in the yarbles, if you have any yarbles, you eunuch jelly, thou." And then westarted.

There were four of us to six of them, like I have already indicated, but poor old Dim, for all his dimness, was worth three of the others in sheer madness and dirty fighting. Dim had a real horrorshow length of oozy or chain round his waist, twice wound round, and he unwound this and began to swing it beautiful in the eyes or glazzies. Pete and Georgie had good sharp nozhes, but I for my own part had a fine starry horrorshow cut-throat britva which, at that time, I could flash and shine artistic. So there we were dratsing away in the dark, the old Luna with men on it just coming up, the stars stabbing away as it might be knives anxious to join in the dratsing.

With my britva I managed to slit right down the front of one of Billyboy's droog's platties, very very neat and not even touching the plott under the cloth. Then in the dratsing this droog of Billyboy's suddenly found himself all opened up like a peapod, with his belly bare and his poor old yarbles showing, and then he got very razdraz, waving and screaming and losing his guard and letting in old Dim with his chain snaking whisssssshhhhhhhh, so that old Dim chained him right in the glazzies, and this droog of Billyboy's went totter-ing off and howling his heart out. We were doing very horrorshow, and soon we had Billyboy's number-one down underfoot, blinded with old Dim's chain and crawling and howling about like an animal, but with one fair boot on the gulliverhe was out and out and out.

Of the four of us Dim, as usual, came out the worst in point of looks, that is to say his litso was all bloodied and his platties a dirty mess, but the others of us were still cool and whole. It was stinking fatty Billyboy I wanted now, and there I was dancing about with my britva like I might be a barber on board a ship on a very rough sea, trying to get in at him with a few fair slashes on his unclean oily litso. Billyboy had a nozh, a long flick-type, but he was a malenky bit too slow and heavy in his movements to vred anyone really bad. And, my brothers, it was real satisfaction to me to waltz - left two three, right two three - and carve left cheeky and right cheeky, so that like two curtains of blood seemed to pour out at the same time, one on either side of his fat filthy oily snout in the winter starlight. Down this blood poured in like red curtains, but you could viddy Billyboy felt not a thing, and he went lumbering on like a filthy fatty bear, poking at me with his nozh.

Then we slooshied the sirens and knew the millicents were coming with pooshkas pushing out of the police-auto-windows at the ready. That weepy little devotchka had told them, no doubt, there being a box for calling the rozzes not too far behind the Muni Power Plant. "Get you soon, fear not," I called, "stinking billygoat. I'll have your yarbles off lovely." Then off they ran, slow and panting, except for Number One Leo out snoring on the ground, away north towards the river, and we went the other way. Just round the next turning was an alley, dark and empty and open at both ends, and we rested there, panting fast then slower, then breathing like normal. It was like resting between the feet of two terrific and very enormous mountains, these being the flatblocks, and in the windows of all the flats you could viddy like blue dancing light. This would be the telly. Tonight was what thy called a worldcast, meaning that the same programme was being viddied by everybody in the world that wanted to, that being mostly the middle-aged middle-class lewdies. There would be some big famous stupid comic chelloveck or black singer, and it was all being bounced off the special telly satellites in outer space, my brothers. We waited panting, and we could slooshy the sirening millicents going east, so we knew we were all right now. But poor old Dim kept looking up at the stars and planets and the Luna with his rot wide open like a kid who'd never viddied any such things before, and he said: "What's on them, I wonder. What would be up there on things likethat?"

I nudged him hard, saying: "Come, gloopy bastard as thou art. Think thou not on them. There'll be life like down here most likely, with some getting knifed and others doing the knifing. And now, with the nochy still molodoy, let us be on our way, O my brothers." The others smecked at this, but poor old Dim looked at me serious, then up again at the stars and the Luna. So we went on our way down the alley, with the worldcast blueing on on either side. What we needed now was an auto, so we turned left coming out of the alley,

knowing right away we were in Priestly Place as soon as we viddied the big bronze statue of some starry poet with an apey upper lip and a pipe stuck in a droopy old rot. Going north we came to the filthy old Filmdrome, peeling and dropping to bits through nobody going there much except malchicks like me and my droogs, and then only for a yell or a razrez or a bit of in-out-in-out in the dark. We could viddy from the poster on the Filmdrome's face, a couple of fly-dirtied spots trained on it, that there was the usual cowboy riot, with the archangels on the side of the US marshal six-shooting at the rustlers out of hell's fighting legions, the kind of hound-and-horny veshch put out by Statefilm in those days. The autos parked by the sinny weren't all that horrorshow, crappy starry veshches most of them, but there was anewish Durango 95 that I thought might do. Georgie had one of these polyclefs, as they called them, on his keyring, so we were soon aboard - Dim and Pete at the back, puffing away lordly at their cancers - and I turned on the ignition and started her up and she grumbled away real horrorshow, a nice warm vibraty feeling grumbling all through your guttiwuts. Then I made with the noga, and we backed out lovely, and nobody viddied us take off.

We fillied round what was called the backtown for a bit, scaring old vecks and cheenas that were crossing the roads and zigzagging after cats and that. Then we took the road west. There wasn't much traffic about, so I kept pushing the old noga through the floorboards near, and the Durango 95 ate up the road like spaghetti. Soon it was winter trees and dark, my brothers, with a country dark, and at one place I ran over something big with a snarling toothy rot in the head-lamps, then it screamed and squelched under and old Dim at the back near laughed his gulliver off - "Ho ho ho" - at that.

Then we saw one young malchick with his sharp, lubbilubbing under a tree, so we stopped and cheered at them, then we bashed into them both with a couple of half-hearted tolchocks, making them cry, and on we went. What we were after now was the old surprise visit. That was a real kick and good for smecks and lashings of the ultra-violent. We came at last to a sort of village, and just outside this village was a small sort of a cottage on its own with a bit of garden. The Luna was well up now, and we could viddy this cottage fine and clear as I eased up and put the brake on, the other three giggling like bezoomny, and we could viddy the name on the gate of this cottage veshch was HOME, a gloomy sort of a name. I got out of the auto, ordering my droogs to shush their giggles and act like serious, and I opened this malenky gate and walked up to the front door. I knocked nice and gentle and nobody came, so I knocked a bit more and this time I could slooshy somebody coming, then a bolt drawn, then the door inched open an inch or so, then I could viddy this one glazz looking out at me and the door was on a chain. "Yes? Who is it?" It was a sharp's goloss, a youngish devotchka by her sound, so I said in a very refined manner of speech, a real gentleman's goloss: "Pardon, madam, most sorry to disturb you, but my friend and me were out for a walk, and my friend has taken bad all of a sudden with a very troublesome turn, and he is out there on the road dead out and groaning. Would you have the goodness to let me use your telephone to telephone for an ambulance?"

"We haven't a telephone," said this devotchka. "I'm sorry, but we haven't. You'll have to go somewhere else." From inside this malenky cottage I could slooshy the clack clack clacky clack clack clackity clackclack of some veck typing away, and then the typing stopped and there was this chelloveck's goloss calling: "What is it, dear?"

"Well," I said, "could you of your goodness please let him have a cup of water? It's like a faint, you see. It seems as though he's passed out in a sort of a fainting fit."

The devotchka sort of hesitated and then said: "Wait." Then she went off, and my three droogs had got out of the auto quiet and crept up horrorshow stealthy, putting their maskies on now, then I put mine on, then it was only a matter of me putting in the old rooker and undoing the chain, me having softened up this devotchka with my gent's goloss, so that she hadn't shut the door like sheshould have done, us being strangers of the night. The four of us then went roaring in, old Dim playing the shoot as usual with his jumping up and down and singing out dirty slovos, and it was a nice malenky cottage, I'll say that. We all went smecking into the room with a light on, and there was this devotchka sort of cower-ing, a young pretty bit of sharp with real horrorshow groodies on her, and with her was this chelloveck who was her moodge, youngish too with horn-rimmed otchkies on him, and on a table was a typewriter and all papers scattered everywhere, but there was one little pile of paper like that must have been what he'd already typed, so here was another intelligent type

bookman type like that we'd fillied with some hours back, but this one was a writer not a reader. Anyway, he said: "What is this? Who are you? How dare you enter my house without permission." And all the time his goloss was trembling and his rookers too. So I said: "Never fear. If fear thou hast in thy heart, O brother, pray banish it forthwith." Then Georgie and Pete went out to find the kitchen, while old Dim waited for orders, standing next to me with his rot wide open. "What is this, then?" I said, picking up the pile like of typing from off of the table, and the horn-rimmed moodge said, dithering: "That's just what I want to know. What is this? What do you want? Get out at once before I throw you out." So poor old Dim, masked like Peebee Shelley, had a good loud smeck at that, roaring like some animal.

"It's a book," I said. "It's a book what you are writing." I made the old goloss very coarse. "I have always had the strong-est admiration for them as can write books." Then I looked at its top sheet, and there was the name - A C L O C K W O R K O R A N G E - and I said: "That's a fair gloopy title. Who ever heard of a clockwork orange?" Then I read a malenky bit out loud in a sort of very high type preaching goloss: " - The attempt to impose upon man, a creature of growth and capable of sweetness, to ooze juicily at the last round the bearded lips of God, to attempt to impose, I say, laws and conditions appropriate to a mechanical creation, against this I raise my sword-pen - " Dim made the old lip-music at that and I had to smeck myself. Then I started to tear up the sheets and scatter the bits over the floor, and this writer moodge went sort of bezoomny and made for me with his zoobies clenched and showing yellow and his nails ready for me like claws. So that was old Dim's cue and he went grinning and going er er and a a a for this veck's dithering rot, crack crack, first left fistie then right, so that our dear old droog the red - red vino on tap and the same in all places, like it's put out by the same big firm - started to pour and spot the nice clean carpet and the bits of this book that I was still ripping away at, razrez razrez. All this time this devotchka, his loving and faithful wife, just stood like froze by the fireplace, and then she started letting out little malenky creeches, like in time to the like music of old Dim's fisty work. Then Georgie and Pete came in from the kitchen, both munching away, though with their maskies on, you could do that with them on and no trouble. Georgie with like a cold leg of something in one rooker and half a loaf of kleb with a big dollop of maslo on it in the other, and Pete with a bottle of beer frothing its gulliver off and a horrorshow rookerful of like plum cake. They went haw haw haw, viddying old Dim dancing round and fisting the writer veck so that the writer veck started to platch like his life's work was ruined, going boo hoo hoo with a very square bloody rot, but it was haw haw haw in a muffled eater's way and you could see bits of what they were eating. I didn't like that, it being dirty and slobbery, so I said: "Drop that mounch. I gave no permission. Grab hold of this veck here so he can viddy all and not get away." So they put down their fatty pishcha on the table among all the flying paper and they clopped over to the writer veck whose horn-rimmed otchkies were cracked but still hanging on, with old Dim still dancing round and making ornaments shake on the mantelpiece (I swept them all off then and they couldn't shake no more, little brothers) while he fillied with the author of 'A Clockwork Orange', making his litso all purple and dripping away like some very special sort of a juicy fruit. "All right, Dim," I said. "Now for the other veshch, Bog help us all." So he

did the strong-man on the devotchka, who was still creech creech creeching away in very horrorshow four-in-a-bar, locking her rookers from the back, while I ripped away at this and that and the other, the others going haw haw haw still, and real good horrorshow groodies they were that then exhibited their pink glazzies, O my brothers, while I untrussed and got ready for the plunge. Plunging, I could slooshy cries of agony and this writer bleeding veck that Georgie and Pete held on to nearly got loose howling bezoomny with the filthiest of slovos that I already knew and others he was making up.

Then after me it was right old Dim should have his turn, which he did in a beastly snorty howly sort of a way with his Peebee Shelley maskie taking no notice, while I held on to her. Then there was a changeover, Dim and me grabbing the slobbering writer veck who was past struggling really, only just coming out with slack sort of slovos like he was in the land in a milk-plus bar, and Pete and Georgie had theirs. Then there was like quiet and we were full of like hate, so smashed what was left to be smashed - typewriter, lamp, chairs - and Dim, it was typical of old Dim, watered the fire out and was going to dung on the carpet, there being plenty of

paper, but I said no. "Out out out out," I howled. The writer veck and his zheena were not really there, bloody and torn and making noises. But they'd live.

So we got into the waiting auto and I left it to Georgie to take the wheel, me feeling that malenky bit shagged, and we went back to town, running over odd squealing things on the way.

We yeckated back townwards, my brothers, but just outside, not far from what they called the Industrial Canal, we viddied the fuel needle had like collapsed, like our own ha ha ha needles had, and the auto was coughing kashl kashl kashl. Not to worry overmuch, though, because a rail station kept flashing blue - on off on off - just near. The point was whether to leave the auto to be sobiratted by the rozzes or, us feeling like in a hate and murder mood, to give it a fair tolchock into the starry waters for a nice heavy loud plesk before the death of the evening. This latter we decided on, so we got out and, the brakes off, all four tolchocked it to the edge of the filthy water that was like treacle mixed with human hole products, then one good horrorshow tolchock and in she went. We had to dash back for fear of the filth splashing on our platties, but splusssshhh and gloop she went, down and lovely. "Farewell, old droog," called Georgie, and Dim obliged with a clowny great guff - "Huh huh huhhuh."

Then we made for the station to ride the one stop to Center, as the middle of the town was called. We paid our fares nice and polite and waited gentlemanly and quiet on the platform, old Dim fillying with the slot machines, his carmans being full of small malenky coin, and ready if need beto distribute chocbars to the poor and starving, though there was none such about, and then the old espresso rapido came lumbering in and we climbed aboard, the train looking to be near empty.

To pass the three-minute ride we fillied about with what they called the upholstery, doing some nice horrorshow tearing-out of the seats' guts and old Dim chaining the okno till the glass cracked and sparkled in the winter air, but we were all feeling that bit shagged and fagged and fashed, it having been an evening of some small energy expenditure, my brothers, only Dim, like the clowny animal he was, full of the joys-of, but looking all dirtied over and too much von of sweat on him, which was one thing I had against old Dim.

We got out at Center and walked slow back to the Korova Milkbar, all going yawwwww a malenky bit and exhibiting to moon and star and lamplight our back fillings, because we were still only growing malchicks and had school in the daytime, and when we got into the Korova we found it fuller than when we'd left earlier on. But the chelloveck that had been burbling away, in the land, on white and synthemesc or whatever, was still on at it, going: "Urchins of deadcast in the way-ho-hay glill platonic time weatherborn." It was probable that this was his third or fourth lot that evening, for he had that pale inhuman look, like he'd become a 'thing', and like his litso was really a piece of chalk carved. Really, if he wanted to spend so long in the land, he should have gone into one of the private cubies at the back and not stayed in the big mesto, because here some of the malchickies would filly about with him a malenky bit, though not too much because there were powerful bruiseboys hidden away in the old Korova who could stop any riot. Anyway, Dim squeezed in next to this veck and, with his big clown's yawp that showed his hanging grape, he stabbed this veck's foot with his own large filthy sabog. But the veck, my brothers, heard nought, being now all above thebody.

It was nadsats milking and coking and fillying around (nadsats were what we used to call the teens), but there were a few of the more starry ones, vecks and cheenas alike (but not of the bourgeois, never them) laughing and govoreeting at the bar. You could tell them from their barberings and loose platties (big stringy sweaters mostly) that they'd been on rehearsals at the TV studios around the corner. The devotchkas among them had these very lively litsos and wide big rots, very red, showing a lot of teeth, and smeking away and not caring about the wicked world one whit. And then the disc on the stereo twanged off and out (it was Johnny Zhivago, a Russky koshka, singing 'Only Every Other Day'), and in the like interval, the short silence before the next one came on, one of these devotchkas - very fair and with a big smiling red rot and in her late thirties I'd say - suddenly came with a burst of singing, only a bar and a half and as though she was like giving an example of something they'd all been govoreeting about, and it was like for a moment, O my brothers, some great bird had flown into the milkbar, and I felt all the little malenky hairs on my plott standing endwise and the shivers crawling up like slow malenky lizards and then down again. Because I knew what she sang. It was

from an opera by Friedrich Gitter-fenster called 'Das Bettzeug', and it was the bit where she's snuffing it with her throat cut, and the slovos are 'Better like this maybe'. Anyway, I shivered.

But old Dim, as soon as he'd slooshied this dollop of song like a lomtick of redhot meat plonked on your plate, let off one of his vulgarities, which in this case was a lip-trump followed by a dog-howl followed by two fingers pronging twice at the air followed by a clowny guffaw. I felt myself all of a fever and like drowning in redhot blood, slooshying and viddying Dim's vulgarity, and I said: "Bastard. Filthy drooling mannerless bastard." Then I leaned across Georgie, who was between me and horrible Dim, and fisted Dim skorry on the rot. Dim looked very surprised, his rot open, wiping the krovvy off of his goober with his rook and in turn looking surprised at the red flowing krovvy and at me. "What for did you do that for?" he said in his ignorant way. Not many viddied what I'd done, and those that viddied cared not. The stereo was on again and was playing a very sick electronic guitar veshch. I said: "For being a bastard with no manners and not the dook of an idea how to comport yourself publicwise, O mybrother."

Dim put on a hound-and-horny look of evil, saying: "I don't like you should do what you done then. And I'm not your brother no more and wouldn't want to be." He'd taken a big snotty tashtook from his pocket and was mopping the red flow puzzled, keeping on looking at it frowning as if he thought that blood was for other vecks and not for him. It was like he was singing blood to make up for his vulgarity when that devotchka was singing music. But that devotchka was smecking away ha ha ha now with her droogs at the bar, her red rot working and her zoobies ashine, not having noticed Dim's filthy vulgarity. It was me really Dim had done wrong to. I said: "if you don't like this and you wouldn't want that, then you know what to do, little brother."

Georgie said, in a sharp way that made me look: "All right. Let's not be starting."

"That's clean up to Dim," I said. "Dim can't go on all his jeezny being as a little child." And I looked sharp at Georgie.

Dim said, and the red krovvy was easing its flow now: "What natural right does he have to think he can give the orders and tolchock me whenever he likes? Yarbles is what I say to him, and I'd chain his glazzies out as soon as look."

"Watch that," I said, as quiet as I could with the stereo bouncing all over the walls and ceiling and the in-the-land veck beyond Dim getting loud now with his "Spark nearer, ultoptimate", I said: "Do watch that, O Dim, if to continue to be on live thou dostwish."

"Yarbles," said Dim, sneering, "great bolshy yarblockos to you. What you done then you had no right. I'll meet you with chain or nozh or britva any time, not having you aiming tolchocks at me reasonless, it stands to reason I won't haveit."

"A nozh scrap any time you say," I snarled back. Pete said: "Oh now, don't, both of you malchicks. Droogs, aren't we?"

It isn't right droogs should behave thiswise. See, there are some loose-lipped malchicks over there smecking at us, leering like. We mustn't let ourselvesdown."

"Dim," I said, "has got to learn his place. Right?"

"Wait," said Georgie. "What is all this about place? This is thefirst I ever hear about lewdies learning their place."

Pete said: "If the truth is known, Alex, you shouldn't have given old Dim that uncalled-for tolchock. I'll say it once and no more. I say it with all respect, but if it had been me you'd given it to you'd have to answer. I say no more." And he drowned his litso in his milk-glass.

I could feel myself getting all razdraz inside, but I tried to cover it, saying calm: "There has to be a leader. Discipline there has to be. Right?" None of them skazatted a word or nodded even. I got more razdraz inside, calmer out. "I," I said, "have been in charge long now. We are all droogs, but somebody has to be in charge. Right? Right?" They all like nodded, wary like. Dim was osooshing the last of the krovvy off. It was Dim who said now: "Right, right. Doobidoob. A bit tired, maybe, everybodyis."

Best not to say more." I was surprised and just that malenky bit poogly to sloosh Dim govoreeting that wise. Dim said: "Bedways is rightways now, so best we go homeways. Right?" I was very surprised. The other two nodded, going right right right. I said: "You understand about that tolchok on the rot, Dim.

It was the music, see. I get all bezoomny when any veck interferes with a ptitsa singing, as it might be. Like that then."

"Best we go off homeways and get a bit of spatchka," said Dim. "A long night for growing malchicks. Right?" Right right nodded the other two. I said: "I think it best we go home now. Dim has made a real horrorshow suggestion. If we don't meet day-wise, O my brothers, well then - same time same place tomorrow?"

"Oh yes," said Georgie. "I think that can be arranged."

"I might," said Dim, "be just that malenky bit late. But same place and near same time tomorrow surely." He was still wiping at his goober, though no krovvy flowed any longer now. "And," he said, "it is to be hoped there won't be no more of them singing ptitsas in here." Then he gave his old Dim guff, a clowny big hohohohoho. It seemed like he was too dim to take much offence.

So off we went our several ways, me belching arrrrgh on the cold coke I'd peeted. I had my cut-throat britva handy in case any of Billyboy's droogs should be around near the flatblock waiting, or for that matter any of the other bandas or gruppas or shaikas that from time to time were at war with one. Where I lived was with my dadda and mum in the flats of Municipal Flatblock 18A, between Kingsley Avenue and Wil-sonsway. I got to the big main door with no trouble, though I did pass one young malchick sprawling and creeching and moaning in the gutter, all cut aboutlovely, and saw in the lamplight also streaks of blood here and there like signatures, my brothers, of the night's fillying. And too I saw just by 18A a pair of devotchka's neezhnies doubtless rudely wrenched off in the heat of the moment, O my brothers. And so in. In the hallway was the good old municipal painting on the wallsecks and ptitsas very well developed, stern in the dignity of labour, at workbench and machine with not one stitch of platties on their well-developed plotts. But of course some of the malchicks living in 18A had, as was to be expected, em-bellished and decorated the said big painting with handy pencil and ballpoint, adding hair and stiff rods and dirty ballooning slovos out of the dignified rots of these nagoy (bare, that is) cheenas and vecks. I went to the lift, but there was no need to press the electric knopka to see if it was working or not, because it had been tolchocked real horrorshow this night, the metal doors all buckled, some feat of rare strength indeed, so I had to walk the ten floors up. I cursed and panted climbing, being tired in plott if not so much in brain. I wanted music very bad this evening, that singing devotchka in the Korova having perhaps started me off. I wanted like a big feast of it before getting my passport stamped, my brothers, at sleep's frontier and the stripy shest lifted to let methrough.

I opened the door of 10-8 with my own little klotch, and inside our malenky quarters all was quiet, the pee and em both being in sleepland, and mum had laid out on the table on malenky bit of supper - a couple of lomticks of tinned sponge-meat with a shive or so of kleb and butter, a glass of the old cold moloko. Hohoho, the old moloko, with no knives or synthemesc or drenchrom in it. How wicked, my brothers, innocent milk must always seem to me now. Still I drank and ate growling, being more hungry than I thought at first, and I got fruit-pie from the larder and tore chunks off it to stuff into my greedy rot. Then I tooth-cleaned and clicked, cleaning out the old rot with my yahzick or tongue, then I went into my own little room or den, easing off my platties as I didso.

Here was my bed and my stereo, pride of my jeezny, and my discs in their cupboard, and banners and flags on the wall, these being like remembrances of my corrective school life since I was eleven, O my brothers, each one shining and blaz-oned with name or number: SOUTH 4; METRO CORSKOL BLUE DIVISION; THE BOYS OF ALPHA.

The little speakers of my stereo were all arranged round the room, on ceiling, walls, floor, so, lying on my bed slooshying the music, I was like netted and meshed in the orchestra. Now what I fancied first tonight was this new violin concerto by the American Geoffrey Plautus, played by Odysseus Choerilos with the Macon (Georgia) Philharmonic, so I slid it from where it was neatly filed and switched on and waited.

Then, brothers, it came. Oh, bliss, bliss and heaven. I lay all nagoy to the ceiling, my gulliver on my rookers on the pillow, glazzies closed, rot open in bliss, slooshying the sluice of lovely sounds. Oh, it was gorgeousness and gorgeosity made flesh. The trombones crunched redgold under my bed, and behind my gulliver the trumpets three-wise silverflamed, and there by the door the timps rolling through my guts and out again crunched like candy thunder. Oh, it was wonder of wonders. And then, a bird of like rarest spun heavenmetal, or like silvery wine flowing in a spaceship, gravity all nonsense now, came the violin solo above all the other strings, and those strings were like a cage of silk around my bed. Then flute and oboe bored, like worms of likeplatinum, into the thick thick toffee gold and silver. I was in such bliss, mybrothers.

Pee and em in their bedroom next door had learnt now not to knock on the wall with complaints of what they called noise.

I had taught them. Now they would take sleep-pills. Perhaps, knowing the joy I had in my night music, they had already taken them. As I slooshied, my glazzies tight shut to shut in the bliss that was better than any synthemesc Bog or God, I knew such lovely pictures. There were vecks and ptitsas, both young and starry, lying on the ground screaming for mercy, and I was smeking all over my rot and grinding my boot in their litsos. And there were devotchkas ripped and creeching against walls and I plunging like a shлага into them, and indeed when the music, which was one movement only, rose to the top of its big highest tower, then, lying there on my bed with glazzies tight shut and rookers behind my gulliver, I broke and spattered and cried aaaaaaah with the bliss of it.

And so the lovely music glided to its glowing close.

After that I had lovely Mozart, the Jupiter, and there were new pictures of different litsos to be ground and splashed, and it was after this that I thought I would have just one last disc only before crossing the border, and I wanted something starry and strong and very firm, so it was J. S. Bach I had, the Brandenburg Concerto just for middle and lower strings. And, slooshying with different bliss than before, I viddied again this name on the paper I'd razrezzed that night, a long time ago it seemed, in that cottage called HOME. The name was about a clockwork orange. Listening to the J. S. Bach, I began to pony better what that meant now, and I thought, slooshying away to the brown gorgeousness of the starry German master, that I would like to have tolchecked them both harder and ripped them to ribbons on their own floor.

The next morning I woke up at oh eight oh oh hours, my brothers, and as I still felt shagged and fagged and fashed and bashed and my glazzies were stuck together real horrorshow with sleepglue, I thought I would not go to school. I thought how I would have a malenky bit longer in the bed, an hour or two say, and then get dressed nice and easy, perhaps even having a splosh about in the bath, make toast for myself and slooshy the radio or read the gazetta, all on my oddy knocky.

And then in the afterlunch I might perhaps, if I still felt like it,

itty off to the old skolliwoll and see what was vareeting in the great seat of gloopy useless learning, O my brothers. I heard my papapa grumbling and trampling and then ittying off to the dyeworks where he rabbited, and then my mum called in in a very respectful goloss as she did now I was growing up big and strong: "It's gone eight, son. You don't want to be late again."

So I called back: "A bit of pain in my gulliver. Leave us be and I'll try to sleep it off and then I'll be right as dodgers forthis after." I slooshied her give a sort of a sigh and she said: "I'll put your breakfast in the oven then, son. I've got to be off myself now." Which was true, there being this law for everybody not a child nor with child nor ill to go out rabbiting. My mum worked at one of the Statemarts, as they called them, filling up the shelves with tinned soup and beans and all that cal. So I slooshied her clank a plate in the gas-oven like and then she was putting her shoes on and then getting her coat from behind the door and then sighing again, thenshesaid: "I'moffnow, son." But I letontobebackinsleeplandandthenIdiddozeoffrealhorrorshow,

and I had a queer and very real like sneety, dreaming for some reason of my droog Georgie. In this sneety he'd got like very much older and very sharp and hard and was govoreeting about discipline and obedience and how all the malchicks under his control had to jump hard at it and throw up the old salute like being in the army, and there was me in line like the rest saying yes sir and no sir, and the I viddied clear that Georgie had these stars on his pletchoes and he was like a general. And then he brought in old Dim with a whip, and Dim was a lot more starry and grey and had a few zoobies missing as you could see when he let out a smeck, viddying me, and then my droog Georgie said, pointing like at me: "That man has filth and cal all over his platties," and it was true. Then I creeched: "Don't hit, please don't, brothers," and started to run. And I was running in like circles and Dim was after me, smeking his gulliver off, cracking with the old whip, and each time I got a real horrorshow tolchock with this whip there was like a very loud electric bell ringringring, and this bell was like a sort of a paintoo.

Then I woke up real skorry, my heart going bap bap bap, and of course there was really a bell going brrrrr, and it was our front-door bell. I let on that nobody was at home, but this brrrrr still ittied on, and then I heard a goloss shouting through the door: "Come on then, get out of it, I know you're in bed." I recognized the goloss right away. It was the goloss of P. R. Deltoid (a real gloopy nazz, that one) what they called my Post-Corrective Adviser, an overworked veck with hundreds on his books. I shouted right right right, in a goloss of like pain, and I got out of bed and attired myself, Omy brothers, in a very lovely over-gown of like silk, with designs of like great cities all over this over-gown. Then I put my nogas into very comfy wooly toofles, combed my luscious glory, and was ready for P. R. Deltoid. When I opened up he came shambling in looking shagged, a battered old shlapa on his gulliver, his raincoat filthy. "Ah, Alex boy," he said to me. "I met your mother, yes. She said something about a pain somewhere. Hence not at schol, yes."

"A rather intolerable pain in the head, brother, sir," I said in my gentleman's goloss. "I think it should clear by this afternoon."

"Or certainly by this evening, yes," said P. R. Deltoid. "The evening is the great time, isn't it, Alex boy? Sit," he said, "sit, sit," as though this was his domy and me his guest. And he sat in this starry rocking-chair of mydad's and began rocking, as if that was all he had come for. I said: "A cup of the old chai, sir? Tea, I mean." "No time," he said. And he rocked, giving me the old glint under frowning brows, as if with all the time in the world. "No time, yes," he said, gloopy. So I put the kettle on. Then I said: "To what do I owe the extreme pleasure? Is anything wrong, sir?" "Wrong?" he said, very skorry and sly, sort of hunched looking at me but still rocking away. Then he caught sight of an advert in the gazetta, which was on the table - a lovely smecking young ptitsa with her groodies hanging out to advertise, my brothers, the Glories of the Jugoslav Beaches.

Then, after sort of eating her up in two swallows, he said: "Why should you think in terms of there being anything wrong? Have you been doing something you shouldn't, yes?"

"Just a manner of speech," I said, "sir."

"Well," said P. R. Deltoid, "it's just a manner of speech from me to you that you watch out, little Alex, because next time, as you very well know, it's not going to be the corrective school any more. Next time it's going to be the barry place and all my work ruined. If you have no consideration for your horrible self you at least might have some for me, who have sweated over you. A big black mark, I tell you in confidence, for every one we don't reclaim, a confession of failure for every one of you that ends up in the stripyhole."

"I've been doing nothing I shouldn't, sir," I said. "The millicents have nothing on me, brother, sir I mean."

"Cut out this clever talk about millicents," said P. R. Deltoid very weary, but still rocking. "Just because the police have not picked you up lately doesn't, as you very well know, mean you've not been up to some nastiness. There was a bit of a fight last night, wasn't there? There was a bit of shuffling withnozhes and bike-chains and the like. One of a certain fat boy's friends was ambulanced off late from near the Power Plant and hospitalized, cut about very unpleasantly, yes. Your name was mentioned. The word has got through to me by the usual channels. Certain friends of yours were named also. There seems to have been a fair amount of assorted nastiness last night. Oh, nobody can prove anything about anybody, as usual. But I'm warning you,

little Alex, being a good friend to you as always, the one man in this sick and sore community who wants to save you from yourself."

"I appreciate all that, sir," I said, "very sincerely."

"Yes, you do, don't you?" he sort of sneered. "Just watch it, that's all, yes. We know more than you think, little Alex."

Then he said, in a goloss of great suffering, but still rocking away: "What gets into you all? We study the problem and we've been studying it for damn well near a century, yes, but we get no further with our studies. You've got a good home here, good loving parents, you've got not too bad of a brain.

Is it some devil that crawls inside you?"

"Nobody's got anything on me, sir," I said. "I've been out of the rookers of the millicents for a long time now."

"That's just what worries me," sighed P. R. Deltoid. "A bit too long of a time to be healthy. You're about due now by my reckoning. That's why I'm warning you, little Alex, to keep your handsome young proboscis out of the dirt, yes. Do I make myself clear?"

"As an unmuddied lake, sir," I said. "Clear as an azure sky of deepest summer. You can rely on me, sir." And I gave him a nice zoobysmile.

But when he'd ookadeeted and I was making this very strong pot of chai, I grinned to myself over this veshch that P. R. Deltoid and his droogs worried about. All right, I do bad, what with crasting and tolchocks and carves with the britva and the old in-out-in-out, and if I get loveded, well, too bad for me, O my little brothers, and you can't run a country with every chelloveck comporting himself in my manner of the night. So if I get loveded and it's three months in this mesto and another six in that, and the, as P. R. Deltoid so kindly warns, next time, in spite of the great tenderness of my summers, brothers, it's the great unearthly zoo itself, well, I say: "Fair, but a pity, my lords, because I just cannot bear to be shut in. My endeavour shall be, in such future as stretches out its snowy and lilywhite arms to me before the nozh overtakes or the blood spatters its final chorus in twisted metal and smashed glass on the highroad, to not get loveded again." Which is fair speeching. But, brothers, this biting of their toe-nails over what is the cause of badness is what turns me into a fine laughing malchick. They don't go into the cause of goodness, so why the other shop? If lewdies are good that's because they like it, and I wouldn't ever interfere with their pleasures, and so of the other shop. And I was patron-izing the other shop. More, badness is of the self, the one, the you or me on our oddy knockies, and that self is made by old Bog or God and is his great pride and radosty. But the not-self cannot have the bad, meaning they of the government and the judges and the schools cannot allow the bad because they cannot allow the self. And is not our modern history, my brothers, the story of brave malenky selves fighting these big machines? I am serious with you, brothers, over this. But what I do I do because I like todo.

So now, this smiling winter morning, I drink this very strong chai with moloko and spoon after spoon after spoon of sugar, me having a sladky tooth, and I dragged out of the oven the breakfast my poor old mum had cooked for me. It was an egg fried, that and no more, but I made toast and ate egg and toast and jam, smacking away at it while I read the gazetta. The gazetta was the usual about ultra-violence and bank robberies and strikes and footballers making everybody paralytic with fright by threatening to not play next Saturday if they did not get higher wages, naughty malchickiwicks as they were. Also there were more space-trips and bigger stereo TV screens and offers of free packets of soapflakes in ex-change for the labels on soup-tins, amazing offer for one week only, which made me smeck. And there was a bolshy big article on Modern Youth (meaning me, so I gave the old bow, grinning like bezoomny) by some very clever bald chelloveck.

I read this with care, my brothers, slurping away at the old chai, cup after tass after chasha, crunching my lomticks of black toast dipped in jammiwam and eggiweg. This learned veck said the usual veshches, about no parental discipline, as he called it, and the shortage of real horrorshow teachers who would lambast bloody beggary out of their innocent poops and make them go boohooohoo for mercy. All this was gloopy and made me smeck, but it was like nice to go on knowing one was making the news all the time, O my brothers. Every

day there was something about Modern Youth, but the best veshch they ever had in the old gazetta was by some starry pop in a doggy collar who said that in his considered opinion and he was govoreeting as a man of Bog IT WAS THE DEVIL THAT WAS ABROAD and waslike ferreting his way into like young innocent flesh, and it was the adult world that could take the responsibility for this with their wars and bombs and nonsense. So that was all right. So he knew what he talked of, being a Godman. So we young innocent malchicks could take no blame. Right right right.

When I'd gone erk erk a couple of razzes on my full innocent stomach, I started to get out day platties from my ward-robe, turning the radio on. There was music playing, a very nice malenky string quartet, my brothers, by Claudius Bird-man, one that I knew well. I had to have a smeck, though, thinking of what I'd viddied once in one of these like articles on Modern Youth, about how Modern Youth would be better off if A Lively Appreciation Of The Arts could be like encouraged. Great Music, it said, and Great Poetry would like quieten Modern Youth down and make Modern Youth more Civilized. Civilized my syphilised yarbles. Music always sort ofsharpened me up, O my brothers, and made me feel like old Bog himself, ready to make with the old donner and blit-zen and have vecks and ptitsas creeching away in my ha ha power. And when I'd cheested up my litso and rookers a bit and done dressing (my day platties were like student-wear: the old blue pantalonies with sweater with A for Alex) I thought here at last was time to itty off to the disc-bootick (and cutter too, my pockets being full of pretty polly) to see about this long-promised and long-ordered stereo Beethoven Number Nine (the Choral Symphony, that is), recorded on Masterstroke by the Esh Sham Sinfonia under L. Muhaiwir. So out I went, brothers.

The day was very different from the night. The night belonged to me and my droogs and all the rest of the nadsats, and the starry bourgeois lurked indoors drinking in the gloopy worldcasts, but the day was for the starry ones, and there always seemed to be more rozzes or millicents about during the day, too. I got the autobus from the corner and rode to Center, and then I walked back to Taylor Place, and there was the disc-bootick I favoured with my inestimable custom, O my brothers. It had the gloopy name of MELODIA, but it was a real horrorshow mesto and skorry, most times, at getting the new recordings. I walked in and the only other customers were two young ptitsas sucking away at ice-sticks (and this, mark, was dead cold winter and sort of shuffling through the new pop-discs - Johnny Burnaway, Stash Kroh, The Mixers, Lay Quit Awhile With Ed And Id Molotov, and all the rest of that cal). These two ptitsas couldn't have been more than ten, and they too, like me, it seemed, evidently, had decided to take the morning off from the old skolliwoll. They saw themselves, you could see, as real grown-up devotchkas already, what with the old hip-swing when they saw your Faithful Narrator, brothers, and padded groodies and red all ploshed on their goobers. I went up to the counter, making with the polite zooby smile at old Andy behind it (always polite himself, always helpful, a real horrorshow type of a veck, though bald and very very thin). He said: "Aha. I know what you want, I think. Good news, good news. It has arrived." And with like big conductor's rookers beating time he went to get it. The two young ptitsas started giggling, as they will at that age, and I gave them a like cold glazzy. Andy was back real skorry, waving the great shiny white sleeve of the Ninth, which had on it, brothers, the frowning beetled like thunderbolted litso of Ludwig van himself. "Here," said Andy. "Shall we give it the trial spin?"

But I wanted it back home on my stereo to slooshy on my oddy knocky, greedy as hell. I fumbled out the deng to pay and one of the little ptitsas said: "Who you getten, bratty? What biggy, what only?" These young devotchkas had their own like way of govoreeting.

"The Heaven Seventeen? Luke Sterne? Goggly Gogol?" And both giggled, rocking and hippy. Then an idea hit me and made me near fall over with the anguish and ecstasy of it, Omy brothers, so I could not breathe for near ten seconds. I recovered and made with my new-clean zoobies and said: "What you got back home, little sisters, to play your fuzzy warbles on?" Because I could viddy the discs they were buying were these teeny pop veshches. "I bet you got little save tiny portable like picnic spinners." And they sort of pushed their lower lips out at that. "Come with uncle," I said, "and hear all proper. Hear angel trumpets and devil trombones. You are invited." And I like bowed. They giggled again and one said: "Oh, but we're so hungry. Oh, but we could so eat." The other said: "Yah, she can say that, can't she just." So I said: "Eat with uncle. Name your place."

Then they viddied themselves as real sophistoes, which was like pathetic, and started talking in big-lady golosses about the Ritz and the Bristol and the Hilton and Il Ristorante Gran-turco. But I stopped that with "Follow uncle," and I led them to the Pasta Parlour just round the corner and let them fill their innocent young litsos on spaghetti and sausages and cream-puffs and banana-splits and hot choc-sauce, till I near sicked with the sight of it, I, brothers, lunching but frugally offa cold ham-slice and a growling dollop of chilli. These two young ptitsas were much alike, though not sisters. They had the same ideas or lack of, and the same colour hair - a like dyed strawy. Well, they would grow up real today. Today I would make a day of it. No school this afterlunch, but education certain, Alex as teacher. Their names, they said, were Marty and Sonietta, bezoomny enough and in the heighth of their childish fashion, so I said: "Righty right, Marty and Sonietta. Time for the bigspin.

Come." When we were outside on the cold street they thought they would not go by autobus, oh no, but by taxi, so I gave them the humour, though with a real horrorshow ingrin, and I called ataxi from the rank near Center. The driver, a starry whiskery veck in very stained platties, said: "No tearing up, now. No nonsense with them seats. Just re-upholstered they are." I quieted his gloopy fears and off we spun to Municipal Flatblock 18A, these two bold little ptitsas giggling and whispering. So, to cut all short, we arrived, O my brothers, and I led the way up to 10-8, and they panted and smecked away the way up, and then they were thirsty, they said, so I unlocked the treasure-chest in my room and gave these ten-year-young devotchkas a real horrorshow Scotchman apiece, though well filled with sneezy pins-and-needles soda. They sat on my bed (yet unmade) and leg-swung, smecking and peeting their highballs, while I spun their like pathetic malenky discs through my stereo. Like peeting some sweet scented kid's drink, that was, in like very beautiful and lovely and costly gold goblets. But they went oh oh oh andsaid,

"Swoony" and "Hilly" and other weird slovos that were the heighth of fashion in that youth group. While I spun this cal for them I encouraged them to drink and have another, and they were nothing loath, O my brothers. So by the time their pathetic pop-discs had been twice spun each (there were two: 'Honey Nose', sung by Ike Yard, and 'Night After Day After Night', moaned by two horrible yarbleless like eunuchs whose names I forget) they were getting near the pitch of like young ptitsa's hysterics, what with jumping all over my bed and me in the room with them.

What was actually done that afternoon there is no need to describe, brothers, as you may easily guess all. Those two were unplattied and smecking fit to crack in no time at all, and they thought it the bolshiest fun to viddy old Uncle Alex standing there all nagoy and pan-handled, squirting the hypodermic like some bare doctor, then giving myself the old jab of growling jungle-cat secretion in the rooker. Then I pulled the lovely Ninth out of its sleeve, so that Ludwig van was now nagoy too, and I set the needle hissing on to the last movement, which was all bliss. There it was then, the bass strings like govoreeting away from under my bed at the rest of the orchestra, and then the male human goloss coming in and telling them all to be joyful, and then the lovely blissful tune all about Joy being a glorious spark like of heaven, and then I felt the old tigers leap in me and then I leapt on these two young ptitsas. This time they thought nothing fun and stopped creeching with high mirth, and had to submit to the strange and weird desires of Alexander the Large which, what with the Ninth and the hypo jab, were choodeessny and zammechat and very demanding, O my brothers. But they were both very very drunken and could hardly feel verymuch.

When the last movement had gone round for the second time with all the banging and creeching about Joy Joy Joy Joy, then these two young ptitsas were not acting the big lady sophisto no more. They were like waking up to what was being done to their malenky persons and saying that they wanted to go home and like I was a wild beast. They looked like they had been in some big bitva, as indeed they had, and were all bruised and pouty. Well, if they would not go to school they must stil have their education. And education they had had. They were creeching and going ow ow ow as they put their platties on, and they were like punchipunching me with their teeny fists as I lay there dirty and nagoy and fair shagged and fagged on the bed. This young Sonietta was creeching: "Beast and hateful animal. Filthy horror." So I let themget their things together and get out, which they did, talking about how the rozzes should be got on to me and all that cal.

Then they were going down the stairs and I dropped off to sleep, still with the old Joy Joy Joy Joy crashing and howling away.

What happened, though, was that I woke up late (near seven-thirty by my watch) and, as it turned out, that was not so clever. You can viddy that everything in this wicked world counts. You can pony that one thing always leads to another.

Right right right. My stereo was no longer on about Joy and I Embrace Ye O Ye Millions, so some veck had dealt it the off, and that would be either pee or em, both of them now being quite clear to the slooshying in the living-room and, from the clink clink of plates and slurp slurp of peeting tea from cups, at their tired meal after the day's rabbiting in factory the one, store the other. The poor old. The pitiable starry. I put on my over-gown and looked out, in guise of loving only son, to say: "Hi hi hi, there. A lot better after the day's rest. Ready now for evening work to earn that little bit." For that's what they said they believed I did these days. "Yum, yum, mum. Any of that for me?" It was like some frozen pie that she'd unfroze and then warmed up and it looked not so very appetitish, but I had to say what I said. Dad looked at me with a not-so-pleased suspicious like look but said nothing, knowing he dared not, and mum gave me a tired like little smeck, to thee fruit of my womb my only son sort of. I danced to the bath-room and had a real skorry cheest all over, feeling dirty and gluey, then back to my den for the evening's platties. Then, shining, combed, brushed and gorgeous, I sat to my lomtick of pie. Papapa said: "Not that I want to pry, son, but where exactly is it you go to work o'evenings?"

"Oh," I chewed, "it's mostly odd things, helping like. Here and there, as it might be." I gave him a straight dirty glazzy, asto say to mind his own and I'd mind mine. "I never ask for money, do I? Not money for clothes or for pleasures? All right, then, whyask?"

My dad was like humble mumble chumble. "Sorry, son," he said. "But I get worried sometimes.

Sometimes I have dreams.

You can laugh if you like, but there's a lot in dreams. Last night I had this dream with you in it and I didn't like it onebit."

"Oh?" He had gotten me interesso-vatted now, dreaming of me like that. I had like a feeling I had had a dream, too, but I could not remember proper what. "Yes?" I said, stopping chewing my gluey pie.

"It was vivid," said my dad. "I saw you lying on the street and you had been beaten by other boys. These boys were like the boys you used to go around with before you were sent to that last Corrective School."

"Oh?" I had an in-grin at that, papapa believing I had really reformed or believing he believed.

And then I remembered my own dream, which was a dream of that morning, of Georgie giving his general's orders and old Dim smecking around toothless as he wielded the whip. But dreams go by opposites I was once told. "Never worry about thine only son and heir, O my father," I said. "Fear not. He canst taketh care of himself, verily."

"And," said my dad, "you were like helpless in your blood and you couldn't fight back." That was real opposites, so I had another quiet malenky grin within and then I took all the deng out of my carmans and tinkled it on the saucy table-cloth. I said: "Here, dad, it's not much. It's what I earned last night. But perhaps for the odd peet of Scotchman in the snug somewhere for you and mum."

"Thanks, son," he said. "But we don't go out much now. We daren't go out much, the streets being what they are. Young hooligans and so on. Still, thanks. I'll bring her home a bottle of something tomorrow." And he scooped this ill-gotten pretty into his trouser carmans, mum being at the cheesting of the dishes in the kitchen. And I went out with loving smiles all round.

When I got to the bottom of the stairs of the flatblock I was somewhat surprised. I was more than that. I opened my rot like wide in the old stony gapes. They had come to meet me. They were waiting by the all scrawled-over municipal wall-painting of the nagoy dignity of labour, bare vecks and cheenas stern at the wheels of industry, like I said, with all this dirt pencilled from their rots by naughty malchicks. Dim had a big thick stick of black greasepaint and was tracing filthy slovos real big over our municipal painting and doing

the old Dim guff - wuh huh huh - while he did it. But he turned round when Georgie and Pete gave me the well hello, showing their shining droogy zoobies, and he horned out: "He are here, he have arrived, hooray," and did a clumsy turntoe bit of dancing.

"We got worried," said Georgie. "There we were awaiting and peeting away at the old knify moloko, and you might have been like offended by some veshch or other, so round we come to your abode. That's right, Pete, right?"

"Oh, yes, right," said Pete.

"Appy polly loggies," I said careful. "I had something of a pain in the gulliver so had to sleep. I was not wakened when I gave orders for wakening. Still, here we all are, ready for what the old nochy offers, yes?" I seemed to have picked up that yes? from P. R. Deltoid, my Post-Corrective Adviser. Very strange.

"Sorry about the pain," said Georgie, like very concerned.

"Using the gulliver too much like, maybe. Giving orders and discipline and such, perhaps. Sure the pain is gone? Sure you'llnot be happier going back to the bed?" And they all had a bit of a malenky grin.

"Wait," I said. "Let's get things nice and sparkling clear.

Thissarcasm, if I may call it such, does not become you, O my little friends. Perhaps you have been having a bit of a quiet govoreet behind my back, making your own little jokes and such-like. As I am your droog and leader, surely I am entitled to know what goes on, eh? Now then, Dim, what does that great big horsy gape of a grin portend?" For Dim had his rot open in a sort of bezoomny soundless smeck. Georgie got in very skorry with:

"All right, no more picking on Dim, brother. That's part of the new way."

"New way?" I said. "What's this about a new way? There's been some very large talk behind my sleeping back and no error. Let me slooshy more." And I sort of folded my rookers and leaned comfortable to listen against the broken banister-rail, me being still higher than them, droogs as they called themselves, on the third stair.

"No offence, Alex," said Pete, "but we wanted to have things more democratic like. Not like you like saying what to do and what not all the time. But no offence."

George said: "Offence is neither here nor elsewhere. It's the matter of who has ideas. What ideas has he had?" And he kept his very bold glazzies turned full on me. "It's all the small stuff, malenky veshches like last night. We're growing up, brothers."

"More," I said, not moving. "Let me slooshy more."

"Well," said Georgie, "if you must have it, have it then. We itty round, shop-crasting and the like, coming out with a piti-ful rookerful of cutter each. And there's Will the English in the Musclemans coffee mesto saying he can fence anything that any malchick cares to try to crast. The shiny stuff, the ice," Hesaid, still with these like cold glazzies on me. "The big big bigmoney is available is what Will the English says."

"So," I said, very comfortable out but real razdraz within.

"Since when have you been consorting and comporting with Will the English?"

"Now and again," said Georgie, "I get around all on my oddy knocky. Like last Sabbath for instance. I can live my own jeezny, droogy, right?"

I didn't care for any of this, my brothers. "And what will you do," I said, "with the big big big deng or money as you so highfaluting call it? Have you not every veshch you need? If you need an auto you pluck it from the trees. If you need pretty polly you take it. Yes? Why this sudden shilarny for being the big bloated capitalist?"

"Ah," said Georgie, "you think and govoreet sometimes like a little child." Dim went huh huh huh at that.

"Tonight," said Georgie, "we pull a mansize crast."

So my dream had told truth, then. Georgie the general saying what we should do and what not do, Dim with the whip as mindless grinning bulldog. But I played with care, with great care, the greatest, saying, smiling: "Good. Real horrorshow."

Initiative comes to them as wait. I have taught you much, little droogie. Now tell me what you have in mind, Georgieboy."

"Oh," said Georgie, cunning and crafty in his grin, "the old moloko-plus first, would you not say? Something to sharpen us up, boy, but you especially, we having the start on you."

"You have govoreeted my thoughts for me," I smiled away.

"I was about to suggest the dear old Korova. Good good good. Lead, little Georgie." And I made with a like deep bow, smiling like bezoomny but thinking all the time. But when we got into the street I viddied that thinking is for the gloopy ones and that the oomny ones use like inspiration and what Bog sends. For now it was lovely music that came to my aid.

There was an auto ittying by and it had its radio on, and I could just slooshy a bar or so of Ludwig van (it was the Violin Concerto, last movement), and I viddied right at once what to do. I said, in like a thick deep goloss: "Right, Georgie, now," and I whisked out my cut-throat britva. Georgie said: "Uh?" but he was skorry enough with his nozh, the blade coming sloosh out of the handle, and we were on to each other. Old Dim said: "Oh no, not right that isn't, and made to uncoil the chain round his tally, but Pete said, putting his rooker firm on old Dim: "Leave them. It's right like that." So then Georgie and Your Humble did the old quiet cat-stalk, looking for openings, knowing each other's style a bit too horrorshow really. Georgie now and then going lurch lurch with his shining nozh but not no wise connecting. And all the time lewdies passed by and viddied all this but minded their own, it being perhaps a common street-sight. But then I counted odin dva tree and went ak ak ak with the britva, though not at litso or glazzies but at Georgie's nozh-holding rooker and, my little brothers, he dropped. He did. He dropped his nozh with a tinkle tankle on the hard winter sidewalk. I had just ticklewickled his fingers with my britva, and there he was looking at the malenky dribble of krovvy that was redding out in the lamplight. "Now," I said, and it was me that was starting, because Pete had given old Dim the soviet not to uncoil the oozy from round his tally and Dim had taken it, "now, Dim, let's thou and me have all this now, shall us?" Dim went, "Aaaaaarhgh," like some bolshy bezoomny animal, and snaked out the chain from his waist real horrorshow and skorry, so you had to admire. Now the right style for me here was to keep low like in frog-dancing to protect litso and glazzies, and this I did, brothers, so that poor old Dim was a malenky bit surprised, him being accus-tomed to the straight face-on lash lash lash. Now I will say that he wished me horrible on the back so that it stung like bezoomny, but that pain told me to dig in skorry once and for all and be done with old Dim. So I swished with the britva at his left noga in its very tight tight and I slashed two inches of cloth and drew a malenky drop of krovvy to make Dim real bezoomny. Then while he went hauwww hauwww hauwww like a doggie I tried the same style as for Georgie, banking all on one move - up, cross, cut - and I felt the britva go just deep enough in the meat of old Dim's wrist and he dropped his snaking oozy yelping like a little child. Then he tried to drink in all the blood from his wrist and howl at the same time, and there was too much krovvy to drink and he went bubble bubble bubble, the red like fountaining out lovely, but not for very long. I said: "Right, my droogies, now we should know. Yes, Pete?"

"I never said anything," said Pete. "I never govoreeted one slovo. Look, old Dim's bleeding to death."

"Never," I said. "One can die but once. Dim died before he was born. That red red krovvy will soon stop." Because I had not cut into the like main cables. And I myself took a clean tashtook from my carman to wrap round poor old dying Dim's rooker, howling and moaning as he was, and the krovvy stopped like I said it would, O my brothers. So they knew now who was master and leader, sheep, thought I.

It did not take long to quieten these two wounded soldiers down in the snug of the Duke of New York, what with large brandies (bought with their own cutter, me having given all to my dad, and a wipe with tashtooks dipped in the water-jug.

The old ptitsas we'd been so horrorshow to last night were there again, going, "Thanks, lads" and "God bless you, boys" like they couldn't stop, though we had not repeated the old sammy act with them. But Pete said: "What's it to be, girls?" and bought black and suds for them, him seeming to have a fair amount of pretty polly in his carmans, so they were on louder than ever with their "God bless and keep you all, lads" and "We'd

never split on you, boys" and "The best lads breathing, that's what you are." At last I said to Georgie: "Now we're back to where we were, yes? Just like before and all forgotten, right?"

"Right right right," said Georgie. But old Dim still looked a bit dazed and he even said: "I could have got that big bastard, see, with my oozy, only some veck got in the way," as though he'd been dratsing not with me but with some other malchick.

I said: "Well, Georgieboy, what did you have in mind?"

"Oh," said Georgie, "not tonight. Not this nochy, please."

"You're a big strong chelloveck," I said, "like us all. We're not little children, are we, Georgieboy? What, then, didst thou in thy mind have?"

"I could have chained his glazzies real horrorshow," said Dim, and the old baboochkas were stil on with their "Thanks, lads."

"It was this house, see," said Georgie. "The one with the two lamps outside. The one with the gloopy name like."

"What gloopy name?"

"The Mansion or the Manse or some such piece of gloop.

Where this very starry ptitsa lives with her cats and all these very starry valuable veshches."

"Such as?"

"Gold and silver and like jewels. It was Will the English who like said."

"I viddy," I said. "I viddy horrorshow." I knew where he meant - Oldtown, just beyond Victoria Flatblock. Well, the real horrorshow leader knows always when like to give and show generous tohis like unders. "Very good, Georgie," I said.

"A good thought, and one to be followed. Let us at once itty."

And as we were going out the old baboochkas said: "We'll say nothing, lads. Been here all the time you have, boys." So I said: "Good old girls. Back to buy more in ten minutes." And so I led my three droogs out to my doom.

Just past the Duke of New York going east was offices and then there was the starry beat-up biblio and then was the bolshy flatblock called Victoria Flatblock after some victory or other, and then you came to the like starry type houses of the town in what was called Oldtown. You got some of the real horrorshow ancient domies here, my brothers, with starry lewdies living in them, thin old barking like colonels with sticks and old ptitsas who were widows and deaf starry damas with cats who, my brothers, had felt not the touch of any chelloveck in the whole of their pure like jeeznies. And here, true, there were starry veshches that would fetch their share of cutter on the tourist market - like pictures and jewels and other starry pre-plastic cal of that type. So we came nice and quiet to this domy called the Manse, and there were globe lights outside on iron stalks, like guarding the front door on each side, and there was a light like dim on in one of the rooms on the ground level, and we went to a nice patch of street dark to watch through the window what was ittying on.

This window had iron bars in front of it, like the house was a prison, but we could viddy nice and clear what was ittying on.

What was ittying on was that this starry ptitsa, very grey in the voloss and with a very liny like litso, was pouring the old moloko from a milk-bottle into saucers and then setting these saucers down on the floor, so you could tell there were plenty of mewing kots and koshkas writhing about down there. And we could viddy one or two, great fat scoteenas, jumping up on to the table with their rots open going mare mare mare. And you could viddy this old baboochka talking back to them, govoreeting in like scoldy language to her pussies. In the room you could viddy a lot of old pictures on the walls and starry very elaborate clocks, also some like vases and ornaments that looked starry and dorogoy. Georgie whispered: "Real horrorshow deng to be gotten for them, brothers. Will the English is real anxious." Pete said: "How in?"

Now it was up to me, and skorry, before Georgie started telling us how. "First veshch," I whispered, "is to try the regularway, the front. I will go very polite and say that one of my droogs has had a like funny fainting turn on the street. Georgie can be ready to show, when she opens, thatwise. Then to ask for water or to phone the doc. Then in easy." Georgie said: "She may not open." I said: "We'll try it, yes?" And he sort of shrugged his pletchoes, making with a frog's rot. So I said to Pete and old Dim: "You two droogies get either side of the door. Right?" They nodded in the dark right right right. "So," I said to Georgie, and I made bold straight for the front door. There was abellpush and I pushed, and brrrrrr brrrrr sounded down the hall inside. Alike sense of slooshying followed, as though the ptitsa and her koshkas all had their ears back at the brrrrrr brrrrr, wondering. So I pushed the old zvonock a malenky bit more urgent. I then bent down to the letter-slit and called through in a refined like goloss: "Help, madam, please. My friend has just had a funny turn on the street. Let me phone a doctor, please." Then I could viddy a light being put on in the hall, and then I could hear the old baboochka's nogas going flip flap in flip-flap slippers to nearer the front door, and I got the idea, I don't know why, that she had a big fat pussycat under each arm. Then she called out in a very surprising deep like goloss: "Go away. Go away or I shoot." Georgie heard that and wanted to giggle. I said, with like suffering and urgency in my gentleman's goloss: "Oh, please help, madam. My friend's veryill."

"Go away," she called. "I know your dirty tricks, making me open the door and then buy things I don't want. Go away. I tell you." That was real lovely innocence, that was. "Go away," she said again, "or I'll set my cats on to you." A malenky bit bezoomny she was, you could tell that, through spending her jeezny all on her oddy knocky. Then I looked up and I viddied that there was a sash-window above the front door and that it would be a lot more skorry to just do the old pletcho climb and get in that way. Else there'd be this argument all the long nochy. So I said: "Very well, madam. If you won't help I must take my suffering friend elsewhere." And I winked my droogies all away quiet, only me crying out: "All right, old friend, you willsurely

meet some good samaritan some place other. This old lady perhaps cannot be blamed for being suspicious with so many scoundrels and rogues of the night about. No, indeed not."

Then we waited again in the dark and I whispered: "Right."

Return to the door. Me stand on Dim's pletchoes. Open that window and me enter, droogies. Then to shut up that old ptitsa and open up for all. No trouble." For I was like showing who was leader and the chelloveck with the ideas. "See," I said.

"Real horrorshow bit of stonework over that door, a nice hold for my nogas." They viddied all that, admiring perhaps I thought, and said and nodded Right right right in the dark.

So back tiptoe to the door. Dim was our heavy strong malchick and Pete and Georgie like heaved me up on to Dim's bolshy manly pletchoes. All this time, O thanks to worldcasts on the gloopy TV and, more, lewdies' night-fear through lack of night-police, dead lay the street. Up there on Dim's pletchoes I viddied that this stonework above the door would take my boots lovely. I kneed up, brothers, and there I was.

The window, as I had expected, was closed, but I outed with my britva and cracked the glass of the window smart with the bony handle thereof. All the time below my droogies were hard breathing. So I put in my rooker through the crack and made the lower half of the window sail up open silver-smooth and lovely. And I was, like getting into the bath, in.

And there were my sheep down below, their rots open as they looked up, O brothers.

I was in bumpy darkness, with beds and cupboards and bolshy heavy stoolies and piles of boxes and books about.

But I strode manful towards the door of the room I was in, seeing a like crack of light under it. The door went squeeeeeeeeeek and then I was on a dusty corridor with other doors. All this waste, brothers, meaning all these rooms and but one starry sharp and her pussies, but perhaps the kots and koshkas had like separate bedrooms, living on cream and fish-heads like royal queens and princes. I could hear the like muffled goloss of this old ptitsa down below saying: "Yes yes yes, that's it," but she would be govoreeting to these mewling sidlers going maaaaaaa for more moloko.

Then I saw the stairs going down to the hall and I thought to myself that I would show these fickle and worthless droogs of mine that I was worth the whole three of them and more. I would do all on my oddy knocky. I would perform the old ultra-violence on the starry ptitsa and on her pusspots if need be, then I would take fair rookerfuls of what looked like real polezny stuff and go waltzing to the front door and open up showering gold and silver on my waiting droogs. They must learn all about leadership.

So down I ittied, slow and gentle, admiring in the stairwell grahzny pictures of old time - devotchkas with long hair and high collars, the like country with trees and horses, the holy bearded veck all nagoy hanging on a cross. There was a real musty von of pussies and pussy-fish and starry dust in this domy, different from the flatblocks. And then I was downstairs and I could viddy the light in this front room where she had been doling moloko to the kots and koschkas. More, I could viddy these great overstuffed scoteenas going in and out with their tails waving and like rubbing themselves on the door-bottom. On a like big wooden chest in the dark hall I could viddy a nice malenky statue that shone in the light of the room, so I crasted this for my own self, it being like a young thin devotchka standing on one noga with her rookers out, and I could see this was made of silver. So I had this when I ittied into the lit-up room, saying: "Hi hi hi. At last wemeet. Our brief govoreet through the letter-hole was not, shall we say, satisfactory, yes? Let us admit not, oh verily not, you stinking starry old sharp." And I like blinked in the light at this room and the old ptitsa in it. It was full of kots and koschkas all crawling to and fro over the carpet, with bits of fur floating in the lower air, and these fat scoteenas were all different shapes and colours, black, white, tabby, ginger, tor-toise-shell, and of all ages, too, so that there were kittens fillying about with each other and there were pussies full-grown and there were real dribbling starry ones very bad-tempered. Their mistress, this old ptitsa, looked at me fierce like a man and said: "How did you get in? Keep your distance, you villainous young toad, or I shall be forced to strike you."

I had a real horrorshow smeck at that, viddying that she had in her veiny rooker a crappy wood walking-stick which she raised at me threatening. So, making with my shiny zoobies, I ittied a bit nearer to her, taking my time, and on the way I saw on a like sideboard a lovely little veshch, the love-liest malenky veshch any malchick fond of music like myself could ever hope to viddy with his own two glazzies, for it was like the gulliver and pletchoes of Ludwig van himself, what they call a bust, a like stone veshch with stone long hair and blind glazzies and the big flowing cravat. I was off for that right away, saying: "Well, how lovely and all for me." But ittying towards it with my glazzies like full on it and my greedy rooker held out, I did not see the milk saucers on the floor and into one I went and sort of lost balance. "Whoops,"

I said, trying to steady, but this old ptitsa had come up behind me very sly and with great skorriness for her age and then she went crack crack on my gulliver with her bit of a stick. So I found myself on my rookers and knees trying to get up and saying: "Naughty, naughty naughty." And then she was going crack crack crack again, saying: "Wretched little slummy bedbug, breaking into real people's houses." I didn't like this crack crack eegra, so I grasped hold of one end of her stick as it came down again and then she lost her balance and was trying to steady herself against the table, but then the table-cloth came off with a milk-jug and a milk-bottle going all drunk then scattering white splosh in all directions, then she was down on the floor, grunting, going: "Blast you, boy, you shall suffer." Now all the cats were getting spoogy and running and jumping in a like cat-panic, and some were blaming each other, hitting out cat-tolchocks with the old lapa and ptaaaaa and grrrrr and kraaaaark. I got up on to my nogas, and there was this nasty vindictive starry forella with her wattles ashake and grunting as she like tried to lever herself up from the floor, so I gave her a malenky fair kick in the litso, and she didn't like that, crying: "Waaaaah," and you could viddy her veiny mottled litso going purplewurple where I'd landed the oldnoga.

As I stepped back from the kick I must have like trod on the tail of one of these dratsing creeching pusspots, because I slooshied a gromky yauuuuuuuuw and found that like fur and teeth and claws had like fastened themselves around my leg, and there I was cursing away and trying to shake it off holding this silver malenky statue in one rooker and trying to climb over this old ptitsa on the floor to reach lovely Ludwig van in frowning like stone. And then I was into another saucer brim-ful of creamy moloko and near went flying again, the whole veshch really a very humorous one if you could imagine it sloochatting to some other veck and not to Your Humble Narrator. And then the starry ptitsa on the floor reached over all the dratsing yowling

pusscats and grabbed at my noga, still going "Waaaaah" at me, and, my balance being a bit gone, I went really crash this time, on to splashing moloko and skriking koshkas, and the old forella started to fist me on the litso, both of us being on the floor, creeching: "Thrash him, beat him, pull out his finger-nails, the poisonous young beetle," addressing her pusscats only, and then, as if like obey-ing the starry old ptitsa, a couple of koshkas got on to me and started scratching like bezoomny. So then I got real bezoomny myself, brothers, and hit out at them, but this baboochka said: "Toad, don't touch my kitties," and like scratched my litso. So then I screeched: "You filthy old soomka", and upped with the little malenky like silver statue and cracked her a fine fair tolchock on the gulliver and that shut her up real horrorshow and lovely.

Now as I got up from the floor among all the crarking kots and koshkas what should I slooshy but the shoom of the old police-auto siren in the distance, and it dawned on me skorry that the old forella of the pusscats had been on the phone to the millicents when I thought she'd been govoreeting to the mewlers and mowlers, her having got her suspicions skorry on the boil when I'd rung the old zvonock pretending for help. So now, slooshying this fearful shoom of the rozz-van, I belted for the front door and had a rabbiting time undoing all the locks and chains and bolts and other protective veshches. Then I got it open, and who should be on the door-step but old Dim, me just being able to viddy the other two of my so-called droogs belting off. "Away," I creeched to Dim.

"The rozzes are coming," Dim said: "You stay to meet them huh huh huh," and then I viddied that he had his oozy out, and then he upped with it and it snaked whishhh and he chained me gentle and artistic like on the glazlids, me just closing them up in time. Then I was howling around trying to viddy with this howling great pain, and Dim said: "I don't like you should do what you done, old droogy. Not right it wasn't to get on to me like the way you done, brat." And then I could slooshy his bolshy lumpy boots beating off, him going huh huh huh into the darkmans, and it was only about seven seconds after that I slooshied the millicent-van draw up with a filthy great dropping siren-howl, like some bezoomny animal snuffing it. I was howling too and like yawing about and I banged my gulliver smack on the hall-wall, my glazzies being tight shut and the juice astream from them, very agonizing. So there I was like groping in the hallway as the millicents arrived. I couldn't viddy them, of course, but I could slooshy and damn near smell the von of the bastards, and soon I could feel the bastards as they got rough and did the old twist-arm act, carrying me out. I could also slooshy one millicent goloss saying from like the room I'd come out of with all the kots and koshkas in it: "She's been nastily knocked but she's breathing," and there was loud mewling all the time.

"A real pleasure this is," I heard another millicent goloss say as I was tolchocked very rough and skorry into the auto.

"Little Alex all to our own selves." I creeched out: "I'm blind, Bog bust and bleed you, you grahzny bastards."

"Language, language," like smecked a goloss, and then I got a like backhand tolchock with some ringy rooker or other full on the rot. I said: "Bog murder you, you vonny stinking bratchnies. Where are the others? Where are my stinking traitorous droogs? One of my cursed grahzny bratties chained me on the glazzies. Get them before they get away. It was all their idea, brothers.

They like forced me to do it. I'm innocent, Bog butcher you."

By this time they were all having like a good smeck at me with the heighth of like callousness, and they'd tolchocked me into the back of the auto, but I still kept on about these so-called droogs of mine and then I viddied it would be no good, because they'd all be back now in the snug of the Duke of New York forcing black and suds and double Scotchmen down the unprotesting gorloes of those stinking starry ptitsas and they saying: "Thanks, lads. God bless you, boys. Been here all the time you have, lads. Not been out of our sight you haven't."

All the time we were sirening off to the rozz-shop, me being wedged between two millicents and being given the odd thump and malenky tolchock by these smecking bullies. Then I found I could open up my glazlids a malenky bit and viddy like through all tears a kind of steamy city going by, all the lights like having run into one another. I could viddy now through smarting glazzies thesetwo smecking millicents at the back with me and the thin-necked driver and the fat-necked bastard next to him, this one having a sarky like govoreet at me,

saying: "Well, Alex boy, we all look forward to a pleasant evening together, don't we not?" I said: "How do you know my name, you stinking vonny bully?"

May Bog blast you to hell, grahzny bratchny as you are, you sod." So they all had a smeck at that and I had my ooko like twisted by one of these stinking millicents at the back with me. The fat-necked not-driver said: "Everybody knows little Alex and his droogs. Quite a famous young boy our Alex has become."

"It's those others," I creeched. "Georgie and Dim and Pete.

No droogs of mine, the bastards."

"Well," said the fat-neck, "you've got the evening in front of you to tell the whole story of the daring exploits of those young gentlemen and how they led poor little innocent Alex astray." Then there was the shoom of another like police siren passing this auto but going the other way.

"Is that for those bastards?" I said. "Are they being picked up by you bastards?"

"That," said fat-neck, "is an ambulance. Doubtless for your old lady victim, you ghastly wretched scoundrel."

"It was all their fault," I creeched, blinking my smarting glazzies. "The bastards will be peeting away in the Duke of New York. Pick them up blast you, you vonny sods." And then there was more smecking and another malenky tolchock, Omy brothers, on my poor smarting rot. And then we arrived at the stinking rozz-shop and they helped me get out of the auto with kicks and pulls and they tolchocked me up the steps and I knew I was going to get nothing like fair play from these stinky grahzny bratchnies, Bog blast them.

They dragged me into this very bright-lit whitewashed cantora, and it had a strong von that was a mixture of like sick and lavatories and beery rots and disinfectant, all coming from the barry places near by. You could hear some of the plennies in their cells cursing and singing and I fancied I could slooshy one belting out: 'And I will go back to my darling, my darling, When you, my darling, are gone.'

But there were the golosses of millicents telling them to shut it and you could even slooshy the zvook of like somebody being tolchocked real horrorshow and goingowwwwwwwww, and it was like the goloss of a drunken starry ptitsa, not a man. With me in this cantora were four millicents, all having a good loud peet of chai, a big pot of it being on the table and they sucking and belching away over their dirty bolshy mugs. They didn't offer me any. All that they gave me, my brothers, was a crappy starry mirror to look into, and indeed I was not your handsome young Narrator any longer but a real strack of a sight, my rot swollen and my glazzies all red and my nose bumped a bit also. They all had a real horrorshow smeck when they viddied my like dismay, and one of them said: "Love's young nightmare like." And then a top millicent came in with like stars on his pletchoes to show he was high high high, and he viddied me and said: "Hm." So then they started. I said: "I won't say one single solitary slovo unless I have my lawyer here. I know the law, you bastards." Of course they all had a good gromky smeck at that and then the stellar top Millicent said: "Righty right, boys, we'll start off by showing him that we know the law, too, but that knowing the law isn't everything."

He had a like gentleman's goloss and spoke in a very weary sort of a way, and he nodded with a like droogy smile at one very big fat bastard. This big fat bastard took off his tunic and

you could viddy he had a real big starry pot on him, then he came up to me not too skorry and I could get the von of the milky chai he'd been peeting when he opened his rot in a like very tired leery grin at me. He was not too well shaved for a rozz and you could viddy like patches of dried sweat on his shirt under the arms, and you could get this von of like earwax from him as he came close. Then he clenched his stinking red rooker and let me have it right in the belly, which was unfair, and all the other millicents smecked their gullivers off at that, except the top one and he kept on with this weary like bored grin. I had to lean against the white-washed wall so that all the white got on to my platties, trying to drag the old breath back and in great agony, and then I wanted to sick up the gluey pie I'd had before the start of the evening. But I couldn't stand that sort of veshch, sicking all over the floor, so I held it back. Then I saw that this fatty bruiseboy was turning to his millicent droogs to have a real horrorshow smeck at what he'd done, so I raised my right noga and before they could creech at him to watch out I'd kicked him smart and lovely on the shin. And he creeched murder, hoppingaround.

But after that they all had a turn, bouncing me from one to the other like some very weary bloody ball, O my brothers, and fisting me in the yarbles and the rot and the belly and dealing out kicks, and then at last I had to sick up on the floor and, like some real bezoomny veck, I even said: "Sorry, brothers, that was not the right thing at all. Sorry sorry sorry." But they handed me starry bits of gazetta and made me wipe it, and then they made me make with the sawdust. And then they said, almost like dear old droogs, that I was to sit down and we'd all have a quiet like govoreet. And then P. R. Deltoid came in to have a viddy, his office being in the same building, looking very tired and grahzny, to say: "So it's happened, Alex boy, yes? Just as I thought it would. Dear dear dear, yes."

Then he turned to the millicents to say: "Evening, inspector."

Evening, sergeant. Evening, evening, all. Well, this is the end of the line for me, yes. Dear dear, this boy does look messy, doesn't he? Just look at the state of him."

"Violence makes violence," said the top millicent in a very holy type goloss. "He resisted his lawful arresters."

"End of the line, yes," said P. R. Deltoid again. He looked at me with very cold glazzies like I had become a thing and was no more a bleeding very tired battered chelloveck. "I suppose I'll have to be in court tomorrow."

"It wasn't me, brother, sir," I said, a malenky bit weepy.

"Speak up for me, sir, for I'm not so bad. I was led on by the treachery of the others, sir."

"Sings like a linnet," said the top rozz, sneery. "Sings the roof off lovely, he does that."

"I'll speak," said cold P. R. Deltoid. "I'll be there tomorrow, don't worry."

"If you'd like to give him a bash in the chops, sir," said the top millicent, "don't mind us. We'll hold him down. He must be another great disappointment to you."

P. R. Deltoid then did something I never thought any man like him who was supposed to turn us baddiwads into real horrorshow malchicks would do, especially with all those rozzes around. He came a bit nearer and he spat. He spat. He spat full in my litso and then wiped his wet spitty rot with the back of his rooker. And I wiped and wiped and wiped my spat-on litso with my bloody tashtook, saying "Thank you, sir, thank you very much, sir, that was very kind of you, sir, thank you." And then P. R. Deltoid walked out without another slovo.

The millicents now got down to making this long statement for me to sign, and I thought to myself, Hell and blast you all, if all you bastards are on the side of the Good then I'm glad I belong to the other shop. "All right," I said to them, "you grahzny bratchnies as you are, you vonny sods. Take it, take the lot. I'm not going to crawl around on my brooko any more, you merzky gets. Where do you want it taking from, you cally vonning animals? From my last corrective?"

Horrorshow, horrorshow, here it is, then." So I gave it to them, and I had this shorthand millicent, a very quiet and scared type chelloveck, no real rozz at all, covering page after page after page after. I gave them the ultra-violence, the crasting, the dratsing, the old in-out-in-out, the lot, right up to this night's veshch with the bugatty starry ptitsa with the mewing kots and koshkas. And I made sure my so-called droogs were in it, right up to the shiyah. When I'd got through the lot the shorthand millicent looked a bit faint, poor old veck. The top rozz said to him, in a kind type goloss: "Right, son, you go off and get a nice cup of chai for yourself and then type all that filth and rottenness out with a clothes-peg on your nose, three copies. Then they can be brought to our handsome young friend here for signature."

And you," he said to me, "can now be shown to your bridal suite with running water and all conveniences. All right," in this weary goloss to two of the real tough rozzes, "take him away."

So I was kicked and punched and bullied off to the cells and put in with about ten or twelve otherplennies, a lot of them drunk. There were real oozhassny animal type vecks among them, one with his nose all ate away and his rot open like a big black hole, one that was lying on the floor snoring away and all like slime dribbling all the time out of his rot, and one that had like done all cal in his pantalonies. Then there were two like queer

ones who both took a fancy to me, and one of them made a jump onto my back, and I had a real nasty bit of dratsing with him and the von on him, like of meth and cheap scent, made me want to sick again, only my belly was empty now, O my brothers. Then the other queer one started putting his rookers on to me, and then there was a snarling bit of dratsing between these two, both of them wanting to get at my plott. The shoorn became very loud, so that a couple of millicents came along and cracked into these two with like truncheons, so that both sat quiet then, looking like into space, and there was the old krovvy going drip drip drip down the litso of one of them. There were bunks in this cell, but all filled. I climbed up to the top one of one tier of bunks, there being four in a tier, and there was a starry drunken veck snoring away, most probably heaved up there to the top by the millicents. Anyway, I heaved him down again, him not being all that heavy, and he collapsed on top of a fat drunk chelloveck on the floor, and both woke and started creeching and punching pathetic at each other. So I lay down on this vonny bed, my brothers, and went to very tired and exhausted and hurt sleep. But it was not really like sleep, it was like passing out to another better world. And in this other better world, Omy brothers, I was in like a big field with all flowers and trees, and there was a like goat with a man's litso playing away on a like flute. And there rose like the sun Ludwig van himself with thundery litso and cravat and wild windy voloss, and then I heard the Ninth, last movement, with the slovos all a bit mixed-up like they knew themselves they had to be mixed-up, this being a dream: Boy, thou uproarious shark of heaven, Slaughter of Elysium, Hearts on fire, aroused, enraptured, We will tolchock you on the rot and kick your grahzny vonnybum.

But the tune was right, as I knew when I was being woke up two or ten minutes or twenty hours or days or years later, my watch having been taken away. There was a millicent like miles and miles down below and he was prodding at me with a long stick with a spike on the end, saying: "Wake up, son. Wake up, my beauty. Wake to real trouble."

I said: "Why? Who? Where? What is it?" And the tune of the Joy ode in the Ninth was singing away real lovely and horrorshow within, The millicent said: "Come down and find out. There's some real lovely news for you, my son." So I scrambled down, very stiff and sore and not like real awake, and this rozz, who had a strong von of cheese and onions on him, pushed me out of the filthy snoring cell, and then along corridors, and all the time the old tune Joy Thou Glorious Spark Of Heaven was sparking away within. Then we came to a very neat like cantora with typewriters and flowers on the desks, and at the like chief desk the top millicent was sitting, looking very serious and fixing a like very cold glazzy on my sleepy litso. I said: "Well well well. What makes, bratty. What gives, this fine bright middle of the nochy?" He said: "I'll give you just ten seconds to wipe that stupid grin off of your face. Then I want you to listen."

"Well, what?" I said, smecking. "Are you not satisfied with beating me near to death and having me spat upon and making me confess to crimes for hours on end and then shoving me among bezoomnies and vonny perverts in that grahzny cell?"

Have you some new torture for me, you bratchny?"

"It'll be your own torture," he said, serious. "I hope to God it'll torture you to madness."

And then, before he told me, I knew what it was. The old ptitsa who had all the kots and koshkas had passed on to a better world in one of the city hospitals. I'd cracked her a bit too hard, like. Well, well, that was everything. I thought of all those kots and koshkas mewling for moloko and getting none, not any more from their starry forella of a mistress.

That was everything. I'd done the lot, now and me still only fifteen.

Part Two

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

I take it up now, and this is the real weepy and like tragic part of the story beginning, my brothers and only friends, in Staja (State Jail, that is) Number 84F. You will have little desire to slooshy all the cally and horribleraskaz of the shock that sent my dad beating his bruised and krovvy rockers against an unfair like Bog

in his Heaven, and my mum squaring her rot for owwww owwww owwww in her mother's grief at her only child and son of her bosom like letting everybody down real horrorshow. Then there was the starry very grim magistrate in the lower court govoreeting some very hard slovos against your Friend and Humble Narrator, after all the cally and grahzny slander spat forth by P. R. Deltoid and the rozzes, Bog blast them. Then there was being rem-anded in filthy custody among vonny perverts and prestoopnicks. Then there was the trial in the higher court with judges and a jury, and some very very nasty slovos indeed govoreeted in a very like solemn way, and then Guilty and my mum boohooohooing when they said Fourteen Years, O my brothers. So here I was now, two years just to the day of being kicked and clanged into Staja 84F, dressed in the height of prison fashion, which was a one-piece suit of a very filthy like cal colour, and the number sewn on the groody part just above the old tick-tocker and on the back as well, so that going and coming I was 6655321 and not your little droog Alex not no longer.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

It had not been like edifying, indeed it had not, being in this grahzny hellhole and like human zoo for two years, being kicked and tolchoked by brutal bully warders and meeting vonny leering like criminals, some of them real perverts and ready to dribble all over a luscious young malchick like your story-teller. And there was having to rabbit in the workshop at making matchboxes and itty round and round and round the yard for like exercise, and in the evenings sometimes some starry prof type veck would give a talk on beetles or the Milky Way or the Glorious Wonders of the Snowflake, and I had a good smeck at this last one, because it reminded me of that time of the tolchocking and Sheer Vandalism with that ded coming from the public biblio on a winter's night when my droogs were stil not traitors and I was like happy and free. Of those droogs I had slooshied but one thing, and that was one day when my pee and em came to visit and I was told that Georgie was dead. Yes, dead, my brothers. Dead as a bit of dog-cal on the road. Georgie had led the other two into a like very rich chelloveck's house, and there they had kicked and tolchoked the owner on the floor, and then Georgie had started to razrez the cushions and curtains, and then old Dim had cracked at some very precious ornaments, like statues and so on, and this rich beat-up chelloveck had raged like real bezoomny and gone for them all with a very heavy ironbar.

His being all razdraz had given him some gigantic strength, and Dim and Pete had got out through the window, but Georgie had tripped on the carpet and then brought this terrible swinging iron bar crack and splodge on the gulliver, and that was the end of traitorous Georgie. The starry murderer had got off with Self Defence, as was really right and proper.

Georgie being killed, though it was more than one year after me being caught by the millicents, it all seemed right and proper and like Fate.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

I was in the Wing Chapel, it being Sunday morning, and the prison charlie was govoreeting the Word of the Lord. It was my rabbit to play the starry stereo, putting on solemn music before and after and in the middle too when hymns weresung.

I was at the back of the Wing Chapel (there were four along here in Staja 84F) near where the warders or chassos were standing with their rifles and their dirty bolshy blue brutal jowls, and I could viddy all the plennies sitting down slooshying the Slovo of the Lord in their horrible cal-coloured prison platties, and a sort of filthy von rose from them, not like real unwashed, not grazzy, but like a special real stinking von which you only got with the criminal types, my brothers, a like dusty, greasy, hopeless sort of a von. And I was thinking that perhaps I had this von too, having become a real plenny myself, though still very young. So it was important to me, O my brothers, to get out of this stinking grahzny zoo as soon as I could. And, as you will viddy if you keep reading on, it was not long before Idid.

"What's it going to be then, eh?" said the prison charlie for the third raz. "Is it going to be in and out and in and out of institutions, like this, though more in than out for most of you, or are yougoing to attend to the Divine Word and realize the punishments that await the unrepentant sinner in the next world, as well as in this? Alotofblastedidiotsyouare,mostofyou,sellingyourbirthrightforasaucerofcoldpor-ridge.The

thrill of theft, or violence, the urge to live easy -is it worth it when we have undeniable proof, yes yes, incontrovertible evidence that hell exists? I know, I know, my friends, I have been informed in visions that there is a place, darker than any prison, hotter than any flame of human fire, where souls of unrepentant criminal sinners like yourselves and don't leer at me, damn you, don't laugh - like yourselves, I say, scream in endless and intolerable agony, their noses choked with the smell of filth, their mouths crammed with burning ordure, their skin peeling and rotting, a fireball spinning in their screaming guts. Yes, yes, yes, I know"

At this point, brothers, a plenny somewhere or other near the back row let out a shoom of lip-music - 'Prrrrrrp' - and then the brutal chassos were on the job right away, rushing real skorroy to what they thought was the scene of the schoom, then hitting out nasty and delivering tolchocks, left and right. Then they picked out one poor trembling plenny, very thin and malenky and starry too, and dragged him off, but all the time he kept creeching: "It wasn't me, it was him, see," but that made no difference. He was tolchocked real nasty and then dragged out of the Wing Chapel creeching his gulliver off.

"Now," said the prison charlie, "listen to the Word of the Lord." Then he picked up the big book and flipped over the pages, keeping on wetting his fingers to do this by licking them splurge splurge. He was a bolshy great burly bastard with a very red litso, but he was very fond of myself, me being young and also now very interested in the big book. It had been arranged as part of my like further education to read in the book and even have music on the chapel stereo while I was reading, O my brothers. And that was real horrorshow.

They would like lock me in and let me slooshy holy music by J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel, and I would read of these starry yahoodies tolchocking each other and then peeting their Hebrew vino and getting on to the bed with their wives' like hand-maidens, real horrorshow. That kept me going, brothers. I didn't so much kopat the later part of the book, which is more like all preachy govoreeting than fighting and the old in-out. But one day the charles said to me, squeezing me like tight with his bolshy beefy rooker: "Ah, 6655321, think on the divine suffering. Meditate on that, my boy." And all the time he had this rich manny von of Scotch on him, and then he went off to his little cantora to peet some more. So I read all about the scourging and the crowning with thorns and then the cross veshch and all that cal, and I viddied better that there was something in it. While the stereo played bits of lovely Bach I closed my glazzies and viddied myself helping in and even taking charge of the tolchocking and the nailing in, being dressed in a like toga that was the heighth of Roman fashion. So being in Staja 84F was not all that wasted, and the Governor himself was very pleased to hear that I had taken to like Religion, and that was where I had myhopes.

This Sunday morning the charlie read out from the book about chellovecks who slooshied the slovo and didn't take a blind bit being like a domy built upon sand, and then the rain came splashand the old boomaboom cracked the sky and that was the end of that domy. But I thought that only a very dim veck would have built his domy upon sand, and a right lot of real sneering droogs and nasty neighbours a veck like that would have, them not telling him how dim he was doing that sort of building. Then the charles creeched: "Right, you lot.

We'll end with Hymn Number 435 in the Prisoners' Hymnal."

Then there was a crash and plop and a wish wish while the plennies picked up and dropped and lickturned the pages of their grazzy malenky hymnbooks, and the bully fierce warders creeched: "Stop talking there, bastards. I'm watching you, 920537." Of course I had the disc ready on the stereo, and then I let the simple music for organ only come belting out with a growwwwowwwwowwww. Then the plennies started to sing real horrible: Weak tea are we, new brewed But stirring make all strong. We eat no angel's food, Our times of trial are long.

They sort of howled and wept these stupid slovos with the charlie like whipping them on with "Louder, damn you, sing up," and the warders creeching: "Just you wait, 7749222", and "One on the turnip coming up for you, filth." Then it was all over and the charlie said: "May the Holy Trinity keep you always and make you good, amen," and the shamle out began to a nice choice bit of Symphony No. 2 by Adrian Schweigsel-ber, chosen by your Humble Narrator, O my brothers. What a lot they were, I thought, as I stood there by the starry chapel stereo, viddying them all shuffle out going marrrrre and baaaaaa like animals and up-your-piping with their grahznny fingers at me, because it looked like I was very special favoured. When the lastone

had slouched out, his rookers hanging like an ape and the one warder left giving him a fair loud tolchuck on the back of the gulliver, and when I had turned off the stereo, the charlie came up to me, puffing away at a cancer, still in his starry bogman's platties, all lacy and white like a devotchka's. He said: "Thank you as always, little 6655321. And what news have you got for me today?" The idea was, I knew, that this charlie was after becoming a very great holy chelloveck in the world of Prison Religion, and he wanted a real horrorshow tes-timonial from the Governor, so he would go and govoreet quietly to the Governor now and then about what dark plots were brewing among the plennies, and he would get a lot of this cal from me. A lot of it would be all like made up, but some of it would be true, like for instance the time it had come through to our cell on the waterpipes knock knock knockiknockiknock knockiknock that big Harriman was going to break. He was going to tolchuck the warder at slop-time and get out in the warder's platties. Then there was going to be a big throwing about of the horrible pishcha we got in the dining-hall, and I knew about that and told. Then the charlie passed it on and was complimented like by the Governor for his Public Spirit and Keen Ear. So this time I said, and this was nottrue:

"Well, sir, it has come through on the pipes that a con-signment of cocaine has arrived byirregular means and that a cell somewhere along Tier 5 is to be the centre of distribution." I made all that up as I went along, like I made up so many of these stories, but the prison charlie was very grateful, saying: "Good, good, good. I shall pass that on to Himself," this being what he called the Governor. Then I said: "Sir, I have done my best, have I not?" I always used my very polite gentleman's goloss govoreeting with those at the top.

"I've tried, sir, haven't I?"

"I think," said the charlie, "that on the whole you have, 6655321. You've been very helpful and, I consider, shown a genuine desire to reform. You will, if you continue in this manner, earn your remission with no trouble at all."

"But sir," I said, "how about this new thing they're talking about? How about this new like treatment that gets you out of prison in no time at all and makes sure that you never get back in again?"

"Oh," he said, very like wary. "Where did you hear this?"

Who's been telling you these things?"

"These things get around, sir," I said. "Two warders talk, as it might be, and somebody can't help hearing what they say. And then somebody picks up a scrap of newspaper in the workshops and the newspaper says all about it. How about you putting me in for this thing, sir, if I may make so bold as to make the suggestion?"

You could viddy him thinking about that while he puffed away at his cancer, wondering how much to say to me about what he knew about this veshch I'd mentioned. Then he said: "I take it you're referring to Ludovico's Technique." He was still very wary.

"I don't know what it's called, sir," I said. "All I know is that it gets you out quickly and makes sure that you don't get in again."

"That is so," he said, his eyebrows like all beetling while he looked down at me. "That is quite so, 6655321. Of course, it's only in the experimental stage at the moment. It's very simple but verydrastic."

"But it's being used here, isn't it, sir?" I said. "Those new like white buildings by the South wall, sir. We've watched those being built, sir, when we've been doing our exercise."

"It's not been used yet," he said, "not in this prison, 6655321. Himself has grave doubts about it. I must confess I share those doubts. The question is whether such a technique can really make a man good. Goodness comes from within, 6655321. Goodness is something chosen. When a man cannot choose he ceases to be a man." He would have gone on with a lot more of this cal, but we could slooshy the next lot of plennies marching clank clank down the iron stairs to come for their bit of Religion. He said: "We'll have a little chat about this some other time. Now you'd better start the vol-untary." So I went over to the starry stereo and put on J.S.Bach's 'Wachet Auf' Choral Prelude and in these grahznny vonny bastard criminals and perverts came

shambling like a lot of broke-down apes, the warders or chassos like barking at them and lashing them. And soon the prison charlie was asking them: "What's it going to be then, eh?" And that's where you came in.

We had four of these lomticks of like Prison Religion that morning, but the charles said no more to me about this Ludovico's Technique, whatever it was, O my brothers. When I'd finished my rabbit with the stereo he just govoreeted a few slovos of thanks and then I was privodeeted back to the cell on Tier 6 which was my very vonny and crammed home. The chasso was not really too bad of a veck and he did not tolchock or kick me in when he'd opened up, he just said: "Here we are, sonny, back to the old waterhole." And there I was with my new type droogs, all very criminal but, Bog be praised, not given to perversions of the body. There was Zophar on his bunk, a very thin and brown veck who went on and on and on in his like cancery goloss, so that nobody bothered to slooshy. What he was saying now like to nobody was "And at that time you couldn't get hold of a poggy" (whatever that was, brothers), "not if you was to hand over ten million archibalds, so what do I do, eh, I goes down to Turkey's and says I've got this sproog on that morrow, see, and what can he do?" It was all this very old-time real criminal's slang he spoke. Also there was Wall, who had only one glazzy, and he was tearing bits of his toe-nails off in honour of Sunday. Also there was Big Jew, a very fat sweaty veck lying flat on his bunk like dead. In addition there was Jojohn and The Doctor. Jojohn was very mean and keen and wiry and had specialized in like Sexual Assault, and The Doctor had pretended to be able to cure syph and gon and gleet but he had only injected water, also he had killed off two devotchkas instead, like he had promised, of getting rid of their unwanted loads for them. They were a terrible grahzny lot really, and I didn't enjoy being with them, O my brothers, any more than you do now, but it won't be for much longer.

Now what I want you to know is that this cell was intended for only three when it was built, but there were six of us there, all jammed together sweaty and tight. And that was the state of all the cells in all the prisons in those days, brothers, and adirty cally disgrace it was, there not being decent room for a chelloveck to stretch his limbs. And you will hardly believe what I say now, which is that on this Sunday they brosatted in another plenny. Yes, we had had our horrible pishcha of dumplings and vonny stew and were smoking a quiet cancer each on our bunks when this veck was thrown into our midst.

He was a chinny starry veck and it was him who started creeching complaints before we even had a chance to viddy the position. He tried to like shake the bars, creeching: "I demand my sodding rights, this one's full-up, it's a bleeding im-position, that's what it is." But one of the chassos came back to say that he had to make the best of it and share a bunk with whoever would let him, otherwise it would have to be the floor. "And," said the warder, "it's going to get worse, not better. A right dirty criminal world you lot are trying tobuild."

Well, it was the letting-in of this new chelloveck that was really the start of my getting out of theold Staja, for he was such a nasty quarrelsome type of plenny, with a very dirty mind and filthy intentions, that trouble nachinatted that very same day. He was also very boastful and started to make with a very sneery litso at us all and a loud proud goloss. He made out that he was the only real horrorshow prestoopnick in the whole zoo, going on that he'd done this and done the other and killed ten rozzes with one crack of his rooker and all that cal. But nobody was very impressed, O my brothers. So then he started on me, me being the youngest there, trying to say that as the youngest I ought to be the one to zasnoot on the floor and not him. But all the others were for me, creeching:"Leave him alone, you grahzny bratchny," and then he began the old whine about how nobody loved him. So that same nochy I woke up to find this horrible plenny actually lying with me on my bunk, which was on the bottom of the three-tier and also very narrow, and he was govoreeting dirty like love-slovos and stroke stroke stroking away. So then I got real bezoomny and lashed out, though I could not viddy all that horrorshow, there being only this malenky little red light outside on the landing. But I knew it was this one, the vonny bastard, and then when the trouble really got under way and the lights were turned on I could viddy his horrible litso with all krovvy dripping from his rot where I'd hit out with my clawingrooker.

What sloochatted then, of course, was that me cell-mates woke up and started to join in, tolchocking a bit wild in the near-dark, and the shoom seemed to wake up the whole tier, so that you could slooshy a lot of creeching and banging about with tin mugs on the wall, as though all the plennies in all the cells thought abig

break was about to commence, Omy brothers. So then the lights came on and the chassos came along in their shirts and trousers and caps, waving big sticks.

We could viddy each other's flushed litsos and the shaking of fisty rookers, and there was a lot of creeching and cursing.

Then I put in my complaint and every chasso said it was probably your Humble Narrator, brothers, that started it all anyway, me having no mark of a scratch on me but this horrible plenny dipping red red krovvy from the rot where I'd got him with my clawing rooker. That made me real bezoomny. I said I would not sleep another nochy in that cell if the Prison Authorities were going to allow horrible vonny stinking perverted prestoopnicks to leap on my plott when I was in no position to defend myself, being asleep. "Wait till the morning," they said. "Is it a private room with bath and television that your honour requires? Well, all that will be seen to in the morning. But for the present, little droog, get your bleeding gulliver down on your straw-filled podooshka and let's have no more trouble from anyone. Right right right?" Then off they went with stern warnings for all, then soon after the lights went out, and then I said I would sit up all the rest of the nochy, saying first to this horrible prestoopnick: "Go on, get on my bunk if you wish it. I fancy it no longer. You have made it filthy and cally with your horrible vonny plott lying on it already." But then the others joined in.

Big Jew said, still sweating from the bit of a bitva we'd had in the dark: "Not having that we're not, brotherth. Don't give in to the thquirt." So this new one said: "Crash your dermat, yid," meaning to shut up, but it was very insulting. So then Big Jew gotready to launch a tolchock. The Doctor said: "Come on, gentlemen, we don't want any trouble, do we?" in his very high-class goloss, but this new prestoopnick was really asking for it. You could viddy that he thought he was a very big bolshy veck and it was beneath his dignity to be sharing a cell with six and having to sleep on the floor till I made this gesture at him. In his sneery way he tried to take off The Doctor, saying: "Owwww, yew wahnt noo moor trouble, is that it, Archi-balls?" So Jojohn, mean and keen and wiry, said: "If we can't have sleep let's have some education. Our new friend here had better be taught a lesson." Although he like specialized in Sexual Assault he had a nice way of govoreeting, quiet and like precise. So the new plenny sneered: "Kish and kosh and koosh, you little terror." So then it all really started, but in a queer like gentle way, with nobody raising his goloss much. The new plenny creeched a malenky bit at first, but the Wall fisted his rot while Big Jew held him up against the bars so that he could be viddied in the malenky red light from the landing, and he just went oh oh oh. He was not a very strong type of veck, being very feeble in his trying to tolchock back, and I suppose he made up for this by being shoomny in the goloss and very boastful. Anyway, seeing the old krovvy flow red in the red light, I felt the old joy like risingup in my keeshkas and I said: "Leave him to me, go on, let me have him now, brothers."

So Big Jew said: "Yeth, yeth, boyth, that'th fair. Thlosh him then, Alekth." So they all stood around while I cracked at this prestoopnick in the near dark. I fisted him all over, dancing about with my boots on though unlaced, and then I tripped him and he went crash crash on to the floor. I gave him one real horrorshow kick on the gulliver and he went ohhhh, then he sort of snorted off to like sleep, and The Doctor said: "Very well, I think that wil be enough of a lesson," squinting to viddy this downed and beaten-up veck on the floor. "Let him dream perhaps about being a better boy in the future." So we all climbed back into our bunks, being very tired now.

What I dreamt of, O my brothers, was of being in some very big orchestra, hundreds and hundreds strong, and the conductor was a like mixture of Ludwig van and G. F. Handel, looking very deaf and blind and weary of the world. I was with the wind instruments, but what I was playing was like a white pinky bassoon made of flesh and growing out of my plott, right in the middle of my belly, and when I blew into it I had to smeck ha ha ha very loud because it like tickled, and then Ludwig van G. F. got very razdraz and bezoomny. Then he came right up to my litso and creeched loud in my ooko, and then I woke up like sweating. Of course, what the loud shoom really was was the prison buzzer going brrrrr brrrrr brrrrr. It was winter morning and my glazzies were all cally with sleepglue, and when I opened up they were very sore in the electric light that had been switched on all over thezoo.

Then I looked down and viddied this new prestoopnick lying on the floor, very bloody and bruised and still out out out.

Then I remembered about last night and that made me smeck a bit.

But when I got off the bunk and moved him with my bare noga, there was a feel of like stiff coldness, so I went over to The Doctor's bunk and shook him, him always being very slow at waking up in the morning. But he was off his bunk skorry enough this time, and so were the others, except for Wall who slept like dead meat. "Very unfortunate," The Doctor said. "A heart attack, that's what it must have been."

Then he said, looking round at us all: "You really shouldn't have gone for him like that. It was most ill-advised really."

Jojohn said: "Come come, doc, you weren't all that backward yourself in giving him a sly bit of fist." Then Big Jew turned on me, saying:

"Alekh, you were too impetuous. That latht kick with a very very nathty one." I began to get razdraz about this and said: "Who started it, eh? I only got in at the end, didn't I?" I pointed at Jojohn and said: "It was your idea." Wall snored a bit loud, so I said: "Wake that vonny bratchny up. It was him that kept on at his rot while Big Jew here had him up against the bars." The Doctor said: "Nobody will deny having a little hit at the man, to teach him a lesson so to speak, but it's apparent that you, my dear boy, with the forcefulness and, shall I say, heedlessness of youth, dealt him the coo de gras. It's a great pity."

"Traitors," I said. "Traitors and liars," because I could viddy it was all like before, two years before, when my so-called droogs had left me to the brutal rookers of the millicents.

There was no trust anywhere in the world, O my brothers, the way I could see it. And Jojohn went and woke up Wall, and Wall was only too ready to swear that it was Your Humble Narrator that had done the real dirty tolchocking and brutality. When the chassos came along, and then the Chief Chasso, and then the Governor himself, all these cell-droogs of mine were very shoomny with tales of what I'd done to oobivat this worthless pervert whose krovvy-covered plott lay sacklike on the floor.

That was a very queer day, O my brothers. The dead plott was carried off, and then everybody in the whole prison had to stay locked up until further orders, and there was no pishcha given out, not even a mug of hot chai. We just all sat there, and the warders or chassos sort of strode up and down the tier, now and then creeching "Shut it" or "Close that hole" whenever they slooshied even a whisper from any of the cells.

Then about eleven o'clock in the morning there was a sort of like stiffening and excitement and like the von of fear spread-ing from outside the cell, and then we could viddy the Governor and the Chief Chasso and some very bolshy important-looking chellovecks walking by real skorry, govoreeting like bezoomny. They seemed to walk right to the end of the tier, then they could be slooshied walking back again, more slow this time, and you could slooshy the Governor, a very sweaty fatty fair-haired veck, saying slovos like "But, sir-" and "Well, what can be done, sir?" and so on. Then the whole lot stopped at our cell and the Chief Chasso opened up. You could viddy who was the real important veck right away, very tall and with blue glazzies and with real horrorshow platties on him, the most lovely suit, brothers, I have ever viddied, absolutely in the height of fashion. He just sort of looked right through us poor plennies, saying, in a very beautiful real educated goloss: "The Government cannot be concerned any longer with outmoded penological theories. Cram criminals together and see what happens. You get concentrated criminality, crime in the midst of punishment. Soon we may be needing all our prison space for political offenders." I didn't pony this at all, brothers, but after all he was not govoreeting to me. Then he said: "Common criminals like this unsavoury crowd" - (that meant me, brothers, as well as the others, who were real prestoopnicks and treacherous with it) - "can best be dealt with on a purely curative basis. Kill the criminal reflex, that's all. Full implementation in a year's time. Punishment means nothing to them, you can see that. They enjoy their so-called punishment. They start murdering each other."

And he turned his stern blue glazzies on me. So I said, bold: "With respect, sir, I object very strongly to what you said then. I am not a common criminal, sir, and I am not unsavoury. The others may be unsavoury but I

am not." The Chief Chasso went all purple and creeched: "You shut your bleeding hole, you. Don't you know who this is?"

"All right, all right," said this big veck. Then he turned to the Governor and said: "You can use him as a trail-blazer. He's young, bold, vicious. Brodsky will deal with him tomorrow and you can sit in and watch Brodsky. It works all right, don't worry about that. This vicious young hoodlum will be transformed out of all recognition."

And those hard slovos, brothers, were like the beginning of my freedom.

That very same evening I was dragged down nice and gentle by brutal tolchocking chassos to viddy the Governor in his holy of holies holy office. The Governor looked very weary at me and said: "I don't suppose you know who that was this morning, do you, 6655321?" And without waiting for me to say no he said: "That was no less a personage than the Minister of the Interior, the new Minister of the Interior and what they call a very new broom. Well, these new ridiculous ideas have come at last and orders are orders, though I may say to you in confidence that I do not approve. I most emphatically do not approve. An eye for an eye, I say. If someone hits you you hit back, do you not? Why then should not the State, very severely hit by you brutal hooligans, not hit back also? But the new view is to say no. The new view is that we turn the bad into the good. All of which seems to me grossly unjust. Hm?"

So I said, trying to be like respectful and accomodating: "Sir." And then the Chief Chasso, who was standing all red and burly behind the Governor's chair, creeched: "Shut your filthy hole, you scum."

"All right, all right," said the like tired and fagged-out Governor. "You, 6655321, are to be reformed. Tomorrow you go to this man Brodsky. It is believed that you will be able to leave State Custody in a little over a fortnight. In a little over a fortnight you will be out again in the big free world, no longer a number. I suppose," and he snorted a bit here, "that prospect pleases you?" I said nothing so the Chief Chasso creeched: "Answer, you filthy young swine, when the Governor asks you a question." So I said: "Oh, yes, sir. Thank you very much, sir. I've done my best here, really I have. I'm very grateful to all concerned."

"Don't be," like sighed the Governor. "This is not a reward."

This is far from being a reward. Now, there is a form here to be signed. It says that you are willing to have the residue of your sentence commuted to submission to what is called here, ridiculous expression, Reclamation Treatment. Will you sign?"

"Most certainly I will sign," I said, "sir. And very many thanks." So I was given an ink-pencil and I signed my name nice and flowy. The Governor said: "Right. That's the lot, I think." The Chief Chasso said: "The Prison Chaplain would like a word with him, sir." So I was marched out and off down the corridor towards the Wing Chapel, tolchocked on the back and the gulliver all the way by one of the chassos, but in a very like yawny and bored manner. And I was marched across the Wing Chapel to the little cantora of the charles and then made to go in. The charles was sitting at his desk, smelling loud and clear of a finemanny von of expensive cancers and Scotch. He said: "Ah, little 6655321, be seated." And to the chassos: "Wait outside, eh?" Which they did. Then he spoke in a very like earnest way to me, saying: "One thing I want you to understand, boy, is that this is nothing to do with me. Were it expedient, I would protest about it, but it is not expedient."

There is the question of my own career, there is the question of the weakness of my own voice when set against the shout of certain more powerful elements in the polity. Do I make myself clear?" He didn't, brothers, but I nodded that he did.

"Very hard ethical questions are involved," he went on. "You are to be made into a good boy, 6655321. Never again will you have the desire to commit acts of violence or to offend in any way whatsoever against the State's Peace. I hope you take all that in. I hope you are absolutely clear in your own mind about that." I said: "Oh, it will be nice to be good, sir." But I had a real horrorshow smeck at that inside, brothers.

He said: "It may not be nice to be good, little 6655321. It may be horrible to be good. And when I say that to you I realize how self-contradictory that sounds. I know I shall have many sleepless nights about this. What does God want? Does God want woodness or the choice of goodness? Is a man who chooses the bad perhaps

in some ways better than a man who has the good imposed upon him? Deep and hard questions, little 6655321. But all I want to say to you now is this: if at any time in the future you look back to these times and remember me, the lowest and humblest of all God's servitors, do not, I pray, think evil of me in your heart, thinking me in any way involved in what is now about to happen to you. And now, talking of praying, I realize sadly that there will be littlepoint in praying for you. You are passing now to a region where you will be beyond the reach of the power of prayer. A terrible terrible thing to consider. And yet, in a sense, in choosing to be deprive of the ability to make an ethical choice, you have in a sense really chosen the good. So I shall like to think. So, God help us all, 6655321, I shall like to think." And then he began to cry. But I didn't really take much notice of that, brothers only having a bit of a quiet smeck inside, because you could viddy that he had been peeting away at the old whisky, and now he took a bottle from a cupboard in his desk and started to pour himself a real horrorshow bolshy slog into a very greasy and grahzny glass. He downed it and the said: "All may be well, who knows? God works in a mysterious way." Then he began to sing away at a hymn in a real loud rich goloss. Then the door opened and the chassos came in to tolchock me back to my vonny cell, but the old charles still went on singing thishymn.

Well, the next morning I had to say good-bye to the old Staja, and I felt a malenky bit sad as you always will when you have to leave a place you've like got used to. But I didn't go very far, O my brothers. I was punched and kicked along to the new white building just beyond the yard where we used to do our bit of exercise. This was a very new building and it had a new cold like sizy smell which gave you a bit of the shivers.

stood there in the horrible bolshy bare hall and I got new vons, sniffing away there with my like very sensitive morder or sniffer. These were like hospital vons, and the chelloveck the chassos handed me over to had a white coat on, as he might be a hospital man. He signed for me, and one of the brutal chassos who had brought nme said: "You watch this one, sir. A right brutal bastard he has been and will be again, in spite of all his sucking up to the Prison Chaplain and reading the Bible." But this new chelloveck had real horrorshow blue glazzies which like smiled when he govoreeted. He said:"Oh, we don't anticipate any trouble. We're going to be friends, aren't we?" And he smiled with his glazzies and his finebig rot which was full of shining white zoobies and I sort of took to this veck right away. Anyway, he passed me on to a like lesser veck in a white coat, and this one was very nice too, and I was led off to a very nice white clean bedroom with curtains and a bedside lamp, and just the one bed in it, all for Your Humble Narrator. So I had a real horrorshow inner smeck at that, thinking I was really a very lucky young malchickiwick. I was told to take off my horrible prison platties and I was given a really beautiful set of pyjamas, O my brothers, in plain green, the heighth of bedwear fashion. And I was given a nice warm dressing-gown too and lovely toofles to put my bare nogas in, and I thought: "Well, Alex boy, little 6655321 as was, you have copped it lucky and nomistake.

You are really going to enjoy it here."

After I had been given a nice chasha of real horrorshow coffee and some old gazettas and mags to look at while peeting it, this first veck in white came in, the one who had like signed for me, and he said: "Aha, there you are," a silly sort of a veshch to say but it didn't sound silly, this veck being so likenice. "My name," he said, "is Dr. Branom. I'm Dr. Brodsky's assistant. With your permission, I'll just give you the usual brief overall examination." And he took the old stetho out of his right carman. "We must make sure you're quite fit, mustn't we? Yes indeed, we must." So while I lay there with my pyjama top off and he did this, that and the other, I said:"What exactly is it, sir, that you're going to do?"

"Oh," said Dr. Branom, his cold stetho going all down my back, "it's quite simple, really. We just show you some films."

"Films?" I said. I could hardly believe my ookos, brothers, as you may well understand. "You mean," I said, "it will be just like going to thepictures?"

"They'll be special films," said Dr. Branom. "Very special films. You'll be having the first session this afternoon. Yes,"Hesaid, getting up from bending over me, "you seem to be quite a fit young boy. A bit under-nourished perhaps. That will be the fault of the prison food. Put your pyjama top back on. After every meal,"

he said, sitting on the edge of the bed, "we shall begiving you a shot in the arm. That should help." I felt really grateful to this very nice Dr. Branom.

I said: "Vitamins, sir, will it be?"

"Something like that," he said, smiling real horrorshow and friendly, "just a jab in the arm after every meal." Then he went out. I lay on the bed thinking this was like real heaven, and I read some of the mags they'd given me - 'Worldsport', 'Sinny' (this being a film mag) and 'Goal'. Then I lay back on the bed and shut my glazzies and thought how nice it was going to be out there again, Alex with perhaps a nice easy job during the day, mebeing now too old for the old skolliwoll, and then perhaps getting a new like gang together for the nochy, and the first rabbit would be to get old Dim and Pete, if they had not been got already by the millicents. This time I would be very careful not to get loveted. They were giving another like chance, me having done murder and all, and it would not be like fair to get loveted again, after going to all this trouble toshow me films that were going to make me a real good malchick. I had a real horrorshow smeck at everybody's like innocence, and I was smecking my gulliver off when they brought in my lunch on a tray. The veck who brought it was the one who'd led me to this malenky bedroom when I came into the mesto, and he said: "It's nice to know somebody's happy." It was really a very nice appetizing bit of pishcha they'd laid out on the tray - two or three lomticks of like hot roastbeef with mashed kartoffel and vedge, then there was also ice-cream and a nice hot chasha of chai. And there was even a cancer to smoke and a matchbox with one match in. So this looked like it was the life, O my brothers. Then, about half an hour after while I was lying a bit sleepy on the bed, a woman nurse came in, a real nice young devotchka with real horrorshow groodies (I had not seen such for two years) and she had a tray and a hypodermic. I said: "Ah, the old vitamins, eh?" And I clickclicked at her but she took no notice. All she did was to slam the needle into my left arm, and then swishhhh in went the vitamin stuff. Then she went out again, clack clack on her high-heeled nogas. Then the white-coated veck who was like a male nurse came in with a wheelchair. I was a malenky bit surprised to viddy that. I said: "What giveth then, brother? I can walk, surely, to wherever we have to itty to." But hesaid:

"Best I push you there." And indeed, O my brothers, when I got off the bed I found myself a malenky biy weak. It was the under-nourishment like Dr. Branom had said, all that horrible prison pishcha. But the vitamins in the after-meal injection would put me right. No doubt at all about that, I thought.

Where I was wheeled to, brothers, was like no sinny I had ever viddied before. True enough, one wall was all covered with silver screen, and direct opposite was a wall with square holes in for the projector to project through, and there were stereo speakers stuck all over the mesto. But against the right-hand one of the other walls was a bank of all like little meters, and in the middle of the floor facing the screen was like a dentist's chair with all lengths of wire running from it, and I had to like crawl from the wheelchair to this, being given some help by another like male nurse veck in a white coat. Then I noticed that underneath the projection holes was like all frosted glass and I thought I viddied shadows of like people moving behind it and I thought I slooshied somebody cough kashl kashl kashl. But then all I could like notice was how weak I seemed to be, and I put that down to changing over from prison pishcha to this new rich pishcha and the vitamins injected into me. "Right," said the wheelchair-wheeling veck, "now I'll leave you. The show will commence as soon as Dr. Brodsky arrives.

Hope you enjoy it." To be truthful, brothers, I did not really feel that I wanted to viddy any film-show this afternoon. I was just not in the mood. I would have liked much better to have a nicequiet spatchka on the bed, nice and quiet and all on my oddy knocky. I felt very limp.

What happened now was that one white-coated veck strapped my gulliver to a like head-rest, singing to himself all the time some vonny cally pop-song. "What's this for?" I said.

And this veck replied, interrupting his like song an instant, that it was to keep my gulliver still and make me look at the screen. "But," I said, "I want to look at the screen. I've been brought here to viddy films and viddy films I shall." And then the other white-coat veck (there were three altogether, one of them a devotchka who was like sitting at the bank of meters and twiddling with knobs) had a bit of a smeck at that.

He said: "You never know. Oh, you never know. Trust us, friend. It's better this way." And then I found they were strapping my rookers to the chair-arms and my nogas were like stuck to a foot-rest. It seemed a bit bezoomny to me but I let them get on with what they wanted to get on with. If I was to be a free young malchick again in a fortnight's time I would put up with much in the meantime, O my brothers. One veshch I did not like, though, was when they put like clips on the skin of my forehead, so that my top glazz-lids were pulled up and up and up and I could not shut my glazzies no matter how I tried. I tried to smeck and said: "This must be a real horrorshow film if you're so keen on my viddyng it." And one of the white-coat vecks said, smecking:

"Horrorshow is right, friend. A real show of horrors." And then I had like a cap stuck on my gulliver and I could viddy all wires running away from it, and they stuck a like suction pad on my belly and one on the old tick-tocker, and I could just about viddy wires running away from those. Then there was the shoom of a door opening and you could tell some very important chelloveck was coming in by the way the white-coated under-veckes went all stiff. And then I viddied this Dr. Brodsky. He was a malenky veck, very fat, with all curly hair curling all over his gulliver, and on his spuddy nose he had very thick ochkies. I could just viddy that he had a real horrorshow suit on, absolutely the heighth of fashion, and he had a like very delicate and subtle von of operating-theatres coming from him. With him was Dr. Branom, all smiling like as though to give me confidence. "Everything ready?" said Dr. Brodsky in a very breathy goloss. Then I could slooshy voices saying Right right right from like a distance, then nearer to, then there was a quiet like humming shoom as though things had been switched on. And then the lights went out and there was Your Humble Narrator And Friend sitting alone in the dark, all on his frightened oddy knocky, not able to move nor shut his glazzies nor anything. And then, O my brothers, the film-show started off with some very gromky atmosphere music coming from the speakers, very fierce and full of dis-cord. And then on the screen the picture came on, but there was no title and no credits. What came on was a street, as it might have been any street in any town, and it was a real dark nochy and the lamps were lit. It was a very good like professional piece of sinny, and there were none of these flickers and blobs you get, say, when you viddy one of these dirty films in somebody's house in a back street. All the time the music bumped out, very like sinister. And then you could viddy an old man coming down the street, very starry, and then there leaped out on this starry veck two malchicks dressed in the heighth of fashion, as it was at this time (still thin trousers but no like cravat any more, more of a real tie), and then they started to filly with him. You could slooshy the screams and moans, very realistic, and you could even get the like heavy breathing and panting of the two tolchockingmalchicks. They made a real pudding out of this starry veck, going crack crack crack at him with the fisty rookers, tearing his platties off and then finishing up by booting his nagoy plott (this lay all krovvy-red in the grahzny mud of the gutter) and then running off very skorry. Then there was the close-up gulliver of this beaten-up starry veck, and the krovvy flowed beautiful red. It's funny how the colours of the like real world only seem really real when you viddy them on thescreen.

Now all the time I was watching this I was beginning to get very aware of a like not feeling all that well, and this I put down to the under-nourishment and my stomach not quite ready for tthe rich pishcha and vitamins I was getting here. But I tried to forget this, concentrating on the next film which came on at once, brothers, without any break at all. This time the film jumped right away on a young devotchka who was being given the old in-out by first one malchick then another then another then another, she creeching away very gromky through the speakers and like very pathetic and tragic music going on at the same time. This was real, very real, though if you thought about it properly you couldn't imagine lewdies actually agreeing to having all this done to them in a film, and if these films were made by the Good or the State you couldn't imagine them being allowed to take these films without like interfering with what was going on. So it must have been very clever what they call cutting or editing or some such veshch. For it was very real. And when it came to the sixth or seventh malchick leering and smecking and then going into it and the devotchka creeching on the sound-track like bezoomny, then I began to feel sick. I had like pains all over and felt I could sick up and at thesametimenotsickup, andIbegantofeellikeindistress, Omybrothers, beingfixedrigidtooonthis

chair. When this bit of film was over I could slooshy the goloss of this Dr. Brodsky from over by the switchboard saying: "Reaction about twelve point five? Promising, promising."

Then we shot straight into another lomtick of film, and this time it was of just a human litso, a very like pale human face held still and having different nasty veshches done to it. I was sweating a malenky bit with the pain in my guts and a horrible thirst and my gulliver going throb throb throb, and it seemed to me that if I could not viddy this bit of film I would perhaps be not so sick. But I could not shut my glazzies, and even if I tried to move my glaz-balls about I still could not get like out of the line of fire of this picture. So I had to go on viddying what was being done and hearing the most ghastly creechings coming from this litso. I knew it could not really be real, but that made no difference. I was heaving away but could not sick, viddying first a britva cut out an eye, then slice down the cheek, then go rip rip rip all over, while red krovvy shot on to the camera lens. Then all the teeth were like wrenched out with a pair of pliers, and the creeching and the blood were terrific. Then I slooshied this very pleased goloss of Dr.Brodsky going: "Excellent, excellent, excellent."

The next lomtick of film was of an old woman who kept a shop being kicked about amid very gromky laughter by a lot of malchicks, and these malchicks broke up the shop and then set fire to it. You could viddy this poor starry ptitsa trying tocrawl out of the flames, screaming and creeching, but having had her leg broke by these malchicks kicking her she could not move. So then all the flames went roaring round her, and you could viddy her agonized litso like appealing through the flames and the disappearing in the flames, and then you could slooshy the most gromky and agonized and agonizing screams that ever came from a human goloss. So this time I knew I had to sick up, so I creeched:

"I want to be sick. Please let me be sick. Please bring something for me to be sick into." But this

Dr. Brodsky called back:"Imagination only. You've nothing to worry about. Next film coming up." That was perhaps meant to be a joke, for I heard a like smeck coming from the dark. And then I was forced to viddy a most nasty film about Japanese torture. It was the 1939-45 War, and there were soldiers being fixed to trees with nails and having fires lit under them and having their yarbles cut off, and you even viddied a gulliver being sliced off a soldier with a sword, and then with his head rolling about and the rot and glazzies looking alive still, the plott of this soldier actually ran about, krovvying like a fountain out of the neck, and then it dropped, and all the time there was very very loud laughter from the Japanese. The pains I felt now in my belly and the headache and the thirst were terrible, and they all seemed to be coming out of the screen. So I creeched:"Stop the film! Please, please stop it! I can't stand any more." And then the goloss of this Dr.Brodsky said:"Stop it? Stop it, did you say? Why, we've hardly started."

And he and the others smecked quite loud.

I do not wish to describe, brothers, what other horrible veshches I was like forced to viddy that afternoon. The like minds of this Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Branom and the others in white coats, and remember there was this devotchka twiddling with the knobs and watching the meters, they must have been more cally and filthy than any prestoopnick in the Staja itself. Because I did not think it was possible for any veck to even think of making films of what I was forced to viddy, all tied to this chair and my glazzies made to be wide open. All I could do was to creech very gromky for them to turn it off, turn it off, and that like part drowned the noise of dratsing and fillying and also the music that went with it all. You can imagine it was like a terrible relief when I'd viddied the last bit of film, and this Dr. Brodsky said, in a very yawny and bored like goloss: "I think that should be enough for Day One, don't you, Branom?" And there I was with the lights switched on, my gulliver throbbing like a bolshy big engine that makes pain, and my rot all dry and cally inside, and feeling I could like sick up every bit of pishcha I had ever eaten, O my brothers, since the day I was like weaned. "All right," said this Dr. Brodsky, "he can be taken back to his bed." Then he like patted me on the pletcho and said: "Good, good. A very promising start," grinning all over his litso, then he like waddled out, Dr. Branom after him, but Dr. Branom gave me a like very droogy and sympathetic type smile as though he had nothing to do with all this veshch but was like forced into it as I was.

Anyhow, they freed my plott from the chair and they let go the skin above my glazzies so that I could open and shut them again, and I shut them, O my brothers, with the pain and throb in my gulliver, and then I was

like carried to the old wheelchair and taken back to my malenkybedroom, the under-veck who wheeled me singing away at some hound-and-horny popsong so that I like snarled: "Shut it, thou," but he only smecked and said: "Never mind, friend," and then sang louder.

So I was put into the bed and still felt bolnoy but could not sleep, but soon I started to feel that soon I might start to feel that I might soon start feeling just a malenky bit better, and then I was brought some nice hot chai with plenty of moloko and sakar and, peeting that, I knew that that like horrible nightmare was in the past and all over. And then Dr. Branom came in, all nice and smiling. He said: "Well, by my calculations you should be starting to feel all right again. Yes?"

"Sir," I said, like wary. I did not quite kopat what he was getting at govoreeting about calculations, seeing that getting better from feeling bolnoy is like your own affair and nothing to do with calculations. He sat down, all nice and droogy, on the bed's edge and said: "Dr. Brodsky is pleased with you. You had a very positive response. Tomorrow, of course, there'll be two sessions, morning and afternoon, and I should imagine that you'll be feeling a bit limp at the end of the day. But we have to be hard on you, you have to be cured." I said:

"You mean I have to sit through - ? You mean I have to look at - ? Oh, no," I said. "It was horrible."

"Of course it was horrible," smiled Dr. Branom. "Violence is a very horrible thing. That's what you're learning now. Your body is learning it."

"But," I said, "I don't understand. I don't understand about feeling sick like I did. I never used to feel sick before. I used to feel like very the opposite. I mean, doing it or watching it I used to feel real horrorshow. I just don't understand why or how or what - "Life is a very wonderful thing," said Dr. Branom in a like very holy goloss. "The processes of life, the make-up of the human organism, who can fully understand these miracles? Dr. Brodsky is, of course, a remarkable man. What is happening to you now is what should happen to any normal healthy human organism contemplating the actions of the forces of evil, the workings of the principle of destruction. You are being made sane, you are being made healthy."

"That I will not have," I said, "nor can understand at all.

What you've been doing is to make me feel very ill."

"Do you feel ill now?" he said, still with the old droogy smile on his litso. "Drinking tea, resting, having a quiet chat with a friend - surely you're not feeling anything but well?"

I like listened and felt for pain and sickness in my gulliver and plott, in a like cautious way, but it was true, brothers, that I felt real horrorshow and even wanting my dinner. "I don't get it," I said. "You must be doing something to me to make me feel ill." And I sort of frowned about that, thinking.

"You felt ill this afternoon," he said, "because you're getting better. When we're healthy we respond to the presence of the hateful with fear and nausea. You're becoming healthy, that's all. You'll be healthier still this time tomorrow." Then he patted me on the noga and went out, and I tried to puzzle the whole veshch out as best I could. What it seemed to me was that the wire and other veshches that were fixed to my plott perhaps were making me feel ill, and that it was all a trick really. I was still puzzling out all this and wondering whether I should refuse to be strapped down to this chair tomorrow and start a real bit of dratsing with them all, because I had my rights, when another chelloveck came in to see me. He was a like smiling starry veck who said he was what he called the Discharge Officer, and he carried a lot of bits of paper with him. He said: "Where will you go when you leave here?" I hadn't really thought about that sort of veshch at all, and it only now really began to dawn on me that I'd be a fine free malchick very soon, and then I viddied that would only be if I played it everybody's way and did not start any dratsing and creeching and refusing and so on. I said: "Oh, I shall go home. Back to my pee andem."

"Your - ?" He didn't get nadsat-talk at all, so I said: "To my parents in the dear old flatblock."

"I see," he said. "And when did you last have a visit from your parents?"

"A month," I said, "very near. They like suspended visiting-day for a bit because of one prestoopnick getting some blasting-powder smuggled in across the wires from his ptitsa. A real cally trick to play on the innocent, like punishing them as well. So it's near a month since I had a visit."

"I see," said this veck. "And have your parents been informed of your transfer and impending release?" That had a real lovely zvook that did, that slovo 'release'. I said: "No." Then I said: "It will be a nice surprise for them, that, won't it? Me just walking in through the door and saying: 'Here I am, back, a free veck again.' Yes, real horrorshow."

"Right," said the Discharge Officer veck, "we'll leave it at that."

So long as you have somewhere to live. Now, there's the question of your having a job, isn't there?" And he showed me this long list of jobs I could have, but I thought, well, there would be time enough for that. A nice malenky holiday first. I could do a crasting job soon as I got out and fill the old carmans with pretty polly, but I would have to be very careful and I would have to do the job all on my oddy knocky. I did not trust so-called droogs any more. So I told this veck to leave it a bit and we would govoreet about it again. He said right right right, then got ready to leave. He showed himself to be a very queer sort of a veck, because what he did now was to like giggle and then say: "Would you like to punch me in the face before I go?" I did not think I could possibly have slooshied that right, so I said:

"Eh?"

"Would you," he giggled, "like to punch me in the face before I go?" I frowned like at that, very puzzled, and said:

"Why?"

"Oh," he said, "just to see how you're getting on." And he brought his litso real near, a fat grin all over his rot. So I fisted up and went smack at this litso, but he pulled himself away real skorry, grinning still, and my rooker just punched air. Very puzzling, this was, and I frowned as he left, smeking his gulliver off. And then, my brothers, I felt real sick again, just like in the afternoon, just for a couple of minootas. It then passed off skorry, and when they brought my dinner in I found I had a fair appetite and was ready to crunk away at the roast chicken. But it was funny that starry chelloveck asking for a tolchock in the litso. And it was funny feeling sicklike that.

What was even funnier was when I went to sleep that night, O my brothers, I had a nightmare, and, as you might expect, it was one of those bits of film I'd viddied in the afternoon. A dream or nightmare is really only like a film inside your gulliver, except that it is as though you could walk into it and be part of it. And this is what happened to me. It was a nightmare of one of the bits of film they showed me near the end of the afternoon like session, all of smeking malchicks doing the ultra-violent on a young ptitsa who was creeching away in her red red krovvy, her platties all razrezzed real horrorshow. I was in this fillying about, smeking away and being like the ring-leader, dressed in the heighth of nadsat fashion. And then at the heighth of all this dratsing and tolchocking I felt like paralysed and wanting to be very sick, and all the other malchicks had a real gromky smeck at me. Then I was dratsing my way back to being awake all through my own krovvy, pints and quarts and gallons of it, and then I found myself in my bed in this room. I wanted to be sick, so I got out of the bed all trembly so as to go off down the corridor to the oldvaysay.

But, behold, brothers, the door was locked. And turning round I viddied for like the first raz that there were bars on the window. And so, as I reached for the like pot in the malenky cupboard beside the bed, I viddied that there would be no escaping from any of all this. Worse, I did not dare to go back into my own sleeping gulliver. I soon found I did not want to be sick after all, but then I was poogly of getting back into bed to sleep. But soon I fell smack into sleep and did not dream anymore.

"Stop it, stop it, stop it," I kept on creeching out. "Turn it off

you grahzny bastards, for I can stand no more." It was the next day, brothers, and I had truly done my best morning and afternoon to play it their way and sit like a horrorshow smiling cooperative malchick in their chair of torture while they flashed nasty bits of ultra-violence on the screen, my glazzies clipped open to viddy all, my plott and rookers and nogas fixed to the chair so I could not get away. What I was being made to viddy now was not really a veshch I would have thought to be too bad before, it being only three or four malchickscrastinginashopandfillingtheirarmanswithcutter,atthesametimefillyingaboutwiththe

creeching starry ptitsa running the shop, tolchocking her and letting the red red krovvy flow. But the throb and like crash crash crash in my gulliver and the wanting to be sick and the terrible dry rasping thirstiness in my rot, all were worse than yesterday.

"Oh. I've had enough" I cried. "It's not fair, you vonny sods," and I tried to struggle out of the chair but it was not possible me being as good as stuck to it.

"First-class," creeched out this Dr. Brodsky. "You're doing really well. Just one more and then we're finished."

What it was now was the starry 1939-45 War again, and it was a very blobby and liny and crackly film you could viddy had been made by the Germans. It opened with German eagles and the Nazi flag with that like crooked cross that all malchicks at school love to draw, and then there were very haughty and nadmenny like German officers walking through streets that were all dust and bomb-holes and broken buildings. Then you were allowed to viddy lewdies being shot against walls, officers giving the orders, and also horrible nagoy plotts left lying in gutters, all like cages of bare ribs and white thin nogas. Then there were lewdies being dragged off creeching though not on the sound-track, my brothers, the only sound being music, and being tolchocked while they were dragged off. Then I noticed, in all my pain and sickness, what music it was that like crackled and boomed on the sound-track, and it was Ludwig van, the last movement of the Fifth Symphony, and I creeched like bezoomny at that. "Stop!"

I creeched. "Stop, you grahzny disgusting sods. It's a sin, that's what it is, a filthy unforgivable sin, you bratchnies!" They didn't stop right away, because there was only a minute or two more to go - lewdies being beaten up and all krovvy, then more firing squads, then the old Nazi flag and THE END. But when the lights came on this Dr. Brodsky and also Dr. Branom were standing in front of me, and Dr. Brodsky said: "What's all this about sin, eh?"

"That," I said, very sick. "Using Ludwig van like that. He did no harm to anyone. Beethoven just wrote music." And then I was really sick and they had to bring a bowl that was in the shape of like a kidney.

"Music," said Dr. Brodsky, like musing. "So you're keen on music. I know nothing about it myself. It's a useful emotional heightener, that's all I know. Well, well. What do you think about that, eh, Branom?"

"It can't be helped," said Dr. Branom. "Each man kills the thing he loves, as the poet-prisoner said. Here's the punishment element, perhaps. The Governor ought to be pleased."

"Give me a drink," I said, "for Bog's sake."

"Loosen him," ordered Dr. Brodsky. "Fetch him a carafe of ice-cold water." So then these under-vecks got to work and soon I was peeing gallons and gallons of water and it was like heaven, O my brothers. Dr. Brodsky said: "You seem a sufficiently intelligent young man. You seem, too, to be not without taste. You've just got this violence thing, haven't you? Violence and theft, theft being an aspect of violence." I didn't govoreet a single slovo, brothers, I was still feeling sick, though getting a malenky bit better now.

But it had been a terrible day. "Now then," said Dr. Brodsky, "how do you think this is done? Tell me, what do you think we're doing to you?"

"You're making me feel ill. I'm ill when I look at those filthy pervert films of yours. But it's not really the films that's doing it. But I feel that if you'll stop these films I'll stop feeling ill."

"Right," said Dr. Brodsky. "It's association, the oldest educational method in the world. And what really causes you to feel ill?"

"These grahzny sodding veshches that come out of my gulliver and my plott," I said, "that's what it is."

"Quaint," said Dr. Brodsky, like smiling, "the dialect of the tribe. Do you know anything of its provenance, Branom?"

"Odd bits of old rhyming slang," said Dr. Branom, who did not look quite so much like a friend any more. "A bit of gipsy talk, too. But most of the roots are Slav. Propaganda. Sub-liminal penetration."

"All right, all right, all right," said Dr. Brodsky, like impatient and not interested any more. "Well," he said to me, "it isn't the wires. It's nothing to do with what's fastened to you. Those are just for measuring your reactions. What is it, then?"

I viddied then, of course, what a bezoomny shoot I was not to notice that it was the hypodermic shots in the rooker.

"Oh," I creeched, "oh, I viddy all now. A filthy cally vonny trick. An act of treachery, sod you, and you won't do it again."

"I'm glad you've raised your objections now," said Dr. Brodsky. "Now we can be perfectly clear about it. We can get this stuff of Ludovico's into your system in many different ways. Orally, for instance. But the subcutaneous method is the best. Don't fight against it, please. There's no point in your fighting. You can't get the better of us."

"Grazhny bratchnies," I said, like snivelling. Then I said: "I don't mind about the ultra-violence and all that cal. I put up with that. But it's not fair on the music. It's not fair I should feel ill when I'm slooshying lovely Ludwig van and G. F. Handel and others. All that shows you're an evil lot of bastards and I shall never forgive you, sods."

They both looked a bit like thoughtful. Then Dr. Brodsky said: "Delimitation is always difficult. The world is one, life is one. The sweetest and most heavenly of activities partake in some measure of violence - the act of love, for instance; music, for instance. You must take your chance, boy. The choice has been all yours." I didn't understand all these slovos, but now I said:

"You needn't take it any further, sir." I'd changed my tune a malenky bit in my cunning way. "You've proved to me that all this dratsing and ultra-violence and killing is wrong wrong and terribly wrong. I've learned my lesson, sirs. I see now what I've never seen before. I'm cured, praise God." And I raised my glazzies in a like holy way to the ceiling. But both these doctors shook their gullivers like sadly and Dr. Brodsky said:

"You're not cured yet. There's still a lot to be done. Only when your body reacts promptly and violently to violence, as to a snake, without further help from us, without medication, only then - " I said: "But, sir, sirs, I see that it's wrong. It's wrong because it's against like society, it's wrong because every veck on earth has the right to live and be happy without being beaten and tolchoked and knifed. I've learned a lot, oh really I have."

But Dr. Brodsky had a loud long smeck at that, showing all his white zoobies, and said:

"The heresy of an age of reason," or some such slovos. "I see what is right and approve, but I do what is wrong. No, no, my boy, you must leave it all to us. But be cheerful about it.

It will soon be all over. In less than a fortnight now you'll be a free man." Then he patted me on the pletcho.

Less than a fortnight, O my brothers and friends, it was like an age. It was like from the beginning of the world to the end of it. To finish the fourteen years without remission in the Staja would have been nothing to it. Every day it was the same. When the devotchka with the hypodermic came round, though, four days after this govoreeting with Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Branom, I said: "Oh, no you won't," and tolchoked her on the rooker, and the syringe went tinkle clatter on to the floor. That was like to viddy what they would do. What they did was to get four or five real bolshy white-coated bastards of under-vecks to hold me down on the bed, tolchocking me with grinny litsos close to mine, and then this nurse ptitsa said: "You wicked naughty little devil, you," while she jabbed my rooker with another syringe and squirted this stuff in real brutal and nasty. And then I was wheeled off exhausted to this like hell sinny as before.

Every day, my brothers, these films were like the same, all kicking and tolchocking and red red krovvy dripping off of litsos and plotts and spattering all over the camera lenses. It was usually grinning and smecking malchicks in the heighth of nadsat fashion, or else teeheeheeing Jap torturers or brutal Nazi kickers and shooters. And each day the feeling of wanting to die with the sickness and gulliver pains and aches in the zoobies and horrible horrible thirst grew really worse. Until one morning I tried to defeat the bastards by crash crashing my gulliver against the wall so that I should tolchock myself unconscious, but all that

happened was I felt sick with viddying that this kind of violence was like the violence in the films, so I was just exhausted and was given the injection and was wheeled off like before.

And then there came a morning when I woke up and had my breakfast of eggs and toast and jam and very hot milky chai, and then I thought: "It can't be much longer now. Now must be very near the end of the time. I have suffered to the heighths and cannot suffer any more." And I waited and waited, brothers, for this nurse ptitsa to bring in the syringe, but she did not come. And then the white-coated under-veck came and said: "Today, old friend, we are letting you walk."

"Walk?" I said. "Where?"

"To the usual place," he said. "Yes, yes, look not so astonished. You are to walk to the films, me with you of course.

You are no longer to be carried in a wheelchair."

"But," I said, "how about my horrible morning injection?"

For I was really surprised at this, brothers, they being so keen on pushing this Ludovico veshch into me, as they said. "Don't I get that horrible sicky stuff rammed into my poor suffering rooker any more?"

"All over," like smecked this veck. "For ever and ever amen.

You're on your own now, boy. Walking and all to the chamber of horrors. But you're still to be strapped down and made to see. Come on then, my little tiger." And I had to put my over-gown and toofles on and walk down the corridor to the like sinnymesto.

Now this time, O my brothers, I was not only very sick but very puzzled. There it was again, all the old ultra-violence and vecks with their gullivers smashed and torn krovvy-dripping ptitsas creeching for mercy, the like private and individual fillying and nastiness. Then there were the prison-camps and the Jews and the grey like foreign streets full of tanks and uniforms and vecks going down in withering rifle-fire, this being the public side of it. And this time I could blame nothing for me feeling sick and thirsty and full of aches except what I was forced to viddy, my glazzies still being clipped open and my nogas and plott fixed to the chair but this set of wires and other veshches no longer coming out of my plott and gulliver. So what could it be but the films I was viddying that were doing this to me? Except, of course, brothers, that this Ludovico stuff was like a vaccination and there it was cruising about in my krovvy, so that I would be sick always for ever and ever amen whenever I viddied any of this ultra-violence.

So now I squared my rot and went boo hoo hoo, and the tears like blotted out what I was forced to viddy in like all blessed runny silvery dewdrops. But these white-coat bratchnies were skorry with their tashtooks to wipe the tears away, saying: "There there, wazzums all weepy-weepy den."

And there it was again all clear before my glazzies, these Germans prodding like beseeching and weeping Jews - vecks and cheenas and malchicks and devotchkas - into mestos where they would all snuff it of poison gas. Boo hoo hoo I had to go again, and along they came to wipe the tears off, very skorry, so I should not miss one solitary veshch of what they were showing. It was a terrible and horrible day, O my brothers and onlyfriends.

I was lying on the bed all alone that nochy after my dinner of fat thick mutton stew and fruit-pie and ice-cream, and I thought to myself: "Hell hell hell, there might be a chance for me if I get out now." I had no weapon, though. I was allowed no britva here, and I had been shaved every other day by a fat bald-headed veck who came to my bed before breakfast, two white-coated bratchnies standing by to viddy I was a good non-violent malchick. The nails on my rookers had been scissored and filed real short so I could not scratch. But I was stillskorry on the attack, though they had weakened me down, brothers, to a like shadow of what I had been in the old free days. So now I got off the bed and went to the locked door and began tofist it real horrorshow and hard, creeching at the same time: "Oh, help help. I'm sick, I'm dying. Doctor doctor doctor, quick. Please. Oh, I'll die, I shall. Help." My gorlo wasreal dry and sore before anyone came. Then I heard nogas coming down the corridor and a like grumbling goloss, and then I recognized the goloss of the white-coated veck who brought me pishcha and like escorted me to my daily doom.

He like grumbled:

"What is it? What goes on? What's your little nasty game in there?"

"Oh, I'm dying," I like moaned. "Oh, I have a ghastly pain in my side. Appendicitis, it is. Ooooooh."

"Appendy shitehouse," grumbled this veck, and then to my joy, brothers, I could slooshy the like clank of keys. "If you'retrying it little friend, my friends and me will beat and kick you all through the night." Then he opened up and brought in like the sweet air of the promise of my freedom. Now I was like behind the door when he pushed it open, and I could viddy him in the corridor light looking round for me puzzled. Then I raised my two fisties to tolchock him on the neck nasty, and then, I swear, as I viddied him in advance lying moaning or out out out and felt the like joy rise in my guts, it was then that this sickness rose in me as it might be a wave and I felt a horrible fear as if I was really going to die. I like totteredover to the bed going urgh urgh urgh, and the veck, who was not in his white coat but an over-gown, viddied clear enough what I had in mind for he said: "Well, everything's a lesson, isn't it? Learning all the time, as you could say. Come on, little friend, get up from that bed and hit me. I want you to, yes, really. A real good crack across the jaw. Oh, I'm dying for it, really I am." But all I could do, brothers, was to just lay there sobbing boo hoo hoo. "Scum," like sneered this veck now. "Filth." And he pulled me up by like the scruff of my pyjama-top, me being very weak and limp, and he raised and swung his right rooker so that I got a fair old tolchock clean on the litso. "That," he said, "is for getting me out of my bed, you young dirt." And he wiped his rookers against each other swish swish and went out. Crunch crunch went the key in the lock.

And what, brothers, I had to escape into sleep from then was the horrible and wrong feeling that it was better to get the hit than give it. If that veck had stayed I might even have like presented the other cheek.

I could not believe, brothers, what I was told. It seemed that I had been in that vonny mesto for near ever and would be there for near ever more. But it had always been a fortnight and now they said the fortnight was near up. They said: "Tomorrow, little friend, out out out." And they made with the old thumb, like pointing to freedom. And then the white-coated veck who had tolchocked me and who had still brought me my trays of pishcha and like escorted me to my everyday torture said: "But you still have one real big day in front of you. It's to be your passing-out day," and he had a leery smeck at that.

I expected this morning that I would be ittying as usual to the sinny mesto in my pyjamas and toofles and over-gown.

But no. This morning I was given my shirt and underveshches and my platties of the night and my horrorshow kick-boots, all lovely and washed or ironed and polished. And I was even given my cut-throat britva that I had used in those old happy days for fillying and dratsing. So I gave with the puzzled frown at this as I got dressed, but the white-coated under-veck just like grinned and would govoreet nothing, O my brothers.

I was led quite kindly to the same old mesto, but there were changes there. Curtains had been drawn in front of the sinny screen and the frosted glass under the projection holes was no longer there, it having perhaps been pushed up or folded to the sides like blinds or shutters. And where there had been just the noise of coughing kashl kashl kashl and like shadows of the lewdies was now a real audience, and in this audience there were litsos I knew. There was the Staja Governor and the holy man, the charlie or charles as he was called, and the Chief Chasso and this very important and well-dressed chelloveck who was the Minister of the Interior or Inferior. All the rest I did not know. Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Branom were there, though not now white-coated, instead they were dressed as doctors would dress who were big enough to want to dress in the heighth of fashion. Dr. Branom just stood, but Dr. Brodsky stood and govoreeted in a like learned manner to all the lewdies assembled. When he viddied me coming in he said:

"Aha. At this stage, gentlemen, we introduce the subject himself. He is, as you will percieve, fit and well nourished. He comes straight from a night's sleep and a good breakfast, undrugged, unhypnotized. Tomorrow we send him with confidence out into the world again, as decent a lad as you would meet on a May morning, inclined to the kindly word and the helpful act. What a change is here, gentlemen, from the wretched hoodlum the State committed to unprofitable punishment some two years ago, unchanged after two years.

Unchanged, do I say? Not quite. Prison taught him the false smile, the rubbed hands of hypocrisy, the fawning greased obsequious leer. Other vices it taught him, as well as confirming him in those he had long practised before. But gentlemen, enough of words. Actions speak louder than.

Action now. Observe, all."

I was a bit dazed by all this govtoreeting and I was trying to grasp in my mind that like all this was about me. Then all the lights went out and then there came on two like spotlights shining from the projection-squares, and one of them was full on Your Humble and Suffering Narrator. And into the other spotlight there walked a bolshy big chelloveck I had never viddied before. He had a lardy like litso and a moustache and like strips of hair pasted over his near-bald gulliver. He was about thirty or forty or fifty, some old age like that, starry.

He ittied up to me and the spotlight ittied with him, and soon the two spotlights had made like one big pool. He said to me, very sneery: "Hello, heap of dirt. Pooh, you don't wash much, judging from the horrible smell." Then, as if he was like dancing, he stamped on my nogas, left, right, then he gave me a finger-nail flick on the nose that hurt like bezoomny and brought the old tears to my glazzies then he twisted at my left ooko like it was a radio dial. I could slooshy titters and a couple of real horrorshow hawhawhaws coming from like the audience. My nose and nogas and ear-hole stung and pained like bezoomny, so I said: "What do you do that to me for? I've never done wrong to you, brother."

"Oh," this veck said, "I do this" - flickedflicked nose again - "and that" - twisted smarting ear-hole - "and the other" - stamped nasty on right noga - "because I don't care for your horrible type. And if you want to do anything about it, start, start, please do." Now I knew that I'd have to be real skorry and get my cut-throat britva out before this horrible killing sickness whooshed up and turned the like joy of battle into feeling I was going to snuff it. But, O brothers, as my rooker reached for the britva in my inside carman I got this like picture in my mind's glazzy of this insulting chelloveck howling for mercy with the red red krovvy all streaming out of his rot, and hot after this picture the sickness and dryness and pains were rushing to overtake, and I viddied that I'd have to change the way I felt about this rotten veck very very skorry indeed, so I felt in my carmans for cigarettes or for pretty polly, and, O my brothers, there was not either of these veshches, I said, like all howly and blubbery: "I'd like to give you a cigarette, brother, but I don't seem to have any." This veck went: "Wah wah. Boohoo. Cry, baby." Then he flick-flickflicked with his bolshy horny nail at my nose again, and I could slooshy very loud smecks of like mirth coming from the dark audience. I said, real desperate, trying to be nice to this insulting and hurtful veck to stop the pains and sickness coming up: "Please let me do something for you, please." And I felt in my carmans but could find only my cut-throat britva, so I took this out and handed it to him and said: "Please take this, please. A little present. Please have it." But he said: "Keep your stinking bribes to yourself. You can't get round me that way." And he banged at my rooker and my cut-throat britva fell on the floor. So I said: "Please, I must do something. Shall I clean your boots? Look, I'll get down and lick them." And, my brothers, believe it or kiss my sharries, I got down on my knees and pushed my red yahzick out a mile and half to lick his grahznny vonny boots. But all this veck did was to kick me not too hard on the rot.

So then it seemed to me that it would not bring on the sickness and pain if I just gripped hisankles with my rookers tight round them and brought this grahznny bratchny down to the floor. So I did this and he got a real bolshy surprise, coming down crack amid loud laughter from the vonny audience. But viddying him on the floor I could feel the whole horrible feeling coming over me, so I gave him my rooker to lift him up skorry and up he came. Then just as he was going to give me a real nasty and earnest tolchock on the litso Dr. Brodsky said: "All right, that will do very well." Then this horrible veck sort of bowed and danced off like an actor while the lights came up on me blinking and with my rot square forhowling.

Dr. Brodsky said to the audience: "Our subject is, you see, impelled towards the good by, paradoxically, being impelled towards evil. The intention to act violently is accompanied by strong feelings of physical distress. To counter these the subject has to switch to a diametrically opposed attitude. Any questions?"

"Choice," rumbled a rich deep goloss. I viddied it belonged to the prison charlie. "He has no real choice, has he? Self-interest, fear of physical pain, drove him to that grotesque act of self-abasement. Its insincerity was clearly to be seen. He ceases to be a wrongdoer. He ceases also to be a creature capable of moral choice."

"These are subtleties," like smiled Dr. Brodsky. "We are not concerned with motive, with the higher ethics. We are concerned only with cutting down crime - "

"And," chipped in this bolshy well-dressed Minister, "with relieving the ghastly congestion in our prisons."

"Hear hear," said somebody.

There was a lot of govoreeting and arguing then and I just stood there, brothers, like completely ignored by all these ignorant bratchnies, so I creeched out: "Me, me, me. How about me? Where do I come into all this? Am I just some animal or dog?" And that started them off govoreeting real loud and throwing slovos at me. So I creeched louder, still creeching: "Am I just to be like a clockwork orange?" I didn't know what made me use those slovos, brothers, which just came like without asking into my gulliver. And that shut all those vecks up for some reason for a minoota or two. Then one very thin starry professor type chelloveck stood up, his neck like all cables carrying like power from his gulliver to his plott, and he said: "You have no cause to grumble, boy. You made your choice and all this is a consequence of your choice. Whatever now ensues is what you yourself have chosen." And the prison charlie creeched out: "Oh, if only I could believe that." And you could viddy the Governor give him a look like meaning that he would not climb so high in like Prison Religion as he thought he would.

Then loud arguing started again, and then I could slooshy the slovo Love being thrown around, the prison charles himself creeching as loud as any about Perfect Love Casteth Out Fear and all that cal. And now Dr. Brodsky said, smiling all over his litso:

"I am glad, gentlemen, this question of Love has been raised. Now we shall see in action a manner of Love that was thought to be dead with the Middle Ages." And then the lights went down and the spotlights came on again, one on your poor and suffering Friend and Narrator, and into the other there like rolled or sidled the most lovely young devotchka you could ever hope in all your jeezny, O my brothers, to viddy. That is to say, she had real horrorshow groodies all of which you could like viddy, she having on platties which came down down down off her pletchoes. And her nogas were like Bog in His Heaven, and she walked like to make you groan in your keeshkas, and yet her litso was a sweet smiling young like innocent litso. She came up towards me with the light like it was the like light of heavenly grace and all that cal coming with her, and the first thing that flashed into my gulliver was that I would like to have her right down there on the floor with the old in-out real savage, but skorry as a shot came the sickness, like a like detective that had been watching round a corner and now followed to make his grahzny arrest. And now the von of lovely perfume that came off her made me want to think of starting to heave in my keeshkas, so I knew I had to think of some new like way of thinking about her before all the pain and thirstiness and horrible sickness come over me real horrorshow and proper. So I creeched out: "O most beautiful and beauteous of devotchkas, I throw like my heart at your feet for you to like trample all over. If I had a rose I would give it to you. If it was all rainy and cally now on the ground you could have my platties to walk on so as not to cover your dainty nogas with filth and cal." And as I was saying all this, O my brothers, I could feel the sickness like slinking back. "Let me," I creeched out, "worship you and be like your helper and protector from the wicked likeworld."

Then I thought of the right slovo and felt better for it, saying:

"Let me be like your true knight," and down I went again on the old knees, bowing and like scraping.

And then I felt real shooty and dim, it having been like an act again, for this devotchka smiled and bowed to the audience and like danced off, the lights coming up to a bit of applause. And the glazzies of some of these starry vecks in the audience were like popping out at this young devotchka with dirty and like unholy desire, O mybrothers.

"He will be your true Christian," Dr. Brodsky was creeching out, "ready to turn the other cheek, ready to be crucified rather than crucify, sick to the very heart at the thought even of killing a fly." And that was right,

brothers, because when he said that I thought of killing a fly and felt just that tiny bit sick, but I pushed the sickness and pain back by thinking of the fly being fed with bits of sugar and looked after like a bleeding pet and all that cal. "Reclamation," he creeched. "Joy before the Angels of God."

"The point is," this Minister of the Inferior was saying real gromky, "that it works."

"Oh," the prison charlie said, like sighing, "it works all right, God help the lot of us."

Part Three

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

That, my brothers, was me asking myself the next morning, standing outside this white building that was like tacked on to the old Staja, in my platties of the night of two years back in the grey light of dawn, with a malenky bit of a bag with my few personal veshches in and a bit of cutter kindly donated by the vonny Authorities to like start me off in my new life.

The rest of the day before had been very tiring, what with interviews to go on tape for the telenews and photographs being took flash flash flash and more like demonstrations of me folding up in the face of ultra-violence and all that embarrassing cal. And then I had like fallen into the bed and then, as it looked to me, been waked up to be told to get off out, to itty off home, they did not want to viddy Your Humble Narrator never not no more, O my brothers. So there I was, very very early in the morning, with just this bit of pretty polly in my left carman, jingle-jangling it and wondering: "What's it going to be then, eh?"

Some breakfast some mesto, I thought, me not having eaten at all that morning, every veck being so anxious to tolchock me off out to freedom. A chasha of chai only I had peeted. This Staja was in a very like gloomy part of the town, but there were malenky workers' caffs all around and I soon found one of these, my brothers. It was very cally and vonny, with one bulb in the ceiling with fly-dirt like obscuring its bit of light, and there were early rabbiters slurping away at chai and horrible-looking sausages and slices of kleb which they like wolfed, going wolf wolf wolf and then creeching for more. They were served by a very cally devotchka but with very bolshy groodies on her, and some of the eating vecks tried to grab her, going haw haw haw while she went he he he, and the sight of them near made me want to sick, brothers.

But I asked for some toast and jam and chai very politely and with my gentleman's goloss, then I sat in a dark corner to eat and peet.

While I was doing this, a malenky little dwarf of a veck ittied in, selling the morning's gazettas, a twisted and grahzny prestoopnick type with thick glasses on with steel rims, his platties like the colour of very starry decaying currant pudding.

I kupetted a gazetta, my idea being to get ready for plunging back into normal jeezny again by viddying what was ittying on in the world. This gazetta I had seemed to be like a Government gazetta, for the only news that was on the front page was about the need for every veck to make sure he put the Government back in again on the next General Election, which seemed to be about two or three weeks off. There were very boastful slovos about what the Government had done, brothers, in the last year or so, what with increased exports and a real horrorshow foreign policy and improved social services and all that cal. But what the Government was really most boastful about was the way in which they reckoned the streets had been made safer for all peace-loving night-walking lewdies in the last six months, what with better pay for the police and the police getting like tougher with young hooligans and perverts and burglars and all that cal. Which interessovatted Your Humble Narrator some deal. And on the second page of the gazetta there was a blurry like photograph of somebody who looked very familiar, and it turned out to be none other than me me me. I looked very gloomy and like scared, but that was really with the flashbulbs going pop pop all the time. What it said undrneath my picture was that here was the first graduate from the new State Institute for Reclamation of Criminal Types, cured of his criminal instincts in a fortnight only, now a good law-fearing citizen and all that cal.

Then I viddied there was a very boastful article about this Ludovico's Technique and how clever the Government was and all that cal. Then there was another picture of some veck I thought I knew, and it was this Minister of the Inferior or Interior. It seemed that he had been doing a bit of boasting, looking forward to a nice crime-free era in which there would be no more fear of cowardly attacks from young hooligans and perverts and burglars and all that cal. So I went arghhhhhh and threw this gazetta on the floor, so that it covered up stains of spilled chai and horrible spat gobs from the cally animals that used thuscaff.

"What's it going to be then, eh?"

What it was going to be now, brothers, was homeways and a nice surprise for dadada and mum, their only son and heir back in the family bosom. Then I could lay back on the bed in my own malenky den and slooshy some lovely music, and at the same time I could think over what to do now with my jeezny. The Discharge Officer had given me a long list the day before of jobs I could try for, and he had telephoned to different vecks about me, but I had no intention, my brothers, of going off to rabbit right away. A malenky bit of a rest first, yes, and a quiet think on the bed to the sound of lovely music.

And so the autobus to Center, and then the autobus to Kingsley Avenue, the flats of Flatblock 18A being just near.

You will believe me, my brothers, when I say that my heart was going clopclopclop with the like excitement. All was very quiet, it still being early winter morning, and when I ittied into

the vestibule of the flatblock there was no veck about, only the nagoy vecks and cheenas of the Dignity of Labour. What surprised me, brothers, was the way that had been cleaned up, there being no longer any dirty ballooning slovos from the rots of the Dignified Labourers, not any dirty parts of the body added to their naked plotts by dirty-minded pencilling malchicks. And what also surprised me was that the lift was working. It came purring down when I pressed the electric knopka, and when I got in I was surprised again to viddy all was clean inside the likecage.

So up I went to the tenth floor, and there I saw 10-8 as it had been before, and my rooker trembled and shook as I took out of my carman the little klootch I had for opening up. But I very firmly fitted the klootch in the lock and turned, then opened up then went in, and there I met three pairs of surprised and almost frightened glazzies looking at me, and it was pee and em having their breakfast, but it was also another veck that I had never viddied in my jeezny before, a bolshy thick veck in his shirt and braces, quite at home, brothers, slurping away at the milky chai and munchmunching at his eggiweg and toast. And it was this stranger veck who spoke first, saying: "Who are you, friend? Where did you get hold of akey?"

Out, before I push your face in. Get out there and knock.

Explain your business, quick."

My dad and mum sat like petrified, and I could viddy they had not yet read the gazetta, then I remembered that the gazetta did not arrive till papapa had gone off to his work. But then mum said: "Oh, you've broken out. You've escaped.

Whatever shall we do? We shall have the police here, oh oh oh. Oh, you bad and wicked boy, disgracing us all likethis."

And, believe it or kiss my sharries, she started to go boo hoo.

So I started to try and explain, they could ring up the Staja if they wanted, and all the time this stranger veck sat there like frowning and looking as if he could push my litso in with his hairy bolshy beefy fist. So I said: "How about you answering a few, brother? What are you doing here and for how long? I didn't like the tone of what you said just then. Watch it. Come on, speak up." He was a working-man type veck, very ugly, about thirty or forty, and he sat now with his rot open at me, not govoreeting one single slovo. Then my dad said: "This is all a bit bewildering, son. You should have let us know you were coming. We thought it would be at least another five or six years before they let you out. Not," he said, and he said it very like gloomy, "that we're not very pleased to see you again and a free man, too."

"Who is this?" I said. "Why can't he speak up? What's going on in here?"

"This is Joe," said my mum. "He lives here now. The lodger, that's what he is. Oh, dear dear dear," she went.

"You," said this Joe. "I've heard all about you, boy. I know what you've done, breaking the hearts of your poor grieving parents. So you're back, eh? Back to make life a misery for them once more, is that it? Over my dead corpse you will, because they've let me be more like a son to them than like a lodger." I could nearly have smacked loud at that if the old razdraz within me hadn't started to wake up the feeling of wanting to sick, because this veck looked about the same age as my pee and em, and there he was like trying to put a son's protecting rooker round my crying mum, O my brothers.

"So," I said, and I near felt like collapsing in all tears myself.

"So that's it, then. Well, I give you five large minootas to clearall your horrible cally veshches out of my room." And I made for this room, this veck being a malenky bit too slow to stop me. When I opened the door my heart cracked to the carpet, because I viddied it was no longer like my room at all, brothers. All my flags had gone off the walls and this veck had put up pictures of boxers, also like a team sitting smug with folded rookers and silver like shield in front. And then I viddied what else was missing. My stereo and my disc-cupboard were no longer there, nor was my locked treasure-chest that contained bottles and drugs and two shining clean syringes.

"There's been some filthy vonny work going on here," I creeched. "What have you done with my own personal veshches, you horrible bastard?" This was to this Joe, but it wasmy dad that answered, saying:"That was all took away, son, by the police. This new regulation, see, about compensation for thevictims."

I found it very hard not to be very ill, but my gulliver was aching shocking and my rot was so dry that I had to take a skorry swig from the milk-bottle on the table, so that this Joe said: "Filthy piggish manners." I said:"But she died. That onedied."

"It was the cats, son," said my dad like sorrowful, "that were left with nobody to look after them till the will was read, so they had to have somebody in to feed them. So the police sold your things, clothes and all, to help with the looking after of them. That's the law, son. But you were never much of a one for following the law."

I had to sit down then, and this Joe said: "Ask permission before you sit, you mannerless young swine," so I cracked back skorry with a "Shut your dirty big fat hole, you," feeling sick. Then I tried to be all reasonable and smiling for my health's sake like, so I said: "Well, that's my room, there's no denying that. This is my home also. What suggestions have you, my pee and em, to make?" But they just looked very glum, my mum shaking a bit, her litso all lines and wet with like tears, and then my dad said:"All this needs thinking about, son. We can't very well just kick Joe out, not just like that, can we? I mean, Joe's here doing a job, a contract it is, two years, and we made like an arrangement, didn't we, Joe? I mean son, thinking you were going to stay in prison a long time and that room going begging." He was a bit ashamed, you could viddy that from his litso. So I just smiled and like nodded, saying:"I viddy all. You got used to a bit of peace and you got used to a bit of extra pretty polly. That's the way itgoes.

And your son has just been nothing but a terrible nuisance."

And then, my brothers, believe me or kiss my sharries, I started to like cry, feeling very like sorry for myself. So my dad said:"Well, you see, son, Joe's paid next month's rent already. I mean, whatever we do in the future we can't say to Joe to get out, can we, Joe?" This Joe said:"It's you two I've got to think of, who've been like a father and mother to me. Would it be right or fair to go off and leave you to the tender mercies of this young monster who has been like no real son at all? He's weeping now, but that's his craft and artfulness. Let him go off and find a room somewhere. Let him learn the error of his ways and that a bad boy like he's been doesn't deserve such a good mum and dad as what he's had."

"All right," I said, standing up in all like tears still. "I knowhow things are now. Nobody wants or loves me. I've suffered and suffered and suffered and everybody wants me to go on suffering. I know."

"You've made others suffer," said this Joe. "It's only right you should suffer proper. I've been told everything that you've done, sitting here at night round the family table, and pretty shocking it was to listen to. Made me real sick a lot of it did."

"I wish," I said, "I was back in the prison. Dear old Staja as it was. I'm ittying off now," I said. "You won't ever viddy me no more. I'll make my own way, thank you very much. Let it lie heavy on your consciences." My dadsaid:

"Don't take it like that, son," and my mum just went boo hoo hoo, her litso all screwed up real ugly, and this Joe put his rooker round her again, patting her and going there there there like bezoomny. And so I just sort of staggered to the door and went out, leaving them to their horrible guilt, O my brothers.

Ittying down the street in a like aimless sort of a way brothers, in these night platties which lewdies like stared at as I went by, cold too, it being a bastard cold winter day, all I felt I wanted was to be away from all this and not have to think any more about any sort of veshch at all. So I got the autobus to Center, then walked back to Taylor Place, and there was the disc-bootick 'MELODIA' - I had used to favour with my inestimable custom, O my brothers, and it looked much the same sort of mesto as it always had, and walking in I expected to viddy old Andy there, that bald and very very thin helpful little veck from whom I had kupetted discs in the old days. But there was no Andy there now, brothers, only a scream and a creech of nadsat (teenage, that is) malchicks and ptitsas slooshying some new horrible popsong and dancing to it as well, and the veck behind the counter not much more than a nadsat himself, clicking his rooker-bones and smeking like bezoomny. So I went up and waited till he like deigned to notice me, then I said: "I'd like to hear a disc of the Mozart Number Forty." I don't know why that should have come into my gulliver, but it did.

The counter-veck said: "Forty what, friend?"

I said: "Symphony. Symphony Number Forty in G Minor."

"Ooooh," went one of the dancing nadsats, a malchick with his hair all over his glazzies, "seemfunnah. Don't it seem funny? He wants aseemfunnah."

I could feel myself growing all razdraz within, but I had to watch that, so I like smiled at the veck who had taken over Andy's place and at all the dancing and creeching nadsats. This counter-veck said: "You go into that listen-booth over there, friend, and I'll pipe something through."

So I went over to the malenky box where you could slooshy the discs you wanted to buy, and then this veck put a disc on for me, but it wasn't the Mozart Forty, it was the Mozart 'Prague' - he seemingly having just picked up any Mozart he could find on the shelf - and that should have started making me real razdraz and I had to watch that for fear of the pain and sickness, but what I'd forgotten was something I shouldn't have forgotten and now made me want to snuff it.

It was that these doctor bratchnies had so fixed things that any music that was like for the emotions would make me sick just like viddying or wanting to do violence. It was because all those violence films had music with them. And I remembered especially that horrible Nazi film with the Beethoven Fifth, last movement. And now here was lovely Mozart made horrible. I dashed out of the shop with these nadsats smeking after me and the counter-veck creeching: "Eh eh eh!" But I took no notice and went staggering almost like blind across the road and round the corner to the Korova Milkbar. I knew what I wanted.

The mesto was near empty, it being still morning. It looked strange too, having been painted with all red mooing cows, and behind the counter was no veck I knew. But when I said:

"Milk plus, large," the veck with a like lean litso very newly shaved knew what I wanted. I took the large moloko plus to one of the little cubies that were all around this mesto, there being like curtains to shut them off from the main mesto, and there I sat down in the plushy chair and sipped and sipped.

When I'd finished the whole lot I began to feel that things were happening. I had my glazzies like fixed on a malenky bit of silver paper from a cancer packet that was on the floor, the sweeping-up of this mesto not being all that horrorshow, brothers. This scrap of silver began to grow and grow and grow and it was so like bright and fiery that I had to squint my glazzies at it. It got so big that it became not only this whole cubie I

was lolling in but like the whole Korova, the whole street, the whole city. Then it was the whole world, then it was the whole everything, brothers, and it was like a sea washing over every veshch that had ever been made or thought of even. I could sort of slooshy myself making special sort of shooms and govoreeting slovos like 'Dear dead idlewilds, rot not in variform guises' and all that cal.

Then I could like feel the vision beating up in all this silver, and then there were colours like nobody had ever viddied before, and then I could viddy like a group of statues a long long long way off that was like being pushed nearer and nearer and nearer, all lit up by very bright light from below and above alike, O my brothers. This group of statues was of God or Bog and all His Holy Angels and Saints, all very bright like bronze, with beards and bolshy great wings that waved about in a kind of wind, so that they could not really be of stone or bronze, really, and the eyes or glazzies like moved and were alive. These bolshy big figures came nearer and nearer and nearer till they were like going to crush me down, and I could slooshy my goloss going 'Eeeeeee'. And I felt I had got rid of everything - platties, body, brain, name, the lot-

and felt real horrorshow, like in heaven. Then there was the shoom of like crumbling and crumpling, and Bog and the Angels and Saints sort of shook their gullivers at me, as though to govoreet that there wasn't quite time now but I must try again, and then everything like leered and smecked and collapsed and the big warm light grew like cold, and then there I was as I wasbefore, the empty glass on the table and wanting to cry and feeling like death was the only answer to everything.

And that was it, that was what I viddied quite clear was the thing to do, but how to do it I did not properly know, never having thought of that before, O my brothers. In my little bag of personal veshches I had my cut-throat britva, but I at once felt very sick as I thought of myself going swishhhh at myself and all my own red red krovvy flowing. What I wanted was not something violent but something that would make me like just go off gentle to sleep and that be the end of Your Humble Narrator, no more trouble to anybody any more.

Perhaps, i thought, if I ittied off to the Public Biblio around the corner I might find some book on the best way of snuffing it with no pain. I thought of myself dead and how sorry everybody was going to be, pee and em and that cally vonny Joe who was a like usurper, and also Dr. Brodsky and Dr. Branom and that Inferior Interior Minister and every veck else. And the boastful vonny Government too. So out I scatted into the winter, and it was afternoon now, near two o'clock, as I could viddy from the bolshy Center timepiece, so that me being in the land with the old moloko plus must have took like longer than I thought. I walked down Marghanita Boulevard and then turned into Boothby Avenue, then round the corner again, and there was the PublicBiblio.

It was a starry cally sort of a mesto that I could not remember going into since I was a very very malenky malchick, no more than about six years old, and there were two parts of it - one part to borrow books and one part to read in, full of gazettas and mags and like the von of very starry old men with their plotts stinking of like old age and poverty. These were standing at the gazetta stands all round the room, sniffing and belching and govoreeting to themselves and turning over the pages to read the news very sadly, or else they were sitting at the tables looking at the mags or pretending to, some of them asleep and one or two of them snoring real gromky. I couldn't remember what it was I wanted at first, then I remembered with a bit of a shock that I had ittied here to find out how to snuff it without pain, so I goolied over to the shelf full of reference veshches. There were a lot of books, but there was none with a title, brothers, that would really do. There was a medical book that I took down, but when I opened it it was full of drawings and photographs of horrible wounds and diseases, and that made me want to sick just a bit. So I put that back and took down the big book or Bible, as it was called, thinking that might give me like comfort as it had done in the old Staja days (not so old really, but it seemed a very very long time ago), and I staggered over to a chair to read in it. But all I found was about smiting seventy times seven and a lot of Jews cursing and tolchocking each other, and that made me want to sick, too. So then I near cried, so that a very starry ragged moodge opposite mesaid:

"What is it, son? What's the trouble?"

"I want to snuff it," I said. "I've had it, that's what it is.

Life'sbecome too much for me."

A starry reading veck next to me said: "Shhhh," without looking up from some bezoomny mag he had full of drawings of like bolshy geometrical veshches. That rang a bell somehow. This other moodge said: "You're too young for that, son. Why, you've got everything in front of you."

"Yes," I said, bitter. "Like a pair of false groodies." This mag-reading veck said: "Shhhh" again, looking up this time, and something clocked for both of us. I viddied who it was. He said, real gromky: "I never forget a shape, by God. I never forget the shape of anything. By God, you young swine, I've got you now." Crystallography, that was it. That was what he'd been taking away from the Biblio that time. False teeth crunched up real horrorshow. Platties torn off. His books razrezzed, all about Crystallography. I thought I had best get out of here real skorry, brothers. But this starry old moodge was on his feet, creeching like bezoomny to all the starry old coughers at the gazettas round the walls and to them dozing over mags at the tables. "We have him," he creeched. "The poisonous young swine who ruined the books on Crystallography, rare books, books not to be obtained ever again, anywhere." This had a terrible mad shoom about it, as though this old veck was really off his gulliver. "A prize specimen of the cowardly brutalyoung," he creeched. "Here in our midst and at our mercy. He and his friends beat me and kicked me and thumped me. They stripped me and tore out my teeth. They laughed at my blood and my moans. They kicked me off home, dazed and naked."

All this wasn't quite true, as you know, brothers. He had some platties on, he hadn't been completely nagoy.

I creeched back: "That was over two years ago. I've been punished since then. I've learned my lesson. See over there my picture's in the papers."

"Punishment, eh?" said one starry like ex-soldier type. "You lot should be exterminated. Like so many noisome pests. Punishment indeed."

"All right, all right," I said. "Everybody's entitled to his opinion. Forgive me, all. I must go now." And I started to ittyout of this mesto of bezoomny old men. Aspirin, that was it.

You could snuff it on a hundred aspirin. Aspirin from the old drugstore. But the crystallography veck creeched: "Don't let him go. We'll teach him all about punishment, the murderous young pig. Get him." And, believe it, brothers, or do the other veshch, two or three starry dodderers, about ninety years old apiece, grabbed me with their trembly old rookers, and I was like made sick by the von of old age and disease which came from these near-dead moodges. The crystal veck was on to me now, starting to deal me malenky weak tolchocks on my litso, and I tried to get away and itty out, but these starry rookers that held me were stronger than I had thought. Then other starry vecks came hobbling from the gazettas to have a go at Your Humble Narrator. They were creeching veshches like: "Kill him, stamp on him, murder him, kick his teeth in," and all that cal, and I could viddy what it was clear enough. It was old age having a go at youth, that's what it was. But some of them were saying: "Poor old Jack, near killed poor old Jack he did, this is the young swine" and so on, as though it had all happened yesterday. Which to them I suppose it had. There was now like a sea of vonny runny dirty old men trying to get at me with their like feeble rookers and horny old claws, creeching and panting on to me, but our crystal droog was there in front, dealing out tolchock after tolchock. And I daren't do a solitary single veshch, O my brothers, it being better to be hit at like that than to want to sick and feel that horrible pain, but of course the fact that there was violence going on made me feel that the sickness was peeping round the corner to viddy whether to come out into the open and roaraway.

Then an attendant veck came along, a youngish veck, and he creeched: "What goes on here? Stop it at once. This is a reading room." But nobody took any notice. So the attendant veck said: "Right, I shall phone the police." So I creeched, and I never thought I would ever do that in all my jeezny: "Yes yes yes, do that, protect me from these old madmen." I noticed that the attendant veck was not too anxious to join in the dratsing and rescue me from the rage and madness of these starry vecks' claws; he just scatted off to his like office or wherever the telephone was. Now these old men were panting a lot now, and I felt I could just flick at them and they would all fall over, but I just let myself be held, very patient, by these starry rookers, my glazzies closed, and feel the feeble tolchocks on my litso, also slooshy the panting breathy old golosses creeching: "Young swine, young murderer, hooligan, thug, kill him." Then I got such a real painful tolchock on the nose that I said to myself to hell to hell, and I opened my glazzies up and started to struggle to get free, which was

not hard, brothers, and I tore off creeching to the sort of hallway outside the reading-room. But these starry avengers still came after me, panting like dying, with their animal claws all trembling to get at your friend and Humble Narrator. Then I was tripped up and was on the floor and was being kicked at, then I slooshied golosses of young vecks creeching: "All right, all right, stop it now," and I knew the police had arrived.

I was like dazed, O my brothers, and could not viddy very clear, but I was sure I had met these millicents some mesto before. The one who had hold of me, going: "There there there," just by the front door of the Public Biblio, him I did not know at all, but it seemed to me he was like very young to be a rozz. But the other two had backs that I was sure I had viddied before. They were lashing into these starry old vecks with great bolshy glee and joy, swishing away with malenky whips, creeching: "There, you naughty boys. That should teach you to stop rioting and breaking the State's Peace, you wicked villains, you." So they drove these panting and wheez-ing and near dying starry avengers back into the reading-room, then they turned round, smecking with the fun they'd had, to viddy me. The older one of the two said: "Well well well well well well well. If it isn't little Alex.

Verylong time no viddy, droog. How goes?" I was like dazed, the uniform and the shlem or helmet making it hard to viddy who this was, though litso and goloss were very familiar. Then I looked at the other one, and about him, with his grinning bezoomny litso, there was no doubt. Then, all numb and growing number, I looked back at the well well welling one.

This one was then fatty old Billyboy, my old enemy. The other was, of course, Dim, who had used to be my droog and also the enemy of stinking fatty goaty Billyboy, but was now a millicent with uniform and shlem and whip to keep order. I said: "Oh no."

"Surprise, eh?" And old Dim came out with the old guff I remembered so horrorshow: "Huh huh huh."

"It's impossible," I said. "It can't be so. I don't believe it."

"Evidence of the old glazzies," grinned Billyboy. "Nothing up our sleeves. No magic, droog. A job for two who are now of job-age. The police."

"You're too young," I said. "Much too young. They don't make rozzes of malchicks of your age."

"Was young," went old millicent Dim. I could not get over it, brothers, I really could not. "That's what we was, young droogie. And you it was that was always the youngest. And here now weare."

"I still can't believe it," I said. Then Billyboy, rozz Billyboy that I couldn't get over, said to this young millicent that was like holding on to me and that I did not know:

"More good would be done, I think, Rex, if we doled out a bit of the old summary. Boys will be boys, as always was. No need to go through the old station routine. This one here has been up to his old tricks, as we can well remember though you, of course, can't. He has been attacking the aged and defenceless, and they have properly been retaliating. But we must have our say in the State's name."

"What is all this?" I said, not able hardly to believe my ookos. "It was them that went for me, brothers. You're not on their side and can't be. You can't be, Dim. It was a veck we fillied with once in the old days trying to get his own malenky bit of revenge after all this long time."

"Long time is right," said Dim. "I don't remember them days too horrorshow. Don't call me Dim no more, either. Officer call me."

"Enough is remembered, though," Billyboy kept nodding.

He was not so fatty as he had been. "Naughty little malchicks handy with cut-throat britvas - these must be kept under."

And they took me in a real strong grip and like walked me out of the Biblio. There was a millicent patrol-car waiting outside, and this veck they called Rex was the driver. They like tolchoked me into the back of this auto, and I couldn't help feeling it was all really like a joke, and that Dim anyway would pull his shlem off his gulliver and go haw haw haw. But he didn't. I said, trying to fight the strack inside me:

"And old Pete, what happened to old Pete? It was sad about Georgie," I said. "I slooshied all about that."

"Pete, oh yes, Pete," said Dim. "I seem to remember like the name." I could viddy we were driving out of town. I said:

"Where are we supposed to be going?"

Billyboy turned round from the front to say: "It's light still.

A little drive into the country, all winter-bare but lonely and lovely. It is not right, not always, for lewdies in the town to viddy too much of our summary punishments. Streets must be kept clean in more than one way." And he turned to the front again.

"Come," I said. "I just don't get this at all. The old days are dead and gone days. For what I did in the past I have been punished. I have been cured."

"That was read out to us," said Dim. "The Super read all that out to us. He said it was a very good way."

"Read to you," I said, a malenky bit nasty. "You still too dim to read for yourself, O brother?"

"Ah, no," said Dim, very like gentle and like regretful. "Not to speak like that. Not no more, droogie." And he launched a bolshy tolchock right on my cluve, so that all red red nose-krovvy started to drip drip drip.

"There was never any trust," I said, bitter, wiping off the krovvy with my rooker. "I was always on my oddy knocky."

"This will do," said Billyboy. We were now in the country and it was all bare trees and a few odd distant like twitters, and in the distance there was some like farm machine making a whirring shoom. It was getting all dusk now, this being the height of winter. There were no lewdies about, nor no animals. There was just the four. "Get out, Alex boy," said Dim. "Just a malenky bit of summary."

All through what they did this driver veck just sat at the wheel of the auto, smoking a cancer, reading a malenky bit of a book. He had the light on in the auto to viddy by. He took no notice of what Billyboy and Dim did to your Humble Narrator. I will not go into what they did, but it was all like panting and thudding against this like background of whirring farm engines and the twittwitttwittering in the bare or nagoy branches. You could viddy a bit of smoky breath in the auto light, this driver turning the pages over quite calm. And they were on to me all the time, O my brothers. Then Billyboy or Dim, I couldn't say which one, said: "About enough, droogie. I should think, shouldn't you?" Then they gave me one final tolchock on the litso each and I fell over and just laid there on the grass. It was cold but I was not feeling the cold. Then they dusted their rookers and put back on their shlems and tunics which they had taken off, and then they got back into the auto. "Be viddying you some more sometime, Alex," said Billyboy, and Dim just gave one of his old clowny guffs. The driver finished the page he was reading and put his book away, then he started the auto and they were off townwards, my ex-droog and ex-enemywaving.

But I just laid there, fagged and shagged.

After a bit I was hurting bad, and then the rain started, all icy. I could viddy no lewdies in sight, nor no lights of houses. Where was I to go, who had no home and not much cutter in my carmans? I cried for myself boo hoo hoo. Then I got up and started walking.

Home, home, home, it was home I was wanting, and it was HOME I came to, brothers. I walked through the dark and followed not the town way but the way where the shoom of a like farm machine had been coming from. This brought me to a sort of village I felt I had viddied before, but was perhaps because all villages look the same, in the dark especially. Here were houses and there was a like drinking mesto, and right at the end of the village there was a malenky cottage on its oddy knocky, and I could viddy its name shining on the gate.

HOME, it said. I was all dripping wet with this icy rain, so that my platties were no longer in the heighth of fashion but real miserable and like pathetic, and my luscious glory was a wet tangle cally mess all spread over my gulliver, and I was sure there were cuts and bruises all over my litso, and a couple of my zoobies sort of joggled loose when I touched them with my tongue or yahzick. And I was sore all over my plott and very thirsty, so that I kept opening my rot to the cold rain, and my stomach growled grrrrr all the time with not having had any pishcha since morning and then not very much, O my brothers.

HOME, it said, and perhaps here would be some veck to help. I opened the gate and sort of slithered down the path, the rain like turning to ice, and then I knocked gentle and pathetic on the door. No veck came, so I knocked a malenky bit longer and louder, and then I heard the shoom of nogas coming to the door. Then the door opened and a male goloss said: "Yes, what is it?"

"Oh," I said, "please help. I've been beaten up by the police and just left to die on the road. Oh, please give me a drink of something and a sit by the fire, please, sir."

The door opened full then, and I could viddy like warm light and a fire going crackle crackle within. "Come in," said this veck, "whoever you are. God help you, you poor victim, come in and let's have a look at you." So I like staggered in, and it was no big act I was putting on, brothers, I really felt done and finished. This kind veck put his rookers round my pletchoes and pulled me into this room where the fire was, and of course I knew right away now where it was and why HOME on the gate looked so familiar. I looked at this veck and he looked at me in a kind sort of way, and I remembered him well now. Of course he would not remember me, for in those carefree days I and my so-called droogs did all our bolshy dratsing and fillying and crasting in maskies which were real horrorshow disguises. He was a shortish veck in middle age, thirty, forty, fifty, and he had otchkies on. "Sit down by the fire," he said, "and I'll get you some whisky and warm water. Dear dear dear, somebody has been beating youup."

And he gave a like tender look at my gulliver and litso.

"The police," I said. "The horrible ghastly police."

"Another victim," he said, like sighing. "A victim of the modern age. I'll go and get you that whisky and then I must clean up your wounds a little." And off he went. I had a look round this malenky comfortable room. It was nearly all books now and a fire and a couple of chairs, and you could viddy somehow that there wasn't a woman living there. On the table was a typewriter and a lot of like tumbled papers, and I remembered that this veck was a writer veck. 'A Clockwork Orange', that had been it. It was funny that that stuck in my mind. I must not let on, though, for I needed help and kindness now. Those horrible grahzny bratchnies in that terrible white mesto had done that to me, making me need help and kindness now and forcing me to want to give help and kindness myself, if anybody would takeit.

"Here we are, then," said this veck returning. He gave me this hot stimulating glassful to peet, and it made me feel better, and then he cleaned up these cuts on my litso. Then he said: "You have a nice hot bath, I'll draw it for you, and then you can tell me all about it over a nice hot supper which I'll get ready while you're having the bath." O my brothers, I could have wept at his kindness, and I think he must have viddied the old tears in my glazzies, for he said: "There there there," patting me on thepletcho.

Anyway, I went up and had this hot bath, and he brought in pyjamas and an over-gown for me to put on, all warmed by the fire, also a very worn pair of toofles. And now, brothers, though I was aching and full of pains all over, I felt I would soon feel a lot better. I ittied downstairs and viddied that in the kitchen he had set the table with knives and forks and a fine big loaf of kleb, also a bottle of PRIMA SAUCE, and soon he served out a nice fry of eggiwegs and lomticks of ham and bursting sausages and big bolshy mugs of hot sweet milky chai. It was nice sitting there in the warm, eating, and I found I was very hungry, so that after the fry I had to eat lomtick after lomtick of kleb and butter spread with strawberry jam out of a bolshy great pot. "A lot better," I said. "Howcan I everrepay?"

"I think I know who you are," he said. "If you are who I think you are, then you've come, my friend, to the right place.

Wasn't that your picture in the papers this morning? Are you the poor victim of this horrible new technique? If so, then you have been sent here by Providence. Tortured in prison, then thrown out to be tortured by the police. My heart goes out to you, poor poor boy." Brothers, I could not get a slovo in, though I had my rot wide open to answer hisquestions.

"You are not the first to come here in distress," he said. "The police are fond of bringing their victims to the outskirts of this village. But it is providential that you, who are also another kind of victim, should come here. Perhaps, then, you have heard of me?"

I had to be very careful, brothers. I said: "I have heard of 'A Clockwork Orange'. I have not read it, but I have heard of it."

"Ah," he said, and his litso shone like the sun in its flaming morning glory. "Now tell me about yourself."

"Little enough to tell, sir," I said, all humble. "There was a foolish and boyish prank, my so-called friends persuading or rather forcing me to break into the house of an old pitisalady, I mean. There was no real harm meant. Unfortunately the lady strained her good old heart in trying to throw me out, though I was quite ready to go of my own accord, and then she died. I was accused of being the cause of her death.

So I was sent to prison, sir."

"Yes yes yes, go on."

"Then I was picked out by the Minister of the Inferior or Interior to have this Ludovico's veshch tried out on me."

"Tell me all about it," he said, leaning forward eager, his pullover elbows with all strawberry jam on them from the plate I'd pushed to one side. So I told him all about it. I told him the lot, all, my brothers. He was very eager to hear all, his glazies like shining and his goobers apart, while the grease on the plates grew harder harder harder. When I had finished he got up from the table, nodding a lot and going hm hm hm, picking up the plates and other veshches from the table and taking them to the sink for washing up. I said: "I will do that, sir, and gladly."

"Rest, rest, poor lad," he said, turning the tap on so that all steam came burping out. "You've sinned, I suppose, but your punishment has been out of all proportion. They have turned you into something other than a human being. You have no power of choice any longer. You are committed to socially acceptable acts, a little machine capable only of good. And I see that clearly - that business about the marginal condition-ings. Music and the sexual act, literature and art, all must be a source now not of pleasure but of pain."

"That's right, sir," I said, smoking one of this kind man's cork-tipped cancers.

"They always bite off too much," he said, drying a plate like absent-mindedly. "But the essential intention is the real sin. A man who cannot choose ceases to be a man."

"That's what the Charles said, sir," I said. "The prison chaplain, I mean."

"Did he, did he? Of course he did. He'd have to, wouldn't he, being a Christian? Well, now then," he said, still wiping the same plate he'd been wiping ten minutes ago, "we shall have a few people in to see you tomorrow. I think you can be used, poor boy. I think that you can help dislodge this overbearing Government. To turn a decent young man into a piece of clockwork should not, surely, be seen as any triumph for any government, save one that boasts of its repressiveness." He was still wiping this same plate. I said:

"Sir, you're still wiping that same plate, I agree with you, sir, about boasting. This Government seems to be very boastful."

"Oh," he said, like viddying this plate for the first time and then putting it down. "I'm still not too handy," he said, "with domestic chores. My wife used to do them all and leave me to my writing."

"Your wife, sir?" I said. "Has she gone and left you?" I really wanted to know about his wife, remembering very well.

"Yes, left me," he said, in a like loud and bitter goloss. "She died, you see. She was brutally raped and beaten. The shock was very great. It was in this house," his rookers were trembling, holding a wiping-up cloth, "in that room next door. I have had to steel myself to continue to live here, but she would have wished me to stay where her fragrant memory still lingers. Yes yes yes. Poor little girl." I viddied all clearly, my brothers, what had happened that far-off nochy, and viddying myself on that job, I began to feel I wanted to sick and the pain started up in my gulliver. This veck viddied this, because my litso felt it was all drained of redred krovvy,

very pale, and he would be able to viddy this. "You go to bed now," he said kindly. "I've got the spare room ready. Poor poor boy, you must have had a terrible time. A victim of the modern age, just as she was. Poor poor poor girl."

I had a real horrorshow night's sleep, brothers, with no dreams at all, and the morning was very clear and like frosty, and there was the very pleasant like von of breakfast frying away down below. It took me some little time to remember where I was, as it always does, but it soon came back to me and then I felt like warmed and protected. But, as I laid there in the bed, waiting to be called down to breakfast, it struck me that I ought to get to know the name of this kind protecting and like motherly veck, so I had a pad round in my nagoy nogas looking for 'A Clockwork Orange', which would be bound to have his eemya in, he being the author. There was nothing in my bedroom except a bed and a chair and a light, so I ittied next door to this veck's own room, and there I viddied his wife on the wall, a bolshy blown-up photo, so I felt a malenky bit sick remembering. But there were two or three shelves of books there too, and there was, as I thought there must be, a copy of 'A Clockwork Orange', and on the back of the book, like on the spine, was the author's eemya -F. Alexander. Good Bog, I thought, he is another Alex. Then I leafed through, standing in his pyjamas and bare nogas but not feeling one malenky bit cold, the cottage being warm all through, and I could not viddy what the book was about. It seemed written in a very bezoomny like style, full of Ah and Oh and all that cal, but what seemed to come out of it was that all lewdies nowadays were being turned into machines and that they were really - you and me and him and kiss-my-sharries - more like a natural growth like a fruit. F. Alexander seemed to think that we all like grow on what he called the world-tree in the world-orchard that like Bog or God planted, and we were there because Bog or God had need of us to quench his thirsty love, or some such cal. I didn't like the shoom of this at all, O my brothers, and wondered how bezoomny this F. Alexander really was, perhaps driven bezoomny by his wife's snuffing it. But then he called me down in a like sane veck's goloss, full of joy and love and all that cal, so down Your Humble Narratorwent.

"You've slept long," he said, ladling out boiled eggs and pulling black toast from under the grill. "It's nearly ten already. I've been up hours, working."

"Writing another book, sir?" I said.

"No no, not that now," he said, and we sat down nice and droogy to the old crack crack crack of eggs and crackle crunch crunch of this black toast, very milky chai standing by in bolshy great morning mugs. "No, I've been on the phone to various people."

"I thought you didn't have a phone," I said, spooning egg in and not watching out what I was saying.

"Why?" he said, very alert like some skorry animal with an egg-spoon in its rooker. "Why shouldn't you think I have a phone?"

"Nothing," I said, "nothing, nothing." And I wondered, brothers, how much he remembered of the earlier part of that distant nochy, me coming to the door with the old tale and saying to phone the doctor and she saying no phone. He took a very close smot at me but then went back to being like kind and cheerful and spooning up the old eggiweg. Munching away, he said:

"Yes, I've rung up various people who will be interested in your case. You can be a very potent weapon, you see, in en-suring that this present evil and wicked Government is not returned in the forthcoming election. The Government's big boast, you see, is the way it has dealt with crime these last months." He looked at me very close again over his steaming egg, and I wondered again if he was viddying what part I had so far played in his jeezny. But he said: "Recruiting brutal young roughs for the police. Proposing debilitating and will-sapping techniques of conditioning." All these long slovos, brothers, and a like mad or bezoomny look in his glazzies. "We've seen it all before," he said, "in other countries. The thin end of the knowledge. Before we know where we are we shall have the full apparatus of totalitarianism." "Dear dear dear," I thought, egging away and toast-crunching. I said: "Where do I come into all this, sir?"

"You," he said, still with this bezoomny look, "are a living witness to these diabolical proposals. The people, the common people must know, must see." He got up from his breakfast and started to walk up and down the kitchen, from the sink to the like larder, saying very gromky: "Would they like their sons to become what you,

poor victim, have become? Will not the Government itself now decide what is and what is not crime and pump out the life and guts and will of whoever sees fit to displease the Government? He became quieter but did not go back to his egg. "I've written an article," he said, "this morning, while you were sleeping. That will be out in a day or so, together with your unhappy picture. You shall sign it, poor boy, a record of what they have done to you." I said: "And what do you get out of all this, sir? I mean, besides the pretty polly you'll get for the article, as you call it? I mean, why are you so hot and strong against this Government, if I may make like so bold as to ask?"

He gripped the edge of the table and said, gritting his zoobies, which were very cally and all stained with cancer-smoke: "Some of us have to fight. There are great traditions of liberty to defend. I am no partisan man. Where I see the infamy I seek to erase it. Party names mean nothing. The tradition of liberty means all. The common people will let it go, oh yes. They will sell liberty for a quieter life. That is why they must be prodded, prodded - " And here, brothers, he picked up a fork and stuck it two or three razzes into the wall, so that it got all bent. Then he threw it on the floor. Very kindly he said: "Eat well, poor boy, poor victim of the modern world," and I could viddy quite clear he was going off his gulliver. "Eat, eat. Eat my egg as well." But I said: "And what do I get out of this? Do I get cured of the way I am? Do I find myself able to slooshy the old Choral Symphony without being sick once more? Can I live like a normal jeezny again? What, sir, happens to me?"

He looked at me, brothers, as if he hadn't thought of that before and, anyway, it didn't matter compared with Liberty and all that cal, and he had a look of surprise at me saying what I said, as though I was being like selfish in wanting something for myself. Then he said: "Oh, as I say, you're a living witness, poor boy. Eat up all your breakfast and then come and see what I've written, for it's going into 'The Weekly Trumpet' under your name, you unfortunate victim."

Well, brothers, what he had written was a very long and very weepy piece of writing, and as I read it I felt very sorry for the poor malchick who was govoreeting about his sufferings and how the Government had sapped his will and how it was up to all lewdies to not let such a rotten and evil Government rule them again, and then of course I realized that the poor suffering malchick was none other than Y. H.N.

"Very good," I said. "Real horrorshow. Written well thou hast, O sir." And then he looked at me very narrow and said: "What?" It was like he had not slooshied me before.

"Oh, that," I said, "is what we call nadsat talk. All the teens use that, sir." So then he itted off to the kitchen to wash up the dishes, and I was left in these borrowed night platties and toofles, waiting to have done to me what was going to be done to me, because I had no plans for myself, O my brothers.

While the great F. Alexander was in the kitchen a ding-alingaling came at the door. "Ah," he creeched, coming out wiping his rookers, "it will be these people. I'll go." So he went and let them in, a kind of rumbling hahaha of talk and hallo and filthy weather and how are things in the hallway, then they itted into the room with the fire and the book and the article about how I had suffered, viddying me and going Aaaaah as they did it. There were three lewdies, and F. Alex gave me their eemyas. Z.Dolin was a very wheezy smoky kind of a veck, coughing kashl kashl kashl with the end of a cancer in his rot, spilling ash all down his platties and then brushing it away with like very impatient rookers. He was a malenky round veck, fat, with big thick-framed otchkies on. Then there was Something Something Rubinstein, a very tall and polite chelloveck with a real gentleman's goloss, very starry with a like eggy beard. And lastly there was D. B. da Silva who was like skorry in his movements and had this strong von of scent coming from him. They all had a real horrorshow look at me and seemed like overjoyed with what they viddied. Z. Dolin said: "All right, all right, eh? What a superb device he can be, this boy. If anything, of course, he could for preference look even iller and more zomyish than he does. Anything for the cause.

No doubt we can think of something."

I did not like that crack about zomyish, brothers, and so I said: "What goes on, bratties? What dost thou in mind for thy little droog have?" And the F. Alexander swooshed in with:

"Strange, strange, that manner of voice pricks me. We've come into contact before, I'm sure we have." And he brooded, like frowning. I would have to watch this, O my brothers.

D. B. da Silva said: "Public meetings, mainly. To exhibit you at public meetings will be a tremendous help. And, of course, the newspaper angle is all tied up. A ruined life is the approach. We must inflame all hearts." He showed his thirty-odd zoobies, very white against his dark-coloured litso, he looking a malenky bit like some foreigner. I said:

"Nobody will tell me what I get out of all this. Tortured in jail, thrown out of my home by my own parents and their filthy overbearing lodger, beaten by old men and near-killed by the millicents - what is to become of me?" The Rubinstein veck came inwith:

"You will see, boy, that the Party will not be ungrateful. Oh, no. At the end of it all there will be some very acceptable littlesurprise for you. Just you wait and see."

"There's only one veshch I require," I creeched out, "and that's to be normal and healthy as I was in the starry days, having my malenky bit of fun with real droogs and not those who just call themselves that and are really more like traitors.

Can you do that, eh? Can any veck restore me to what I was?

That's what I want and that's what I want to know."

Kashl kashl kashl, coughed this Z. Dolin. "A martyr to the cause of Liberty," he said. "You have your part to play and don't forget it. Meanwhile, we shall look after you." And he began to stroke my left rooker as if I was like an idiot, grinning in a bezoomny way. I creeched: "Stop treating me like a thing that's like got to be just used. I'm not an idiot you can impose on, you stupid bratchnies. Ordinary prestoopnicks are stupid, but I'm not ordinary and nor am I dim. Do youslooshy?"

"Dim," said F. Alexander, like musing. "Dim. That was a name somewhere. Dim."

"Eh?" I said. "What's Dim got to do with it? What do you know about Dim?" And then I said: "Oh, Bog help us." I didn't like the look in F. Alexander's glazzies. I made for the door, wanting to go upstairs and get my platties and then itty off.

"I could almost believe," said F. Alexander, showing his stained zoobies, his glazzies mad. "But such things are impossible. For, by Christ, if he were I'd tear him. I'd split him, by

God, yes yes, so I would."

"There," said D. B. da Silva, stroking his chest like he was a doggie to calm him down. "It's all in the past. It was other people altogether. We must help this poor victim. That's what we must do now, remembering the Future and our Cause."

"I'll just get my platties," I said, at the stair-foot, "that is tosay clothes, and then I'll be ittying off all on my oddy knocky. I mean, my gratitude for all, but I have my own jeezny to live."

Because, brothers, I wanted to get out of here real skorry. But Z. Dolin said:

"Ah, no. We have you, friend, and we keep you. You come with us. Everything will be all right, you'll see." And he came up to me like to grab hold of my rooker again. Then, brothers, I thought of fight, but thinking of fight made me like want to collapse and sick, so I just stood. And then I saw this like madness in F. Alexander's glazzies and said:

"Whatever you say. I am in your rookers. But let's get it started and all over, brothers." Because what I wanted now was to get out of this mesto called HOME. I was beginning not to like the look of the glazzies of F. Alexander one malenky bit.

"Good," said this Rubinstein. "Get dressed and let's get started."

"Dim dim dim," F. Alexander kept saying in a like low mutter. "What or who was this Dim?" I ittied upstairs real skorry and dressed in near two seconds flat. Then I was out with these three and into an auto, Rubinstein one side of me and Z. Dolin coughing kashl kashl kashl the other side. D. B. da Silva doing the driving, into the town and to a flatblock not really all that distant from what had used to be my own flatblock or home.

"Come, boy, out," said Z. Dolin, coughing to make the cancer-end in his rot glow red like some malenky furnace. "This is where you shall be installed." So we ittied in, and there was like another of these Dignity of Labour veshches on the wall of the vestibule, and we upped in the lift, brothers, and then went into a flat like all the flats of all the flatblocks of the town. Very very malenky, with two bedrooms and one live-eat-work-room, the table of this all covered with books and papers and ink and bottles and all that cal. "Here is your new home," said D. B. da Silva. "Settle here, boy. Food is in the food-cupboard. Pyjamas are in a drawer. Rest, rest, perturbedspirit."

"Eh?" I said, not quite ponying that.

"All right," said Rubinstein, with his starry goloss. "We are now leaving you. Work has to be done. We'll be with you later. Occupy yourself as best you can."

"One thing," coughed Z. Dolin kashl kashl kashl. "You saw what stirred in the tortured memory of our friend F. Alexander. Was it, by chance - ? That is to say, did you - ? I think you know what I mean. We won't let it go anyfurther."

"I've paid," I said. "Bog knows I've paid for what I did. I've paid not only for like myself but for those bratchnies too that called themselves my droogs." I felt violent so then I felt a

bit sick. "I'll lay down a bit," I said. "I've been through terrible terrible times."

"You have," said D. B. da Silva, showing all his thirty zoobies. "You do that."

So they left me, brothers. They ittied off about their business, which I took to be about politics and all that cal, and I was on the bed, all on my oddy knocky with everything very very quiet. I just laid there with my sabogs kicked off my nogas and my tie loose, like all bewildered and not knowing what sort of a jeezny I was going to live now. And all sorts of like pictures kept like passing through my gulliver, of the different chellovecks I'd met at school and in the Staja, and the different veshches that had happened to me, and how there was not one veck you could trust in the whole bolshy world. And then I like dozed off, brothers.

When I woke up I could hear slooshy music coming out of the wall, real gromky, and it was that that had dragged me out of my bit of like sleep. It was a symphony that I knew real horrorshow but had not slooshied for many a year, namely the Symphony Number Three of the Danish veck Otto Skade-lig, a very gromky and violent piece, especially in the first movement, which was what was playing now. I slooshied for two seconds in like interest and joy, but then it all came over me, the start of the pain and the sickness, and I began to groan deep down in my keeshkas. And then there I was, me who had loved music so much, crawling off the bed and going oh oh oh to myself and then bang bang banging on the wall creching: "Stop, stop it, turn it off!" But it went on and it seemed to be like louder. So I crashed at the wall till my knuckles were all red red krovvy and torn skin, creeching and creeching, but the music did not stop. Then I thought I had to get away fromit, so I lurched out of the malenky bedroom and ittied skorry to the front door of the flat, but this had been locked from the outside and I could not get out. And all the time the music got more and more gromky, like it was all a deliberate torture, O my brothers. So I stuck my little fingersreal deep in my ookos, but the trombones and kettledrums blasted through gromky enough. So I creeched again for them to stop and went hammer hammer hammer on the wall, but it made not one malenky bit of difference. "Oh, what am I to do?" I boohooed to myself. "Oh, Bog in Heaven help me." I was like wandering all over the flat in pain and sickness, trying to shut out the music and like groaning deep out of my guts, and then on top of the pile of books and papers and all that cal that was on the tablein the living room I viddied what I had to do and what I had wanted to do until those old men in the Public Biblio and then Dim and Billyboy disguised as rozzes stopped me, and that was to do myself in, to snuff it, to blast off for ever out of this wicked and cruel world. What I viddied was the slovo DEATH on the cover of a like pam-phlet, even though it was only DEATH to THE GOVERNMENT. And like it was Fate there was another malenky booklet which had an open window on the cover, and it said: "Open the window to fresh air, fresh ideas, a new way of living." And so I knew that was like telling me to finish it all offby jumping out. One moment of pain, perhaps, and then sleep for ever and ever and ever.

The music was still pouring in all brass and drums and the violins miles up through the wall. The window in the room where I had laid down was open. I itted to it and viddied a fair drop to the autos and buses and waiting chellovecks below. I creeched out to the world: "Good-bye, good-bye, may Bog forgive you for a ruined life." Then I got on to the sill, the music blasting away to my left, and I shut my glazzies and felt the cold wind on my litso, then I jumped.

I jumped, O my brothers, and I fell on the sidewalk hard, but I did not snuff it, oh no. If I had snuffed it I would not be here to write what I written have. It seems that the jump was not from a big enough heighth to kill. But I cracked my back and my wrists and nogas and felt very bolshy pain before I passed out, brothers, with astonished and surprised litsos of chellovecks in the streets looking at me from above. And just before I passed out I viddied clear that not one chelloveck in the whole horrid world was for me and that that music through the wall had all been like arranged by those who were supposed to be my like new droogs and that it was some veshch like this that they wanted for their horrible selfish and boastful politics. All that was in like a million millionth part of oneminoota before I threw over the world and the sky and the litsos of the staring chellovecks that were above me.

Where I was when I came back to jeezny after a long black black gap of it might have been a million years was a hospital, all white and with this von of hospitals you get, all like sour and smug and clean. These antiseptic veshches you get in hospitals should have a real horrorshow von of like frying onions or of flowers. I came very slow back to knowing who I was and I was all bound up in white and I could not feel anything in my plott, pain nor sensation nor any veshch at all.

All round my gulliver was a bandage and there were bits of stuff like stuck to my litso, and my rookers were all in bandages and like bits of stick were like fixed to my fingers likeon it might be flowers to make them grow straight, and my poor old nogas were all straightened out too, and it was all bandages and wire cages and into my right rooker, near the pletcho, was red red krovvy dripping from a jar upsidedown.

But I could not feel anything, O my brothers. There was a nurse sitting by my bed and she was reading some book that was all very dim print and you could viddy it was a story because of a lot of inverted commas, and she was like breathing hard uh uh uh over it, so it must have been a story about the old in-out in-out. She was a real horrorshow devotchka, this nurse, with a very red rot and like long lashes over her glazzies, and under her like very stiff uniform you could viddy she had very horrorshow groodies. So I said to her: "What gives, O my little sister? Come thou and have a nice lay-down with your malenky droog in this bed." But the slovos didn't come out horrorshow at all, it being as though my rot was all stiffened up, and I could feel with my yahzick that some of my zoobies were no longer there. But this nurse like jumped and dropped her book on the floor andsaid:

"Oh, you've recovered consciousness."

That was like a big rotful for a malenky ptitsa like her, and I tried to say so, but the slovos came out only like er er er. She itted off and left me on my oddy knocky, and I could viddy now that I was in a malenky room of my own, not in one of these long wards like I had been in as a very little malchick, full of coughing dying starry vecks all around to make you want to get well and fit again. It had been like diphtheria I had had then, O mybrothers.

It was like now as though I could not hold to being conscious all that long, because I was like asleep again almost right away, very skorry, but in a minoota or two I was sure that this nurse ptitsa had come back and had brought chellovecks in white coats with her and they were viddying me very frowning and going hm hm hm at Your Humble Narrator. And with them I was sure there was the old charles from the Staja govoreeting: "Oh my son, my son," breathing a like very stale von of whisky on to me and then saying: "But I would not stay, oh no. I could not in no wise subscribe to what those bratchnies are going to do to other poor prestoopnicks. O I got out and am preaching sermons now about it all, my little beloved son in J.C."

I woke up again later on and who should I viddy there round the bed but the three from whose flat I had jumped out, namely D. B. da Silva and Something Something Rubinstein and Z. Dolin. "Friend," one of these vecks was saying, but I could not viddy, or slooshy horrorshow which one, "friend, little friend," this goloss

was saying, "the people are on fire with indignation. You have killed those horrible boastful villains' chances of re-election. They will go and will go for ever and ever. You have served Liberty well." I tried to say:

"If I had died it would have been even better for you political bratchnies, would it not, pretending and treacherous droogs as you are." But all that came out was er er er. Then one of these three seemed to hold out a lot of bits cut from gazettas and what I could viddy was a horrible picture of me all krovvy on a stretcher being carried off and I seemed to like remember a kind of a poppingof lights which must have been photographer vecks. Out of one glazz I could read like headlines which were sort of trembling in the rooker of the chelloveck that held them, like BOY VICTIM OF CRIMINALREFORM SCHEME and GOVERNMENT AS MURDERER and there was like a picture of a veck that looked familiar to me and it said OUT OUT OUT, and that would be the Minister of the Inferior or Interior. Then the nurse ptitsasaid:

"You shouldn't be exciting him like that. You shouldn't be doing anything that will make him upset. Now come on, let's have you out." I tried to say:

"Out out out," but it was er er er again. Anyway, these three political vecks went. And I went, too, only back to the land, back to all blackness lit up by like odd dreams which I didn't know whether they were dreams or not, O my brothers. Like for instance I had this idea of my whole plott or body being like emptied of as it might be dirty water and then filled up again with clean. And then there were really lovely and horrorshow dreams of being in some veck's auto that had been crasted by me and driving up and down the world all on my oddy knocky running lewdies down and hearing them creech they were dying, and in me no pain and no sickness. And also there were dreams of doing the old in-out in-out with devotchkas, forcing like them down on the ground and making them have it and everybody standing around claping their rookers and cheering like bezoomny. And then I woke up again and it was my pee and em come to viddy their ill son, my em boohooing real horrorshow. I could govoreet a lot better now and couldsay:

"Well well well well well, what gives? What makes you think you are like welcome?" My papapa said, in a like ashamed way:"You were in the papers, son. It said they had done great wrong to you. It said how the Government drove you to try and do yourself in. And it was our fault too, in a way, son.

Your home's your home, when all's said and done, son." And my mum kept on going boohooohoo and looking ugly as kiss-my-sharries. So I said:

"And how beeth the new son Joe? Well and healthy and prosperous, I trust and pray?" My mum said:"Oh, Alex Alex. Owwwwwww." My papapa said:"A very awkward thing, son. He got into a bit of trouble with the police and was done by the police."

"Really?" I said. "Really? Such a good sort of chelloveck and all. Amazed proper I am, honest."

"Minding his own business he was," said my pee. "And the police told him to move on. Waiting at a corner he was, son, to see a girl he was going to meet. And they told him to move on and he said he had rights like everybody else, and then they sort of fell on top of him and hit him about cruel."

"Terrible," I said. "Really terrible. And where is the poor boy now?"

"Owwwww," boohooed my mum. "Gone back owwww-wwwme."

"Yes," said dad. "He's gone back to his own home town to get better. They've had to give his job here to somebody else."

"So now," I said, "You're willing for me to move back in again and things be like they were before."

"Yes, son," said my papapa. "Please, son."

"I'll consider it," I said. "I'll think about it real careful."

"Owwwww," went my mum.

"Ah, shut it," I said, "or I'll give you something proper to yowl and creech about. Kick your zoobies in I will." And, Omy brothers, saying that made me feel a malenky bit better, as if all like fresh red red krovvy was flowing all through my plott. That was something I had to think about. It was like as though to get better I had had to get worse.

"That's no way to speak to your mother, son," said my papapa. "After all, she brought you into the world."

"Yes," I said. "And a right grahzny vonny world too." I shut my glazzies tight in like pain and said: "Go away now. I'll thinkabout coming back. But things will have to be very different."

"Yes, son," said my pee. "Anything you say."

"You'll have to make up your mind," I said, "who's to be boss."

"Owwwww," my mum went on.

"Very good, son," said my papapa. "Things will be as you like. Only get well."

When they had gone I laid and thought a bit about different veshches, like all different pictures passing through my gulliver, and when the nurse ptitsa came back in and like straightened the sheets on the bed I said to her: "How long is it I've been in here?"

"A week or so," she said.

"And what have they been doing to me?"

"Well," she said, "you were all broken up and bruised and had sustained severe concussion and had lost a lot of blood."

"They've had to put all that right, haven't they?"

"But," I said, "has anyone been doing anything with my gulliver? What I mean is, have they been playing around with inside like my brain?"

"Whatever they've done," she said, "it'll all be for the best."

But a couple of days later a couple of like doctor vecks came in, both youngish vecks with these very sladky smiles, and they had like a picture book with them. One of them said:

"We want you to have a look at these and to tell us what you think about them. All right?"

"What giveth, O little droogies?" I said. "What new bezoomny idea dost thou in mind have?" So they both had a like embarrassed smeck at that and then they sat down either side of the bed and opened up this book. On the first page there was like a photograph of a bird-nest full of eggs.

"Yes?" one of these doctor vecks said.

"A bird-nest," I said, "full of like eggs. Very very nice."

"And what would you like to do about it?" the other one said.

"Oh," I said, "smash them. Pick up the lot and like throw them against a wall or a cliff or something and then viddy them all smash up real horrorshow."

"Good good," they both said, and then the page was turned.

It was like a picture of one of these bolshy great birds called peacocks with all its tail spread out in all colours in a very boastful way. "Yes?" said one of these vecks.

"I would like," I said, "to pull out like all those feathers in its tail and slooshy it creech blue murder. For being so like boastful."

"Good," they both said, "good good good." And they went on turning the pages. There were like pictures of real horrorshow devotchkas, and I said I would like to give them the old in-out in-out with lots of ultra-violence. There were like pictures of chellovecks being given the boot straight in the litso and all red red krovvy everywhere and I said I would like to be in on that. And there was a picture of the old nagoy droog of the prison charlie's carrying his cross up a hill, and I said I would like to have the old hammer and nails. Good good good, I said: "What is all this?"

"Deep hypnopaedia," or some such slovo, said one of these two vecks. "You seem to be cured."

"Cured?" I said. "Me tied down to this bed like this and you say cured? Kiss my sharries is what I say."

So I waited and, O my brothers, I got a lot better, munching away at eggiewebs and lomticks of toast and peeting bolshy great mugs of milky chai, and then one day they said I was going to have a very very very

special visitor. "Who?" I said, while they straightened the bed and combed my luscious glory for me, me having the bandage off now from my gulliver and the hair growing again.

"You'll see, you'll see," they said. And I viddied all right.

Attwo-thirty of the afternoon there were like all photographers and men from gazettas with noteboks and pencils and all that cal. And, brothers, they near trumpeted a bolshy fanfare for this great and important veck who was coming to viddy Your Humble Narrator. And in he came, and of course it was none other than the Minister of the Interior or Inferior, dressed in the heighth of fashion and with this very upper-class haw haw goloss. Flash flash bang went the cameras when he put out his rooker to me to shake it. I said: "Well well well well well. What giveth then, old droogie?"

Nobody seemed to quite pony that, but somebody said in a like harsh goloss:

"Be more respectful, boy, in addressing the Minister."

"Yarbles," I said, like snarling like a doggie. "Bolshy great yarblockos to thee and thine."

"All right, all right," said the Interior Inferior one very skorry. "He speaks to me as a friend, don't you, son?"

"I am everyone's friend," I said. "Except to my enemies."

"Well," said the Int Inf Min, sitting down by my bed. "I and the Government of which I am member want you to regard us as friends. Yes, friends. We have put you right, yes? You aregetting the best of treatment. We never wished you harm, but there are some who did and do. And I think you know who those are."

"Yes yes yes," he said. "There are certain men who wanted to use you, yes, use you for political ends. They would have been glad, yes, glad for you to be dead, for they thought they could then blame it all on the Government. I think you know who those menare."

"There is a man," said the Intinfmin, "called F. Alexander, a writer of subversive literature, who has been howling for your blood. He has been mad with desire to stick a knife in you.

But you're safe from him now. We put him away."

"He was supposed to be like a droogie," I said. "Like a mother to me was what he was."

"He found out that you had done wrong to him. At least," said the Min very very skorry, "he believed you had done wrong. He formed this idea in his mind that you had been responsible for the death of someone near and dear to him."

"What you mean," I said, "is that he was told."

"He had this idea," said the Min. "He was a menace. We put him away for his own protection. And also," he said, "for yours."

"Kind," I said. "Most kind of thou."

"When you leave here," said the Min, "you will have no worries. We shall see to everything. A good job on a good salary. Because you are helping us."

"Am I?" I said.

"We always help our friends, don't we?" And then he took my rooker and some veck creeched: "Smile!" and I smiled like bezoomny without thinking, and then flash flash crack flash bang there were pictures being taken of me and the Intinfmin all droogy together. "Good boy," said this great chelloveck.

"Good good boy. And now, see, a present."

What was brought in now, brothers, was a big shiny box, and I viddied clear what sort of a veshch it was. It was a stereo. It was put down next to the bed and opened up and some veck plugged its lead into the wall-socket. "What shall it be?" asked a veck with otchkies on his nose, and he had in his rookers lovely shiny sleeves full of music. "Mozart? Beethoven? Schoenberg? Carl Orff?"

"The Ninth," I said. "The glorious Ninth."

And the Ninth it was, O my brothers. Everybody began to leave nice and quiet while I laid there with my glazzies closed, slooshying the lovely music. The Min said: "Good good boy,"

patting me on the pletcho, then he itted off. Only one veck was left, saying: "Sign here, please." I opened my glazzies up tosign, not knowing what I was signing and not, O my brothers, caring either. Then I was left alone with the glorious Ninth of Ludwigvan.

Oh it was gorgeosity and yumyumyum. When it came to the Scherzo I could viddy myself very clear running and running on like very light and mysterious nogas, carving the whole litso of the creeching world with my cut-throat britva.

And there was the slow movement and the lovely last singing movement still to come. I was cured all right.

‘What’s it going to be then, eh?’

There was me, Your Humble Narrator, and my three droogs, that is Len, Rick, and Bully being called Bully because of his bolshly big neck and very gromky goloss which was just like some bolshy great bull bellowing auuuuuuuuh. We were sitting in the Korova Milkbar making up our rassoodocks what to do with the evening, a flip dark chill winter bastard though dry. All round were chellovecks well away on milk plus vellocet and synthemesc and drenchrom and other veshches which take you far far far away from this wicked and real world into the land to viddy Bog And All His Angels And Saints in your left sabog with lights bursting and spurting all over your mozg. What we were peeting was the old moloko with knives in it, as we used to say, to sharpen you up and make you ready for a bit of dirty twenty-to-one, but I’ve told you all that before.

We were dressed in the heighth of fashion, which in those days was these very wide trousers and a very loose black shiny leather like jerkin over an open-necked shirt with a like scarf tucked in. At this time too it was the heighth of fashion to use the old britva on the gulliver, so that most of the gulliver was like bald and there was hair only on the sides. But it was always the same on the old nogas-real horrorshow bolshy big boots for kicking litsos in.

‘What’s it going to be then, eh?’

I was like the oldest of we four, and they all looked up to me as their leader, but I got the idea sometimes that Bully had the thought in his gulliver that he would like to take over, this being because of his bigness and the gromky goloss that bellowed out of him when he was on the warpath. But all the ideas came from Your Humble, O my brothers, and also there was this veshch that I had been famous and had had my pictures and articles and all that cal in the gazettas. Also I had by far the best job of all we four, being in the National Gramodisc Archives on the music side with a real horrorshow carman full of pretty polly at the week’s end and a lot of nice free discs for my own malenky self on the side.

This evening in the Korova there was a fair number of vecks and ptitsas and devotchkas and malchicks smecking and peeting away, and cutting through their govoreeting and the burbling of the in-the-landers with their ‘Gorgor fallatuke and the worm sprays in filltip slaughterballs’ and all that cal you could slooshy a pop-disc on the stereo, this being Ned Achimota singing ‘That Day, Yeah, That Day’. At the counter were three devotchkas dressed in the heighth of nadsat fashion, that is to say long uncombed hair dyed white and false groodies sticking out a metre or more and very very tight short skirts with all like frothy white underneath, and Bully kept saying: ‘Hey, get in there we could, three of us. Old Len is not interested. Leave old Len alone with his God.’ And Len kept saying: ‘Yarbles yarbles. Where is the spirit of all for one and one for all, eh boy?’ Suddenly I felt both very very tired and also full of tingly energy, and Isaid:

‘Out out out out out.’

‘Where to?’ said Rick, who had a litso like a frog’s.

‘Oh, just to viddy what’s doing in the great outside,’ I said.

But somehow, my brothers, I felt very bored and a bit hopeless, and I had been feeling that a lot these days. So I turned to the chelloveck nearest me on the big plush seat that ran right round the whole mesto, a chelloveck, that is, who was burbling away under the influence, and I fisted himrealskorrry ack ack ack in the

belly. But he felt it not, brothers, only burbling away with his ‘Cart cart virtue, where in toptails lieth the poppoppicorns?’ So we scatted out into the big winter nochy.

We walked down Marghanita Boulevard and there were no millicents patrolling that way, so when we met a starry veck coming away from a news-kiosk where he had been kupetting a gazetta I said to Bully: ‘All right, Bully boy, thou canst if thou like wishest.’

More and more these days I had been just giving the orders and standing back to viddy them being carried out. So Bully cracked into him er er er, and the other two tripped him and kicked at him, smecking away, while he was down and then let him crawl off to where he lived, like whimpering to himself. Bully said:

‘How about a nice yummy glass of something to keep out the cold, O Alex?’ For we were not too far from the Duke of New York. The other two nodded yes yes yes but all looked at me to viddy whether that was all right. I nodded too and so off we ittied.

Inside the snug there were these starry ptitsas or sharps or baboochkas you will remember from the beginning and they all started on their: ‘Evening, lads, God bless you, boys, best lads living, that’s what you are,’ waiting for us to say ‘What’s it going to be girls?’ Bully rang the collocoll and a waiter came in rubbing his rookers on his grazzy apron. ‘Cutter on the table, droogies,’ said Bully, pulling out his own rattling and chinking mound of deng. ‘Scotchmen for us and the same for the old baboochkas, eh?’ And then Isaid:

‘Ah, to hell. Let them buy their own.’ I didn’t know what it was, but these last days I had become like mean. There had come into my gulliver a like desire to keep all my pretty polly to myself, to like hoard it all up for some reason. Bully said:

‘What gives, bratty? What’s coming over old Alex?’

‘Ah, to hell,’ I said. ‘I don’t know. I don’t know. What it is I don’t like just throwing away my hard-earned pretty polly, that’s what it is.’

‘Earned?’ said Rick. ‘Earned? It doesn’t have to be earned, as well thou knowest, old droogie. Took, that’s all, just took, like.’ And he smecked real gromky and I viddied one or two of his zoobies weren’t all that horrorshow.

‘Ah,’ I said, ‘I’ve got some thinking to do.’ But viddying these baboochkas looking all eager like for some free alc, I like shrugged my pletchoes and pulled out my own cutter from my trouser carman, notes and coin all mixed together, and plonked it tinkle crackle on thetable.

‘Scotchmen all round, right,’ said the waiter. But for some reason I said:

‘No, boy, for me make it one small beer, right.’ Len said:

‘This I do not much go for,’ and he began to put his rooker on my gulliver, like kidding I must have fever, but I like snarled doggy-wise for him to give over skorry. ‘All right, all right, droog,’ he said. ‘As thou like sayest.’ But Bully was having a smot with his rot open at something that hadcome out of my carman with the pretty polly I’d put on the table. He said:

‘Well well well. And we never knew.’

‘Give me that,’ I snarled and grabbed it skorry. I couldn’t explain how it had got there, brothers, but it was a photograph I had scissored out of the old gazetta and it was of a baby. It was of a baby gurgling goo goo goo with all like moloko dribbling from its rot and looking up and like smecking at everybody, and its was all nagoy and its flesh was like in all folds with being a very fat baby. There was then like a bit of haw haw haw struggling to get hold of this bit of paper from me, so I had to snarl again at them and I grabbed the photo and tore it up into tiny teeny pieces and let it fall like a bit of snow on to the floor. The whisky came in then and the starry baboochkas said:

‘Good health, lads, God bless you, boys, the best lads living, that’s what you are,’ and all that cal. And one of them who was all lines and wrinkles and no zoobies in her shrunken old rot said: ‘Don’t tear up money, son. If you don’t need it give it them as does,’ which was very bold and forward of her. But Rick said:

‘Money that was not, O baboochka. It was a picture of a dear little itsy witsy bitsy bit of a baby.’ I said:

'I'm getting just that bit tired, that I am. It's you who's the babies, you lot. Scoffing and grinning and all you can do is smeck and give people bolshy cowardly tolchocks when they can't give them back.' Bully said:

'Well now, we always thought it was you who was the king of that and also the teacher. Not well, that's the trouble with thou, old droogie.'

I viddied this sloppy glass of beer I had on the table in front of me and felt like all vomity within, so I went 'Aaaaah' and poured all the frothy vonny cal all over the floor. One of the starry ptitsas said:

'Waste not want not.' I said:

'Look, droogies. Listen. Tonight I am somehow just not in the mood. I know not why or how it is, but there it is. You three go your own ways this nightwise, leaving me out. Tomorrow we shall meet same place same time, me hoping to be like a lot better.'

'Oh,' said Bully, 'right sorry I am.' But you could viddy a like gleam in his glazzies, because now he would be taking over for this nochy. Power power, everybody like wants power. 'We can postpone till tomorrow,' said Bully. 'what we in mindhad.

Namely, that bit of shopcrasting in Gagarin Street. Flip horrorshow takings there, droog, for the having.'

'No,' I said. 'You postpone nothing. You just carry on in your own like style. Now,' I said, 'I itty off.' And I got up from my chair.

'Where to, then?' asked Rick.

'That know I not,' I said. 'Just to be on like my own and sort things out.' You could viddy the old baboochkas were real puzzled at me going out like that and like all morose and not the bright and smecking malchickiwick you will remember. But I said:

'Ah, to hell, to hell,' and scatted out all on my oddy knocky into the street.

It was dark and there was a wind sharp as a nozh getting up, and there were very very few lewdies about. There were these patrol cars with brutal rozzes inside them like cruising about, and now and then on the corner you would viddy a couple of very young millicents stamping against the bitchy cold and letting out steam breath on the winter air, O my brothers. I suppose really a lot of the old ultra-violence and crasting was dying out now, the rozzes being so brutal with who they caught, though it had become like a fight between naughty nadsats and the rozzes who could be more skorry with the nozh and the britva and the stick and even the gun. But what was the matter with me these days was that I didn't like care much. It was like something soft getting into me and I could not pony why. What I wanted these days I did not know. Even the music I liked to slooshy in my own malenky den what what I would have smecked at before, brothers. I was slooshying more like malenky romantic songs, what theycall

Lieder, just a goloss and a piano, very quiet and like yearny, different from when it had been allbolshy orchestras and me lying on the bed between the violins and the trombones and kettledrums. There was something happening inside me, and I wondered if it was like some disease or if it was what they had done to me that time upsetting my gulliver and perhaps going to make me real bezoomny.

So thinking like this with my gulliver bent and my rookers stuck in my trouser carmans I walked the town, brothers, and at last I began to feel very tired and also in great need of a nice bolshy chasha of milky chai. Thinking about this chai, I got a sudden like picture of me sitting before a bolshy fire in an armchair peeting away at this chai, and what was funny and very very strange was that I seemed to have turned into a very starry chelloveck, about seventy years old, because I could viddy my own voloss, which was very grey, and I also had whiskers, and these were very grey too. I could viddy myself as an old man, sitting by a fire, and then the like picture vanished. But it was very likestrange.

I came to one of these tea-and-coffee mestos, brothers, and I could viddy through the long long window that it was full of very dull lewdies, like ordinary, who had these very patient and expressionless litsos and would do no harm to no one, all sitting there and govoreeting like quietly and peeting away at their nice harmless chai and coffee. I ittied inside and went up to the counter and bought me a nice hot chai with plenty of moloko, then I ittied to one of these tables and sat down to peet it. There was a like young couple at this table, peeting

and smoking filter-tip cancers, and govorreeting and smecking very quietly between themselves, but I took no notice of them and just went on peeting away and like dreaming and wondering what it was in me that was like changing and what was going to happen to me. But I viddied that the devotchka at this table who was with this chelloveck was real horrorshow, not the sort you would want to like throw down and give the old in-out in-out to, but with a horrorshow plott and litso and a smiling rot and very very fair voloss and all that cal. And then the veck with her, who had a hat on his gulliver and had his litso like turned away from me, swivelled round to viddy the bolshy big clock they had on the wall in this mesto, and then I viddied who he was and then he viddied who I was. It was Pete, one of my three droogs from those days when it was Georgie and Dim and him and me. It was Pete like looking a lot older though he could not now be more than nineteen and a bit, and he had a bit of a moustache and an ordinary day-suit and this hat on. Isaid:

‘Well well well, droogie, what gives? Very very long time no viddy.’ He said:

‘It’s little Alex, isn’t it?’

‘None other,’ I said. ‘A long long long time since those dead and gone good days. And now poor Georgie, they told me, is underground and old Dim is a brutal millicent, and here is thou and here is I, and what news hast thou, old droogie?’

‘He talks funny, doesn’t he?’ said this devotchka, like giggling.

‘This, said Pete to the devotchka, ‘is an old friend. His name is Alex. May I,’ he said to me, ‘introduce my wife?’

My rot fell wide open then. ‘Wife?’ I like gaped. ‘Wife wife wife? Ah no, that cannot be. Too young art thou to be married, old droog. Impossible impossible.’

This devotchka who was like Pete’s wife (impossible impossible) giggled again and said to Pete:

‘Did you used to talk like that too?’

‘Well,’ said Pete, and he like smiled. ‘I’m nearly twenty. Old enough to be hitched, and it’s been two months already. You were very young and very forward, remember.’

‘Well,’ I liked gaped still. ‘Over this get can I not, old droogie. Pete married. Well well well.’

‘We have a small flat,’ said Pete. ‘I am earning very small money at State Marine Insurance, but things will get better, that I know. And Georgina here-‘

‘What again is that name?’ I said, rot still open like bezoomny.

Pete’s wife. (wife, brothers) like giggled again.

‘Georgina,’ said Pete. ‘Georgina works too. Typing, you know.

We manage, we manage.’ I could not, brothers, take my glazzies off him, really. He was like grown up now, with a grown-up goloss and all. ‘You must,’ said Pete, ‘come and see us sometime. You still,’ he said, ‘look very young, despite all your terrible experiences. Yes, yes, yes, we’ve read all about them. But, of course, you *are* very young still.’

‘Eighteen,’ I said, ‘Just gone.’

‘Eighteen, eh?’ said Pete. ‘As old as that. Well wellwell.

Now,’ he said, ‘we have to be going.’ And he like gave this Georgina of his a like loving look and pressed one of her rookers between his and she gave him one of these looks back, O my brothers. ‘Yes,’ said Pete, turning back to me, ‘we’re off to a little party at Greg’s.’

‘Greg?’ I said.

‘Oh, of course,’ said Pete, ‘you wouldn’t know Greg, would you?’

Greg is after your time. While you were away Greg came into the picture. He runs little parties, you know. Mostly wine-cup and word-games. But very nice, very pleasant, you know. Harmless, if you see what I mean.’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Harmless. Yes, yes, I viddy that real horrorshow.’ And this Georgina devotchka giggled again at my slovos. And then these two ittied off to their vonny word-games at this Greg’s, whoever he was. I was left all on my oddy knocky with my milky chai, which was getting cold now, like thinking andwondering.

Perhaps that was it, I kept thinking. Perhaps I was getting too old for the sort of jeezny I had been leading, brothers. I was eighteen now, just gone. Eighteen was not a young age. At eighteen old Wolfgang Amadeus had written concertos and symphonies and operas and oratorios and all that cal, no, not cal, heavenly music. And then there was old Felix M. with his

Midsummer Night’s Dream Overture. And there were others. And there was this like French poetset by old Benjy Britt, who had done all his best poetry by the age of fifteen, O my brothers.

Arthur, his first name. Eighteen was not all that young an age, then. But what was I going to do?

Walking the dark chill bastards of winter streets after ittying off from this chai-and-coffee mesto, I kept viddying like visions, like these cartoons in the gazettas. There was Your Humble Narrator Alex coming home from work to a good hot plate of dinner, and there was this ptitsa all welcoming and greeting like loving. But I could not viddy her all that horrorshow, brothers, I could not think who it might be. But I had this sudden very strong idea that if I walked into the room next to this room where the fire was burning away and my hot dinner laid on the table, there I should find what I really wanted, and now it all tied up, that picture scissored out of the gazetta and meeting old Pete like that. For in that other room in a cot was laying gurgling goo goo goo my son. Yes yes yes, brothers, my son. And now I felt this bolshy big hollow inside my plott, feeling very surprised too at myself. I knew what was happening, O my brothers. I was like growingup.

Yes yes yes, there it was. Youth must go, ah yes. But youth is only being in a way like it might be an animal. No, it is not just like being an animal so much as being one of these malenky toys you viddy being sold in the streets, like little chellovecks made out of tin and with a spring inside and then a winding handle on the outside and you wind it up grrr grrr grrr and off it itties, like walking, O my brothers. But it itties in a straight line and bangs straight into things bang bang and it cannot help what it is doing. Being young is like being like one of these malenkymachines.

My son, my son. When I had my son I would explain all that to him when he was starry enough to like understand. But then I knew he would not understand or would not want to understand at all and would do all the veshches I had done, yes perhaps even killing some poor starry forella surrounded with mewing kots and koshkas, and I would not be able to really stop him. And nor would he be able to stop his own son, brothers. And so it would itty on until like the end of the world, round and round and round, like some bolshy gigantic like chelloveck, like old Bog Himself(by courtesy of Korova Milkbar) turning and turning and turning a vonny grahzny orange in his giganticrookers.

But first of all, brothers, there was this veshch of finding some devotchka or other who would be a mother to this son. I would have to start on that tomorrow, I kept thinking. That was something like new to do. That was something I would have to get started on, a new like chapter beginning.

That’s what it’s going to be then, brothers, as I come to the like end of this tale. You have been everywhere with your little droog Alex, suffering with him, and you have viddied some of the most grahzny bratchnies old Bog ever made, all on to your old droog Alex. And all it was was that I was young. But now as I end this story, brothers, I am not young, not no longer, ohno.

Alex like groweth up, oh yes.

But where I itty now, O my brothers, is all on my oddy knocky, where you cannot go. Tomorrow is all like sweet flowers and the turning vonny earth and the stars and the old Luna up there and your old droog Alex all on his oddy knocky seeking like a mate.

And all that cal. A terrible grahzny vonny world, really, O my brothers. And so farewell from your little droog. And to all others in this story profound shooms of lipmusic brrrrrr. And they can kiss my sharries. But you, O my brothers, remember sometimes thy little Alex that was. Amen. And all thatcal.

Exercises:

Descriptive answer type questions:

1. Why the freedom of choice is an important concept of this novel?
2. Explain the view of youth and youth culture in *A Clockwork Orange*? Is it a positive or negative vision?

Short answer type questions:

1. What the title *A Clockwork Orange* means?
2. How is Alex's relationship with his parents depicted in *A Clockwork Orange*?
3. What effect does the vitamin shot have upon Alex?
4. What does the gang advice about the front of the old woman's house?
5. What does Alex's favourite newspaper columnist say about modern youth?
6. What does Alex tell his parents he does in the evening??
7. What does the top policeman call Alex's prison cell?

Classroom activities:

1. Why do you think Burgess feels about modern Psychiatry? Support your answer through this story *A Clockwork Orange*?
2. Based on the young people in the novel how might you describe Burgess's attitude towards teenagers?



Unit-IV

B) THE GAMBLER

-Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Introduction:

Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoyevsky (November 11, 1821- February 9, 1881) Russian novelist and short-story writer is usually regarded as one of the finest novelist as well as psychologist in the history of world literature. He was born in the Moscow hospital where his father worked as a physician. He was the second child of Dr. Mikhail Dostoyevsky and Maria Dostoyevsky. Fyodor Dostoyevsky is famous for his literary inclined psychiatrists and accurate portrayal of mental illness in his several works. He is best known for his novels *Notes from the Underground* (1864) and his four long novels are *Crime and Punishment* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), *The Possessed* (1872), *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* (1877) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). He completed his first novel *Poor Folk* in May 1846. His works of fiction include 15 novels and novellas, 17 short stories and 5 translations. *Gambler* (1866) is one of the greatest semi-autobiographical novellas inspired by his addiction to roulette focusing on the depiction of gambling.

The primary motif of writing this novella was frustrated love and compulsive gambling of the writer which is about addiction, obsession, money and loss. He himself was addicted to gambling and wrote this novella to pay off gambling debts. It describes a representative case of pathological gambling. Aleksey Ivanovitch is a main character of this novella. He is a twenty five-year-old nobleman with no money. He is a family teacher and lives in the family of a Russian General. He shows the typical evolution of the disorder in three well defined phases: profits, losses and despair.

Throughout the whole novella, Aleksey shows tolerance to frustrations and impulsivity what has a negative impact on his interpersonal relationships. The writer perfectly portrays the misfortunes of a gambler with several psychological characteristics of the disorder, so that it is also possible to predict the psychodynamic aspects involved. Alexey tries to break through the wall of the established order in Russia, but instead becomes mired in the endless downward spiral of betting and loss. His intense and inescapable addiction is accentuated by his affair with General's cruel yet seductive niece, Polina. In this novella Dostoevsky reaches the heights of drama with this stunning psychological portrait.

Text

I

At length I returned from two weeks leave of absence to find that my patrons had arrived three days ago in Roulette berg. I received from them a welcome quite different to that which I had expected. The General eyed me coldly, greeted me in rather haughty fashion, and dismissed me to pay my respects to his sister. It was clear that from SOMEWHERE money had been acquired. I thought I could even detect certain shamefacedness in the General's glance. Maria Philipovna, too, seemed distraught, and conversed with me with an air of detachment. Nevertheless, she took the money which I handed to her, counted it, and listened to what I had to tell. To luncheon there were expected that day a Monsieur Mezentsov, a French lady, and an Englishman; for, whenever money was in hand, a banquet in Muscovite style was always given. Polina Alexandrovna, on seeing me, inquired why I had been so long away. Then, without waiting for an answer, she departed. Evidently this was not mere accident, and I felt that I must throw some light upon matters. It was high time that I did so.

I was assigned a small room on the fourth floor of the hotel (for you must know that I belonged to the General's suite). So far as I could see, the party had already gained some notoriety in the place, which had come to look upon the General as a Russian nobleman of great wealth. Indeed, even before luncheon he charged me, among other things, to get two thousand-franc notes changed for him at the hotel counter, which put us in a position to be

thoughtmillionaires at all events for a week! Later, I was about to take Mischa and Nadia for a walk when a summons reached me from the staircase that I must attend the General. He began by deigning to inquire of me where I was going to take the children; and as he did so, I could see that he failed to look me in the eyes. He WANTED to do so, but each time was met by me with such a fixed, disrespectful stare that he desisted in confusion. In pompous language, however, which jumbled one sentence into another, and at length grew disconnected, he gave me to understand that I was to lead the children altogether away from the Casino, and out into the park. Finally his anger exploded, and he added sharply:

"I suppose you would like to take them to the Casino to play roulette? Well, excuse my speaking so plainly, but I know how addicted you are to gambling. Though I am not your mentor, nor wish to be, at least I have a right to require that you shall not actually compromise me."

"I have no money for gambling," I quietly replied.

"But you will soon be in receipt of some," retorted the General, reddening a little as he dived into his writing desk and applied himself to a memorandum book. From it he saw that he had 120 roubles of mine in his keeping.

"Let us calculate," he went on. "We must translate these roubles into thalers. Here--take 100 thalers, as a round sum. The rest will be safe in my hands."

In silence I took the money.

"You must not be offended at what I say," he continued. "You are too touchy about these things. What I have said I have said merely as a warning. To do so is no more than my right."

When returning home with the children before luncheon, I met a cavalcade of our party riding to view some ruins. Two splendid carriages, magnificently horsed, with Mlle. Blanche, Maria Philipovna, and Polina Alexandrovna in one of them, and the Frenchman, the Englishman, and the General in attendance on horseback! The passers-by stopped to stare at them, for the effect was splendid--the General could not have improved upon it. I calculated that, with the 4000 francs which I had brought with me, added to what my patrons seemed already to have acquired, the party must be in possession of at least 7000 or 8000 francs--though that would be none too much for Mlle. Blanche, who, with her mother and the Frenchman, was also lodging in our hotel. The latter gentleman was called by the lacqueys "Monsieur le Comte," and Mlle. Blanche's mother was dubbed "Madame la Comtesse." Perhaps in very truth they WERE "Comte et Comtesse."

I knew that "Monsieur le Comte" would take no notice of me when we met at dinner, as also that the General would not dream of introducing us, nor of recommending me to the "Comte." However, the latter had lived awhile in Russia, and knew that the person referred to as an "uchitel" is never looked upon as a bird of fine feather. Of course, strictly speaking, he knew me; but I was an uninvited guest at the luncheon--the General had forgotten to arrange otherwise, or I should have been dispatched to dine at the table d'hôte. Nevertheless, I presented myself in such guise that the General looked at me with a touch of approval; and, though the good Maria Philipovna was for showing me my place, the fact of my having previously met the Englishman, Mr. Astley, saved me, and thenceforward I figured as one of the company.

This strange Englishman I had met first in Prussia, where we had happened to sit vis-a-vis in a railway train in which I was travelling to overtake our party; while, later, I had run across him in France, and again in Switzerland--twice within the space of two weeks! To think, therefore, that I should suddenly encounter him again here, in Roulettenberg! Never in my life had I known a more retiring man, for he was shy to the pitch of imbecility, yet well aware of the fact (for he was no fool). At the same time, he was a gentle, amiable sort of an individual, and, even on our first encounter in Prussia I had contrived to draw him out, and he had told me that he had just been to the North Cape, and was now anxious to visit the fair at Nizhni Novgorod. How he had come to make the General's acquaintance I do not know, but, apparently, he was much struck with Polina. Also, he was delighted that I should sit next him at table, for he appeared to look upon me as his bosom friend.

During the meal the Frenchman was in great feather: he was discursive and pompous to every one. In Moscow too, I remembered, he had blown a great many bubbles. Interminably he discoursed on finance and Russian

politics, and though, at times, the General made feints to contradict him, he did so humbly, and as though wishing not wholly to lose sight of his own dignity.

For myself, I was in a curious frame of mind. Even before luncheon was half finished I had asked myself the old, eternal question: "WHY do I continue to dance attendance upon the General, instead of having left him and his family long ago?" Every now and then I would glance at Polina Alexandrovna, but she paid me no attention; until eventually I became so irritated that I decided to play the boor.

First of all I suddenly, and for no reason whatever, plunged loudly and gratuitously into the general conversation. Above everything I wanted to pick a quarrel with the Frenchman; and, with that end in view I turned to the General, and exclaimed in an overbearing sort of way--indeed, I think that I actually interrupted him--that that summer it had been almost impossible for a Russian to dine anywhere at tables d'hote. The General bent upon me a glance of astonishment.

"If one is a man of self-respect," I went on, "one risks abuse by so doing, and is forced to put up with insults of every kind. Both at Paris and on the Rhine, and even in Switzerland--there are so many Poles, with their sympathisers, the French, at these tables d'hote that one cannot get a word in edgeways if one happens only to be a Russian."

This I said in French. The General eyed me doubtfully, for he did not know whether to be angry or merely to feel surprised that I should so far forget myself.

"Of course, one always learns SOMETHING EVERYWHERE," said the Frenchman in a careless, contemptuous sort of tone.

"In Paris, too, I had a dispute with a Pole," I continued, "and then with a French officer who supported him. After that a section of the Frenchmen present took my part. They did so as soon as I told them the story of how once I threatened to spit into Monsignor's coffee."

"To spit into it?" the General inquired with grave disapproval in his tone, and a stare, of astonishment, while the Frenchman looked at me unbelievably.

"Just so," I replied. "You must know that, on one occasion, when, for two days, I had felt certain that at any moment I might have to depart for Rome on business, I repaired to the Embassy of the Holy See in Paris, to have my passport visaed. There I encountered a sacristan of about fifty, and a man dry and cold of mien. After listening politely, but with great reserve, to my account of myself, this sacristan asked me to wait a little. I was in a great hurry to depart, but of course I sat down, pulled out a copy of L'Opinion Nationale, and fell to reading an extraordinary piece of invective against Russia which it happened to contain. As I was thus engaged I heard some one enter an adjoining room and ask for Monsignor; after which I saw the sacristan make a low bow to the visitor, and then another bow as the visitor took his leave. I ventured to remind the good man of my own business also; whereupon, with an expression of, if anything, increased dryness, he again asked me to wait. Soon a third visitor arrived who, like myself, had come on business (he was an Austrian of some sort); and as soon as ever he had stated his errand he was conducted upstairs! This made me very angry. I rose, approached the sacristan, and told him that, since Monsignor was receiving callers, his lordship might just as well finish off my affair as well. Upon this the sacristan shrunk back in astonishment. It simply passed his understanding that any insignificant Russian should dare to compare himself with other visitors of Monsignor's! In a tone of the utmost effrontery, as though he were delighted to have a chance of insulting me, he looked me up and down, and then said: "Do you suppose that Monsignor is going to put aside his coffee for YOU?" But I only cried the louder: "Let me tell you that I am going to SPIT into that coffee! Yes, and if you do not get me my passport visaed this very minute, I shall take it to Monsignor myself."

"What? While he is engaged with a Cardinal? screeched the sacristan, again shrinking back in horror. Then, rushing to the door, he spread out his arms as though he would rather die than let me enter.

Thereupon I declared that I was a heretic and a barbarian--"Je suis heretique etbarbare," I said, "and that these archbishops and cardinals and monsignors, and the rest of them, meant nothing at all to me. In a word, I showed him that I was not going to give way. He looked at me with an air of infinite resentment. Then he snatched up my

passport, and departed with it upstairs. A minute later the passport had been visaed! Here it is now, if you care to see it,"--and I pulled out the document, and exhibited the Roman visa.

"But--" the General began.

"What really saved you was the fact that you proclaimed yourself a heretic and a barbarian," remarked the Frenchman with a smile. "Cela n'etait pas si bete."

"But is that how Russian subjects ought to be treated? Why, when they settle here they dare not utter even a word--they are ready even to deny the fact that they are Russians! At all events, at my hotel in Paris I received far more attention from the company after I had told them about the fracas with the sacristan. A fat Polish nobleman, who had been the most offensive of all who were present at the table d'hote, at once went upstairs, while some of the Frenchmen were simply disgusted when I told them that two years ago I had encountered a man at whom, in 1812, a French 'hero' fired for the mere fun of discharging his musket. That man was then a boy of ten and his family are still residing in Moscow."

"Impossible!" the Frenchman spluttered. "No French soldier would fire at a child!"

"Nevertheless the incident was as I say," I replied. "A very respected ex-captain told me the story, and I myself could see the scar left on his cheek."

The Frenchman then began chattering volubly, and the General supported him; but I recommended the former to read, for example, extracts from the memoirs of General Perovski, who, in 1812, was a prisoner in the hands of the French. Finally Maria Philipovna said something to interrupt the conversation. The General was furious with me for having started the altercation with the Frenchman. On the other hand, Mr. Astley seemed to take great pleasure in my brush with Monsieur, and, rising from the table, proposed that we should go and have a drink together. The same afternoon, at four o'clock, I went to have my customary talk with Polina Alexandrovna; and, the talk soon extended to a stroll. We entered the Park, and approached the Casino, where Polina seated herself upon a bench near the fountain, and sent Nadia away to a little distance to play with some other children. Mischa also I dispatched to play by the fountain, and in this fashion we--that is to say, Polina and myself--contrived to find ourselves alone.

Of course, we began by talking on business matters. Polina seemed furious when I handed her only 700 gulden, for she had thought to receive from Paris, as the proceeds of the pledging of her diamonds, at least 2000 gulden, or even more.

"Come what may, I MUST have money," she said. "And get it somehow I will--otherwise I shall be ruined."

I asked her what had happened during my absence.

"Nothing; except that two pieces of news have reached us from St. Petersburg. In the first place, my grandmother is very ill, and unlikely to last another couple of days. We had this from Timothy Petrovitch himself, and he is a reliable person. Every moment we are expecting to receive news of the end."

"All of you are on the tiptoe of expectation?" "I queried.

"Of course--all of us, and every minute of the day. For a year-and-a-half now we have been looking for this."

"Looking for it?"

"Yes, looking for it. I am not her blood relation, you know--I am merely the General's step-daughter. Yet I am certain that the old lady has remembered me in her will."

"Yes, I believe that you WILL come in for a good deal," I said with some assurance.

"Yes, for she is fond of me. But how come you to think so?"

I answered this question with another one. "That Marquis of yours," I said, "—is HE also familiar with your family secrets?"

"And why are you yourself so interested in them?" was her retort as she eyed me with dry grimness.

"Never mind. If I am not mistaken, the General has succeeded in borrowing money of the Marquis."

"It may be so."

"Is it likely that the Marquis would have lent the money if he had not known something or other about your grandmother? Did you notice, too, that three times during luncheon, when speaking of her, he called her 'La Baboulenka'? [Dear little Grandmother]. What loving, friendly behaviour, to be sure!"

"Yes, that is true. As soon as ever he learnt that I was likely to inherit something from her he began to pay me his addresses. I thought you ought to know that."

"Then he has only just begun his courting? Why, I thought he had been doing so a long while!"

"You KNOW he has not," retorted Polina angrily. "But where on earth did you pick up this Englishman?" She said this after a pause.

"I KNEW you would ask about him!" Whereupon I told her of my previous encounters with Astley while travelling.

"He is very shy," I said, "and susceptible. Also, he is in love with you.--" "Yes, he is in love with me," she replied.

"And he is ten times richer than the Frenchman. In fact, what does the Frenchman possess? To me it seems at least doubtful that he possesses anything at all."

"Oh, no, there is no doubt about it. He does possess some chateau or other. Last night the General told me that for certain. NOW are you satisfied?"

"Nevertheless, in your place I should marry the Englishman."

"And why?" asked Polina.

"Because, though the Frenchman is the handsomer of the two, he is also the baser; whereas the Englishman is not only a man of honour, but ten times the wealthier of the pair."

"Yes? But then the Frenchman is a marquis, and the cleverer of the two," remarked Polina imperturbably.

"Is that so?" I repeated.

"Yes; absolutely."

Polina was not at all pleased at my questions; I could see that she was doing her best to irritate me with the brusquerie of her answers. But I took no notice of this.

"It amuses me to see you grow angry," she continued. "However, inasmuch as I allow you to indulge in these questions and conjectures, you ought to pay me something for the privilege."

"I consider that I have a perfect right to put these questions to you," was my calm retort; "for the reason that I am ready to pay for them, and also care little what becomes of me."

Polina giggled.

"Last time you told me--when on the Shlangenberg--that at a word from me you would be ready to jump down a thousand feet into the abyss. Some day I may remind you of that saying, in order to see if you will be as good as your word. Yes, you may depend upon it that I shall do so. I hate you because I have allowed you to go to such lengths, and I also hate you and still more--because you are so necessary to me. For the time being I want you, so I must keep you."

Then she made a movement to rise. Her tone had sounded very angry. Indeed, of late her talks with me had invariably ended on a note of temper and irritation--yes, of real temper.

"May I ask you who is this Mlle. Blanche?" I inquired (since I did not wish Polina to depart without an explanation).

"You KNOW who she is--just Mlle. Blanche. Nothing further has transpired. Probably she will soon be Madame General--that is to say, if the rumours that Grandmamma is nearing her end should prove true. Mlle. Blanche, with her mother and her cousin, the Marquis, know very well that, as things now stand, we are ruined."

"And is the General at last in love?"

“That has nothing to do with it. Listen to me. Take these 700 florins, and go and play roulette with them. Win as much for me as you can, for I am badly in need of money.

So saying, she called Nadia back to her side, and entered the Casino, where she joined the rest of our party. For myself, I took, in musing astonishment, the first path to the left. Something had seemed to strike my brain when she told me to go and play roulette. Strangely enough, that something had also seemed to make me hesitate, and to set me analysing my feelings with regard to her. In fact, during the two weeks of my absence I had felt far more at my ease than I did now, on the day of my return; although, while travelling, I had moped like an imbecile, rushed about like a man in a fever, and actually beheld her in my dreams. Indeed, on one occasion (this happened in Switzerland, when I was asleep in the train) I had spoken aloud to her, and set all my fellow-travellers laughing. Again, therefore, I put to myself the question: “Do I, or do I not love her?” and again I could return myself no answer or, rather, for the hundredth time I told myself that I detested her. Yes, I detested her; there were moments (more especially at the close of our talks together) when I would gladly have given half my life to have strangled her! I swear that, had there, at such moments, been a sharp knife ready to my hand, I would have seized that knife with pleasure, and plunged it into her breast. Yet I also swear that if, on the Shlangenberg, she had REALLY said to me, “Leap into that abyss,” I should have leapt into it, and with equal pleasure. Yes, this I knew well. One way or the other, the thing must soon be ended. She, too, knew it in some curious way; the thought that I was fully conscious of her inaccessibility, and of the impossibility of my ever realising my dreams, afforded her, I am certain, the keenest possible pleasure. Otherwise, is it likely that she, the cautious and clever woman that she was, would have indulged in this familiarity and openness with me? Hitherto (I concluded) she had looked upon me in the same light that the old Empress did upon her servant--the Empress who hesitated not to unrobe herself before her slave, since she did not account a slave a man. Yes, often Polina must have taken me for something less than aman!”

Still, she had charged me with a commission--to win what I could at roulette. Yet all the time I could not help wondering WHY it was so necessary for her to win something, and what new schemes could have sprung to birth in her ever-fertile brain. A host of new and unknown factors seemed to have arisen during the last two weeks. Well, it behoved me to divine them, and to probe them, and that as soon as possible. Yet not now: at the present moment I must repair to the roulette-table.

II

I confess I did not like it. Although I had made up my mind to play, I felt averse to doing so on behalf of some one else. In fact, it almost upset my balance, and I entered the gaming rooms with an angry feeling at my heart. At first glance the scene irritated me. Never at any time have I been able to bear the flunkeyishness which one meets in the Press of the world at large, but more especially in that of Russia, where, almost every evening, journalists write on two subjects in particular namely, on the splendour and luxury of the casinos to be found in the Rhenish towns, and on the heaps of gold which are daily to be seen lying on their tables. Those journalists are not paid for doing so: they write thus merely out of a spirit of disinterested complaisance. For there is nothing splendid about the establishments in question; and, not only are there no heaps of gold to be seen lying on their tables, but also there is very little money to be seen at all. Of course, during the season, some madman or another may make his appearance--generally an Englishman, or an Asiatic, or a Turk--and (as had happened during the summer of which I write) win or lose a great deal; but, as regards the rest of the crowd, it plays only for pettygulden, and seldom does much wealth figure on the board.

When, on the present occasion, I entered the gaming-rooms (for the first time in my life), it was several moments before I could even make up my mind to play. For one thing, the crowd oppressed me. Had I been playing for myself, I think I should have left at once, and never have embarked upon gambling at all, for I could feel my heart beginning to beat, and my heart was anything but cold-blooded. Also, I knew, I had long ago made up my mind, that never should I depart from Roulettenberg until some radical, some final, change had taken place in my fortunes. Thus, it must and would be. However ridiculous it may seem to you that I was expecting to win at

roulette, I look upon the generally accepted opinion concerning the folly and the grossness of hoping to win at gambling as a thing even more absurd. For why is gambling a whit worse than any other method of acquiring money? How, for instance, is it worse than trade? True, out of a hundred persons, only one can win; yet what business is that of yours or of mine?

At all events, I confined myself at first simply to looking on, and decided to attempt nothing serious. Indeed, I felt that, if I began to do anything at all, I should do it in an absent-minded, haphazard sort of way--of that I felt certain. Also, it behoved me to learn the game itself; since, despite a thousand descriptions of roulette which I had read with ceaseless avidity, I knew nothing of its rules, and had never even seen it played.

In the first place, everything about it seemed to me so foul--so morally mean and foul. Yet I am not speaking of the hungry, restless folk who, by scores nay, even by hundreds--could be seen crowded around the gaming-tables. For in a desire to win quickly and to win much I can see nothing sordid; I have always applauded the opinion of a certain dead and gone, but cocksure, moralist who replied to the excuse that "one may always gamble moderately", by saying that to do so makes things worse, since, in that case, the profits too will always be moderate.

Insignificant profits and sumptuous profits do not stand on the same footing. No, it is all a matter of proportion. What may seem a small sum to a Rothschild may seem a large sum to me, and it is not the fault of stakes or of winnings

that everywhere men can be found winning, can be found depriving their fellows of something, just as they do at roulette. As to the question whether stakes and winnings are, in themselves, immoral is another question altogether, and I wish to express no opinion upon it. Yet the very fact that I was full of a strong desire to win caused this gambling for gain, in spite of its attendant squalor, to contain, if you will, something intimate, something sympathetic, to my eyes: for it is always pleasant to see men dispensing with ceremony, and acting naturally, and in an unbuttoned mood. . . .

Yet, why should I so deceive myself? I could see that the whole thing was avain and unreasoning pursuit; and what, at the first glance, seemed to me the ugliest feature in this mob of roulette players was their respect for their occupation--the seriousness, and even the humility, with which they stood around the gaming tables. Moreover, I had always drawn sharp distinctions between a game which is de mauvais genre and a game which is permissible to a decent man. In fact, there are two sorts of gaming--namely, the game of the gentleman and the game of the plebs--the game for gain, and the game of the herd. Herein, as said, I draw sharp distinctions. Yet how essentially base are the distinctions! For instance, a gentleman may stake, say, five or ten Louis d'or--seldom more, unless he is a very rich man, when he may stake, say, a thousand francs; but, he must do this simply for the love of the game itself--simply for sport, simply in order to observe the process of winning or of losing, and, above all things, as a man who remains quite uninterested in the possibility of his issuing a winner. If he wins, he will be at liberty, perhaps, to give vent to a laugh, or to pass a remark on the circumstance to a bystander, or to stake again, or to double his stake; but, even this he must do solely out of curiosity, and for the pleasure of watching the play of chances and of calculations, and not because of any vulgar desire to win. In a word, he must look upon the gaming-table, upon roulette, and upon trente et quarante, as mere relaxations which have been arranged solely for his amusement. Of the existence of the lures and gains upon which the bank is founded and maintained he must profess to have not an inkling. Best of all, he ought to imagine his fellow-gamblers and the rest of the mob which stands trembling over a coin to be equally rich and gentlemanly with himself, and playing solely for recreation and pleasure. This complete ignorance of the realities, this innocent view of mankind, is what, in my opinion, constitutes the truly aristocratic. For instance, I have seen even fond mothers so far indulge their guileless, elegant daughters--misses of fifteen or sixteen--as to give them a few gold coins and teach them how to play; and though the young ladies may have won or have lost, they have invariably laughed, and departed as though they were well pleased. In the same way, I saw our General once approach the table in a stolid, important manner. A lacquy darted to offer him a chair, but the General did not even notice him. Slowly he took out his money bags, and slowly extracted 300 francs in gold, which he staked on the black, and won. Yet he did not take up his winnings--he left them there on the table. Again the black turned up, and again he did not gather in what he had won; and when, in the third round, the RED turned up he lost, at a stroke, 1200 francs. Yet even then he rose with a smile, and thus preserved his reputation; yet I knew that his money bags must be chafing his heart, as well as that, had

the stake been twice or thrice as much again, he would still have restrained himself from venting his disappointment.

On the other hand, I saw a Frenchman first win, and then lose, 30,000 francs cheerfully, and without a murmur. Yes; even if a gentleman should lose his whole substance, he must never give way to annoyance. Money must be so subservient to gentility as never to be worth a thought. Of course, the SUPREMELY aristocratic thing is to be entirely oblivious of the mire of rabble, with its setting; but sometimes a reverse course may be aristocratic to remark, to scan, and even to gape at, the mob (for preference, through a lorgnette), even as though one were taking the crowd and its squalor for a sort of raree show which had been organised specially for a gentleman's diversion. Though one may be squeezed by the crowd, one must look as though one were fully assured of being the observer--of having neither part nor lot with the observed. At the same time, to stare fixedly about one is unbecoming; for that, again, is ungentlemanly, seeing that no spectacle is worth an open stare--are no spectacles in the world which merit from a gentleman too pronounced an inspection.

However, to me personally the scene DID seem to be worth undisguised

contemplation--more especially in view of the fact that I had come there not only to look at, but also to number myself sincerely and wholeheartedly with, the mob. As for my secret moral views, I had no room for them amongst my actual, practical opinions. Let that stand as written: I am writing only to relieve my conscience. Yet let me say also this: that from the first I have been consistent in having an intense aversion to any trial of my acts and thoughts by a moral standard. Another standard altogether has directed my life. . . .

As a matter of fact, the mob was playing in exceedingly foul fashion. Indeed, I have an idea that sheer robbery was going on around that gaming-table. The croupiers who sat at the two ends of it had not only to watch the stakes, but also to calculate the game--an immense amount of work for two men! As for the crowd itself--well, it consisted mostly of Frenchmen. Yet I was not then taking notes merely in order to be able to give you a description of roulette, but in order to get my bearings as to my behaviour when I myself should begin to play. For example, I noticed that nothing was more common than for another's hand to stretch out and grab one's winnings whenever one had won. Then there would arise a dispute, and frequently an uproar; and it would be a case of "I beg of you to prove, and to produce witnesses to the fact, that the stake is yours."

At first the proceedings were pure Greek to me. I could only divine and distinguish that stakes were hazarded on numbers, on "odd" or "even," and on colours. Polina's money I decided to risk, that evening, only to the amount of 100 gulden. The thought that I was not going to play for myself quite unnerved me. It was an unpleasant sensation, and I tried hard to banish it. I had a feeling that, once I had begun to play for Polina, I should wreck my own fortunes. Also, I wonder if any one has EVER approached a gaming-table without falling an immediate prey to superstition? I began by pulling out fifty gulden, and staking them on "even." The wheels spun and stopped at

13. I had lost! With a feeling like a sick qualm, as though I would like to make my way out of the crowd and go home, I staked another fifty gulden--this time on the red. The red turned up. Next time I staked the 100 gulden just where they lay--and again the red turned up. Again I staked the whole sum, and again the red turned up. Clutching my 400 gulden, I placed 200 of them on twelve figures, to see what would come of it. The result was that the croupier paid me out three times my total stake! Thus from 100 gulden my store had grown to 800! Upon that such a curious, such an inexplicable, unwonted feeling overcame me that I decided to depart. Always the thought kept recurring to me that if I had been playing for myself alone I should never have had such luck. Once more I staked the whole 800 gulden on the "even." The wheel stopped at I was paid out another 800 gulden, and, snatching up my pile of 1600, departed in search of Polina Alexandrovna.

I found the whole party walking in the park, and was able to get an interview with her only after supper. This time the Frenchman was absent from the meal, and the General seemed to be in a more expansive vein. Among other things, he thought it necessary to remind me that he would be sorry to see me playing at the gaming-tables. In his opinion, such conduct would greatly compromise him--especially if I were to lose much. "And even if you were to WIN much I should be compromised," he added in a meaning sort of way. "Of course I have no RIGHT to order your actions, but you yourself will agree that..." As usual, he did not finish his sentence. I answered drily that I had very little money in my possession, and that, consequently, I was hardly in a position to indulge in any

conspicuous play, even if I did gamble. At last, when ascending to my own room, I succeeded in handing Polina her winnings, and told her that, next time, I should not play for her.

“Why not?” she asked excitedly.

“Because I wish to play FOR MYSELF,” I replied with a feigned glance of astonishment. “That is my sole reason.”

“Then are you so certain that your roulette-playing will get us out of our difficulties?” she inquired with a quizzical smile.

I said very seriously, “Yes,” and then added: “Possibly my certainty about winning may seem to you ridiculous; yet, pray leave me in peace.”

Nonetheless she insisted that I ought to go halves with her in the day’s winnings, and offered me 800 gulden on condition that henceforth, I gambled only on those terms; but I refused to do so, once and for all--stating, as my reason, that I found myself unable to play on behalf of any one else, “I am not unwilling so to do,” I added, “but in all probability I should lose.”

“Well, absurd though it be, I place great hopes on your playing of roulette,” she remarked musingly; “wherefore, you ought to play as my partner and on equal shares; wherefore, of course, you will do as I wish.”

Then she left me without listening to any further protests on my part.

III

On the morrow she said not a word to me about gambling. In fact, she purposely avoided me, although her old manner to me had not changed: the same serene coolness was hers on meeting me -- a coolness that was mingled even with a spice of contempt and dislike. In short, she was at no pains to conceal her aversion to me. That I could see plainly. Also, she did not trouble to conceal from me the fact that I was necessary to her, and that she was keeping me for some end which she had in view. Consequently there became established between us relations which, to a large extent, were incomprehensible to me, considering her general pride and aloofness. For example, although she knew that I was madly in love with her, she allowed me to speak to her of my passion (though she could not well have showed her contempt for me more than by permitting me, unhindered and unrebuked, to mention to her my love).

“You see,” her attitude expressed, “how little I regard your feelings, as well as how little I care for what you say to me, or for what you feel for me.” Likewise, though she spoke as before concerning her affairs, it was never with complete frankness. In her contempt for me there were refinements. Although she knew well that I was aware of a certain circumstance in her life of something which might one day cause her trouble, she would speak to me about her affairs (whenever she had need of me for a given end) as though I were a slave or a passing acquaintance--yet tell them me only in so far as one would need to know them if one were going to be made temporary use of. Had I not known the whole chain of events, or had she not seen how much I was pained and disturbed by her teasing insistency, she would never have thought it worthwhile to soothe me with this frankness--even though, since she not infrequently used me to execute commissions that were not only troublesome, but risky, she ought, in my opinion, to have been frank in ANY case. But, forsooth, it was not worth her while to trouble about MY feelings--about the fact that I was uneasy, and, perhaps, thrice as put about by her cares and misfortunes as she was herself!

For three weeks I had known of her intention to take to roulette. She had even warned me that she would like me to play on her behalf, since it was unbecoming for her to play in person; and, from the tone of her words I had gathered that there was something on her mind besides a mere desire to win money. As if money could matter to HER! No, she had some end in view, and there were circumstances at which I could guess, but which I did not know for certain. True, the slavery and abasement in which she held me might have given me (such things often do so) the power to question her with abrupt directness (seeing that, inasmuch as I figured in her eyes as a mere

slave and nonentity, she could not very well have taken offence at any rude curiosity); but the fact was that, though she let me question her, she never returned me a single answer, and at times did not so much as notice me. That is how matters stood.

Next day there was a good deal of talk about a telegram which, four days ago, had been sent to St. Petersburg, but to which there had come no answer. The General was visibly disturbed and moody, for the matter concerned his mother. The Frenchman, too, was excited, and after dinner the whole party talked long and seriously together--the Frenchman's tone being extraordinarily presumptuous and offhand to everybody. It almost reminded one of the proverb, "Invite a man to your table, and soon he will place his feet upon it." Even to Polina he was brusque almost to the point of rudeness. Yet still he seemed glad to join us in our walks in the Casino, or in our rides and drives about the town. I had long been aware of certain circumstances which bound the General to him; I had long been aware that in Russia they had hatched some scheme together although I did not know whether the plot had come to anything, or whether it was still only in the stage of being talked of. Likewise I was aware, in part, of a family secret--namely, that, last year, the Frenchman had bailed the General out of debt, and given him 30,000 roubles wherewith to pay his Treasury dues on retiring from the service. And now, of course, the General was in a vice -- although the chief part in the affair was being played by Mlle. Blanche. Yes, of this last I had no doubt.

But WHO was this Mlle. Blanche? It was said of her that she was a Frenchwoman of good birth who, living with her mother, possessed a colossal fortune. It was also said that she was some relation to the Marquis, but only a distant one a cousin, or cousin-german, or something of the sort. Likewise I knew that, up to the time of my journey to Paris, she and the Frenchman had been more ceremonious towards our party--they had stood on a much more precise and delicate footing with them; but that now their acquaintanceship--their friendship, their intimacy--had taken on a much more off-hand and rough-and-ready air. Perhaps they thought that our means were too modest for them, and, therefore, unworthy of politeness or reticence. Also, for the last three days I had noticed certain looks which Astley had kept throwing at Mlle. Blanche and her mother; and it had occurred to me that he must have had some previous acquaintance with the pair. I had even surmised that the Frenchman too must have met Mr. Astley before. Astley was a man so shy, reserved, and taciturn in his manner that one might have looked for anything from him. At all events the Frenchman accorded him only the slightest of greetings, and scarcely even looked at him. Certainly he did not seem to be afraid of him; which was intelligible enough. But why did Mlle. Blanche also never look at the Englishman?--particularly since, a propos of something or another, the Marquis had declared the Englishman to be immensely and indubitably rich? Was not that a sufficient reason to make Mlle. Blanche look at the Englishman? Anyway the General seemed extremely uneasy; and, one could well understand what a telegram to announce the death of his mother would mean for him!

Although I thought it probable that Polina was avoiding me for a definite reason, I adopted a cold and indifferent air; for I felt pretty certain that it would not be long before she herself approached me. For two days, therefore, I devoted my attention to Mlle. Blanche. The poor General was in despair! To fall in love at fifty-five, and with such vehemence, is indeed a misfortune! And add to that his widowerhood, his children, his ruined property, his debts, and the woman with whom he had fallen in love! Though Mlle. Blanche was extremely good-looking, I may or may not be understood when I say that she had one of those faces which one is afraid of. At all events, I myself have always feared such women. Apparently about twenty-five years of age, she was tall and broad-shouldered, with shoulders that sloped; yet though her neck and bosom were ample in their proportions, her skin was dull yellow in colour, while her hair (which was extremely abundant--sufficient to make two coiffures) was as black as Indian ink. Add to that a pair of black eyes with yellowish whites, a proud glance, gleaming teeth, and lips which were perennially pomaded and redolent of musk. As for her dress, it was invariably rich, effective, and chic, yet in good taste. Lastly, her feet and hands were astonishing, and her voice a deep contralto. Sometimes, when she laughed, she displayed her teeth, but at ordinary times her air was taciturn and haughty--especially in the presence of Polina and Maria Philipovna. Yet she seemed to me almost destitute of education, and even of wits, though cunning and suspicious. This, apparently, was not because her life had been lacking in incident. Perhaps, if all were known, the Marquis was not her kinsman at all, nor her mother, her mother; but there was evidence that, in Berlin, where we had first come across the pair, they had possessed acquaintances of good standing. As for the Marquis himself, I doubt to this day if he was a Marquis--although about the fact that he had

formerly belonged to high society (for instance, in Moscow and Germany) there could be no doubt whatever. What he had formerly been in France I had not a notion. All I knew was that he was said to possess a chateau. During the last two weeks I had looked for much to transpire, but am still ignorant whether at that time anything decisive ever passed between Mademoiselle and the General. Everything seemed to depend upon our means--upon whether the General would be able to flourish sufficient money in her face. If ever the news should arrive that the grandmother was not dead, Mlle. Blanche, I felt sure, would disappear in a twinkling. Indeed, it surprised and amused me to observe what a passion for intrigue I was developing. But how I loathed it all! With what pleasure would I have given everybody and everything the go-by! Only--I could not leave Polina. How, then, could I show contempt for those who surrounded her? Espionage is a base thing, but--what have I to do with that?

Mr. Astley, too, I found a curious person. I was only sure that he had fallen in love With Polina. A remarkable and diverting circumstance is the amount which may lie in the mien of a shy and painfully modest man who has been touched with the divine passion--especially when he would rather sink into the earth than betray himself by a single word or look. Though Mr. Astley frequently met us when we were out walking, he would merely take off his hat and pass us by, though I knew he was dying to join us. Even when invited to do so, he would refuse. Again, in places of amusement--in the Casino, at concerts, or near the fountain--he was never far from the spot where we were sitting. In fact, WHEREVER we were in the Park, in the forest, or on the Shlangenberg--one needed but to raise one's eyes and glance around to catch sight of at least a PORTION of Mr. Astley's frame sticking out--whether on an adjacent path or behind a bush. Yet never did he lose any chance of speaking to myself; and, one morning when we had met, and exchanged a couple of words, he burst out in his usual abrupt way, without saying "Good-morning."

"That Mlle. Blanche," he said. "Well, I have seen a good many women like her."

After that he was silent as he looked me meaningly in the face. What he meant I did not know, but to my glance of inquiry he returned only a dry nod, and a reiterated "It is so." Presently, however, he resumed:

"Does Mlle. Polina like flowers?"

"I really cannot say," was my reply.

"What? You cannot say?" he cried in great astonishment.

"No; I have never noticed whether she does so or not," I repeated with a smile.

"Hm! Then I have an idea in my mind," he concluded. Lastly, with a nod, he walked away with a pleased expression on his face. The conversation had been carried on in execrable French.

IV

Today has been a day of folly, stupidity, and ineptness. The time is now eleven o'clock in the evening, and I am sitting in my room and thinking. It all began, this morning, with my being forced to go and play roulette for Polina Alexandrovna. When she handed me over her store of six hundred gulden I exacted two conditions --namely, that I should not go halves with her in her winnings, if any (that is to say, I should not take anything for myself), and that she should explain to me, that same evening, why it was so necessary for her to win, and how much was the sum which she needed. For, I could not suppose that she was doing all this merely for the sake of money. Yet clearly she did need some money, and that as soon as possible, and for a special purpose. Well, she promised to explain matters, and I departed. There was a tremendous crowd in the gaming-rooms. What an arrogant, greedy crowd it was! I pressed forward towards the middle of the room until I had secured a seat at a croupier's elbow. Then I began to play in timid fashion, venturing only twenty or thirty gulden at a time. Meanwhile, I observed and took notes. It seemed to me that calculation was superfluous, and by no means possessed of the importance which certain other players attached to it, even though they sat with ruled papers in their hands, whereon they set down the coups, calculated the chances, reckoned, staked, and--lost exactly as we more simple mortals did who played without any reckoning at all.

However, I deduced from the scene one conclusion which seemed to me reliable --namely, that in the flow of fortuitous chances there is, if not a system, at all events a sort of order. This, of course, is a very strange thing. For instance, after a dozen middle figures there would always occur a dozen or so outer ones. Suppose the ball stopped twice at a dozen outer figures; it would then pass to a dozen of the first ones, and then, again, to a dozen of the middle ciphers, and fall upon them three or four times, and then revert to a dozen outers; whence, after another couple of rounds, the ball would again pass to the first figures, strike upon them once, and then return thrice to the middle series--continuing thus for an hour and a half, or two hours. One, three, two: one, three, two. It was all very curious. Again, for the whole of a day or a morning the red would alternate with the black, but almost without any order, and from moment to moment, so that scarcely two consecutive rounds would end upon either the one or the other. Yet, next day, or, perhaps, the next evening, the red alone would turn up, and attain a run of over two score, and continue so for quite a length of time--say, for a whole day. Of these circumstances the majority were pointed out to me by Mr. Astley, who stood by the gaming-table the whole morning, yet never once staked in person.

For myself, I lost all that I had on me, and with great speed. To begin with, I staked two hundred gulden on "even," and won. Then I staked the same amount again, and won: and so on some two or three times. At one moment I must have had in my hands--gathered there within a space of five minutes--about 4000 gulden. That, of course, was the proper moment for me to have departed, but there arose in me a strange sensation as of a challenge to Fate--as of a wish to deal her a blow on the cheek, and to put out my tongue at her. Accordingly I set down the largest stake allowed by the rules--namely, 4000 gulden--and lost. Fired by this mishap, I pulled out all the money left to me, staked it all on the same venture, and--again lost! Then I rose from the table, feeling as though I were stupefied. What had happened to me I did not know; but, before luncheon I told Polina of my losses--until which time I walked about the Park.

At luncheon I was as excited as I had been at the meal three days ago. Mlle. Blanche and the Frenchman were lunching with us, and it appeared that the former had been to the Casino that morning, and had seen my exploits there. So now she showed me more attention when talking to me; while, for his part, the Frenchman approached me, and asked outright if it had been my own money that I had lost. He appeared to be suspicious as to something being on foot between Polina and myself, but I merely fired up, and replied that the money had been all my own.

At this the General seemed extremely surprised, and asked me whence I had procured it; whereupon I replied that, though I had begun only with 100 gulden, six or seven rounds had increased my capital to 5000 or 6000 gulden, and that subsequently I had lost the whole in two rounds.

All this, of course, was plausible enough. During my recital I glanced at Polina, but nothing was to be discerned on her face. However, she had allowed me to fire up without correcting me, and from that I concluded that it was my cue to fire up, and to conceal the fact that I had been playing on her behalf. "At all events," I thought to myself, "she, in her turn, has promised to give me an explanation to-night, and to reveal to me something or another."

Although the General appeared to be taking stock of me, he said nothing. Yet I could see uneasiness and annoyance in his face. Perhaps his straitened circumstances made it hard for him to have to hear of piles of gold passing through the hands of an irresponsible fool like myself within the space of a quarter of an hour. Now, I have an idea that, last night, he and the Frenchman had a sharp encounter with one another. At all events they closeted themselves together, and then had a long and vehement discussion; after which the Frenchman departed in what appeared to be a passion, but returned, early this morning, to renew the combat. On hearing of my losses, however, he only remarked with a sharp, and even a malicious, air that "a man ought to go more carefully." Next, for some reason or another, he added that, "though a great many Russians go in for gambling, they are no good at the game."

"I think that roulette was devised specially for Russians," I retorted; and when the Frenchman smiled contemptuously at my reply I further remarked that I was sure I was right; also that, speaking of Russians in the capacity of gamblers, I had far more blame for them than praise--of that he could be quite sure.

"Upon what do you base your opinion?" he inquired.

“Upon the fact that to the virtues and merits of the civilised Westerner there has become historically added--though this is not his chief point--a capacity for acquiring capital; whereas, not only is the Russian incapable of acquiring capital, but also he exhausts it wantonly and of sheer folly. None the less we Russians often need money; wherefore, we are glad of, and greatly devoted to, a method of acquisition like roulette--whereby, in a couple of hours, one may grow rich without doing any work. This method, I repeat, has a great attraction for us, but since we play in wanton fashion, and without taking any trouble, we almost invariably lose.”

“To a certain extent that is true,” assented the Frenchman with a self-satisfied air.

“Oh no, it is not true,” put in the General sternly. “And you,” he added to me, “you ought to be ashamed of yourself for traducing your own country!”

“I beg pardon,” I said. “Yet it would be difficult to say which is the worst of the two--Russian ineptitude or the German method of growing rich through honest toil.”

“What an extraordinary idea,” cried the General.

“And what a RUSSIAN idea!” added the Frenchman.

I smiled, for I was rather glad to have a quarrel with them.

“I would rather live a wandering life in tents,” I cried, “than bow the knee to a German idol!”

“To WHAT idol?” exclaimed the General, now seriously angry.

“To the German method of heaping up riches. I have not been here very long, but I can tell you that what I have seen and verified makes my Tartar blood boil. Good Lord! I wish for no virtues of that kind. Yesterday I went for a walk of about ten versts; and, everywhere I found that things were even as we read of them in good German picture-books -- that every house has its ‘Fater,’ who is horribly beneficent and extraordinarily honourable. So honourable is he that it is dreadful to have anything to do with him; and I cannot bear people of that sort. Each such ‘Fater’ has his family, and in the evenings they read improving books aloud. Over their roof-trees there murmur elms and chestnuts; the sun has sunk to his rest; a stork is roosting on the gable; and all is beautifully poetic and touching. Do not be angry, General. Let me tell you something that is even more touching than that. I can remember how, of an evening, my own father, now dead, used to sit under the lime trees in his little garden, and to read books aloud to myself and my mother. Yes, I know how things ought to be done. Yet every German family is bound to slavery and to submission to its ‘Fater.’ They work like oxen, and amass wealth like Jews. Suppose the ‘Fater’ has put by a certain number of gulden which he hands over to his eldest son, in order that the said son may acquire a trade or a small plot of land. Well, one result is to deprive the daughter of a dowry, and so leave her among the unwedded. For the same reason, the parents will have to sell the younger son into bondage or the ranks of the army, in order that he may earn more towards the family capital. Yes, such things ARE done, for I have been making inquiries on the subject. It is all done out of sheer rectitude--out of a rectitude which is magnified to the point of the younger son believing that he has been RIGHTLY sold, and that it is simply idyllic for the victim to rejoice when he is made over into pledge. What more have I to tell? Well, this--that matters bear just as hardly upon the eldest son. Perhaps he has his Gretchen to whom his heart is bound; but he cannot marry her, for the reason that he has not yet amassed sufficient gulden. So, the pair wait on in a mood of sincere and virtuous expectation, and smilingly deposit themselves in pawn the while. Gretchen’s cheeks grow sunken, and she begins to wither; until at last, after some twenty years, their substance has multiplied, and sufficient gulden have been honourably and virtuously accumulated. Then the ‘Fater’ blesses his forty-year-old heir and the thirty-five-year-old Gretchen with the sunken bosom and the scarlet nose; after which he bursts, into tears, reads the pair a lesson on morality, and dies. In turn the eldest son becomes a virtuous ‘Fater,’ and the old story begins again. In fifty or sixty years’ time the grandson of the original ‘Fater’ will have amassed a considerable sum; and that sum he will hand over to, his son, and the latter to HIS son, and so on for several generations; until at length there will issue a Baron Rothschild, or a ‘Hoppe and Company,’ or the devil knows what! Is it not a beautiful spectacle--the spectacle of a century or two of inherited labour, patience, intellect, rectitude, character, perseverance, and calculation, with a stork sitting on the roof above it all? What is more; they think there can never be anything better than this; wherefore, from their point of view they begin to judge the rest of the world, and to censure all who are at fault—that is to say, who are not exactly like themselves. Yes, there you have it in a nutshell. For my

own part, I would rather grow fat after the Russian manner, or squander my whole substance at roulette. I have no wish to be 'Hoppe and Company' at the end of five generations. I want the money for MYSELF, for in no way do I look upon my personality as necessary to, or meet to be given over to, capital. I may be wrong, but there you have it. Those are MY views."

"How far you may be right in what you have said I do not know," remarked the General moodily; "but I DO know that you are becoming an insufferable farceur whenever you are given the least chance."

As usual, he left his sentence unfinished. Indeed, whenever he embarked upon anything that in the least exceeded the limits of daily small-talk, he left unfinished what he was saying. The Frenchman had listened to me contemptuously, with a slight protruding of his eyes; but, he could not have understood very much of my harangue. As for Polina, she had looked on with serene indifference. She seemed to have heard neither my voice nor any other during the progress of the meal.

V

Yes, she had been extraordinarily meditative. Yet, on leaving the table, she immediately ordered me to accompany her for a walk. We took the children with us, and set out for the fountain in the Park.

I was in such an irritated frame of mind that in rude and abrupt fashion I blurted out a question as to "why our Marquis de Griens had ceased to accompany her for strolls, or to speak to her for days together."

"Because he is a brute," she replied in rather a curious way. It was the first time that I had heard her speak so of De Griens: consequently, I was momentarily awed into silence by this expression of resentment.

"Have you noticed, too, that today he is by no means on good terms with the General?" I went on.

"Yes-- and I suppose you want to know why," she replied with dry captiousness. "You are aware, are you not, that the General is mortgaged to the Marquis, with all his property? Consequently, if the General's mother does not die, the Frenchman will become the absolute possessor of everything which he now holds only in pledge."

"Then it is really the case that everything is mortgaged? I have heard rumours to that effect, but was unaware how far they might be true."

"Yes, they ARE true. What then?"

"Why, it will be a case of 'Farewell, Mlle. Blanche,'" I remarked; "for in such an event she would never become Madame General. Do you know, I believe the old man is so much in love with her that he will shoot himself if she should throw him over. At his age it is a dangerous thing to fall in love."

"Yes, something, I believe, WILL happen to him," assented Polina thoughtfully.

"And what a fine thing it all is!" I continued. "Could anything be more abominable than the way in which she has agreed to marry for money alone? Not one of the decencies has been observed; the whole affair has taken place without the least ceremony. And as for the grandmother, what could be more comical, yet more dastardly, than the sending of telegram after telegram to know if she is dead? What do you think of it, Polina Alexandrovna?"

"Yes, it is very horrible," she interrupted with a shudder. "Consequently, I am the more surprised that YOU should be so cheerful. What are YOU so pleased about? About the fact that you have gone and lost my money?"

"What? The money that you gave me to lose? I told you I should never win for other people--least of all for you. I obeyed you simply because you ordered me to; but you must not blame me for the result. I warned you that no good would ever come of it. You seem much depressed at having lost your money. Why do you need it so greatly?"

"Why do YOU ask me these questions?"

"Because you promised to explain matters to me. Listen. I am certain that, as soon as ever I 'begin to play for myself' (and I still have 120 gulden left), I shall win. You can then take of me what you require."

She made a contemptuous grimace.

"You must not be angry with me," I continued, "for making such a proposal. I am so conscious of being only a nonentity in your eyes that you need not mind accepting money from me. A gift from me could not possibly offend you. Moreover, it was I who lost your gulden."

She glanced at me, but, seeing that I was in an irritable, sarcastic mood, changed the subject.

"My affairs cannot possibly interest you," she said. Still, if you DO wish to know, I am in debt. I borrowed some money, and must pay it back again. I have a curious, senseless idea that I am bound to win at the gaming-tables. Why I think so I cannot tell, but I do think so, and with some assurance. Perhaps it is because of that assurance that I now find myself without any other resource."

"Or perhaps it is because it is so NECESSARY for you to win. It is like a drowning man catching at a straw. You yourself will agree that, unless he were drowning he would not mistake a straw for the trunk of a tree."

Polina looked surprised.

"What?" she said. "Do not you also hope something from it? Did you not tell me again and again, two weeks ago, that you were certain of winning at roulette if you played here? And did you not ask me not to consider you a fool for doing so? Were you joking? You cannot have been, for I remember that you spoke with a gravity which forbade the idea of your jesting."

"True," I replied gloomily. "I always felt certain that I should win. Indeed, what you say makes me ask myself--Why have my absurd, senseless losses of today raised a doubt in my mind? Yet I am still positive that, so soon as ever I begin to play for myself, I shall infallibly win."

"And why are you so certain?"

"To tell the truth, I do not know. I only know that I must win--that it is the one resource I have left. Yes, why do I feel so assured on the point?"

"Perhaps because one cannot help winning if one is fanatically certain of doing so."

"Yet I dare wager that you do not think me capable of serious feeling in the matter?"

"I do not care whether you are so or not," answered Polina with calm indifference. "Well, since you ask me, I DO doubt your ability to take anything seriously. You are capable of worrying, but not deeply. You are too ill-regulated and unsettled a person for that. But why do you want money? Not a single one of the reasons which you have given can be looked upon as serious."

"By the way," I interrupted, "you say you want to pay off a debt. It must be a large one. Is it to the Frenchman?"

"What do you mean by asking all these questions? You are very clever today. Surely you are not drunk?"

"You know that you and I stand on no ceremony, and that sometimes I put to you very plain questions. I repeat that I am your, slave--and slaves cannot be shamed or offended."

"You talk like a child. It is always possible to comport oneself with dignity. If one has a quarrel it ought to elevate rather than to degrade one."

"A maxim straight from the copybook! Suppose I CANNOT comport myself with dignity. By that I mean that, though I am a man of self-respect, I am unable to carry off a situation properly. Do you know the reason? It is because we Russians are too richly and multifariously gifted to be able at once to find the proper mode of expression. It is all a question of mode. Most of us are so bounteously endowed with intellect as to require also a spice of genius to choose the right form of behaviour. And genius is lacking in us for the reason that so little genius at all exists. It belongs only to the French--though a few other Europeans have elaborated their forms so well as to be able to figure with extreme dignity, and yet be wholly undignified persons. That is why, with us, the mode is so all-important. The Frenchman may receive an insult-- a real, a venomous insult: yet, he will not so much as frown. But a tweaking of the nose he cannot bear, for the reason that such an act is an infringement of the accepted, of the time-hallowed order of decorum. That is why our good ladies are so fond of Frenchmen--the Frenchman's manners, they say, are perfect! But in my opinion there is no such thing as a Frenchman's manners. The Frenchman is only a bird--the coq gaulois. At the same time, as I am not a woman, I do not properly

understand the question. Cocks may be excellent birds. If I am wrong you must stop me. You ought to stop and correct me more often when I am speaking to you, for I am too apt to say everything that is in my head.

"You see, I have lost my manners. I agree that I have none, nor yet any dignity. I will tell you why. I set no store upon such things. Everything in me has undergone a cheek. You know the reason. I have not a single human thought in my head. For a long while I have been ignorant of what is going on in the world--here or in Russia. I have been to Dresden, yet am completely in the dark as to what Dresden is like. You know the cause of my obsession. I have no hope now, and am a mere cipher in your eyes; wherefore, I tell you outright that wherever I go I see only you--all the rest is a matter of indifference.

"Why or how I have come to love you I do not know. It may be that you are not altogether fair to look upon. Do you know, I am ignorant even as to what your face is like. In all probability, too, your heart is not comely, and it is possible that your mind is wholly ignoble."

"And because you do not believe in my nobility of soul you think to purchase me with money?" she said.

"WHEN have I thought to do so?" was my reply.

"You are losing the thread of the argument. If you do not wish to purchase me, at all events you wish to purchase my respect."

"Not at all. I have told you that I find it difficult to explain myself. You are hard upon me. Do not be angry at my chattering. You know why you ought not to be angry with me--that I am simply an imbecile. However, I do not mind if you ARE angry. Sitting in my room, I need but to think of you, to imagine to myself the rustle of your dress, and at once I fall almost to biting my hands. Why should you be angry with me? Because I call myself your slave? Revel, I pray you, in my slavery--revel in it. Do you know that sometimes I could kill you?--not because I do not love you, or am jealous of you, but, because I feel as though I could simply devour you... You are laughing!"

"No, I am not," she retorted. "But I order you, nevertheless, to be silent."

She stopped, well nigh breathless with anger. God knows, she may not have been a beautiful woman, yet I loved to see her come to a halt like this, and was therefore, the more fond of arousing her temper. Perhaps she divined this, and for that very reason gave way to rage. I said as much to her.

"What rubbish!" she cried with a shudder.

"I do not care," I continued. "Also, do you know that it is not safe for us to take walks together? Often I have a feeling that I should like to strike you, to disfigure you, to strangle you. Are you certain that it will never come to that? You are driving me to frenzy. Am I afraid of a scandal, or of your anger? Why should I fear your anger? I love without hope, and know that hereafter I shall love you a thousand times more. If ever I should kill you I should have to kill myself too. But I shall put off doing so as long as possible, for I wish to continue enjoying the unbearable pain which your coldness gives me. Do you know a very strange thing? It is that, with every day, my love for you increases--though that would seem to be almost an impossibility. Why should I not become a fatalist? Remember how, on the third day that we ascended the Shlangenberg, I was moved to whisper in your ear: 'Say but the word, and I will leap into the abyss.' Had you said it, I should have leapt. Do you not believe me?"

"What stupid rubbish!" she cried.

"I care not whether it be wise or stupid," I cried in return. "I only know that in your presence I must speak, speak, speak. Therefore, I am speaking. I lose all conceit when I am with you, and everything ceases to matter."

"Why should I have wanted you to leap from the Shlangenberg?" she said drily, and (I think) with wilful offensiveness. "THAT would have been of no use to me."

"Splendid!" I shouted. "I know well that you must have used the words 'of no use' in order to crush me. I can see through you. 'Of no use,' did you say? Why, to give pleasure is ALWAYS of use; and, as for barbarous, unlimited power--even if it be only over a fly--why, it is a kind of luxury. Man is a despot by nature, and loves to torture. You, in particular, love to do so."

I remember that at this moment she looked at me in a peculiar way. The fact is that my face must have been expressing all the maze of senseless, gross sensations which were seething within me. To this day I can remember, word for word, the conversation as I have written it down. My eyes were suffused with blood, and the foam had caked itself on my lips. Also, on my honour I swear that, had she bidden me cast myself from the summit of the Shlangenberg, I should have done it. Yes, had she bidden me in jest, or only in contempt and with a spit in my face, I should have cast myself down.

"Oh no! Why so? I believe you," she said, but in such a manner--in the manner of which, at times, she was a mistress--and with such a note of disdain and viperish arrogance in her tone, that God knows I could have killed her.

Yes, at that moment she stood in peril. I had not lied to her about that.

"Surely you are not a coward?" suddenly she asked me.

"I do not know," I replied. "Perhaps I am, but I do not know. I have long given up thinking about such things."

"If I said to you, 'Kill that man,' would you kill him?"

"Whom?"

"Whomsoever I wish?"

"The Frenchman?"

"Do not ask me questions; return me answers. I repeat, whomsoever I wish? I desire to see if you were speaking seriously just now."

She awaited my reply with such gravity and impatience that I found the situation unpleasant.

"Do YOU, rather, tell me," I said, "what is going on here? Why do you seem half-afraid of me? I can see for myself what is wrong. You are the step-daughter of a ruined and insensate man who is smitten with love for this devil of a Blanche. And there is this Frenchman, too, with his mysterious influence over you. Yet, you actually ask me such a question! If you do not tell me how things stand, I shall have to put in my oar and do something. Are you ashamed to be frank with me? Are you shy of me?"

"I am not going to talk to you on that subject. I have asked you a question, and am waiting for an answer."

"Well, then--I will kill whomsoever you wish," I said. "But are you REALLY going to bid me do such deeds?"

"Why should you think that I am going to let you off? I shall bid you do it, or else renounce me. Could you ever do the latter? No, you know that you couldn't. You would first kill whom I had bidden you, and then kill ME for having dared to send you away!"

Something seemed to strike upon my brain as I heard these words. Of course, at the time I took them half in jest and half as a challenge; yet, she had spoken them with great seriousness. I felt thunderstruck that she should so express herself, that she should assert such a right over me, that she should assume such authority and say outright: "Either you kill whom I bid you, or I will have nothing more to do with you." Indeed, in what she had said there was something so cynical and unveiled as to pass all bounds. For how could she ever regard me as the same after the killing was done? This was more than slavery and abasement; it was sufficient to bring a man back to his right senses. Yet, despite the outrageous improbability of our conversation, my heart shook within me.

Suddenly, she burst out laughing. We were seated on a bench near the spot where the children were playing--just opposite the point in the alley-way before the Casino where the carriages drew up in order to set down their occupants.

"Do you see that fat Baroness?" she cried. "It is the Baroness Burmergelm. She arrived three days ago. Just look at her husband--that tall, wizened Prussian there, with the stick in his hand. Do you remember how he stared at us the other day? Well, go to the Baroness, take off your hat to her, and say something in French."

"Why?"

"Because you have sworn that you would leap from the Shlangenberg for my sake, and that you would kill any one whom I might bid you kill. Well, instead of such murders and tragedies, I wish only for a good laugh. Go without answering me, and let me see the Baron give you a sound thrashing with his stick."

“Then you throw me out a challenge?--you think that I will not do it?” “Yes, I do challenge you. Go, for such is my will.”

“Then I WILL go, however mad be your fancy. Only, look here: shall you not be doing the General a great disservice, as well as, through him, a great disservice to yourself? It is not about myself I am worrying-- it is about you and the General. Why, for a mere fancy, should I go and insult a woman?”

“Ah! Then I can see that you are only a trifler,” she said contemptuously. “Your eyes are swimming with blood-- but only because you have drunk a little too much at luncheon. Do I not know that what I have asked you to do is foolish and wrong, and that the General will be angry about it? But I want to have a good laugh, all the same. I want that, and nothing else. Why should you insult a woman, indeed? Well, you will be given a sound thrashing for so doing.”

I turned away, and went silently to do her bidding. Of course the thing was folly, but I could not get out of it. I remember that, as I approached the Baroness, I felt as excited as a schoolboy. I was in a frenzy, as though I were drunk.

VI

Two days have passed since that day of lunacy. What a noise and a fuss and a chattering and an uproar there was! And what a welter of unseemliness and disorder and stupidity and bad manners! And I the cause of it all! Yet part of the scene was also ridiculous--at all events to myself it was so. I am not quite sure what was the matter with me--whether I was merely stupefied or whether I purposely broke loose and ran amok. At times my mind seems all confused;

while at other times I seem almost to be back in my childhood, at the school desk, and to have done the deed simply out of mischief.

It all came of Polina--yes, of Polina. But for her, there might never have been a fracas. Or perhaps I did the deed in a fit of despair (though it may be foolish of me to think so)? What there is so attractive about her I cannot think. Yet there IS something attractive about her--something passing fair, it would seem.

Others besides myself she has driven to distraction. She is tall and straight, and very slim. Her body looks as though it could be tied into a knot, or bent double, like a cord. The imprint of her foot is long and narrow. It is, a maddening imprint--yes, simply a maddening one! And her hair has a reddish tint about it, and her eyes are like cat's eyes--though able also to glance with proud, disdainful mien. On the evening of my first arrival, four months ago, I remember that she was sitting and holding an animated conversation with De Griens in the salon. And the way in which she looked at him was such that later, when I retired to my own room upstairs, I kept fancying that she had smitten him in the face--that she had smitten him right on the cheek, so peculiar had been her look as she stood confronting him. Ever since that evening I have loved her.

But to my tale.

I stepped from the path into the carriage-way, and took my stand in the middle of it. There I awaited the Baron and the Baroness. When they were but a few paces distant from me I took off my hat, and bowed.

I remember that the Baroness was clad in a voluminous silk dress, pale grey in colour, and adorned with flounces and a crinoline and train. Also, she was short and inordinately stout, while her gross, flabby chin completely concealed her neck. Her face was purple, and the little eyes in it had an impudent, malicious expression. Yet she walked as though she were conferring a favour upon everybody by so doing. As for the Baron, he was tall, wizened, bony-faced after the German fashion, spectacled, and, apparently, about forty-five years of age. Also, he had legs which seemed to begin almost at his chest--or, rather, at his chin! Yet, for all his air of peacock-like conceit, his clothes sagged a little, and his face wore a sheepish air which might have passed for profundity.

These details I noted within a space of a few seconds.

At first my bow and the fact that I had my hat in my hand barely caught their attention. The Baron only scowled a little, and the Baroness swept straight on.

"Madame la Baronne," said I, loudly and distinctly--embroidering each word, as it were--"j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave."

Then I bowed again, put on my hat, and walked past the Baron with a rude smile on my face.

Polina had ordered me merely to take off my hat: the bow and the general effrontery were of my own invention. God knows what instigated me to perpetrate the outrage! In my frenzy I felt as though I were walking on air,

"Hein!" ejaculated--or, rather, growled--the Baron as he turned towards me in angry surprise.

I too turned round, and stood waiting in pseudo-courteous expectation. Yet still I wore on my face an impudent smile as I gazed at him. He seemed to hesitate, and his brows contracted to their utmost limits. Every moment his visage was growing darker. The Baroness also turned in my direction, and gazed at me in wrathful perplexity, while some of the passers-by also began to stare at us, and others of them halted outright.

"Hein!" the Baron vociferated again, with a redoubled growl and a note of growing wrath in his voice.

"Ja wohl!" I replied, still looking him in the eyes.

"Sind sie rasend?" he exclaimed, brandishing his stick, and, apparently, beginning to feel nervous. Perhaps it was my costume which intimidated him, for I was well and fashionably dressed, after the manner of a man who belongs to indisputably good society.

"Ja wo-o-ohl!" cried I again with all my might with a longdrawn rolling of the "ohl" sound after the fashion of the Berliners (who constantly use the phrase "Ja wohl!" in conversation, and more or less prolong the syllable "ohl" according as they desire to express different shades of meaning or of mood).

At this the Baron and the Baroness faced sharply about, and almost fled in their alarm. Some of the bystanders gave vent to excited exclamations, and others remained staring at me in astonishment. But I do not remember the details very well.

Wheeling quietly about, I returned in the direction of Polina Alexandrovna. But, when I had got within a hundred paces of her seat, I saw her rise and set out with the children towards the hotel.

At the portico I caught up to her.

"I have perpetrated the--the piece of idiocy," I said as I came level with her.

"Have you? Then you can take the consequences," she replied without so much as looking at me. Then she moved towards the staircase.

I spent the rest of the evening walking in the park. Thence I passed into the forest, and walked on until I found myself in a neighbouring principality. At a wayside restaurant I partook of an omelette and some wine, and was charged for the idyllic repast a thaler and a half.

Not until eleven o'clock did I return home--to find a summons awaiting me from the General.

Our party occupied two suites in the hotel; each of which contained two rooms. The first (the larger suite) comprised a salon and a smoking-room, with, adjoining the latter, the General's study. It was here that he was awaiting me as he stood posed in a majestic attitude beside his writing-table. Lolling on a divan close by was De Griens.

"My good sir," the General began, "may I ask you what this is that you have gone and done?"

"I should be glad," I replied, "if we could come straight to the point. Probably you are referring to my encounter of today with a German?"

"With a German? Why, the German was the Baron Burmergelm--a most important personage! I hear that you have been rude both to him and to the Baroness?"

"No, I have not."

"But I understand that you simply terrified them, my good sir?" shouted the General.

"Not in the least," I replied. "You must know that when I was in Berlin I frequently used to hear the Berliners repeat, and repellently prolong, a certain phrase--namely, 'Ja wohl!'; and, happening to meet this couple in the carriage-drive, I found, for some reason or another, that this phrase suddenly recurred to my memory, and exercised a rousing effect upon my spirits. Moreover, on the three previous occasions that I have met the Baroness she has walked towards me as though I were a worm which could easily be crushed with the foot. Not unnaturally, I too possess a measure of self-respect; wherefore, on THIS occasion I took off my hat, and said politely (yes, I assure you it was said politely): 'Madame, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave.' Then the Baron turned round, and said 'Hein!'; whereupon I felt moved to ejaculate in answer 'Ja wohl!' Twice I shouted it at him--the first time in an ordinary tone, and the second time with the greatest prolonging of the words of which I was capable. That is all."

I must confess that this puerile explanation gave me great pleasure. I felt a strong desire to overlay the incident with an even added measure of grossness; so, the further I proceeded, the more did the gusto of my proceeding increase.

"You are only making fun of me!" vociferated the General as, turning to the Frenchman, he declared that my bringing about of the incident had been gratuitous. De Griens smiled contemptuously, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Do not think THAT," I put in. "It was not so at all. I grant you that my behaviour was bad--I fully confess that it was so, and make no secret of the fact. I would even go so far as to grant you that my behaviour might well be called stupid and indecent tomfoolery; but, MORE than that it was not. Also, let me tell you that I am very sorry for my conduct. Yet there is one circumstance which, in my eyes, almost absolves me from regret in the matter. Of late--that is to say, for the last two or three weeks--I have been feeling not at all well. That is to say, I have been in a sick, nervous, irritable, fanciful condition, so that I have periodically lost control over myself. For instance, on more than one occasion I have tried to pick a quarrel even with Monsieur le Marquis here; and, under the circumstances, he had no choice but to answer me. In short, I have recently been showing signs of ill-health. Whether the Baroness Burmergelm will take this circumstance into consideration when I come to beg her pardon (for I do intend to make her amends) I do not know; but I doubt if she will, and the less so since, so far as I know, the circumstance is one which, of late, has begun to be abused in the legal world, in that advocates in criminal cases have taken to justifying their clients on the ground that, at the moment of the crime, they (the clients) were unconscious of what they were doing--that, in short, they were out of health. 'My client committed the murder--that is true; but he has no recollection of having committed it.' And doctors actually support these advocates by affirming that there really is such a malady--that there really can arise temporary delusions which make a man remember nothing of a given deed, or only a half or a quarter of it! But the Baron and Baroness are members of an older generation, as well as Prussian Junkers and landowners. To them such a process in the medico-judicial world will be unknown, and therefore, they are the more unlikely to accept any such explanation. What is YOUR opinion about it, General?"

"Enough, sir!" he thundered with barely restrained fury. "Enough, I say! Once and for all I must endeavour to rid myself of you and your impertinence. To justify yourself in the eyes of the Baron and Baroness will be impossible. Any intercourse with you, even though it be confined to a begging of their pardons, they would look upon as a degradation. I may tell you that, on learning that you formed part of, my household, the Baron approached me in the Casino, and demanded of me additional satisfaction. Do you understand, then, what it is that you have entailed upon me--upon ME, my good sir? You have entailed upon me the fact of my being forced to sue humbly to the Baron, and to give him my word of honour that this very day you shall cease to belong to my establishment!"

"Excuse me, General," I interrupted, "but did he make an express point of it that I should 'cease to belong to your establishment,' as you call it?"

"No; I, of my own initiative, thought that I ought to afford him that satisfaction; and, with it he was satisfied. So we must part, good sir. It is my duty to hand over to you forty gulden, three florins, as per the accompanying statement. Here is the money, and here the account, which you are at liberty to verify. Farewell. From henceforth we are strangers. From you I have never had anything but trouble and unpleasantness. I am about to call the

landlord, and explain to him that from tomorrow onwards I shall no longer be responsible for your hotel expenses. Also I have the honour to remain your obedient servant.”

I took the money and the account (which was indicted in pencil), and, bowing low to the General, said to him very gravely:

“The matter cannot end here. I regret very much that you should have been put to unpleasantness at the Baron’s hands; but, the fault (pardon me) is your own. How came you to answer for me to the Baron? And what did you mean by saying that I formed part of your household? I am merely your family tutor--not a son of yours, nor yet your ward, nor a person of any kind for whose acts you need be responsible. I am a judicially competent person, a man of twenty-five years of age, a university graduate, a gentleman, and, until I met yourself, a complete stranger to you. Only my boundless respect for your merits restrains me from demanding satisfaction at your hands, as well as a further explanation as to the reasons which have led you to take it upon yourself to answer for my conduct.”

So struck was he with my words that, spreading out his hands, he turned to the Frenchman, and interpreted to him that I had challenged himself (the General) to a duel. The Frenchman laughed aloud.

“Nor do I intend to let the Baron off,” I continued calmly, but with not a little discomfiture at De Griens’ merriment. “And since you, General, have today been so good as to listen to the Baron’s complaints, and to enter into his concerns--since you have made yourself a participator in the affair--I have the honour to inform you that, tomorrow morning at the latest, I shall, in my own name, demand of the said Baron a formal explanation as to the reasons which have led him to disregard the fact that the matter lies between him and myself alone, and to put a slight upon me by referring it to another person, as though I were unworthy to answer for my own conduct.”

Then there happened what I had foreseen. The General on hearing of this further intended outrage, showed the white feather.

“What? “ he cried. “Do you intend to go on with this damned nonsense? Do you not realise the harm that it is doing me? I beg of you not to laugh at me, sir--not to laugh at me, for we have police authorities here who, out of respect for my rank, and for that of the Baron... In short, sir, I swear to you that I will have you arrested, and marched out of the place, to prevent any further brawling on your part. Do you understand what I say?” He was almost breathless with anger, as well as in a terrible fright.

“General,” I replied with that calmness which he never could abide, “one cannot arrest a man for brawling until he has brawled. I have not so much as begun my explanations to the Baron, and you are altogether ignorant as to the form and time which my intended procedure is likely to assume. I wish but to disabuse the Baron of what is, to me, a shameful supposition--namely, that I am under the guardianship of a person who is qualified to exercise control over my free will. It is vain for you to disturb and alarm yourself.”

“For God’s sake, Alexis Ivanovitch, do put an end to this senseless scheme of yours!” he muttered, but with a sudden change from a truculent tone to one of entreaty as he caught me by the hand. “Do you know what is likely to come of it? Merely further unpleasantness. You will agree with me, I am sure, that at present I ought to move with especial care--yes, with very especial care. You cannot be fully aware of how I am situated. When we leave this place I shall be ready to receive you back into my household; but, for the time being I-- Well, I cannot tell you all my reasons.” With that he wound up in a despairing voice: “O Alexis Ivanovitch, Alexis Ivanovitch!”

I moved towards the door--begging him to be calm, and promising that everything should be done decently and in order; whereafter I departed.

Russians, when abroad, are over-apt to play the poltroon, to watch all their words, and to wonder what people are thinking of their conduct, or whether such and such a thing is ‘comme il faut.’ In short, they are over-apt to cosset themselves, and to lay claim to great importance. Always they prefer the form of behaviour which has once and for all become accepted and established. This they will follow slavishly whether in hotels, on promenades, at meetings, or when on a journey. But the General had avowed to me that, over and above such considerations as these, there were circumstances which compelled him to “move with especial care at present”, and that the fact had actually made him poor-spirited and a coward--it had made him altogether change his tone towards me. This

fact I took into my calculations, and duly noted it, for, of course, he MIGHT apply to the authorities tomorrow, and it behoved me to go carefully.

Yet it was not the General but Polina that I wanted to anger. She had treated me with such cruelty, and had got me into such a hole, that I felt a longing to force her to beseech me to stop. Of course, my tomfoolery might compromise her; yet certain other feelings and desires had begun to form themselves in my brain. If I was never to rank in her eyes as anything but a nonentity, it would not greatly matter if I figured as a draggle-tailed cockerel, and the Baron were to give me a good thrashing; but, the fact was that I desired to have the laugh of them all, and to come out myself unscathed. Let people see what they WOULD see. Let Polina, for once, have a good fright, and be forced to whistle me to heel again. But, however much she might whistle, she should see that I was at least no draggle-tailedcockerel!

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I have just received a surprising piece of news. I have just met our chambermaid on the stairs, and been informed by her that Maria Philipovna departed today, by the night train, to stay with a cousin at Carlsbad. What can that mean? The maid declares that Madame packed her trunks early in the day. Yet how is it that no one else seems to have been aware of the circumstance? Or is it that I have been the only person to be unaware of it? Also, the maid has just told me that, three days ago, Maria Philipovna had some high words with the General. I understand, then! Probably the words were concerning Mlle. Blanche. Certainly something decisive is approaching.

VII

In the morning I sent for the maitre d'hotel, and explained to him that, in future, my bill was to be rendered to me personally. As a matter of fact, my expenses had never been so large as to alarm me, nor to lead me to quit the hotel; while, moreover, I still had 160 gulden left to me, and--in them--yes, in them, perhaps, riches awaited me. It was a curious fact, that, though I had not yet won anything at play, I nevertheless acted, thought, and felt as though I were sure, before long, to become wealthy-- since I could not imagine myselfotherwise.

Next, I bethought me, despite the earliness of the hour, of going to see Mr. Astley, who was staying at the Hotel de l'Angleterre (a hostelry at no great distance from our own). But suddenly De Griens entered my room. This had never before happened, for of late that gentleman and I had stood on the most strained and distant of terms--he attempting no concealment of his contempt for me (he even made an express, point of showing it), and I having no reason to desire his company. In short, I detested him. Consequently, his entry at the present moment the more astounded me. At once I divined that something out of the way was on thecarpet.

He entered with marked affability, and began by complimenting me on my room. Then, perceiving that I had my hat in my hands, he inquired whither I was going so early; and, no sooner did he hear that I was bound for Mr. Astley's than he stopped, looked grave, and seemed plunged in thought.

He was a true Frenchman insofar as that, though he could be lively and engaging when it suited him, he became insufferably dull and wearisome as soon as ever the need for being lively and engaging had passed. Seldom is a Frenchman NATURALLY civil: he is civil only as though to order and of set purpose. Also, if he thinks it incumbent upon him to be fanciful, original, and out of the way, his fancy always assumes a foolish, unnatural vein, for the reason that it is compounded of trite, hackneyed forms. In short, the natural Frenchman is a conglomeration of commonplace, petty, everyday positiveness, so that he is the most tedious person in the world.-Indeed, I believe that none but greenhorns and excessively Russian people feel an attraction towards theFrench; for, to any man of sensibility, such a compendium of outworn forms--a compendium which is built up of drawing-room manners, expansiveness, and gaiety--becomes at once over-noticeable and unbearable.

"I have come to see you on business," De Griers began in a very off-hand, yet polite, tone; "nor will I seek to conceal from you the fact that I have come in the capacity of an emissary, of an intermediary, from the General. Having small knowledge of the Russian tongue, I lost most of what was said last night; but, the General has now explained matters, and I must confess that--"

"See here, Monsieur de Griers," I interrupted. "I understand that you have undertaken to act in this affair as an intermediary. Of course I am only 'un utchitel,' a tutor, and have never claimed to be an intimate of this household, nor to stand on at all familiar terms with it. Consequently, I do not know the whole of its circumstances. Yet pray explain to me this: have you yourself become one of its members, seeing that you are beginning to take such a part in everything, and are now present as an intermediary?"

The Frenchman seemed not over-pleased at my question. It was one which was too outspoken for his taste--and he had no mind to be frank with me.

"I am connected with the General," he said drily, "partly through business affairs, and partly through special circumstances. My principal has sent me merely to ask you to forego your intentions of last evening. What you contemplate is, I have no doubt, very clever; yet he has charged me to represent to you that you have not the slightest chance of succeeding in your end, since not only will the Baron refuse to receive you, but also he (the Baron) has at his disposal every possible means for obviating further unpleasantness from you. Surely you can see that yourself? What, then, would be the good of going on with it all? On the other hand, the General promises that at the first favourable opportunity he will receive you back into his household, and, in the meantime, will credit you with your salary--with 'vos appointements.' Surely that will suit you, will it not?"

Very quietly I replied that he (the Frenchman) was labouring under a delusion; that perhaps, after all, I should not be expelled from the Baron's presence, but,

on the contrary, be listened to; finally, that I should be glad if Monsieur de Griers would confess that he was now visiting me merely in order to see how far I intended to go in the affair.

"Good heavens!" cried de Griers. "Seeing that the General takes such an interest in the matter, is there anything very unnatural in his desiring also to know your plans? "

Again I began my explanations, but the Frenchman only fidgeted and rolled his head about as he listened with an expression of manifest and unconcealed irony on his face. In short, he adopted a supercilious attitude. For my own part, I endeavoured to pretend that I took the affair very seriously. I declared that, since the Baron had gone and complained of me to the General, as though I were a mere servant of the General's, he had, in the first place, lost me my post, and, in the second place, treated me like a person to whom, as to one not qualified to answer for himself, it was not even worth while to speak. Naturally, I said, I felt insulted at this. Yet, comprehending as I did, differences of years, of social status, and so forth (here I could scarcely help smiling), I was not anxious to bring about further scenes by going personally to demand or to request satisfaction of the Baron. All that I felt was that I had a right to go in person and beg the Baron's and the Baroness's pardon--the more so since, of late, I had been feeling unwell and unstrung, and had been in a fanciful condition. And so forth, and so forth. Yet (I continued) the Baron's offensive behaviour to me of yesterday (that is to say, the fact of his referring the matter to the General) as well as his insistence that the General should deprive me of my post, had placed me in such a position that I could not well express my regret to him (the Baron) and to his good lady, for the reason that in all probability both he and the Baroness, with the world at large, would imagine that I was doing so merely because I hoped, by my action, to recover my post. Hence, I found myself forced to request the Baron to express to me HIS OWN regrets, as well as to express them in the most unqualified manner--to say, in fact, that he had never had any wish to insult me. After the Baron had done THAT, I should, for my part, at once feel free to express to him, whole-heartedly and without reserve, my own regrets." In short," I declared in conclusion, "my one desire is that the Baron may make it possible for me to adopt the lattercourse."

"Oh fie! What refinements and subtleties!" exclaimed De Griers. "Besides, what have you to express regret for? Confess, Monsieur, Monsieur--pardon me, but I have forgotten your name--confess, I say, that all this is merely a plan to annoy the General? Or perhaps, you have some other and special end in view? Eh?"

"In return you must pardon ME, mon cher Marquis, and tell me what you have to do with it."

“The General--“

”But what of the General? Last night he said that, for some reason or another, it behoved him to ‘move with especial care at present;’ wherefore, he was feeling nervous. But I did not understand the reference.”

“Yes, there DO exist special reasons for his doing so,” assented De Griens in a conciliatory tone, yet with rising anger. “You are acquainted with Mlle. de Cominges, are you not?”

“Mlle. Blanche, you mean?”

“Yes, Mlle. Blanche de Cominges. Doubtless you know also that the General is in love with this young lady, and may even be about to marry her before he leaves here? Imagine, therefore, what any scene or scandal would entail upon him!”

“I cannot see that the marriage scheme need, be affected by scenes or scandals.”

“Mais le Baron est si irascible--un caractere prussien, vous savez! Enfin il fera une querelle d’Allemand.”

“I do not care,” I replied, “seeing that I no longer belong to his household” (of set purpose I was trying to talk as senselessly as possible). “But is it quite settled that Mlle. is to marry the General? What are they waiting for? Why should they conceal such a matter--at all events from ourselves, the General’s own party?”

“I cannot tell you. The marriage is not yet a settled affair, for they are awaiting news from Russia. The General has business transactions to arrange.”

“Ah! Connected, doubtless, with madame his mother?” De Griens shot at me a glance of hatred.

“To cut things short,” he interrupted, “I have complete confidence in your native politeness, as well as in your tact and good sense. I feel sure that you will do what I suggest, even if it is only for the sake of this family which has received you as a kinsman into its bosom and has always loved and respected you.”

“Be so good as to observe,” I remarked, “that the same family has just EXPELLED me from its bosom. All that you are saying you are saying but for show; but, when people have just said to you, ‘Of course we do not wish to turn you out, yet, for the sake of appearance’s, you must PERMIT yourself to be turned out,’ nothing can matter very much.”

“Very well, then,” he said, in a sterner and more arrogant tone. “Seeing that my solicitations have had no effect upon you, it is my duty to mention that other measures will be taken. There exist here police, you must remember, and this very day they shall send you packing. Que diable! To think of a blanc bec like yourself challenging a person like the Baron to a duel! Do you suppose that you will be ALLOWED to do such things? Just try doing them, and see if any one will be afraid of you! The reason why I have asked you to desist is that I can see that your conduct is causing the General annoyance. Do you believe that the Baron could not tell his lacquey simply to put you out of doors?”

“Nevertheless I should not GO out of doors,” I retorted with absolute calm. “You are labouring under a delusion, Monsieur de Griens. The thing will be done in far better trim than you imagine. I was just about to start for Mr. Astley’s, to ask him to be my intermediary--in other words, my second. He has a strong liking for me, and I do not think that he will refuse. He will go and see the Baron on MY behalf, and the Baron will certainly not decline to receive him. Although I am only a tutor--a kind of subaltern, Mr. Astley is known to all men as the nephew of a real English lord, the Lord Piebroch, as well as a lord in his own right. Yes, you may be pretty sure that the Baron will be civil to Mr. Astley, and listen to him. Or, should he decline to do so, Mr. Astley will take the refusal as a personal affront to himself (for you know how persistent the English are?) and thereupon introduce to the Baron a friend of his own (and he has many friends in a good position). That being so, picture to yourself the issue of the affair--an affair which will not quite end as you think it will.”

This caused the Frenchman to bethink him of playing the coward. “Really things may be as this fellow says,” he evidently thought. “Really he MIGHT be able to engineer another scene.”

“Once more I beg of you to let the matter drop,” he continued in a tone that was now entirely conciliatory. “One would think that it actually PLEASED you to have scenes! Indeed, it is a brawl rather than genuine satisfaction that you are seeking. I have said that the affair may prove to be diverting, and even clever, and that possibly you

may attain something by it; yet none the less I tell you” (he said this only because he saw me rise and reach for my hat) “that I have come hither also to hand you these few words from a certain person. Read them, please, for I must take her back ananswer.”

So saying, he took from his pocket a small, compact, wafer-sealed note, and handed it to me. In Polina’s handwriting I read:

“I hear that you are thinking of going on with this affair. You have lost your temper now, and are beginning to play the fool! Certain circumstances, however, I may explain to you later. Pray cease from your folly, and put a check upon yourself. For folly it all is. I have need of you, and, moreover, you have promised to obey me. Remember the Shlangenberg. I ask you to be obedient. If necessary, I shall even BID you be obedient.--Your own POLINA.

“P.S.--If so be that you still bear a grudge against me for what happened last night, pray forgive me.”

Everything, to my eyes, seemed to change as I read these words. My lips grew pale, and I began to tremble. Meanwhile, the cursed Frenchman was eyeing me discreetly and askance, as though he wished to avoid witnessing my confusion. It would have been better if he had laughed outright.

“Very well,” I said, “you can tell Mlle. not to disturb herself. But,” I added sharply, “I would also ask you why you have been so long in handing me this note? Instead of chattering about trifles, you ought to have delivered me the missive at once--if you have really come commissioned as you say.”

“Well, pardon some natural haste on my part, for the situation is so strange. I wished first to gain some personal knowledge of your intentions; and, moreover, I did not know the contents of the note, and thought that it could be given you at any time.”

“I understand,” I replied. “So you were ordered to hand me the note only in the last resort, and if you could not otherwise appease me? Is it not so? Speak out, Monsieur de Griens.”

“Perhaps,” said he, assuming a look of great forbearance, but gazing at me in a meaning way.

I reached for my hat; whereupon he nodded, and went out. Yet on his lips I fancied that I could see a mocking smile. How could it have been otherwise?

“You and I are to have a reckoning later, Master Frenchman,” I muttered as I descended the stairs. “Yes, we will measure our strength together.” Yet my thoughts were all in confusion, for again something seemed to have struck me dizzy. Presently the air revived me a little, and, a couple of minutes later, my brain had sufficiently cleared to enable two ideas in particular to stand out in it. Firstly, I asked myself, which of the absurd, boyish, and extravagant threats which I had uttered at random last night had made everybody so alarmed? Secondly, what was the influence which this Frenchman appeared to exercise over Polina? He had but to give the word, and at once she did as he desired--at once she wrote me a note to beg of me to forbear! Of course, the relations between the pair had, from the first, been a riddle to me--they had been so ever since I had first made their acquaintance. But of late I had remarked in her a strong aversion for, even a contempt for--him, while, for his part, he had scarcely even looked at her, but had behaved towards her always in the most churlish fashion. Yes, I had noted that. Also, Polina herself had mentioned to me her dislike for him, and delivered herself of some remarkable confessions on the subject. Hence, he must have got her into his power somehow--somehow he must be holding her as in a vice.

VIII

All at once, on the Promenade, as it was called--that is to say, in the Chestnut Avenue--I came face to face with my Englishman.

“I was just coming to see you,” he said; “and you appear to be out on a similar errand. So you have parted with your employers?”

“How do you know that?” I asked in astonishment. “Is EVERY ONE aware of the fact? “

"By no means. Not every one would consider such a fact to be of moment. Indeed, I have never heard any one speak of it."

"Then how come you to know it?"

"Because I have had occasion to do so. Whither are you bound? I like you, and was therefore coming to pay you a visit."

"What a splendid fellow you are, Mr. Astley!" I cried, though still wondering how he had come by his knowledge. "And since I have not yet had my coffee, and you have, in all probability, scarcely tasted yours, let us adjourn to the Casino Cafe, where we can sit and smoke and have atalk."

The cafe in question was only a hundred paces away; so, when coffee had been brought, we seated ourselves, and I lit a cigarette. Astley was no smoker, but, taking a seat by my side, he prepared himself to listen.

"I do not intend to go away," was my first remark. "I intend, on the contrary, to remain here."

"That I never doubted," he answered good-humouredly.

It is a curious fact that, on my way to see him, I had never even thought of telling him of my love for Polina. In fact, I had purposely meant to avoid any mention of the subject. Nor, during our stay in the place, had I ever made aught but the scantiest reference to it. You see, not only was Astley a man of great reserve, but also from the first I had perceived that Polina had made a great impression upon him, although he never spoke of her. But now, strangely enough, he had no sooner seated himself and bent his steely gaze upon me, than, for some reason or another, I felt moved to tell him everything--to speak to him of my love in all its phases. For an hour and a half did I discourse on the subject, and found it a pleasure to do so, even though this was the first occasion on which I had referred to the matter. Indeed, when, at certain moments, I perceived that my more ardent passages confused him, I purposely increased my ardour of narration. Yet one thing I regret: and that is that I made references to the Frenchman which were a little over-personal.

Mr. Astley sat without moving as he listened to me. Not a word nor a sound of any kind did he utter as he stared into my eyes. Suddenly, however, on my mentioning the Frenchman, he interrupted me, and inquired sternly whether I did right to speak of an extraneous matter (he had always been a strange man in his mode of propounding questions).

"No, I fear not," I replied.

"And concerning this Marquis and Mlle. Polina you know nothing beyond surmise?"

Again I was surprised that such a categorical question should come from such a reserved individual.

"No, I know nothing FOR CERTAIN about them" was my reply. "No--nothing."

"Then you have done very wrong to speak of them to me, or even to imagine things about them."

"Quite so, quite so," I interrupted in some astonishment. "I admit that. Yet that is not the question." Whereupon I related to him in detail the incident of two days ago. I spoke of Polina's outburst, of my encounter with the Baron, of my dismissal, of the General's extraordinary pusillanimity, and of the call which De Griens had that morning paid me. In conclusion, I showed Astley the note which I had lately received.

"What do you make of it?" I asked. "When I met you I was just coming to ask you your opinion. For myself, I could have killed this Frenchman, and am not sure that I shall not do so even yet."

"I feel the same about it," said Mr. Astley. "As for Mlle. Polina--well, you yourself know that, if necessity drives, one enters into relation with people whom one simply detests. Even between this couple there may be something which, though unknown to you, depends upon extraneous circumstances. For, my own part, I think that you may reassure yourself--or at all events partially. And as for Mlle. Polina's proceedings of two days ago, they were, of course, strange; not because she can have meant to get rid of you, or to earn for you a thrashing from the Baron's cudgel (which for some curious reason, he did not use, although he had it ready in his hands), but because such proceedings on the part of such--well, of such a refined lady as Mlle. Polina are, to say the least of it, unbecoming. But she cannot have guessed that you would carry out her absurd wish to the letter?"

"Do you know what?" suddenly I cried as I fixed Mr. Astley with my gaze. "I believe that you have already heard the story from some one--very possibly from Mlle. Polina herself?"

In return he gave me an astonished stare.

"Your eyes look very fiery," he said with a return of his former calm, "and in them I can read suspicion. Now, you have no right whatever to be suspicious. It is not a right which I can for a moment recognise, and I absolutely refuse to answer your questions."

"Enough! You need say no more," I cried with a strange emotion at my heart, yet not altogether understanding what had aroused that emotion in my breast. Indeed, when, where, and how could Polina have chosen Astley to be one of her confidants? Of late I had come rather to overlook him in this connection, even though Polina had always been a riddle to me--so much so that now, when I had just permitted myself to tell my friend of my infatuation in all its aspects, I had found myself struck, during the very telling, with the fact that in my relations with her I could specify nothing that was explicit, nothing that was positive. On the contrary, my relations had been purely fantastic, strange, and unreal; they had been unlike anything else that I could think of.

"Very well, very well," I replied with a warmth equal to Astley's own. "Then I stand confounded, and have no further opinions to offer. But you are a good fellow, and I am glad to know what you think about it all, even though I do not need your advice."

Then, after a pause, I resumed:

"For instance, what reason should you assign for the General taking fright in this way? Why should my stupid clowning have led the world to elevate it into a serious incident? Even De Griens has found it necessary to put in his oar (and he only interferes on the most important occasions), and to visit me, and to address to me the most earnest supplications. Yes, HE, De Griens, has actually been playing the suppliant to ME! And, mark you, although he came to me as early as nine o'clock, he had ready-prepared in his hand Mlle. Polina's note. When, I would ask, was that note written? Mlle. Polina must have been aroused from sleep for the express purpose of writing it. At all events the circumstance shows that she is an absolute slave to the Frenchman, since she actually begs my pardon in the note--actually begs my pardon! Yet what is her personal concern in the matter? Why is she interested in it at all? Why, too, is the whole party so afraid of this precious Baron? And what sort of a business do you call it for the General to be going to marry Mlle. Blanche de Cominges? He told me last night that, because of the circumstance, he must 'move with especial care at present.' What is your opinion of it all? Your look convinces me that you know more about it than I do."

Mr. Astley smiled and nodded.

"Yes, I think I DO know more about it than you do," he assented. "The affair centres around this Mlle. Blanche. Of that I feel certain."

"And what of Mlle. Blanche?" I cried impatiently (for in me there had dawned a sudden hope that this would enable me to discover something about Polina).

"Well, my belief is that at the present moment Mlle. Blanche has, in very truth,

a special reason for wishing to avoid any trouble with the Baron and the Baroness. It might lead not only to some unpleasantness, but even to a scandal."

"Oh, oh! "

"Also I may tell you that Mlle. Blanche has been in Roulettenberg before, for she was staying here three seasons ago. I myself was in the place at the time, and in those days Mlle. Blanche was not known as Mlle. de Cominges, nor was her mother, the Widow de Cominges, even in existence. In any case no one ever mentioned the latter. De Griens, too, had not materialised, and I am convinced that not only do the parties stand in no relation to one another, but also they have not long enjoyed one another's acquaintance. Likewise, the Marquisate de Griens is of recent creation. Of that I have reason to be sure, owing to a certain circumstance. Even the name De Griens itself may be taken to be a new invention, seeing that I have a friend who once met the said 'Marquis' under a different name altogether."

"Yet he possesses a good circle of friends?"

“Possibly. Mlle. Blanche also may possess that. Yet it is not three years since she received from the local police, at the instance of the Baroness, an invitation to leave the town. And she left it.”

“But why?”

“Well, I must tell you that she first appeared here in company with an Italian--a prince of some sort, a man who bore an historic name (Barberini or something of the kind). The fellow was simply a mass of rings and diamonds -- real diamonds, too -- and the couple used to drive out in a marvellous carriage. At first Mlle. Blanche played ‘trente et quarante’ with fair success, but, later, her luck took a marked change for the worse. I distinctly remember that in a single evening she lost an enormous sum. But worse was to ensue, for one fine morning her prince disappeared--horses, carriage, and all. Also, the hotel bill which he left unpaid was enormous. Upon this Mlle. Zelma (the name which she assumed after figuring as Madame Barberini) was in despair. She shrieked and howled all over the hotel, and even tore her clothes in her frenzy. In the hotel

there was staying also a Polish count (you must know that ALL travelling Poles are counts!), and the spectacle of Mlle. Zelma tearing her clothes and, catlike, scratching her face with her beautiful, scented nails produced upon him a strong impression. So the pair had a talk together, and, by luncheon time, she was consoled. Indeed, that evening the couple entered the Casino arm-in-arm

-- Mlle. Zelma laughing loudly, according to her custom, and showing even more expansiveness in her manners than she had before shown. For instance, she thrust her way into the file of women roulette-players in the exact fashion of those ladies who, to clear a space for themselves at the tables, push their fellow-players roughly aside. Doubtless you have noticed them?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Well, they are not worth noticing. To the annoyance of the decent public they are allowed to remain here--at all events such of them as daily change 4000 franc notes at the tables (though, as soon as ever these women cease to do so, they receive an invitation to depart). However, Mlle. Zelma continued to change notes of this kind, but her play grew more and more unsuccessful, despite the fact that such ladies’ luck is frequently good, for they have a surprising amount of cash at their disposal. Suddenly, the Count too disappeared, even as the Prince had done, and that same evening Mlle. Zelma was forced to appear in the Casino alone. On this occasion no one offered her a greeting. Two days later she had come to the end of her resources; whereupon, after staking and losing her last louis d’or she chanced to look around her, and saw standing by her side the Baron Burmergelm, who had been eyeing her with fixed disapproval. To his distaste, however, Mlle. paid no attention, but, turning to him with her well-known smile, requested him to stake, on her behalf, ten louis on the red. Later that evening a complaint from the Baroness led the authorities to request Mlle. not to re-enter the Casino. If you feel in any way surprised that I should know these petty and unedifying details, the reason is that I had them from a relative of mine who, later that evening, drove Mlle. Zelma in his carriage from Roulettenberg to Spa. Now, mark you, Mlle. wants to become Madame General, in order that, in future, she may be spared the receipt of such invitations from Casino authorities as she received three years ago. At present she is not playing; but that is only because, according to the signs, she is lending money to other players. Yes, that is a much more paying game. I even suspect that the unfortunate General is himself in her debt, as well as, perhaps, also De Griens. Or, it may be that the latter has entered into a partnership with her. Consequently you yourself will see that, until the marriage shall have been consummated, Mlle. would scarcely like to have the attention of the Baron and the Baroness drawn to herself. In short, to any one in her position, a scandal would be most detrimental. You form a member of the menage of these people; wherefore, any act of yours might cause such a scandal--and the more so since daily she appears in public arm in arm with the General or with Mlle. Polina. NOW do you understand?”

“No, I do not!” I shouted as I banged my fist down upon the table--banged it with such violence that a frightened waiter came running towards us. “Tell me, Mr. Astley, why, if you knew this history all along, and, consequently, always knew who this Mlle. Blanche is, you never warned either myself or the General, nor, most of all, Mlle. Polina” (who is accustomed to appear in the Casino -- in public everywhere with Mlle. Blanche).” How could you do it?”

"It would have done no good to warn you," he replied quietly, "for the reason that you could have effected nothing. Against what was I to warn you? As likely as not, the General knows more about Mlle. Blanche even than I do; yet the unhappy man still walks about with her and Mlle. Polina. Only yesterday I saw this Frenchwoman riding, splendidly mounted, with De Griens, while the General was careering in their wake on a roan horse. He had said, that morning, that his legs were hurting him, yet his riding-seat was easy enough. As he passed I looked at him, and the thought occurred to me that he was a man lost for ever. However, it is no affair of mine, for I have only recently had the happiness to make Mlle. Polina's acquaintance. Also"--he added this as an afterthought--"I have already told you that I do not recognise your right to ask me certain questions, however sincere be my liking for you."

"Enough," I said, rising. "To me it is as clear as day that Mlle. Polina knows all about this Mlle. Blanche, but cannot bring herself to part with her Frenchman; wherefore, she consents also to be seen in public with Mlle. Blanche. You may be sure that nothing else would ever have induced her either to walk about

with this Frenchwoman or to send me a note not to touch the Baron. Yes, it is THERE that the influence lies before which everything in the world must bow! Yet she herself it was who launched me at the Baron! The devil take it, but I was left no choice in the matter."

"You forget, in the first place, that this Mlle. de Cominges is the General's innamorata, and, in the second place, that Mlle. Polina, the General's step-daughter, has a younger brother and sister who, though they are the General's own children, are completely neglected by this madman, and robbed aswell."

"Yes, yes; that is so. For me to go and desert the children now would mean their total abandonment; whereas, if I remain, I should be able to defend their interests, and, perhaps, to save a moiety of their property. Yes, yes; that is quite true. And yet, and yet--Oh, I can well understand why they are all so interested in the General's mother!"

"In whom?" asked Mr. Astley.

"In the old woman of Moscow who declines to die, yet concerning whom they are for ever expecting telegrams to notify the fact of her death."

"Ah, then of course their interests centre around her. It is a question of succession. Let that but be settled, and the General will marry, Mlle. Polina will be set free, and De Griens--"

"Yes, and De Griens?"

"Will be repaid his money, which is what he is now waiting for."

"What? You think that he is waiting for that?"

"I know of nothing else," asserted Mr. Astley doggedly.

"But, I do, I do!" I shouted in my fury. "He is waiting also for the old woman's will, for the reason that it awards Mlle. Polina a dowry. As soon as ever the money is received, she will throw herself upon the Frenchman's neck. All women are like that. Even the proudest of them become abject slaves where marriage is concerned. What Polina is good for is to fall head over ears in love.

That is MY opinion. Look at her--especially when she is sitting alone, and plunged in thought. All this was pre-ordained and foretold, and is accursed. Polina could perpetrate any mad act. She--she--But who called me by name?" I broke off. "Who is shouting for me? I heard some one calling in Russian, 'Alexis Ivanovitch!' It was a woman's voice. Listen!"

At the moment, we were approaching my hotel. We had left the cafe long ago, without even noticing that we had done so.

"Yes, I DID hear a woman's voice calling, but whose I do not know. The someone was calling you in Russian. Ah! NOW I can see whence the cries come. They come from that lady there--the one who is sitting on the settee, the one who has just been escorted to the verandah by a crowd of lacqueys. Behind her see that pile of luggage! She must have arrived by train."

"But why should she be calling ME? Hear her calling again! See! She is beckoning to us!"

"Yes, so she is," assented Mr. Astley.

“Alexis Ivanovitch, Alexis Ivanovitch! Good heavens, what a stupid fellow!” came in a despairing wail from the verandah.

We had almost reached the portico, and I was just setting foot upon the space before it, when my hands fell to my sides in limp astonishment, and my feet glued themselves to the pavement!

IX

For on the topmost tier of the hotel verandah, after being carried up the steps in an armchair amid a bevy of footmen, maid-servants, and other menials of the hotel, headed by the landlord (that functionary had actually run out to meet a visitor who arrived with so much stir and din, attended by her own retinue, and accompanied by so great a pile of trunks and portmanteaux)--on the topmost tier of the verandah, I say, there was sitting--THE GRANDMOTHER! Yes, it was she--rich, and imposing, and seventy-five years of age--Antonida Vassilievna Tarassevitcha, landowner and grande dame of Moscow--the “LaBaboulenka” who had caused so many telegrams to be sent off and received--who had been dying, yet not dying--who had, in her own person, descended upon us even as snow might fall from the clouds! Though unable to walk, she had arrived borne aloft in an armchair (her mode of conveyance for the last five years), as brisk, aggressive, self-satisfied, bolt-upright, loudly imperious, and generally abusive as ever. In fact, she looked exactly as she had on the only two occasions when I had seen her since my appointment to the General’s household. Naturally enough, I stood petrified with astonishment. She had sighted me a hundred paces off! Even while she was being carried along in her chair she had recognised me, and called me by name and surname (which, as usual, after hearing once, she had remembered everafterwards).

“And this is the woman whom they had thought to see in her grave after making her will!” I thought to myself. “Yet she will outlive us, and every one else in the hotel. Good Lord! what is going to become of us now? What on earth is to happen to the General? She will turn the place upside down!”

“My good sir,” the old woman continued in a stentorian voice, “what are you standing THERE for, with your eyes almost falling out of your head? Cannot you come and say how-do-you-do? Are you too proud to shake hands? Or do you not recognise me? Here, Potapitch!” she cried to an old servant who, dressed in a frock coat and white waistcoat, had a bald, red head (he was the chamberlain who always accompanied her on her journeys). “Just think! Alexis Ivanovitch does not recognise me! They have buried me for good and all! Yes, and after sending hosts of telegrams to know if I were dead or not! Yes, yes, I have heard the whole story. I am very much alive, though, as you maysee.”

“Pardon me, Antonida Vassilievna,” I replied good humouredly as I recovered my presence of mind. “I have no reason to wish you ill. I am merely rather astonished to see you. Why should I not be so, seeing how unexpected--”

“WHY should you be astonished? I just got into my chair, and came. Things are quiet enough in the train, for there is no one there to chatter. Have you been out for awalk?”

“Yes. I have just been to the Casino.”

“Oh? Well, it is quite nice here,” she went on as she looked about her. “The place seems comfortable, and all the trees are out. I like it very well. Are your people at home? Is the General, for instance, indoors?”

“Yes; and probably all of them.”

“Do they observe the conveniences, and keep up appearances? Such things always give one tone. I have heard that they are keeping a carriage, even as Russian gentlefolks ought to do. When abroad, our Russian people always cut a dash. Is Prascovia here too?”

“Yes. Polina Alexandrovna is here.”

“And the Frenchwoman? However, I will go and look for them myself. Tell me the nearest way to their rooms. Do you like beinghere?”

“Yes, I thank you, Antonida Vassilievna.”

“And you, Potapitch, you go and tell that fool of a landlord to reserve me a suitable suite of rooms. They must be handsomely decorated, and not too high up. Have my luggage taken up to them. But what are you tumbling over yourselves for? Why are you all tearing about? What scullions these fellows are!--Who is that with you?” she added to myself.

“A Mr. Astley,” I replied.

“And who is Mr. Astley?”

“A fellow-traveller, and my very good friend, as well as an acquaintance of the General’s.”

“Oh, an Englishman? Then that is why he stared at me without even opening his lips. However, I like Englishmen. Now, take me upstairs, direct to their rooms. Where are they lodging?”

Madame was lifted up in her chair by the lacqueys, and I preceded her up the grand staircase. Our progress was exceedingly effective, for everyone whom we met stopped to stare at the cortege. It happened that the hotel had the reputation of being the best, the most expensive, and the most aristocratic in all the spa, and at every turn on the staircase or in the corridors we encountered fine ladies and important-looking Englishmen--more than one of whom hastened downstairs to inquire of the awestruck landlord who the newcomer was. To all such questions he returned the same answer--namely, that the old lady was an influential foreigner, a Russian, a Countess, and a grande dame, and that she had taken the suite which, during the previous week, had been tenanted by the Grande Duchesse de N.

Meanwhile the cause of the sensation--the Grandmother--was being borne aloft in her armchair. Every person whom she met she scanned with an inquisitive eye, after first of all interrogating me about him or her at the top of her voice. She was stout of figure, and, though she could not leave her chair, one felt, the moment that one first looked at her, that she was also tall of stature. Her back was as straight as a board, and never did she lean back in her seat. Also, her large grey head, with its keen, rugged features, remained always erect as she glanced about her in an imperious, challenging sort of way, with looks and gestures that clearly were unstudied. Though she had reached her seventy-sixth year, her face was still fresh, and her teeth had not decayed. Lastly, she was dressed in a black silk gown and white mobcap.

“She interests me tremendously,” whispered Mr. Astley as, still smoking, he walked by my side. Meanwhile I was reflecting that probably the old lady knew all about the telegrams, and even about De Griens, though little or nothing about Mlle. Blanche. I said as much to Mr. Astley.

But what a frail creature is man! No sooner was my first surprise abated than I found myself rejoicing in the shock which we were about to administer to the General. So much did the thought inspire me that I marched ahead in the gayest of fashions.

Our party was lodging on the third floor. Without knocking at the door, or in any way announcing our presence, I threw open the portals, and the Grandmother was borne through them in triumph. As though of set purpose, the whole party chanced at that moment to be assembled in the General’s study. The time was eleven o’clock, and it seemed that an outing of some sort (at which a portion of the party were to drive in carriages, and others to ride on horseback, accompanied by one or two extraneous acquaintances) was being planned. The General was present, and also Polina, the children, the latter’s nurses, De Griens, Mlle. Blanche (attired in a riding-habit), her mother, the young Prince, and a learned German whom I beheld for the first time. Into the midst of this assembly the lacqueys conveyed Madame in her chair, and set her down within three paces of the General!

Good heavens! Never shall I forget the spectacle which ensued! Just before our entry, the General had been holding forth to the company, with De Griens in support of him. I may also mention that, for the last two or three days, Mlle. Blanche and De Griens had been making a great deal of the young Prince, under the very nose of the poor General. In short, the company, though decorous and conventional, was in a gay, familiar mood. But no sooner did the Grandmother appear than the General stopped dead in the middle of a word, and, with jaw dropping, stared hard at the old lady--his eyes almost starting out of his head, and his expression as spellbound as though he had just seen a basilisk. In return, the Grandmother stared at him silently and without moving--though

with a look of mingled challenge, triumph, and ridicule in her eyes. For ten seconds did the pair remain thus eyeing one another, amid the profound silence of the company; and even De Griers sat petrified--an extraordinary look of uneasiness dawning on his face. As for Mlle. Blanche, she too stared wildly at the Grandmother, with eyebrows raised and her lips parted--while the Prince and the German savant contemplated the tableau in profound amazement. Only Polina looked anything but perplexed or surprised. Presently, however, she too turned as white as a sheet, and then reddened to her temples. Truly the Grandmother's arrival seemed to be a catastrophe for everybody! For my own part, I stood looking from the Grandmother to the company, and back again, while Mr. Astley, as usual, remained in the background, and gazed calmly and decorously at the scene.

"Well, here I am--and instead of a telegram, too!" the Grandmother at last ejaculated, to dissipate the silence. "What? You were not expecting me?"

"Antonida Vassilievna! O my dearest mother! But how on earth did you, did you--?" The mutterings of the unhappy General died away.

I verily believe that if the Grandmother had held her tongue a few seconds longer she would have had a stroke.

"How on earth did I WHAT?" she exclaimed. "Why, I just got into the train and came here. What else is the railway meant for? But you thought that I had turned up my toes and left my property to the lot of you. Oh, I know ALL about the telegrams which you have been dispatching. They must have cost you a pretty sum, I should think, for telegrams are not sent from abroad for nothing. Well, I picked up my heels, and came here. Who is this Frenchman? Monsieur de Griers, I suppose?"

"Oui, madame," assented De Griers. "Et, croyez, je suis si enchanté! Votre santé--c'est un miracle vous voir ici. Une surprise charmante!"

"Just so. 'Charmante!' I happen to know you as a mountebank, and therefore trust you no more than THIS." She indicated her little finger. "And who is THAT?" she went on, turning towards Mlle. Blanche. Evidently the Frenchwoman looked so becoming in her riding-habit, with her whip in her hand, that she had made an impression upon the old lady. "Who is that woman there?"

"Mlle. de Cominges," I said. "And this is her mother, Madame de Cominges. They also are staying in the hotel."

"Is the daughter married?" asked the old lady, without the least semblance of ceremony.

"No," I replied as respectfully as possible, but under my breath.

"Is she good company?"

I failed to understand the question.

"I mean, is she or is she not a bore? Can she speak Russian? When this De Griers was in Moscow he soon learnt to make himself understood."

I explained to the old lady that Mlle. Blanche had never visited Russia.

"Bonjour, then," said Madame, with sudden brusquerie.

"Bonjour, madame," replied Mlle. Blanche with an elegant, ceremonious bow as, under cover of an unwonted modesty, she endeavoured to express, both in face and figure, her extreme surprise at such strange behaviour on the part of the Grandmother.

"How the woman sticks out her eyes at me! How she mows and minces!" was the Grandmother's comment. Then she turned suddenly to the General, and continued: "I have taken up my abode here, so am going to be your next-door neighbour. Are you glad to hear that, or are you not?"

"My dear mother, believe me when I say that I am sincerely delighted," returned the General, who had now, to a certain extent, recovered his senses; and inasmuch as, when occasion arose, he could speak with fluency, gravity, and a certain effect, he set himself to be expansive in his remarks, and went on: "We have been so dismayed and upset by the news of your indisposition! We had received such hopeless telegrams about you! Then suddenly--"

"Fibs, fibs!" interrupted the Grandmother.

"How on earth, too, did you come to decide upon the journey?" continued the General, with raised voice as he hurried to overlook the old lady's last remark. "Surely, at your age, and in your present state of health, the thing is so unexpected that our surprise is at least intelligible. However, I am glad to see you (as indeed, are we all)--he said this with a dignified, yet conciliatory, smile), "and will use my best endeavours to render your stay here as pleasant as possible."

"Enough! All this is empty chatter. You are talking the usual nonsense. I shall know quite well how to spend my time. How did I come to undertake the journey, you ask? Well, is there anything so very surprising about it? It was done quite simply. What is every one going into ecstasies about?--How do you do, Prascovia? What are YOU doinghere?"

"And how are YOU, Grandmother?" replied Polina, as she approached the old lady. "Were you long on the journey?"

"The most sensible question that I have yet been asked! Well, you shall hearfor yourself how it all happened. I lay and lay, and was doctored and doctored,; until at last I drove the physicians from me, and called in an apothecary from Nicolai who had cured an old woman of a malady similar to my own--cured her merely with a little hayseed. Well, he did me a great deal of good, for on the third day I broke into a sweat, and was able to leave my bed. Then my German doctors held another consultation, put on their spectacles, and told me that if I would go abroad, and take a course of the waters, the indisposition would finally pass away. 'Why should it not?' I thought to myself. So I had got things ready, and on the following day, a Friday, set out for here. I occupied a special compartment in the train, and where ever I had to change I found at the station bearers who were ready to carry me for a few coppers. You have nice quarters here," she went on as she glanced around the room. " But where on earth did you get the money for them, my good sir? I thought that everything of yours had been mortgaged? This Frenchman alone must be your creditor for a good deal. Oh, I know all about it, all aboutit."

"I-I am surprised at you, my dearest mother," said the General in some confusion. "I-I am greatly surprised. But I do not need any extraneous control of my finances. Moreover, my expenses do not exceed my income, andwe--"

"They do not exceed it? Fie! Why, you are robbing your children of their last kopeck--you, their guardian!"

"Afterthis,"saidtheGeneral,completelytakenaback,"--afterwhat youhavejustsaid,Idonotknowwhether--"

"You do not know what? By heavens, are you never going to drop that roulette of yours? Are you going to whistle all your propertyaway?"

This made such an impression upon the General that he almost choked with fury.

"Roulette, indeed? I play roulette? Really, in view of my position--Recollect what you are saying, my dearest mother. You must still be unwell."

"Rubbish, rubbish!" she retorted. "The truth is that you CANNOT be got away from that roulette. You are simply telling lies. This very day I mean to go andsee for myself what roulette is like. Prascovia, tell me what there is to be seen here; and do you, Alexis Ivanovitch, show me everything; and do you, Potapitch, make me a list of excursions. What IS there to be seen?" again she inquired of Polina.

"There is a ruined castle, and the Shlangenberg." "The Shlangenberg? What is it? A forest?"

"No, a mountain on the summit of which there is a place fenced off. From it you can get a most beautiful view."

"Could a chair be carried up that mountain of yours?" "Doubtless we could find bearers for the purpose," I interposed.

At this moment Theodosia, the nursemaid, approached the old lady with the General's children.

"No, I DON'T want to see them," said the Grandmother. "I hate kissing children, for their noses are always wet. How are you getting on, Theodosia?"

"I am very well, thank you, Madame," replied the nursemaid. "And how is your ladyship? We have been feeling so anxious about you!"

"Yes, I know, you simple soul--But who are those other guests?" the old lady continued, turning again to Polina. "For instance, who is that old rascal in the spectacles?"

"Prince Nilski, Grandmamma," whispered Polina.

"Oh, a Russian? Why, I had no idea that he could understand me! Surely he did not hear what I said? As for Mr. Astley, I have seen him already, and I see that he is here again. How do you do?" she added to the gentleman in question.

Mr. Astley bowed in silence. "Have you NOTHING to say to me?" the old lady went on. "Say something, for goodness' sake! Translate to him, Polina."

Polina did so.

"I have only to say," replied Mr. Astley gravely, but also with alacrity, "that I am indeed glad to see you in such good health." This was interpreted to the Grandmother, and she seemed much gratified.

"How well English people know how to answer one!" she remarked. "That is why I like them so much better than French. Come here," she added to Mr. Astley. "I will try not to bore you too much. Polina, translate to him that I am staying in rooms on a lower floor. Yes, on a lower floor," she repeated to Astley, pointing downwards with her finger.

Astley looked pleased at receiving the invitation.

Next, the old lady scanned Polina, from head to foot with minute attention.

"I could almost have liked you, Prascovia," suddenly she remarked, "for you are a nice girl--the best of the lot. You have some character about you. I too have character. Turn round. Surely that is not false hair that you are wearing?"

"No, Grandmamma. It is my own."

"Well, well. I do not like the stupid fashions of today. You are very good looking. I should have fallen in love with you if I had been a man. Why do you not get married? It is time now that I was going. I want to walk, yet I always have to ride. Are you still in a bad temper?" she added to the General.

"No, indeed," rejoined the now mollified General.

"I quite understand that at your time of life--"

"Cette vieille est tombee en enfance," De Griens whispered to me.

"But I want to look round a little," the old lady added to the General. Will you lend me Alexis Ivanovitch for the purpose?

"As much as you like. But I myself--yes, and Polina and Monsieur de Griens too--we all of us hope to have the pleasure of escorting you."

"Mais, madame, cela sera un plaisir," De Griens commented with a bewitching smile.

'Plaisir' indeed! Why, I look upon you as a perfect fool, monsieur." Then she remarked to the General: "I am not going to let you have any of my money. I must be off to my rooms now, to see what they are like. Afterwards we will look round a little. Lift me up."

Again the Grandmother was borne aloft and carried down the staircase amid a perfect bevy of followers--the General walking as though he had been hit over the head with a cudgel, and De Griens seeming to be plunged in thought.

Endeavouring to be left behind, Mlle. Blanche next thought better of it, and followed the rest, with the Prince in her wake. Only the German savant and Madame de Cominges did not leave the General's apartments.

At spas--and, probably, all over Europe--hotel landlords and managers are guided in their allotment of rooms to visitors, not so much by the wishes and requirements of those visitors, as by their personal estimate of the same. It may also be said that these landlords and managers seldom make a mistake. To the Grandmother, however, our landlord, for some reason or another, allotted such a sumptuous suite that he fairly overreached himself; for he assigned her a suite consisting of four magnificently appointed rooms, with bathroom, servants' quarters, a separate room for her maid, and so on. In fact, during the previous week the suite had been occupied by no less a personage than a Grand Duchess: which circumstance was duly explained to the new occupant, as an excuse for raising the price of these apartments. The Grandmother had herself carried-- or, rather, wheeled--through each room in turn, in order that she might subject the whole to a close and attentive scrutiny; while the landlord--an elderly, bald-headed man--walked respectfully by her side.

What every one took the Grandmother to be I do not know, but it appeared, at least, that she was accounted a person not only of great importance, but also, and still more, of great wealth; and without delay they entered her in the hotel register as "Madame la Generale, Princesse de Tarassevitcheva," although she had never been a princess in her life. Her retinue, her reserved compartment in the train, her pile of unnecessary trunks, portmanteaux, and strong-boxes, all

helped to increase her prestige; while her wheeled chair, her sharp tone and voice, her eccentric questions (put with an air of the most overbearing and unbridled imperiousness), her whole figure--upright, rugged, and commanding as it was--completed the general awe in which she was held. As she inspected her new abode she ordered her chair to be stopped at intervals in order that, with finger extended towards some article of furniture, she might ply the respectfully smiling, yet secretly apprehensive, landlord with unexpected questions. She addressed them to him in French, although her pronunciation of the language was so bad that sometimes I had to translate them. For the most part, the landlord's answers were unsatisfactory, and failed to please her; nor were the questions themselves of a practical nature, but related, generally, to God knows what.

For instance, on one occasion she halted before a picture which, a poor copy of a well-known original, had a mythological subject.

"Of whom is this a portrait?" she inquired.

The landlord explained that it was probably that of a countess.

"But how know you that?" the old lady retorted.

"You live here, yet you cannot say for certain! And why is the picture there at all? And why do its eyes look so crooked?"

To all these questions the landlord could return no satisfactory reply, despite his floundering endeavours.

"The blockhead!" exclaimed the Grandmother in Russian.

Then she proceeded on her way--only to repeat the same story in front of a Saxon statuette which she had sighted from afar, and had commanded, for some reason or another, to be brought to her. Finally, she inquired of the landlord what was the value of the carpet in her bedroom, as well as where the said carpet had been manufactured; but, the landlord could do no more than promise to make inquiries.

"What donkeys these people are!" she commented. Next, she turned her attention to the bed.

"What a huge counterpane!" she exclaimed. "Turn it back, please." The lacqueys did so.

"Further yet, further yet," the old lady cried. "Turn it RIGHT back. Also, take off those pillows and bolsters, and lift up the feather bed."

The bed was opened for her inspection.

"Mercifully it contains no bugs," she remarked.

"Pull off the whole thing, and then put on my own pillows and sheets. The place is too luxurious for an old woman like myself. It is too large for any one person. Alexis Ivanovitch, come and see me whenever you are not teaching your pupils,"

"After tomorrow I shall no longer be in the General's service," I replied, "but merely living in the hotel on my own account."

"Why so?"

"Because, the other day, there arrived from Berlin a German and his wife--persons of some importance; and, it chanced that, when taking a walk, I spoke to them in German without having properly comprehended the Berlin accent."

"Indeed?"

"Yes: and this action on my part the Baron held to be an insult, and complained about it to the General, who yesterday dismissed me from his employ."

"But I suppose you must have threatened that precious Baron, or something of the kind? However, even if you did so, it was a matter of no moment."

"No, I did not. The Baron was the aggressor by raising his stick at me." Upon that the Grandmother turned sharply to the General.

"What? You permitted yourself to treat your tutor thus, you nincompoop, and to dismiss him from his post? You are a blockhead--an utter blockhead! I can see that clearly."

"Do not alarm yourself, my dear mother," the General replied with a lofty air--an air in which there was also a tinge of familiarity. "I am quite capable of managing my own affairs. Moreover, Alexis Ivanovitch has not given you a true account of the matter."

"What did you do next?" The old lady inquired of me.

"I wanted to challenge the Baron to a duel," I replied as modestly as possible; "but the General protested against my doing so."

"And WHY did you so protest?" she inquired of the General. Then she turned to the landlord, and questioned him as to whether HE would not have fought a duel, if challenged. "For," she added, "I can see no difference between you and the Baron; nor can I bear that German visage of yours." Upon this the landlord bowed and departed, though he could not have understood the Grandmother's compliment.

"Pardon me, Madame," the General continued with a sneer, "but are duels really feasible?"

"Why not? All men are crowing cocks, and that is why they quarrel. YOU, though, I perceive, are a blockhead--a man who does not even know how to carry his breeding. Lift me up. Potapitch, see to it that you always have TWO bearers ready. Go and arrange for their hire. But we shall not require more than two, for I shall need only to be carried upstairs. On the level or in the street I can be WHEELED along. Go and tell them that, and pay them in advance, so that they may show me some respect. You too, Potapitch, are always to come with me, and YOU, Alexis Ivanovitch, are to point out to me this Baron as we go along, in order that I may get a squint at the precious 'Von.' And where is that roulette played?"

I explained to her that the game was carried on in the salons of the Casino; whereupon there ensued a string of questions as to whether there were many such salons, whether many people played in them, whether those people played a whole day at a time, and whether the game was managed according to fixed rules. At length, I thought it best to say that the most advisable course would be for her to go and see it for herself, since a mere description of it would be a difficult matter.

"Then take me straight there," she said, "and do you walk on in front of me, Alexis Ivanovitch."

"What, mother? Before you have so much as rested from your journey?" the General inquired with some solicitude. Also, for some reason which I could not divine, he seemed to be growing nervous; and, indeed, the whole party was evincing signs of confusion, and exchanging glances with one another. Probably they were thinking that it would be a ticklish--even an embarrassing--business to accompany the Grandmother to the Casino, where, very likely, she would perpetrate further eccentricities, and in public too! Yet on their own initiative they had offered to escort her!

"Why should I rest?" she retorted. "I am not tired, for I have been sitting still these past five days. Let us see what your medicinal springs and waters are like, and where they are situated. What, too, about that, that--what did you call it, Prascovia?--oh, about that mountain top?"

"Yes, we are going to see it, Grandmamma."

"Very well. Is there anything else for me to see here?"

"Yes! Quite a number of things," Polina forced herself to say.

"Martha, YOU must come with me as well," went on the old lady to her maid.

"No, no, mother!" ejaculated the General. "Really she cannot come. They would not admit even Potapitch to the Casino."

"Rubbish! Because she is my servant, is that a reason for turning her out? Why, she is only a humanbeing like the rest of us; and as she has been travelling for a week she might like to look about her. With whom else could she go out but myself? She would never dare to show her nose in the street alone."

"But, mother--"

"Are you ashamed to be seen with me? Stop at home, then, and you will be asked no questions. A pretty General YOU are, to be sure! I am a general's widow myself. But, after all, why should I drag the whole party with me? I will go and see the sights with only Alexis Ivanovitch as my escort."

De Griens strongly insisted that EVERY ONE ought to accompany her. Indeed, he launched out into a perfect shower of charming phrases concerning the pleasure of acting as her cicerone, and so forth. Every one was touched with his words.

"Mais elle est tombee en enfance," he added aside to the General. "Seule, elle fera des betises." More than this I could not overhear, but he seemed to have got some plan in his mind, or even to be feeling a slight return of his hopes.

The distance to the Casino was about half a verst, and our route led us through the Chestnut Avenue until we reached the square directly fronting the building. The General, I could see, was a trifle reassured by the fact that, though our progress was distinctly eccentric in its nature, it was, at least, correct and orderly. As a matter of fact, the spectacle of a person who is unable to walk is not anything to excite surprise at a spa. Yet it was clear that the General had a great fear of the Casino itself: for why should a person who had lost the use of her limbs--more especially an old woman--be going to rooms which were set apart only for roulette? On either side of the wheeled chair walked Polina and Mlle. Blanche--the latter smiling, modestly jesting, and, in short, making herself so agreeable to the Grandmother that in the end the old lady relented towards her. On the other side of the chair Polina had to answer an endless flow of petty questions--such as "Who was it passed just now?" "Who is that coming along?" "Is the town a large one?" "Are the public gardens extensive?" "What sort of trees are those?" "What is the name of those hills?" "Do I see eagles flying yonder?" "What is that absurd-looking building?" and so forth. Meanwhile Astley whispered to me, as he walked by my side, that he looked for much to happen that morning. Behind the old lady's chair marched Potapitch and Martha--Potapitch in his frockcoat and white waistcoat, with a cloak over all, and the forty-year-old and rosy, but slightly grey-headed, Martha in a mobcap, cotton dress, and squeaking shoes. Frequently the old lady would twist herself round to converse with these servants. As for De Griens, he spoke as though he had made up his mind to do something (though it is also possible that he spoke in this manner merely in order to hearten the General, with whom he appeared to have held a conference). But, alas, the Grandmother had uttered the fatal words, "I am not going to give you any of my money," and though De Griens might regard these words lightly, the General knew his mother better. Also, I noticed that De Griens and Mlle. Blanche were still exchanging looks; while of the Prince and the German savant I lost sight at the end of the Avenue, where they had turned back and left us.

Into the Casino we marched in triumph. At once, both in the person of the commissionaire and in the persons of the footmen, there sprang to life the same reverence as had arisen in the lacqueys of the hotel. Yet it was not without some curiosity that they eyed us.

Without loss of time, the Grandmother gave orders that she should be wheeled through every room in the establishment; of which apartments she praised a few, while to others she remained indifferent. Concerning everything, however, she asked questions. Finally we reached the gaming-salons, where a lacquey who was, acting as guard over the doors, flung them open as though he were a manpossessed.

The Grandmother's entry into the roulette-salon produced a profound impression upon the public. Around the tables, and at the further end of the room where the trente-et-quarante table was set out, there may have been gathered from 150 to 200 gamblers, ranged in several rows. Those who had succeeded in pushing their way to the tables were standing with their feet firmly planted, in order to avoid having to give up their places until they should have finished their game (since merely to stand looking on--thus occupying a gambler's place for nothing--was not permitted). True, chairs were provided around the tables, but few players made use of them--more especially if there was a large attendance of the general public; since to stand allowed of a closer approach; and, therefore, of greater facilities for calculation and staking. Behind the foremost row were herded a second and a third row of people awaiting their turn; but sometimes their impatience led these people to stretch a hand through the first row, in order to deposit their stakes. Even third-row individuals would dart forward to stake; whence seldom did more than five or ten minutes pass without a scene over disputed money arising at one or another end of the table. On the other hand, the police of the Casino were an able body of men; and though to escape the crush was an impossibility, however much one might wish it, the eight croupiers apportioned to each table kept an eye upon the stakes, performed the necessary reckoning, and decided disputes as they arose.

In the last resort they always called in the Casino police, and the disputes would immediately come to an end. Policemen were stationed about the Casino in ordinary costume, and mingled with the spectators so as to make it impossible to recognise them. In particular they kept a lookout for pickpockets and swindlers, who simply swanned in the roulette salons, and reaped a rich harvest. Indeed, in every direction money was being filched from pockets or purses--though, of course, if the attempt miscarried, a great uproar ensued. One had only to approach a roulette table, begin to play, and then openly grab some one else's winnings, for a din to be raised, and the thief to start vociferating that the stake was HIS; and, if the coup had been carried out with sufficient skill, and the witnesses wavered at all in their testimony, the thief would as likely as not succeed in getting away with the money, provided that the sum was not a large one--not large enough to have attracted the attention of the croupiers or some fellow-player. Moreover, if it were a stake of insignificant size, its true owner would sometimes decline to continue the dispute, rather than become involved in a scandal. Conversely, if the thief was detected, he was ignominiously expelled the building.

Upon all this the Grandmother gazed with open-eyed curiosity; and, on some thieves happening to be turned out of the place, she was delighted. Trente-et-quarante interested her but little; she preferred roulette, with its ever-revolving wheel. At length she expressed a wish to view the game closer; whereupon in some mysterious manner, the lacqueys and other officious agents (especially one or two ruined Poles of the kind who keep offering their services to successful gamblers and foreigners in general) at once found and cleared a space for the old lady among the crush, at the very centre of one of the tables, and next to the chief croupier; after which they wheeled her chair thither. Upon this a number of visitors who were not playing, but only looking on (particularly some Englishmen with their families), pressed closer forward towards the table, in order to watch the old lady from among the ranks of the gamblers. Many a lorgnette I saw turned in her direction, and the croupiers' hopes rose high that such an eccentric player was about to provide them with something out of the common. An old lady of seventy-five years who, though unable to walk, desired to play was not an everyday phenomenon. I too pressed forward towards the table, and ranged myself by the Grandmother's side; while Martha and Potapitch remained somewhere in the background among the crowd, and the General, Polina, and De Griers, with Mlle. Blanche, also remained hidden among the spectators.

At first the old lady did no more than watch the gamblers, and ply me, in a half-whisper, with sharp-broken questions as to who was so-and-so. Especially did her favour light upon a very young man who was plunging heavily, and had won (so it was whispered) as much as 40,000 francs, which were lying before him on the table in a heap of gold and bank-notes. His eyes kept flashing, and his hands shaking; yet all the while he staked without

any sort of calculation--just what came to his hand, as he kept winning and winning, and raking and raking in his gains. Around him lacqueys fussed--placing chairs just behind where he was standing--and clearing the spectators from his vicinity, so that he should have more room, and not be crowded--the whole done, of course, in expectation of a generous largesse. From time to time other gamblers would hand him part of their winnings--being glad to let him stake for them as much as his hand could grasp; while beside him stood a Pole in a state of violent, but respectful, agitation, who, also in expectation of a generous largesse, kept whispering to him at intervals (probably telling him what to stake, and advising and directing his play). Yet never once did the player throw him a glance as he staked and staked, and raked in his winnings. Evidently, the player in question was dead to all besides.

For a few minutes the Grandmother watched him.

"Go and tell him," suddenly she exclaimed with a nudge at my elbow, "--go and tell him to stop, and to take his money with him, and go home. Presently he will be losing--yes, losing everything that he has now won." She seemed almost breathless with excitement.

"Where is Potapitch?" she continued. "Send Potapitch to speak to him. No, YOU must tell him, you must tell him,"--here she nudged me again--"for I have not the least notion where Potapitch is. Sortez, sortez," she shouted to the young man, until I leant over in her direction and whispered in her ear that no shouting was allowed, nor even loud speaking, since to do so disturbed the calculations of the players, and might lead to our being ejected.

"How provoking!" she retorted. "Then the young man is done for! I suppose he WISHES to be ruined. Yet I could not bear to see him have to return it all. What a fool the fellow is!" and the old lady turned sharply away.

On the left, among the players at the other half of the table, a young lady was playing, with, beside her, a dwarf. Who the dwarf may have been--whether a relative or a person whom she took with her to act as a foil--I do not know; but I had noticed her there on previous occasions, since, everyday, she entered the Casino at one o'clock precisely, and departed at two--thus playing for exactly one hour. Being well-known to the attendants, she always had a seat provided for her; and, taking some gold and a few thousand-franc notes out of her pocket--would begin quietly, coldly, and after much calculation, to stake, and mark down the figures in pencil on a paper, as though striving to work out a system according to which, at given moments, the odds might group themselves. Always she staked large coins, and either lost or won one, two, or three thousand francs a day, but not more; after which she would depart. The Grandmother took a long look at her.

"THAT woman is not losing," she said. "To whom does she belong? Do you know her? Who is she?"

"She is, I believe, a Frenchwoman," I replied.

"Ah! A bird of passage, evidently. Besides, I can see that she has her shoes polished. Now, explain to me the meaning of each round in the game, and the way in which one ought to stake."

Upon this I set myself to explain the meaning of all the combinations--of "rouge et noir," of "pair et impair," of "manque et passe," with, lastly, the different values in the system of numbers. The Grandmother listened attentively, took notes, put questions in various forms, and laid the whole thing to heart. Indeed, since an example of each system of stakes kept constantly occurring, a great deal of information could be assimilated with ease and celerity. The Grandmother was vastly pleased.

"But what is zero?" she inquired. "Just now I heard the flaxen-haired croupier call out 'zero!' And why does he keep raking in all the money that is on the table? To think that he should grab the whole pile for himself! What does zero mean?"

"Zero is what the bank takes for itself. If the wheel stops at that figure, everything lying on the table becomes the absolute property of the bank. Also, whenever the wheel has begun to turn, the bank ceases to pay out anything."

"Then I should receive nothing if I were staking?"

"No; unless by any chance you had PURPOSELY staked on zero; in which case you would receive thirty-five times the value of your stake."

"Why thirty-five times, when zero so often turns up? And if so, why do not more of these fools stake upon it?"

"Because the number of chances against its occurrence is thirty-six."

"Rubbish! Potapitch, Potapitch! Come here, and I will give you some money." The old lady took out of her pocket a tightly-clasped purse, and extracted from its depths a ten-gulden piece. "Go at once, and stake that upon zero."

"But, Madame, zero has only this moment turned up," I remonstrated; "wherefore, it may not do so again for ever so long. Wait a little, and you may then have a better chance."

"Rubbish! Stake, please."

"Pardon me, but zero might not turn up again until, say, tonight, even though you had staked thousands upon it. It often happens so."

"Rubbish, rubbish! Who fears the wolf should never enter the forest. What? We have lost? Then stake again."

A second ten-gulden piece did we lose, and then I put down a third. The Grandmother could scarcely remain seated in her chair, so intent was she upon the little ball as it leapt through the notches of the ever-revolving wheel. However, the third ten-gulden piece followed the first two. Upon this the Grandmother went perfectly crazy. She could no longer sit still, and actually struck the table with her fist when the croupier cried out, "Trente-six," instead of the desiderated zero.

"To listen to him!" fumed the old lady. "When will that accursed zero ever turn up? I cannot breathe until I see it. I believe that that infernal croupier is PURPOSELY keeping it from turning up. Alexis Ivanovitch, stake TWO golden pieces this time. The moment we cease to stake, that cursed zero will come turning up, and we shall get nothing."

"My good Madame--"

"Stake, stake! It is not YOUR money."

Accordingly I staked two ten-gulden pieces. The ball went hopping round the wheel until it began to settle through the notches. Meanwhile the Grandmother sat as though petrified, with my hand convulsively clutched in hers.

"Zero!" called the croupier.

"There! You see, you see!" cried the old lady, as she turned and faced me, wreathed in smiles. "I told you so! It was the Lord God himself who suggested to me to stake those two coins. Now, how much ought I to receive? Why do they not pay it out to me? Potapitch! Martha! Where are they? What has become of our party? Potapitch, Potapitch!"

"Presently, Madame," I whispered. "Potapitch is outside, and they would decline to admit him to these rooms. See! You are being paid out your money. Pray take it." The croupiers were making up a heavy packet of coins, sealed in blue paper, and containing fifty ten gulden pieces, together with an unsealed packet containing another twenty. I handed the whole to the old lady in a money-shovel.

"Faites le jeu, messieurs! Faites le jeu, messieurs! Rien ne va plus," proclaimed the croupier as once more he invited the company to stake, and prepared to turn the wheel.

"We shall be too late! He is going to spin again! Stake, stake!" The Grandmother was in a perfect fever. "Do not hang back! Be quick!" She seemed almost beside herself, and nudged me as hard as she could.

"Upon what shall I stake, Madame?"

"Upon zero, upon zero! Again upon zero! Stake as much as ever you can. How much have we got? Seventy ten-gulden pieces? We shall not miss them, so stake twenty pieces at a time."

"Think a moment, Madame. Sometimes zero does not turn up for two hundred rounds in succession. I assure you that you may lose all your capital."

"You are wrong--utterly wrong. Stake, I tell you! What a chattering tongue you have! I know perfectly well what I am doing." The old lady was shaking with excitement.

"But the rules do not allow of more than 120 gulden being staked upon zero at a time."

“How ‘do not allow’? Surely you are wrong? Monsieur, monsieur--“ here she nudged the croupier who was sitting on her left, and preparing to spin--“combien zero? Douze?Douze?”

I hastened to translate.

“Oui, Madame,” was the croupier’s polite reply. “No single stake must exceed four thousand florins. That is the regulation.”

“Then there is nothing else for it. We must risk in gulden.”

“Le jeu est fait!” the croupier called. The wheel revolved, and stopped at thirty. We had lost!

“Again, again, again! Stake again!” shouted the old lady. Without attempting to oppose her further, but merely shrugging my shoulders, I placed twelve more ten-gulden pieces upon the table. The wheel whirled around and around, with the Grandmother simply quaking as she watched its revolutions.

“Does she again think that zero is going to be the winning coup?” thought I, as I stared at her in astonishment. Yet an absolute assurance of winning was shining on her face; she looked perfectly convinced that zero was about to be called again. At length the ball dropped off into one of the notches.

“Zero!” cried the croupier.

“Ah!!!” screamed the old lady as she turned to me in a whirl of triumph.

I myself was at heart a gambler. At that moment I became acutely conscious both of that fact and of the fact that my hands and knees were shaking, and that the blood was beating in my brain. Of course this was a rare occasion--an occasion on which zero had turned up no less than three times within a dozen rounds; yet in such an event there was nothing so very surprising, seeing that, only three days ago, I myself had been a witness to zero turning up THREE TIMES IN SUCCESSION, so that one of the players who was recording the coups on paper was moved to remark that for several days past zero had never turned up at all!

With the Grandmother, as with any one who has won a very large sum, the management settled up with great attention and respect, since she was fortunate to have to receive no less than 4200 gulden. Of these gulden the odd 200 were paid her in gold, and the remainder in bank notes.

This time the old lady did not call for Potapitch; for that she was too preoccupied. Though not outwardly shaken by the event (indeed, she seemed perfectly calm), she was trembling inwardly from head to foot. At length, completely absorbed in the game, she burst out:

“Alexis Ivanovitch, did not the croupier just say that 4000 florins were the most that could be staked at any one time? Well, take these 4000, and stake them upon the red.”

To oppose her was useless. Once more the wheel revolved.

“Rouge!” proclaimed the croupier.

Again 4000 florins--in all 8000!

“Give me them,” commanded the Grandmother, “and stake the other 4000 upon the red again.”

I did so.

“Rouge!” proclaimed the croupier.

“Twelve thousand!” cried the old lady. “Hand me the whole lot. Put the gold into this purse here, and count the bank notes. Enough! Let us go home. Wheel my chair away.”

XI

THE chair, with the old lady beaming in it, was wheeled away towards the doors at the further end of the salon, while our party hastened to crowd around her, and to offer her their congratulations. In fact, eccentric as was her conduct, it was also overshadowed by her triumph; with the result that the General no longer feared to be publicly

compromised by being seen with such a strange woman, but, smiling in a condescending, cheerfully familiar way, as though he were soothing a child, he offered his greetings to the old lady. At the same time, both he and the rest of the spectators were visibly impressed. Everywhere people kept pointing to the Grandmother, and talking about her. Many people even walked beside her chair, in order to view her the better while, at a little distance, Astley was carrying on a conversation on the subject with two English acquaintances of his. De Griens was simply overflowing with smiles and compliments, and a number of fine ladies were staring at the Grandmother as though she had been something curious.

“Quelle victoire!” exclaimed De Griens.

“Mais, Madame, c’était du feu!” added Mlle. Blanche with an elusive smile.

“Yes, I have won twelve thousand florins,” replied the old lady. “And then there is all this gold. With it the total ought to come to nearly thirteen thousand. How much is that in Russian money? Six thousand roubles, I think?”

However, I calculated that the sum would exceed seven thousand roubles--or, at the present rate of exchange, even eight thousand.

“Eight thousand roubles! What a splendid thing! And to think of you simpletons sitting there and doing nothing! Potapitch! Martha! See what I have won!”

“How DID you do it, Madame?” Martha exclaimed ecstatically. “Eight thousand roubles!”

“And I am going to give you fifty gulden apiece. There they are.” Potapitch and Martha rushed towards her to kiss her hand.

“And to each bearer also I will give a ten-gulden piece. Let them have it out of the gold, Alexis Ivanovitch. But why is this footman bowing to me, and that other man as well? Are they congratulating me? Well, let them have ten gulden apiece.”

“Madame la princesse--Un pauvre expatrié--Malheur continuel--Les princes russes sont si généreux!” said a man who for some time past had been hanging around the old lady’s chair--a personage who, dressed in a shabby frockcoat and coloured waistcoat, kept taking off his cap, and smiling pathetically.

“Give him ten gulden,” said the Grandmother. “No, give him twenty. Now, enough of that, or I shall never get done with you all. Take a moment’s rest, and then carry me away. Prascovia, I mean to buy a new dress for you tomorrow. Yes, and for you too, Mlle. Blanche. Please translate, Prascovia.”

“Merci, Madame,” replied Mlle. Blanche gratefully as she twisted her face into the mocking smile which usually she kept only for the benefit of De Griens and the General. The latter looked confused, and seemed greatly relieved when we reached the Avenue.

“How surprised Theodosia too will be!” went on the Grandmother (thinking of the General’s nursemaid). “She, like yourselves, shall have the price of a new gown. Here, Alexis Ivanovitch! Give that beggar something” (a crooked-backed ragamuffin had approached to stare at us).

“But perhaps he is NOT a beggar--only a rascal,” I replied.

“Never mind, never mind. Give him a gulden.”

I approached the beggar in question, and handed him the coin. Looking at me in great astonishment, he silently accepted the gulden, while from his person there proceeded a strong smell of liquor.

“Have you never tried your luck, Alexis Ivanovitch?”

“No, Madame.”

“Yet just now I could see that you were burning to do so?”

“I do mean to try my luck presently.”

“Then stake everything upon zero. You have seen how it ought to be done? How much capital do you possess?”

“Two hundred gulden, Madame.”

“Not very much. See here; I will lend you five hundred if you wish. Take this purse of mine.” With that she added sharply to the General: “But YOU need not expect to receive any.”

This seemed to upset him, but he said nothing, and De Griens contented himself by scowling.

"Que diable!" he whispered to the General. "C'est une terrible vieille."

"Look! Another beggar, another beggar!" exclaimed the grandmother. "Alexis Ivanovitch, go and give him a gulden."

As she spoke I saw approaching us a grey-headed old man with a woodenleg--a man who was dressed in a blue frockcoat and carrying a staff. He looked like an old soldier. As soon as I tendered him the coin he fell back a step or two, and eyed me threateningly.

"Was ist der Teufel!" he cried, and appended thereto a round dozen of oaths.

"The man is a perfect fool!" exclaimed the Grandmother, waving her hand. "Move on now, for I am simply famished. When we have lunched we will return to that place."

"What?" cried I. "You are going to play again?"

"What else do you suppose?" she retorted. "Are you going only to sit here, and grow sour, and let me look at you?"

"Madame," said De Griens confidentially, "les chances peuvent tourner. Une seule mauvaise chance, et vous perdrez tout--surtout avec votre jeu. C'était terrible!"

"Oui; vous perdrez absolument," put in Mlle. Blanche.

"What has that got to do with YOU?" retorted the old lady. "It is not YOUR money that I am going to lose; it is my own. And where is that Mr. Astley of yours?" she added to myself.

"He stayed behind in the Casino."

"What a pity! He is such a nice sort of man!"

Arriving home, and meeting the landlord on the staircase, the Grandmother called him to her side, and boasted to him of her winnings--thereafter doing the same to Theodosia, and conferring upon her thirty gulden; after which she bid her serve luncheon. The meal over, Theodosia and Martha broke into a joint flood of ecstasy.

"I was watching you all the time, Madame," quavered Martha, "and I asked Potapitch what mistress was trying to do. And, my word! the heaps and heaps of money that were lying upon the table! Never in my life have I seen so much money. And there were gentlefolk around it, and other gentlefolk sitting down. So, I asked Potapitch where all these gentry had come from; for, thought I, maybe the Holy Mother of God will help our mistress among them. Yes, I prayed for you, Madame, and my heart died within me, so that I kept trembling and trembling. The Lord be with her, I thought to myself; and in answer to my prayer He has now sent you what He has done! Even yet I tremble--I tremble to think of it all."

"Alexis Ivanovitch," said the old lady, "after luncheon,--that is to say, about four o'clock--get ready to go out with me again. But in the meanwhile, good-bye. Do not forget to call a doctor, for I must take the waters. Now go and get rested a little."

I left the Grandmother's presence in a state of bewilderment.

Vainly I endeavoured to imagine what would become of our party, or what turn the affair would next take. I could perceive that none of the party had yet recovered their presence of mind--least of all the General. The factor of the Grandmother's appearance in place of the hourly expected telegram to announce her death (with, of course, resultant legacies) had so upset the whole scheme of intentions and projects that it was with a decided feeling of apprehension and growing paralysis that the conspirators viewed any future performances of the old lady at roulette. Yet this second factor was not quite so important as the first, since, though the Grandmother had twice declared that she did not intend to give the General any money, that declaration was not a complete ground for the abandonment of hope. Certainly De Griens, who, with the General, was up to the neck in the affair, had not wholly lost courage; and I felt sure that Mlle. Blanche also--Mlle. Blanche who was not only as deeply involved as the other two, but also expectant of becoming Madame General and an important legatee--would not lightly surrender the position, but would use her every resource of coquetry upon the old lady, in order to afford a contrast to the impetuous Polina, who was difficult to understand, and lacked the art of pleasing.

Yet now, when the Grandmother had just performed an astonishing feat at roulette; now, when the old lady's personality had been so clearly and typically revealed as that of a rugged, arrogant woman who was "tombee en enfance"; now, when everything appeared to be lost,--why, now the Grandmother was as merry as a child which plays with thistle-down. "Good Lord!" I thought with, may God forgive me, a most malicious smile, "every tengulden piece which the Grandmother staked must have raised a blister on the General's heart, and maddened De Griens, and driven Mlle. de Cominges almost to frenzy with the sight of this spoon dangling before her lips." Another factor is the circumstance that even when, overjoyed at winning, the Grandmother was distributing almsright and left, and taking every one to be a beggar, she again snapped out to the General that he was not going to be allowed any of her money--which meant that the old lady had quite made up her mind on the point, and was sure of it. Yes, danger loomed ahead.

All these thoughts passed through my mind during the few moments that, having left the old lady's rooms, I was ascending to my own room on the top storey. What most struck me was the fact that, though I had divined the chief, the stoutest, threads which united the various actors in the drama, I had, until now, been ignorant of the methods and secrets of the game. For Polina had never been completely open with me. Although, on occasions, it had happened that involuntarily, as it were, she had revealed to me something of her heart, I had noticed that in most cases--in fact, nearly always--she had either laughed away these revelations, or grown confused, or purposely imparted to them a false guise. Yes, she must have concealed a great deal from me. But, I had a presentiment that now the end of this strained and mysterious situation was approaching. Another stroke, and all would be finished and exposed. Of my own fortunes, interested though I was in the affair, I took no account. I was in the strange position of possessing but two hundred gulden, of being at a loose end, of lacking both a post, the means of subsistence, a shred of hope, and any plans for the future, yet of caring nothing for these things. Had not my mind been so full of Polina, I should have given myself up to the comical piquancy of the impending denouement, and laughed my fill at it. But the thought of Polina was torture to me. That her fate was settled I already had an inkling; yet that was not the thought which was giving me so much uneasiness. What I really wished for was to penetrate her secrets. I wanted her to come to me and say, "I love you," and, if she would not so come, or if to hope that she would ever do so was an unthinkable absurdity--why, then there was nothing else for me to want. Even now I do not know what I am wanting. I feel like a man who has lost his way. I yearn but to be in her presence, and within the circle of her light and splendour--to be there now, and forever, and for the whole of my life. More I do not know. How can I ever bring myself to leave her?

On reaching the third storey of the hotel I experienced a shock. I was just passing the General's suite when something caused me to look round. Out of adoor about twenty paces away there was coming Polina! She hesitated for a moment on seeing me, and then beckoned me to her.

"Polina Alexandrovna!"

"Hush! Not so loud."

"Something startled me just now," I whispered, "and I looked round, and saw you. Some electrical influence seems to emanate from your form."

"Take this letter," she went on with a frown (probably she had not even heard my words, she was so preoccupied), "and hand it personally to Mr. Astley. Go as quickly as ever you can, please. No answer will be required. He himself--" She did not finish her sentence.

"To Mr. Astley?" I asked, in some astonishment.

But she had vanished again.

Aha! So the two were carrying on a correspondence! However, I set off to search for Astley--first at his hotel, and then at the Casino, where I went the round of the salons in vain. At length, vexed, and almost in despair, I was on my way home when I ran across him among a troop of English ladies and gentlemen who had been out for a ride. Beckoning to him to stop, I handed him the letter. We had barely time even to look at one another, but I suspected that it was of set purpose that he restarted his horse so quickly.

Was jealousy, then, gnawing at me? At all events, I felt exceedingly depressed, despite the fact that I had no desire to ascertain what the correspondence was about. To think that HE should be her confidant! "My friend, mine own familiar friend!" passed through my mind. Yet WAS there any love in the matter? "Of course not," reason whispered to me. But reason goes for little on such occasions. I felt that the matter must be cleared up, for it was becoming unpleasantly complex.

I had scarcely set foot in the hotel when the commissionaire and the landlord (the latter issuing from his room for the purpose) alike informed me that I was being searched for high and low--that three separate messages to ascertain my whereabouts had come down from the General. When I entered his study I was feeling anything but kindly disposed. I found there the General himself, De Griens, and Mlle. Blanche, but not Mlle.'s mother, who was a person whom her reputed daughter used only for show purposes, since in all matters of business the daughter fended for herself, and it is unlikely that the mother knew anything about them.

Some very heated discussion was in progress, and meanwhile the door of the study was open--an unprecedented circumstance. As I approached the portals I could hear loud voices raised, for mingled with the pert, venomous accents of De Griens were Mlle. Blanche's excited, impudently abusive tongue and the General's plaintive wail as, apparently, he sought to justify himself in something. But on my appearance every one stopped speaking, and tried to put a better face upon matters. De Griens smoothed his hair, and twisted his angry face into a smile--into the mean, studiously polite French smile which I so detested; while the downcast, perplexed General assumed an air of dignity--though only in a mechanical way. On the other hand, Mlle. Blanche did not trouble to conceal the wrath that was sparkling in her countenance, but bent her gaze upon me with an air of impatient expectancy. I may remark that hitherto she had treated me with absolute superciliousness, and, so far from answering my salutations, had always ignored them.

"Alexis Ivanovitch," began the General in a tone of affectionate upbraiding, "may I say to you that I find it strange, exceedingly strange, that--In short, your conduct towards myself and my family--In a word, your--er--extremely"

"Eh! Ce n'est pas ca," interrupted De Griens in a tone of impatience and contempt (evidently he was the ruling spirit of the conclave). "Mon cher monsieur, notre general se trompe. What he means to say is that he warns you--he begs of you most earnestly--not to ruin him. I use the expression because--"

"Why? Why?" I interjected.

"Because you have taken upon yourself to act as guide to this, to this--how shall I express it?--to this old lady, a cette pauvre terrible vieille. But she will only gamble away all that she has--gamble it away like this old lady. You yourself have seen her play. Once she has acquired the taste for gambling, she will never leave the roulette-table, but, of sheer perversity and temper, will stake her all, and lose it. In cases such as hers a gambler can never be torn away from the game; and then--and then--"

"And then," asseverated the General, "you will have ruined my whole family. I and my family are her heirs, for she has no nearer relatives than ourselves. I tell you frankly that my affairs are in great--very great disorder; how much they are so you yourself are partially aware. If she should lose a large sum, or, maybe, her whole fortune, what will become of us--of my children" (here the General exchanged a glance with De Griens) "or of me?" (here he looked at Mlle. Blanche, who turned her head contemptuously away). "Alexis Ivanovitch, I beg of you to save us."

"Tell me, General, how am I to do so? On what footing do I stand here?"

"Refuse to take her about. Simply leave her alone."

"But she would soon find some one else to take my place?"

"Ce n'est pas ca, ce n'est pas ca," again interrupted De Griens. "Que diable! Do not leave her alone so much as advise her, persuade her, draw her away. In any case do not let her gamble; find her some counter-attraction."

“And how am I to do that? If only you would undertake the task, Monsieur de Griens! “ I said this last as innocently as possible, but at once saw a rapid glance of excited interrogation pass from Mlle. Blanche to De Griens, while in the face of the latter also there gleamed something which he could not repress.

“Well, at the present moment she would refuse to accept my services,” said he with a gesture. “But if, later--“

Here he gave Mlle. Blanche another glance which was full of meaning; whereupon she advanced towards me with a bewitching smile, and seized and pressed my hands. Devil take it, but how that devilish visage of hers could change! At the present moment it was a visage full of supplication, and as gentle in its expression as that of a smiling, roguish infant. Stealthily, she drew me apart from the rest as though the more completely to separate me from them; and, though no harm came of her doing so--for it was merely a stupid manoeuvre, and no more--I found the situation very unpleasant.

The General hastened to lend her his support.

“Alexis Ivanovitch,” he began, “pray pardon me for having said what I did just now--for having said more than I meant to do. I beg and beseech you, I kiss the hem of your garment, as our Russian saying has it, for you, and only you, can save us. I and Mlle. de Cominges, we all of us beg of you--But you understand, do you not? Surely you understand?” and with his eyes he indicated Mlle. Blanche. Truly he was cutting a pitiful figure!

At this moment three low, respectful knocks sounded at the door; which, on being opened, revealed a chambermaid, with Potapitch behind her--come from the Grandmother to request that I should attend her in her rooms. “She is in a bad humour,” added Potapitch.

The time was half-past three.

“My mistress was unable to sleep,” explained Potapitch; “so, after tossing about for a while, she suddenly rose, called for her chair, and sent me to look for you. She is now in the verandah.”

“Quelle megere!” exclaimed De Griens.

True enough, I found Madame in the hotel verandah -much put about at my delay, for she had been unable to contain herself until four o’clock.

“Lift me up,” she cried to the bearers, and once more we set out for the roulette-salons.

XII

The Grandmother was in an impatient, irritable frame of mind. Without doubt the roulette had turned her head, for she appeared to be indifferent to everything else, and, in general, seemed much distraught. For instance, she asked me no questions about objects en route, except that, when a sumptuous barouche passed us and raised a cloud of dust, she lifted her hand for a moment, and inquired, “What was that?” Yet even then she did not appear to hear my reply, although at times her abstraction was interrupted by sallies and fits of sharp, impatient fidgeting. Again, when I pointed out to her the Baron and Baroness Burmergelm walking to the Casino, she merely looked at them in an absent-minded sort of way, and said with complete indifference, “Ah!” Then, turning sharply to Potapitch and Martha, who were walking behind us, she rapped out:

“Why have YOU attached yourselves to the party? We are not going to take you with us every time. Go home at once.” Then, when the servants had pulled hasty bows and departed, she added to me: “You are all the escort I need.”

At the Casino the Grandmother seemed to be expected, for no time was lost in procuring her former place beside the croupier. It is my opinion that though croupiers seem such ordinary, humdrum officials--men who care nothing whether the bank wins or loses--they are, in reality, anything but indifferent to the bank’s losing, and are given instructions to attract players, and to keep a watch over the bank’s interests; as also, that for such services, these officials are awarded prizes and premiums. At all events, the croupiers of Roulettenberg seemed to look upon the Grandmother as their lawful prey--whereafter there befell what our party had foretold.

It happened thus:

As soon as ever we arrived the Grandmother ordered me to stake twelve ten-gulden pieces in succession upon zero. Once, twice, and thrice I did so, yet zero never turned up.

"Stake again," said the old lady with an impatient nudge of my elbow, and I obeyed.

"How many times have we lost?" she inquired--actually grinding her teeth in her excitement.

"We have lost 144 ten-gulden pieces," I replied. "I tell you, Madame, that zero may not turn up until nightfall."

"Never mind," she interrupted. "Keep on staking upon zero, and also stake a thousand gulden upon rouge. Here is a banknote with which to do so."

The red turned up, but zero missed again, and we only got our thousand gulden back.

"But you see, you see" whispered the old lady. "We have now recovered almost all that we staked. Try zero again. Let us do so another ten times, and then leave off."

By the fifth round, however, the Grandmother was weary of the scheme.

"To the devil with that zero!" she exclaimed. Stake four thousand gulden upon the red."

"But, Madame, that will be so much to venture!" I remonstrated. "Suppose the red should not turn up?" The Grandmother almost struck me in her excitement. Her agitation was rapidly making her quarrelsome. Consequently, there was nothing for it but to stake the whole four thousand gulden as she had directed.

The wheel revolved while the Grandmother sat as bolt upright, and with as proud and quiet a mien, as though she had not the least doubt of winning.

"Zero!" cried the croupier.

At first the old lady failed to understand the situation; but, as soon as she saw the croupier raking in her four thousand gulden, together with everything else that happened to be lying on the table, and recognised that the zero which had been so long turning up, and on which we had lost nearly two hundred ten-gulden pieces, had at length, as though of set purpose, made a sudden reappearance--why, the poor old lady fell to cursing it, and to throwing herself about, and wailing and gesticulating at the company at large. Indeed, some people in our vicinity actually burst outlaughing.

"To think that that accursed zero should have turned up NOW!" she sobbed. "The accursed, accursed thing! And, it is all YOUR fault," she added, rounding upon me in a frenzy. "It was you who persuaded me to cease staking upon it."

"But, Madame, I only explained the game to you. How am I to answer for every mischance which may occur in it?"

"You and your mischances!" she whispered threateningly. "Go! Away at once!"

"Farewell, then, Madame." And I turned to depart.

"No--stay," she put in hastily. "Where are you going to? Why should you leave me? You fool! No, no... stay here. It is I who was the fool. Tell me what I ought to do."

"I cannot take it upon myself to advise you, for you will only blame me if I do so. Play at your own discretion. Say exactly what you wish staked, and I will stake it."

"Very well. Stake another four thousand gulden upon the red. Take this banknote to do it with. I have still got twenty thousand roubles in actual cash."

"But," I whispered, "such a quantity of money--"

"Never mind. I cannot rest until I have won back my losses. Stake!"

I staked, and we lost.

"Stake again, stake again--eight thousand at a stroke!"

"I cannot, Madame. The largest stake allowed is four thousand gulden."

"Well, then; stake four thousand."

This time we won, and the Grandmother recovered herself a little.

"You see, you see!" she exclaimed as she nudged me. "Stake another four thousand."

I did so, and lost. Again, and yet again, we lost. "Madame, your twelve thousand gulden are now gone," at length I reported.

"I see they are," she replied with, as it were, the calmness of despair. "I see they are," she muttered again as she gazed straight in front of her, like a person lost in thought. "Ah well, I do not mean to rest until I have staked another four thousand."

"But you have no money with which to do it, Madame. In this satchel I can see only a few five percent bonds and some transfers--no actual cash."

"And in the purse?"

"A mere trifle."

"But there is a money-changer's office here, is there not? They told me I should be able to get any sort of paper security changed! "

"Quite so; to any amount you please. But you will lose on the transaction what would frighten even a Jew."

"Rubbish! I am DETERMINED to retrieve my losses. Take me away, and call those fools of bearers."

I wheeled the chair out of the throng, and, the bearers making their appearance, we left the Casino.

"Hurry, hurry!" commanded the Grandmother. "Show me the nearest way to the money-changer's. Is it far?"

"A couple of steps, Madame."

At the turning from the square into the Avenue we came face to face with the whole of our party--the General, De Griers, Mlle. Blanche, and her mother. Only Polina and Mr. Astley were absent.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the Grandmother. "But we have no time to stop. What do you want? I can't talk to you here."

I dropped behind a little, and immediately was pounced upon by De Griers.

"She has lost this morning's winnings," I whispered, "and also twelve thousand gulden of her original money. At the present moment we are going to get some bonds changed."

De Griers stamped his foot with vexation, and hastened to communicate the tidings to the General. Meanwhile we continued to wheel the old lady along.

"Stop her, stop her," whispered the General in consternation.

"You had better try and stop her yourself," I returned--also in a whisper.

"My good mother," he said as he approached her, "--my good mother, pray let, let--" (his voice was beginning to tremble and sink) "--let us hire a carriage, and go for a drive. Near here there is an enchanting view to be obtained. We-we-we were just coming to invite you to go and see it."

"Begone with you and your views!" said the Grandmother angrily as she waved him away.

"And there are trees there, and we could have tea under them," continued the General--now in utter despair.

"Nous boirons du lait, sur l'herbe fraiche," added De Griers with the snarl almost of a wild beast.

"Du lait, de l'herbe fraiche"--the idyll, the ideal of the Parisian bourgeois--his whole outlook upon "la nature et la verite"!

"Have done with you and your milk!" cried the old lady. "Go and stuff YOURSELF as much as you like, but my stomach simply recoils from the idea. What are you stopping for? I have nothing to say to you."

"Here we are, Madame," I announced. "Here is the moneychanger's office."

I entered to get the securities changed, while the Grandmother remained outside in the porch, and the rest waited at a little distance, in doubt as to their best course of action. At length the old lady turned such an angry stare upon them that they departed along the road towards the Casino.

The process of changing involved complicated calculations which soon necessitated my return to the Grandmother for instructions.

"The thieves!" she exclaimed as she clapped her hands together. "Never mind, though. Get the documents cashed--No; send the banker out to me," she added as an afterthought.

"Would one of the clerks do, Madame?"

"Yes, one of the clerks. The thieves!"

The clerk consented to come out when he perceived that he was being asked for by an old lady who was too infirm to walk; after which the Grandmother began to upbraid him at length, and with great vehemence, for his alleged usuriousness, and to bargain with him in a mixture of Russian, French, and German--I acting as interpreter. Meanwhile, the grave-faced official eyed us both, and silently nodded his head. At the Grandmother, in particular, he gazed with a curiosity which almost bordered upon rudeness. At length, too, he smiled.

"Pray recollect yourself!" cried the old lady. "And may my money choke you! Alexis Ivanovitch, tell him that we can easily repair to someone else."

"The clerk says that others will give you even less than he."

Of what the ultimate calculations consisted I do not exactly remember, but at all events they were alarming. Receiving twelve thousand florins in gold, I took also the statement of accounts, and carried it out to the Grandmother.

"Well, well," she said, "I am no accountant. Let us hurry away, hurry away." And she waved the paper aside.

"Neither upon that accursed zero, however, nor upon that equally accursed red do I mean to stake a cent," I muttered to myself as I entered the Casino.

This time I did all I could to persuade the old lady to stake as little as possible--saying that a turn would come in the chances when she would be at liberty to stake more. But she was so impatient that, though at first she agreed to do as I suggested, nothing could stop her when once she had begun. By way of prelude she won stakes of a hundred and two hundred gulden.

"There you are!" she said as she nudged me. "See what we have won! Surely it would be worth our while to stake four thousand instead of a hundred, for we might win another four thousand, and then--! Oh, it was YOUR fault before--all your fault!"

I felt greatly put out as I watched her play, but I decided to hold my tongue, and to give her no more advice.

Suddenly De Griers appeared on the scene. It seemed that all this while he and his companions had been standing beside us-- though I noticed that Mlle. Blanche had withdrawn a little from the rest, and was engaged in flirting with the Prince. Clearly the General was greatly put out at this. Indeed, he was in a perfect agony of vexation. But Mlle. was careful never to look his way, though he did his best to attract her notice. Poor General! By turns his face blanched and reddened, and he was trembling to such an extent that he could scarcely follow the old lady's play. At length Mlle. and the Prince took their departure, and the General followed them.

"Madame, Madame," sounded the honeyed accents of De Griers as he leant over to whisper in the Grandmother's ear. "That stake will never win. No, no, it is impossible," he added in Russian with a writhe. "No, no!"

"But why not?" asked the Grandmother, turning round. "Show me what I ought to do."

Instantly De Griers burst into a babble of French as he advised, jumped about, declared that such and such chances ought to be waited for, and started to make calculations of figures. All this he addressed to me in my capacity as translator--tapping the table the while with his finger, and pointing hither and thither. At length he seized a pencil, and began to reckon sums on paper until he had exhausted the Grandmother's patience.

"Away with you!" she interrupted. "You talk sheer nonsense, for, though you keep on saying 'Madame, Madame,' you haven't the least notion what ought to be done. Away with you, Isay!"

"Mais, Madame," cooed De Griers--and straightway started afresh with his fussy instructions.

"Stake just ONCE, as he advises," the Grandmother said to me, "and then we shall see what we shall see. Of course, his stake MIGHT win."

As a matter of fact, De Grier's one object was to distract the old lady from staking large sums; wherefore, he now suggested to her that she should stake upon certain numbers, singly and in groups. Consequently, in accordance with his instructions, I staked a ten-gulden piece upon several odd numbers in the first twenty, and five ten-gulden pieces upon certain groups of numbers-groups of from twelve to eighteen, and from eighteen to twenty-four. The total staked amounted to 160 gulden.

The wheel revolved. "Zero!" cried the croupier.

We had lost it all!

"The fool!" cried the old lady as she turned upon De Griers. "You infernal Frenchman, to think that you should advise! Away with you! Though you fuss and fuss, you don't even know what you're talking about."

Deeply offended, De Griers shrugged his shoulders, favoured the Grandmother with a look of contempt, and departed. For some time past he had been feeling ashamed of being seen in such company, and this had proved the last straw.

An hour later we had lost everything in hand.

"Home!" cried the Grandmother.

Not until we had turned into the Avenue did she utter a word; but from that point onwards, until we arrived at the hotel, she kept venting exclamations of "What a fool I am! What a silly old fool I am, to be sure!"

Arrived at the hotel, she called for tea, and then gave orders for her luggage to be packed.

"We are off again," she announced.

"But whither, Madame?" inquired Martha.

"What business is that of YOURS? Let the cricket stick to its hearth. [The Russian form of "Mind your own business."] Potapitch, have everything packed, for we are returning to Moscow at once. I have fooled away fifteen thousand roubles."

"Fifteen thousand roubles, good mistress? My God!" And Potapitch spat upon his hands--probably to show that he was ready to serve her in any way he could.

"Now then, you fool! At once you begin with your weeping and wailing! Be quiet, and pack. Also, run downstairs, and get my hotel bill."

"The next train leaves at 9:30, Madame," I interposed, with a view to checking her agitation.

"And what is the time now?"

"Half-past eight."

"How vexing! But, never mind. Alexis Ivanovitch, I have not a kopeck left; I have but these two bank notes. Please run to the office and get them changed. Otherwise I shall have nothing to travel with."

Departing on her errand, I returned half an hour later to find the whole party gathered in her rooms. It appeared that the news of her impending departure for Moscow had thrown the conspirators into consternation even greater than her losses had done. For, said they, even if her departure should save her fortune, what will become of the General later? And who is to repay De Griers? Clearly Mlle. Blanche would never consent to wait until the Grandmother was dead, but would at once elope with the Prince or someone else. So they had all gathered together--endeavouring to calm and dissuade the Grandmother. Only Polina was absent. For her part the Grandmother had nothing for the party but abuse.

"Away with you, you rascals!" she was shouting. "What have my affairs to do with you? Why, in particular, do you"--here she indicated De Griers--"come sneaking here with your goat's beard? And what do YOU"--here she turned to Mlle. Blanche "want of me? What are YOU finicking for?"

"Diantre!" muttered Mlle. under her breath, but her eyes were flashing. Then all at once she burst into a laugh and left the room--crying to the General as she did so: "Elle vivra cent ans!"

"So you have been counting upon my death, have you?" fumed the old lady. "Away with you! Clear them out of the room, Alexis Ivanovitch. What business is it of THEIRS? It is not THEIR money that I have been squandering, but my own."

The General shrugged his shoulders, bowed, and withdrew, with De Griens behind him.

"Call Prascovia," commanded the Grandmother, and in five minutes Martha reappeared with Polina, who had been sitting with the children in her own room (having purposely determined not to leave it that day). Her face looked grave and careworn.

"Prascovia," began the Grandmother, "is what I have just heard through a side wind true--namely, that this fool of a stepfather of yours is going to marry that silly whirligig of a Frenchwoman--that actress, or something worse? Tell me, is it true?"

"I do not know FOR CERTAIN, Grandmamma," replied Polina; "but from Mlle. Blanche's account (for she does not appear to think it necessary to conceal anything) I conclude that--"

"You need not say any more," interrupted the Grandmother energetically. "I understand the situation. I always thought we should get something like this from him, for I always looked upon him as a futile, frivolous fellow who gave himself unconscionable airs on the fact of his being a general (though he only became one because he retired as a colonel). Yes, I know all about the sending of the telegrams to inquire whether 'the old woman is likely to turn up her toes soon.' Ah, they were looking for the legacies! Without money that wretched woman (what is her name?--Oh, De Cominges) would never dream of accepting the General and his false teeth--no, not even for him to be her lacquey--since she herself, they say, possesses a pile of money, and lends it on interest, and makes a good thing out of it. However, it is not you, Prascovia, that I am blaming; it was not you who sent those telegrams. Nor, for that matter, do I wish to recall old scores. True, I know that you are a vixen by nature--that you are a wasp which will sting one if one touches it--yet, my heart is sore for you, for I loved your mother, Katerina. Now, will you leave everything here, and come away with me? Otherwise, I do not know what is to become of you, and it is not right that you should continue living with these people. Nay," she interposed, the moment that Polina attempted to speak, "I have not yet finished. I ask of you nothing in return. My house in Moscow is, as you know, large enough for a palace, and you could occupy a whole floor of it if you liked, and keep away from me for weeks together. Will you come with me or will you not?"

"First of all, let me ask of YOU," replied Polina, "whether you are intending to depart at once?"

"What? You suppose me to be jesting? I have said that I am going, and I AM going. Today I have squandered fifteen thousand roubles at that accursed roulette of yours, and though, five years ago, I promised the people of a certain suburb of Moscow to build them a stone church in place of a wooden one, I have been fooling away my money here! However, I am going back now to build my church."

"But what about the waters, Grandmamma? Surely you came here to take the waters?"

"You and your waters! Do not anger me, Prascovia. Surely you are trying to? Say, then: will you, or will you not, come with me?"

"Grandmamma," Polina replied with deep feeling, "I am very, very grateful to you for the shelter which you have so kindly offered me. Also, to a certain extent you have guessed my position aright, and I am beholden to you to such an extent that it may be that I will come and live with you, and that very soon; yet there are important reasons why--why I cannot make up my mind just yet. If you would let me have, say, a couple of weeks to decide in--?"

"You mean that you are NOT coming?"

"I mean only that I cannot come just yet. At all events, I could not well leave my little brother and sister here, since, since--if I were to leave them--they would be abandoned altogether. But if, Grandmamma, you would take the little ones AND myself, then, of course, I could come with you, and would do all I could to serve you" (this she said with great earnestness). "Only, without the little ones I CANNOT come."

"Do not make a fuss" (as a matter of fact Polina never at any time either fussed or wept). "The Great Foster--Father [Translated literally--The Great Poulterer] can find for all his chicks a place. You are not coming without

the children? But see here, Prascovia. I wish you well, and nothing but well: yet I have divined the reason why you will not come. Yes, I know all, Prascovia. That Frenchman will never bring you good of anysort.”

Polina coloured hotly, and even I started. “For,” thought I to myself, “every one seems to know about that affair. Or perhaps I am the only one who does not know about it?”

“Now, now! Do not frown,” continued the Grandmother. “But I do not intend to slur things over. You will take care that no harm befalls you, will you not? For you are a girl of sense, and I am sorry for you—I regard you in a different light to the rest of them. And now, please, leave me. Good-bye.”

“But let me stay with you a little longer,” said Polina.

“No,” replied the other; “you need not. Do not bother me, for you and all of them have tired me out.”

Yet when Polina tried to kiss the Grandmother’s hand, the old lady withdrew it, and herself kissed the girl on the cheek. As she passed me, Polina gave me a momentary glance, and then as swiftly averted her eyes.

“And good-bye to you, also, Alexis Ivanovitch. The train starts in an hour’s time, and I think that you must be weary of me. Take these five hundred gulden for yourself.”

“I thank you humbly, Madame, but I am ashamed to--“

“Come, come!” cried the Grandmother so energetically, and with such an air of menace, that I did not dare refuse the money further.

“If, when in Moscow, you have no place where you can lay your head,” she added, “come and see me, and I will give you a recommendation. Now, Potapitch, get things ready.”

I ascended to my room, and lay down upon the bed. A whole hour I must have lain thus, with my head resting upon my hand. So the crisis had come! I needed time for its consideration. To-morrow I would have a talk with Polina.

Ah! The Frenchman! So, it was true? But how could it be so? Polina and De Griens! What a combination!

No, it was too improbable. Suddenly I leapt up with the idea of seeking Astley and forcing him to speak. There could be no doubt that he knew more than I did. Astley? Well, he was another problem for me to solve.

Suddenly there came a knock at the door, and I opened it to find Potapitch awaiting me.

“Sir,” he said, “my mistress is asking for you.”

“Indeed? But she is just departing, is she not? The train leaves in ten minutes’ time.”

“She is uneasy, sir; she cannot rest. Come quickly, sir; do not delay.”

I ran downstairs at once. The Grandmother was just being carried out of her rooms into the corridor. In her hands she held a roll of bank-notes.

“Alexis Ivanovitch,” she cried, “walk on ahead, and we will set out again.” “But whither, Madame?”

“I cannot rest until I have retrieved my losses. March on ahead, and ask me no questions. Play continues until midnight, does it not?”

For a moment I stood stupefied--stood deep in thought; but it was not long before I had made up my mind.

“With your leave, Madame,” I said, “I will not go with you.”

“And why not? What do you mean? Is every one here a stupid good-for-nothing?”

“Pardon me, but I have nothing to reproach myself with. I merely will not go. I merely intend neither to witness nor to join in your play. I also beg to return you your five hundred gulden. Farewell.”

Laying the money upon a little table which the Grandmother’s chair happened to be passing, I bowed and withdrew.

“What folly!” the Grandmother shouted after me. “Very well, then. Do not come, and I will find my way alone. Potapitch, you must come with me. Lift up the chair, and carry me along.”

I failed to find Mr. Astley, and returned home. It was now growing late--it was past midnight, but I subsequently learnt from Potapitch how the Grandmother’s day had ended. She had lost all the money which, earlier in the day,

I had got for her paper securities--a sum amounting to about ten thousand roubles. This she did under the direction of the Pole whom, that afternoon, she had dowered with two ten-gulden pieces. But before his arrival on the scene, she had commanded Potapitch to stake for her; until at length she had told him also to go about his business. Upon that the Pole had leapt into the breach. Not only did it happen that he knew the Russian language, but also he could speak a mixture of three different dialects, so that the pair were able to understand one another. Yet the old lady never ceased to abuse him, despite his deferential manner, and to compare him unfavourably with myself (so, at all events, Potapitch declared). "You," the old chamberlain said to me, "treated her as a gentleman should, but he--he robbed her right and left, as I could see with my own eyes. Twice she caught him at it, and rated him soundly. On one occasion she even pulled his hair, so that the bystanders burst out laughing. Yet she lost everything, sir--that is to say, she lost all that you had changed for her. Then we brought her home, and, after asking for some water and saying her prayers, she went to bed. So worn out was she that she fell asleep at once. May God send her dreams of angels! And this is all that foreign travel has done for us! Oh, my own Moscow! For what have we not at home there, in Moscow? Such a garden and flowers as you could never see here, and fresh air and apple-trees coming into blossom,--and a beautiful view to look upon. Ah, but what must she do but go travelling abroad? Alack,alack!"

XIII

Almost a month has passed since I last touched these notes-- notes which I began under the influence of impressions at once poignant and disordered. The crisis which I then felt to be approaching has now arrived, but in a form a hundred times more extensive and unexpected than I had looked for. To me it all seems strange, uncouth, and tragic. Certain occurrences have befallen me which border upon the marvellous. At all events, that is how I view them. I view them so in one regard at least. I refer to the whirlpool of events in which, at the time, I was revolving. But the most curious feature of all is my relation to those events, for hitherto I had never clearly understood myself. Yet now the actual crisis has passed away like a dream. Even my passion for Polina is dead. Was it ever so strong and genuine as I thought? If so, what has become of it now? At times I fancy that I must be mad; that somewhere I am sitting in a madhouse; that these events have merely SEEMED to happen; that still they merely SEEM to be happening.

I have been arranging and re-perusing my notes (perhaps for the purpose of convincing myself that I am not in a madhouse). At present I am lonely and alone. Autumn is coming--already it is mellowing the leaves; and, as I sit brooding in this melancholy little town (and how melancholy the little towns of Germany can be!), I find myself taking no thought for the future, but living under the influence of passing moods, and of my recollections of the tempest which recently drew me into its vortex, and then cast me out again. At times I seem still to be caught within that vortex. At times, the tempest seems once more to be gathering, and, as it passes overhead, to be wrapping me in its folds, until I have lost my sense of order and reality, and continue whirling and whirling and whirling around.

Yet, it may be that I shall be able to stop myself from revolving if once I can succeed in rendering myself an exact account of what has happened within the month just past. Somehow I feel drawn towards the pen; on many and many an evening I have had nothing else in the world to do. But, curiously enough, of late I have taken to amusing myself with the works of M. Paul de Kock, which I read in German translations obtained from a wretched local library. These works I cannot abide, yet I read them, and find myself marvelling that I should be doing so. Somehow I seem to be afraid of any SERIOUS book--afraid of permitting any SERIOUS preoccupation to break the spell of the passing moment. So dear to me is the formless dream of which I have spoken, so dear to me are the impressions which it has left behind it, that I fear to touch the vision with anything new, lest it should dissolve in smoke. But is it so dear to me? Yes, it IS dear to me, and will ever be fresh in my recollections--even forty years hence. . .

So let me write of it, but only partially, and in a more abridged form than my full impressions might warrant.

First of all, let me conclude the history of the Grandmother. Next day she lost every gulden that she possessed. Things were bound to happen so, for persons of her type who have once entered upon that road descend it with ever-increasing rapidity, even as a sledge descends a toboggan-slide. All day until eight o'clock that evening did she play; and, though I personally did not witness her exploits, I learnt of them later through report.

All that day Potapitch remained in attendance upon her; but the Poles who directed her play she changed more than once. As a beginning she dismissed her Pole of the previous day--the Pole whose hair she had pulled--and took to herself another one; but the latter proved worse even than the former, and incurred dismissal in favour of the first Pole, who, during the time of his unemployment, had nevertheless hovered around the Grandmother's chair, and from time to time obtruded his head over her shoulder. At length the old lady became desperate, for the second Pole, when dismissed, imitated his predecessor by declining to go away; with the result that one Pole remained standing on the right of the victim, and the other on her left; from which vantage points the pair quarrelled, abused each other concerning the stakes and rounds, and exchanged the epithet "laidak" [Rascal] and other Polish terms of endearment. Finally, they effected a mutual reconciliation, and, tossing the money about anyhow, played simply at random. Once more quarrelling, each of them staked money on his own side of the Grandmother's chair (for instance, the one Pole staked upon the red, and the other one upon the black), until they had so confused and browbeaten the old lady that, nearly weeping, she was forced to appeal to the head croupier for protection, and to have the two Poles expelled. No time was lost in this being done, despite the rascals' cries and protestations that the old lady was in their debt, that she had cheated them, and that her general behaviour had been mean and dishonourable. The same evening the unfortunate Potapitch related the story to me with tears complaining that the two men had filled their pockets with money (he himself had seen them do it) which had been shamelessly pilfered from his mistress. For instance, one Pole demanded of the Grandmother fifty gulden for his trouble, and then staked the money by the side of her stake. She happened to win; whereupon he cried out that the winning stake was his, and hers the loser. As soon as the two Poles had been expelled, Potapitch left the room, and reported to the authorities that the men's pockets were full of gold; and, on the Grandmother also requesting the head croupier to look into the affair, the police made their appearance, and, despite the protests of the Poles (who, indeed, had been caught redhanded), their pockets were turned inside out, and the contents handed over to the Grandmother. In fact, in view of the circumstance that she lost all day, the croupiers and other authorities of the Casino showed her every attention; and on her fame spreading through the town, visitors of every nationality--even the most knowing of them, the most distinguished--crowded to get a glimpse of "la vieille comtesse russe, tombee en enfance," who had lost "so many millions."

Yet with the money which the authorities restored to her from the pockets of the Poles the Grandmother effected very, very little, for there soon arrived to take his countrymen's place, a third Pole--a man who could speak Russian fluently, was dressed like a gentleman (albeit in lacqueyish fashion), and sported a huge moustache. Though polite enough to the old lady, he took a high hand with the bystanders. In short, he offered himself less as a servant than as an ENTERTAINER. After each round he would turn to the old lady, and swear terrible oaths to the effect that he was a "Polish gentleman of honour" who would scorn to take a kopeck of her money; and, though he repeated these oaths so often that at length she grew alarmed, he had her play in hand, and began to win on her behalf; wherefore, she felt that she could not well get rid of him. An hour later the two Poles who, earlier in the day, had been expelled from the Casino, made a reappearance behind the old lady's chair, and renewed their offers of service--even if it were only to be sent on messages; but from Potapitch I subsequently had it that between these rascals and the said "gentleman of honour" there passed a wink, as well as that the latter put something into their hands. Next, since the Grandmother had not yet lunched--she had scarcely for a moment left her chair--one of the two Poles ran to the restaurant of the Casino, and brought her thence a cup of soup, and afterwards some tea. In fact, BOTH the Poles hastened to perform this office. Finally, towards the close of the day, when it was clear that the Grandmother was about to play her last bank-note, there could be seen standing behind her chair no fewer than six natives of Poland--persons who, as yet, had been neither audible nor visible; and as soon as ever the old lady played the note in question, they took no further notice of her, but pushed their way past her chair to the table; seized the money, and staked it--shouting and disputing the while, and arguing with the "gentleman of honour" (who also had forgotten the Grandmother's existence), as though he were their

equal. Even when the Grandmother had lost her all, and was returning (about eight o'clock) to the hotel, some three or four Poles could not bring themselves to leave her, but went on running beside her chair and volubly protesting that the Grandmother had cheated them, and that she ought to be made to surrender what was not her own. Thus the party arrived at the hotel; whence, presently, the gang of rascals was ejected neck and crop.

According to Potapitch's calculations, the Grandmother lost, that day, a total of ninety thousand roubles, in addition to the money which she had lost the day before. Every paper security which she had brought with her--five percent bonds, internal loan scrip, and what not--she had changed into cash. Also, I could not but marvel at the way in which, for seven or eight hours at a stretch, she sat in that chair of hers, almost never leaving the table. Again, Potapitch told me that there were three occasions on which she really began to win; but that, led on by false hopes, she was unable to tear herself away at the right moment. Every gambler knows how a person may sit a day and a night at cards without ever casting a glance to right or to left.

Meanwhile, that day some other very important events were passing in our hotel. As early as eleven o'clock--that is to say, before the Grandmother had quitted her rooms--the General and De Griers decided upon their last stroke. In other words, on learning that the old lady had changed her mind about departing, and was bent on setting out for the Casino again, the whole of our gang (Polina only excepted) proceeded en masse to her rooms, for the purpose of finally and frankly treating with her. But the General, quaking and greatly apprehensive as to his possible future, overdid things. After half an hour's prayers and entreaties, coupled with a full confession of his debts, and even of his passion for Mlle. Blanche (yes, he had quite lost his head), he suddenly adopted a tone of menace, and started to rage at the old lady--exclaiming that she was sullyng the family honour, that she was making a public scandal of herself, and that she was smirching the fair name of Russia. The upshot was that the Grandmother turned him out of the room with her stick (it was a real stick, too!). Later in the morning he held several consultations with De Griers--the question which occupied him being: Is it in any way possible to make use of the police--to tell them that "this respected, but unfortunate, old lady has gone out of her mind, and is squandering her last kopeck," or something of the kind? In short, is it in any way possible to engineer a species of supervision over, or of restraint upon, the old lady? De Griers, however, shrugged his shoulders at this, and laughed in the General's face, while the old warrior went on chattering volubly, and running up and down his study. Finally De Griers waved his hand, and disappeared from view; and by evening it became known that he had left the hotel, after holding a very secret and important conference with Mlle. Blanche. As for the latter, from early morning she had taken decisive measures, by completely excluding the General from her presence, and bestowing upon him not a glance. Indeed, even when the General pursued her to the Casino, and met her walking arm in arm with the Prince, he (the General) received from her and her mother not the slightest recognition. Nor did the Prince himself bow. The rest of the day Mlle. spent in probing the Prince, and trying to make him declare himself; but in this she made a woeful mistake. The little incident occurred in the evening. Suddenly Mlle. Blanche realised that the Prince had not even a copper to his name, but, on the contrary, was minded to borrow of her money wherewith to play at roulette. In high displeasure she drove him from her presence, and shut herself up in her room.

The same morning I went to see--or, rather, to look for--Mr. Astley, but was unsuccessful in my quest. Neither in his rooms nor in the Casino nor in the Park was he to be found; nor did he, that day, lunch at his hotel as usual. However, at about five o'clock I caught sight of him walking from the railway station to the Hotel d'Angleterre. He seemed to be in a great hurry and much preoccupied, though in his face I could discern no actual traces of worry or perturbation. He held out to me a friendly hand, with his usual ejaculation of "Ah!" but did not check his stride. I turned and walked beside him, but found, somehow, that his answers forbade any putting of definite questions. Moreover, I felt reluctant to speak to him of Polina; nor, for his part, did he ask me any questions concerning her, although, on my telling him of the Grandmother's exploits, he listened attentively and gravely, and then shrugged his shoulders.

"She is gambling away everything that she has," I remarked.

"Indeed? She arrived at the Casino even before I had taken my departure by train, so I knew she had been playing. If I should have time I will go to the Casino to-night, and take a look at her. The thing interests me."

“Where have you been today?” I asked--surprised at myself for having, as yet, omitted to put to him that question.

“To Frankfort.”

“On business?”

“On business.”

What more was there to be asked after that? I accompanied him until, as we drew level with the Hotel des Quatre Saisons, he suddenly nodded to me and disappeared. For myself, I returned home, and came to the conclusion that, even had I met him at two o'clock in the afternoon, I should have learnt no more from him than I had done at five o'clock, for the reason that I had no definite question to ask. It was bound to have been so. For me to formulate the query which I really wished to put was a simple impossibility.

Polina spent the whole of that day either in walking about the park with the nurse and children or in sitting in her own room. For a long while past she had avoided the General and had scarcely had a word to say to him (scarcely a word, I mean, on any SERIOUS topic). Yes, that I had noticed. Still, even though I was aware of the position in which the General was placed, it had never occurred to me that he would have any reason to avoid HER, or to trouble her with family explanations. Indeed, when I was returning to the hotel after my conversation with Astley, and chanced to meet Polina and the children, I could see that her face was as calm as though the family disturbances had never touched her. To my salute she responded with a slight bow, and I retired to my room in a very bad humour.

Of course, since the affair with the Burmergelms I had exchanged not a word with Polina, nor had with her any kind of intercourse. Yet I had been at my wits' end, for, as time went on, there was arising in me an ever-seething dissatisfaction. Even if she did not love me she ought not to have trampled upon my feelings, nor to have accepted my confessions with such contempt, seeing that she must have been aware that I loved her (of her own accord she had allowed me to tell her as much). Of course the situation between us had arisen in a curious manner. About two months ago, I had noticed that she had a desire to make me her friend, her confidant--that she was making trial of me for the purpose; but, for some reason or another, the desired result had never come about, and we had fallen into the present strange relations, which had led me to address her as I had done. At the same time, if my love was distasteful to her, why had she not FORBIDDEN me to speak of it to her?

But she had not so forbidden me. On the contrary, there had been occasions when she had even INVITED me to speak. Of course, this might have been done out of sheer wantonness, for I well knew--I had remarked it only too often--that, after listening to what I had to say, and angering me almost beyond endurance, she loved suddenly to torture me with some fresh outburst of contempt and aloofness! Yet she must have known that I could not live without her. Three days had elapsed since the affair with the Baron, and I could bear the severance no longer. When, that afternoon, I met her near the Casino, my heart almost made me faint, it beat so violently. She too could not live without me, for had she not said that she had NEED of me? Or had that too been spoken in jest?

That she had a secret of some kind there could be no doubt. What she had said to the Grandmother had stabbed me to the heart. On a thousand occasions I had challenged her to be open with me, nor could she have been ignorant that I was ready to give my very life for her. Yet always she had kept me at a distance with that contemptuous air of hers; or else she had demanded of me, in lieu of the life which I offered to lay at her feet, such escapades as I had perpetrated with the Baron. Ah, was it not torture to me, all this? For could it be that her whole world was bound up with the Frenchman? What, too, about Mr. Astley? The affair was inexplicable throughout. My God, what distress it caused me!

Arrived home, I, in a fit of frenzy, indited the following:

“Polina Alexandrovna, I can see that there is approaching us an exposure which will involve you too. For the last time I ask of you--have you, or have you not, any need of my life? If you have, then make such dispositions as you wish, and I shall always be discoverable in my room if required. If you have need of my life, write or send for me.”

I sealed the letter, and dispatched it by the hand of a corridor lacquey, with orders to hand it to the addressee in person. Though I expected no answer, scarcely three minutes had elapsed before the lacquey returned with "the compliments of a certain person."

Next, about seven o'clock, I was sent for by the General. I found him in his study, apparently preparing to go out again, for his hat and stick were lying on the sofa. When I entered he was standing in the middle of the room--his feet wide apart, and his head bent down. Also, he appeared to be talking to himself. But as soon as ever he saw me at the door he came towards me in such a curious manner that involuntarily I retreated a step, and was for leaving the room; whereupon he seized me by both hands, and, drawing me towards the sofa, and seating himself thereon, he forced me to sit down on a chair opposite him. Then, without letting go of my hands, he exclaimed with quivering lips and a sparkle of tears on his eyelashes:

"Oh, Alexis Ivanovitch! Save me, save me! Have some mercy upon me!"

For a long time I could not make out what he meant, although he kept talking and talking, and constantly repeating to himself, "Have mercy, mercy!" At length, however, I divined that he was expecting me to give him something in the nature of advice--or, rather, that, deserted by every one, and overwhelmed with grief and apprehension, he had bethought himself of my existence, and sent for me to relieve his feelings by talking and talking and talking.

In fact, he was in such a confused and despondent state of mind that, clasping his hands together, he actually went down upon his knees and begged me to go to Mlle. Blanche, and beseech and advise her to return to him, and to accept him in marriage.

"But, General," I exclaimed, "possibly Mlle. Blanche has scarcely even remarked my existence? What could I do with her?"

It was in vain that I protested, for he could understand nothing that was said to him. Next he started talking about the Grandmother, but always in a disconnected sort of fashion--his one thought being to send for the police.

"In Russia," said he, suddenly boiling over with indignation, "or in any well-ordered State where there exists a government, old women like my mother are placed under proper guardianship. Yes, my good sir," he went on, relapsing into a scolding tone as he leapt to his feet and started to pace the room, "do you not know this " (he seemed to be addressing some imaginary auditor in the corner) "--do you not know this, that in Russia old women like her are subjected to restraint, the devil take them?" Again he threw himself down upon the sofa.

A minute later, though sobbing and almost breathless, he managed to gasp out that Mlle. Blanche had refused to marry him, for the reason that the Grandmother had turned up in place of a telegram, and it was therefore clear that he had no inheritance to look for. Evidently, he supposed that I had hitherto been in entire ignorance of all this. Again, when I referred to De Griens, the General made a gesture of despair. "He has gone away," he said, "and everything which I possess is mortgaged to him. I stand stripped to my skin. Even of the money which you brought me from Paris, I know not if seven hundred francs be left. Of course that sum will do to go on with, but, as regards the future, I know nothing, I know nothing."

"Then how will you pay your hotel bill?" I cried in consternation. "And what shall you do afterwards?"

He looked at me vaguely, but it was clear that he had not understood--perhaps had not even heard--my questions. Then I tried to get him to speak of Polina and the children, but he only returned brief answers of "Yes, yes," and again started to maunder about the Prince, and the likelihood of the latter marrying Mlle. Blanche. "What on earth am I to do?" he concluded. "What on earth am I to do? Is this not ingratitude? Is it not sheer ingratitude?" And he burst into tears.

Nothing could be done with such a man. Yet to leave him alone was dangerous, for something might happen to him. I withdrew from his rooms for a little while, but warned the nursemaid to keep an eye upon him, as well as exchanged a word with the corridor lacquey (a very talkative fellow), who likewise promised to remain on the look-out.

Hardly had I left the General, when Potapitch approached me with a summons from the Grandmother. It was now eight o'clock, and she had returned from the Casino after finally losing all that she possessed. I found her sitting in her chair--much distressed and evidently fatigued. Presently Martha brought her up a cup of tea and forced her to drink it; yet, even then I could detect in the old lady's tone and manner a greatchange.

"Good evening, Alexis Ivanovitch," she said slowly, with her head drooping. "Pardon me for disturbing you again. Yes, you must pardon an old, old woman like myself, for I have left behind me all that I possess--nearly a hundred thousand roubles! You did quite right in declining to come with me this evening. Now I am without money--without a single groat. But I must not delay a moment; I must leave by the 9:30 train. I have sent for that English friend of yours, and am going to beg of him three thousand francs for a week. Please try and persuade him to think nothing of it, nor yet to refuse me, for I am still a rich woman who possesses three villages and a couple of mansions. Yes, the money shall be found, for I have not yet squandered EVERYTHING. I tell you this in order that he may have no doubts about--Ah, but here he is! Clearly he is a goodfellow."

True enough, Astley had come hot-foot on receiving the Grandmother's appeal. Scarcely stopping even to reflect, and with scarcely a word, he counted out the three thousand francs under a note of hand which she duly signed. Then, his business done, he bowed, and lost no time in taking his departure.

"You too leave me, Alexis Ivanovitch," said the Grandmother. "All my bones are aching, and I still have an hour in which to rest. Do not be hard upon me, old fool that I am. Never again shall I blame young people for being frivolous. I should think it wrong even to blame that unhappy General of yours. Nevertheless, I do not mean to let him have any of my money (which is all that he desires), for the reason that I look upon him as a perfect blockhead, and consider myself, simpleton though I be, at least wiser than HE is. How surely does God visit old age, and punish it for its presumption! Well, good-bye. Martha, come and lift me up."

However, I had a mind to see the old lady off; and, moreover, I was in an expectant frame of mind--somehow I kept thinking that SOMETHING was going to happen; wherefore, I could not rest quietly in my room, but stepped out into the corridor, and then into the Chestnut Avenue for a few minutes' stroll. My letter to Polina had been clear and firm, and in the present crisis, I felt sure, would prove final. I had heard of De Griens' departure, and, however much Polina might reject me as a FRIEND, she might not reject me altogether as a SERVANT. She would need me to fetch and carry for her, and I was ready to do so. How could it have been otherwise?

Towards the hour of the train's departure I hastened to the station, and put the Grandmother into her compartment--she and her party occupying a reserved family saloon.

"Thanks for your disinterested assistance," she said at parting. "Oh, and please remind Prascovia of what I said to her last night. I expect soon to see her."

Then I returned home. As I was passing the door of the General's suite, I met the nursemaid, and inquired after her master. "There is nothing new to report, sir," she replied quietly. Nevertheless I decided to enter, and was just doing so when I halted thunderstruck on the threshold. For before me I beheld the General and Mlle. Blanche--laughing gaily at one another!-- while beside them, on the sofa, there was seated her mother. Clearly the General was almost out of his mind with joy, for he was talking all sorts of nonsense, and bubbling over with a long-drawn, nervous laugh--a laugh which twisted his face into innumerable wrinkles, and caused his eyes almost to disappear.

Afterwards I learnt from Mlle. Blanche herself that, after dismissing the Prince and hearing of the General's tears, she bethought her of going to comfort the old man, and had just arrived for the purpose when I entered. Fortunately, the poor General did not know that his fate had been decided--that Mlle. had long ago packed her trunks in readiness for the first morning train to Paris!

Hesitating a moment on the threshold I changed my mind as to entering, and departed unnoticed. Ascending to my own room, and opening the door, I perceived in the semi-darkness a figure seated on a chair in the corner by the window. The figure did not rise when I entered, so I approached it swiftly, peered at it closely, and felt my heart almost stop beating. The figure was Polina!

XIV

The shock made me utter an exclamation.

"What is the matter? What is the matter?" she asked in a strange voice. She was looking pale, and her eyes were dim.

"What is the matter?" I re-echoed. "Why, the fact that you are HERE!"

"If I am here, I have come with all that I have to bring," she said. "Such has always been my way, as you shall presently see. Please light a candle."

I did so; whereupon she rose, approached the table, and laid upon it an open letter.

"Read it," she added.

"It is De Griens' handwriting!" I cried as I seized the document. My hands were so tremulous that the lines on the pages danced before my eyes. Although, at this distance of time, I have forgotten the exact phraseology of the missive, I append, if not the precise words, at all events the general sense.

"Mademoiselle," the document ran, "certain untoward circumstances compel me to depart in haste. Of course, you have of yourself remarked that hitherto I have always refrained from having any final explanation with you, for the reason that I could not well state the whole circumstances; and now to my difficulties the advent of the aged Grandmother, coupled with her subsequent proceedings, has put the final touch. Also, the involved state of my affairs forbids me to write with any finality concerning those hopes of ultimate bliss upon which, for a long while past, I have permitted myself to feed. I regret the past, but at the same time hope that in my conduct you have never been able to detect anything that was unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour. Having lost, however, almost the whole of my money in debts incurred by your stepfather, I find myself driven to the necessity of saving the remainder; wherefore, I have instructed certain friends of mine in St. Petersburg to arrange for the sale of all the property which has been mortgaged to myself. At the same time, knowing that, in addition, your frivolous stepfather has squandered money which is exclusively yours, I have decided to absolve him from a certain moiety of the mortgages on his property, in order that you may be in a position to recover of him what you have lost, by suing him in legal fashion. I trust, therefore, that, as matters now stand, this action of mine may bring you some advantage. I trust also that this same action leaves me in the position of having fulfilled every obligation which is incumbent upon a man of honour and refinement. Rest assured that your memory will for ever remain graven in my heart."

"All this is clear enough," I commented. "Surely you did not expect aught else from him?" Somehow I was feeling annoyed.

"I expected nothing at all from him," she replied--quietly enough, to all outward seeming, yet with a note of irritation in her tone. "Long ago I made up my mind on the subject, for I could read his thoughts, and knew what he was thinking. He thought that possibly I should sue him--that one day I might become a nuisance." Here Polina halted for a moment, and stood biting her lips. "So of set purpose I redoubled my contemptuous treatment of him, and waited to see what he would do. If a telegram to say that we had become legatees had arrived from, St. Petersburg, I should have flung at him a quittance for my foolish stepfather's debts, and then dismissed him. For a long time I have hated him. Even in earlier days he was not a man; and now!--Oh, how gladly I could throw those fifty thousand roubles in his face, and spit in it, and then rub the spittle in!"

"But the document returning the fifty-thousand rouble mortgage--has the General got it? If so, possess yourself of it, and send it to De Griens."

"No, no; the General has not got it."

"Just as I expected! Well, what is the General going to do?" Then an idea suddenly occurred to me. "What about the Grandmother?" I asked.

Polina looked at me with impatience and bewilderment.

“What makes you speak of HER?” was her irritable inquiry. “I cannot go and live with her. Nor,” she added hotly, “will I go down upon my knees to ANYONE.”

“Why should you?” I cried. “Yet to think that you should have loved De Griens! The villain, the villain! But I will kill him in a duel. Where is he now?”

“In Frankfurt, where he will be staying for the next three days.”

“Well, bid me do so, and I will go to him by the first train tomorrow,” I exclaimed with enthusiasm.

She smiled.

“If you were to do that,” she said, “he would merely tell you to be so good as first to return him the fifty thousand francs. What, then, would be the use of having a quarrel with him? You talk sheer nonsense.”

I ground my teeth.

“The question,” I went on, “is how to raise the fifty thousand francs. We cannot expect to find them lying about on the floor. Listen. What of Mr. Astley?” Even as I spoke a new and strange idea formed itself in my brain.

Her eyes flashed fire.

“What? YOU YOURSELF wish me to leave you for him?” she cried with a scornful look and a proud smile. Never before had she addressed me thus.

Then her head must have turned dizzy with emotion, for suddenly she seated herself upon the sofa, as though she were powerless any longer to stand.

A flash of lightning seemed to strike me as I stood there. I could scarcely believe my eyes or my ears. She DID love me, then! It WAS to me, and not to Mr. Astley, that she had turned! Although she, an unprotected girl, had come to me in my room--in an hotel room--and had probably compromised herself thereby, I had not understood!

Then a second mad idea flashed into my brain.

“Polina,” I said, “give me but an hour. Wait here just one hour until I return. Yes, you MUST do so. Do you not see what I mean? Just stay here for that time.”

And I rushed from the room without so much as answering her look of inquiry.

She called something after me, but I did not return.

Sometimes it happens that the most insane thought, the most impossible conception, will become so fixed in one's head that at length one believes the thought or the conception to be reality. Moreover, if with the thought or the conception there is combined a strong, a passionate, desire, one will come to look upon the said thought or conception as something fated, inevitable, and foreordained--something bound to happen. Whether by this there is connoted something in the nature of a combination of presentiments, or a great effort of will, or a self-annulment of one's true expectations, and so on, I do not know; but, at all events that night saw happen to me (a night which I shall never forget) something in the nature of the miraculous. Although the occurrence can easily be explained by arithmetic, I still believe it to have been a miracle. Yet why did this conviction take such a hold upon me at the time, and remain with me ever since? Previously, I had thought of the idea, not as an occurrence which was ever likely to come about, but as something which NEVER could come about.

The time was a quarter past eleven o'clock when I entered the Casino in such a state of hope (though, at the same time, of agitation) as I had never before experienced. In the gaming-rooms there were still a large number of people, but not half as many as had been present in the morning.

At eleven o'clock there usually remained behind only the real, the desperate gamblers--persons for whom, at spas, there existed nothing beyond roulette, and who went thither for that alone. These gamesters took little note of what was going on around them, and were interested in none of the appurtenances of the season, but played from morning till night, and would have been ready to play through the night until dawn had that been possible. As it was, they used to disperse unwillingly when, at midnight, roulette came to an end. Likewise, as soon as ever roulette was drawing to a close and the head croupier had called “Les trois derniers coups,” most of them were ready to stake on the last three rounds all that they had in their pockets--and, for the most part, lost it. For my own part I proceeded toward the table at which the Grandmother had lately sat; and, since the crowd around it was

not very large, I soon obtained standing room among the ring of gamblers, while directly in front of me, on the green cloth, I saw marked the word "Passe."

"Passe" was a row of numbers from 19 to 36 inclusive; while a row of numbers from 1 to 18 inclusive was known as "Manque." But what had that to do with me? I had not noticed--I had not so much as heard the numbers upon which the previous coup had fallen, and so took no bearings when I began to play, as, in my place, any SYSTEMATIC gambler would have done. No, I merely extended my stock of twenty ten-gulden pieces, and threw them down upon the space "Passe" which happened to be confronting me.

"Vingt-deux!" called the croupier.

I had won! I staked upon the same again--both my original stake and my winnings.

"Trente-et-un!" called the croupier.

Again I had won, and was now in possession of eighty ten-gulden pieces. Next, I moved the whole eighty on to twelve middle numbers (a stake which, if successful, would bring me in a triple profit, but also involved a risk of two chances to one). The wheel revolved, and stopped at twenty-four. Upon this I was paid out notes and gold until I had by my side a total sum of two thousand gulden.

It was as in a fever that I moved the pile, en bloc, on to the red. Then suddenly I came to myself (though that was the only time during the evening's play when fear cast its cold spell over me, and showed itself in a trembling of the hands and knees). For with horror I had realised that I MUST win, and that upon that stake there depended all my life.

"Rouge!" called the croupier. I drew a long breath, and hot shivers went coursing over my body. I was paid out my winnings in bank-notes--amounting, of course, to a total of four thousand florins, eight hundred gulden (I could still calculate the amounts).

After that, I remember, I again staked two thousand florins upon twelve middle numbers, and lost. Again I staked the whole of my gold, with eight hundred gulden, in notes, and lost. Then madness seemed to come upon me, and seizing my last two thousand florins, I staked them upon twelve of the first numbers--wholly by chance, and at random, and without any sort of reckoning. Upon my doing so there followed a moment of suspense only comparable to that which Madame Blanchard must have experienced when, in Paris, she was descending earthwards from a balloon.

"Quatre!" called the croupier.

Once more, with the addition of my original stake, I was in possession of six thousand florins! Once more I looked around me like a conqueror--once more I feared nothing as I threw down four thousand of these florins upon the black. The croupiers glanced around them, and exchanged a few words; the bystanders murmured expectantly.

The black turned up. After that I do not exactly remember either my calculations or the order of my stakings. I only remember that, as in a dream, I won in one round sixteen thousand florins; that in the three following rounds, I lost twelve thousand; that I moved the remainder (four thousand) on to "Passe" (though quite unconscious of what I was doing--I was merely waiting, as it were, mechanically, and without reflection, for something) and won; and that, finally, four times in succession I lost. Yes, I can remember raking in money by thousands--but most frequently on the twelve, middle numbers, to which I constantly adhered, and which kept appearing in a sort of regular order--first, three or four times running, and then, after an interval of a couple of rounds, in another break of three or four appearances. Sometimes, this astonishing regularity manifested itself in patches; a thing to upset all the calculations of note-taking gamblers who play with a pencil and a memorandum book in their hands. Fortune perpetrates some terrible jests at roulette!

Since my entry not more than half an hour could have elapsed. Suddenly a croupier informed me that I had, won thirty thousand florins, as well as that, since the latter was the limit for which, at any one time, the bank could make itself responsible, roulette at that table must close for the night. Accordingly, I caught up my pile of gold, stuffed it into my pocket, and, grasping my sheaf of bank-notes, moved to the table in an adjoining salon where a

second game of roulette was in progress. The crowd followed me in a body, and cleared a place for me at the table; after which, I proceeded to stake as before--that is to say, at random and without calculating. What saved me from ruin I do not know.

Of course there were times when fragmentary reckonings DID come flashing into my brain. For instance, there were times when I attached myself for a while to certain figures and coups--though always leaving them, again before long, without knowing what I was doing.

In fact, I cannot have been in possession of all my faculties, for I can remember the croupiers correcting my play more than once, owing to my having made mistakes of the gravest order. My brows were damp with sweat, and my hands were shaking. Also, Poles came around me to proffer their services, but I heeded none of them. Nor did my luck fail me now. Suddenly, there arose around me a loud din of talking and laughter. "Bravo, bravo!" was the general shout, and some people even clapped their hands. I had raked in thirty thousand florins, and again the bank had had to close for the night!

"Go away now, go away now," a voice whispered to me on my right. The person who had spoken to me was a certain Jew of Frankfurt--a man who had been standing beside me the whole while, and occasionally helping me in my play.

"Yes, for God's sake go," whispered a second voice in my left ear. Glancing around, I perceived that the second voice had come from a modestly, plainly dressed lady of rather less than thirty--a woman whose face, though pale and sickly-looking, bore also very evident traces of former beauty. At the moment, I was stuffing the crumpled bank-notes into my pockets and collecting all the gold that was left on the table. Seizing up my last note for five hundred gulden, I contrived to insinuate it, unperceived, into the hand of the pale lady. An overpowering impulse had made me do so, and I remember how her thin little fingers pressed mine in token of her lively gratitude. The whole affair was the work of a moment.

Then, collecting my belongings, I crossed to where trente et quarante was being played--a game which could boast of a more aristocratic public, and was played with cards instead of with a wheel. At this diversion the bank made itself responsible for a hundred thousand thalers as the limit, but the highest stake allowable was, as in roulette, four thousand florins. Although I knew nothing of the game--and I scarcely knew the stakes, except those on black and red--I joined the ring of players, while the rest of the crowd massed itself around me. At this distance of time I cannot remember whether I ever gave a thought to Polina; I seemed only to be conscious of a vague pleasure in seizing and raking in the bank-notes which kept massing themselves in a pile before me.

But, as ever, fortune seemed to be at my back. As though of set purpose, there came to my aid a circumstance which not infrequently repeats itself in gaming. The circumstance is that not infrequently luck attaches itself to, say, the red, and does not leave it for a space of say, ten, or even fifteen, rounds in succession. Three days ago I had heard that, during the previous week there had been a run of twenty-two coups on the red--an occurrence never before known at roulette--so that men spoke of it with astonishment. Naturally enough, many deserted the red after a dozen rounds, and practically no one could now be found to stake upon it. Yet upon the black also--the antithesis of the red--no experienced gambler would stake anything, for the reason that every practised player knows the meaning of "capricious fortune." That is to say, after the sixteenth (or so) success of the red, one would think that the seventeenth coup would inevitably fall upon the black; wherefore, novices would be apt to back the latter in the seventeenth round, and even to double or treble their stakes upon it--only, in the end, to lose.

Yet some whim or other led me, on remarking that the red had come up consecutively for seven times, to attach myself to that colour. Probably this was mostly due to self-conceit, for I wanted to astonish the bystanders with the riskiness of my play. Also, I remember that--oh, strange sensation!--I suddenly, and without any challenge from my own presumption, became obsessed with a DESIRE to take risks. If the spirit has passed through a great many sensations, possibly it can no longer be sated with them, but grows more excited, and demands more sensations, and stronger and stronger ones, until at length it falls exhausted. Certainly, if the rules of the game had permitted even of my staking fifty thousand florins at a time, I should have staked them. All of a sudden I heard exclamations arising that the whole thing was a marvel, since the red was turning up for the fourteenth time!

"Monsieur a gagne cent mille florins," a voice exclaimed beside me.

I awoke to my senses. What? I had won a hundred thousand florins? If so, what more did I need to win? I grasped the banknotes, stuffed them into my pockets, raked in the gold without counting it, and started to leave the Casino. As I passed through the salons people smiled to see my bulging pockets and unsteady gait, for the weight which I was carrying must have amounted to half a pood! Several hands I saw stretched out in my direction, and as I passed I filled them with all the money that I could grasp in my own. At length two Jews stopped me near the exit.

“You are a bold young fellow,” one said, “but mind you depart early tomorrow--as early as you can--for if you do not you will lose everything that you have won.”

But I did not heed them. The Avenue was so dark that it was barely possible to distinguish one's hand before one's face, while the distance to the hotel was half a verst or so; but I feared neither pickpockets nor highwaymen. Indeed, never since my boyhood have I done that. Also, I cannot remember what I thought about on the way. I only felt a sort of fearful pleasure --the pleasure of success, of conquest, of power (how can I best express it?). Likewise, before me there flitted the image of Polina; and I kept remembering, and reminding myself, that it was to HER I was going, that it was in HER presence I should soon be standing, that it was SHE to whom I should soon be able to relate and show everything. Scarcely once did I recall what she had lately said to me, or the reason why I had left her, or all those varied sensations which I had been experiencing a bare hour and a half ago. No, those sensations seemed to be things of the past, to be things which had righted themselves and grown old, to be things concerning which we needed to trouble ourselves no longer, since, for us, life was about to begin anew. Yet I had just reached the end of the Avenue when there DID come upon me a fear of being robbed or murdered. With each step the fear increased until, in my terror, I almost started to run. Suddenly, as I issued from the Avenue, there burst upon me the lights of the hotel, sparkling with a myriad lamps! Yes, thanks be to God, I had reached home!

Running up to my room, I flung open the door of it. Polina was still on the sofa, with a lighted candle in front of her, and her hands clasped. As I entered she stared at me in astonishment (for, at the moment, I must have presented a strange spectacle). All I did, however, was to halt before her, and fling upon the table my burden of wealth.

XV

I remember, too, how, without moving from her place, or changing her attitude, she gazed into my face.

“I have won two hundred thousand francs!” cried I as I pulled out my last sheaf of bank-notes. The pile of paper currency occupied the whole table. I could not withdraw my eyes from it. Consequently, for a moment or two Polina escaped my mind. Then I set myself to arrange the pile in order, and to sort the notes, and to mass the gold in a separate heap. That done, I left everything where it lay, and proceeded to pace the room with rapid strides as I lost myself in thought. Then I darted to the table once more, and began to recount the money; until all of a sudden, as though I had remembered something, I rushed to the door, and closed and double-locked it. Finally I came to a meditative halt before my little trunk.

“Shall I put the money there until tomorrow?” I asked, turning sharply round to Polina as the recollection of her returned to me.

She was still in her old place--still making not a sound. Yet her eyes had followed every one of my movements. Somehow in her face there was a strange expression--an expression which I did not like. I think that I shall not be wrong if I say that it indicated sheer hatred.

Impulsively I approached her.

“Polina,” I said, “here are twenty-five thousand florins--fifty thousand francs, or more. Take them, and tomorrow throw them in De Griens' face.”

She returned no answer.

"Or, if you should prefer," I continued, "let me take them to him myself tomorrow--yes, early tomorrow morning. Shall I?"

Then all at once she burst out laughing, and laughed for a long while. With astonishment and a feeling of offence I gazed at her. Her laughter was too like the derisive merriment which she had so often indulged in of late--merriment which had broken forth always at the time of my most passionate explanations. At length she ceased, and frowned at me from under hereyebrows.

"I am NOT going to take your money," she said contemptuously.

"Why not?" I cried. "Why not, Polina?"

"Because I am not in the habit of receiving money for nothing."

"But I am offering it to you as a FRIEND in the same way I would offer you myvery life."

Upon this she threw me a long, questioning glance, as though she were seeking to probe me to the depths.

"You are giving too much for me," she remarked with a smile. "The beloved of De Griens is not worth fifty thousand francs."

"Oh Polina, how can you speak so?" I exclaimed reproachfully. "Am I De Griens?"

"You?" she cried with her eyes suddenly flashing. "Why, I HATE you! Yes, yes, I HATE you! I love you no more than I do DeGriens."

Then she buried her face in her hands, and relapsed into hysterics. I darted to her side. Somehow I had an intuition of something having happened to her which had nothing to do with myself. She was like a person temporarilyinsane.

"Buy me, would you, would you? Would you buy me for fifty thousand francs as De Griens did?" she gasped between her convulsive sobs.

I clasped her in my arms, kissed her hands and feet, and fell upon my knees before her.

Presently the hysterical fit passed away, and, laying her hands upon my shoulders, she gazed for a while into my face, as though trying to readit--something I said to her, but it was clear that she did not hear it. Her facelooked so dark and despondent that I began to fear for her reason. At lengthshe drew me towards herself--a trustful smile playing over her features; andthen, as suddenly, she pushed me away again as she eyed me dimly.

Finally she threw herself upon me in an embrace.

"You love me?" she said. "DO you?--you who were willing even to quarrel with the Baron at my bidding?"

Then she laughed--laughed as though something dear, but laughable, had recurred to her memory. Yes, she laughed and wept at the same time. What was I to do? I was like a man in a fever. I remember that she began to saysomething to me--though WHAT I do not know, since she spoke with a feverish lisp, as though she were trying to tell me something very quickly. At intervals, too, she would break off into the smile which I was beginning to dread. "No, no!" she kept repeating. "YOU are my dear one; YOU are the man I trust." Again she laid her hands upon my shoulders, and again she gazed at me as she reiterated: "You love me, you love me? Will you ALWAYS love me?" I could not take my eyes off her. Never before had I seen her in this mood of humility and affection. True, the mood was the outcome of hysteria; but--! All of a sudden she noticed my ardent gaze, and smiled slightly. The next moment, for no apparent reason, she began to talk ofAstley.

She continued talking and talking about him, but I could not make out all she said--more particularly when she was endeavouring to tell me of something or other which had happened recently. On the whole, she appeared to be laughing at Astley, for she kept repeating that he was waiting for her, and did I know whether, even at that moment, he was not standing beneath the window? "Yes, yes, he is there," she said. "Open the window, and see if he is not." She pushed me in that direction; yet, no sooner did I make a movement to obey her behest than she burst into laughter, and I remained beside her, and she embracedme.

"Shall we go away tomorrow?" presently she asked, as though some disturbing thought had recurred to her recollection. "How would it be if we were to try and overtake Grandmamma? I think we should do so at Berlin."

And what think you she would have to say to us when we caught her up, and her eyes first lit upon us? What, too, about Mr. Astley? HE would not leap from the Shlangenberg for my sake! No! Of that I am very sure!"--and she laughed. "Do you know where he is going next year? He says he intends to go to the North Pole for scientific investigations, and has invited me to go with him! Ha, ha, ha! He also says that we Russians know nothing, can do nothing, without European help. But he is a good fellow all the same. For instance, he does not blame the General in the matter, but declares that Mlle. Blanche--that love--But no; I do not know, I do not know." She stopped suddenly, as though she had said her say, and was feeling bewildered. "What poor creatures these people are. How sorry I am for them, and for Grandmamma! But when are you going to kill De Griens? Surely you do not intend actually to murder him? You fool! Do you suppose that I should ALLOW you to fight De Griens? Nor shall you kill the Baron." Here she burst out laughing. "How absurd you looked when you were talking to the Burmergelms! I was watching you all the time--watching you from where I was sitting. And how unwilling you were to go when I sent you! Oh, how I laughed and laughed!"

Then she kissed and embraced me again; again she pressed her face to mine with tender passion. Yet I neither saw nor heard her, for my head was in a whirl. . . .

It must have been about seven o'clock in the morning when I awoke. Daylight had come, and Polina was sitting by my side--a strange expression on her face, as though she had seen a vision and was unable to collect her thoughts. She too had just awoken, and was now staring at the money on the table. My head ached; it felt heavy. I attempted to take Polina's hand, but she pushed me from her, and leapt from the sofa. The dawn was full of mist, for rain had fallen, yet she moved to the window, opened it, and, leaning her elbows upon the window-sill, thrust out her head and shoulders to take the air. In this position did she remain for several minutes, without ever looking round at me, or listening to what I was saying. Into my head there came the uneasy thought: What is to happen now? How is it all to end? Suddenly Polina rose from the window, approached the table, and, looking at me with an expression of infinite aversion, said with lips which quivered with anger:

"Well? Are you going to hand me over my fifty thousand francs?" "Polina, you say that AGAIN, AGAIN?" I exclaimed.

"You have changed your mind, then? Ha, ha, ha! You are sorry you ever promised them?"

On the table where, the previous night, I had counted the money there still was lying the packet of twenty five thousand florins. I handed it to her.

"The francs are mine, then, are they? They are mine?" she inquired viciously as she balanced the money in her hands.

"Yes; they have ALWAYS been yours," I said.

"Then TAKE your fifty thousand francs!" and she hurled them full in my face.

The packet burst as she did so, and the floor became strewn with bank-notes.

The instant that the deed was done she rushed from the room.

At that moment she cannot have been in her right mind; yet, what was the cause of her temporary aberration I cannot say. For a month past she had been unwell. Yet what had brought about this PRESENT condition of mind, above all things, this outburst? Had it come of wounded pride? Had it come of despair over her decision to come to me? Had it come of the fact that, presuming too much on my good fortune, I had seemed to be intending to desert her (even as De Griens had done) when once I had given her the fifty thousand francs? But, on my honour, I had never cherished any such intention. What was at fault, I think, was her own pride, which kept urging her not to trust me, but, rather, to insult me--even though she had not realised the fact. In her eyes I corresponded to De Griens, and therefore had been condemned for a fault not wholly my own. Her mood of late had been a sort of delirium, a sort of light-headedness--that I knew full well; yet, never had I sufficiently taken it into consideration. Perhaps she would not pardon me now? Ah, but this was THE PRESENT. What about the future? Her delirium and sickness were not likely to make her forget what she had done in bringing me De Griens' letter. No, she must have known what she was doing when she brought it.

Somehow I contrived to stuff the pile of notes and gold under the bed, to cover them over, and then to leave the room some ten minutes after Polina. I felt sure that she had returned to her own room; wherefore, I intended quietly to follow her, and to ask the nursemaid aid who opened the door how her mistress was. Judge, therefore, of my surprise when, meeting the domestic on the stairs, she informed me that Polina had not yet returned, and that she (the domestic) was at that moment on her way to my room in quest of her!

"Mlle. left me but ten minutes ago," I said. "What can have become of her?" The nursemaid looked at me reproachfully.

Already sundry rumours were flying about the hotel. Both in the office of the commissionaire and in that of the landlord it was whispered that, at seven o'clock that morning, the Fraulein had left the hotel, and set off, despite the rain, in the direction of the Hotel d'Angleterre. From words and hints let fall I could see that the fact of Polina having spent the night in my room was now public property. Also, sundry rumours were circulating concerning the General's family affairs. It was known that last night he had gone out of his mind, and paraded the hotel in tears; also, that the old lady who had arrived was his mother, and that she had come from Russia on purpose to forbid her son's marriage with Mlle. de Cominges, as well as to cut him out of her will if he should disobey her; also that, because he had disobeyed her, she had squandered all her money at roulette, in order to have nothing more to leave to him. "Oh, these Russians!" exclaimed the landlord, with an angry toss of the head, while the bystanders laughed and the clerk betook himself to his accounts. Also, every one had learnt about my winnings; Karl, the corridor lacquey, was the first to congratulate me. But with these folk I had nothing to do. My business was to set off at full speed to the Hotel d'Angleterre.

As yet it was early for Mr. Astley to receive visitors; but, as soon as he learnt that it was I who had arrived, he came out into the corridor to meet me, and stood looking at me in silence with his steel-grey eyes as he waited to hear what I had to say. I inquired after Polina.

"She is ill," he replied, still looking at me with his direct, unwavering glance.

"And she is in your rooms."

"Yes, she is in my rooms."

"Then you are minded to keep her there?"

"Yes, I am minded to keep her there."

"But, Mr. Astley, that will raise a scandal. It ought not to be allowed. Besides, she is very ill. Perhaps you had not remarked that?"

"Yes, I have. It was I who told you about it. Had she not been ill, she would not have gone and spent the night with you."

"Then you know all about it?"

"Yes; for last night she was to have accompanied me to the house of a relative of mine. Unfortunately, being ill, she made a mistake, and went to your rooms instead."

"Indeed? Then I wish you joy, Mr. Astley. Apropos, you have reminded me of something. Were you beneath my window last night? Every moment Mlle. Polina kept telling me to open the window and see if you were there; after which she always smiled."

"Indeed? No, I was not there; but I was waiting in the corridor, and walking about the hotel."

"She ought to see a doctor, you know, Mr. Astley."

"Yes, she ought. I have sent for one, and, if she dies, I shall hold you responsible."

This surprised me.

"Pardon me," I replied, "but what do you mean?"

"Never mind. Tell me if it is true that, last night, you won two hundred thousand thalers?"

"No; I won a hundred thousand florins."

"Good heavens! Then I suppose you will be off to Paris this morning?"

“Why?”

“Because all Russians who have grown rich go to Paris,” explained Astley, as though he had read the fact in a book.

“But what could I do in Paris in summer time?--I LOVE her, Mr. Astley! Surely you know that?”

“Indeed? I am sure that you do NOT. Moreover, if you were to stay here, you would lose everything that you possess, and have nothing left with which to pay your expenses in Paris. Well, good-bye now. I feel sure that today will see you gone from here.”

“Good-bye. But I am NOT going to Paris. Likewise--pardon me--what is to become of this family? I mean that the affair of the General and Mlle. Polina will soon be all over the town.”

“I daresay; yet, I hardly suppose that that will break the General’s heart. Moreover, Mlle. Polina has a perfect right to live where she chooses. In short, we may say that, as a family, this family has ceased to exist.”

I departed, and found myself smiling at the Englishman’s strange assurance that I should soon be leaving for Paris. “I suppose he means to shoot me in a duel, should Polina die. Yes, that is what he intends to do.” Now, although I was honestly sorry for Polina, it is a fact that, from the moment when, the previous night, I had approached the gaming-table, and begun to rake in the packets of bank-notes, my love for her had entered upon a new plane. Yes, I can say that now; although, at the time, I was barely conscious of it. Was I, then, at heart a gambler? Did I, after all, love Polina not so very much? No, no! As God is my witness, I loved her! Even when I was returning home from Mr. Astley’s my suffering was genuine, and my self-reproach sincere. But presently I was to go through an exceedingly strange and ugly experience.

I was proceeding to the General’s rooms when I heard a door near me open, and a voice call me by name. It was Mlle.’s mother, the Widow de Cominges who was inviting me, in her daughter’s name, to enter.

I did so; whereupon, I heard a laugh and a little cry proceed from the bedroom (the pair occupied a suite of two apartments), where Mlle. Blanche was just arising.

“Ah, c’est lui! Viens, donc, bete! Is it true that you have won a mountain of gold and silver? J’aimerais mieux l’or.”

“Yes,” I replied with a smile.

“How much?”

“A hundred thousand florins.”

“Bibi, comme tu es bete! Come in here, for I can’t hear you where you are now. Nous ferons bombance, n’est-ce pas?”

Entering her room, I found her lolling under a pink satin coverlet, and revealing a pair of swarthy, wonderfully healthy shoulders--shoulders such as one sees in dreams--shoulders covered over with a white cambric nightgown which, trimmed with lace, stood out, in striking relief, against the darkness of her skin.

“Mon fils, as-tu du coeur?” she cried when she saw me, and then giggled. Her laugh had always been a very cheerful one, and at times it even sounded sincere.

“Tout autre--“ I began, paraphrasing Comeille.

“See here,” she prattled on. “Please search for my stockings, and help me to dress. Aussi, si tu n’es pas trop bete je te prends a Paris. I am just off, let me tell you.”

“This moment?”

“In half an hour.”

True enough, everything stood ready-packed--trunks, portmanteaux, and all.

Coffee had long been served.

“Eh bien, tu verras Paris. Dis donc, qu’est-ce que c’est qu’un ‘utchitel’? Tu etais bien bete quand tu etais ‘utchitel.’ Where are my stockings? Please help me to dress.”

And she lifted up a really ravishing foot--small, swarthy, and not misshapen like the majority of feet which look dainty only in bottines. I laughed, and started to draw on to the foot a silk stocking, while Mlle. Blanche sat on the edge of the bed and chattered.

"Eh bien, que feras-tu si je te prends avec moi? First of all I must have fifty thousand francs, and you shall give them to me at Frankfurt. Then we will go on to Paris, where we will live together, et je te ferai voir des etoiles en plein jour. Yes, you shall see such women as your eyes have never lit upon."

"Stop a moment. If I were to give you those fifty thousand francs, what should I have left for myself?"

"Another hundred thousand francs, please to remember. Besides, I could live with you in your rooms for a month, or even for two; or even for longer. But it would not take us more than two months to get through fifty thousand francs; for, look you, je suis bonne enfante, et tu verras des etoiles, you may be sure."

"What? You mean to say that we should spend the whole in two months?"

"Certainly. Does that surprise you very much? Ah, vil esclave! Why, one month of that life would be better than all your previous existence. One month--et apres, le deluge! Mais tu ne peux comprendre. Va! Away, away! You are not worth it.--Ah, que fais-tu?"

For, while drawing on the other stocking, I had felt constrained to kiss her. Immediately she shrunk back, kicked me in the face with her toes, and turned me neck and prop out of the room.

"Eh bien, mon 'utchitel'," she called after me, "je t'attends, si tu veux. I start in a quarter of an hour's time."

I returned to my own room with my head in a whirl. It was not my fault that Polina had thrown a packet in my face, and preferred Mr. Astley to myself. A few bank-notes were still fluttering about the floor, and I picked them up. At that moment the door opened, and the landlord appeared--a person who, until now, had never bestowed upon me so much as a glance. He had come to know if I would prefer to move to a lower floor--to a suite which had just been tenanted by Count V.

For a moment I reflected.

"No!" I shouted. "My account, please, for in ten minutes I shall be gone."

"To Paris, to Paris!" I added to myself. "Every man of birth must make her acquaintance."

Within a quarter of an hour all three of us were seated in a family compartment--Mlle. Blanche, the Widow de Cominges, and myself. Mlle. kept laughing hysterically as she looked at me, and Madame re-echoed her; but I did not feel so cheerful. My life had broken in two, and yesterday had infected me with a habit of staking my all upon a card. Although it might be that I had failed to win my stake, that I had lost my senses, that I desired nothing better, I felt that the scene was to be changed only FOR A TIME. "Within a month from now," I kept thinking to myself, "I shall be back again in Roulettenberg; and THEN I mean to have it out with you, Mr. Astley!" Yes, as now I look back at things, I remember that I felt greatly depressed, despite the absurd gigglings of the egregious Blanche.

"What is the matter with you? How dull you are!" she cried at length as she interrupted her laughter to take me seriously to task.

"Come, come! We are going to spend your two hundred thousand francs for you, et tu seras heureux comme un petit roi. I myself will tie your tie for you, and introduce you to Hortense. And when we have spent your money you shall return here, and break the bank again. What did those two Jews tell you?--that the thing most needed is daring, and that you possess it? Consequently, this is not the first time that you will be hurrying to Paris with money in your pocket. Quant ... moi, je veux cinquante mille francs de rente, et alors"

"But what about the General?" I interrupted.

"The General? You know well enough that at about this hour every day he goes to buy me a bouquet. On this occasion, I took care to tell him that he must hunt for the choicest of flowers; and when he returns home, the poor fellow will find the bird flown. Possibly he may take wing in pursuit--ha, ha, ha! And if so, I shall not be sorry, for he could be useful to me in Paris, and Mr. Astley will pay his debtshere."

In this manner did I depart for the Gay City.

Of Paris what am I to say? The whole proceeding was a delirium, a madness. I spent a little over three weeks there, and, during that time, saw my hundred thousand francs come to an end. I speak only of the ONE hundred thousand francs, for the other hundred thousand I gave to Mlle. Blanche in pure cash. That is to say, I handed her fifty thousand francs at Frankfurt, and, three days later (in Paris), advanced her another fifty thousand on note of hand. Nevertheless, a week had not elapsed ere she came to me for more money. "Et les cent mille francs qui nous restent," she added, "tu les mangeras avec moi, mon utchitel." Yes, she always called me her "utchitel." A person more economical, grasping, and mean than Mlle. Blanche one could not imagine. But this was only as regards HER OWN money. MY hundred thousand francs (as she explained to me later) she needed to set up her establishment in Paris, "so that once and for all I may be on a decent footing, and proof against any stones which may be thrown at me--at all events for a long time to come." Nevertheless, I saw nothing of those hundred thousand francs, for my own purse (which she inspected daily) never managed to amass in it more than a hundred francs at a time; and, generally the sum did not reach even that figure.

"What do you want with money?" she would say to me with air of absolute simplicity; and I never disputed the point. Nevertheless, though she fitted out her flat very badly with the money, the fact did not prevent her from saying when, later, she was showing me over the rooms of her new abode: "See what care and taste can do with the most wretched of means!" However, her "wretchedness" had cost fifty thousand francs, while with the remaining fifty thousand she purchased a carriage and horses.

Also, we gave a couple of balls--evening parties attended by Hortense and Lisette and Cleopatre, who were women remarkable both for the number of their liaisons and (though only in some cases) for their good looks. At these reunions I had to play the part of host--to meet and entertain fat mercantile parvenus who were impossible by reason of their rudeness and braggadocio, colonels of various kinds, hungry authors, and journalistic hacks--all of whom disported themselves in fashionable tailcoats and pale yellow gloves, and displayed such an aggregate of conceit and gasconade as would be unthinkable even in St. Petersburg--which is saying a great deal! They used to try to make fun of me, but I would console myself by drinking champagne and then lolling in a retiring-room. Nevertheless, I found it deadly work. "C'est un utchitel," Blanche would say of me, "qui a gagne deux cent mille francs, and but for me, would have had not a notion how to spend them. Presently he will have to return to his tutoring. Does any one know of a vacant post? You know, one must do something for him."

I had the more frequent recourse to champagne in that I constantly felt depressed and bored, owing to the fact that I was living in the most bourgeois commercial milieu imaginable--a milieu wherein every sou was counted and grudged. Indeed, two weeks had not elapsed before I perceived that Blanche had no real affection for me, even though she dressed me in elegant clothes, and herself tied my tie each day. In short, she utterly despised me. But that caused me no concern. Blase and inert, I spent my evenings generally at the Chateau des Fleurs, where I would get fuddled and then dance the cancan (which, in that establishment, was a very indecent performance) with éclat. At length, the time came when Blanche had drained my purse dry. She had conceived an idea that, during the term of our residence together, it would be well if I were always to walk behind her with a paper and pencil, in order to jot down exactly what she spent, what she had saved, what she was paying out, and what she was laying by. Well, of course I could not fail to be aware that this would entail a battle over every ten francs; so, although for every possible objection that I might make she had prepared a suitable answer, she soon saw that I made no objections, and therefore, had to start disputes herself. That is to say, she would burst out into tirades which were met only with silence as I lolled on a sofa and stared fixedly at the ceiling. This greatly surprised her. At first she imagined that it was due merely to the fact that I was a fool, "un utchitel"; wherefore she would break off her harangue in the belief that, being too stupid to understand, I was a hopeless case. Then she would leave the room, but return ten minutes later to resume the contest. This continued throughout her squandering of my money--a squandering altogether out of proportion to our means. An example is the way in which she changed her first pair of horses for a pair which cost sixteen thousand francs.

"Bibi," she said on the latter occasion as she approached me, "surely you are not angry?"

"No-o-o: I am merely tired," was my reply as I pushed her from me. This seemed to her so curious that straightway she seated herself by my side.

"You see," she went on, "I decided to spend so much upon these horses only because I can easily sell them again. They would go at any time for TWENTY thousand francs."

"Yes, yes. They are splendid horses, and you have got a splendid turn-out. I am quite content. Let me hear no more of the matter."

"Then you are not angry?"

"No. Why should I be? You are wise to provide yourself with what you need, for it will all come in handy in the future. Yes, I quite see the necessity of your establishing yourself on a good basis, for without it you will never earn your million. My hundred thousand francs I look upon merely as a beginning--as a mere drop in the bucket."

Blanche, who had by no means expected such declarations from me, but, rather, an uproar and protests, was rather takenaback.

"Well, well, what a man you are!" she exclaimed. "Mais tu as l'esprit pour comprendre. Sais-tu, mon garçon, although you are a tutor, you ought to have been born a prince. Are you not sorry that your money should be going soquickly?"

"No. The quicker it goes the better."

"Mais--sais-tu-mais dis donc, are you really rich? Mais sais-tu, you have too much contempt for money. Qu'est-ce que tu feras apres, dis donc?"

"Apres I shall go to Homburg, and win another hundred thousand francs."

"Oui, oui, c'est ca, c'est magnifique! Ah, I know you will win them, and bring them to me when you have done so. Dis donc--you will end by making me love you. Since you are what you are, I mean to love you all the time, and never to be unfaithful to you. You see, I have not loved you before parce que je croyais que tu n'es qu'un utchitel (quelque chose comme un lacquais, n'est-ce pas?) Yet all the time I have been true to you, parce que je suis bonne fille."

"You lie!" I interrupted. "Did I not see you, the other day, with Albert--with that black-jowled officer?"

"Oh, oh! Mais tu es--"

"Yes, you are lying right enough. But what makes you suppose that I should be angry? Rubbish! Il faut que jeunesse se passe. Even if that officer were here now, I should refrain from putting him out of the room if I thought you really cared for him. Only, mind you, do not give him any of my money. You hear?"

"You say, do you, that you would not be angry? Mais tu es un vrai philosophe, sais-tu? Oui, un vrai philosophe! Eh bien, je t'aimerai, je t'aimerai. Tu verras-tu seras content."

True enough, from that time onward she seemed to attach herself only to me, and in this manner we spent our last ten days together. The promised "etoiles" I did not see, but in other respects she, to a certain extent, kept her word.

Moreover, she introduced me to Hortense, who was a remarkable woman in her way, and known among us as Therese Philosophe.

But I need not enlarge further, for to do so would require a story to itself, and entail a colouring which I am lothe to impart to the present narrative. The point is that with all my faculties I desired the episode to come to an end as speedily as possible. Unfortunately, our hundred thousand francs lasted us, as I have said, for very nearly a month--which greatly surprised me. At all events, Blanche bought herself articles to the tune of eighty thousand francs, and the rest sufficed just to meet our expenses of living. Towards the close of the affair, Blanche grew almost frank with me (at least, she scarcely lied to me at all)--declaring, amongst other things, that none of the debts which she had been obliged to incur were going to fall upon my head. "I have purposely refrained from making you responsible for my bills or borrowings," she said, "for the reason that I am sorry for you. Any other woman in my place would have done so, and have let you go to prison. See, then, how much I love you, and how good-hearted I am! Think, too, what this accursed marriage with the General is going to cost me!"

True enough, the marriage took place. It did so at the close of our month together, and I am bound to suppose that it was upon the ceremony that the last remnants of my money were spent. With it the episode--that is to say, mysojourn with the Frenchwoman--came to an end, and I formally retired from the scene.

It happened thus: A week after we had taken up our abode in Paris there arrived thither the General. He came straight to see us, and thenceforward lived with us practically as our guest, though he had a flat of his own as well. Blanche met him with merry badinage and laughter, and even threw her arms around him. In fact, she managed it so that he had to follow everywhere in her train--whether when promenading on the Boulevards, or when driving, or when going to the theatre, or when paying calls; and this use which she made of him quite satisfied the General. Still of imposing appearance and presence, as well as of fair height, he had a dyed moustache and whiskers (he had formerly been in the cuirassiers), and a handsome, though a somewhat wrinkled, face. Also, his manners were excellent, and he could carry a frockcoat well--the more so since, in Paris, he took to wearing his orders. To promenade the Boulevards with such a man was not only a thing possible, but also, so to speak, a thing advisable, and with this programme the good but foolish General had not a fault to find. The truth is that he had never counted upon this programme when he came to Paris to seek us out. On that occasion he had made his appearance nearly shaking with terror, for he had supposed that Blanche would at once raise an outcry, and have him put from the door; wherefore, he was the more enraptured at the turn that things had taken, and spent the month in a state of senseless ecstasy. Already I had learnt that, after our unexpected departure from Roulettenberg, he had had a sort of a fit--that he had fallen into a swoon, and spent a week in a species of garrulous delirium. Doctors had been summoned to him, but he had broken away from them, and suddenly taken a train to Paris. Of course Blanche's reception of him had acted as the best of all possible cures, but for long enough he carried the marks of his affliction, despite his present condition of rapture and delight. To think clearly, or even to engage in any serious conversation, had now become impossible for him; he could only ejaculate after each word "Hm!" and then nod his head in confirmation. Sometimes, also, he would laugh, but only in a nervous, hysterical sort of a fashion; while at other times he would sit for hours looking as black as night, with his heavy eyebrows knitted. Of much that went on here remained wholly oblivious, for he grew extremely absent-minded, and took to talking to himself. Only Blanche could awake him to any semblance of life. His fits of depression and moodiness in corners always meant either that he had not seen her for some while, or that she had gone out without taking him with her, or that she had omitted to caress him before departing. When in this condition, he would refuse to say what he wanted--nor had he the least idea that he was thus sulking and moping. Next, after remaining in this condition for an hour or two (this I remarked on two occasions when Blanche had gone out for the day--probably to see Albert), he would begin to look about him, and to grow uneasy, and to hurry about with an air as though he had suddenly remembered something, and must try and find it; after which, not perceiving the object of his search, nor succeeding in recalling what that object had been, he would as suddenly relapse into oblivion, and continue so until the reappearance of Blanche--merry, wanton, half-dressed, and laughing her strident laugh as she approached to pet him, and even to kiss him (though the latter reward he seldom received). Once, he was so overjoyed at her doing so that he burst into tears. Even I myself was surprised.

From the first moment of his arrival in Paris, Blanche set herself to plead with me on his behalf; and at such times she even rose to heights of eloquence--saying that it was for ME she had abandoned him, though she had almost become his betrothed and promised to become so; that it was for HER sake he had deserted his family; that, having been in his service, I ought to remember the fact, and to feel ashamed. To all this I would say nothing, however much she chattered on; until at length I would burst out laughing, and the incident would come to an end (at first, as I have said, she had thought me a fool, but since she had come to deem me a man of sense and sensibility). In short, I had the happiness of calling her better nature into play; for though, at first, I had not deemed her so, she was, in reality, a kind-hearted woman after her own fashion. "You are good and clever," she said to me towards the finish, "and my one regret is that you are also so wrong-headed. You will NEVER be a rich man!"

"Un vrai Russe--un Kalmuk" she usually called me.

Several times she sent me to give the General an airing in the streets, even as she might have done with a lacquey and her spaniel; but, I preferred to take him to the theatre, to the Bal Mabille, and to restaurants. For this purpose

she usually allowed me some money, though the General had a little of his own, and enjoyed taking out his purse before strangers. Once I had to use actual force to prevent him from buying a phaeton at a price of seven hundred francs, after a vehicle had caught his fancy in the Palais Royal as seeming to be a desirable present for Blanche. What could SHE have done with a seven-hundred-franc phaeton?--and the General possessed in the world but a thousand francs! The origin even of those francs I could never determine, but imagined them to have emanated from Mr. Astley--the more so since the latter had paid the family's hotel bill. As for what view the General took of myself, I think that he never divined the footing on which I stood with Blanche. True, he had heard, in a dim sort of way, that I had won a good deal of money; but more probably he supposed me to be acting as secretary--or even as a kind of servant--to his inamorata. At all events, he continued to address me, in his old haughty style, as my superior. At times he even took it upon himself to scold me. One morning in particular, he started to sneer at me over our matutinal coffee. Though not a man prone to take offence, he suddenly, and for some reason of which to this day I am ignorant, fell out with me. Of course even he himself did not know the reason. To put things shortly, he began a speech which had neither beginning nor ending, and cried out, a batons rompus, that I was a boy whom he would soon put to rights--and so forth, and so forth. Yet no one could understand what he was saying, and at length Blanche exploded in a burst of laughter. Finally something appeased him, and he was taken out for his walk. More than once, however, I noticed that his depression was growing upon him; that he seemed to be feeling the want of somebody or something; that, despite Blanche's presence, he was missing some person in particular. Twice, on these occasions, did he plunge into a conversation with me, though he could not make himself intelligible, and only went on rambling about the service, his late wife, his home, and his property. Every now and then, also, some particular word would please him; whereupon he would repeat it a hundred times in the day--even though the word happened to express neither his thoughts nor his feelings. Again, I would try to get him to talk about his children, but always he cut me short in his old snappish way, and passed to another subject. "Yes, yes--my children," was all that I could extract from him. "Yes, you are right in what you have said about them." Only once did he disclose his real feelings. That was when we were taking him to the theatre, and suddenly he exclaimed: "My unfortunate children! Yes, sir, they are unfortunate children." Once, too, when I chanced to mention Polina, he grew quite bitter against her. "She is an ungrateful woman!" he exclaimed. "She is a bad and ungrateful woman! She has broken up a family. If there were laws here, I would have her impaled. Yes, I would." As for De Griens, the General would not have his name mentioned. "He has ruined me," he would say. "He has robbed me, and cut my throat. For two years he was a perfect nightmare to me. For months at a time he never left me in my dreams. Do not speak of him again."

It was now clear to me that Blanche and he were on the point of coming to terms; yet, true to my usual custom, I said nothing. At length, Blanche took the initiative in explaining matters. She did so a week before we parted.

"Il a du chance," she prattled, "for the Grandmother is now REALLY ill, and therefore, bound to die. Mr. Astley has just sent a telegram to say so, and you will agree with me that the General is likely to be her heir. Even if he should not be so, he will not come amiss, since, in the first place, he has his pension, and, in the second place, he will be content to live in a back room; whereas I shall be Madame General, and get into a good circle of society" (she was always thinking of this) "and become a Russian chatelaine. Yes, I shall have a mansion of my own, and peasants, and a million of money at my back."

"But, suppose he should prove jealous? He might demand all sorts of things, you know. Do you follow me?"

"Oh, dear no! How ridiculous that would be of him! Besides, I have taken measures to prevent it. You need not be alarmed. That is to say, I have induced him to sign notes of hand in Albert's name. Consequently, at any time I could get him punished. Isn't he ridiculous?"

"Very well, then. Marry him."

And, in truth, she did so--though the marriage was a family one only, and involved no pomp or ceremony. In fact, she invited to the nuptials none but Albert and a few other friends. Hortense, Cleopatre, and the rest she kept firmly at a distance. As for the bridegroom, he took a great interest in his new position. Blanche herself tied his tie, and Blanche herself pomaded him-- with the result that, in his frockcoat and white waistcoat, he looked quite *comme il faut*.

"Il est, pourtant, TRES comme il faut," Blanche remarked when she issued from his room, as though the idea that he was "TRES comme il faut" had impressed even her. For myself, I had so little knowledge of the minor details of the affair, and took part in it so much as a supine spectator, that I have forgotten most of what passed on this occasion. I only remember that Blanche and the Widow figured at it, not as "de Cominges," but as "du Placet." Why they had hitherto been "de Cominges" I do not know--I only know that this entirely satisfied the General, that he liked the name "du Placet" even better than he had liked the name "de Cominges." On the morning of the wedding, he paced the salon in his gala attire and kept repeating to himself with an air of great gravity and importance: "Mlle. Blanche du Placet! Mlle. Blanche du Placet, du Placet!" He beamed with satisfaction as he did so. Both in the church and at the wedding breakfast he remained not only pleased and contented, but even proud. She too underwent a change, for now she assumed an air of addeddignity.

"I must behave altogether differently," she confided to me with a serious air. "Yet, mark you, there is a tiresome circumstance of which I had never before thought--which is, how best to pronounce my new family name. Zagorianski, Zagozianski, Madame la Generale de Sago, Madame la Generale de Fourteen Consonants--oh these infernal Russian names! The LAST of them would be the best to use, don't you think?"

At length the time had come for us to part, and Blanche, the egregious Blanche, shed real tears as she took her leave of me. "Tu etais bon enfant" she said with a sob. "je te croyais bete et tu en avais l'air, but it suited you." Then, having given me a final handshake, she exclaimed, "Attends!"; whereafter, running into her boudoir, she brought me thence two thousand-franc notes. I could scarcely believe my eyes! "They may come in handy for you," she explained, "for, though you are a very learned tutor, you are a very stupid man. More than two thousand francs, however, I am not going to give you, for the reason that, if I did so, you would gamble them all away. Now good-bye. Nous serons toujours bons amis, and if you win again, do not fail to come to me, et tu seras heureux."

I myself had still five hundred francs left, as well as a watch worth a thousand francs, a few diamond studs, and so on. Consequently, I could subsist for quite a length of time without particularly bestirring myself. Purposely I have taken up my abode where I am now partly to pull myself together, and partly to wait for Mr. Astley, who, I have learnt, will soon be here for a day or so on business. Yes, I know that, and then--and then I shall go to Homburg. But to Roulettenberg I shall not go until next year, for they say it is bad to try one's luck twice in succession at a table. Moreover, Homburg is where the best play is carried on.

XVII

It is a year and eight months since I last looked at these notes of mine. I do so now only because, being overwhelmed with depression, I wish to distract my mind by reading them through at random. I left them off at the point where I was just going to Homburg. My God, with what a light heart (comparatively speaking) did I write the concluding lines!--though it may be not so much with a light heart, as with a measure of self-confidence and unquenchable hope. At that time had I any doubts of myself? Yet behold me now. Scarcely a year and a half have passed, yet I am in a worse position than the meanest beggar. But what is a beggar? A fig for beggary! I have ruined myself--that is all. Nor is there anything with which I can compare myself; there is no moral which it would be of any use for you to read to me. At the present moment nothing could well be more incongruous than a moral. Oh, you self-satisfied persons who, in your unctuous pride, are forever ready to mouth your maxims--if only you knew how fully I myself comprehend the sordidness of my present state, you would not trouble to wag your tongues at me! What could you say to me that I do not already know? Well, wherein lies my difficulty? It lies in the fact that by a single turn of a roulette wheel everything for me, has become changed. Yet, had things befallen otherwise, these moralists would have been among the first (yes, I feel persuaded of it) to approach me with friendly jests and congratulations. Yes, they would never have turned from me as they are doing now! A fig for all of them! What am I? I am zero--nothing. What shall I be tomorrow? I may be risen from the dead, and have begun life anew. For still, I may discover the man in myself, if only my manhood has not become utterly shattered.

I went, I say, to Homburg, but afterwards went also to Roulettenberg, as well as to Spa and Baden; in which latter place, for a time, I acted as valet to a certain rascal of a Privy Councillor, by name Heintze, who until lately was also my master here. Yes, for five months I lived my life with lacqueys! That was just after I had come out of Roulettenberg prison, where I had lain for a small debt which I owed. Out of that prison I was bailed by--by whom? By Mr. Astley? By Polina? I do not know. At all events, the debt was paid to the tune of two hundred thalers, and I sallied forth a free man. But what was I to do with myself? In my dilemma I had recourse to this Heintze, who was a young scapegrace, and the sort of man who could speak and write three languages. At first I acted as his secretary, at a salary of thirty gulden a month, but afterwards I became his lacquey, for the reason that he could not afford to keep a secretary--only an unpaid servant. I had nothing else to turn to, so I remained with him, and allowed myself to become his flunkey. But by stinting myself in meat and drink I saved, during my five months of service, some seventy gulden; and one evening, when we were at Baden, I told him that I wished to resign my post, and then hastened to betake myself to roulette.

Oh, how my heart beat as I did so! No, it was not the money that I valued--what I wanted was to make all this mob of Heintzes, hotel proprietors, and fine ladies of Baden talk about me, recount my story, wonder at me, extol my doings, and worship my winnings. True, these were childish fancies and aspirations, but who knows but that I might meet Polina, and be able to tell her everything, and see her look of surprise at the fact that I had overcome so many adverse strokes of fortune. No, I had no desire for money for its own sake, for I was perfectly well aware that I should only squander it upon some new Blanche, and spend another three weeks in Paris after buying a pair of horses which had cost sixteen thousand francs. No, I never believed myself to be a hoarder; in fact, I knew only too well that I was a spendthrift. And already, with a sort of fear, a sort of sinking in my heart, I could hear the cries of the croupiers--"Trente et un, rouge, impair et passe," "Quarte, noir, pair et manque." How greedily I gazed upon the gaming-table, with its scattered louis d'or, ten-gulden pieces, and thalers; upon the streams of gold as they issued from the croupier's hands, and piled themselves up into heaps of gold scintillating as fire; upon the ell-long rolls of silver lying around the croupier. Even at a distance of two rooms I could hear the chink of that money--so much so that I nearly fell into convulsions.

Ah, the evening when I took those seventy gulden to the gaming table was a memorable one for me. I began by staking ten gulden upon passe. For passe I had always had a sort of predilection, yet I lost my stake upon it. This left me with sixty gulden in silver. After a moment's thought I selected zero--beginning by staking five gulden at a time. Twice I lost, but the third round suddenly brought up the desired coup. I could almost have died with joy as I received my one hundred and seventy-five gulden. Indeed, I have been less pleased when, in former times, I have won a hundred thousand gulden. Losing no time, I staked another hundred gulden upon the red, and won; two hundred upon the red, and won; four hundred upon the black, and won; eight hundred upon manque, and won. Thus, with the addition of the remainder of my original capital, I found myself possessed, within five minutes, of seventeen hundred gulden. Ah, at such moments one forgets both oneself and one's former failures! This I had gained by risking my very life. I had dared so to risk, and behold, again I was a member of mankind!

I went and hired a room, I shut myself up in it, and sat counting my money until three o'clock in the morning. To think that when I awoke on the morrow, I was no lacquey! I decided to leave at once for Homburg. There I should neither have to serve as a footman nor to lie in prison. Half an hour before starting, I went and ventured a couple of stakes--no more; with the result that, in all, I lost fifteen hundred florins. Nevertheless, I proceeded to Homburg, and have now been there for a month.

Of course, I am living in constant trepidation, playing for the smallest of stakes, and always looking out for something--calculating, standing whole days by the gaming-tables to watch the play--even seeing that play in my dreams--yet seeming, the while, to be in some way stiffening, to be growing caked, as it were, in mire. But I must conclude my notes, which I finish under the impression of a recent encounter with Mr. Astley. I had not seen him since we parted at Roulettenberg, and now we met quite by accident. At the time I was walking in the public gardens, and meditating upon the fact that not only had I still some fifty olden in my possession, but also I had fully paid up my hotel bill three days ago. Consequently, I was in a position to try my luck again at roulette; and if I won anything I should be able to continue my play, whereas, if I lost what I now possessed, I should once more have to accept a lacquey's place, provided that, in the alternative, I failed to discover a Russian family

which stood in need of a tutor. Plunged in these reflections, I started on my daily walk through the Park and forest towards a neighbouring principality. Sometimes, on such occasions, I spent four hours on the way, and would return to Homburg tired and hungry; but, on this particular occasion, I had scarcely left the gardens for the Park when I caught sight of Astley seated on a bench. As soon as he perceived me, he called me by name, and I went and sat down beside him; but, on noticing that he seemed a little stiff in his manner, I hastened to moderate the expression of joy which the sight of him had called forth.

“YOU here?” he said. “Well, I had an idea that I should meet you. Do not trouble to tell me anything, for I know all--yes, all. In fact, your whole life during the past twenty months lies within my knowledge.”

“How closely you watch the doings of your old friends!” I replied. “That does you infinite credit. But stop a moment. You have reminded me of something. Was it you who bailed me out of Roulettenberg prison when I was lying there for a debt of two hundred gulden? SOMEONE did so.”

“Oh dear no!--though I knew all the time that you were lying there.” “Perhaps you could tell me who DID bail me out?”

“No; I am afraid I could not.”

“What a strange thing! For I know no Russians at all here, so it cannot have been a Russian who befriended me. In Russia we Orthodox folk DO go bail for one another, but in this case I thought it must have been done by some English stranger who was not conversant with the ways of the country.”

Mr. Astley seemed to listen to me with a sort of surprise. Evidently he had expected to see me looking more crushed and broken than I was.

“Well,” he said--not very pleasantly, “I am none the less glad to find that you retain your old independence of spirit, as well as your buoyancy.”

“Which means that you are vexed at not having found me more abased and humiliated than I am?” I retorted with a smile.

Astley was not quick to understand this, but presently did so and laughed.

“Your remarks please me as they always did,” he continued. “In those words I see the clever, triumphant, and, above all things, cynical friend of former days. Only Russians have the faculty of combining within themselves so many opposite qualities. Yes, most men love to see their best friend in abasement; for generally it is on such abasement that friendship is founded. All thinking persons know that ancient truth. Yet, on the present occasion, I assure you, I am sincerely glad to see that you are NOT cast down. Tell me, are you never going to give up gambling?”

“Damn the gambling! Yes, I should certainly have given it up, were it not that--“

”That you are losing? I thought so. You need not tell me any more. I know how things stand, for you have said that last in despair, and therefore, truthfully. Have you no other employment than gambling?”

“No; none whatever.”

Astley gave me a searching glance. At that time it was ages since I had last looked at a paper or turned the pages of a book.

“You are growing blase,” he said. “You have not only renounced life, with its interests and social ties, but the duties of a citizen and a man; you have not only renounced the friends whom I know you to have had, and every aim in life but that of winning money; but you have also renounced your memory. Though I can remember you in the strong, ardent period of your life, I feel persuaded that you have now forgotten every better feeling of that period--that your present dreams and aspirations of subsistence do not rise above pair, impair rouge, noir, the twelve middle numbers, and so forth.”

“Enough, Mr. Astley!” I cried with some irritation--almost in anger. “Kindly do not recall to me any more recollections, for I can remember things for myself. Only for a time have I put them out of my head. Only until I shall have rehabilitated myself, am I keeping my memory dulled. When that hour shall come, you will see me arise from the dead.”

"Then you will have to be here another ten years," he replied. "Should I then be alive, I will remind you--here, on this very bench--of what I have just said. In fact, I will bet you a wager that I shall do so."

"Say no more," I interrupted impatiently. "And to show you that I have not wholly forgotten the past, may I enquire where Mlle. Polina is? If it was not you who bailed me out of prison, it must have been she. Yet never have I heard a word concerning her."

"No, I do not think it was she. At the present moment she is in Switzerland, and you will do me a favour by ceasing to ask me these questions about her." Astley said this with a firm, and even an angry, air.

"Which means that she has dealt you a serious wound?" I burst out with an involuntary sneer.

"Mlle. Polina," he continued, "Is the best of all possible living beings; but, I repeat, that I shall thank you to cease questioning me about her. You never really knew her, and her name on your lips is an offence to my moral feeling."

"Indeed? On what subject, then, have I a better right to speak to you than on this? With it are bound up all your recollections and mine. However, do not be alarmed: I have no wish to probe too far into your private, your secret affairs. My interest in Mlle. Polina does not extend beyond her outward circumstances and surroundings. About them you could tell me in two words."

"Well, on condition that the matter shall end there, I will tell you that for a long time Mlle. Polina was ill, and still is so. My mother and sister entertained her for a while at their home in the north of England, and thereafter Mlle. Polina's grandmother (you remember the mad old woman?) died, and left Mlle. Polina a personal legacy of seven thousand pounds sterling. That was about six months ago, and now Mlle. is travelling with my sister's family--my sister having since married. Mlle.'s little brother and sister also benefited by the Grandmother's will, and are now being educated in London. As for the General, he died in Paris last month, of a stroke. Mlle. Blanche did well by him, for she succeeded in having transferred to herself all that he received from the Grandmother. That, I think, concludes all that I have to tell."

"And De Griens? Is he too travelling in Switzerland?"

"No; nor do I know where he is. Also I warn you once more that you had better avoid such hints and ignoble suppositions; otherwise you will assuredly have to reckon with me."

"What? In spite of our old friendship?"

"Yes, in spite of our old friendship."

"Then I beg your pardon a thousand times, Mr. Astley. I meant nothing offensive to Mlle. Polina, for I have nothing of which to accuse her. Moreover, the question of there being anything between this Frenchman and this Russian lady is not one which you and I need discuss, nor even attempt to understand."

"If," replied Astley, "you do not care to hear their names coupled together, may I ask you what you mean by the expressions 'this Frenchman,' 'this Russian lady,' and 'there being anything between them'? Why do you call them so particularly a 'Frenchman' and a 'Russian lady'?"

"Ah, I see you are interested, Mr. Astley. But it is a long, long story, and calls for a lengthy preface. At the same time, the question is an important one, however ridiculous it may seem at the first glance. A Frenchman, Mr. Astley, is merely a fine figure of a man. With this you, as a Britisher, may not agree.

With it I also, as a Russian, may not agree--out of envy. Yet possibly our goodladies are of another opinion. For instance, one may look upon Racine as abroken-down, hobbledehoy, perfumed individual--one may even be unable to read him; and I too may think him the same, as well as, in some respects, a subject for ridicule. Yet about him, Mr. Astley, there is a certain charm, and, above all things, he is a great poet--though one might like to deny it. Yes, the Frenchman, the Parisian, as a national figure, was in process of developing into a figure of elegance before we Russians had even ceased to be bears. The Revolution bequeathed to the French nobility its heritage, and now everywhippersnapper of a Parisian may possess manners, methods of expression, and even thoughts that are above reproach in form, while all the time he himself may share in that form neither in initiative nor in intellect nor in soul--his manners, and the rest, having come to him through inheritance. Yes, taken by himself, the Frenchman is frequently a fool off fools and a villain of villains. Per contra, there is no one in the world more

worthy of confidence and respect than this young Russian lady. De Griers might so mask his face and play a part as easily to overcome her heart, for he has an imposing figure, Mr. Astley, and this young lady might easily take that figure for his real self—for the natural form of his heart and soul--instead of the mere cloak with which hereditary has dowered him. And even though it may offend you, I feel bound to say that the majority also of English people are uncouth and unrefined, whereas we Russian folk can recognise beauty wherever we see it, and are always eager to cultivate the same. But to distinguish beauty of soul and personal originality there is needed far more independence and freedom than is possessed by our women, especially by our younger ladies. At all events, they need more EXPERIENCE. For instance, this Mlle. Polina--pardon me, but the name has passed my lips, and I cannot well recall it--is taking a very long time to make up her mind to prefer you to Monsieur de Griers. She may respect you, she may become your friend, she may open out her heart to you; yet over that heart there will be reigning that loathsome villain, that mean and petty usurer, De Griers. This will be due to obstinacy and self-love--to the fact that De Griers once appeared to her in the transfigured guise of a marquis, of a disenchanted and ruined liberal who was doing his best to help her family and the frivolous old General; and, although these transactions of his have since been exposed, you will find that the exposure has made no impression upon her mind. Only give her the De Griers of former days, and she will ask of you no more. The more she may detest the present De Griers, the more will she lament the De Griers of the past--even though the latter never existed but in her own imagination. You are a sugar refiner, Mr. Astley, are you not?"

"Yes, I belong to the well-known firm of Lovell and Co."

"Then see here. On the one hand, you are a sugar refiner, while, on the other hand, you are an Apollo Belvedere. But the two characters do not mix with one another. I, again, am not even a sugar refiner; I am a mere roulette gambler who has also served as a lacquey. Of this fact Mlle. Polina is probably well aware, since she appears to have an excellent force of police at her disposal."

"You are saying this because you are feeling bitter," said Astley with cold indifference. "Yet there is not the least originality in your words."

"I agree. But therein lies the horror of it all--that, however mean and farcical my accusations may be, they are none the less TRUE. But I am only wasting words."

"Yes, you are, for you are only talking nonsense! exclaimed my companion--his voice now trembling and his eyes flashing fire. "Are you aware," he continued, "that wretched, ignoble, petty, unfortunate man though you are, it was at HER request I came to Homburg, in order to see you, and to have a long, serious talk with you, and to report to her your feelings and thoughts and hopes--yes, and your recollections of her, too?"

"Indeed? Is that really so?" I cried--the tears beginning to well from my eyes.

Never before had this happened.

"Yes, poor unfortunate," continued Astley. "She DID love you; and I may tell you this now for the reason that now you are utterly lost. Even if I were also to tell you that she still loves you, you would none the less have to remain where you are. Yes, you have ruined yourself beyond redemption. Once upon a time you had a certain amount of talent, and you were of a lively disposition, and your good looks were not to be despised. You might even have been useful to your country, which needs men like you. Yet you remained here, and your life is now over. I am not blaming you for this--in my view all Russians resemble you, or are inclined to do so. If it is not roulette, then it is something else. The exceptions are very rare. Nor are you the first to learn what a taskmaster is yours. For roulette is not exclusively a Russian game. Hitherto, you have honourably preferred to serve as a lacquey rather than to act as a thief; but what the future may have in store for you I tremble to think. Now good-bye. You are in want of money, I suppose? Then take these ten louis d'or. More I shall not give you, for you would only gamble it away. Take care of these coins, and farewell. Once more, TAKE CARE of them."

"No, Mr. Astley. After all that has been said I--"

"TAKE CARE of them!" repeated my friend. "I am certain you are still a gentleman, and therefore I give you the money as one gentleman may give money to another. Also, if I could be certain that you would leave both Homburg and the gaming-tables, and return to your own country, I would give you a thousand pounds down to start life afresh; but, I give you ten louis d'or instead of a thousand pounds for the reason that at the present time a

thousand pounds and ten louis d'or will be all the same to you--you will lose the one as readily as you will the other. Take the money, therefore, and good-bye."

"Yes, I WILL take it if at the same time you will embrace me."

"With pleasure."

So we parted--on terms of sincere affection.

.....

But he was wrong. If I was hard and undiscerning as regards Polina and De Griens, HE was hard and undiscerning as regards Russian people generally. Of myself I say nothing. Yet--yet words are only words. I need to ACT. Above all things I need to think of Switzerland. Tomorrow, tomorrow--Ah, but if only I could set things right tomorrow, and be born again, and rise again from the dead! But no--I cannot. Yet I must show her what I can do. Even if she should do no more than learn that I can still play the man, it would be worth it. Today it is too late, but TOMORROW...

Yet I have a presentiment that things can never be otherwise. I have got fifteen louis d'or in my possession, although I began with fifteen gulden. If I were to play carefully at the start--But no, no! Surely I am not such a fool as that? Yet WHY should I not rise from the dead? I should require at first but to go cautiously and patiently and the rest would follow. I should require but to put a check upon my nature for one hour, and my fortunes would be changed entirely. Yes, my nature is my weak point. I have only to remember what happened to me some months ago at Roulettenberg, before my final ruin. What a notable instance that was of my capacity for resolution! On the occasion in question I had lost everything--everything; yet, just as I was leaving the Casino, I heard another gulden give a rattle in my pocket! "Perhaps I shall need it for a meal," I thought to myself; but a hundred paces further on, I changed my mind, and returned. That gulden I staked upon *manque*--and there is something in the feeling that, though one is alone, and in a foreign land, and far from one's own home and friends, and ignorant of whence one's next meal is to come, one is nevertheless staking one's very last coin! Well, I won the stake, and in twenty minutes had left the Casino with a hundred and seventy gulden in my pocket! That is a fact, and it shows what a last remaining gulden can do. But what if my heart had failed me, or I had shrunk from making up my mind? . . .

No: tomorrow all shall be ended!

--The End--

Exercises:

Descriptive answer type questions:

1. Comment on the significance of the title of the story.
2. What are the major themes in *Gambler*?

Short answer type questions:

1. What Casino game does Fyodor Dostoyevsky write about in this story?
2. --?
3. --?
4. --
5. --
6. --?
7. --?

Classroom activities:

1. Did you even gamble to get money with which to pay debt or otherwise solve financial difficulties?
2. What characteristics of Fyodor Dostoyevsky as a writer are revealed in this story?



Unit-V

A) FAHRENHEIT 451

-Ray Bradbury

Introduction:

Ray Douglas Bradbury (August 22, 1920-June 5, 2012) was born in Waukegan, Illinois and spent his childhood in a large and loving family. He was raised Baptist by his parents who themselves were infrequent churchgoers. He was an American author and screenwriter who was famous for writing the iconic dystopian novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953) his science fiction and horror story collections, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950) *The Illustrated Man* (1951) and *I Sing the body Electric* (1969). He was a prolific writer who wrote every day up until his death. His first short story *Hollerbochen's Dilemma* was published in 1938 in a form magazine and this was a start of his long, prolific and really meteorical career of author and screenwriter. The period of the 1950s and 1960s were richly productive for Bradbury. In 1954 *Fahrenheit 451* won the *American Academy of Arts and Letters Award* in Literature and the commonwealth club of California Gold medal. It later won the *Prometheus Hall of Fame Award* in 1984 and *Retro Hugo Award*. Bradbury wrote many short essays on the culture and the arts to attract the attention of critics and he used his fiction to explore and criticize his culture and society.

Fahrenheit 451 was first published in a shorter form as 'The Fireman', was major impressive novella of Bradbury. It is a part of the dystopian novel genre which consists of a futuristic world governed by some kind of tyranny and oppression. *Fahrenheit 451* tells the story of Montag's journey of self-discovery to find the meaning in life. The novella is divided into three parts almost like the three acts of a play, all focused on Montag's growing disillusionment, awareness and first acts of rebellion. The three parts represent the dystopian vision through the experiences of the protagonist, Guy Montag, a fireman whose seeming contentment with his job is disrupted by the arrival of the female character Clarisse McClellan. The protagonist Guy Montag for whom burning books is a mere pleasure in the beginning, is presented as a typical state fireman whose helmet is numbered 451.

The title explains the temperature at which book paper catches fire and burns. The novella presents a future American society where books are outlawed and fireman burn any that are fond. It deals with a range of issues like censorship, thought control, burning books and intellectuality and demonstrates how the totalitarian state puts on an obstacle to imagination and knowledge in this dystopian vision. The novella presents horrifying views of the near future where societal pressures enforce rigid limitations on individual freedom. It plays the role in the life and development of humankind.

Text:

PART I

IT WAS A PLEASURE TO BURN

IT was a special pleasure to see things eaten, to see things blackened and changed. With the brass nozzle in his fists, with this great python spitting its venomous kerosene upon the world, the blood pounded in his head, and his hands were the hands of some amazing conductor playing all the symphonies of blazing and burning to bring down the tatters and charcoal ruins of history. With his symbolic helmet numbered 451 on his stolid head, and his eyes all orange flame with the thought of what came next, he flicked the igniter and the house jumped up in a gorging fire that burned the evening sky red and yellow and black. He strode in a swarm of fireflies. He wanted above all, like the old joke, to shove a marshmallow on a stick in the furnace, while the flapping pigeon-winged books died on the porch and

lawn of the house. While the books went up in sparkling whirls and blew away on a wind turned dark with burning. Montag grinned the fierce grin of all men singed and driven back by flame.

He knew that when he returned to the firehouse, he might wink at himself, a minstrel man, burnt-corked, in the mirror. Later, going to sleep, he would feel the fiery smile still gripped by his face muscles, in the dark. It never went away, that smile, it never ever went away, as long as he remembered.

He hung up his black-beetle-coloured helmet and shined it, he hung his flameproof jacket neatly; he showered luxuriously, and then, whistling, hands in pockets, walked across the upper floor of the fire station and fell down the hole. At the last moment, when disaster seemed positive, he pulled his hands from his pockets and broke his fall by grasping the golden pole. He slid to a squeaking halt, the heels one inch from the concrete floor downstairs. He walked out of the fire station and along the midnight street toward the subway where the silent, air-propelled train slid soundlessly down its lubricated flue in the earth and let him out with a great puff of warm air and to the cream-tiled escalator rising to the suburb. Whistling, he let the escalator waft him into the still night air. He walked toward the corner, thinking little at all about nothing in particular. Before he reached the corner, however, he slowed as if a wind had sprung up from nowhere, as if someone had called his name.

The last few nights he had had the most uncertain feelings about the sidewalk just around the corner here, moving in the starlight toward his house. He had felt that a moment before his making the turn, someone had been there. The air seemed charged with a special calm as if someone had waited there, quietly, and only a moment before he came, simply turned to a shadow and let him through. Perhaps his nose detected a faint perfume, perhaps the skin on the backs of his hands, on his face, felt the temperature rise at this one spot where a person's standing might raise the immediate atmosphere ten degrees for an instant. There was no understanding it. Each time he made the turn, he saw only the white, unused, buckling sidewalk, with perhaps, on one night, something vanishing swiftly across a lawn before he could focus his eyes or speak.

But now, tonight, he slowed almost to a stop. His inner mind, reaching out to turn the corner for him, had heard the faintest whisper. Breathing? Or was the atmosphere compressed merely by someone standing very quietly there, waiting?

He turned the corner.

The autumn leaves blew over the moonlit pavement in such a way as to make the girl who was moving there seem fixed to a sliding walk, letting the motion of the wind and the leaves carry her forward. Her head was half bent to watch her shoes stir the circling leaves. Her face was slender and milk-white, and in it was a kind of gentle hunger that touched over everything with tireless curiosity. It was a look, almost, of pale surprise; the dark eyes were so fixed to the world that no move escaped them. Her dress was white and it whispered. He almost thought he heard the motion of her hands as she walked, and the infinitely small sound now, the white stir of her face turning when she discovered she was a moment away from a man who stood in the middle of the pavement waiting.

The trees overhead made a great sound of letting down their dry rain. The girl stopped and looked as if she might pull back in surprise, but instead stood regarding Montag with eyes so dark and shining and alive, that he felt he had said something quite wonderful. But he knew his mouth had only moved to say hello, and then when she seemed hypnotized by the salamander on his arm and the phoenix-disc on his chest, he spoke again. "Of course," he said, "you're a new neighbour, aren't you?"

"And you must be"-she raised her eyes from his professional symbols-"the fireman." Her voice trailed off.

"How oddly you say that."

"I'd-I'd have known it with my eyes shut," she said, slowly. "What-the smell of kerosene? My wife always complains," he laughed. "You never wash it off completely."

"No, you don't," she said, in awe.

He felt she was walking in a circle about him, turning him end for end, shaking him quietly, and emptying his pockets, without once moving herself.

"Kerosene," he said, because the silence had lengthened, "is nothing but perfume to me."

"Does it seem like that, really?"

"Of course. Why not?"

She gave herself time to think of it. "I don't know." She turned to face the sidewalk going toward their homes. "Do you mind if I walk back with you? I'm Clarisse McClellan."

"Clarisse. Guy Montag. Come along. What are you doing out so late wandering around? How old are you?"

They walked in the warm-cool blowing night on the silvered pavement and there was the faintest breath of fresh apricots and strawberries in the air, and he looked around and realized this was quite impossible, so late in the year.

There was only the girl walking with him now, her face bright as snow in the moonlight, and he knew she was working his questions around, seeking the best answers she could possibly give. "Well," she said, "I'm seventeen and I'm crazy. Myuncle says the two always go together. When people ask your age, he said, always say seventeen and insane. Isn't this a nice time of night to walk? I like to smell things and look at things, and sometimes stay up all night, walking, and watch the sun rise."

They walked on again in silence and finally she said, thoughtfully, "You know, I'm not afraid of you at all."

He was surprised. "Why should you be?"

"So many people are. Afraid of firemen, I mean. But you're just a man, after all..."

He saw himself in her eyes, suspended in two shining drops of bright water, himself dark and tiny, in fine detail, the lines about his mouth, everything there, as if her eyes were two miraculous bits of violet amber that might capture and hold him intact. Her face, turned to him now, was fragile milk crystal with a soft and constant light in it. It was not the hysterical light of electricity but-what? But the strangely comfortable and rare and gently flattering light of the candle. One time, when he was a child, in a power-failure, his mother had found and lit a last candle and there had been a brief hour of rediscovery, of such illumination that space lost its vast dimensions and drew comfortably around them, and they, mother and son, alone, transformed, hoping that the power might not come on again too soon And then Clarisse McClellan said:

"Do you mind if I ask? How long have you worked at being a fireman?"

"Since I was twenty, ten years ago."

"Do you ever read any of the books you bum?"

He laughed. "That's against the law!"

"Oh. Of course."

"It's fine work. Monday bum Millay, Wednesday Whitman, Friday Faulkner, burn 'em to ashes, then bum the ashes. That's our official slogan."

They walked still further and the girl said, "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires out instead of going to start them?"

"No. Houses. have always been fireproof, take my word for it."

"Strange. I heard once that a long time ago houses used to burn by accident and they needed firemen to stop the flames."

He laughed.

She glanced quickly over. "Why are you laughing?"

"I don't know." He started to laugh again and stopped "Why?"

"You laugh when I haven't been funny and you answer right off. You never stop to think what I've asked you."

He stopped walking, "You are an odd one," he said, looking at her. "Haven't you any respect?"

"I don't mean to be insulting. It's just, I love to watch people too much, I guess."

"Well, doesn't this mean anything to you?" He tapped the numerals 451 stitched on his charcoal-coloured sleeve.

"Yes," she whispered. She increased her pace. "Have you ever watched the jet cars racing on the boulevards down that way?"

"You're changing the subject!"

"I sometimes think drivers don't know what grass is, or flowers, because they never see them slowly," she said. "If you showed a driver a green blur, Oh yes! he'd say, that's grass! A pink blur? That's a rose-garden! White blurs are houses. Brown blurs are cows. My uncle drove slowly on a highway once. He drove forty miles an hour and they jailed him for two days. Isn't that funny, and sad, too?"

"You think too many things," said Montag, uneasily.

"I rarely watch the 'parlour walls' or go to races or Fun Parks. So I've lots of time for crazy thoughts, I guess. Have you seen the two-hundred-foot-long billboards in the country beyond town? Did you know that once billboards were only twenty feet long? But cars started rushing by so quickly they had to stretch the advertising out so it would last." "I didn't know that!" Montag laughed abruptly.

"But I know something else you don't. There's dew on the grass in the morning."

He suddenly couldn't remember if he had known this or not, and it made him quite irritable. "And if you look"-she nodded at the sky-"there's a man in the moon." He hadn't looked for a long time.

They walked the rest of the way in silence, hers thoughtful, his a kind of clenching and uncomfortable silence in which he shot her accusing glances. When they reached her house all its lights were blazing.

"What's going on?" Montag had rarely seen that many house lights.

"Oh, just my mother and father and uncle sitting around, talking. It's like being a pedestrian, only rarer. My uncle was arrested another time-did I tell you?-for being a pedestrian. Oh, we're most peculiar."

"But what do you talk about?"

She laughed at this. "Good night!" She started up her walk. Then she seemed to remember something and came back to look at him with wonder and curiosity. "Are you happy?" she said. "Am I what?" he cried.

But she was gone-running in the moonlight. Her front door shut gently.

"Happy! Of all the nonsense."

He stopped laughing.

He put his hand into the glove-hole of his front door and let it know his touch. The front door slid open.

Of course I'm happy. What does she think? I'm not? he asked the quiet rooms. He stood looking up at the ventilator grille in the hall and suddenly remembered that something lay hidden behind the grille, something that seemed to peer down at him now. He moved his eyes quickly away.

What a strange meeting on a strange night. He remembered nothing like it save one afternoon a year ago when he had met an old man in the park and they had talked

Montag shook his head. He looked at a blank wall. The girl's face was there, really quite beautiful in memory: astonishing, in fact. She had a very thin face like the dial of a small clock seen faintly in a dark room in the middle of a night when you waken to see the time and see the clock telling you the hour and the minute and the second, with a white silence and a glowing, all certainty and knowing what it has to tell of the night passing swiftly on toward further darknesses but moving also toward a new sun.

"What?" asked Montag of that other self, the subconscious idiot that ran babbling at times, quite independent of will, habit, and conscience.

He glanced back at the wall. How like a mirror, too, her face. Impossible; for how many people did you know that refracted your own light to you? People were more often-he searched for a simile, found one in his work-torches, blazing away until they whiffed out. How rarely did other people's faces take of you and throw back to you your own expression, your own innermost trembling thought?

What incredible power of identification the girl had; she was like the eager watcher of a marionette show, anticipating each flicker of an eyelid, each gesture of his hand, each flick of a finger, the moment before it began. How long had they walked together? Three minutes? Five?

Yet how large that time seemed now. How immense a figure she was on the stage before him; what a shadow she threw on the wall with her slender body! He felt that if his eye itched, she might blink. And if the muscles of his jaws stretched imperceptibly, she would yawn long before he would.

Why, he thought, now that I think of it, she almost seemed to be waiting for me there, in the street, so damned late at night

He opened the bedroom door.

It was like coming into the cold marbled room of a mausoleum after the moon had set. Complete darkness, not a hint of the silver world outside, the windows tightly shut, the chamber a tomb-world where no sound from the great city could penetrate. The room was not empty. He listened.

The little mosquito-delicate dancing hum in the air, the electrical murmur of a hidden wasp snug in its special pink warm nest. The music was almost loud enough so he could follow the tune. He felt his smile slide away, melt, fold over, and down on itself like a tallow skin, like the stuff of a fantastic candle burning too long and now collapsing and now blown out. Darkness. He was not happy. He was not happy. He said the words to himself. He recognized this as the true state of affairs. He wore his happiness like a mask and the girl had run off across the lawn with the mask and there was no way of going to knock on her door and ask for it back.

Without turning on the light he imagined how this room would look. His wife stretched on the bed, uncovered and cold, like a body displayed on the lid of a tomb, her eyes fixed to the ceiling by invisible threads of steel, immovable. And in her ears the little Seashells, the thimble radios tamped tight, and an electronic ocean of sound, of music and talk and music and talk coming in, coming in on the shore of her unsleeping mind. The room was indeed empty. Every night the waves came in and bore her off on their great tides of sound, floating her, wide-eyed, toward morning. There had been no night in the last two years that Mildred had not swum that sea, had not gladly gone down in it for the thirdtime.

The room was cold but nonetheless he felt he could not breathe. He did not wish to open the curtains and open the french windows, for he did not want the moon to come into the room. So, with the feeling of a man who will die in the next hour for lack of air, he felt his way toward his open, separate, and therefore cold bed.

An instant before his foot hit the object on the floor he knew he would hit such an object. It was not unlike the feeling he had experienced before turning the corner and almost knocking the girl down. His foot, sending vibrations ahead, received back echoes of the small barrier across its path even as the foot swung. His foot kicked. The object gave a dull clink and slid off in darkness.

He stood very straight and listened to the person on the dark bed in the completely featureless night. The breath coming out of the nostrils was so faint it stirred only the furthest fringes of life, a small leaf, a black feather, a single fibre of hair.

He still did not want outside light. He pulled out his igniter, felt the salamander etched on its silver disc, gave it a flick....

Two moonstones looked up at him in the light of his small hand-held fire; two pale moonstones buried in a creek of clear water over which the life of the world ran, not touching them. "Mildred ! "

Her face was like a snow-covered island upon which rain might fall; but it felt no rain; over which clouds might pass their moving shadows, but she felt no shadow. There was only the singing of the thimble-wasps in her tamped-shut ears, and her eyes all glass, and breath going in and out, softly, faintly, in and out of her nostrils, and her not caring whether it came or went, went on came.

The object he had sent tumbling with his foot now glinted under the edge of his own bed. The small crystal bottle of sleeping-tablets which earlier today had been filled with thirty capsules and which now lay uncapped and empty in the light of the tiny flare.

As he stood there the sky over the house screamed. There was a tremendous ripping sound as if two giant hands had torn ten thousand miles of black linen down the seam. Montag was cut in half. He felt his chest chopped down and split apart. The jet-bombs going over, going over, going over, one two, one two, one two, six of them, nine of them, twelve of them, one and one and one and another and another and another, did all the screaming for him. He opened his own mouth and let their shriek come down and out between his bared teeth. The house shook. The flare went out in his hand. The moonstones vanished. He felt his hand plunge toward the telephone.

The jets were gone. He felt his lips move, brushing the mouthpiece of the phone. "Emergency hospital." A terrible whisper.

He felt that the stars had been pulverized by the sound of the black jets and that in the morning the earth would be thought as he stood shivering in the dark, and let his lips go on moving and moving.

They had this machine. They had two machines, really. One of them slid down into your stomach like a black cobra down an echoing well looking for all the old water and the old time gathered there. It drank up the green matter that flowed to the top in a slow boil. Did it drink of the darkness? Did it suck out all the poisons accumulated with the years? It fed in silence with an occasional sound of inner suffocation and blind searching. It had an Eye. The impersonal operator of the machine could, by wearing a special optical helmet, gaze into the soul of the person whom he was pumping out. What did the Eye see? He did not say. He saw but did not see what the Eye saw. The entire operation was not unlike the digging of a trench in one's yard. The woman on the bed was no more than a hard stratum of marble they had reached. Go on, anyway, shove the bore down, slush up the emptiness, if such a thing could be brought out in the throb of the suction snake. The operator stood smoking a cigarette. The other machine was working too. The other machine was operated by an equally impersonal fellow in non-stainable reddish-brown overalls. This machine pumped all of the blood from the body and replaced it with fresh blood and serum.

"Got to clean 'em out both ways," said the operator, standing over the silent woman. "No use getting the stomach if you don't clean the blood. Leave that stuff in the blood and the blood hits the brain like a mallet, bang, a couple of thousand times and the brain just gives up, just quits." "Stop it!" said Montag.

"I was just sayin'," said the operator.

"Are you done?" said Montag.

They shut the machines up tight. "We're done." His anger did not even touch them. They stood with the cigarette smoke curling around their noses and into their eyes without making them blink or squint. "That's fifty bucks."

"First, why don't you tell me if she'll be all right?"

"Sure, she'll be O.K. We got all the mean stuff right in our suitcase here, it can't get at her now. As I said, you take out the old and put in the new and you're O.K."

"Neither of you is an M.D. Why didn't they send an M.D. from Emergency?"

"Hell! " the operator's cigarette moved on his lips. "We get these cases nine or ten a night. Got so many, starting a few years ago, we had the special machines built. With the optical lens, of course, that was new; the rest is ancient. You don't need an M.D., case like this; all you need is two handymen, clean up the problem in half an hour. Look"-he started for the door-"we gotta go. Just had another call on the old ear-

thimble. Ten blocks from here. Someone else just jumped off the cap of a pillbox. Call if you need us again. Keep her quiet. We got a contra-sedative in her. She'll wake up hungry. So long."

And the men with the cigarettes in their straight-lined mouths, the men with the eyes of puff-adders, took up their load of machine and tube, their case of liquid melancholy and the slow dark sludge of nameless stuff, and strolled out the door.

Montag sank down into a chair and looked at this woman. Her eyes were closed now, gently, and he put out his hand to feel the warmth of breath on his palm. "Mildred," he said, at last.

There are too many of us, he thought. There are billions of us and that's too many. Nobody knows anyone. Strangers come and violate you. Strangers come and cut your heart out. Strangers come and take your blood. Good God, who were those men? I never saw them before in my life! Half an hour passed.

The bloodstream in this woman was new and it seemed to have done a new thing to her. Her cheeks were very pink and her lips were very fresh and full of colour and they looked soft and relaxed. Someone else's blood there. If only someone else's flesh and brain and memory. If only they could have taken her mind along to the dry-cleaner's and emptied the pockets and steamed and cleansed it and reblocked it and brought it back in the morning. If only . . .

He got up and put back the curtains and opened the windows wide to let the night air in. It was two o'clock in the morning. Was it only an hour ago, Clarisse McClellan in the street, and him coming in, and the dark room and his foot kicking the little crystal bottle? Only an hour, but the world had melted down and sprung up in a new and colourless form.

Laughter blew across the moon-coloured lawn from the house of Clarisse and her father and mother and the uncle who smiled so quietly and so earnestly. Above all, their laughter was relaxed and hearty and not forced in any way, coming from the house that was so brightly lit this late at night while all the other houses were kept to themselves in darkness. Montag heard the voices talking, talking, talking, giving, talking, weaving, reweaving their hypnotic web.

Montag moved out through the french windows and crossed the lawn, without even thinking of it. He stood outside the talking house in the shadows, thinking he might even tap on their door and whisper, "Let me come in. I won't say anything. I just want to listen. What is it you're saying?"

But instead he stood there, very cold, his face a mask of ice, listening to a man's voice (the uncle?) moving along at an easy pace:

"Well, after all, this is the age of the disposable tissue. Blow your nose on a person, wad them, flush them away, reach for another, blow, wad, flush. Everyone using everyone else's coattails. How are you supposed to root for the home team when you don't even have a programme or know the names? For that matter, what colour jerseys are they wearing as they trot out on to the field?"

Montag moved back to his own house, left the window wide, checked Mildred, tucked the covers about her carefully, and then lay down with the moonlight on his cheek-bones and on the frowning ridges in his brow, with the moonlight distilled in each eye to form a silver cataract there.

One drop of rain. Clarisse. Another drop. Mildred. A third. The uncle. A fourth. The fire tonight. One, Clarisse. Two, Mildred. Three, uncle. Four, fire, One, Mildred, two, Clarisse. One, two, three, four, five, Clarisse, Mildred, uncle, fire, sleeping-tablets, men, disposable tissue, coat-tails, blow, wad, flush, Clarisse, Mildred, uncle, fire, tablets, tissues, blow, wad, flush. One, two, three, one, two, three! Rain. The storm. The uncle laughing. Thunder falling downstairs. The whole world pouring down. The fire gushing up in a volcano. All rushing on down around in a spouting roar and rivering stream toward morning.

"I don't know anything any more," he said, and let a sleep-lozenge dissolve on his tongue.

At nine in the morning, Mildred's bed was empty.

Montag got up quickly, his heart pumping, and ran down the hall and stopped at the kitchen door.

Toast popped out of the silver toaster, was seized by a spidery metal hand that drenched it with melted butter.

Mildred watched the toast delivered to her plate. She had both ears plugged with electronic bees that were humming the hour away. She looked up suddenly, saw him, and nodded. "You all right?" he asked.

She was an expert at lip-reading from ten years of apprenticeship at Seashell ear-thimbles. She nodded again. She set the toaster clicking away at another piece of bread. Montag sat down.

His wife said, "I don't know why I should be so hungry."

"You-?"

"I'm HUNGRY."

"Last night," he began.

"Didn't sleep well. Feel terrible," she said. "God, I'm hungry. I can't figure it." "Last night-" he said again.

She watched his lips casually. "What about last night?"

"Don't you remember?"

"What? Did we have a wild party or something? Feel like I've a hangover. God, I'm hungry. Who was here?"

"A few people," he said.

"That's what I thought." She chewed her toast. "Sore stomach, but I'm hungry as all-get-out. Hope I didn't do anything foolish at the party." "No," he said, quietly.

The toaster spidered out a piece of buttered bread for him. He held it in his hand, feeling grateful.

"You don't look so hot yourself," said his wife.

In the late afternoon it rained and the entire world was dark grey. He stood in the hall of his house, putting on his badge with the orange salamander burning across it. He stood looking up at the air-conditioning vent in the hall for a long time. His wife in the TV parlour paused long enough from reading her script to glance up. "Hey," she said. "The man's THINKING!"

"Yes," he said. "I wanted to talk to you." He paused. "You took all the pills in your bottle last night."

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," she said, surprised.

"The bottle was empty."

"I wouldn't do a thing like that. Why would I do a thing like that?" she asked.

"Maybe you took two pills and forgot and took two more, and forgot again and took two more, and were so dopy you kept right on until you had thirty or forty of them in you." "Heck," she said, "what would I want to go and do a silly thing like that for?"

"I don't know," he said.

She was quite obviously waiting for him to go. "I didn't do that," she said. "Never in a billion years."

"All right if you say so," he said.

"That's what the lady said." She turned back to her script.

"What's on this afternoon?" he asked tiredly.

She didn't look up from her script again. "Well, this is a play comes on the wall-to-wall circuit in ten minutes. They mailed me my part this morning. I sent in some box-tops. They write the script with one part missing. It's a new idea. The home-maker, that's me, is the missing part. When it comes time for the missing lines, they all look at me out of the three walls and I say the lines: Here, for instance, the man says, 'What do you think of this whole idea, Helen?' And he looks at me sitting here centre stage, see? And I say, I say --" She paused and ran her finger under a line in the script. " 'I think that's fine!' And then they go on with the play until he says, 'Do you agree to that, Helen!' and I say, 'I sure do!' Isn't that fun, Guy?" He stood in the hall looking after.

"It's sure fun," she said.

"What's the play about?"

"I just told you. There are these people named Bob and Ruth and Helen."

"Oh."

"It's really fun. It'll be even more fun when we can afford to have the fourth wall installed. Howlong you figure before we save up and get the fourth wall torn out and a fourth wall-TV put in?

It's only two thousand dollars."

"That's one-third of my yearly pay."

"It's only two thousand dollars," she replied. "And I should think you'd consider me sometimes. If we had a fourth wall, why it'd be just like this room wasn't ours at all, but all kinds of exotic people's rooms. We could do without a fewthings."

"We're already doing without a few things to pay for the third wall. It was put in only two months ago, remember?"

"Is that all it was?" She sat looking at him for a long moment. "Well, good-bye, dear." . "Good-bye," he said. He stopped and turned around. "Does it have a happy ending?" "I haven't read that far."

He walked over, read the last page, nodded, folded the script, and handed it back to her. He walked out of the house into the rain.

The rain was thinning away and the girl was walking in the centre of the sidewalk with her head up and the few drops falling on her face. She smiled when she saw Montag. "Hello!"

He said hello and then said, "What are you up to now?" "I'm still crazy. The rain feels good. I love to walk in it. "I don't think I'd like that," he said. "You might if you tried."

"I never have."

She licked her lips. "Rain even tastes good."

"What do you do, go around trying everything once?" he asked.

"Sometimes twice." She looked at something in her hand.

"What've you got there?" he said.

"I guess it's the last of the dandelions this year. I didn't think I'd find one on the lawn this late.

Have you ever heard of rubbing it under your chin? Look." She touched her chin with the flower,laughing.

"Why?"

"If it rubs off, it means I'm in love. Has it?"

He could hardly do anything else but look.

"Well?" she said.

"You're yellow under there."

"Fine! Let's try YOU now."

"It won't work for me."

"Here." Before he could move she had put the dandelion under his chin. He drew back and she laughed.

"Hold still!"

She peered under his chin and frowned.

"Well?" he said.

"What a shame," she said. "You're not in love with anyone."

"Yes, I am ! "

"It doesn't show."

"I am very much in love!" He tried to conjure up a face to fit the words, but there was no face. "I am ! "

"Oh please don't look that way."

"It's that dandelion," he said. "You've used it allup on yourself. That's why it won't work for me."

"Of course, that must be it. Oh, now I've upset you, I can see I have; I'm sorry, really I am." She touched his elbow.

"No, no," he said, quickly, "I'm all right."

"I've got to be going, so say you forgive me. I don't want you angry with me."

"I'm not angry. Upset, yes."

"I've got to go to see my psychiatrist now. They make me go. I made up things to say. I don't know what he thinks of me. He says I'm a regular onion! I keep him busy peeling away the layers."

"I'm inclined to believe you need the psychiatrist," said Montag.

"You don't mean that."

He took a breath and let it out and at last said, "No, I don't mean that."

"The psychiatrist wants to know why I go out and hike around in the forests and watch the birds and collect butterflies. I'll show you my collection some day." "Good."

"They want to know what I do with all my time. I tell them that sometimes I just sit and think.

But I won't tell them what. I've got them running. And sometimes, I tell them, I like to put my head back, like this, and let the rain fall into my mouth. It tastes just like wine. Have you ever tried it?"

"No I--"

"You HAVE forgiven me, haven't you?"

"Yes." He thought about it. "Yes, I have. God knows why. You're peculiar, you're aggravating, yet you're easy to forgive. You say you're seventeen?" "Well-next month."

"How odd. How strange. And my wife thirty and yet you seem so much older at times. I can't get over it."

"You're peculiar yourself, Mr. Montag. Sometimes I even forget you're a fireman. Now, may I make you angry again?"

"Go ahead."

"How did it start? How did you get into it? How did you pick your work and how did you happen to think to take the job you have? You're not like the others. I've seen a few; I know. When I talk, you look at me. When I said something about the moon, you looked at the moon, last night. The others would never do that. The others would walk off and leave me talking. Or threaten me. No one has time any more for anyone else. You're one of the few who put up with me. That's why I think it's so strange you're a fireman, it just doesn't seem right for you, somehow."

He felt his body divide itself into a hotness and a coldness, a softness and a hardness, a trembling and a not trembling, the two halves grinding one upon the other. "You'd better run on to your appointment," he said.

And she ran off and left him standing there in the rain. Only after a long time did he move. And then, very slowly, as he walked, he tilted his head back in the rain, for just a few moments, and opened his mouth....

The Mechanical Hound slept but did not sleep, lived but did not live in its gently humming, gently vibrating, softly illuminated kennel back in a dark corner of the firehouse. The dim light of one in the morning, the moonlight from the open sky framed through the great window, touched here and there on the brass and the copper and the steel of the faintly trembling beast. Light flickered on bits of ruby glass and on sensitive capillary hairs in the nylon-brushed nostrils of the creature that quivered gently, gently, gently, its eight legs spidered under it on rubber-padded paws.

Montag slid down the brass pole. He went out to look at the city and the clouds had cleared away completely, and he lit a cigarette and came back to bend down and look at the Hound. It was like a great bee come home from some field where the honey is full of poison wildness, of insanity and nightmare, its body crammed with that over-rich nectar and now it was sleeping the evil out of itself.

"Hello," whispered Montag, fascinated as always with the dead beast, the livingbeast.

At night when things got dull, which was every night, the men slid down the brass poles, and set the ticking combinations of the olfactory system of the Hound and let loose rats in the firehouse area-way, and sometimes chickens, and sometimes cats that would have to be drowned anyway, and there would be betting to see which the Hound would seize first. The animals were turned loose. Three seconds later the game was done, the rat, cat, or chicken caught half across the areaway, gripped in gentling paws while a four-inch hollow steel needle plunged down from the proboscis of the Hound to inject massive jolts of morphine or procaine. The pawn was then tossed in the incinerator. A new game began.

Montag stayed upstairs most nights when this went on. There had been a time two years ago when he had bet with the best of them, and lost a week's salary and faced Mildred's insane anger, which showed itself in veins and blotches. But now at night he lay in his bunk, face turned to the wall, listening to whoops of laughter below and the piano-string scurry of rat feet, the violin squeaking of mice, and the great shadowing, motioned silence of the Hound leaping out like a moth in the raw light, finding, holding its victim, inserting the needle and going back to its kennel to die as if a switch had been turned.

Montag touched the muzzle. .

The Hound growled.

Montag jumped back.

The Hound half rose in its kennel and looked at him with green-blue neon light flickering in its suddenly activated eyebulbs. It growled again, a strange rasping combination of electrical sizzle, a frying sound, a scraping of metal, a turning of cogs that seemed rusty and ancient with suspicion.

"No, no, boy," said Montag, his heart pounding.

He saw the silver needle extended upon the air an inch, pull back, extend, pull back. The growl simmered in the beast and it looked at him.

Montag backed up. The Hound took a step from its kennel.

Montag grabbed the brass pole with one hand. The pole, reacting, slid upward, and took him through the ceiling, quietly. He stepped off in the half-lit deck of the upper level. He was trembling and his face was green-white. Below, the Hound had sunk back down upon its eight

incredible insect legs and was humming to itself again, its multi-faceted eyes at peace.

Montag stood, letting the fears pass, by the drop-hole. Behind him, four men at a card table under a green-lidded light in the corner glanced briefly but said nothing. Only the man with the Captain's hat and the sign of the Phoenix on his hat, at last, curious, his playing cards in his thin hand, talked across the long room.

"Montag . . . ?"

"It doesn't like me," said Montag.

"What, the Hound?" The Captain studied his cards.

"Come off it. It doesn't like or dislike. It just `functions.' It's like a lesson in ballistics. It has a trajectory we decide for it. It follows through. It targets itself, homes itself, and cuts off. It's only copper wire, storage batteries, and electricity."

Montag swallowed. "Its calculators can be set to any combination, so many amino acids, so much sulphur, so much butterfat and alkaline. Right?" "We all know that."

"All of those chemical balances and percentages on all of us here in the house are recorded in the master file downstairs. It would be easy for someone to set up a partial combination on the Hound's 'memory,' a touch of amino acids, perhaps. That would account for what the animal did just now. Reacted toward me."

"Hell," said the Captain.

"Irritated, but not completely angry. Just enough 'memory' set up in it by someone so it growled when I touched it."

"Who would do a thing like that?," asked the Captain. "You haven't any enemies here, Guy."

"None that I know of."

"We'll have the Hound checked by our technicians tomorrow."

"This isn't the first time it's threatened me," said Montag. "Last month it happened twice."

"We'll fix it up. Don't worry"

But Montag did not move and only stood thinking of the ventilator grille in the hall at home and what lay hidden behind the grille. If someone here in the firehouse knew about the ventilator then mightn't they "tell" the Hound . . . ?

The Captain came over to the drop-hole and gave Montag a questioning glance.

"I was just figuring," said Montag, "what does the Hound think about down there nights? Is it coming alive on us, really? It makes me cold."

"It doesn't think anything we don't want it to think."

"That's sad," said Montag, quietly, "because all we put into it is hunting and finding and killing. What a shame if that's all it can ever know."

Beatty snorted, gently. "Hell! It's a fine bit of craftsmanship, a good rifle that can fetch its own target and guarantees the bull's-eye every time."

"That's why," said Montag. "I wouldn't want to be the next victim."

"Why? You got a guilty conscience about something?"

Montag glanced up swiftly.

Beatty stood there looking at him steadily with his eyes, while his mouth opened and began to laugh, very softly.

One two three four five six seven days. And as many times he came out of the house and Clarisse was there somewhere in the world. Once he saw her shaking a walnut tree, once he saw her sitting on the lawn knitting a blue sweater, three or four times he found a bouquet of late flowers on his porch, or a handful of chestnuts in a little sack, or some autumn leaves neatly pinned to a sheet of white paper and thumb-tacked to his door. Every day Clarisse walked him to the corner. One day it was raining, the next it was clear, the day after that the wind blew strong, and the day after that it was mild and calm, and the day after that calm day was a day like a furnace of summer and Clarisse with her face all sunburnt by late afternoon.

"Why is it," he said, one time, at the subway entrance, "I feel I've known you so many years?" "Because I like you," she said, "and I don't want anything from you. And because we know each other."

"You make me feel very old and very much like a father."

"Now you explain," she said, "why you haven't any daughters like me, if you love children so much?"

"I don't know."

"You're joking!"

"I mean-" He stopped and shook his head. "Well, my wife, she . . . she just never wanted any children at all."

The girl stopped smiling. "I'm sorry. I really, thought you were having fun at my expense. I'm a fool."

"No, no," he said. "It was a good question. It's been a long time since anyone cared enough to ask. A good question."

"Let's talk about something else. Have you ever smelled old leaves? Don't they smell like cinnamon? Here. Smell."

"Why, yes, it is like cinnamon in a way."

She looked at him with her clear dark eyes. "You always seem shocked."

"It's just I haven't had time--"

"Did you look at the stretched-out billboards like I told you?"

"I think so. Yes." He had to laugh.

"Your laugh sounds much nicer than it did"

"Does it?"

"Much more relaxed."

He felt at ease and comfortable. "Why aren't you in school? I see you every day wandering around."

"Oh, they don't miss me," she said. "I'm anti-social, they say. I don't mix. It's so strange. I'm very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn't it? Social to me means talking about things like this." She rattled some chestnuts that had fallen off the tree in the front yard.

"Or talking about how strange the world is. Being with people is nice. But I don't think it's social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you? An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don't; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That's not social to me at all. It's a lot of funnels and a lot of water poured down the spout and out the bottom, and them telling us it's wine when it's not. They run us so ragged by the end of the day we can't do anything but go to bed or head for a Fun Park to bully people around, break windowpanes in the Window Smasher place or wreck cars in the Car Wrecker place with the big steel ball. Or go out in the cars and race on the streets, trying to see how close you can get to lamp-posts, playing 'chicken' and 'knock hub-caps.' I guess I'm everything they say I am, all right. I haven't any friends. That's supposed to prove I'm abnormal. But everyone I know is either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another. Do you notice how people hurt each other nowadays?"

"You sound so very old."

"Sometimes I'm ancient. I'm afraid of children my own age. They kill each other. Did it always used to be that way? My uncle says no. Six of my friends have been shot in the last year alone. Ten of them died in car wrecks. I'm afraid of them and they don't like me because I'm afraid. My uncle says his grandfather remembered when children didn't kill each other. But that was a long time ago when they had things different. They believed in responsibility, my uncle says. Do you know, I'm responsible. I was spanked when I needed it, years ago. And I do all the shopping and house-cleaning by hand."

"But most of all," she said, "I like to watch people. Sometimes I ride the subway all day and look at them and listen to them. I just want to figure out who they are and what they want and where they're going. Sometimes I even go to the Fun Parks and ride in the jet cars when they race on the edge of town at midnight and the police don't care as long as they're insured. As long as everyone has ten thousand insurance everyone's happy. Sometimes I sneak around and listen in subways. Or I listen at soda fountains, and do you know what?" "What?"

"People don't talk about anything."

"Oh, they must!"

"No, not anything. They name a lot of cars or clothes or swimming-pools mostly and say how swell! But they all say the same things and nobody says anything different from anyone else. And most of the time in the cafes they have the jokeboxes on and the same jokes most of the time, or the musical wall lit and all

the coloured patterns running up and down, but it's only colour and all abstract. And at the museums, have you ever been? All abstract. That's all there is now. My uncle says it was different once. A long time back sometimes pictures said things or even showed people."

"Your uncle said, your uncle said. Your uncle must be a remarkable man."

"He is. He certainly is. Well, I've got to be going. Goodbye, Mr. Montag."

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye...."

One two three four five six seven days: the firehouse. "Montag, you shin that pole like a bird up a tree."

Third day.

"Montag, I see you came in the back door this time. The Hound bother you?"

"No, no."

Fourth day.

"Montag, a funny thing. Heard tell this morning. Fireman in Seattle, purposely set a Mechanical Hound to his own chemical complex and let it loose. What kind of suicide would you call that?" Five six seven days.

And then, Clarisse was gone. He didn't know what there was about the afternoon, but it was not seeing her somewhere in the world. The lawn was empty, the trees empty, the street empty, and while at first he did not even know he missed her or was even looking for her, the fact was that by the time he reached the subway, there were vague stirrings of un-ease in him. Something was the matter, his routine had been disturbed. A simple routine, true, established in a short few days, and yet . . . ? He almost turned back to make the walk again, to give her time to appear. He was certain if he tried the same route, everything would work out fine. But it was late, and the arrival of his train put a stop to his plan.

The flutter of cards, motion of hands, of eyelids, the drone of the time-voice in the firehouse ceiling ". . . one thirty-five. Thursday morning, November 4th,... one thirty-six . . . one thirty-seven a.m..." The tick of the playing-cards on the greasy table-top, all the sounds came to Montag, behind his closed eyes, behind the barrier he had momentarily erected. He could feel the firehouse full of glitter and shine and silence, of brass colours, the colours of coins, of gold, of silver: The unseen men across the table were sighing on their cards, waiting.

". . .one forty-five..." The voice-clock mourned out the cold hour of a cold morning of a still colder year.

"What's wrong, Montag?"

Montag opened his eyes.

A radio hummed somewhere. ". . . war may be declared any hour. This country stands ready to defend its--"

The firehouse trembled as a great flight of jet planes whistled a single note across the black morning sky.

Montag blinked. Beatty was looking at him as if he were a museum statue. At any moment,

Beatty might rise and walk about him, touching, exploring his guilt and self-consciousness.

Guilt? What guilt was that?

"Your play, Montag."

Montag looked at these men whose faces were sunburnt by a thousand real and ten thousand imaginary fires, whose work flushed their cheeks and fevered their eyes. These men who looked steadily into their platinum igniter flames as they lit their eternally burning black pipes. They and their charcoal hair and soot-coloured brows and bluish-ash-smeared cheeks where they had shaven close; but their heritage showed. Montag started up, his mouth opened. Had he ever seen a fireman that didn't have black hair, black brows, a fiery face, and a blue-steel shaved but unshaved look? These men were all mirror-images of himself! Were all firemen picked then for their looks as well as their proclivities? The colour of cinders andashaboutthem,andthecontinualsmellofburningfromtheirpipes.CaptainBeattythere,risingin

thunderheads of tobacco smoke. Beatty opening a fresh tobacco packet, crumpling the cellophane into a sound of fire.

Montag looked at the cards in his own hands. "I-I've been thinking. About the fire last week. About the man whose library we fixed. What happened to him?" "They took him screaming off to the asylum"

"He. wasn't insane."

Beatty arranged his cards quietly. "Any man's insane who thinks he can fool the Government and us."

"I've tried to imagine," said Montag, "just how it would feel. I mean to have firemen burn our houses and our books."

"We haven't any books."

"But if we did have some."

"You got some?"

Beatty blinked slowly.

"No." Montag gazed beyond them to the wall with the typed lists of a million forbidden books. Their names leapt in fire, burning down the years under his axe and his hose which sprayed not water but kerosene. "No." But in his mind, a cool wind started up and blew out of the ventilator grille at home, softly, softly, chilling his face. And, again, he saw himself in a green park talking to an old man, a very old man, and the wind from the park was cold, too.

Montag hesitated, "Was-was it always like this? The firehouse, our work? I mean, well, once upon a time..."

"Once upon a time!" Beatty said. "What kind of talk is THAT?"

Fool, thought Montag to himself, you'll give it away. At the last fire, a book of fairy tales, he'd glanced at a single line. "I mean," he said, "in the old days, before homes were completely fireproofed " Suddenly it seemed a much younger voice was speaking for him. He opened his mouth and it was Clarisse McClellan saying, "Didn't firemen prevent fires rather than stoke them up and get them going?"

"That's rich!" Stoneman and Black drew forth their rulebooks, which also contained brief histories of the Firemen of America, and laid them out where Montag, though long familiar with them, might read:

"Established, 1790, to burn English-influenced books in the Colonies. First Fireman: Benjamin Franklin."

RULE (1) Answer the alarm swiftly.

(2) Start the fire swiftly.

(3) Burn everything.

(4) Report back to firehouse immediately.

(5) Stand alert for other alarms. Everyone watched Montag. He did not move. The alarm sounded.

The bell in the ceiling kicked itself two hundred times. Suddenly there were four empty chairs. The cards fell in a flurry of snow. The brass pole shivered. The men were gone.

Montag sat in his chair. Below, the orange dragon coughed into life. Montag slid down the pole like a man in a dream.

The Mechanical Hound leapt up in its kennel, its eyes all green flame. "Montag, you forgot your helmet!" He seized it off the wall behind him, ran, leapt, and they were off, the night wind hammering about their siren scream and their mighty metal thunder !

It was a flaking three-storey house in the ancient part of the city, a century old if it was a day, but like all houses it had been given a thin fireproof plastic sheath many years ago, and this preservative shell seemed to be the only thing holding it in the sky.

"Here we are !"

The engine slammed to a stop. Beatty, Stoneman, and Black ran up the sidewalk, suddenly odious and fat in the plump fireproof slickers. Montag followed.

They crashed the front door and grabbed at a woman, though she was not running, she was not trying to escape. She was only standing, weaving from side to side, her eyes fixed upon a nothingness in the wall as if they had struck her a terrible blow upon the head. Her tongue was moving in her mouth, and her eyes seemed to be trying to remember something, and then they remembered and her tongue moved again:-- 'Play the man, Master Ridley; we shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out.' "

"Enough of that!" said Beatty. "Where are they?"

He slapped her face with amazing objectivity and repeated the question. The old woman's eyes came to a focus upon Beatty. "You know where they are or you wouldn't be here," she said. Stoneman held out the telephone alarm card with the complaint signed in telephone duplicate on the back "Have reason to suspect attic; 11 No. Elm, City. --- E. B."

"That would be Mrs. Blake, my neighbour;" said the woman, reading the initials. "All right, men, let's get 'em!"

Next thing they were up in musty blackness, swinging silver hatchets at doors that were, after all, unlocked, tumbling through like boys all rollick and shout. "Hey! " A fountain of books sprang down upon Montag as he climbed shuddering up the sheer stair-well. How inconvenient! Always before it had been like snuffing a candle. The police went first and adhesive-taped the victim's mouth and bandaged him off into their glittering beetle cars, so when you arrived you found an empty house. You weren't hurting anyone, you were hurting only things! And since things really couldn't be hurt, since things felt nothing, and things don't scream or whimper, as this woman might begin to scream and cry out, there was nothing to tease your conscience later. You were simply cleaning up. Janitorial work, essentially. Everything to its proper place. Quick with the kerosene! Who's got amatch!

But now, tonight, someone had slipped. This woman was spoiling the ritual. The men were making too much noise, laughing, joking to cover her terrible accusing silence below. She made the empty rooms roar with accusation and shake down a fine dust of guilt that was sucked in their nostrils as they plunged about. It was neither cricket nor correct. Montag felt an immense irritation. She shouldn't be here, on top of everything!

Books bombarded his shoulders, his arms, his upturned face A book alighted, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering. In the dim, wavering light, a page hung open and it was like a snowy feather, the words delicately painted thereon. In all the rush and fervour, Montag had only an instant to read a line, but it blazed in his mind for the next minute as if stamped there with fiery steel. "Time has fallen asleep in the afternoon sunshine." He dropped the book. Immediately, another fell into his arms.

"Montag, up here! "

Montag's hand closed like a mouth, crushed the book with wild devotion, with an insanity of mindlessness to his chest. The men above were hurling shovelfuls of magazines into the dusty air. They fell like slaughtered birds and the woman stood below, like a small girl, among the bodies.

Montag had done nothing. His hand had done it all, his hand, with a brain of its own, with a conscience and a curiosity in each trembling finger, had turned thief.. Now, it plunged the book back under his arm, pressed it tight to sweating armpit, rushed out empty, with a magician's flourish! Look here! Innocent! Look!

He gazed, shaken, at that white hand. He held it way out, as if he were far-sighted. He held it close, as if he were blind.

"Montag! "

He jerked about.

"Don't stand there, idiot!"

The books lay like great mounds of fishes left to dry. The men danced and slipped and fell over them. Titles glittered their golden eyes, falling, gone.

"Kerosene! They pumped the cold fluid from the numbered 451 tanks strapped to their shoulders.

They coated each book, they pumped rooms full of it.

They hurried downstairs, Montag staggered after them in the kerosene fumes.

"Come on, woman!"

The woman knelt among the books, touching the drenched leather and cardboard, reading the gilt titles with her fingers while her eyes accused Montag. "You can't ever have my books," she said.

"You know the law," said Beatty. "Where's your common sense? None of those books agree with each other. You've been locked up here for years with a regular damned Tower of Babel. Snap out of it! The people in those books never lived. Come on now!" She shook her head.

"The whole house is going up;" said Beatty,

The men walked clumsily to the door. They glanced back at Montag, who stood near the woman.

"You're not leaving her here?" he protested.

"She won't come."

"Force her, then!"

Beatty raised his hand in which was concealed the igniter. "We're due back at the house. Besides, these fanatics always try suicide; the pattern's familiar."

Montag placed his hand on the woman's elbow. "You can come with me."

"No," she said. "Thank you, anyway."

"I'm counting to ten," said Beatty. "One. Two."

"Please," said Montag.

"Go on," said the woman.

"Three. Four."

"Here." Montag pulled at the woman.

The woman replied quietly, "I want to stay here"

"Five. Six."

"You can stop counting," she said. She opened the fingers of one hand slightly and in the palm of the hand was a single slender object.

An ordinary kitchen match.

The sight of it rushed the men out and down away from the house. Captain Beatty, keeping his dignity, backed slowly through the front door, his pink face burnt and shiny from a thousand fires and night excitements. God, thought Montag, how true! Always at night the alarm comes. Never by day! Is it because the fire is prettier by night? More spectacle, a better show? The pink face of Beatty now showed the faintest panic in the door. The woman's hand twitched on the single matchstick. The fumes of kerosene bloomed up about her. Montag felt the hidden book pound like a heart against his chest.

"Go on," said the woman, and Montag felt himself back away and away out of the door, after Beatty, down the steps, across the lawn, where the path of kerosene lay like the track of some evil snail.

On the front porch where she had come to weigh them quietly with her eyes, her quietness a condemnation, the woman stood motionless.

Beatty flicked his fingers to spark the kerosene.

He was too late. Montag gasped.

The woman on the porch reached out with contempt for them all, and struck the kitchen match against the railing.

People ran out of houses all down the street.

They said nothing on their way back to the firehouse. Nobody looked at anyone else. Montag sat in the front seat with Beatty and Black. They did not even smoke their pipes. They sat there looking out of the front of the great salamander as they turned a corner and went silently on.

"Master Ridley," said Montag at last.

"What?" said Beatty.

"She said, 'Master Ridley.' She said some crazy thing when we came in the door. 'Play the man,' she said, 'Master Ridley.' Something, something, something."

" 'We shall this day light such a candle, by God's grace, in England, as I trust shall never be put out,'" said Beatty. Stoneman glanced over at the Captain, as did Montag, startled.

Beatty rubbed his chin. "A man named Latimer said that to a man named Nicholas Ridley, as they were being burnt alive at Oxford, for heresy, on October 16, 1555."

Montag and Stoneman went back to looking at the street as it moved under the engine wheels. "I'm full of bits and pieces," said Beatty. "Most fire captains have to be. Sometimes I surprise myself. WATCH it, Stoneman!"

Stoneman braked the truck.

"Damn!" said Beatty. "You've gone right by the corner where we turn for the firehouse." "Who is it?"

"Who would it be?" said Montag, leaning back against the closed door in the dark. His wife said, at last, "Well, put on the light."

"I don't want the light." "Come to bed."

He heard her roll impatiently; the bedsprings squealed. "Are you drunk?" she said.

So it was the hand that started it all. He felt one hand and then the other work his coat free and let it slump to the floor. He held his pants out into an abyss and let them fall into darkness. His hands had been infected, and soon it would be his arms. He could feel the poison working up his wrists and into his elbows and his shoulders, and then the jump-over from shoulder-blade to shoulder-blade like a spark leaping a gap. His hands were ravenous. And his eyes were beginning to feel hunger, as if they must look at something, anything, everything.

His wife said, "What are you doing?"

He balanced in space with the book in his sweating cold fingers.

A minute later she said, "Well, just don't stand there in the middle of the floor." He made a small sound.

"What?" she asked.

He made more soft sounds. He stumbled towards the bed and shoved the book clumsily under the cold pillow. He fell into bed and his wife cried out, startled. He lay far across the room from her, on a winter island separated by an empty sea. She talked to him for what seemed a long while and she talked about this and she talked about that and it was only words, like the words he had heard once in a nursery at a friend's house, a two-year-old child building word patterns, talking jargon, making pretty sounds in the air. But Montag said nothing and after a long while when he only made the small sounds, he felt her move in the room and come to his bed and stand over him and put her hand down to feel his cheek. He knew that when she pulled her hand away from his face it was wet.

Late in the night he looked over at Mildred. She was awake. There was a tiny dance of melody in the air, her Seashell was tamped in her ear again and she was listening to far people in far places, her eyes wide and staring at the fathoms of blackness above her in the ceiling.

Wasn't there an old joke about the wife who talked so much on the telephone that her desperate husband ran out to the nearest store and telephoned her to ask what was for dinner? Well, then, why didn't he buy himself an audio-Seashell broadcasting station and talk to his wife late at night, murmur, whisper, shout, scream, yell? But what would he whisper, what would he yell? What could he say?

And suddenly she was so strange he couldn't believe he knew her at all. He was in someone else's house, like those other jokes people told of the gentleman, drunk, coming home late at night, unlocking the wrong door, entering a wrong room, and bedding with a stranger and getting up early and going to work and neither of them the wiser.

"Millie.... ?" he whispered.

"What?"

"I didn't mean to startle you. What I want to know is"

"Well?"

"When did we meet. And where?"

"When did we meet for what?" she asked.

"I mean-originally."

He knew she must be frowning in the dark.

He clarified it. "The first time we ever met, where was it, and when?"

"Why, it was at --"

She stopped.

"I don't know," she said.

He was cold. "Can't you remember?"

"It's been so long."

"Only ten years, that's all, only ten!"

"Don't get excited, I'm trying to think." She laughed an odd little laugh that went up and up. "Funny, how funny, not to remember where or when you met your husband or wife."

He lay massaging his eyes, his brow, and the back of his neck, slowly. He held both hands over his eyes and applied a steady pressure there as if to crush memory into place. It was suddenly more important than any other thing in a life-time that he knew where he had met Mildred.

"It doesn't matter," She was up in the bathroom now, and he heard the water running, and the swallowing sound she made.

"No, I guess not," he said.

He tried to count how many times she swallowed and he thought of the visit from the two zinc-oxide-faced men with the cigarettes in their straight-lined mouths and the electronic-eyed snake winding down into the layer upon layer of night and stone and stagnant spring water, and he wanted to call out to her, how many have you taken TONIGHT! the capsules! how many will you take later and not know? and so on, every hour! or maybe not tonight, tomorrow night! And me not sleeping, tonight or tomorrow night or any night for a long while; now that this has started. And he thought of her lying on the bed with the two technicians standing straight over her, not bent with concern, but only standing straight, arms folded. And he remembered thinking then that if she died, he was certain he wouldn't cry. For it would be the dying of an unknown, a street face, a newspaper image, and it was suddenly so very wrong that he had begun to cry, not at death but at the thought of not crying at death, a silly empty man near a silly empty woman, while the hungry snake made her still more empty.

How do you get so empty? he wondered. Who takes it out of you? And that awful flower the other day, the dandelion! It had summed up everything, hadn't it? "What a shame! You're not in love with anyone !" And why not?

Well, wasn't there a wall between him and Mildred, when you came down to it? Literally not just one, wall but, so far, three! And expensive, too! And the uncles, the aunts, the cousins, the

nieces, the nephews, that lived in those walls, the gibbering pack of tree-apes that said nothing, nothing, nothing and said it loud, loud, loud. He had taken to calling them relatives from the very first. "How's Uncle Louis today?" "Who?" "And Aunt Maude?" The most significant memory he had of Mildred, really, was of a little girl in a forest without trees (how odd!) or rather a little girl lost on a plateau where there used to be trees (you could feel the memory of their shapes all about) sitting in the centre of the "living-room." The living-room; what a good job of labeling that was now. No matter when he came in, the walls were always talking to Mildred.

"Something must be done! I!"

"Yes, something must be done!"

"Well, let's not stand and talk!"

"Let's do it! "

"I'm so mad I could SPIT!"

What was it all about? Mildred couldn't say. Who was mad at whom? Mildred didn't quite know.

What were they going to do? Well, said Mildred, wait around and see.

He had waited around to see.

A great thunderstorm of sound gushed from the walls. Music bombarded him at such an immense volume that his bones were almost shaken from their tendons; he felt his jaw vibrate, his eyes wobble in his head. He was a victim of concussion. When it was all over he felt like a man who had been thrown from a cliff, whirled in a centrifuge and spat out over a waterfall that fell and fell into emptiness and emptiness and never-quite-touched-bottom-never-never-quite-no not quite-touched-bottom ... and you fell so fast you didn't touch the sides either ... never ... quite . . . touched . anything.

The thunder faded. The music died.

"There," said Mildred, and it was indeed remarkable. Something had happened. Even though the people in the walls of the room had barely moved, and nothing had really been settled, you had the impression that someone had turned on a washing-machine or sucked you up in a gigantic vacuum. You drowned in music and pure cacophony. He came out of the room sweating and on the point of collapse. Behind him, Mildred sat in her chair and the voices went on again: "Well, everything will be all right now," said an "aunt."

"Oh, don't be too sure," said a "cousin."

"Now, don't get angry!"

"Who's angry?"

"YOU are ! "

"You're mad!"

"Why should I be mad!"

"Because!"

"That's all very well," cried Montag, "but what are they mad about? Who are these people? Who's that man and who's that woman? Are they husband and wife, are they divorced, engaged, what? Good God, nothing's connected up."

"They--" said Mildred. "Well, they-they had this fight, you see. They certainly fight a lot. You should listen. I think they're married. Yes, they're married. Why?"

And if it was not the three walls soon to be four walls and the dream complete, then it was the open car and Mildred driving a hundred miles an hour across town, he shouting at her and she shouting back and both trying to hear what was said, but hearing only the scream of the car. "At least keep it down to the minimum!" he yelled: "What?" she cried. "Keep it down to fifty-five, the minimum!" he shouted. "The

what?" she shrieked. "Speed!" he shouted. And she pushed it up to one hundred and five miles an hour and tore the breath from his mouth. When they stepped out of the car, she had the Seashells stuffed in her ears. Silence. Only the wind blowing softly.

"Mildred." He stirred in bed.

He reached over and pulled one of the tiny musical insects out of her ear. "Mildred. Mildred?" "Yes." Her voice was faint.

He felt he was one of the creatures electronically inserted between the slots of the phono-colour walls, speaking, but the speech not piercing the crystal barrier. He could only pantomime, hoping she would turn his way and see him. They could not touch through the glass. "Mildred, do you know that girl I was telling you about?"

"What girl?" She was almost asleep.

"The girl next door."

"What girl next door?"

"You know, the high-school girl. Clarisse, her name is."

"Oh, yes," said his wife.

"I haven't seen her for a few days-four days to be exact. Have you seen her?"

"No."

"I've meant to talk to you about her. Strange."

"Oh, I know the one you mean."

"I thought you would."

"Her," said Mildred in the dark room.

"What about her?" asked Montag.

"I meant to tell you. Forgot. Forgot."

"Tell me now. What is it?"

"I think she's gone."

"Gone?"

"Whole family moved out somewhere. But she's gone for good. I think she's dead."

"We couldn't be talking about the same girl."

"No. The same girl. McClellan. McClellan, Run over by a car. Four days ago. I'm not sure. But I think she's dead. The family moved out anyway. I don't know. But I think she's dead." "You're not sure of it!"

"No, not sure. Pretty sure."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?"

"Forgot."

"Four days ago!"

"I forgot all about it."

"Four days ago," he said, quietly, lying there.

They lay there in the dark room not moving, either of them. "Good night," she said.

He heard a faint rustle. Her hands moved. The electric thimble moved like a praying mantis on the pillow, touched by her hand. Now it was in her ear again, humming. He listened and his wife was singing under her breath.

Outside the house, a shadow moved, an autumn wind rose up and faded away. But there was something else in the silence that he heard. It was like a breath exhaled upon the window. It was like a faint drift of greenish luminescent smoke, the motion of a single huge October leaf blowing across the lawn and away.

The Hound, he thought. It's out there tonight. It's out there now. If I opened the window . . .

He did not open the window.

He had chills and fever in the morning.

"You can't be sick," said Mildred.

He closed his eyes over the hotness. "Yes."

"But you were all right last night."

"No, I wasn't all right " He heard the "relatives" shouting in the parlour.

Mildred stood over his bed, curiously. He felt her there, he saw her without opening his eyes, her hair burnt by chemicals to a brittle straw, her eyes with a kind of cataract unseen but suspect far behind the pupils, the reddened pouting lips, the body as thin as a praying mantis from dieting, and her flesh like white bacon. He could remember her no other way. "Will you bring me aspirin and water?"

"You've got to get up," she said. "It's noon. You've slept five hours later than usual."

"Will you turn the parlour off?" he asked.

"That's my family."

"Will you turn it off for a sick man?"

"I'll turn it down."

She went out of the room and did nothing to the parlour and came back. "Is that better?"

"Thanks."

"That's my favourite programme," she said.

"What about the aspirin?"

"You've never been sick before." She went away again.

"Well, I'm sick now. I'm not going to work tonight. Call Beatty for me."

"You acted funny last night." She returned, humming.

"Where's the aspirin?" He glanced at the water-glass she handed him. "Oh." She walked to the bathroom again. "Did something happen?" "A fire, is all."

"I had a nice evening," she said, in the bathroom.

"What doing?"

"The parlour."

"What was on?"

"Programmes."

"What programmes?"

"Some of the best ever."

"Who?"

"Oh, you know, the bunch."

"Yes, the bunch, the bunch, the bunch." He pressed at the pain in his eyes and suddenly the odour of kerosene made him vomit.

Mildred came in, humming. She was surprised. "Why'd you do that?"

He looked with dismay at the floor. "We burned an old woman with her books."

"It's a good thing the rug's washable." She fetched a mop and worked on it. "I went to Helen's last night."

"Couldn't you get the shows in your own parlour?"

"Sure, but it's nice visiting."

She went out into the parlour. He heard her singing.

"Mildred?" he called.

She returned, singing, snapping her fingers softly. "Aren't you going to ask me about last night?" he said.

"What about it?"

"We burned a thousand books. We burned a woman."

"Well?"

The parlour was exploding with sound.

"We burned copies of Dante and Swift and Marcus Aurelius."

"Wasn't he a European?"

"Something like that."

"Wasn't he a radical?"

"I never read him."

"He was a radical." Mildred fiddled with the telephone. "You don't expect me to call Captain Beatty, do you?"

"You must! "

"Don't shout!"

"I wasn't shouting." He was up in bed, suddenly, enraged and flushed, shaking. The parlour roared in the hot air. "I can't call him. I can't tell him I'm sick." "Why?" "Because you're afraid," he thought. A child feigning illness, afraid to call because after a moment's discussion, the conversation would run so: "Yes, Captain, I feel better already. I'll be in at ten o'clock tonight."

"You're not sick," said Mildred.

Montag fell back in bed. He reached under his pillow. The hidden book was still there. "Mildred, how would it be if, well, maybe, I quit my job awhile?"

"You want to give up everything? After all these years of working, because, one night, some woman and her books--"

"You should have seen her, Millie! "

"She's nothing to me; she shouldn't have had books. It was her responsibility, she should have thought of that. I hate her. She's got you going and next thing you know we'll be out, no house, no job, nothing."

"You weren't there, you didn't see," he said. "There must be something in books, things we can't imagine, to make a woman stay in a burning house; there must be something there. You don't stay for nothing."

"She was simple-minded."

"She was as rational as you and I, more so perhaps, and we burned her."

"That's water under the bridge."

"No, not water; fire. You ever seen a burned house? It smoulders for days. Well, this fire'll last me the rest of my life. God! I've been trying to put it out, in my mind, all night. I'm crazy with trying."

"You should have thought of that before becoming a fireman."

"Thought! " he said. "Was I given a choice? My grandfather and father were firemen. In my sleep, I ran after them."

The parlour was playing a dance tune.

"This is the day you go on the early shift," said Mildred. "You should have gone two hours ago. I just noticed."

"It's not just the woman that died," said Montag. "Last night I thought about all the kerosene I've used in the past ten years. And I thought about books. And for the first time I realized that a man was behind each

one of the books. A man had to think them up. A man had to take a long time to put them down on paper. And I'd never even thought that thought before." He got out of bed.

"It took some man a lifetime maybe to put some of his thoughts down, looking around at the world and life, and then I came along in two minutes and boom! it's all over." "Let me alone," said Mildred. "I didn't do anything."

"Let you alone! That's all very well, but how can I leave myself alone? We need not to be let alone. We need to be really bothered once in a while. How long is it since you were really bothered? About something important, about something real?"

And then he shut up, for he remembered last week and the two white stones staring up at the ceiling and the pump-snake with the probing eye and the two soap-faced men with the cigarettes moving in their mouths when they talked. But that was another Mildred, that was a Mildred so deep inside this one, and so bothered, really bothered, that the two women had never met. He turned away.

Mildred said, "Well, now you've done it. Out front of the house. Look who's here." "I don't care."

"There's a Phoenix car just driven up and a man in a black shirt with an orange snake stitched on his arm coming up the front walk."

"Captain Beauty?" he said, "Captain Beatty."

Montag did not move, but stood looking into the cold whiteness of the wall immediately before him.

"Go let him in, will you? Tell him I'm sick."

"Tell him yourself!" She ran a few steps this way, a few steps that, and stopped, eyes wide, when the front door speaker called her name, softly, softly, Mrs. Montag, Mrs. Montag, someone here, someone here, Mrs. Montag, Mrs. Montag, someone's here. Fading.

Montag made sure the book was well hidden behind the pillow, climbed slowly back into bed, arranged the covers over his knees and across his chest, half-sitting, and after a while Mildred moved and went out of the room and Captain Beatty strolled in, his hands in his pockets. "Shut the 'relatives' up," said Beatty, looking around at everything except Montag and his wife.

This time, Mildred ran. The yammering voices stopped yelling in the parlour.

Captain Beatty sat down in the most comfortable chair with a peaceful look on his ruddy face.

He took time to prepare and light his brass pipe and puff out a great smoke cloud. "Just thought I'd come by and see how the sick manis."

"How'd you guess?"

Beatty smiled his smile which showed the candy pinkness of his gums and the tiny candy whiteness of his teeth. "I've seen it all. You were going to call for a night off." Montag sat in bed.

"Well," said Beatty, "take the night off!" He examined his eternal matchbox, the lid of which said GUARANTEED: ONE MILLION LIGHTS IN THIS IGNITER, and began to strike the chemical match abstractedly, blow out, strike, blow out, strike, speak a few words, blow out. He looked at the flame. He blew, he looked at the smoke. "When will you be well?" "Tomorrow. The next day maybe. First of the week."

Beatty puffed his pipe. "Every fireman, sooner or later, hits this. They only need understanding, to know how the wheels run. Need to know the history of our profession. They don't feed it to rookies like they used to. Damn shame." Puff. "Only fire chiefs remember it now." Puff. "I'll let you in on it."

Mildred fidgeted.

Beatty took a full minute to settle himself in and think back for what he wanted to say.

"When did it all start, you ask, this job of ours, how did it come about, where, when? Well, I'd say it really got started around about a thing called the Civil War. Even though our rule-book claims it was founded

earlier. The fact is we didn't get along well until photography came into its own. Then--motion pictures in the early twentieth century. Radio. Television. Things began to have mass."

Montag sat in bed, not moving.

"And because they had mass, they became simpler," said Beatty. "Once, books appealed to a few people, here, there, everywhere. They could afford to be different. The world was roomy. But then the world got full of eyes and elbows and mouths. Double, triple, quadruple population.

Films and radios, magazines, books levelled down to a sort of paste pudding norm, do you follow me?"

"I think so."

Beatty peered at the smoke pattern he had put out on the air. "Picture it. Nineteenth-century man with his horses, dogs, carts, slow motion. Then, in the twentieth century, speed up your camera. Books cut shorter. Condensations, Digests. Tabloids. Everything boils down to the gag, the snap ending."

"Snap ending." Mildred nodded.

"Classics cut to fit fifteen-minute radio shows, then cut again to fill a two-minute book column, winding up at last as a ten- or twelve-line dictionary resume. I exaggerate, of course. The dictionaries were for reference. But many were those whose sole knowledge of Hamlet (you know the title certainly, Montag; it is probably only a faint rumour of a title to you, Mrs. Montag) whose sole knowledge, as I say, of Hamlet was a one-page digest in a book that claimed: 'now at least you can read all the classics; keep up with your neighbours.' Do you see? Out of the nursery into the college and back to the nursery; there's your intellectual pattern for the past five centuries or more."

Mildred arose and began to move around the room, picking things up and putting them down. Beatty ignored her and continued "Speed up the film, Montag, quick. Click? Pic? Look, Eye, Now, Flick, Here, There, Swift, Pace, Up, Down, In, Out, Why, How, Who, What, Where, Eh? Uh! Bang! Smack! Wallop, Bing, Bong, Boom! Digest-digests, digest-digest-digests. Politics? One column, two sentences, a headline! Then, in mid-air, all vanishes! Whirl man's mind around about so fast under the pumping hands of publishers, exploiters, broadcasters, that the centrifuge flings off all unnecessary, time-wasting thought!"

Mildred smoothed the bedclothes. Montag felt his heart jump and jump again as she patted his pillow. Right now she was pulling at his shoulder to try to get him to move so she could take the pillow out and fix it nicely and put it back. And perhaps cry out and stare or simply reach down her hand and say, "What's this?" and hold up the hidden book with touching innocence.

"School is shortened, discipline relaxed, philosophies, histories, languages dropped, English and spelling gradually neglected, finally almost completely ignored. Life is immediate, the job counts, pleasure lies all about after work. Why learn anything save pressing buttons, pulling switches, fitting nuts and bolts?"

"Let me fix your pillow," said Mildred.

"No!" whispered Montag, "The zipper displaces the button and a man lacks just that much time to think while dressing at dawn, a philosophical hour, and thus a melancholy hour." Mildred said, "Here."

"Get away," said Montag.

"Life becomes one big pratfall, Montag; everything bang; boff, and wow!"

"Wow," said Mildred, yanking at the pillow.

"For God's sake, let me be!" cried Montag passionately.

Beatty opened his eyes wide.

Mildred's hand had frozen behind the pillow. Her fingers were tracing the book's outline and as the shape became familiar her face looked surprised and then stunned. Her mouth opened to ask a question . . .

"Empty the theatres save for clowns and furnish the rooms with glass walls and pretty colours running up and down the walls like confetti or blood or sherry or sauterne. You like baseball,

don't you, Montag?"

"Baseball's a fine game."

Now Beatty was almost invisible, a voice somewhere behind a screen of smoke "What's this?" asked Mildred, almost with delight. Montag heaved back against her arms. "What's this here?"

"Sit down!" Montag shouted. She jumped away, her hands empty. "We're talking ! "

Beatty went on as if nothing had happened. "You like bowling, don't you, Montag?"

"Bowling, yes."

"And golf?"

"Golf is a fine game."

"Basketball?"

"A fine game."

"Billiards, pool? Football?"

"Fine games, all of them."

"More sports for everyone, group spirit, fun, and you don't have to think, eh? Organize and organize and superorganize super-super sports. More cartoons in books. More pictures. The mind drinks less and less. Impatience. Highways full of crowds going somewhere, somewhere, somewhere, nowhere. The gasoline refugee. Towns turn into motels, people in nomadic surges from place to place, following the moon tides, living tonight in the room where you slept this noon and I the night before."

Mildred went out of the room and slammed the door. The parlour "aunts" began to laugh at the parlour "uncles.", "Now let's take up the minorities in our civilization, shall we? Bigger the population, the more minorities. Don't step on the toes of the dog?lovers, the cat?lovers, doctors, lawyers, merchants, chiefs, Mormons, Baptists, Unitarians, second?generation Chinese, Swedes, Italians, Germans, Texans, Brooklynites, Irishmen, people from Oregon or Mexico. The people in this book, this play, this TV serial are not meant to represent any actual painters, cartographers, mechanics anywhere. The bigger your market, Montag, the less you handle controversy, remember that! All the minor minor minorities with their navels to be kept clean. Authors, full of evil thoughts, lock up your typewriters. They did. Magazines became a nice blend of vanilla tapioca. Books, so the damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No wonder books stopped selling, the critics said. But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic?books survive. And the three?dimensional sex?magazines, of course. There you have it, Montag. It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, ortrade?journals."

"Yes, but what about the firemen, then?" asked Montag.

"Ah." Beatty leaned forward in the faint mist of smoke from his pipe. "What more easily explained and natural? With school turning out more runners, jumpers, racers, tinkers, grabbers, snatchers, fliers, and swimmers instead of examiners, critics, knowers, and imaginative creators, the word 'intellectual,' of course, became the swear word it deserved to be. You always dread the unfamiliar. Surely you remember the boy in your own school class who was exceptionally 'bright,' did most of the reciting and answering while the others sat like so many leaden idols, hating him. And wasn't it this bright boy you selected for beatings and tortures after hours? Of course it was. We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against. So! A book is a loaded gun in the house next door. Burn it. Take the shot from the weapon. Breach man's mind. Who knows who might be the target of the well-read man? Me? I won't stomach them for a minute. And so when houses were finally fireproofed completely, all over the world (you were correct in your assumption

the other night) there was no longer need of firemen for the old purposes. They were given the new job, as custodians of our peace of mind, the focus of our understandable and rightful dread of being inferior; official censors, judges, and executors. That's you, Montag, and that's me."

The door to the parlour opened and Mildred stood there looking in at them, looking at Beatty and then at Montag. Behind her the walls of the room were flooded with green and yellow and orange fireworks sizzling and bursting to some music composed almost completely of trap?drums, tom?toms, and cymbals. Her mouth moved and she was saying something but the sound covered it.

Beatty knocked his pipe into the palm of his pink hand, studied the ashes as if they were a symbol to be diagnosed and searched for meaning.

"You must understand that our civilization is so vast that we can't have our minorities upset and stirred. Ask yourself, What do we want in this country, above all? People want to be happy, isn't that right? Haven't you heard it all your life? I want to be happy, people say. Well, aren't they?

Don't we keep them moving, don't we give them fun? That's all we live for, isn't it? For pleasure, for titillation? And you must admit our culture provides plenty of these." "Yes."

Montag could lip?read what Mildred was saying in the doorway. He tried not to look at her mouth, because then Beatty might turn and read what was there, too.

"Coloured people don't like Little Black Sambo. Burn it. White people don't feel good about Uncle Tom's Cabin. Burn it. Someone's written a book on tobacco and cancer of the lungs? The cigarette people are weeping? Bum the book. Serenity, Montag. Peace, Montag. Take your fight outside. Better yet, into the incinerator. Funerals are unhappy and pagan? Eliminate them, too. Five minutes after a person is dead he's on his way to the Big Flue, the Incinerators serviced by helicopters all over the country. Ten minutes after death a man's a speck of black dust. Let's not quibble over individuals with memoriams. Forget them. Burn them all, burn everything. Fire is bright and fire is clean."

The fireworks died in the parlour behind Mildred. She had stopped talking at the same time; a miraculous coincidence. Montag held his breath.

"There was a girl next door," he said, slowly. "She's gone now, I think, dead. I can't even remember her face. But she was different. How? how did she happen?"

Beatty smiled. "Here or there, that's bound to occur. Clarisse McClellan? We've a record on her family. We've watched them carefully. Heredity and environment are funny things. You can't rid yourselves of all the odd ducks in just a few years. The home environment can undo a lot you try to do at school. That's why we've lowered the kindergarten age year after year until now we're almost snatching them from the cradle. We had some false alarms on the McClellans, when they lived in Chicago. Never found a book. Uncle had a mixed record; anti?social. The girl? She was a time bomb. The family had been feeding her subconscious, I'm sure, from what I saw of her school record. She didn't want to know how a thing was done, but why. That can be embarrassing. You ask Why to a lot of things and you wind up very unhappy indeed, if you keep it. The poor girl's better off dead."

"Yes, dead."

"Luckily, queer ones like her don't happen, often. We know how to nip most of them in the bud, early. You can't build a house without nails and wood. If you don't want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don't want a man unhappy politically, don't give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war. If the Government is inefficient, top?heavy, and tax?mad, better it be all those than that people worry over it. Peace, Montag. Give the people contests they win by remembering the words to more popular songs or the names of state capitals or how much corn Iowa grew last year. Cram them full of non?combustible data, chock them so damned full of 'facts' they feel stuffed, but absolutely `brilliant' with information. Then they'll feel they're thinking, they'll get a sense of motion without moving. And they'll be happy, because facts of that sort don't change. Don't give them any slippery stuff like philosophy or sociology to tie things up with. That way lies

melancholy. Any man who can take a TV wall apart and put it back together again, and most men can nowadays, is happier than any man who tries to slide?rule, measure, and equate the universe, which just won't be measured or equated without making man feel bestial and lonely. I know, I've tried it; to hell with it. So bring on your clubs and parties, your acrobats and magicians, your dare-devils, jet cars, motor?cycle helicopters, your sex and heroin, more of everything to do with automatic reflex. If the drama is bad, if the film says nothing, if the play is hollow, sting me with the theremin, loudly. I'll think I'm responding to the play, when it's only a tactile reaction to vibration. But I don't care. I just like solid entertainment."

Beatty got up. "I must be going. Lecture's over. I hope I've clarified things. The important thing for you to remember, Montag, is we're the Happiness Boys, the Dixie Duo, you and I and the others. We stand against the small tide of those who want to make everyone unhappy with conflicting theory and thought. We have our fingers in the dyke. Hold steady. Don't let the torrent of melancholy and drear philosophy drown our world. We depend on you. I don't think you realize how important you are, to our happy world as it stands now."

Beatty shook Montag's limp hand. Montag still sat, as if the house were collapsing about him and he could not move, in the bed. Mildred had vanished from the door.

"One last thing," said Beatty. "At least once in his career, every fireman gets an itch. What do the books say, he wonders. Oh, to scratch that itch, eh? Well, Montag, take my word for it, I've had to read a few in my time, to know what I was about, and the books say nothing! Nothing you can teach or believe. They're about non?existent people, figments of imagination, if they're fiction. And if they're non?fiction, it's worse, one professor calling another an idiot, one philosopher screaming down another's gullet. All of them running about, putting out the stars and extinguishing the sun. You come away lost."

"Well, then, what if a fireman accidentally, really not, intending anything, takes a book home with him?"

Montag twitched. The open door looked at him with its great vacant eye.

"A natural error. Curiosity alone," said Beatty. "We don't get over?anxious or mad. We let the fireman keep the book twenty?four hours. If he hasn't burned it by then, we simply come and burn it for him."

"Of course." Montag's mouth was dry.

"Well, Montag. Will you take another, later shift, today? Will we see you tonight perhaps?" "I don't know," said Montag.

"What?" Beatty looked faintly surprised.

Montag shut his eyes. "I'll be in later. Maybe."

"We'd certainly miss you if you didn't show," said Beatty, putting his pipe in his pocket thoughtfully.

I'll never come in again, thought Montag.

"Get well and keep well," said Beatty.

He turned and went out through the open door.

Montag watched through the window as Beatty drove away in his gleaming yellow?flame?coloured beetle with the black, char?coloured tyres.

Across the street and down the way the other houses stood with their flat fronts. What was it Clarisse had said one afternoon? "No front porches. My uncle says there used to be front porches. And people sat there sometimes at night, talking when they wanted to talk, rocking, and not talking when they didn't want to talk. Sometimes they just sat there and thought about things, turned things over. My uncle says the architects got rid of the front porches because they didn't look well. But my uncle says that was merely rationalizing it; the real reason, hidden underneath, might be they didn't want people sitting like that, doing nothing, rocking, talking; that was the wrong kind of social life. People talked too much. And they had time to think. So they ran off with the porches. And the gardens, too. Not many gardens any more to sit around in. And look at the furniture. No rocking?chairs any more. They're too comfortable. Get people up and running around. My uncle says . . . and . . . my uncle . . . and . . . my uncle . . ." Her voice faded.

Montag turned and looked at his wife, who sat in the middle of the parlour talking to an announcer, who in turn was talking to her. "Mrs. Montag," he was saying. This, that and the other. "Mrs. Montag?" Something else and still another. The converter attachment, which had cost them one hundred dollars, automatically supplied her name whenever the announcer addressed his anonymous audience, leaving a blank where the proper syllables could be filled in. A special spot?wavex?scrambler also caused his televised image, in the area immediately about his lips, to mouth the vowels and consonants beautifully. He was a friend, no doubt of it, a good friend. "Mrs. Montag?now look righthere."

Her head turned. Though she quite obviously was not listening.

Montag said, "It's only a step from not going to work today to not working tomorrow, to not working at the firehouse ever again." , "You are going to work tonight, though, aren't you?" said Mildred.

"I haven't decided. Right now I've got an awful feeling I want to smash things and kill things :'

"Go take the beetle."

"No thanks."

"The keys to the beetle are on the night table. I always like to drive fast when I feel that way. You get it up around ninetyfive and you feel wonderful. Sometimes I drive all night and come back and you don't know it. It's fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs. Go take the beetle."

"No, I don't want to, this time. I want to hold on to this funny thing. God, it's gotten big on me. I don't know what it is. I'm so damned unhappy, I'm os mad, and I don't know why I feel like I'm putting on weight. I feel fat. I feel like I've been saving up a lot of things, and don't know what. I might even start reading books."

"They'd put you in jail, wouldn't they?" She looked at him as if he were behind the glass wall. He began to put on his clothes, moving restlessly about the bedroom. "Yes, and it might be a good idea. Before I hurt someone. Did you hear Beatty? Did you listen to him? He knows all the answers. He's right. Happiness is important. Fun is everything. And yet I kept sitting there saying to myself, I'm not happy, I'm not happy."

"I am." Mildred's mouth beamed. "And proud of it."

"I'm going to do something," said Montag. "I don'teven know what yet, but I'm going to do something big."

"I'm tired of listening to this junk," said Mildred, turning from him to the announcer again Montag touched the volume control in the wall and the announcer was speechless. "Millie?" He paused. "This is your house as well as mine. I feel it's only fair that I tell you something now. I should have told you before, but I wasn't even admitting it to myself. I have something I want you to see, something I've put away and hid during the past year, now and again, once in a while, I didn't know why, but I did it and I never told you."

He took hold of a straight?backed chair and moved it slowly and steadily into the hall near the front door and climbed up on it and stood for a moment like a statue on a pedestal, his wife standing under him, waiting. Then he reached up and pulled back the grille of the air?conditioning system and reached far back inside to the right and moved still another sliding sheet of metal and took out a book. Without looking at it he dropped it to the floor.

He put his hand back up and took out two books and moved his hand down and dropped the two books to the floor. He kept moving his hand and dropping books, small ones, fairly large ones, yellow, red, green ones. When he was done he looked down upon some twenty books lying at his wife's feet.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I didn't really think. But now it looks as if we're in this together."

Mildred backed away as if she were suddenly confronted by a pack of mice that had come up out of the floor. He could hear her breathing rapidly and her face was pale and her eyes were fastened wide. She said his name over, twice, three times. Then moaning, she ran forward, seized a book and ran toward the kitchen incinerator.

He caught her, shrieking. He held her and she tried to fight away from him, scratching.

"No, Millie, no! Wait! Stop it, will you? You don't know . . . stop it!" He slapped her face, he grabbed her again and shook her.

She said his name and began to cry.

"Millie! " he said. "Listen. Give me a second, will you? We can't do anything. We can't burn these. I want to look at them, at least look at them once. Then if what the Captain says is true, we'll burn them together, believe me, we'll burn them together. You must help me." He looked down into her face and took hold of her chin and held her firmly. He was looking not only at her, but for himself and what he must do, in her face. "Whether we like this or not, we're in it. I've never asked for much from you in all these years, but I ask it now, I plead for it. We've got to start somewhere here, figuring out why we're in such a mess, you and the medicine at night, and the car, and me and my work. We're heading right for the cliff, Millie. God, I don't want to go over. This isn't going to be easy. We haven't anything to go on, but maybe we can piece it out and figure it and help each other. I need you so much right now, I can't tell you. If you love me at all you'll put up with this, twenty?four, forty?eight hours, that's all I ask, then it'll be over. I promise, I swear! And if there is something here, just one little thing out of a whole mess of things, maybe we can pass it on to someone else."

She wasn't fighting any more, so he let her go. She sagged away from him and slid down the wall, and sat on the floor looking at the books. Her foot touched one and she saw this and pulled her foot away.

"That woman, the other night, Millie, you weren't there. You didn't see her face. And Clarisse.

You never talked to her. I talked to her. And men like Beatty are afraid of her. I can't understand it. Why should they be so afraid of someone like her? But I kept putting her alongside the firemen in the house last night, and I suddenly realized I didn't like them at all, and I didn't like myself at all any more. And I thought maybe it would be best if the firemen themselves were burnt."

"Guy! "

The front door voice called softly:

"Mrs. Montag, Mrs. Montag, someone here, someone here, Mrs. Montag, Mrs. Montag, someone here."

Softly.

They turned to stare at the door and the books toppled everywhere, everywhere in heaps.

"Beatty!" said Mildred.

"It can't be him."

"He's come back!" she whispered.

The front door voice called again softly. "Someone here . . ."

"We won't answer." Montag lay back against the wall and then slowly sank to a crouching position and began to nudge the books, bewilderedly, with his thumb, his forefinger. He was shivering and he wanted above all to shove the books up through the ventilator again, but he knew he could not face Beatty again. He crouched and then he sat and the voice of the front door spoke again, more insistently. Montag picked a single small volume from the floor. "Where do we begin?" He opened the book half?way and peered at it. "We begin by beginning, I guess." "He'll come in," said Mildred, "and burn us and the books!"

The front door voice faded at last. There was a silence. Montag felt the presence of someone beyond the door, waiting, listening. Then the footsteps going away down the walk and over the lawn.

"Let's see what this is," said Montag.

He spoke the words haltingly and with a terrible selfconsciousness. He read a dozen pages here and there and came at last to this:

" `It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death rather than submit to break eggs at the smaller end.'"

Mildred sat across the hall from him. "What does it mean? It doesn't mean anything! The Captain was right! "

"Here now," said Montag. "We'll start over again, at the beginning."

PART II

THE SIEVE AND THE SAND

THEY read the long afternoon through, while the cold November rain fell from the sky upon the quiet house. They sat in the hall because the parlour was so empty and grey-looking without its walls lit with orange and yellow confetti and sky-rockets and women in gold-mesh dresses and men in black velvet pulling one-hundred-pound rabbits from silver hats. The parlour was dead and Mildred kept peering in at it with a blank expression as Montag paced the floor and came back and squatted down and read a page as many as ten times, aloud.

" `We cannot tell the precise moment when friendship is formed. As in filling a vessel drop by drop, there is at last a drop which makes it run over, so in a series of kindnesses there is at last one which makes the heart run over.'"

Montag sat listening to the rain.

"Is that what it was in the girl next door? I've tried so hard to figure." "She's dead. Let's talk about someone alive, for goodness'sake."

Montag did not look back at his wife as he went trembling along the hall to the kitchen, where he stood a long .time watching the rain hit the windows before he came back down the hall in the grey light, waiting for the tremble to subside.

He opened another book.

" `That favourite subject, Myself.'"

He squinted at the wall. " `The favourite subject, Myself.' " "I understand that one," said Mildred.

"But Clarisse's favourite subject wasn't herself. It was everyone else, and me. She was the first person in a good many years I've really liked. She was the first person I can remember who looked straight at me as if I counted." He lifted the two books. "These men have been dead a long time, but I know their words point, one way or another, to Clansse." Outside the front door, in the rain, a faintscratching.

Montag froze. He saw Mildred thrust herself back to the wall and gasp.

"I shut it off."

"Someone--the door--why doesn't the door-voice tell us--"

Under the door-sill, a slow, probing sniff, an exhalation of electric steam. Mildred laughed. "It's only a dog, that's what! Youwant me to shoo him away?" "Stay where youare!"

Silence. The cold rain falling. And the smell of blue electricity blowing under the locked door.

"Let's get back to work," said Montag quietly.

Mildred kicked at a book. "Books aren't people. You read and I look around, but there isn't anybody!"

He stared at the parlour that was dead and grey as the waters of an ocean that might teem with life if they switched on the electronic sun.

"Now," said Mildred, "my `family' is people. They tell me things; I laugh, they laugh! And the colours!"

"Yes, I know."

"And besides, if Captain Beatty knew about those books--" She thought about it. Her face grew amazed and then horrified. "He might come and bum the house and the `family.' That's awful! Think of our investment. Why should I read? What for?"

"What for! Why!" said Montag. "I saw the damnedest snake in the world the other night. It was dead but it was alive. It could see but it couldn't see. You want to see that snake. It's at Emergency Hospital where they filed a report on all the junk the snake got out of you! Would you like to go and check their file? Maybe you'd look under Guy Montag or maybe under Fear or War. Would you like to go to that house that burnt last night? And rake ashes for the bones of the woman who set fire to her own house! What about Clarisse McClellan, where do we look for her? The morgue! Listen!"

The bombers crossed the sky and crossed the sky over the house, gasping, murmuring, whistling like an immense, invisible fan, circling in emptiness.

"Jesus God," said Montag. "Every hour so many damn things in the sky! How in hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why doesn't someone want to talk about it? We've started and won two atomic wars since 1960. Is it because we're having so much fun at home we've forgotten the world? Is it because we're so rich and the rest of the world's so poor and we just don't care if they are? I've heard rumours; the world is starving, but we're well-fed. Is it true, the world works hard and we play? Is that why we're hated so much? I've heard the rumours about hate, too, once in a long while, over the years. Do you know why? I don't, that's sure! Maybe the books can get us half out of the cave. They just might stop us from making the same damn insane mistakes! I don't hear those idiot bastards in your parlour talking about it. God, Millie, don't you see? An hour a day, two hours, with these books, and maybe..." The telephone rang. Mildred snatched the phone.

"Ann!" She laughed. "Yes, the White Clown's on tonight!"

Montag walked to the kitchen and threw the book down. "Montag," he said, "you're really stupid.

Where do we go from here? Do we turn the books in, forget it?" He opened the book to read over Mildred's laughter.

Poor Millie, he thought. Poor Montag, it's mud to you, too. But where do you get help, where do you find a teacher this late?

Hold on. He shut his eyes. Yes, of course. Again he found himself thinking of the green park a year ago. The thought had been with him many times recently, but now he remembered how it was that day in the city park when he had seen that old man in the black suit hide something, quickly in his coat.

... The old man leapt up as if to run. And Montag said, "Wait!"

"I haven't done anything!" cried the old man trembling.

"No one said you did."

They had sat in the green soft light without saying a word for a moment, and then Montag talked about the weather, and then the old man responded with a pale voice. It was a strange quiet meeting. The old man admitted to being a retired English professor who had been thrown out upon the world forty years ago when the last liberal arts college shut for lack of students and patronage. His name was Faber, and when he finally lost his fear of Montag, he talked in a cadenced voice, looking at the sky and the trees and the green park, and when an hour had passed he said something to Montag and Montag sensed it was a rhymeless poem. Then the old man grew even more courageous and said something else and that was a poem, too. Faber held his hand over his left coat-pocket and spoke these words gently, and Montag knew if he reached out, he might pull a book of poetry from the man's coat. But he did not reach out. His hands stayed on his knees, numbed and useless. "I don't talk things, sir," said Faber. "I talk the meaning of things. I sit here and know I'm alive."

That was all there was to it, really. An hour of monologue, a poem, a comment, and then without even acknowledging the fact that Montag was a fireman, Faber with a certain trembling, wrote his address on a slip of paper. "For your file," he said, "in case you decide to be angry with me."

"I'm not angry," Montag said, surprised.

Mildred shrieked with laughter in the hall.

Montag went to his bedroom closet and flipped through his file-wallet to the heading: FUTURE INVESTIGATIONS (?). Faber's name was there. He hadn't turned it in and he hadn't erased it. He dialled the call on a secondary phone. The phone on the far end of the line called Faber's name a dozen times before the professor answered in a faint voice. Montag identified himself and was met with a lengthy silence. "Yes, Mr. Montag?"

"Professor Faber, I have a rather odd question to ask. How many copies of the Bible are left in this country?"

"I don't know what you're talking about! "

"I want to know if there are any copies left at all."

"This is some sort of a trap! I can't talk to just anyone on the phone!"

"How many copies of Shakespeare and Plato?"

"None ! You know as well as I do. None!"

Faber hung up.

Montag put down the phone. None. A thing he knew of course from the firehouse listings. But somehow he had wanted to hear it from Faberhimself.

In the hall Mildred's face was suffused with excitement. "Well, the ladies are coming over!"

Montag showed her a book. "This is the Old and New Testament, and-""Don't start that again!"

"It might be the last copy in this part of the world."

"You've got to hand it back tonight, don't you know? Captain Beatty knows you've got it, doesn't he?"

"I don't think he knows which book I stole. But how do I choose a substitute? Do I turn in Mr. Jefferson? Mr. Thoreau? Which is least valuable? If I pick a substitute and Beatty does know which book I stole, he'll guess we've an entire library here!"

Mildred's mouth twitched. "See what you're doing? You'll ruin us! Who's more important, me or that Bible?" She was beginning to shriek now, sitting there like a wax doll melting in its own heat.

He could hear Beatty's voice. "Sit down, Montag. Watch. Delicately, like the petals of a flower. Light the first page, light the second page. Each becomes a black butterfly. Beautiful, eh? Light the third page from the second and so on, chainsmoking, chapter by chapter, all the silly things the words mean, all the false promises, all the second-hand notions and time-worn philosophies." There sat Beatty, perspiring gently, the floor littered with swarms of black moths that had died in a single storm. Mildred stopped screaming as quickly as she started. Montag was not listening. "There's only one thing to do," he said. "Some time before tonight when I give the book to Beatty, I've got to have a duplicate made."

"You'll be here for the White Clown tonight, and the ladies coming over?" cried Mildred. Montag stopped at the door, with his back turned. "Millie?" A silence "What?"

"Millie? Does the White Clown love you?"

No answer.

"Millie, does--" He licked his lips. "Does your `family' love you, love you very much, love you with all their heart and soul, Millie?"

He felt her blinking slowly at the back of his neck.

"Why'd you ask a silly question like that?"

He felt he wanted to cry, but nothing would happen to his eyes or his mouth.

"If you see that dog outside," said Mildred, "give him a kick for me."

He hesitated, listening at the door. He opened it and stepped out.

The rain had stopped and the sun was setting in the clear sky. The street and the lawn and the porch were empty. He let his breath go in a great sigh. He slammed the door.

He was on the subway.

I'm numb, he thought. When did the numbness really begin in my face? In my body? The night I kicked the pill-bottle in the dark, like kicking a buried mine.

The numbness will go away, he thought. It'll take time, but I'll do it, or Faber will do it for me. Someone somewhere will give me back the old face and the old hands the way they were. Even the smile, he thought, the old burnt-in smile, that's gone. I'm lost without it.

The subway fled past him, cream-tile, jet-black, cream-tile, jet-black, numerals and darkness, more darkness and the total adding itself.

Once as a child he had sat upon a yellow dune by the sea in the middle of the blue and hot summer day, trying to fill a sieve with sand, because some cruel cousin had said, "Fill this sieve and you'll get a dime!" And the faster he poured, the faster it sifted through with a hot whispering. His hands were tired, the sand was boiling, the sieve was empty. Seated there in the midst of July, without a sound, he felt the tears move down his cheeks.

Now as the vacuum-underground rushed him through the dead cellars of town, jolting him, he remembered the terrible logic of that sieve, and he looked down and saw that he was carrying the Bible open. There were people in the suction train but he held the book in his hands and the silly thought came to him, if you read fast and read all, maybe some of the sand will stay in the sieve. But he read and the words fell through, and he thought, in a few hours, there will be Beatty, and here will be me handing this over, so no phrase must escape me, each line must be memorized. I will myself to do it.

He clenched the book in his fists.

Trumpets blared.

"Denham's Dentifrice."

Shut up, thought Montag. Consider the lilies of the field.

"Denham's Dentifrice."

They toil not--"Denham's--"Consider the lilies of the field, shut up, shut up.

"Dentifrice ! "

He tore the book open and flicked the pages and felt them as if he were blind, he picked at the shape of the individual letters, not blinking.

"Denham's. Spelled : D-E-N "

They toil not, neither do they . . .

A fierce whisper of hot sand through empty sieve.

"Denham's does it!"

Consider the lilies, the lilies, the lilies..."Denham's dental detergent."

"Shut up, shut up, shut up!" It was a plea, a cry so terrible that Montag found himself on his feet, the shocked inhabitants of the loud car staring, moving back from this man with the insane, gorged face, the gibbering, dry mouth, the flapping book in his fist. The people who had been sitting a moment before, tapping their feet to the rhythm of Denham's Dentifrice, Denham's Dandy Dental Detergent, Denham's Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice, one two, one two three, one two, one two three. The people whose mouths had been faintly twitching the words Dentifrice Dentifrice Dentifrice. The train radio vomited upon Montag, in retaliation, a great ton-load of music made of tin, copper, silver, chromium, and brass. The people were pounded into submission; they did not run, there was no place to run; the great air-train fell down its shaft in the earth.

"Lilies of the field." "Denham's."

"Lilies, I said!"

The people stared.

"Call the guard."

"The man's off--"

"Knoll View!"

The train hissed to its stop.

"Knoll View!" A cry.

"Denham's." A whisper.

Montag's mouth barely moved. "Lilies..."

The train door whistled open. Montag stood. The door gasped, started shut. Only then did he leap past the other passengers, screaming in his mind, plunge through the slicing door only in time. He ran on the white tiles up through the tunnels, ignoring the escalators, because he wanted to feel his feet move, arms swing, lungs clench, unclench, feel his throat go raw with air. A voice drifted after him, "Denham's Denham's Denham's," the train hissed like a snake. The train vanished in its hole.

"Who is it?"

"Montag out here."

"What do you want?"

"Let mein."

"I haven't done anything I"

"I'm alone, dammit ! "

"You swear it?"

"I swear!"

The front door opened slowly. Faber peered out, looking very old in the light and very fragile and very much afraid. The old man looked as if he had not been out of the house in years. He and the white plaster walls inside were much the same. There was white in the flesh of his mouth and his cheeks and his hair was white and his eyes had faded, with white in the vague blueness there.

Then his eyes touched on the book under Montag's arm and he did not look so old any more and not quite as fragile. Slowly his fear went.

"I'm sorry. One has to be careful."

He looked at the book under Montag's arm and could not stop. "So it's true."

Montag stepped inside. The door shut.

"Sit down." Faber backed up, as if he feared the book might vanish if he took his eyes from it.

Behind him, the door to a bedroom stood open, and in that room a litter of machinery and steel tools was strewn upon a desk-top. Montag had only a glimpse, before Faber, seeing Montag's attention diverted, turned quickly and shut the bedroom door and stood holding the knob with a trembling hand. His gaze returned unsteadily to Montag, who was now seated with the book in his lap. "The book-where did you-?"

"I stole it."

Faber, for the first time, raised his eyes and looked directly into Montag's face. "You're brave." "No," said Montag. "My wife's dying. A friend of mine's already dead. Someone who may have been a friend was burnt less than twenty-four hours ago. You're the only one I knew might help me. To see. To see. ."

Faber's hands itched on his knees. "May I?"

"Sorry." Montag gave him the book.

"It's been a long time. I'm not a religious man. But it's been a long time." Faber turned the pages, stopping here and there to read. "It's as good as I remember. Lord, how they've changed it- in our 'parlours' these days. Christ is one of the 'family' now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we've

dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He's a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn't making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshipper absolutely needs." Faber sniffed the book. "Do you know that books smell like nutmeg or some spice from a foreign land? I loved to smell them when I was a boy. Lord, there were a lot of lovely books once, before we let them go." Faber turned the pages. "Mr. Montag, you are looking at a coward. I saw the way things were going, a long time back. I said nothing. I'm one of the innocents who could have spoken up and out when no one would listen to the 'guilty,' but I did not speak and thus became guilty myself. And when finally they set the structure to burn the books, using the, firemen, I grunted a few times and subsided, for there were no others grunting or yelling with me, by then. Now, it's too late." Faber closed the Bible. "Well--suppose you tell me why you came here?"

"Nobody listens any more. I can't talk to the walls because they're yelling at me. I can't talk to my wife; she listens to the walls. I just want someone to hear what I have to say. And maybe if I talk long enough, it'll make sense. And I want you to teach me to understand what I read."

Faber examined Montag's thin, blue-jowled face. "How did you get shaken up? What knocked the torch out of your hands?"

"I don't know. We have everything we need to be happy, but we aren't happy. Something's missing. I looked around. The only thing I positively knew was gone was the books I'd burned in ten or twelve years. So I thought books might help."

"You're a hopeless romantic," said Faber. "It would be funny if it were not serious. It's not books you need, it's some of the things that once were in books. The same things could be in the 'parlour families' today. The same infinite detail and awareness could be projected through the radios and televisions, but are not. No, no, it's not books at all you're looking for! Take it where you can find it, in old phonograph records, old motion pictures, and in old friends; look for it in nature and look for it in yourself. Books were only one type of receptacle where we stored a lot of things we were afraid we might forget. There is nothing magical in them at all. The magic is only in what books say, how they stitched the patches of the universe together into one garment for us. Of course you couldn't know this, of course you still can't understand what I mean when I say all this. You are intuitively right, that's what counts. Three things are missing.

"Number one: Do you know why books such as this are so important? Because they have quality. And what does the word quality mean? To me it means texture. This book has pores. It has features. This book can go under the microscope. You'd find life under the glass, streaming past in infinite profusion. The more pores, the more truthfully recorded details of life per square inch you can get on a sheet of paper, the more 'literary' you are. That's my definition, anyway. Telling detail. Fresh detail. The good writers touch life often. The mediocre ones run a quick hand over her. The bad ones rape her and leave her for the flies.

"So now do you see why books are hated and feared? They show the pores in the face of life.

The comfortable people want only wax moon faces, poreless, hairless, expressionless. We are living in a time when flowers are trying to live on flowers, instead of growing on good rain and black loam. Even fireworks, for all their prettiness, come from the chemistry of the earth. Yet somehow we think we can grow, feeding on flowers and fireworks, without completing the cycle back to reality. Do you know the legend of Hercules and Antaeus, the giant wrestler, whose strength was incredible so long as he stood firmly on the earth. But when he was held, rootless, in mid-air, by Hercules, he perished easily. If there isn't something in that legend for us today, in this city, in our time, then I am completely insane. Well, there we have the first thing I said we needed. Quality, texture of information."

"And the second?"

"Leisure."

"Oh, but we've plenty of off-hours."

"Off-hours, yes. But time to think? If you're not driving a hundred miles an hour, at a clip where you can't think of anything else but the danger, then you're playing some game or sitting in some room where you can't argue with the four-wall television. Why? The television is 'real.' It is immediate, it has dimension. It tells you what to think and blasts it in. It must be, right. It seems so right. It rushes you on so quickly to its own conclusions your mind hasn't time to protest, 'What nonsense!'"

"Only the 'family' is 'people.'"

"I beg your pardon?"

"My wife says books aren't 'real.'"

"Thank God for that. You can shut them, say, 'Hold on a moment.' You play God to it. But who has ever torn himself from the claw that encloses you when you drop a seed in a TV parlour? It grows you any shape it wishes! It is an environment as real as the world. It becomes and is the truth. Books can be beaten down with reason. But with all my knowledge and scepticism, I have never been able to argue with a one-hundred-piece symphony orchestra, full colour, three dimensions, and I being in and part of those incredible parlours. As you see, my parlour is nothing but four plaster walls. And here " He held out two small rubber plugs. "For my ears when I ride the subway-jets."

"Denham's Dentifrice; they toil not, neither do they spin," said Montag, eyes shut. "Where do we go from here? Would books help us?"

"Only if the third necessary thing could be given us. Number one, as I said, quality of information. Number two: leisure to digest it. And number three: the right to carry out actions based on what we learn from the inter-action of the first two. And I hardly think a very old man and a fireman turned sour could do much this late in the game..." "I can get books."

"You're running a risk."

"That's the good part of dying; when you've nothing to lose, you run any risk you want."

"There, you've said an interesting thing," laughed Faber, "without having read it!"

"Are things like that in books. But it came off the top of my mind!"

"All the better. You didn't fancy it up for me or anyone, even yourself."

Montag leaned forward. "This afternoon I thought that if it turned out that books were worth while, we might get a press and print some extra copies--"

"We?" "You and I"

"Oh, no ! " Faber sat up.

"But let me tell you my plan---"

"If you insist on telling me, I must ask you to leave." "But aren't you interested?"

"Not if you start talking the sort of talk that might get me burnt for my trouble. The only way I could possibly listen to you would be if somehow the fireman structure itself could be burnt. Now if you suggest that we print extra books and arrange to have them hidden in firemen's houses all over the country, so that seeds of suspicion would be sown among these arsonists, bravo, I'd say!"

"Plant the books, turn in an alarm, and see the firemen's houses bum, is that what you mean?" Faber raised his brows and looked at Montag as if he were seeing a new man. "I was joking." "If you thought it would be a plan worth trying, I'd have to take your word it would help."

"You can't guarantee things like that! After all, when we had all the books we needed, we still insisted on finding the highest cliff to jump off. But we do need a breather. We do need knowledge. And perhaps in a thousand years we might pick smaller cliffs to jump off. The books are to remind us what asses and fools we are. They're Caesar's praetorian guard, whispering as the parade roars down the avenue, 'Remember, Caesar, thou art mortal.' Most of us can't rush around, talking to everyone, know all the cities of the world, we haven't time, money or that many friends. The things you're looking for, Montag, are in the world, but the only way the average chap will ever see ninety-nine per cent of them is in a book. Don't ask for

guarantees. And don't look to be saved in any one thing, person, machine, or library. Do your own bit of saving, and if you drown, at least die knowing you were headed for shore."

Faber got up and began to pace the room. "Well?" asked Montag.

"You're absolutely serious?"

"Absolutely."

"It's an insidious plan, if I do say so myself." Faber glanced nervously at his bedroom door. "To see the firehouses burn across the land, destroyed as hotbeds of treason. The salamander devours his tail! Ho, God!"

"I've a list of firemen's residences everywhere. With some sort of underground "

"Can't trust people, that's the dirty part. You and I and who else will set the fires?"

"Aren't there professors like yourself, former writers, historians, linguists . . .?"

"Dead or ancient."

"The older the better; they'll go unnoticed. You know dozens, admit it ! "

"Oh, there are many actors alone who haven't acted Pirandello or Shaw or Shakespeare for years because their plays are too aware of the world. We could use their anger. And we could use the honest rage of those historians who haven't written a line for forty years. True, we might form classes in thinking and reading."

"Yes! "

"But that would just nibble the edges. The whole culture's shot through. The skeleton needs melting and re-shaping. Good God, it isn't as simple as just picking up a book you laid down half a century ago. Remember, the firemen are rarely necessary. The public itself stopped reading of its own accord. You firemen provide a circus now and then at which buildings are set off and crowds gather for the pretty blaze, but it's a small sideshow indeed, and hardly necessary to keep things in line. So few want to be rebels any more. And out of those few, most, like myself, scare easily. Can you dance faster than the White Clown, shout louder than 'Mr. Gimmick' and the parlour 'families'? If you can, you'll win your way, Montag. In any event, you're a fool. People are having fun"

"Committing suicide! Murdering!"

A bomber flight had been moving east all the time they talked, and only now did the two men stop and listen, feeling the great jet sound tremble inside themselves.

"Patience, Montag. Let the war turn off the 'families.' Our civilization is flinging itself to pieces. Stand back from the centrifuge."

"There has to be someone ready when it blows up."

"What? Men quoting Milton? Saying, I remember Sophocles? Reminding the survivors that man has his good side, too? They will only gather up their stones to hurl at each other. Montag, go home. Go to bed. Why waste your final hours racing about your cage denying you're a squirrel?"

"Then you don't care any more?"

"I care so much I'm sick."

"And you won't help me?"

"Good night, goodnight."

Montag's hands picked up the Bible. He saw what his hands had done and he looked surprised.

"Would you like to own this?"

Faber said, "I'd give my right arm."

Montag stood there and waited for the next thing to happen. His hands, by themselves, like two men working together, began to rip the pages from the book. The hands tore the flyleaf and then the first and then the second page.

"Idiot, what're you doing!" Faber sprang up, as if he had been struck. He fell, against Montag. Montag warded him off and let his hands continue. Six more pages fell to the floor. He picked them up and wadded the paper under Faber's gaze.

"Don't, oh, don't ! " said the oldman.

"Who can stop me? I'm a fireman. I can bum you!"

The old man stood looking at him. "You wouldn't."

"I could ! "

"The book. Don't tear it any more." Faber sank into a chair, his face very white, his mouth trembling.

"Don't make me feel any more tired. What do you want?" "I need you to teach me."

"All right, all right."

Montag put the book down. He began to unwad the crumpled paper and flatten it out as the old man watched tiredly.

Faber shook his head as if he were waking up.

"Montag, have you some money?"

"Some. Four, five hundred dollars. Why?"

"Bring it. I know a man who printed our college paper half a century ago. That was the year I came to class at the start of the new semester and found only one student to sign up for Drama from Aeschylus to O'Neill. You see? How like a beautiful statue of ice it was, melting in the sun. I remember the newspapers dying like huge moths. No one wanted them back. No one missed them. And the Government, seeing how advantageous it was to have people reading only about passionate lips and the fist in the stomach, circled the situation with your fire-eaters. So, Montag, there's this unemployed printer. We might start a few books, and wait on the wart to break the pattern and give us the push we need. A few bombs and the 'families' in the walls of all the houses, like harlequin rats, will shut up! In silence, our stage-whisper might carry." They both stood looking at the book on the table.

"I've tried to remember," said Montag. "But, hell, it's gone when I turn my head. God, how I want something to say to the Captain. He's read enough so he has all the answers, or seems to have. His voice is like butter. I'm afraid he'll talk me back the way I was. Only a week ago, pumping a kerosene hose, I thought: God, what fun!"

The old man nodded. "Those who don't build must burn. It's as old as history and juvenile delinquents."

"So that's what I am."

"There's some of it in all of us."

Montag moved towards the front door. "Can you help me in any way tonight, with the Fire Captain? I need an umbrella to keep off the rain. I'm so damned afraid I'll drown if he gets me again."

The old man said nothing, but glanced once more nervously, at his bedroom. Montag caught the glance.

"Well?"

The old man took a deep breath, held it, and let it out. He took another, eyes closed, his mouth tight, and at last exhaled. "Montag..."

The old man turned at last and said, "Come along. I would actually have let you walk right out of my house. I am a cowardly old fool."

Faber opened the bedroom door and led Montag into a small chamber where stood a table upon which a number of metal tools lay among a welter of microscopic wire-hairs, tiny coils, bobbins, and crystals.

"What's this?" asked Montag.

"Proof of my terrible cowardice. I've lived alone so many years, throwing images on walls with my imagination. Fiddling with electronics, radio-transmission, has been my hobby. My cowardice is of such a passion, complementing the revolutionary spirit that lives in its shadow, I was forced to design this."

He picked up a small green-metal object no larger than a .22 bullet.

"I paid for all this-how? Playing the stock-market, of course, the last refuge in the world for the dangerous intellectual out of a job. Well, I played the market and built all this and I've waited. I've waited, trembling, half a lifetime for someone to speak to me. I dared speak to no one. That day in the park when we sat together, I knew that some day you might drop by, with fire or friendship, it was hard to guess. I've had this little item ready for months. But I almost let you go, I'm that afraid!"

"It looks like a Seashell radio."

"And something more! It listens! If you put it in your ear, Montag, I can sit comfortably home, warming my frightened bones, and hear and analyse the firemen's world, find its weaknesses, without danger. I'm the Queen Bee, safe in the hive. You will be the drone, the travelling ear. Eventually, I could put out ears into all parts of the city, with various men, listening and evaluating. If the drones die, I'm still safe at home, tending my fright with a maximum of comfort and a minimum of chance. See how safe I play it, how contemptible I am?"

Montag placed the green bullet in his ear. The old man inserted a similar object in his own ear and moved his lips.

"Montag! "

The voice was in Montag's head.

"I hear you! "

The old man laughed. "You're coming over fine, too!" Faber whispered, but the voice in Montag's head was clear. "Go to the firehouse when it's time. I'll be with you. Let's listen to this Captain Beatty together. He could be one of us. God knows. I'll give you things to say. We'll give him a good show. Do you hate me for this electronic cowardice of mine? Here I am sending you out into the night, while I stay behind the lines with my damned ears listening for you to get your head chopped off."

"We all do what we do," said Montag. He put the Bible in the old man's hands. "Here. I'll chance turning in a substitute. Tomorrow--"

"I'll see the unemployed printer, yes; that much I can do."

"Good night, Professor."

"Not good night. I'll be with you the rest of the night, a vinegar gnat tickling your ear when you need me. But good night and good luck, anyway."

The door opened and shut. Montag was in the dark street again, looking at the world.

You could feel the war getting ready in the sky that night. The way the clouds moved aside and came back, and the way the stars looked, a million of them swimming between the clouds, like the enemy discs, and the feeling that the sky might fall upon the city and turn it to chalk dust, and the moon go up in red fire; that was how the night felt.

Montag walked from the subway with the money in his pocket (he had visited the bank which was open all night and every night with robot tellers in attendance) and as he walked he was listening to the Seashell radio in one ear... "We have mobilized a million men. Quick victory is ours if the war comes ... " Music flooded over the voice quickly and it was gone.

"Ten million men mobilized," Faber's voice whispered in his other ear. "But say one million. It's happier."

"Faber?"

"Yes?"

"I'm not thinking. I'm just doing like I'm told, like always. You said get the money and I got it. I didn't really think of it myself. When do I start working things out on my own?" "You've started already, by saying what you just said. You'll have to take me on faith."

"I took the others on faith ! "

"Yes, and look where we're headed. You'll have to ravelt blind for a while. Here's my arm to hold on to."

"I don't want to change sides and just be told what to do. There's no reason to change if I do that."

"You're wise already!"

Montag felt his feet moving him on the sidewalk.toward his house. "Keep talking."

"Would you like me to read? I'll read so you can remember. I go to bed only five hours a night. Nothing to do. So if you like; I'll read you to sleep nights. They say you retain knowledge even when you're sleeping, if someone whispers it in your ear." "Yes."

"Here." Far away across town in the night, the faintest whisper of a turned page. "The Book of Job."

The moon rose in the sky as Montag walked, his lips moving just a trifle.

He was eating a light supper at nine in the evening when the front door cried out in the hall andMildred ran from the parlour like a native fleeing an eruption of Vesuvius. Mrs. Phelps and Mrs.Bowles came through the front door and vanished into the volcano's mouth with martinis in theirhands: Montag stopped eating. They were like a monstrous crystal chandelier tinkling in athousand chimes, he saw their Cheshire Cat smiles burning through the walls of the house, andnow they were screaming at each other above the din. Montag found himself at the parlour doorwith his food still in hismouth.

"Doesn't everyone looknice!"

"Nice."

"You look fine, Millie! "

"Fine."

"Everyone looks swell."

"Swell!"

"Montag stood watching them.

"Patience," whispered Faber.

"I shouldn't be here," whispered Montag, almost to himself. "I should be on my way back to you with the money!" "Tomorrow's time enough. Careful!" "Isn't this show wonderful?" cried Mildred. "Wonderful!"

On one wall a woman smiled and drank orange juice simultaneously. How does she do both at once, thought Montag, insanely. In the other walls an X-ray of the same woman revealed the contracting journey of the refreshing beverage on its way to her delightful stomach! Abruptly the room took off on a rocket flight into the clouds, it plunged into a lime-green sea where blue fish ate red and yellow fish. A minute later, Three White Cartoon Clowns chopped off each other's limbs to the accompaniment of immense incoming tides of laughter. Two minutes more and the room whipped out of town to the jet cars wildly circling an arena, bashing and backing up and bashing each other again. Montag saw a number of bodies fly in the air. "Millie, did you see that?"

"I saw it, I saw it! "

Montag reached inside the parlour wall and pulled the main switch. The images drained away, as if the water had been let out from a gigantic crystal bowl of hysterical fish.

The three women turned slowly and looked with unconcealed irritation and then dislike at Montag.

"When do you suppose the war will start?" he said. "I notice your husbands aren't here tonight?" "Oh, they come and go, come and go," said Mrs. Phelps. "In again out again Finnegan, the Army called Pete yesterday. He'll be back next week. The Army said so. Quick war. Forty-eight hours they said, and everyone home. That's what the Army said. Quick war. Pete was called yesterday and they said he'd be, back next week. Quick..."

The three women fidgeted and looked nervously at the empty mud-coloured walls.

"I'm not worried," said Mrs. Phelps. "I'll let Petedo all the worrying." She giggled. "I'll let old Pete do all the worrying. Not me. I'm not worried."

"Yes," said Millie. "Let old Pete do the worrying." "It's always someone else's husband dies, they say".

"I've heard that, too. I've never known any dead man killed in a war. Killed jumping off buildings, yes, like Gloria's husband last week, but from wars?No."

"Not from wars," said Mrs. Phelps. "Anyway, Pete and I always said, no tears, nothing like that. It's our third marriage each and we're independent .Be independent, we always said. He said, if I get killed off, you just go right ahead and don't cry, but get married again, and don't think of me." "That reminds me," said Mildred. "Did you see that Clara Dove five-minute romance last night in your wall? Well, it was all about this woman who--"Montag said nothing but stood looking at the women's faces as he had once looked at the faces of saints in a strange church he had entered when he was a child. The faces of those enamelled creatures meant nothing to him, though he talked to them and stood in that church for a long time, trying to be of that religion, trying to know what that religion was, trying to get enough of the raw incense and special dust of the place into his lungs and thus into his blood to feel touched and concerned by the meaning of the colourful men and women with the porcelain eyes and the blood-ruby lips. But there was nothing, nothing; it was a stroll through another store, and his currency strange and unusable there, and his passion cold, even when he touched the wood and plaster and clay. So it was now, in his own parlour, with these women twisting in their chairs under his gaze, lighting cigarettes, blowing smoke, touching their sun-fired hair and examining their blazing fingernails as if they had caught fire from his look. Their faces grew haunted with silence. They leaned forward at the sound of Montag's swallowing his final bite of food. They listened to his feverish breathing. The three empty walls of the room were like the pale brows of sleeping giants now, empty of dreams. Montag felt that if you touched these three staring brows you would feel a fine salt sweat on your finger-tips. The perspiration gathered with the silence and the sub-audible trembling around and about and in the women who were burning with tension. Any moment they might hiss a long sputtering hiss and explode. Montag moved hislips.

"Let's talk."

The women jerked and stared.

"How're your children, Mrs. Phelps?" he asked.

"You know I haven't any! No one in his right mind, the Good Lord knows; would have children!" said Mrs. Phelps, not quite sure why she was angry with thisman.

"I wouldn't say that," said Mrs. Bowles. "I've hadtwo children by Caesarian section. No use going through all that agony for a baby. The world must reproduce, you know, the race must go on. Besides, they sometimes look just like you, and that's nice. Two Caesarians tamed the trick, yes, sir. Oh, my doctor said, Caesarians aren't necessary; you've got the, hips for it, everything's normal, but I insisted."

"Caesarians or not, children are ruinous; you're out of your mind," said Mrs. Phelps.

"I plunk the children in school nine days out of ten. I put up with them when they come home three days a month; it's not bad at all. You heave them into the 'parlour' and turn the switch. It's like washing clothes; stuff laundry in and slam the lid." Mrs. Bowles tittered. "They'd just as soon kick as kiss me. Thank God, I can kick back! " The women showed their tongues, laughing.

Mildred sat a moment and then, seeing that Montag was still in the doorway, clapped her hands. "Let's talk politics, to please Guy!"

"Sounds fine," said Mrs. Bowles. "I voted last election, same as everyone, and I laid it on the line for President Noble. I think he's one of the nicest-looking men who ever became president." "Oh, but the man they ran against him!"

"He wasn't much, was he? Kind of small and homely and he didn't shave too close or comb his hair very well."

"What possessed the 'Outs' to run him? You just don't go running a little short man like that against a tall man. Besides -he mumbled. Half the time I couldn't hear a word he said. And the words I did hear I didn't understand!"

"Fat, too, and didn't dress to hide it. No wonder the landslide was for Winston Noble. Even their names helped. Compare Winston Noble to Hubert Hoag for ten seconds and you can almost figure the results."

"Damn it!" cried Montag. "What do you know about Hoag and Noble?"

"Why, they were right in that parlour wall, not six months ago. One was always picking his nose; it drove me wild."

"Well, Mr. Montag," said Mrs. Phelps, "do you want us to vote for a man like that?" Mildred beamed. "You just run away from the door, Guy, and don't make us nervous." But Montag was gone and back in a moment with a book in his hand. "Guy!"

"Damn it all, damn it all, damn it!"

"What've you got there; isn't that a book? I thought that all special training these days was done by film." Mrs. Phelps blinked. "You reading up on fireman theory?" "Theory, hell," said Montag. "It's poetry."

"Montag." A whisper.

"Leave me alone!" Montag felt himself turning in a great circling roar and buzz and hum. "Montag, hold on, don't..."

"Did you hear them, did you hear these monsters talking about monsters? Oh God, the way they jabber about people and their own children and themselves and the way they talk about their husbands and the way they talk about war, dammit, I stand here and I can't believe it!" "I didn't say a single word about any war, I'll have you know," said Mrs. Phelps.

"As for poetry, I hate it," said Mrs. Bowles.

"Have you ever read any?"

"Montag," Faber's voice scraped away at him. "You'll ruin everything. Shut up, you fool!"

"All three women were on their feet.

"Sit down!"

They sat.

"I'm going home," quavered Mrs. Bowles.

"Montag, Montag, please, in the name of God, what are you up to?" pleaded Faber.

"Why don't you just read us one of those poems from your little book," Mrs. Phelps nodded. "I think that'd be very interesting."

"That's not right," wailed Mrs. Bowles. "We can't do that!"

"Well, look at Mr. Montag, he wants to, I know he does. And if we listen nice, Mr. Montag will be happy and then maybe we can go on and do something else." She glanced nervously at the long emptiness of the walls enclosing them.

"Montag, go through with this and I'll cut off, I'll leave." The beetle jabbed his ear. "What good is this, what'll you prove?"

"Scare hell out of them, that's what, scare the living daylights out!"

Mildred looked at the empty air. "Now Guy, just who are you talking to?"

A silver needle pierced his brain. "Montag, listen, only one way out, play it as a joke, cover up, pretend you aren't mad at all. Then-walk to your wall-incinerator, and throw the book in!" Mildred had already anticipated this in a quavery voice. "Ladies, once a year, every fireman's allowed to bring one book home, from the old days, to show his family how silly it all was, how nervous that sort of thing can make you, how crazy. Guy's surprise tonight is to read you one sample to show how mixed-up things were, so none of us will ever have to bother our little old heads about that junk again, isn't that right, darling?" He crushed the book in his fists. "Say`yes."

His mouth moved like Faber's.

"Yes."

Mildred snatched the book with a laugh. "Here! Read this one. No, I take it back. Here's that real funny one you read out loud today. Ladies, you won't understand a word. It goes umpty-tumptyump. Go ahead, Guy, that page, dear."

He looked at the opened page.

A fly stirred its wings softly in his ear. "Read."

"What's the title, dear?"

"Dover Beach." His mouth was numb.

"Now read in a nice clear voice and go slow."

The room was blazing hot, he was all fire, he was all coldness; they sat in the middle of an empty desert with three chairs and him standing, swaying, and him waiting for Mrs. Phelps to stop straightening her dress hem and Mrs. Bowles to take her fingers away from her hair. Then he began to read in a low, stumbling voice that grew firmer as he progressed from line to line, and his voice went out across the desert, into the whiteness, and around the three sitting women therein the great hot emptiness:

"The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore

Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind,
Down the vast edges
Drear and naked shingles of the world."

The chairs creaked under the three women. Montag finished it out:

"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of
dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor
peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and
flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."

Mrs. Phelps was crying.

The others in the middle of the desert watched her crying grow very loud as her face squeezed itself out of shape. They sat, not touching her, bewildered by her display. She sobbed uncontrollably. Montag himself was stunned and shaken.

"Sh, sh," said Mildred. "You're all right, Clara, now, Clara, snap out of it! Clara, what's wrong?"

"I-I," sobbed Mrs. Phelps, "don't know, don't know, I just don't know, oh oh..."

Mrs. Bowles stood up and glared at Montag. "You see? I knew it, that's what I wanted to prove! I knew it would happen! I've always said, poetry and tears, poetry and suicide and crying and awful feelings, poetry and sickness; all that mush! Now I've had it proved to me. You're nasty, Mr. Montag, you're nasty!"

Faber said, "Now..."

Montag felt himself turn and walk to the wall-slot and drop the book in through the brass notch to the waiting flames.

"Silly words, silly words, silly awful hurting words," said Mrs. Bowles. "Why do people want to hurt people? Not enough hurt in the world, you've got to tease people with stuff like that!" "Clara, now, Clara," begged Mildred, pulling her arm. "Come on, let's be cheery, you turn the 'family' on, now. Go ahead. Let's laugh and be happy, now, stop crying, we'll have a party!" "No," said Mrs. Bowles. "I'm trotting right straight home. You want to visit my house and 'family,' well and good. But I won't come in this fireman's crazy house again in my lifetime!" "Go home." Montag fixed his eyes upon her, quietly. "Go home and think of your first husband divorced and your second husband killed in a jet and your third husband blowing his brains out, go home and think of the dozen abortions you've had, go home and think of that and your damn Caesarian sections, too, and your children who hate your guts! Go home and think

how it all happened and what did you ever do to stop it? Go home, go home!" he yelled. "Before I knock you down and kick you out of the door!"

Doors slammed and the house was empty. Montag stood alone in the winter weather, with the parlour walls the colour of dirty snow.

In the bathroom, water ran. He heard Mildred shake the sleeping tablets into her hand. "Fool, Montag, fool, fool, oh God you silly fool..."

"Shut up!" He pulled the green bullet from his ear and jammed it into his pocket. It sizzled faintly. ". . . fool . . . fool . . ."

He searched the house and found the books where Mildred had stacked them behind the refrigerator. Some were missing and he knew that she had started on her own slow process of dispersing the dynamite in her house, stick by stick. But he was not angry now, only exhausted and bewildered with himself. He carried the books into the backyard and hid them in the bushes near the alley fence. For tonight only, he thought, in case she decides to do any more burning. He went back through the house. "Mildred?" He called at the door of the darkened bedroom. There was no sound.

Outside, crossing the lawn, on his way to work, he tried not to see how completely dark and deserted Clarisse McClellan's house was

On the way downtown he was so completely alone with his terrible error that he felt the necessity for the strange warmth and goodness that came from a familiar and gentle voice speaking in the night. Already, in a few short hours, it seemed that he had known Faber a lifetime. Now he knew that he was two people, that he was above all Montag, who knew nothing, who did not even know himself a fool, but only suspected it. And he knew that he was also the old man who talked to him and talked to him as the train was sucked from one end of the night city to the other on one long sickening gasp of motion. In the days to follow, and in the nights when there was no moon and in the nights when there was a very bright moon shining on the earth, the old man would go on with this talking and this talking, drop by drop, stone by stone, flake by flake. His mind would well over at last and he would not be Montag any more, this the old man told him, assured him, promised him. He would be Montag-plus-Faber, fire plus water, and then, one day, after everything had mixed and simmered and worked away in silence, there would be neither fire nor water, but wine. Out of two separate and opposite things, a third. And one day he would look back upon the fool and know the fool. Even now he could feel the start of the long journey, the leave-taking, the going away from the self he had been.

It was good listening to the beetle hum, the sleepy mosquito buzz and delicate filigree murmur of the old man's voice at first scolding him and then consoling him in the late hour of night as he emerged from the steaming subway toward the firehouse world.

"Pity, Montag, pity. Don't haggle and nag them; you were so recently one of them yourself. They are so confident that they will run on for ever. But they won't run on. They don't know that this is all one huge big blazing meteor that makes a pretty fire in space, but that some day it'll have to hit. They see only the blaze, the pretty fire, as you saw it.

"Montag, old men who stay at home, afraid, tending their peanut-brittle bones, have no right to criticize. Yet you almost killed things at the start. Watch it! I'm with you, remember that. I understand how it happened. I must admit that your blind raging invigorated me. God, how young I felt! But now-I want you to feel old, I want a little of my cowardice to be distilled in you tonight. The next few hours, when you see Captain Beatty, tiptoe round him, let me hear him for you, let me feel the situation out. Survival is our ticket. Forget the poor, silly women""I made them unhappier than they have been in years, I think," said Montag. "It shocked me to see Mrs. Phelps cry. Maybe they're right, maybe it's best not to face things, to run, have fun. I don't know. I feel guilty--"

"No, you mustn't! If there were no war, if there was peace in the world, I'd say fine, have fun!

But, Montag, you mustn't go back to being just a fireman. All isn't well with the world."

Montag perspired.

"Montag, you listening?"

"My feet," said Montag. "I can't move them. I feel so damn silly. My feet won't move!"

"Listen. Easy now," said the old man gently. "I know, I know. You're afraid of making mistakes. Don't be. Mistakes can be profited by. Man, when I was young I shoved my ignorance in people's faces. They beat me with sticks. By the time I was forty my blunt instrument had been honed to a fine cutting point for me. If you hide your ignorance, no one will hit you and you'll never learn. Now, pick up your feet, into the firehouse with you! We're twins, we're not alone any more, we're not separated out in different parlours, with no contact between. If you need help when Beatty pries at you, I'll be sitting right here in your eardrum making notes!" Montag felt his right foot, then his left foot, move.

"Old man," he said, "stay with me."

The Mechanical Hound was gone. Its kennel was empty and the firehouse stood all about in plaster silence and the orange Salamander slept with its kerosene in its belly and the firethrowers crossed upon its flanks and Montag came in through the silence and touched the brass pole and slid up in the dark air, looking back at the deserted kennel, his heart beating, pausing, beating. Faber was a grey moth asleep in his ear, for themoment.

Beatty stood near the drop-hole waiting, but with his back turned as if he were not waiting. "Well," he said to the men playing cards, "here comes a very strange beast which in all tongues is called a fool."

He put his hand to one side, palm up, for a gift. Montag put the book in it. Without even glancing at the title, Beatty tossed the book into the trash-basket and lit a cigarette. "'Who are a little wise, the best fools be.' Welcome back, Montag. I hope you'll be staying, with us, now that your fever is done and your sickness over. Sit in for a hand of poker?"

They sat and the cards were dealt. In Beatty's sight, Montag felt the guilt of his hands. His fingers were like ferrets that had done some evil and now never rested, always stirred and picked and hid in pockets, moving from under Beatty's alcohol-flame stare. If Beatty so much as breathed on them, Montag felt that his hands might wither, turn over on their sides, and never be shocked to life again; they would be buried the rest of his life in his coat-sleeves, forgotten. For these were the hands that had acted on their own, no part of him, here was where the conscience first manifested itself to snatch books, dart off with job and Ruth and Willie Shakespeare, and now, in the firehouse, these hands seemed gloved withblood.

Twice in half an hour, Montag had to rise from the game and go to the latrine to wash his hands.

When he came back he hid his hands under the table.

Beatty laughed. "Let's have your hands in sight, Montag.

Not that we don't trust you, understand, but--"

They all laughed.

"Well," said Beatty, "the crisis is past and all is well, the sheep returns to the fold. We're all sheep who have strayed at times. Truth is truth, to the end of reckoning, we've cried. They are never alone that are accompanied with noble thoughts, we've shouted to ourselves. 'Sweet foodof sweetly uttered knowledge,' Sir Philip Sidney said. But on the other hand: 'Words are likeleaves and where they most abound, Much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found.' AlexanderPope. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know."

"Careful," whispered Faber, living in another world, far away.

"Or this? 'A little learning is a dangerous thing. Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring; Thereshallow draughts intoxicate the brain, and drinking largely sobers us again.' Pope. Same Essay.

Where does that put you?"

Montag bit his lip.

"I'll tell you," said Beatty, smiling at his cards. "That made you for a little while a drunkard. Read a few lines and off you go over the cliff. Bang, you're ready to blow up the world, chop off heads, knock down women and children, destroy authority. I know, I've been through it all." "I'm all right," said Montag, nervously.

"Stop blushing. I'm not needling, really I'm not. Do you know, I had a dream an hour ago. I lay down for a cat-nap and in this dream you and I, Montag, got into a furious debate on books. You towered with rage, yelled quotes at me. I calmly parried every thrust. Power, I said, And you, quoting Dr. Johnson, said 'Knowledge is more than equivalent to force!' And I said, 'Well, Dr. Johnson also said, dear boy, that "He is no wise man that will quit a certainty for an uncertainty."' Stick with the fireman, Montag. All else is dreary chaos!"

"Don't listen," whispered Faber. "He's trying to confuse. He's slippery. Watch out!"

Beatty chuckled. "And you said, quoting, 'Truth will come to light, murder will not be hid long!' And I cried in good humour, 'Oh God, he speaks only of his horse!' And 'The Devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.' And you yelled, 'This age thinks better of a gilded fool, than of a threadbare saint in wisdom's school!' And I whispered gently, 'The dignity of truth is lost with much protesting.' And you screamed, 'Carcasses bleed at the sight of the murderer!' And I said, patting your hand, 'What, do I give you trench mouth?' And you shrieked, 'Knowledge is power!' and 'A dwarf on a giant's shoulders of the furthest of the two!' and I summed my side up with rare serenity in, 'The folly of mistaking a metaphor for a proof, a torrent of verbiage for a spring of capital truths, and oneself as an oracle, is inborn in us, Mr. Valery once said.'" Montag's head whirled sickeningly. He felt beaten unmercifully on brow, eyes, nose, lips, chin, on shoulders, on upflailing arms. He wanted to yell, "No! shut up, you're confusing things, stop it!" Beatty's graceful fingers thrust out to seize his wrist.

"God, what a pulse! I've got you going, have I, Montag. Jesus God, your pulse sounds like the day after the war. Everything but sirens and bells! Shall I talk some more? I like your look of panic. Swahili, Indian, English Lit., I speak them all. A kind of excellent dumb discourse, Willie!"

"Montag, hold on! " The moth brushed Montag's ear. "He's muddying the waters!"

"Oh, you were scared silly," said Beatty, "for I was doing a terrible thing in using the very books you clung to, to rebut you on every hand, on every point! What traitors books can be! You think they're backing you up, and they turn on you. Others can use them, too, and there you are, lost in the middle of the moor, in a great welter of nouns and verbs and adjectives. And at the very end of my dream, along I came with the Salamander and said, Going my way? And you got in and we drove back to the firehouse in beatific silence, all -dwindled away to peace." Beatty let Montag's wrist go, let the hand slump limply on the table. "All's well that is well in the end." Silence. Montag sat like a carved white stone. The echo of the final hammer on his skull died slowly away into the black cavern where Faber waited for the echoes to subside. And then when the startled dust had settled down about Montag's mind, Faber began, softly, "All right, he's had his say. You must take it in. I'll say my say, too, in the next few hours. And you'll take it in. And you'll try to judge them and make your decision as to which way to jump, or fall. But I want it to be your decision, not mine, and not the Captain's. But remember that the Captain belongs to the most dangerous enemy of truth and freedom, the solid unmoving cattle of the majority. Oh, God, the terrible tyranny of the majority. We all have our harps to play. And it's up to you now to know with which ear you'll listen."

Montag opened his mouth to answer Faber and was saved this error in the presence of others when the station bell rang. The alarm-voice in the ceiling chanted. There was a tacking-tacking sound as the alarm-report telephone typed out the address across the room. Captain Beatty, his poker cards in one pink hand, walked with exaggerated slowness to the phone and ripped out the address when the report was finished. He glanced perfunctorily at it, and shoved it in his pocket. He came back and sat down. The others looked at him.

"It can wait exactly forty seconds while I take all the money away from you," said Beatty, happily.

Montag put his cards down.

"Tired, Montag? Going out of this game?"

"Yes."

"Hold on. Well, come to think of it, we can finish this hand later. Just leave your cards face down and hustle the equipment. On the double now." And Beatty rose up again. "Montag, you don't look well? I'd hate to think you were coming down with another fever..." "I'll be all right."

"You'll be fine. This is a special case. Come on, jump for it!"

They leaped into the air and clutched the brass pole as if it were the last vantage point above a tidal wave passing below, and then the brass pole, to their dismay slid them down into darkness, into the blast and cough and suction of the gaseous dragon roaring to life! "Hey !"

They rounded a corner in thunder and siren, with concussion of tyres, with scream of rubber, with a shift of kerosene bulk in the glittery brass tank, like the food in the stomach of a giant; with Montag's fingers jolting off the silver rail, swinging into cold space, with the wind tearing his hair back from his head, with the wind whistling in his teeth, and him all the while thinking of the women, the chaff women in his parlour tonight, with the kernels blown out from under them by a neon wind, and his silly damned reading of a book to them. How like trying to put out fires with water-pistols, how senseless and insane. One rage turned in for another. One anger displacing another. When would he stop being entirely mad and be quiet, be very quiet indeed? "Here we go!" Montag looked up. Beatty never drove, but he was driving tonight, slamming the Salamander around corners, leaning forward high on the driver's throne, his massive black slicker flapping out behind so that he seemed a great black bat flying above the engine, over the brass numbers, taking the fullwind.

"Here we go to keep the world happy, Montag !"

Beatty's pink, phosphorescent cheeks glimmered in the high darkness, and he was smiling furiously.

"Here we are!"

The Salamander boomed to a halt, throwing men off in slips and clumsy hops. Montag stood fixing his raw eyes to the cold bright rail under his clenched fingers.

I can't do it, he thought. How can I go at this new assignment, how can I go on burning things? I can't go in this place.

Beatty, smelling of the wind through which he had rushed, was at Montag's elbow. "All right, Montag?"

The men ran like cripples in their clumsy boots, as quietly as spiders. At last Montag raised his eyes and turned. Beatty was watching his face. "Something the matter, Montag?"

"Why," said Montag slowly, "we've stopped in front of my house."

PART III

BURNINGBRIGHT

LIGHTS flicked on and house-doors opened all down the street, to watch the carnival set up. Montag and Beatty stared, one with dry satisfaction, the other with disbelief, at the house before them, this main ring in which torches would be juggled and fire eaten.

"Well," said Beatty, "now you did it. Old Montag wanted to fly near the sun and now that he's burnt his damn wings, he wonders why. Didn't I hint enough when I sent the Hound around your place?"

Montag's face was entirely numb and featureless; he felt his head turn like a stone carving to the dark place next door, set in its bright borders offlowers.

Beatty snorted. "Oh, no! You weren't fooled by that little idiot's routine, now, were you? Flowers, butterflies, leaves, sunsets, oh, hell! It's all in her file. I'll be damned. I've hit the bullseye. Look at the sick look on your face. A few grass-blades and the quarters of the moon. What trash. What good did she ever do with all that?"

Montag sat on the cold fender of the Dragon, moving his head half an inch to the left, half an inch to the right, left, right, left right, left

"She saw everything. She didn't do anything to anyone. She just let them alone."

"Alone, hell ! She chewed around you, didn't she? One of those damn do-gooders with their shocked, holier-than-thou silences, their one talent making others feel guilty. God damn, they rise like the midnight sun to sweat you in your bed!"

The front door opened; Mildred came down the steps, running, one suitcase held with a dream-like clenching rigidity in her fist, as a beetle-taxi hissed to the curb. "Mildred! "

She ran past with her body stiff, her face floured with powder, her mouth gone, without lipstick. "Mildred, you didn't put in the alarm!"

She shoved the valise in the waiting beetle, climbed in, and sat mumbling, "Poor family, poor family, oh everything gone, everything, everything gone now"

Beatty grabbed Montag's shoulder as the beetle blasted away and hit seventy miles an hour, far down the street, gone.

There was a crash like the falling parts of a dream fashioned out of warped glass, mirrors, and crystal prisms. Montag drifted about as if still another incomprehensible storm had turned him, to see Stoneman and Black wielding axes, shattering window-panes to provide cross-ventilation. The brush of a death's-head moth against a cold black screen. "Montag, this is Faber. Do you hear me? What is happening?" "This is happening to me," said Montag.

"What a dreadful surprise," said Beatty. "For everyone nowadays knows, absolutely is certain, that nothing will ever happen to me. Others die, I go on. There are no consequences and no responsibilities. Except that there are. But let's not talk about them, eh? By the time the consequences catch up with you, it's too late, isn't it, Montag?" "Montag, can you get away, run?" asked Faber.

Montag walked but did not feel his feet touch the cement and then the night grasses. Beatty flicked his igniter nearby and the small orange flame drew his fascinated gaze.

"What is there about fire that's so lovely? No matter what age we are, what draws us to it?" Beatty blew out the flame and lit it again. "It's perpetual motion; the thing man wanted to invent but never did. Or almost perpetual motion. If you let it go on, it'd burn our lifetimes out. What is fire? It's a mystery. Scientists give us gobbledegook about friction and molecules. But they don't really know. Its real beauty is that it destroys responsibility and consequences. A problem gets too burdensome, then into the furnace with it. Now, Montag, you're a burden. And fire will lift you off my shoulders, clean, quick, sure; nothing to rot later. Antibiotic, aesthetic, practical." Montag stood looking in now at this queer house, made strange by the hour of the night, by murmuring neighbour voices, by littered glass, and there on the floor, their covers torn off and spilled out like swan-feathers, the incredible books that looked so silly and really not worth bothering with, for these were nothing but black type and yellowed paper, and ravelled binding.

Mildred, of course. She must have watched him hide the books in the garden and brought them back in. Mildred. Mildred.

"I want you to do this job all by your lonesome, Montag. Not with kerosene and a match, but piecework, with a flamethrower. Your house, your clean-up." "Montag, can't you run, get away!"

"No!" cried Montag helplessly. "The Hound! Because of the Hound!"

Faber heard, and Beatty, thinking it was meant for him, heard. "Yes, the Hound's somewhere about the neighbourhood, so don't try anything. Ready?" "Ready." Montag snapped the safety-catch on the flamethrower.

"Fire!"

A great nuzzling gout of flame leapt out to lap at the books and knock them against the wall. He stepped into the bedroom and fired twice and the twin beds went up in a great simmering whisper, with more heat and passion and light than he would have supposed them to contain. He burnt the bedroom walls and the cosmetics chest because he wanted to change everything, the chairs, the tables, and in the dining-room the silverware and plastic dishes, everything that showed that he had lived here in this empty house with a strange woman who would forget him tomorrow, who had gone and quite forgotten him already, listening to her Seashell radio pour in on her and in on her as she rode across town, alone. And as before, it was good to burn, he felt himself gush out in the fire, snatch, rend, rip in half with flame, and put away the senseless problem. If there was no solution, well then now there was no problem, either. Fire was best for everything!

"The books, Montag!"

The books leapt and danced like roasted birds, their wings ablaze with red and yellow feathers. And then he came to the parlour where the great idiot monsters lay asleep with their white thoughts and their snowy dreams. And he shot a bolt at each of the three blank walls and the vacuum hissed out at him. The emptiness made an even emptier whistle, a senseless scream. He tried to think about the vacuum upon which the nothingness had performed, but he could not. He held his breath so the vacuum could not get into his lungs. He cut off its terrible emptiness, drew back, and gave the entire room a gift of one huge bright yellow flower of burning. The fire-proof plastic sheath on everything was cut wide and the house began to shudder with flame. "When you're quite finished," said Beatty behind him. "You're under arrest."

The house fell in red coals and black ash. It bedded itself down in sleepy pink-grey cinders and a smoke plume blew over it, rising and waving slowly back and forth in the sky. It was three-thirty in the morning. The crowd drew back into the houses; the great tents of the circus had slumped into charcoal and rubble and the show was well over.

Montag stood with the flame-thrower in his limp hands, great islands of perspiration drenching his armpits, his face smeared with soot. The other firemen waited behind him, in the darkness, their faces illuminated faintly by the smouldering foundation.

Montag started to speak twice and then finally managed to put his thought together. "Was it my wife turned in the alarm?"

Beatty nodded. "But her friends turned in an alarm earlier, that I let ride. One way or the other, you'd have got it. It was pretty silly, quoting poetry around free and easy like that. It was the act of a silly damn snob. Give a man a few lines of verse and he thinks he's the Lord of all Creation. You think you can walk on water with your books. Well, the world can get by just fine without them. Look where they got you, in slime up to your lip. If I stir the slime with my little finger, you'll drown ! "

Montag could not move. A great earthquake had come with fire and levelled the house and Mildred was under there somewhere and his entire life under there and he could not move. The earthquake was still shaking and falling and shivering inside him and he stood there, his knees half-bent under the great load of tiredness and bewilderment and outrage, letting Beatty hit him without raising a hand.

"Montag, you idiot, Montag, you damn fool; why did you really do it?"

Montag did not hear, he was far away, he was running with his mind, he was gone, leaving this dead soot-covered body to sway in front of another raving fool. "Montag, get out of there! " said Faber.

Montag listened.

Beatty struck him a blow on the head that sent him reeling back. The green bullet in which Faber's voice whispered and cried, fell to the sidewalk. Beatty snatched it up, grinning. He held it half in, half out of his ear.

Montag heard the distant voice calling, "Montag, you all right?"

Beatty switched the green bullet off and thrust it in his pocket. "Well--so there's more here than I thought. I saw you tilt your head, listening. First I thought you had a Seashell. But when you turned clever later, I wondered. We'll trace this and drop it on your friend." "No!" said Montag.

He twitched the safety catch on the flame-thrower. Beatty glanced instantly at Montag's fingers and his eyes widened the faintest bit. Montag saw the surprise there and himself glanced to his hands to see what new thing they had done. Thinking back later he could never decide whether the hands or Beatty's reaction to the hands gave him the final push toward murder. The last rolling thunder of the avalanche stoned down about his ears, not touching him.

Beatty grinned his most charming grin. "Well, that's one way to get an audience. Hold a gun on a man and force him to listen to your speech. Speech away. What'll it be this time? Why don't you belch Shakespeare at me, you fumbling snob? `There is no terror, Cassius, in your threats, for I am arm'd so strong in honesty that they pass by me as an idle wind, which I respect not!' How's that? Go ahead now, you second-hand litterateur, pull the trigger." He took one step toward Montag.

Montag only said, "We never burned right..." "Hand it over, Guy," said Beatty with a fixed smile.

And then he was a shrieking blaze, a jumping, sprawling, gibbering mannikin, no longer human or known, all writhing flame on the lawn as Montag shot one continuous pulse of liquid fire on him. There was a hiss like a great mouthful of spittle banging a red-hot stove, a bubbling and frothing as if salt had been poured over a monstrous black snail to cause a terrible liquefaction and a boiling over of yellow foam. Montag shut his eyes, shouted, shouted, and fought to get his hands at his ears to clamp and to cut away the sound. Beatty flopped over and over and over, and at last twisted in on himself like a charred wax doll and lay silent. The other two firemen did not move.

Montag kept his sickness down long enough to aim the flame-thrower. "Turn around!"

They turned, their faces like blanched meat, streaming sweat; he beat their heads, knocking off their helmets and bringing them down on themselves. They fell and lay without moving. The blowing of a single autumn leaf.

He turned and the Mechanical Hound was there.

It was half across the lawn, coming from the shadows, moving with such drifting ease that it was like a single solid cloud of black-grey smoke blown at him in silence.

It made a single last leap into the air, coming down at Montag from a good three feet over his head, its spidered legs reaching, the procaine needle snapping out its single angry tooth. Montag caught it with a bloom of fire, a single wondrous blossom that curled in petals of yellow and blue and orange about the metal dog, clad it in a new covering as it slammed into Montag and threw him ten feet back against the bole of a tree, taking the flame-gun with him. He felt it scabble and seize his leg and stab the needle in for a moment before the fire snapped the Hound up in the air, burst its metal bones at the joints, and blew out its interior in the single flushing of red colour like a skyrocket fastened to the street. Montag lay watching the dead-alive thing fiddle the air and die. Even now it seemed to want to get back at him and finish the injection which was now working through the flesh of his leg. He felt all of the mingled relief and horror at having pulled back only in time to have just his knee slammed by the fender of a car hurtling by at ninety miles an hour. He was afraid to get up, afraid he might not be able to gain his feet at all, with an anaesthetized leg. A numbness in a numbness hollowed into a numbness....

And now...?

The street empty, the house burnt like an ancient bit of stage-scenery, the other homes dark, the Hound here, Beatty there, the three other firemen another place, and the Salamander . . . ? He gazed at the immense engine. That would have to go, too.

Well, he thought, let's see how badly off you are. On your feet now. Easy, easy . . . there.

He stood and he had only one leg. The other was like a chunk of burnt pine-log he was carrying along as a penance for some obscure sin. When he put his weight on it, a shower of silver needles gushed up the length of the calf and went off in the knee. He wept. Come on! Come on, you, you can't stay here!

A few house-lights were going on again down the street, whether from the incidents just passed, or because of the abnormal silence following the fight, Montag did not know. He hobbled around the ruins, seizing at his bad leg when it lagged, talking and whimpering and shouting directions at it and cursing it and pleading with it to work for him now when it was vital. He heard a number of people crying out in the darkness and shouting. He reached the back yard and the alley. Beatty, he thought, you're not a problem now. You always said, don't face a problem, bum it. Well, now I've done both. Good-bye, Captain. And he stumbled along the alley in the dark.

A shotgun blast went off in his leg every time he put it down and he thought, you're a fool, a damn fool, an awful fool, an idiot, an awful idiot, a damn idiot, and a fool, a damn fool; look at the mess and where's the mop, look at the mess, and what do you do? Pride, damn it, and temper, and you've junked it all, at the very start you vomit on everyone and on yourself. But everything at once, but everything one on top of another; Beatty, the women, Mildred, Clarisse, everything. No excuse, though, no excuse. A fool, a damn fool, go give yourself up!

No, we'll save what we can, we'll do what there is left to do. If we have to burn, let's take a few more with us. Here!

He remembered the books and turned back. Just on the off chance.

He found a few books where he had left them, near the garden fence. Mildred, God bless her, had missed a few. Four books still lay hidden where he had put them. Voices were wailing in the night and flashbeams swirled about. Other Salamanders were roaring their engines far away, and police sirens were cutting their way across town with their sirens.

Montag took the four remaining books and hopped, jolted, hopped his way down the alley and suddenly fell as if his head had been cut off and only his body lay there. Something inside had jerked him to a halt and flopped him down. He lay where he had fallen and sobbed, his legs

folded, his face pressed blindly to the gravel.

Beatty wanted to die.

In the middle of the crying Montag knew it for the truth. Beatty had wanted to die. He had just stood there, not really trying to save himself, just stood there, joking, needling, thought Montag, and the thought was enough to stifle his sobbing and let him pause for air. How strange, strange, to want to die so much that you let a man walk around armed and then instead of shutting up and staying alive, you go on yelling at people and making fun of them until you get them mad, and then

At a distance, running feet.

Montag sat up. Let's get out of here. Come on, get up, get up, you just can't sit! But he was still crying and that had to be finished. It was going away now. He hadn't wanted to kill anyone, not even Beatty. His flesh gripped him and shrank as if it had been plunged in acid. He gagged. He saw Beatty, a torch, not moving, fluttering out on the grass. He bit at his knuckles. I'm sorry, I'm sorry, oh God, sorry He tried to piece it all together, to go back to the normal pattern of life a few short days ago before the sieve and the sand, Denham's Dentifrice, moth-voices, fireflies, the alarms and excursions, too much for a few short days, too much, indeed, for a lifetime. Feet ran in the far end of the alley.

"Get up!" he told himself. "Damn it, get up!" he said to the leg, and stood. The pains were spikes driven in the kneecap and then only darning needles and then only common, ordinary safety pins, and after he had

dragged along fifty more hops and jumps, filling his hand with slivers from the board fence, the prickling was like someone blowing a spray of scalding water on that leg. And the leg was at last his own leg again. He had been afraid that running might break the loose ankle. Now, sucking all the night into his open mouth, and blowing it out pale, with all the blackness left heavily inside himself, he set out in a steady jogging pace. He carried the books in his hands.

He thought of Faber.

Faber was back there in the steaming lump of tar that had no name or identity now. He had burnt Faber, too. He felt so suddenly shocked by this that he felt Faber was really dead, baked like a roach in that small green capsule shoved and lost in the pocket of a man who was now nothing but a frame skeleton strung with asphalt tendons.

You must remember, burn them or they'll burn you, he thought. Right now it's as simple as that. He searched his pockets, the money was there, and in his other pocket he found the usual

Seashell upon which the city was talking to itself in the cold black morning.

"Police Alert. Wanted: Fugitive in city. Has committed murder and crimes against the State.

Name: Guy Montag. Occupation: Fireman. Last seen . . ."

He ran steadily for six blocks, in the alley, and then the alley opened out on to a wide empty thoroughfare ten lanes wide. It seemed like a boatless river frozen there in the raw light of the high white arc-lamps; you could drown trying to cross it, he felt; it was too wide, it was too open.

It was a vast stage without scenery, inviting him to run across, easily seen in the blazing illumination, easily caught, easily shot down.

The Seashell hummed in his ear.

"... watch for a man running ... watch for the running man . . . watch for a man alone, on foot . .

.watch..." Montag pulled back into the shadows. Directly ahead lay a gas station, a great chunk of porcelain snow shining there, and two silver beetles pulling in to fill up. Now he must be clean and presentable if he wished, to walk, not run, stroll calmly across that wide boulevard. It would give him an extra margin of safety if he washed up and combed his hair before he went on his way to get where . . . ?

Yes, he thought, where am I running?

Nowhere. There was nowhere to go, no friend to turn to, really. Except Faber. And then he realized that he was indeed, running toward Faber's house, instinctively. But Faber couldn't hide him; it would be suicide even to try. But he knew that he would go to see Faber anyway, for a few short minutes. Faber's would be the place where he might refuel his fast draining belief in his own ability to survive. He just wanted to know that there was a man like Faber in the world. He wanted to see the man alive and not burned back there like a body shelled in another body. And some of the money must be left with Faber, of course, to be spent after Montag ran on his way. Perhaps he could make the open country and live on or near the rivers and near the highways, in the fields and hills.

A great whirling whisper made him look to the sky.

The police helicopters were rising so far away that it seemed someone had blown the grey head off a dry dandelion flower. Two dozen of them flurried, wavering, indecisive, three miles off, like butterflies puzzled by autumn, and then they were plummeting down to land, one by one, here, there, softly kneading the streets where, turned back to beetles, they shrieked along the boulevards or, as suddenly, leapt back into the air, continuing their search.

And here was the gas station, its attendants busy now with customers. Approaching from the rear, Montag entered the men's washroom. Through the aluminium wall he heard a radio voice saying, "War has been declared." The gas was being pumped outside. The men in the beetles were talking and the attendants were talking about the engines, the gas, the money owed. Montag stood trying to make himself feel the shock of

the quiet statement from the radio, but nothing would happen. The war would have to wait for him to come to it in his personal file, an hour, two hours from now.

He washed his hands and face and towelled himself dry, making little sound. He came out of the washroom and shut the door carefully and walked into the darkness and at last stood again on the edge of the empty boulevard.

There it lay, a game for him to win, a vast bowling alley in the cool morning. The boulevard was as clean as the surface of an arena two minutes before the appearance of certain unnamed victims and certain unknown killers. The air over and above the vast concrete river trembled with the warmth of Montag's body alone; it was incredible how he felt his temperature could cause the whole immediate world to vibrate. He was a phosphorescent target; he knew it, he felt it. And now he must begin his little walk.

Three blocks away a few headlights glared. Montag drew a deep breath. His lungs were like burning brooms in his chest. His mouth was sucked dry from running. His throat tasted of bloody iron and there was rusted steel in his feet.

What about those lights there? Once you started walking you'd have to gauge how fast those beetles could make it down here. Well, how far was it to the other curb? It seemed like a hundred yards. Probably not a hundred, but figure for that anyway, figure that with him going very slowly, at a nice stroll, it might take as much as thirty seconds, forty seconds to walk all the way. The beetles? Once started, they could leave three blocks behind them in about fifteen seconds. So, even if halfway across he started to run . . . ?

He put his right foot out and then his left foot and then his right. He walked on the empty avenue. Even if the street were entirely empty, of course, you couldn't be sure of a safe crossing, for a car could appear suddenly over the rise four blocks further on and be on and past you before you had taken a dozen breaths.

He decided not to count his steps. He looked neither to left nor right. The light from the overhead lamps seemed as bright and revealing as the midday sun and just as hot.

He listened to the sound of the car picking up speed two blocks away on his right. Its movable headlights jerked back and forth suddenly, and caught at Montag. Keep going.

Montag faltered, got a grip on the books, and forced himself not to freeze. Instinctively he took a few quick, running steps then talked out loud to himself and pulled up to stroll again. He was now half across the street, but the roar from the beetle's engines whined higher as it put on speed. The police, of course. They see me. But slow now; slow, quiet, don't turn, don't look, don't seem concerned. Walk, that's it, walls, walk.

The beetle was rushing. The beetle was roaring. The beetle raised its speed. The beetle was whining. The beetle was in high thunder. The beetle came skimming. The beetle came in a single whistling trajectory, fired from an invisible rifle. It was up to 120 m.p.h. It was up to 130 at least. Montag clamped his jaws. The heat of the racing headlights burnt his cheeks, it seemed, and jittered his eye-lids and flushed the sour sweat out all over his body.

He began to shuffle idiotically and talk to himself and then he broke and just ran. He put out his legs as far as they would go and down and then far out again and down and back and out and down and back. God ! God! He dropped a book, broke pace, almost turned, changed his mind, plunged on, yelling in concrete emptiness, the beetle scuttling after its running food, two hundred, one hundred feet away, ninety, eighty, seventy, Montag gasping, flailing his hands, legs up down out, up down out, closer, closer, hooting, calling, his eyes burnt white now as his head jerked about to confront the flashing glare, now the beetle was swallowed in its own light, now it was nothing but a torch hurtling upon him; all sound, all blare. Now-almost on top of him ! He stumbled and fell.

I'm done! It's over!

But the falling made a difference. An instant before reaching him the wild beetle cut and swerved out. It was gone. Montag lay flat, his head down. Wisps of laughter trailed back to him with the blue exhaust from the beetle.

His right hand was extended above him, flat. Across the extreme tip of his middle finger, he saw now as he lifted that hand, a faint sixteenth of an inch of black tread where tyre had touched in passing. He looked at that black line with disbelief, getting to his feet. That wasn't the police, he thought.

He looked down the boulevard. It was clear now. A carful of children, all ages, God knew, from twelve to sixteen, outwhistling, yelling, hurraing, had seen a man, a very extraordinary sight, a man strolling, a rarity, and simply said, "Let's get him," not knowing he was the fugitive Mr. Montag, simply a number of children out for a long night of roaring five or six hundred miles in a few moonlit hours, their faces icy with wind, and coming home or not coming at dawn, alive or not alive, that made the adventure.

They would have killed me, thought Montag, swaying, the air still torn and stirring about him in dust, touching his bruised cheek. For no reason at all in the world they would have killed me. He walked toward the far kerb telling each foot to go and keep going. Somehow he had picked up the spilled books; he didn't remember bending or touching them. He kept moving them from hand to hand as if they were a poker hand he could not figure. I wonder if they were the ones who killed Clarisse?

He stopped and his mind said it again, very loud.

I wonder if they were the ones who killed Clarisse!

He wanted to run after them yelling.

His eyes watered.

The thing that had saved him was falling flat. The driver of that car, seeing Montag down, instinctively considered the probability that running over a body at that speed might turn the car upside down and spill them out. If Montag had remained an upright target. . . ? Montag gasped.

Far down the boulevard, four blocks away, the beetle had slowed, spun about on two wheels, and was now racing back, slanting over on the wrong side of the street, picking up speed.

But Montag was gone, hidden in the safety of the dark alley for which he had set out on a long journey, an hour or was it a minute, ago? He stood shivering in the night, looking back out as the beetle ran by and skidded back to the centre of the avenue, whirling laughter in the air all about it, gone.

Further on, as Montag moved in darkness, he could see the helicopters falling, falling, like the first flakes of snow in the long winter. to come.... The house was silent.

Montag approached from the rear, creeping through a thick night-moistened scent of daffodils and roses and wet grass. He touched the screen door in back, found it open, slipped in, moved across the porch, listening.

Mrs. Black, are you asleep in there? he thought. This isn't good, but your husband did it to others and never asked and never wondered and never worried. And now since you're a fireman's wife, it's your house and your turn, for all the houses your husband burned and the people he hurt without thinking..

The house did not reply.

He hid the books in the kitchen and moved from the house again to the alley and looked back and the house was still dark and quiet, sleeping.

On his way across town, with the helicopters fluttering like torn bits of paper in the sky, he phoned the alarm at a lonely phone booth outside a store that was closed for the night. Then he stood in the cold night air, waiting and at a distance he heard the fire sirens start up and run, and the Salamanders coming, coming to bum Mr. Black's house while he was away at work, to make his wife stand shivering in the morning air while the roof let go and dropped in upon the fire. But now, she was still asleep.

Good night, Mrs. Black, he thought. -

"Faber! "

Another rap, a whisper, and a long waiting. Then, after a minute, a small light flickered inside Faber's small house. After another pause, the back door opened.

They stood looking at each other in the half-light, Faber and Montag, as if each did not believe in the other's existence. Then Faber moved and put out his hand and grabbed Montag and moved him in and sat him down and went back and stood in the door, listening. The sirens were wailing off in the morning distance. He came in and shut the door.

Montag said, "I've been a fool all down the line. I can't stay long. I'm on my way God knows where."

"At least you were a fool about the right things," said Faber. "I thought you were dead. The audio-capsule I gave you--"

"Burnt."

"I heard the captain talking to you and suddenly there was nothing. I almost came out looking for you."

"The captain's dead. He found the audio-capsule, he heard your voice, he was going to trace it. I killed him with the flamethrower."

Faber sat down and did not speak for a time.

"My God, how did this happen?" said Montag. "It was only the other night everything was fine and the next thing I know I'm drowning. How many times can a man go down and still be alive? I can't breathe. There's Beatty dead, and he was my friend once, and there's Millie gone, I thought she was my wife, but now I don't know. And the house all burnt. And my job gone and myself on the run, and I planted a book in a fireman's house on the way. Good Christ, the things I've done in a single week!"

"You did what you had to do. It was coming on for a long time."

"Yes, I believe that, if there's nothing else I believe. It saved itself up to happen. I could feel it for a long time, I was saving something up, I went around doing one thing and feeling another. God, it was all there. It's a wonder it didn't show on me, like fat. And now here I am, messing up your life. They might follow me here."

"I feel alive for the first time in years," said Faber. "I feel I'm doing what I should have done a lifetime ago. For a little while I'm not afraid. Maybe it's because I'm doing the right thing at last."

Maybe it's because I've done a rash thing and don't want to look the coward to you. I suppose I'll have to do even more violent things, exposing myself so I won't fall down on the job and turn scared again. What are your plans?"

"To keep running."

"You know the war's on?"

"I heard."

"God, isn't it funny?" said the old man. "It seems so remote because we have our own troubles."

"I haven't had time to think." Montag drew out a hundred dollars. "I want this to stay with you, use it any way that'll help when I'm gone."

"But--"

"I might be dead by noon; use this."

Faber nodded. "You'd better head for the river if you can, follow along it, and if you can hit the old railroad lines going out into the country, follow them. Even though practically everything's airborne these days and most of the tracks are abandoned, the rails are still there, rusting. I've heard there are still hobo camps all across the country, here and there; walking camps they call them, and if you keep walking far enough and keep an eye peeled, they say there's lots of old Harvard degrees on the tracks between here and Los Angeles. Most of them are wanted and hunted in the cities. They survive, I guess. There aren't many of them, and I guess the Government's never considered them a great enough danger to go in and track them down. You might hole up with them for a time and get in touch with me in St. Louis, I'm leaving on the five a.m. bus this morning, to see a retired printer there, I'm getting out into the open myself, at last."

The money will be put to good use. Thanks and God bless you. Do you want to sleep a few minutes?"

"I'd better run."

"Let's check."

He took Montag quickly into the bedroom and lifted a picture frame aside, revealing a television screen the size of a postal card. "I always wanted something very small, something I could talk to, something I could blot out with the palm of my hand, if necessary, nothing that could shout me down, nothing monstrous big. So, you see." He snapped it on. "Montag," the TV set said, and lit up. "M-O-N-T-A-G." The name was spelled out by the voice. "Guy Montag. Still running. Police helicopters are up. A new Mechanical Hound has been brought from another district.. ." Montag and Faber looked at each other.

". . . Mechanical Hound never fails. Never since its first use in tracking quarry has this incredible invention made a mistake. Tonight, this network is proud to have the opportunity to follow the Hound by camera helicopter as it starts on its way to the target..." Faber poured two glasses of whisky. "We'll need these."

They drank.

". . . nose so sensitive the Mechanical Hound can remember and identify ten thousand odour-indexes on ten thousand men without re-setting!"

Faber trembled the least bit and looked about at his house, at the walls, the door, the doorknob, and the chair where Montag now sat. Montag saw the look. They both looked quickly about the house and Montag felt his nostrils dilate and he knew that he was trying to track himself and his nose was suddenly good enough to sense the path he had made in the air of the room and the sweat of his hand hung from the doorknob, invisible, but as numerous as the jewels of a small chandelier, he was everywhere, in and on and about everything, he was a luminous cloud, a ghost that made breathing once more impossible. He saw Faber stop up his own breath for fear of drawing that ghost into his own body, perhaps, being contaminated with the phantom exhalations and odours of a runningman.

"The Mechanical Hound is now landing by helicopter at the site of the Burning!"

And there on the small screen was the burnt house, and the crowd, and something with a sheet over it and out of the sky, fluttering, came the helicopter like a grotesque flower.

So they must have their game out, thought Montag. The circus must go on, even with war beginning within the hour....He watched the scene, fascinated, not wanting to move. It seemed so remote and no part of him; it was a play apart and separate, wondrous to watch, not without its strange pleasure. That's all for me, you thought, that's all taking place just for me, by God.

If he wished, he could linger here, in comfort, and follow the entire hunt on through its swift. phases, down alleys across streets, over empty running avenues, crossing lots and playgrounds, with pauses here or there for the necessary commercials, up other alleys to the burning house of Mr. and Mrs. Black, and so on finally to this house with Faber and himself seated, drinking, while the Electric Hound snuffed down the last trail, silent as a drift of death itself, skidded to a halt outside that window there. Then, if he wished, Montag might rise, walk to the window, keep one eye on the TV screen, open the window, lean out, look back, and see himself dramatized, described, made over, standing there, limned in the bright small television screen from outside, a drama to be watched objectively, knowing that in other parlours he was large as life, in full colour, dimensionally perfect! And if he kept his eye peeled quickly he would see himself, an instant before oblivion, being punctured for the benefit of how many civilian parlour-sitters who had been wakened from sleep a few minutes ago by the frantic sirening of their living-room walls to come watch the big game, the hunt, the one-mancarnival.

Would he have time for a speech? As the Hound seized him, in view of ten or twenty or thirty million people, mightn't he sum up his entire life in the last week in one single phrase or a word that would stay with them long after the. Hound had turned, clenching him in its metal-plier jaws, and trotted off in darkness, while the camera remained stationary, watching the creature dwindle in the distance--a splendid

fade-out! What could he say in a single word, a few words, that would sear all their faces and wake them up? "There," whispered Faber.

Out of a helicopter glided something that was not machine, not animal, not dead, not alive, glowing with a pale green luminosity. It stood near the smoking ruins of Montag's house and the men brought his discarded flame-thrower to it and put it down under the muzzle of the Hound. There was a whirring, clicking, humming.

Montag shook his head and got up and drank the rest of his drink. "It's time. I'm sorry about this:"

"About what? Me? My house? I deserve everything. Run, for God's sake. Perhaps I can delay them here--"

"Wait. There's no use your being discovered. When I leave, burn the spread of this bed, that I touched. Burn the chair in the living room, in your wall incinerator. Wipe down the furniture with alcohol, wipe the door-knobs. Burn the throwrug in the parlour. Turn the air-conditioning on full in all the rooms and spray with moth-spray if you have it. Then, turn on your lawn sprinklers as high as they'll go and hose off the sidewalks. With any luck at all, we can kill the trail in here, anyway..'

Faber shook his hand. "I'll tend to it. Good luck. If we're both in good health, next week, the week after, get in touch. General Delivery, St. Louis. I'm sorry there's no way I can go with you this time, by ear-phone. That was good for both of us. But my equipment was limited. You see, I never thought I would use it. What a silly old man. No thought there. Stupid, stupid. So I haven't another green bullet, the right kind, to put in your head. Gonow!"

"One last thing. Quick. A suitcase, get it, fill it with your dirtiest clothes, an old suit, the dirtier the better, a shirt, some old sneakers and socks . . ."

Faber was gone and back in a minute. They sealed the cardboard valise with clear tape. "To keep the ancient odour of Mr. Faber in, of course," said Faber sweating at the job.

Montag doused the exterior of the valise with whisky. "I don't want that Hound picking up two odours at once. May I take this whisky. I'll need it later. Christ I hope this works!"

They shook hands again and, going out of the door, they glanced at the TV. The Hound was on its way, followed by hovering helicopter cameras, silently, silently, sniffing the great night wind.

It was running down the first alley.

"Good-bye ! "

And Montag was out the back door lightly, running with the half-empty valise. Behind him he heard the lawn-sprinkling system jump up, filling the dark air with rain that fell gently and then with a steady pour all about, washing on the sidewalks, and draining into the alley. He carried a few drops of this rain with him on his face. He thought he heard the old man call good-bye, but he wasn't certain.

He ran very fast away from the house, down toward the river.

Montag ran.

He could feel the Hound, like autumn, come cold and dry and swift, like a wind that didn't stir grass, that didn't jar windows or disturb leaf-shadows on the white sidewalks as it passed. The Hound did not touch the world. It carried its silence with it, so you could feel the silence building up a pressure behind you all across town. Montag felt the pressure rising, and ran.

He stopped for breath, on his way to the river, to peer through dimly lit windows of wakened houses, and saw the silhouettes of people inside watching their parlour walls and there on the walls the Mechanical Hound, a breath of neon vapour, spidered along, here and gone, here and gone! Now at Elm Terrace, Lincoln, Oak, Park, and up the alley toward Faber's house. Go past, thought Montag, don't stop, go on, don't turn in!

On the parlour wall, Faber's house, with its sprinkler system pulsing in the night air.

The Hound paused, quivering.

No! Montag held to the window sill. This way! Here!

The procaine needle flicked out and in, out and in. A single clear drop of the stuff of dreams fell from the needle as it vanished in the Hound's muzzle. Montag held his breath, like a doubled fist, in his chest.

The Mechanical Hound turned and plunged away from Faber's house down the alley again. Montag snapped his gaze to the sky. The helicopters were closer, a great blowing of insects to a single light source.

With an effort, Montag reminded himself again that this was no fictional episode to be watched on his run to the river; it was in actuality his own chess-game he was witnessing, move by move.

He shouted to give himself the necessary push away from this last house window, and the fascinating seance going on in there! Hell! and he was away and gone! The alley, a street, the alley, a street, and the smell of the river. Leg out, leg down, leg out and down. Twenty million Montags running, soon, if the cameras caught him. Twenty million Montags running, running like an ancient flickery Keystone Comedy, cops, robbers, chasers and the chased, hunters and hunted, he had seen it a thousand times. Behind him now twenty million silently baying Hounds ricocheted across parlours, three-cushion shooting from right wall to centre wall to left wall, gone, right wall, centre wall, left wall, gone !

Montag jammed his Seashell to his ear.

"Police suggest entire population in the Elm Terrace area do as follows: Everyone in every house in every street open a front or rear door or look from the windows. The fugitive cannot escape if everyone in the next minute looks from his house. Ready! "

Of course! Why hadn't they done it before! Why, in all the years, hadn't this game been tried! Everyone up, everyone out! He couldn't be missed! The only man running alone in the night city, the only man proving his legs!

"At the count of ten now! One! Two!"

He felt the city rise. Three .

He felt the city turn to its thousands of doors.

Faster! Leg up, leg down !

"Four ! "

The people sleepwalking in their hallways.

"Five! "

He felt their hands on the doorknobs!

The smell of the river was cool and like a solid rain. His throat was burnt rust and his eyes were wept dry with running. He yelled as if this yell would jet him on, fling him the last hundred yards.

"Six, seven, eight ! "

The doorknobs turned on five thousand doors. "Nine!"

He ran out away from the last row of houses, on a slope leading down to a solid moving blackness. "Ten!" The doors opened.

He imagined thousands on thousands of faces peering into yards, into alleys, and into the sky, faces hid by curtains, pale, night-frightened faces, like grey animals peering from electric caves, faces with grey colourless eyes, grey tongues and grey thoughts looking out through the numb flesh of the face.

But he was at the river.

He touched it, just to be sure it was real. He waded in and stripped in darkness to the skin, splashed his body, arms, legs, and head with raw liquor; drank it and snuffed some up his nose. Then he dressed in Faber's old clothes and shoes. He tossed his own clothing into the river and watched it swept away. Then, holding the suitcase, he walked out in the river until there was no bottom and he was swept away in the dark.

He was three hundred yards downstream when the Hound reached the river. Overhead the great racketing fans of the helicopters hovered. A storm of light fell upon the river and Montag dived under the great illumination as if the sun had broken the clouds. He felt the river pull him further on its way, into darkness. Then the lights switched back to the land, the helicopters swerved over the city again, as if they had picked up another trail. They were gone. The Hound was gone. Now there was only the cold river and Montag floating in a sudden peacefulness, away from the city and the lights and the chase, away from everything.

He felt as if he had left a stage behind and many actors. He felt as if he had left the great seance and all the murmuring ghosts. He was moving from an unreality that was frightening into a reality that was unreal because it was new.

The black land slid by and he was going into the country among the hills: For the first time in a dozen years the stars were coming out above him, in great processions of wheeling fire. He saw a great juggernaut of stars form in the sky and threaten to roll over and crush him.

He floated on his back when the valise filled and sank; the river was mild and leisurely, going away from the people who ate shadows for breakfast and steam for lunch and vapours for supper. The river was very real; it held him comfortably and gave him the time at last, the leisure, to consider this month, this year, and a lifetime of years. He listened to his heart slow. His thoughts stopped rushing with his blood.

He saw the moon low in the sky now. The moon there, and the light of the moon caused by what? By the sun, of course. And what lights the sun? Its own fire. And the sun goes on, day after day, burning and burning. The sun and time. The sun and time and burning. Burning. The river bobbed him along gently. Burning. The sun and every clock on the earth. It all came together and became a single thing in his mind. After a long time of floating on the land and a short time of floating in the river he knew why he must never burn again in his life.

The sun burned every day. It burned Time. The world rushed in a circle and turned on its axis and time was busy burning the years and the people anyway, without any help from him. So if he burnt things with the firemen, and the sun burnt Time, that meant that everything burned!

One of them had to stop burning. The sun wouldn't, certainly. So it looked as if it had to be Montag and the people he had worked with until a few short hours ago. Somewhere the saving and putting away had to begin again and someone had to do the saving and keeping, one way or another, in books, in records, in people's heads, any way at all so long as it was safe, free from moths, silver-fish, rust and dry-rot, and men with matches. The world was full of burning of all types and sizes. Now the guild of the asbestos-weaver must open shop verysoon.

He felt his heel bump land, touch pebbles and rocks, scrape sand. The river had moved him toward shore.

He looked in at the great black creature without eyes or light, without shape, with only a size that went a thousand miles without wanting to stop, with its grass hills and forests that were waiting for him.

He hesitated to leave the comforting flow of the water. He expected the Hound there. Suddenly the trees might blow under a great wind of helicopters.

But there was only the normal autumn wind high up, going by like another river. Why wasn't the Hound running? Why had the search veered inland? Montag listened. Nothing. Nothing.

Millie, he thought. All this country here. Listen to it! Nothing and nothing. So much silence, Millie, I wonder how you'd take it? Would you shout Shut up, shut up! Millie, Millie. And he was sad.

Millie was not here and the Hound was not here, but the dry smell of hay blowing from some distant field put Montag on the land. He remembered a farm he had visited when he was very young, one of the rare times he had discovered that somewhere behind the seven veils of unreality, beyond the walls of parlours and beyond the tin moat of the city, cows chewed grass and pigs sat in warm ponds at noon and dogs barked after white sheep on a hill.

Now, the dry smell of hay, the motion of the waters, made him think of sleeping in fresh hay in a lonely barn away from the loud highways, behind a quiet farmhouse, and under an ancient windmill that whirled like the sound of the passing years overhead. He lay in the high barn loft all night, listening to distant animals and insects and trees, the little motions and stirrings. During the night, he thought, below the loft, he would hear a sound like feet moving, perhaps. He would tense and sit up. The sound would move away, He would lie back and look out of the loft window, very late in the night, and see the lights go out in the farmhouse itself, until a very young and beautiful woman would sit in an unlit window, braiding her hair. It would be hard to see her, but her face would be like the face of the girl so long ago in his past now, so very long ago, the girl who had known the weather and never been burned by the fire-flies, the girl who had known what dandelions meant rubbed off on your chin. Then, she would be gone from the warm window and appear again upstairs in her moon-whitened room. And then, to the sound of death, the sound of the jets cutting the sky into two black pieces beyond the horizon, he would lie in the loft, hidden and safe, watching those strange new stars over the rim of the earth, fleeing from the soft colour of dawn.

In the morning he would not have needed sleep, for all the warm odours and sights of a complete country night would have rested and slept him while his eyes were wide and his mouth, when he thought to test it, was half a smile.

And there at the bottom of the hayloft stair, waiting for him, would be the incredible thing. He would step carefully down, in the pink light of early morning, so fully aware of the world that he would be afraid, and stand over the small miracle and at last bend to touch it.

A cool glass of fresh milk, and a few apples and pears laid at the foot of the steps.

This was all he wanted now. Some sign that the immense world would accept him and give him the long time needed to think all the things that must be thought. A glass of milk, an apple, a pear.

He stepped from the river.

The land rushed at him, a tidal wave. He was crushed by darkness and the look of the country and the million odours on a wind that iced his body. He fell back under the breaking curve of darkness and sound and smell, his ears roaring. He whirled. The stars poured over his sight like flaming meteors. He wanted to plunge in the river again and let it idle him safely on down somewhere. This dark land rising was like that day in his childhood, swimming, when from nowhere the largest wave in the history of remembering slammed him down in salt mud and green darkness, water burning mouth and nose, retching his stomach, screaming! Too much water!

Too much land!

Out of the black wall before him, a whisper. A shape. In the shape, two eyes. The night looking at him. The forest, seeing him.

The Hound!

After all the running and rushing and sweating it out and half-drowning, to come this far, work this hard, and think yourself safe and sigh with relief and come out on the land at last only to find . . . The Hound!

Montag gave one last agonized shout as if this were too much for any man.

The shape exploded away. The eyes vanished. The leafpiles flew up in a dry shower.

Montag was alone in the wilderness.

A deer. He smelled the heavy musk-like perfume mingled with blood and the gummed exhalation of the animal's breath, all cardamon and moss and ragweed odour in this huge night where the trees ran at him, pulled away, ran, pulled away, to the pulse of the heart behind his eyes.

There must have been a billion leaves on the land; he waded in them, a dry river smelling of hot cloves and warm dust. And the other smells! There was a smell like a cut potato from all the land, raw and cold and white from having the moon on it most of the night. There was a smell like pickles from a bottle and a smell like parsley on the table at home. There was a faint yellow odour like mustard from a jar. There was

a smell like carnations from the yard next door. He put down his hand and felt a weed rise up like a child brushing him. His fingers smelled of liquorice. He stood breathing, and the more he breathed the land in, the more he was filled up with all the details of the land. He was not empty. There was more than enough here to fill him. There would always be more than enough.

He walked in the shallow tide of leaves, stumbling.

And in the middle of the strangeness, a familiarity.

His foot hit something that rang dully.

He moved his hand on the ground, a yard this way, a yard that.

The railroad track.

The track that came out of the city and rusted across the land, through forests and woods, deserted now, by the river.

Here was the path to wherever he was going. Here was the single familiar thing, the magic charm he might need a little while, to touch, to feel beneath his feet, as he moved on into the bramble bushes and the lakes of smelling and feeling and touching, among the whispers and the blowing down of leaves.

He walked on the track.

And he was surprised to learn how certain he suddenly was of a single fact he could not prove.

Once, long ago, Clarisse had walked here, where he was walking now.

Half an hour later, cold, and moving carefully on the tracks, fully aware of his entire body, his face, his mouth, his eyes stuffed with blackness, his ears stuffed with sound, his legs prickled with burrs and nettles, he saw the fire ahead.

The fire was gone, then back again, like a winking eye. He stopped, afraid he might blow the fire out with a single breath. But the fire was there and he approached warily, from a long way off. It took the better part of fifteen minutes before he drew very close indeed to it, and then he stood looking at it from cover. That small motion, the white and red colour, a strange fire because it meant a different thing to him.

It was not burning; it was warming!

He saw many hands held to its warmth, hands without arms, hidden in darkness. Above the hands, motionless faces that were only moved and tossed and flickered with firelight. He hadn't known fire could look this way. He had never thought in his life that it could give as well as take. Even its smell was different.

How long he stood he did not know, but there was a foolish and yet delicious sense of knowing himself as an animal come from the forest, drawn by the fire. He was a thing of brush and liquid eye, of fur and muzzle and hoof, he was a thing of horn and blood that would smell like autumn if you bled it out on the ground. He stood a long long time, listening to the warm crackle of the flames.

There was a silence gathered all about that fire and the silence was in the men's faces, and time was there, time enough to sit by this rusting track under the trees, and look at the world and turn it over with the eyes, as if it were held to the centre of the bonfire, a piece of steel these men were all shaping. It was not only the fire that was different. It was the silence. Montag moved toward this special silence that was concerned with all of the world.

And then the voices began and they were talking, and he could hear nothing of what the voices said, but the sound rose and fell quietly and the voices were turning the world over and looking at it; the voices knew the land and the trees and the city which lay down the track by the river.

The voices talked of everything, there was nothing they could not talk about, he knew from the very cadence and motion and continual stir of curiosity and wonder in them.

And then one of the men looked up and saw him, for the first or perhaps the seventh time, and a voice called to Montag:

"All right, you can come out now ! "

Montag stepped back into the shadows.

"It's all right," the voice said. "You're welcome here."

Montag walked slowly toward the fire and the five old men sitting there dressed in dark blue denim pants and jackets and dark blue suits. He did not know what to say to them.

"Sit down," said the man who seemed to be the leader of the small group. "Have some coffee?" He watched the dark steaming mixture pour into a collapsible tin cup, which was handed him straight off. He sipped it gingerly and felt them looking at him with curiosity. His lips were scalded, but that was good. The faces around him were bearded, but the beards were clean, neat, and their hands were clean. They had stood up as if to welcome a guest, and now they sat down again. Montag sipped. "Thanks," he said. "Thanks verymuch."

"You're welcome, Montag. My name's Granger." He held out a small bottle of colourless fluid. "Drink this, too. It'll change the chemical index of your perspiration. Half an hour from now you'll smell like two other people. With the Hound after you, the best thing is Bottoms up." Montag drank the bitterfluid.

"You'll stink like a bobcat, but that's all right," said Granger.

"You know my name;" said Montag.

Granger nodded to a portable battery TV set by the fire.

"We've watched the chase. Figured you'd wind up south along the river. When we heard you plunging around out in the forest like a drunken elk, we didn't hide as we usually do. We figured you were in the river, when the helicopter cameras swung back in over the city. Something funny there. The chase is still running. The other way, though." "The other way?"

"Let's have a look."

Granger snapped the portable viewer on. The picture was a nightmare, condensed, easily passed from hand to hand, in the forest, all whirring colour and flight. A voice cried:

"The chase continues north in the city! Police helicopters are converging on Avenue 87 and Elm Grove Park!"

Granger nodded. "They're faking. You threw them off at the river. They can't admit it. They know they can hold their audience only so long. The show's got to have a snap ending, quick! If they started searching the whole damn river it might take all night. So they're sniffing for a scape-goat to end things with a bang. Watch. They'll catch Montag in the next five minutes! "

"But how--"

"Watch."

The camera, hovering in the belly of a helicopter, now swung down at an empty street.

"See that?" whispered Granger. "It'll be you; right up at the end of that street is our victim. See how our camera is coming in? Building the scene. Suspense. Long shot. Right now, some poor fellow is out for a walk. A rarity. An odd one. Don't think the police don't know the habits of queer ducks like that, men who walk mornings for the hell of it, or for reasons of insomnia. Anyway, the police have had him charted for months, years. Never know when that sort of information might be handy. And today, it turns out, it's very usable indeed. It saves face. Oh, God, look there!"

The men at the fire bent forward.

On the screen, a man turned a corner. The Mechanical Hound rushed forward into the viewer, suddenly. The helicopter light shot down a dozen brilliant pillars that built a cage all about the man.

A voice cried, "There's Montag ! The search is done!"

The innocent man stood bewildered, a cigarette burning in his hand. He stared at the Hound, not knowing what it was. He probably never knew. He glanced up at the sky and the wailing sirens. The cameras rushed

down. The Hound leapt up into the air with a rhythm and a sense of timing that was incredibly beautiful. Its needle shot out. It was suspended for a moment in their gaze, as if to give the vast audience time to appreciate everything, the raw look of the victim's face, the empty street, the steel animal a bullet nosing the target. "Montag, don't move!" said a voice from the sky.

The camera fell upon the victim, even as did the Hound. Both reached him simultaneously. The victim was seized by Hound and camera in a great spidering, clenching grip. He screamed. He screamed. He screamed!

Blackout.

Silence.

Darkness.

Montag cried out in the silence and turned away.

Silence.

And then, after a time of the men sitting around the fire, their faces expressionless, an announcer on the dark screen said, "The search is over, Montag is dead; a crime against society has been avenged."

Darkness.

"We now take you to the Sky Room of the Hotel Lux for a half-hour of Just-Before-Dawn, a programme of-" Granger turned it off.

"They didn't show the man's face in focus. Did you notice?"

Even your best friends couldn't tell if it was you. They scrambled it just enough to let the imagination take over. Hell," he whispered. "Hell."

Montag said nothing but now, looking back, sat with his eyes fixed to the blank screen, trembling.

Granger touched Montag's arm. "Welcome back from the dead." Montag nodded. Granger went on. "You might as well know all of us, now. This is Fred Clement, former occupant of the Thomas Hardy chair at Cambridge in the years before it became an Atomic Engineering School. This other is Dr. Simmons from U.C.L.A., a specialist in Ortega y Gasset; Professor West here did quite a bit for ethics, an ancient study now, for Columbia University quite some years ago. Reverend Padover here gave a few lectures thirty years ago and lost his flock between one Sunday and the next for his views. He's been bumming with us some time now. Myself: I wrote a book called The Fingers in the Glove; the Proper Relationship between the Individual and Society, and here I am! Welcome, Montag!"

"I don't belong with you," said Montag, at last, slowly. "I've been an idiot all the way." "We're used to that. We all made the right kind of mistakes, or we wouldn't be here. When we were separate individuals, all we had was rage. I struck a fireman when he came to burn my library years ago. I've been running ever since. You want to join us, Montag?" "Yes."

"What have you to offer?"

"Nothing. I thought I had part of the Book of Ecclesiastes and maybe a little of Revelation, but I haven't even that now."

"The Book of Ecclesiastes would be fine. Where was it?"

"Here," Montag touched his head.

"Ah," Granger smiled and nodded.

"What's wrong? Isn't that all right?" said Montag.

"Better than all right; perfect!" Granger turned to the Reverend. "Do we have a Book of Ecclesiastes?"

"One. A man named Harris of Youngstown."

"Montag." Granger took Montag's shoulder firmly. "Walk carefully. Guard your health. If anything should happen to Harris, you are the Book of Ecclesiastes. See how important you've become in the last minute!"

"But I've forgotten!"

"No, nothing's ever lost. We have ways to shake down your clinkers for you."

"But I've tried to remember!"

"Don't try. It'll come when we need it. All of us have photographic memories, but spend a lifetime learning how to block off the things that are really in there. Simmons here has worked on it for twenty years and now we've got the method down to where we can recall anything that's been read once. Would you like, some day, Montag, to read Plato's Republic?" "Of course!"

"I am Plato's Republic. Like to read Marcus Aurelius? Mr. Simmons is Marcus."

"How do you do?" said Mr. Simmons.

"Hello," said Montag.

"I want you to meet Jonathan Swift, the author of that evil political book, Gulliver's Travels! And this other fellow is Charles Darwin, and this one is Schopenhauer, and this one is Einstein, and this one here at my elbow is Mr. Albert Schweitzer, a very kind philosopher indeed. Here we all are, Montag. Aristophanes and Mahatma Gandhi and Gautama Buddha and Confucius and Thomas Love Peacock and Thomas Jefferson and Mr. Lincoln, if you please. We are also

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John."

Everyone laughed quietly.

"It can't be," said Montag.

"It is," replied Granger, smiling. "We're book-burners, too. We read the books and burnt them, afraid they'd be found. Micro-filming didn't pay off; we were always travelling, we didn't want to bury the film and come back later. Always the chance of discovery. Better to keep it in the old heads, where no one can see it or suspect it. We are all bits and pieces of history and literature and international law, Byron, Tom Paine, Machiavelli, or Christ, it's here. And the hour is late. And the war's begun. And we are out here, and the city is there, all wrapped up in its own coat of a thousand colours. What do you think, Montag?"

"I think I was blind trying to do things my way, planting books in firemen's houses and sending in alarms."

"You did what you had to do. Carried out on a national scale, it might have worked beautifully. But our way is simpler and, we think, better. All we want to do is keep the knowledge we think we will need, intact and safe. We're not out to incite or anger anyone yet. For if we are destroyed, the knowledge is dead, perhaps for good. We are model citizens, in our own special way; we walk the old tracks, we lie in the hills at night, and the city people let us be. We're stopped and searched occasionally, but there's nothing on our persons to incriminate us. The organization is flexible, very loose, and fragmentary. Some of us have had plastic surgery on our faces and fingerprints. Right now we have a horrible job; we're waiting for the war to begin and, as quickly, end. It's not pleasant, but then we're not in control, we're the odd minority crying in the wilderness. When the war's over, perhaps we can be of some use in the world." "Do you really think they'll listen then?"

"If not, we'll just have to wait. We'll pass the books on to our children, by word of mouth, and let our children wait, in turn, on the other people. A lot will be lost that way, of course.

But you can't make people listen. They have to come round in their own time, wondering what happened and why the world blew up under them. It can't last." "How many of you are there?"

"Thousands on the roads, the abandoned railtracks, tonight, bums on the outside, libraries inside. It wasn't planned, at first. Each man had a book he wanted to remember, and did. Then, over a period of twenty years or so, we met each other, travelling, and got the loose network together and set out a plan. The most important single thing we had to pound into ourselves was that we were not important, we mustn't be

pedants; we were not to feel superior to anyone else in the world. We're nothing more than dust-jackets for books, of no significance otherwise. Some of us live in small towns. Chapter One of Thoreau's Walden in Green River, Chapter Two in Willow Farm, Maine. Why, there's one town in Maryland, only twenty-seven people, no bomb'll ever touch that town, is the complete essays of a man named Bertrand Russell. Pick up that town, almost, and flip the pages, so many pages to a person. And when the war's over, some day, some year, the books can be written again, the people will be called in, one by one, to recite what they know and we'll set it up in type until another Dark Age, when we might have to do the whole damn thing over again. But that's the wonderful thing about man; he never gets so discouraged or disgusted that he gives up doing it all over again, because he knows very well it is important and worth the doing."

"What do we do tonight?" asked Montag.

"Wait," said Granger. "And move downstream a little way, just in case."

He began throwing dust and dirt on the fire.

The other men helped, and Montag helped, and there, in the wilderness, the men all moved their hands, putting out the fire together.

They stood by the river in the starlight.

Montag saw the luminous dial of his waterproof. Five. Five o'clock in the morning. Another year ticked by in a single hour, and dawn waiting beyond the far bank of the river. "Why do you trust me?" said Montag.

A man moved in the darkness.

"The look of you's enough. You haven't seen yourself in a mirror lately. Beyond that, the city has never cared so much about us to bother with an elaborate chase like this to find us. A few crackpots with verses in their heads can't touch them, and they know it and we know it; everyone knows it. So long as the vast population doesn't wander about quoting the Magna Charta and the Constitution, it's all right. The firemen were enough to check that, now and then. No, the cities don't bother us. And you look like hell."

They moved along the bank of the river, going south. Montag tried to see the men's faces, the old faces he remembered from the firelight, lined and tired. He was looking for a brightness, a resolve, a triumph over tomorrow that hardly seemed to be there. Perhaps he had expected their faces to burn and glitter with the knowledge they carried, to glow as lanterns glow, with the light in them. But all the light had come from the camp fire, and these men had seemed no different from any others who had run a long race, searched a long search, seen good things destroyed, and now, very late, were gathering to wait for the end of the party and the blowing out of the lamps. They weren't at all certain that the things they carried in their heads might make every future dawn glow with a purer light, they were sure of nothing save that the books were on file behind their quiet eyes, the books were waiting, with their pages uncut, for the customers who might come by in later years, some with clean and some with dirty fingers. Montag squinted from one face to another as they walked.

"Don't judge a book by its cover," someone said.

And they all laughed quietly, moving downstream.

There was a shriek and the jets from the city were gone overhead long before the men looked up.

Montag stared back at the city, far down the river, only a faint glow now.

"My wife's back there."

"I'm sorry to hear that. The cities won't do well in the next few days," said Granger.

"It's strange, I don't miss her, it's strange I don't feel much of anything," said Montag. "Even if she dies, I realized a moment ago, I don't think I'll feel sad. It isn't right. Something must be wrong with me."

"Listen," said Granger, taking his arm, and walking with him, holding aside the bushes to let him pass. "When I was a boy my grandfather died, and he was a sculptor. He was also a very kind man who had a lot of love to give the world, and he helped clean up the slum in our town; and he made toys for us and he did a million things in his lifetime; he was always busy with his hands. And when he died, I suddenly realized

I wasn't crying for him at all, but for the things he did. I cried because he would never do them again, he would never carve another piece of wood or help us raise doves and pigeons in the back yard or play the violin the way he did, or tell us jokes the way he did. He was part of us and when he died, all the actions stopped dead and there was no one to do them just the way he did. He was individual. He was an important man. I've never gotten over his death. Often I think, what wonderful carvings never came to birth because he died. How many jokes are missing from the world, and how many homing pigeons untouched by his hands. He shaped the world. He did things to the world. The world was bankrupt of ten million fine actions the night he passed on."

Montag walked in silence. "Millie, Millie," he whispered. "Millie."

"What?"

"My wife, my wife. Poor Millie, poor Millie. I can't remember anything. I think of her hands but I don't see them doing anything at all. They just hang there at her sides or they lie there on her lap or there's a cigarette in them, but that's all".

Montag turned and glanced back.

What did you give to the city, Montag?

Ashes.

What did the others give to each other?

Nothingness.

Granger stood looking back with Montag. "Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do, he said, so long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away. The difference between the man who just cuts lawns and a real gardener is in the touching, he said. The lawn-cutter might just as well not have been there at all; the gardener will be there a lifetime." Granger moved his hand. "My grandfather showed me some V-2 rocket films once, fifty years ago. Have you ever seen the atom-bomb mushroom from two hundred miles up? It's a pinprick, it's nothing. With the wilderness all around it.

"My grandfather ran off the V-2 rocket film a dozen times and then hoped that some day our cities would open up and let the green and the land and the wilderness in more, to remind people that we're allotted a little space on earth and that we survive in that wilderness that can take back what it has given, as easily as blowing its breath on us or sending the sea to tell us we are not so big. When we forget how close the wilderness is in the night, my grandpa said, some day it will come in and get us, for we will have forgotten how terrible and real it can be. You see?" Granger turned to Montag. "Grandfather's been dead for all these years, but if you lifted my skull, by God, in the convolutions of my brain you'd find the big ridges of his thumbprint. He touched me. As I said earlier, he was a sculptor. 'I hate a Roman named Status Quo!' he said to me. 'Stuff your eyes with wonder,' he said, 'live as if you'd drop dead in ten seconds. See the world. It's more fantastic than any dream made or paid for in factories. Ask no guarantees, ask for no security, there never was such an animal. And if there were, it would be related to the great sloth which hangs upside down in a tree all day every day, sleeping its life away. To hell with that,' he said, 'shake the tree and knock the great sloth down on his ass.'" "Look!" cried Montag.

And the war began and ended in that instant.

Later, the men around Montag could not say if they had really seen anything. Perhaps the merest flourish of light and motion in the sky. Perhaps the bombs were there, and the jets, ten miles, five miles, one mile up, for the merest instant, like grain thrown over the heavens by a great sowing hand, and the bombs drifting with dreadful swiftness, yet sudden slowness, down upon the morning city they had left behind. The bombardment was to all intents and purposes finished, once the jets had sighted their target, alerted

their bombardiers at five thousand miles an hour; as quick as the whisper of a scythe the war was finished. Once the bomb-release was yanked it was over. Now, a full three seconds, all of the time in history, before the bombs struck, the enemy ships themselves were gone half around the visible world, like bullets in which a savage islander might not believe because they were invisible; yet the heart is suddenly shattered, the body falls in separate motions and the blood is astonished to be freed on the air; the brain squanders its few precious memories and, puzzled, dies.

This was not to be believed. It was merely a gesture. Montag saw the flirt of a great metal fist over the far city and he knew the scream of the jets that would follow, would say, after the deed, disintegrate, leave no stone on another, perish. Die.

Montag held the bombs in the sky for a single moment, with his mind and his hands reaching helplessly up at them. "Run!" he cried to Faber. To Clarisse, "Run!" To Mildred, "Get out, get out of there! " But Clarisse, he remembered, was dead. And Faber was out; there in the deep valleys of the country somewhere the five a.m. bus was on its way from one desolation to another. Though the desolation had not yet arrived, was still in the air, it was certain as man could make it. Before the bus had run another fifty yards on the highway, its destination would be meaningless, and its point of departure changed from metropolis to junkyard. And Mildred . .

Get out, run!

He saw her in her hotel room somewhere now in the halfsecond remaining with the bombs a yard, a foot, an inch from her building. He saw her leaning toward the great shimmering walls of colour and motion where the family talked and talked and talked to her, where the family prattled and chatted and said her name and smiled at her and said nothing of the bomb that was an inch, now a half-inch, now a quarter-inch from the top of the hotel. Leaning into the wall as if all of the hunger of looking would find the secret of her sleepless unease there. Mildred, leaning anxiously, nervously, as if to plunge, drop, fall into that swarming immensity of colour to drown in its brightness.

The first bomb struck.

"Mildred! "

Perhaps, who would ever know? Perhaps the great broadcasting stations with their beams of colour and light and talk and chatter went first into oblivion.

Montag, falling flat, going down, saw or felt, or imagined he saw or felt the walls go dark in Millie's face, heard her screaming, because in the millionth part of time left, she saw her own face reflected there, in a mirror instead of a crystal ball, and it was such a wildly empty face, all by itself in the room, touching nothing, starved and eating of itself, that at last she recognized it as her own and looked quickly up at the ceiling as it and the entire structure of the hotel blasted down upon her, carrying her with a million pounds of brick, metal, plaster, and wood, to meet other people in the hives below, all on their quick way down to the cellar where the explosion rid itself of them in its own unreasonable way.

I remember. Montag clung to the earth. I remember. Chicago. Chicago, a long time ago. Millie and I. That's where we met! I remember now. Chicago. A long time ago.

The concussion knocked the air across and down the river, turned the men over like dominoes in a line, blew the water in lifting sprays, and blew the dust and made the trees above them mourn with a great wind passing away south. Montag crushed himself down, squeezing himself small, eyes tight. He blinked once. And in that instant saw the city, instead of the bombs, in the air. They had displaced each other. For another of those impossible instants the city stood, rebuilt and unrecognizable, taller than it had ever hoped or strived to be, taller than man had built it, erected at last in gouts of shattered concrete and sparkles of torn metal into a mural hung like a reversed avalanche, a million colours, a million oddities, a door where a window should be, a top for a bottom, a side for a back, and then the city rolled over and fell down dead.

Montag, lying there, eyes gritted shut with dust, a fine wet cement of dust in his now shut mouth, gasping and crying, now thought again, I remember, I remember, I remember something else. What is it? Yes, yes, part of the Ecclesiastes and Revelation. Part of that book, part of it, quick now, quick, before it gets away, before the shock wears off, before the wind dies. Book of Ecclesiastes. Here. He said it over to himself silently, lying flat to the trembling earth, he said the words of it many times and they were perfect without trying and there was no Denham's Dentifrice anywhere, it was just the Preacher by himself, standing there in his mind, looking at him

"There," said a voice.

The men lay gasping like fish laid out on the grass. They held to the earth as children hold to familiar things, no matter how cold or dead, no matter what has happened or will happen, their fingers were clawed into the dirt, and they were all shouting to keep their eardrums from bursting, to keep their sanity from bursting, mouths open, Montag shouting with them, a protest against the wind that ripped their faces and tore at their lips, making their noses bleed.

Montag watched the great dust settle and the great silence move down upon their world. And lying there it seemed that he saw every single grain of dust and every blade of grass and that he heard every cry and shout and whisper going up in the world now. Silence fell down in the sifting dust, and all the leisure they might need to look around, to gather the reality of this day into their senses.

Montag looked at the river. We'll go on the river. He looked at the old railroad tracks. Or we'll go that way. Or we'll walk on the highways now, and we'll have time to put things into ourselves.

And some day, after it sets in us a long time, it'll come out of our hands and our mouths. And a lot of it will be wrong, but just enough of it will be right. We'll just start walking today and see the world and the way the world walks around and talks, the way it really looks. I want to see everything now. And while none of it will be me when it goes in, after a while it'll all gather together inside and it'll be me. Look at the world out there, my God, my God, look at it out there, outside me, out there beyond my face and the only way to really touch it is to put it where it's finally me, where it's in the blood, where it pumps around a thousand times ten thousand a day. I get hold of it so it'll never run off. I'll hold onto the world tight some day. I've got one finger on it now; that's a beginning.

The wind died.

The other men lay a while, on the dawn edge of sleep, not yet ready to rise up and begin the day's obligations, its fires and foods, its thousand details of putting foot after foot and hand after hand.

They lay blinking their dusty eyelids. You could hear them breathing fast, then slower, then slow....

Montag sat up.

He did not move any further, however. The other men did likewise. The sun was touching the black horizon with a faint red tip. The air was cold and smelled of a coming rain.

Silently, Granger arose, felt his arms, and legs, swearing, swearing incessantly under his breath, tears dripping from his face. He shuffled down to the river to look upstream.

"It's flat," he said, a long time later. "City looks like a heap of baking-powder. It's gone." And a long time after that. "I wonder how many knew it was coming? I wonder how many were surprised?"

And across the world, thought Montag, how many other cities dead? And here in our country, how many? A hundred, a thousand?

Someone struck a match and touched it to a piece of dry paper taken from their pocket, and shoved this under a bit of grass and leaves, and after a while added tiny twigs which were wet and sputtered but finally caught, and the fire grew larger in the early morning as the sun came up and the men slowly turned from looking up river and were drawn to the fire, awkwardly, with nothing to say, and the sun coloured the backs of their necks as they bent down.

Granger unfolded an oilskin with some bacon in it. "We'll have a bite. Then we'll turn around and walk upstream. They'll be needing us up that way."

Someone produced a small frying-pan and the bacon went into it and the frying-pan was set on the fire. After a moment the bacon began to flutter and dance in the pan and the sputter of it filled the morning air with its aroma. The men watched this ritual silently. Granger looked into the fire. "Phoenix."

"What?"

"There was a silly damn bird called a Phoenix back before Christ: every few hundred years he built a pyre and burned himself up. He must have been first cousin to Man. But every time he burnt himself up he sprang out of the ashes, he got himself born all over again. And it looks like we're doing the same thing, over and over, but we've got one damn thing the Phoenix never had. We know the damn silly thing we just did. We know all the damn silly things we've done for a thousand years, and as long as we know that and always have it around where we can see it, some day we'll stop making the goddam funeral pyres and jumping into the middle of them. We pick up a few more people that remember, every generation."

He took the pan off the fire and let the bacon cool and they ate it, slowly, thoughtfully.

"Now, let's get on upstream," said Granger. "And hold on to one thought: You're not important. You're not anything. Some day the load we're carrying with us may help someone. But even when we had the books on hand, a long time ago, we didn't use what we got out of them. We went right on insulting the dead. We went right on spitting in the graves of all the poor ones who died before us. We're going to meet a lot of lonely people in the next week and the next month and the next year. And when they ask us what we're doing, you can say, We're remembering. That's where we'll win out in the long run. And someday we'll remember so much that we'll build the biggest goddam steam-shovel in history and dig the biggest grave of all time and shove war in and cover it up. Come on now, we're going to go build a mirror-factory first and put out nothing but mirrors for the next year and take a long look in them."

They finished eating and put out the fire. The day was brightening all about them as if a pink lamp had been given more wick. In the trees, the birds that had flown away now came back and settled down.

Montag began walking and after a moment found that the others had fallen in behind him, going north. He was surprised, and moved aside to let Granger pass, but Granger looked at him and nodded him on. Montag went ahead. He looked at the river and the sky and the rusting track going back down to where the farms lay, where the barns stood full of hay, where a lot of people had walked by in the night on their way from the city. Later, in a month or six months, and certainly not more than a year, he would walk along here again, alone, and keep right on going until he caught up with the people.

But now there was a long morning's walk until noon, and if the men were silent it was because there was everything to think about and much to remember. Perhaps later in the morning, when the sun was up and had warmed them, they would begin to talk, or just say the things they remembered, to be sure they were there, to be absolutely certain that things were safe in them. Montag felt the slow stir of words, the slow simmer. And when it came to his turn, what could he say, what could he offer on a day like this, to make the trip a little easier? To everything there is a season. Yes. A time to break down, and a time to build up. Yes. A time to keep silence and a time to speak. Yes, all that. But what else. What else? Something, something . . .

And on either side of the river was there a tree of life, which bore twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month; And the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Yes, thought Montag, that's the one I'll save for noon. For noon... When we reach the city.

Exercises:

Descriptive answer type questions:

1. Describe politics in the novella *Fahrenheit 451* what happened to them.
2. Explain the character of *Fahrenheit 451* with support of your ideas.

Short answer type questions:

1. What is the significance of the title *Fahrenheit 451*?
2. What happens to the elderly woman whose house was burned by the fireman?
3. Why did Montag say he wanted to become a fireman?
4. What lies does Montag tell in *Fahrenheit 451*?
5. What is Captain Beatty's dream about?
6. What fallacies are used in *Fahrenheit 451*? Give examples.
7. What is your first impression of Clarisse?

Classroom activities:

1. Is the end of this novella hopeful or hopeless? What message does the novella give you?
2. How do people learn in *Fahrenheit 451* by Bradbury?



Unit-V

B) ANTHEM

-Ayn Rand

Introduction:

Ayn Rand (February 02, 1905-March 6, 1982) was Russian American writer and philosopher. She was born to Russian-Jewish bourgeois family living in Saint Petersburg as Alissa Rosenbaum. She was the eldest of three daughters of Zinovy Zakhrovich Rosenbaum and his wife, Anna Borisovna. During her young age she lived a comfortable, affluent, middle-class existence. Her father was upwardly Mobile and Pharmacist and her Mother was socially ambitious and religiously observant. She entered in Petrograd State University, Russia where she studied Philosophy and History. At the age of 16, she began her studies in the department of social Pedagogy majoring in History. Her first novel *We the Living* appeared in 1936. She is known for her two best –selling novels *The Fountainhead* (1943) and *Atlas Shrugged* (1957) Her *Anthem* (1938) is a science fiction novella about a future dystopia where the world has been corrupted by communism.

Anthem is the story of totalitarian society in which personal names have been replaced by numbers. It is largely a statement against collectivism which is the idea that society should take precedence over the individual. Ayn Rand's bad experiences with collectivism show through in the society she creates *Anthem*. The characters live in a society where everything is bad and they have no control over their life of destiny. The novella is about a man, Equality 7-2521, who breaks all the laws of his society and dares to be different. He is a street sweeper forbidden to pursue knowledge having been chosen his profession by the council of vocations. Equality 7-2521 is a fictitious example of the great thinkers of the history who have made revolutionary breakthrough in spite of the social antagonism they faced. She describes what it is like in a society when all people are free to control themselves.

The novella has been read as a critical response to the communist collectivism of the Russia of her youth. The theme of this novella appears about the saint of unspeakable word. She touches the several themes individualism Vs collectivism, selflessness, egoism and free-will. It is about the society that is ruled by few and has very limited individualism and freedom of self-expression. It is considered a dystopian novel which was able to give society the struggles present with one's self and society. The constant emphasis was on the independence of collectivism, the defiance against capitalism and totalitarianism and the advocacy towards liberalism. The ideal society of total collectivism is obviously oppressive and evil. He clearly conveys a very humanistic philosophy within philosophy within a moralistic story.

Chapter One

It is a sin to write this. It is a sin to think words no others think and to put them down upon a paper no others are to see. It is base and evil. It is as if we were speaking alone to no ears but our own. And we know well that there is no transgression blacker than to do or think alone. We have broken the laws. The laws say that men may not write unless the Council of Vocations bid them so. May we be forgiven!

But this is not the only sin upon us. We have committed a greater crime, and for this crime there is no name. What punishment awaits us if it be discovered we know not, for no such crime has come in the memory of men and there are no laws to provide for it.

It is dark here. The flame of the candle stands still in the air. Nothing moves in this tunnel save our hand on the paper. We are alone here under the earth. It is a fearful word, alone. The laws say that none among men may be alone, ever and at any time, for this is the great transgression and the root of all evil. But we

have broken many laws. And now there is nothing here save our one body, and it is strange to see only two legs stretched on the ground, and on the wall before us the shadow of our one head.

The walls are cracked and water runs upon them in thin threads without sound, black and glistening as blood. We stole the candle from the larder of the Home of the Street Sweepers. We shall be sentenced to ten years in the Palace of Corrective Detention if it be discovered. But this matters not. It matters only that the light is precious and we should not waste it to write when we need it for that work which is our crime. Nothing matters save the work, our secret, our evil, our precious work. Still, we must also write, for -- may the Council have mercy upon us! -- we wish to speak for once to no ears but our own.

Our name is Equality 7-2521, as it is written on the iron bracelet which all men wear on their left wrists with their names upon it. We are twenty-one years old. We are six feet tall, and this is a burden, for there are not many men who are six feet tall. Ever have the Teachers and the Leaders pointed to us and frowned and said: "There is evil in your bones, Equality 7-2521, for your body has grown beyond the bodies of your brothers." But we cannot change our bones nor our body.

We were born with a curse. It has always driven us to thoughts which are forbidden. It has always given us wishes which men may not wish. We know that we are evil, but there is no will in us and no power to resist it. This is our wonder and our secret fear, that we know and do not resist.

We strive to be like all our brother men, for all men must be alike. Over the portals of the Palace of the World Council, there are words cut in the marble, which we repeat to ourselves whenever we are tempted: "We are one in all and all in one.

There are no men but only the great WE,
One, indivisible and forever."

We repeat this to ourselves, but it helps us not.

These words were cut long ago. There is green mould in the grooves of the letters and yellow streaks on the marble, which come from more years than men could count. And these words are the truth, for they are written on the Palace of the World Council, and the World Council is the body of all truth. Thus has it been ever since the Great Rebirth, and farther back than that no memory can reach.

But we must never speak of the times before the Great Rebirth, else we are sentenced to three years in the Palace of Corrective Detention. It is only the Old Ones who whisper about it in the evenings, in the Home of the Useless. They whisper many strange things, of the towers which rose to the sky, in those Unmentionable Times, and of the wagons which moved without horses, and of the lights which burned without flame. But those times were evil. And those times passed away, when men saw the Great Truth which is this: that all men are one and that there is no will save the will of all men together.

All men are good and wise. It is only we, Equality 7-2521, we alone who were born with a curse. For we are not like our brothers. And as we look back upon our life, we see that it has ever been thus and that it has brought us step by step to our last, supreme transgression, our crime of crimes hidden here under the ground.

We remember the Home of the Infants where we lived till we were five years old, together with all the children of the City who had been born in the same year. The sleeping halls there were white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds. We were just like all our brothers then, save for the one transgression: we fought with our brothers. There are few offenses blacker than to fight with our brothers, at any age and for any cause whatsoever. The Council of the Home told us so, and of all the children of that year, we were locked in the cellar most often.

When we were five years old, we were sent to the Home of the Students, where there are ten wards, for our ten years of learning. Men must learn till they reach their fifteenth year. Then they go to work. In the Home of the Students we arose when the big bell rang in the tower and we went to our beds when it rang again. Before we removed our garments, we stood in the great sleeping hall, and we raised our right arms, and we said all together with the three Teachers at the head:

"We are nothing. Mankind is all. By the grace of our brothers are we allowed our lives. We exist through, by and for our brothers who are the State. Amen."

Then we slept. The sleeping halls were white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds.

We, Equality 7-2521, were not happy in those years in the Home of the Students. It was not that the learning was too hard for us. It was that the learning was too easy. This is a great sin, to be born with a head which is too quick. It is not good to be different from our brothers, but it is evil to be superior to them. The Teachers told us so, and they frowned when they looked upon us.

So we fought against this curse. We tried to forget our lessons, but we always remembered. We tried not to understand what the Teachers taught, but we always understood it before the Teachers had spoken. We looked upon Union 5-3992, who were a pale boy with only half a brain, and we tried to say and do as they did, that we might be like them, like Union 5-3992, but somehow the Teachers knew that we were not. And we were lashed more often than all the other children.

The Teachers were just, for they had been appointed by the Councils, and the Councils are the voice of all justice, for they are the voice of all men. And if sometimes, in the secret darkness of our heart, we regret that which befell us on our fifteenth birthday, we know that it was through our own guilt. We had broken a law, for we had not paid heed to the words of our Teachers. The Teachers had said to us all:

"Dare not choose in your minds the work you would like to do when you leave the Home of the Students. You shall do that which the Council of Vocations shall prescribe for you. For the Council of Vocations knows in its great wisdom where you are needed by your brother men, better than you can know it in your unworthy little minds. And if you are not needed by your brother men, there is no reason for you to burden the earth with your bodies."

We knew this well, in the years of our childhood, but our curse broke our will. We were guilty and we confess it here: we were guilty of the great Transgression of Preference. We preferred some work and some lessons to the others. We did not listen well to the history of all the Councils elected since the Great Rebirth. But we loved the Science of Things. We wished to know. We wished to know about all the things which make the earth around us. We asked so many questions that the Teachers forbade it.

We think that there are mysteries in the sky and under the water and in the plants which grow. But the Council of Scholars has said that there are no mysteries, and the Council of Scholars knows all things. And we learned much from our Teachers. We learned that the earth is flat and that the sun revolves around it, which causes the day and the night. We learned the names of all the winds which blow over the seas and push the sails of our great ships. We learned how to bleed men to cure them of all ailments.

We loved the Science of Things. And in the darkness, in the secret hour, when we awoke in the night and there were no brothers around us, but only their shapes in the beds and their snores, we closed our eyes, and we held our lips shut, and we stopped our breath, that no shudder might let our brothers see or hear or guess, and we thought that we wished to be sent to the Home of the Scholars when our time would come.

All the great modern inventions come from the Home of the Scholars, such as the newest one, which was found only a hundred years ago, of how to make candles from wax and string; also, how to make glass, which is put in our windows to protect us from the rain. To find these things, the Scholars must study the earth and learn from the rivers, from the sands, from the winds and the rocks. And if we went to the Home of the Scholars, we could learn from these also. We could ask questions of these, for they do not forbid questions.

And questions give us no rest. We know not why our curse makes us seek we know not what, ever and ever. But we cannot resist it. It whispers to us that there are great things on this earth of ours, and that we can know them if we try, and that we must know them. We ask, why must we know, but it has no answer to give us. We must know that we may know.

So we wished to be sent to the Home of the Scholars. We wished it so much that our hands trembled under the blankets in the night, and we bit our arm to stop that other pain which we could not endure. It was evil and we dared not face our brothers in the morning. For men may wish nothing for themselves. And we were punished when the Council of Vocations came to give us our life Mandates which tell those who reach their fifteenth year what their work is to be for the rest of their days.

The Council of Vocations came on the first day of spring, and they sat in the great hall. And we who were fifteen and all the Teachers came into the great hall. And the Council of Vocations sat on a high dais, and they had but two words to speak to each of the Students. They called the Students' names, and when the

Students stepped before them, one after another, the Council said: "Carpenter" or "Doctor" or "Cook" or "Leader." Then each Student raised their right arm and said: "The will of our brothers be done."

Now if the Council has said "Carpenter" or "Cook," the Students so assigned go to work and they do not study any further. But if the Council has said "Leader," then those Students go into the Home of the Leaders, which is the greatest house in the City, for it has three stories. And there they study for many years, so that they may become candidates and be elected to the City Council and the State Council and the World Council -- by a free and general vote of all men. But we wished not to be a Leader, even though it is a great honor. We wished to be a Scholar.

So we awaited our turn in the great hall and then we heard the Council of Vocations call our name: "Equality 7-2521." We walked to the dais, and our legs did not tremble, and we looked up at the Council. There were five members of the Council, three of the male gender and two of the female. Their hair was white and their faces were cracked as the clay of a dry river bed. They were old. They seemed older than the marble of the Temple of the World Council. They sat before us and they did not move. And we saw no breath to stir the folds of their white togas. But we knew that they were alive, for a finger of the hand of the oldest rose, pointed to us, and fell down again. This was the only thing which moved, for the lips of the oldest did not move as they said: "StreetSweeper."

We felt the cords of our neck grow tight as our head rose higher to look upon the faces of the Council, and we were happy. We knew we had been guilty, but now we had a way to atone for it. We would accept our Life Mandate, and we would work for our brothers, gladly and willingly, and we would erase our sin against them, which they did not know, but we knew. So we were happy, and proud of ourselves and of our victory over ourselves. We raised our right arm and we spoke, and our voice was the clearest, the steadiest voice in the hall that day, and we said:

"The will of our brothers be done."

And we looked straight into the eyes of the Council, but their eyes were as cold blue glass buttons.

So we went into the Home of the Street Sweepers. It is a grey house on a narrow street. There is a sundial in its courtyard, by which the Council of the Home can tell the hours of the day and when to ring the bell. When the bell rings, we all arise from our beds. The sky is green and cold in our windows to the east. The shadow on the sundial marks off a half-hour while we dress and eat our breakfast in the dining hall, where there are five long tables with twenty clay plates and twenty clay cups on each table. Then we go to work in the streets of the City, with our brooms and our rakes. In five hours, when the sun is high, we return to the Home and we eat our midday meal, for which one-half hour is allowed. Then we go to work again. In five hours, the shadows are blue on the pavements, and the sky is blue with a deep brightness which is not bright. We come back to have our dinner, which lasts one hour. Then the bell rings and we walk in a straight column to one of the City Halls, for the Social Meeting. Other columns of men arrive from the Homes of the different Trades. The candles are lit, and the Councils of the different Homes stand in a pulpit, and they speak to us of our duties and of our brother men. Then visiting Leaders mount the pulpit and they read to us the speeches which were made in the City Council that day, for the City Council represents all men and all men must know. Then we sing hymns, the Hymn of Brotherhood, and the Hymn of Equality, and the Hymn of the Collective Spirit. The sky is a soggy purple when we return to the Home. Then the bell rings and we walk in a straight column to the City Theatre for three hours of Social Recreation. There a play is shown upon the stage, with two great choruses from the Home of the Actors, which speak and answer all together, in two great voices. The plays are about toil and how good it is. Then we walk back to the Home in a straight column. The sky is like a black sieve pierced by silver drops that tremble, ready to burst through. The moths beat against the street lanterns. We go to our beds and we sleep, till the bell rings again. The sleeping halls are white and clean and bare of all things save one hundred beds.

Thus have we lived each day of four years, until two springs ago when our crime happened. Thus must all men live until they are forty. At forty, they are worn out. At forty, they are sent to the Home of the Useless, where the Old Ones live. The Old Ones do not work, for the State takes care of them. They sit in the sun in summer and they sit by the fire in winter. They do not speak often, for they are weary. The Old

Ones know that they are soon to die. When a miracle happens and some live to be forty-five, they are the Ancient Ones, and children stare at them when passing by the Home of the Useless. Such is to be our life, as that of all our brothers and of the brothers who came before us.

Such would have been our life, had we not committed our crime which changed all things for us. And it was our curse which drove us to our crime. We had been a good Street Sweeper and like all our brother Street Sweepers, save for our cursed wish to know. We looked too long at the stars at night, and at the trees and the earth. And when we cleaned the yard of the Home of the Scholars, we gathered the glass vials, the pieces of metal, the dried bones which they had discarded. We wished to keep these things and to study them, but we had no place to hide them. So we carried them to the City Cesspool. And then we made the discovery.

It was on a day of the spring before last. We Street Sweepers work in brigades of three, and we were with Union 5-3992, they of the half-brain, and with International 4-8818. Now Union 5-3992 are a sickly lad and sometimes they are stricken with convulsions, when their mouth froths and their eyes turn white. But International 4-8818 are different. They are a tall, strong youth and their eyes are like fireflies, for there is laughter in their eyes. We cannot look upon International 4-8818 and not smile in answer. For this they were not liked in the Home of the Students, as it is not proper to smile without reason. And also they were not liked because they took pieces of coal and they drew pictures upon the walls, and they were pictures which made men laugh. But it is only our brothers in the Home of the Artists who are permitted to draw pictures, so International 4-8818 were sent to the Home of the Street Sweepers, like ourselves.

International 4-8818 and we are friends. This is an evil thing to say, for it is a transgression, the great Transgression of Preference, to love any among men better than the others, since we must love all men and all men are our friends. So International 4-8818 and we have never spoken of it. But we know. We know, when we look into each other's eyes. And when we look thus without words, we both know other things also, strange things for which there are no words, and these things frighten us.

So on that day of the spring before last, Union 5-3992 were stricken with convulsions on the edge of the City, near the City Theatre. We left them to lie in the shade of the Theatre tent and we went with International 4-8818 to finish our work. We came together to the great ravine behind the Theatre. It is empty save for trees and weeds. Beyond the ravine there is a plain, and beyond the plain there lies the Uncharted Forest, about which men must not think.

We were gathering the papers and the rags which the wind had blown from the Theatre, when we saw an iron bar among the weeds. It was old and rusted by many rains. We pulled with all our strength, but we could not move it. So we called International 4-8818, and together we scraped the earth around the bar. Of a sudden the earth fell in before us, and we saw an old iron grill over a black hole.

International 4-8818 stepped back. But we pulled at the grill and it gave way. And then we saw iron rings as steps leading down a shaft into a darkness without bottom.

"We shall go down," we said to International 4-8818.

"It is forbidden," they answered.

We said: "The Council does not know of this hole, so it cannot be forbidden."

And they answered: "Since the Council does not know of this hole, there can be no law permitting to enter it. And everything which is not permitted by law is forbidden."

But we said: "We shall go, none the less."

They were frightened, but they stood by and watched us go.

We hung on the iron rings with our hands and our feet. We could see nothing below us. And above us the hole open upon the sky grew smaller and smaller, till it came to be the size of a button. But still we went down. Then our foot touched the ground. We rubbed our eyes, for we could not see. Then our eyes became used to the darkness, but we could not believe what we saw.

No men known to us could have built this place, nor the men known to our brothers who lived before us, and yet it was built by men. It was a great tunnel. Its walls were hard and smooth to the touch; it felt like stone, but it was not stone. On the ground there were long thin tracks of iron, but it was not iron; it felt smooth and cold as glass. We knelt, and we crawled forward, our hand groping along the iron line to see

where it would lead. But there was an unbroken night ahead. Only the iron tracks glowed through it, straight and white, calling us to follow. But we could not follow, for we were losing the puddle of light behind us. So we turned and we crawled back, our hand on the iron line. And our heart beat in our fingertips, without reason. And then we knew.

We knew suddenly that this place was left from the Unmentionable Times. So it was true, and those Times had been, and all the wonders of those Times. Hundreds upon hundreds of years ago men knew secrets which we have lost. And we thought: "This is a foul place. They are damned who touch the things of the Unmentionable Times." But our hand which followed the track, as we crawled, clung to the iron as if it would not leave it, as if the skin of our hand were thirsty and begging of the metal some secret fluid beating in its coldness.

We returned to the earth. International 4-8818 looked upon us and stepped back.

"Equality 7-2521," they said, "your face is white."

But we could not speak and we stood looking upon them.

They backed away, as if they dared not touch us. Then they smiled, but it was not a gay smile; it was lost and pleading. But still we could not speak. Then they said:

"We shall report our find to the City Council and both of us will be rewarded."

And then we spoke. Our voice was hard and there was no mercy in our voice. We said:

"We shall not report our find to the City Council. We shall not report it to any men."

They raised their hands to their ears, for never had they heard such words as these.

"International 4-8818," we asked, "will you report us to the Council and see us lashed to death before your eyes?"

They stood straight of a sudden and they answered:

"Rather would we die."

"Then," we said, "keep silent. This place is ours. This place belongs to us, Equality 7-2521, and to no other men on earth. And if ever we surrender it, we shall surrender our life with it also."

Then we saw that the eyes of International 4-8818 were full to the lids with tears they dared not drop.

They whispered, and their voice trembled, so that their words lost allshape:

"The will of the Council is above all things, for it is the will of our brothers, which is holy. But if you wish it so, we shall obey you. Rather shall we be evil with you than good with all our brothers. May the Council have mercy upon both our hearts!"

Then we walked away together and back to the Home of the Street Sweepers. And we walked in silence.

Thus did it come to pass that each night, when the stars are high and the Street Sweepers sit in the City Theatre, we, Equality 7-2521, steal out and run through the darkness to our place. It is easy to leave the Theatre; when the candles are blown and the Actors come onto the stage, no eyes can see us as we crawl under our seat and under the cloth of the tent. Later, it is easy to steal through the shadows and fall in line next to International 4-8818, as the column leaves the Theatre. It is dark in the streets and there are no men about, for no men may walk through the City when they have no mission to walk there. Each night, we run to the ravine, and we remove the stones which we have piled upon the iron grill to hide it from men. Each night, for three hours, we are under the earth, alone.

We have stolen candles from the Home of the Street Sweepers, we have stolen flints and knives and paper, and we have brought them to this place. We have stolen glass vials and powders and acids from the Home of the Scholars. Now we sit in the tunnel for three hours each night and we study. We melt strange metals, and we mix acids, and we cut open the bodies of the animals which we find in the City Cesspool. We have built an oven of the bricks we gathered in the streets. We burn the wood we find in the ravine. The fire flickers in the oven and blue shadows dance upon the walls, and there is no sound of men to disturb us.

We have stolen manuscripts. This is a great offense. Manuscripts are precious, for our brothers in the Home of the Clerks spend one year to copy one single script in their clear handwriting. Manuscripts are rare and they are kept in the Home of the Scholars. So we sit under the earth and we read the stolen scripts. Two years have passed since we found this place. And in these two years we have learned more than we had learned in the ten years of the Home of the Students.

We have learned things which are not in the scripts. We have solved secrets of which the Scholars have no knowledge. We have come to see how great is the unexplored, and many lifetimes will not bring us to the end of our quest. But we wish no end to our quest. We wish nothing, save to be alone and to learn, and to feel as if with each day our sight were growing sharper than the hawk's and clearer than rock crystal. Strange are the ways of evil. We are false in the faces of our brothers. We are defying the will of our Councils. We alone, of the thousands who walk this earth, we alone in this hour are doing a work which has no purpose save that we wish to do it. The evil of our crime is not for the human mind to probe. The nature of our punishment, if it be discovered, is not for the human heart to ponder. Never, not in the memory of the Ancient Ones' Ancients, never have men done that which we are doing. And yet there is no shame in us and no regret. We say to ourselves that we are a wretch and a traitor. But we feel no burden upon our spirit and no fear in our heart. And it seems to us that our spirit is clear as a lake troubled by no eyes save those of the sun. And in our heart -- strange are the ways of evil! -- in our heart there is the first peace we have known in twenty years.

Chapter Two

Liberty 5-3000 . . . Liberty five-three thousand . . . Liberty 5-3000

We wish to write this name. We wish to speak it, but we dare not speak it above a whisper. For men are forbidden to take notice of women, and women are forbidden to take notice of men. But we think of one among women, they whose name is Liberty 5-3000, and we think of no others.

The women who have been assigned to work the soil live in the Homes of the Peasants beyond the City. Where the City ends there is a great road winding off to the north, and we Street Sweepers must keep this road clean to the first milepost. There is a hedge along the road, and beyond the hedge lie the fields. The fields are black and ploughed, and they lie like a great fan before us, with their furrows gathered in some hand beyond the sky, spreading forth from that hand, opening wide apart as they come toward us, like black pleats that sparkle with thin, green spangles. Women work in the fields, and their white tunics in the wind are like the wings of sea-gulls beating over the black soil.

And there it was that we saw Liberty 5-3000 walking along the furrows. Their body was straight and thin as a blade of iron. Their eyes were dark and hard and glowing, with no fear in them, no kindness and no guilt. Their hair was golden as the sun; their hair flew in the wind, shining and wild, as if it defied men to restrain it. They threw seeds from their hand as if they deigned to fling a scornful gift, and the earth was a beggar under their feet.

We stood still; for the first time did we know fear, and then pain. And we stood still that we might not spill this pain more precious than pleasure.

Then we heard a voice from the others call their name: "Liberty 5-3000," and they turned and walked back. Thus we learned their name, and we stood watching them go, till their white tunic was lost in the blue mist.

And the following day, as we came to the northern road, we kept our eyes upon Liberty 5-3000 in the field. And each day thereafter we knew the illness of waiting for our hour on the northern road. And there we looked at Liberty 5-3000 each day. We know not whether they looked at us also, but we think they did. Then one day they came close to the hedge, and suddenly they turned to us. They turned in a whirl and the movement of their body stopped, as if slashed off, as suddenly as it had started. They stood still as a stone, and they looked straight upon us, straight into our eyes. There was no smile on their face, and no welcome. But their face was taut, and their eyes were dark. Then they turned as swiftly, and they walked away from us.

But the following day, when we came to the road, they smiled. They smiled to us and for us. And we smiled in answer. Their head fell back, and their arms fell, as if their arms and their thin white neck were stricken suddenly with a great lassitude. They were not looking upon us, but upon the sky. Then they glanced at us over their shoulder, and we felt as if a hand had touched our body, slipping softly from our lips to our feet.

Every morning thereafter, we greeted each other with our eyes. We dared not speak. It is a transgression to speak to men of other Trades, save in groups at the Social Meetings. But once, standing at the hedge, we raised our hand to our forehead and then moved it slowly, palm down, toward Liberty 5-3000. Had the others seen it, they could have guessed nothing, for it looked only as if we were shading our eyes from the sun. But Liberty 5-3000 saw it and understood. They raised their hand to their forehead and moved it as we had. Thus, each day, we greet Liberty 5-3000, and they answer, and no men cansuspect.

We do not wonder at this new sin of ours. It is our second Transgression of Preference, for we do not think of all our brothers, as we must, but only of one, and their name is Liberty 5-3000. We do not know why we think of them. We do not know why, when we think of them, we feel of a sudden that the earth is good and that it is not a burden to live.

We do not think of them as Liberty 5-3000 any longer. We have given them a name in our thoughts. We call them the Golden One. But it is a sin to give men names which distinguish them from other men. Yet we call them the Golden One, for they are not like the others. The Golden One are not like the others.

And we take no heed of the law which says that men may not think of women, save at the Time of Mating. This is the time each spring when all the men older than twenty and all the women older than eighteen are sent for one night to the City Palace of Mating. And each of the men have one of the women assigned to them by the Council of Eugenics. Children are born each winter, but women never see their children and children never know their parents. Twice have we been sent to the Palace of Mating, but it is an ugly and shameful matter, of which we do not like to think.

We had broken so many laws, and today we have broken one more. Today, we spoke to the Golden One. The other women were far off in the field, when we stopped at the hedge by the side of the road. The Golden One were kneeling alone at the moat which runs through the field. And the drops of water falling from their hands, as they raised the water to their lips, were like sparks of fire in the sun. Then the Golden One saw us, and they did not move, kneeling there, looking at us, and circles of light played upon their white tunic, from the sun on the water of the moat, and one sparkling drop fell from a finger of their hand held as frozen in the air.

Then the Golden One rose and walked to the hedge, as if they had heard a command in our eyes. The two other Street Sweepers of our brigade were a hundred paces away down the road. And we thought that International 4-8818 would not betray us, and Union 5-3992 would not understand. So we looked straight upon the Golden One, and we saw the shadows of their lashes on their white cheeks and the sparks of sun on their lips. And we said:

"You are beautiful, Liberty 5-3000."

Their face did not move and they did not avert their eyes. Only their eyes grew wider, and there was triumph in their eyes, and it was not triumph over us, but over things we could not guess.

Then they asked:

"What is your name?"

"Equality 7-2521," we answered.

"You are not one of our brothers, Equality 7-2521, for we do not wish you to be."

We cannot say what they meant, for there are no words for their meaning, but we know it without words and we knew it then.

"No," we answered, "nor are you one of our sisters."

"If you see us among scores of women, will you look upon us?"

"We shall look upon you, Liberty 5-3000, if we see you among all the women of the earth."

Then they asked:

"Are Street Sweepers sent to different parts of the City or do they always work in the same places?"

"They always work in the same places," we answered, "and no one will take this road away from us."

"Your eyes," they said, "are not like the eyes of any among men."

And suddenly, without cause for the thought which came to us, we felt cold, cold to our stomach.

"How old are you?" we asked.

They understood our thought, for they lowered their eyes for the first time.

"Seventeen," they whispered.

And we sighed, as if a burden had been taken from us, for we had been thinking without reason of the Palace of Mating. And we thought that we would not let the Golden One be sent to the Palace. How to prevent it, how to bar the will of the Councils, we knew not, but we knew suddenly that we would. Only we do not know why such thought came to us, for these ugly matters bear no relation to us and the Golden One. What relation can they bear?

Still, without reason, as we stood there by the hedge, we felt our lips drawn tight with hatred, a sudden hatred for all our brother men. And the Golden One saw it and smiled slowly, and there was in their smile the first sadness we had seen in them. We think that in the wisdom of women the Golden One had understood more than we can understand.

Then three of the sisters in the field appeared, coming toward the road, so the Golden One walked away from us. They took the bag of seeds, and they threw the seeds into the furrows of earth as they walked away. But the seeds flew wildly, for the hand of the Golden One was trembling.

Yet as we walked back to the Home of the Street Sweepers, we felt that we wanted to sing, without reason. So we were reprimanded tonight, in the dining hall, for without knowing it we had begun to sing aloud some tune we had never heard. But it is not proper to sing without reason, save at the Social Meetings.

"We are singing because we are happy," we answered the one of the Home Council who reprimanded us.

"Indeed you are happy," they answered. "How else can men be when they live for their brothers?"

And now, sitting here in our tunnel, we wonder about these words. It is forbidden, not to be happy. For, as it has been explained to us, men are free and the earth belongs to them; and all things on earth belong to all men; and the will of all men together is good for all; and so all men must be happy.

Yet as we stand at night in the great hall, removing our garments for sleep, we look upon our brothers and we wonder. The heads of our brothers are bowed. The eyes of our brothers are dull, and never do they look one another in the eyes. The shoulders of our brothers are hunched, and their muscles are drawn, as if their bodies were shrinking and wished to shrink out of sight. And a word steals into our mind, as we look upon our brothers, and that word is fear.

There is fear hanging in the air of the sleeping halls, and in the air of the streets. Fear walks through the City, fear without name, without shape. All men feel it and none dare to speak.

We feel it also, when we are in the Home of the Street Sweepers. But here, in our tunnel, we feel it no longer. The air is pure under the ground. There is no odor of men. And these three hours give us strength for our hours above the ground.

Our body is betraying us, for the Council of the Home looks with suspicion upon us. It is not good to feel too much joy nor to be glad that our body lives. For we matter not and it must not matter to us whether we live or die, which is to be as our brothers will it. But we, Equality 7-2521, are glad to be living. If this is a vice, then we wish no virtue.

Yet our brothers are not like us. All is not well with our brothers. There are Fraternity 2-5503, a quiet boy with wise, kind eyes, who cry suddenly, without reason, in the midst of day or night, and their body shakes with sobs they cannot explain. There are Solidarity 9-6347, who are a bright youth, without fear in the day; but they scream in their sleep, and they scream: "Help us! Help us! Help us!" into the night, in a voice which chills our bones, but the Doctors cannot cure Solidarity 9-6347.

And as we all undress at night, in the dim light of the candles, our brothers are silent, for they dare not speak the thoughts of their minds. For all must agree with all, and they cannot know if their thoughts are the thoughts of all, and so they fear to speak. And they are glad when the candles are blown for the night. But we, Equality 7-2521, look through the window upon the sky, and there is peace in the sky, and cleanliness, and dignity. And beyond the City there lies the plain, and beyond the plain, black upon the black sky, there lies the Uncharted Forest.

We do not wish to look upon the Uncharted Forest. We do not wish to think of it. But ever do our eyes return to that black patch upon the sky. Men never enter the Uncharted Forest, for there is no power to explore it and no path to lead among its ancient trees which stand as guards of fearful secrets. It is whispered that once or twice in a hundred years, one among the men of the City escape alone and run to

the Uncharted Forest, without call or reason. These men do not return. They perish from hunger and from the claws of the wild beasts which roam the Forest. But our Councils say that this is only a legend. We have heard that there are many Uncharted Forests over the land, among the Cities. And it is whispered that they have grown over the ruins of many cities of the Unmentionable Times. The trees have swallowed the ruins, and the bones under the ruins, and all the things which perished.

And as we look upon the Uncharted Forest far in the night, we think of the secrets of the Unmentionable Times. And we wonder how it came to pass that these secrets were lost to the world. We have heard the legends of the great fighting, in which many men fought on one side and only a few on the other. These few were the Evil Ones and they were conquered. Then great fires raged over the land. And in these fires the Evil Ones were burned. And the fire which is called the Dawn of the Great Rebirth, was the Script Fire where all the scripts of the Evil Ones were burned, and with them all the words of the Evil Ones. Great mountains of flame stood in the squares of the Cities for three months. Then came the Great Rebirth.

The words of the Evil Ones . . . The words of the Unmentionable Times . . . What are the words which we have lost?

May the Council have mercy upon us! We had no wish to write such a question, and we knew not what we were doing till we had written it. We shall not ask this question and we shall not think it. We shall not call death upon our head.

And yet . . . And yet . . .

There is some word, one single word which is not in the language of men, but which had been. And this is the Unspeakable Word, which no men may speak nor hear. But sometimes, and it is rare, sometimes, somewhere, one among men find that word. They find it upon scraps of old manuscripts or cut into the fragments of ancient stones. But when they speak it they are put to death. There is no crime punished by death in this world, save this one crime of speaking the Unspeakable Word.

We have seen one of such men burned alive in the square of the City. And it was a sight which has stayed with us through the years, and it haunts us, and follows us, and it gives us no rest. We were a child then, ten years old. And we stood in the great square with all the children and all the men of the City, sent to behold the burning. They brought the Transgressor out into the square and they led them to the pyre. They had torn out the tongue of the Transgressor, so that they could speak no longer. The Transgressor were young and tall. They had hair of gold and eyes blue as morning. They walked to the pyre, and their step did not falter. And of all the faces on that square, of all the faces which shrieked and screamed and spat curses upon them, theirs was the calmest and the happiestface.

As the chains were wound over their body at the stake, and a flame set to the pyre, the Transgressor looked upon the City. There was a thin thread of blood running from the corner of their mouth, but their lips were smiling. And a monstrous thought came to us then, which has never left us. We had heard of Saints. There are the Saints of Labor, and the Saints of the Councils, and the Saints of the Great Rebirth. But we had never seen a Saint nor what the likeness of a Saint should be. And we thought then, standing in the square, that the likeness of a Saint was the face we saw before us in the flames, the face of the Transgressor of the UnspeakableWord.

As the flames rose, a thing happened which no eyes saw but ours, else we would not be living today. Perhaps it had only seemed to us. But it seemed to us that the eyes of the Transgressor had chosen us from the crowd and were looking straight upon us. There was no pain in their eyes and no knowledge of the agony of their body. There was only joy in them, and pride, a pride holier than it is fit for human pride to be. And it seemed as if these eyes were trying to tell us something through the flames, to send into our eyes some word without sound. And it seemed as if these eyes were begging us to gather that word and not to let it go from us and from the earth. But the flames rose and we could not guess the word. . .

What -- even if we have to burn for it like the Saint of the pyre -- what is the Unspeakable Word?

Chapter Three

We, Equality 7-2521, have discovered a new power of nature. And we have discovered it alone, and we are alone to know it.

It is said. Now let us be lashed for it, if we must. The Council of Scholars has said that we all know the things which exist and therefore the things which are not known by all do not exist. But we think that the Council of Scholars is blind. The secrets of this earth are not for all men to see, but only for those who will seek them. We know, for we have found a secret unknown to all our brothers.

We know not what this power is nor whence it comes. But we know its nature, we have watched it and worked with it. We saw it first two years ago. One night, we were cutting open the body of a dead frog when we saw its leg jerking. It was dead, yet it moved. Some power unknown to men was making it move. We could not understand it. Then, after many tests, we found the answer. The frog had been hanging on a wire of copper; and it had been the metal of our knife which had sent a strange power to the copper through the brine of the frog's body. We put a piece of copper and a piece of zinc into a jar of brine, we touched a wire to them, and there, under our fingers, was a miracle which had never occurred before, a new miracle and a new power.

This discovery haunted us. We followed it in preference to all our studies. We worked with it, we tested it in more ways than we can describe, and each step was as another miracle unveiling before us. We came to know that we had found the greatest power on earth. For it defies all the laws known to men. It makes the needle move and turn on the compass which we stole from the Home of the Scholars; but we had been taught, when still a child, that the loadstone points to the north and that this is a law which nothing can change; yet our new power defies all laws. We found that it causes lightning, and never have men known what causes lightning. In thunderstorms, we raised a tall rod of iron by the side of our hole, and we watched it from below. We have seen the lightning strike it again and again. And now we know that metal draws the power of the sky, and that metal can be made to give it forth.

We have built strange things with this discovery of ours. We used for it the copper wires which we found here under the ground. We have walked the length of our tunnel, with a candle lighting the way. We could go no farther than half a mile, for earth and rock had fallen at both ends. But we gathered all the things we found and we brought them to our work place. We found strange boxes with bars of metal inside, with many cords and strands and coils of metal. We found wires that led to strange little globes of glass on the walls; they contained threads of metal thinner than a spider's web.

These things help us in our work. We do not understand them, but we think that the men of the Unmentionable Times had known our power of the sky, and these things had some relation to it. We do not know, but we shall learn. We cannot stop now, even though it frightens us that we are alone in our knowledge.

No single one can possess greater wisdom than the many Scholars who are elected by all men for their wisdom. Yet we can. We do. We have fought against saying it, but now it is said. We do not care. We forget all men, all laws and all things save our metals and our wires. So much is still to be learned! So long a road lies before us, and what care we if we must travel it alone!

Chapter Four

Many days passed before we could speak to the Golden One again. But then came the day when the sky turned white, as if the sun had burst and spread its flame in the air, and the fields lay still without breath, and the dust of the road was white in the glow. So the women of the field were weary, and they tarried over their work, and they were far from the road when we came. But the Golden One stood alone at the hedge, waiting. We stopped and we saw that their eyes, so hard and scornful to the world, were looking at us as if they would obey any word we might speak.

And we said:

"We have given you a name in our thoughts, Liberty 5-3000."

"What is our name?" they asked.

"The Golden One."

"Nor do we call you Equality 7-2521 when we think of you."

"What name have you given us?"

They looked straight into our eyes and they held their head high and they answered:

"The Unconquered."

For a long time we could not speak. Then we said:

"Such thoughts as these are forbidden, Golden One."

"But you think such thoughts as these and you wish us to think them."

We looked into their eyes and we could not lie.

"Yes," we whispered, and they smiled, and then we said: "Our dearest one, do not obey us."

They stepped back, and their eyes were wide and still.

"Speak these words again," they whispered.

"Which words?" we asked. But they did not answer, and we knew it.

"Our dearest one," we whispered.

Never have men said this to women.

The head of the Golden One bowed slowly, and they stood still before us, their arms at their sides, the palms of their hands turned to us, as if their body were delivered in submission to our eyes. And we could not speak.

Then they raised their head, and they spoke simply and gently, as if they wished us to forget some anxiety of their own.

"The day is hot," they said, "and you have worked for many hours and you must be weary."

"No," we answered.

"It is cooler in the fields," they said, "and there is water to drink. Are you thirsty?"

"Yes," we answered, "but we cannot cross the hedge."

"We shall bring the water to you," they said.

Then they knelt by the moat, they gathered water in their two hands, they rose and they held the water out to our lips.

We do not know if we drank that water. We only knew suddenly that their hands were empty, but we were still holding our lips to their hands, and that they knew it, but did not move.

We raised our head and stepped back. For we did not understand what had made us do this, and we were afraid to understand it.

And the Golden One stepped back, and stood looking upon their hands in wonder. Then the Golden One moved away, even though no others were coming, and they moved stepping back, as if they could not turn from us, their arms bent before them, as if they could not lower their hands.

Chapter Five

We made it. We created it. We brought it forth from the night of the ages. We alone. Our hands. Our mind. Ours alone and only.

We know not what we are saying. Our head is reeling. We look upon the light which we have made. We shall be forgiven for anything we say tonight. . . .

Tonight, after more days and trials than we can count, we finished building a strange thing, from the remains of the Unmentionable Times, a box of glass, devised to give forth the power of the sky of greater strength than we had ever achieved before. And when we put our wires to this box, when we closed the current -- the wire glowed! It came to life, it turned red, and a circle of light lay on the stone before us.

We stood, and we held our head in our hands. We could not conceive of that which we had created. We had touched no flint, made no fire. Yet here was light, light that came from nowhere, light from the heart of metal.

We blew out the candle. Darkness swallowed us. There was nothing left around us, nothing save night and a thin thread of flame in it, as a crack in the wall of a prison. We stretched our hands to the wire, and we saw our fingers in the red glow. We could not see our body nor feel it, and in that moment nothing existed save our two hands over a wire glowing in a black abyss.

Then we thought of the meaning of that which lay before us. We can light our tunnel, and the City, and all the Cities of the world with nothing save metal and wires. We can give our brothers a new light, cleaner and brighter than any they have ever known. The power of the sky can be made to do men's bidding. There are no limits to its secrets and its might, and it can be made to grant us anything if we but choose to ask.

Then we knew what we must do. Our discovery is too great for us to waste our time in sweeping the streets. We must not keep our secret to ourselves, nor buried under the ground. We must bring it into the sight of all men. We need all our time, we need the work rooms of the Home of the Scholars, we want the help of our brother Scholars and their wisdom joined to ours. There is so much work ahead for all of us, for all the Scholars of the world.

In a month, the World Council of Scholars is to meet in our City. It is a great Council, to which the wisest of all lands are elected, and it meets once a year in the different Cities of the earth. We shall go to this Council and we shall lay before them, as our gift, the glass box with the power of the sky. We shall confess everything to them. They will see, understand and forgive. For our gift is greater than our transgression. They will explain it to the Council of Vocations, and we shall be assigned to the Home of the Scholars. This has never been done before, but neither has a gift such as ours ever been offered to men. We must wait. We must guard our tunnel as we had never guarded it before. For should any men save the Scholars learn of our secret, they would not understand it, nor would they believe us. They would see nothing, save our crime of working alone, and they would destroy us and our light. We care not about our body, but our light is . . .

Yes, we do care. For the first time do we care about our body. For this wire is a part of our body, as a vein torn from us, glowing with our blood. Are we proud of this thread of metal, or of our hands which made it, or is there a line to divide these two?

We stretch out our arms. For the first time do we know how strong our arms are. And a strange thought comes to us: we wonder, for the first time in our life, what we look like. Men never see their own faces and never ask their brothers about it, for it is evil to have concern for their own faces or bodies. But tonight, for a reason we cannot fathom, we wish it were possible to us to know the likeness of our own person.

Chapter Six

We have not written for thirty days. For thirty days we have not been here, in our tunnel. We had been caught.

It happened on that night when we wrote last. We forgot, that night, to watch the sand in the glass which tells us when three hours have passed and it is time to return to the City Theatre. When we remembered it, the sand had run out.

We hastened to the Theatre. But the big tent stood grey and silent against the sky. The streets of the City lay before us, dark and empty. If we went back to hide in our tunnel, we would be found and our light found with us. So we walked to the Home of the Street Sweepers.

When the Council of the Home questioned us, we looked upon the faces of the Council, but there was no curiosity in those faces, and no anger, and no mercy. So when the oldest of them asked us: "Where have you been?" we thought of our glass box and of our light, and we forgot all else. And we answered:

"We will not tell you."

The oldest did not question us further. They turned to the two youngest, and said, and their voice was bored:

"Take our brother Equality 7-2521 to the Palace of Corrective Detention. Lash them until they tell."

So we were taken to the Stone Room under the Palace of Corrective Detention. This room has no windows and it is empty save for an iron post. Two men stood by the post, naked but for leather aprons and leather hoods over their faces. Those who had brought us departed, leaving us to the two Judges who stood in a corner of the room. The Judges were small, thin men, grey and bent. They gave the signal to the two strong hoodedones.

They tore our clothes from our body, they threw us down upon our knees and they tied our hands to the iron post.

The first blow of the lash felt as if our spine had been cut in two. The second blow stopped the first, and for a second we felt nothing, then the pain struck us in our throat and fire ran in our lungs without air. But we did not cry out.

The lash whistled like a singing wind. We tried to count the blows, but we lost count. We knew that the blows were falling upon our back. Only we felt nothing upon our back any longer. A flaming grill kept dancing before our eyes, and we thought of nothing save that grill, a grill, a grill of red squares, and then we knew that we were looking at the squares of the iron grill in the door, and there were also the squares of stone on the walls, and the squares which the lash was cutting upon our back, crossing and re-crossing itself in our flesh.

Then we saw a fist before us. It knocked our chin up, and we saw the red froth of our mouth on the withered fingers, and the Judge asked:

"Where have you been?"

But we jerked our head away, hid our face upon our tied hands, and bit our lips.

The lash whistled again. We wondered who was sprinkling burning coal dust upon the floor, for we saw drops of red twinkling on the stones around us.

Then we knew nothing, save two voices snarling steadily, one after the other, even though we knew they were speaking many minutes apart:

"Where have you been where have you been where have you been where have you been? . . ."

And our lips moved, but the sound trickled back into our throat, and the sound was only:

"The light . . . The light . . . The light. . ."

Then we knew nothing.

We opened our eyes, lying on our stomach on the brick floor of a cell. We looked upon two hands lying far before us on the bricks, and we moved them, and we knew that they were our hands. But we could not move our body. Then we smiled, for we thought of the light and that we had not betrayed it.

We lay in our cell for many days. The door opened twice each day, once for the men who brought us bread and water, and once for the Judges. Many Judges came to our cell, first the humblest and then the most honored Judges of the City. They stood before us in their white togas, and they asked:

"Are you ready to speak?"

But we shook our head, lying before them on the floor. And they departed.

We counted each day and each night as it passed. Then, tonight, we knew that we must escape. For tomorrow the World Council of Scholars is to meet in our City.

It was easy to escape from the Palace of Corrective Detention. The locks are old on the doors and there are no guards about. There is no reason to have guards, for men have never defied the Councils so far as to escape from whatever place they were ordered to be. Our body is healthy and strength returns to it speedily. We lunged against the door and it gave way. We stole through the dark passages, and through the dark streets, and down into our tunnel.

We lit the candle and we saw that our place had not been found and nothing had been touched. And our glass box stood before us on the cold oven, as we had left it. What matter they now, the scars upon our back!

Tomorrow, in the full light of day, we shall take our box, and leave our tunnel open, and walk through the streets to the Home of the Scholars. We shall put before them the greatest gift ever offered to men. We shall tell them the truth. We shall hand to them, as our confession, these pages we have written. We shall join our hands to theirs, and we shall work together, with the power of the sky, for the glory of mankind.

Our blessing upon you, our brothers! Tomorrow, you will take us back into your fold and we shall be an outcast no longer. Tomorrow we shall be one of you again. Tomorrow . . .

Chapter Seven

It is dark here in the forest. The leaves rustle over our head, black against the last gold of the sky. The moss is soft and warm. We shall sleep on this moss for many nights, till the beasts of the forest come to tear our body. We have no bed now, save the moss, and no future, save the beasts.

We are old now, yet we were young this morning, when we carried our glass box through the streets of the City to the Home of the Scholars. No men stopped us, for there were none about from the Palace of Corrective Detention, and the others knew nothing. No men stopped us at the gate. We walked through empty passages and into the great hall where the World Council of Scholars sat in solemn meeting.

We saw nothing as we entered, save the sky in the great windows, blue and glowing. Then we saw the Scholars who sat around a long table; they were as shapeless clouds huddled at the rise of the great sky. There were men whose famous names we knew, and others from distant lands whose names we had not heard. We saw a great painting on the wall over their heads, of the twenty illustrious men who had invented the candle.

All the heads of the Council turned to us as we entered. These great and wise of the earth did not know what to think of us, and they looked upon us with wonder and curiosity, as if we were a miracle. It is true that our tunic was torn and stained with brown stains which had been blood. We raised our right arm and we said:

"Our greeting to you, our honored brothers of the World Council of Scholars!"

Then Collective 0-0009, the oldest and wisest of the Council, spoke and asked:

"Who are you, our brother? For you do not look like a Scholar."

"Our name is Equality 7-2521," we answered, "and we are a Street Sweeper of this City."

Then it was as if a great wind had stricken the hall, for all the Scholars spoke at once, and they were angry and frightened.

"A Street Sweeper! A Street Sweeper walking in upon the World Council of Scholars! It is not to be believed! It is against all the rules and all the laws!"

But we knew how to stop them.

"Our brothers!" we said. "We matter not, nor our transgression. It is only our brother men who matter. Give no thought to us, for we are nothing, but listen to our words, for we bring you a gift such as has never been brought to men. Listen to us, for we hold the future of mankind in our hands."

Then they listened.

We placed our glass box upon the table before them. We spoke of it, and of our long quest, and of our tunnel, and of our escape from the Palace of Corrective Detention. Not a hand moved in that hall, as we spoke, nor an eye. Then we put the wires to the box, and they all bent forward and sat still, watching. And we stood still, our eyes upon the wire. And slowly, slowly as a flush of blood, a red flame trembled in the wire. Then the wire glowed.

But terror struck the men of the Council. They leapt to their feet, they ran from the table, and they stood pressed against the wall, huddled together, seeking the warmth of one another's bodies to give them courage.

We looked upon them and we laughed and said:

"Fear nothing, our brothers. There is a great power in these wires, but this power is tamed. It is yours. We give it to you."

Still they would not move.

"We give you the power of the sky!" we cried. "We give you the key to the earth! Take it, and let us be one of you, the humblest among you. Let us all work together, and harness this power, and make it ease the toil of men. Let us throw away our candles and our torches. Let us flood our cities with light. Let us bring a new light to men!"

But they looked upon us, and suddenly we were afraid. For their eyes were still, and small, and evil.

"Our brothers!" we cried. "Have you nothing to say to us?"

Then Collective 0-0009 moved forward. They moved to the table and the others followed.

"Yes," spoke Collective 0-0009, "we have much to say to you."

The sound of their voice brought silence to the hall and to the beat of our heart.

"Yes," said Collective 0-0009, "we have much to say to a wretch who have broken all the laws and who boast of their infamy! How dared you think that your mind held greater wisdom than the minds of your brothers? And if the Councils had decreed that you should be a Street Sweeper, how dared you think that you could be of greater use to men than in sweeping the streets?"

"How dared you, gutter cleaner," spoke Fraternity 9-3452, "to hold yourself as one alone and with the thoughts of the one and not of the many?"

"You shall be burned at the stake," said Democracy 4-6998.

"No, they shall be lashed," said Unanimity 7-3304, "till there is nothing left under the lashes."

"No," said Collective 0-0009, "we cannot decide upon this, our brothers. No such crime has ever been committed, and it is not for us to judge. Nor for any small Council. We shall deliver this creature to the World Council itself and let their will be done."

We looked upon them and we pleaded:

"Our brothers! You are right. Let the will of the Council be done upon our body. We do not care. But the light? What will you do with the light?"

Collective 0-0009 looked upon us, and they smiled.

"So you think that you have found a new power," said Collective 0-0009. "Do all your brothers think that?"

"No," we answered.

"What is not thought by all men cannot be true," said Collective 0-0009.

"You have worked on this alone?" asked International 1-5537.

"Yes," we answered.

"What is not done collectively cannot be good," said International 1-5537.

"Many men in the Homes of the Scholars have had strange new ideas in the past," said Solidarity 8-1164, "but when the majority of their brother Scholars voted against them, they abandoned their ideas, as all men must."

"This box is useless," said Alliance 6-7349.

"Should it be what they claim of it," said Harmony 9-2642, "then it would bring ruin to the Department of Candles. The Candle is a great boon to mankind, as approved by all men. Therefore it cannot be destroyed by the whim of one."

"This would wreck the Plans of the World Council," said Unanimity 2-9913, "and without the Plans of the World Council the sun cannot rise. It took fifty years to secure the approval of all the Councils for the Candle, and to decide upon the number needed, and to re-fit the Plans so as to make candles instead of torches. This touched upon thousands and thousands of men working in scores of States. We cannot alter the Plans again so soon."

"And if this should lighten the toil of men," said Similarity 5-0306, "then it is a great evil, for men have no cause to exist save in toiling for othermen."

Then Collective 0-0009 rose and pointed at our box.

"This thing," they said, "must be destroyed."

And all the others cried as one:

"It must be destroyed!"

Then we leapt to the table.

We seized our box, we shoved them aside, and we ran to the window. We turned and we looked at them for the last time, and a rage, such as it is not fit for humans to know, choked our voice in our throat.

"You fools!" we cried. "You fools! You thrice-damned fools!"

We swung our fist through the windowpane, and we leapt out in a ringing rain of glass.

We fell, but we never let the box fall from our hands. Then we ran. We ran blindly, and men and houses streaked past us in a torrent without shape. And the road seemed not to be flat before us, but as if it were leaping up to meet us, and we waited for the earth to rise and strike us in the face. But we ran. We knew not where we were going. We knew only that we must run, run to the end of the world, to the end of our days.

Then we knew suddenly that we were lying on a soft earth and that we had stopped. Trees taller than we had ever seen before stood over us in a great silence. Then we knew. We were in the Uncharted Forest. We had not thought of coming here, but our legs had carried our wisdom, and our legs had brought us to the Uncharted Forest against our will.

Our glass box lay beside us. We crawled to it, we fell upon it, our face in our arms, and we lay still.

We lay thus for a long time. Then we rose, we took our box, had walked on into the forest.

It mattered not where we went. We knew that men would not follow us, for they never enter the Uncharted Forest. We had nothing to fear from them. The forest disposes of its own victims. This gave us no fear either. Only we wished to be away, away from the City and from the air that touches upon the air of the City. So we walked on, our box in our arms, our heart empty.

We are doomed. Whatever days are left to us, we shall spend them alone. And we have heard of the corruption to be found in solitude. We have torn ourselves from the truth which is our brother men, and there is no road back for us, and no redemption.

We know these things, but we do not care. We care for nothing on earth. We are tired.

Only the glass box in our arms is like a living heart that gives us strength. We have lied to ourselves. We have not built this box for the good of our brothers. We built it for its own sake. It is above all our brothers to us, and its truth above their truth. Why wonder about this? We have not many days to live. We are walking to the fangs awaiting us somewhere among the great, silent trees. There is not a thing behind us to regret.

Then a blow of pain struck us, our first and our only. We thought of the Golden One. We thought of the Golden One whom we shall never see again. Then the pain passed. It is best. We are one of the Damned. It is best if the Golden One forget our name and the body which bore that name.

Chapter Eight

It has been a day of wonder, this, our first day in the forest.

We awoke when a ray of sunlight fell across our face. We wanted to leap to our feet, as we have had to leap every morning of our life, but we remembered suddenly that no bell had rung and that there was no bell to ring anywhere. We lay on our back, we threw our arms out, and we looked up at the sky. The leaves had edges of silver that trembled and rippled like a river of green and fire flowing high above us.

We did not wish to move. We thought suddenly that we could lie thus as long as we wished, and we laughed aloud at the thought. We could also rise, or run, or leap, or fall down again. We were thinking that these were thoughts without sense, but before we knew it our body had risen in one leap. Our arms stretched out of their own will, and our body whirled and whirled, till it raised a wind to rustle through the leaves of the bushes. Then our hands seized a branch and swung us high into a tree, with no aim save the wonder of learning the strength of our body. The branch snapped under us and we fell upon the moss that was soft as a cushion. Then our body, losing all sense, rolled over and over on the moss, dry leaves in our tunic, in our hair, in our face. And we heard suddenly that we were laughing, laughing aloud, laughing as if there were no power left in us save laughter.

Then we took our glass box, and we went on into the forest. We went on, cutting through the branches, and it was as if we were swimming through a sea of leaves, with the bushes as waves rising and falling and rising around us, and flinging their green sprays high to the treetops. The trees parted before us, calling us forward. The forest seemed to welcome us. We went on, without thought, without care, with nothing to feel save the song of our body.

We stopped when we felt hunger. We saw birds in the tree branches, and flying from under our footsteps. We picked a stone and we sent it as an arrow at a bird. It fell before us. We made a fire, we cooked the bird, and we ate it, and no meal had ever tasted better to us. And we thought suddenly that there was a great satisfaction to be found in the food which we need and obtain by our own hand. And we wished to be hungry again and soon, that we might know again this strange new pride in eating.

Then we walked on. And we came to a stream which lay as a streak of glass among the trees. It lay so still that we saw no water but only a cut in the earth, in which the trees grew down, upturned, and the sky lay at the bottom. We knelt by the stream and we bent down to drink. And then we stopped. For, upon the blue of the sky below us, we saw our own face for the first time.

We sat still and we held our breath. For our face and our body were beautiful. Our face was not like the faces of our brothers, for we felt no pity when looking upon it. Our body was not like the bodies of our brothers, for our limbs were straight and thin and hard and strong. And we thought that we could trust this being who looked upon us from the stream, and that we had nothing to fear with this being.

We walked on till the sun had set. When the shadows gathered among the trees, we stopped in a hollow between the roots, where we shall sleep tonight. And suddenly, for the first time this day, we remembered that we are the Damned. We remembered it, and we laughed.

We are writing this on the paper we had hidden in our tunic together with the written pages we had brought for the World Council of Scholars, but never given to them. We have much to speak of to ourselves, and we hope we shall find the words for it in the days to come. Now, we cannot speak, for we cannot understand.

Chapter Nine

We have not written for many days. We did not wish to speak. For we needed no words to remember that which has happened to us.

It was on our second day in the forest that we heard steps behind us. We hid in the bushes, and we waited. The steps came closer. And then we saw the fold of a white tunic among the trees, and a gleam of gold.

We leapt forward, we ran to them, and we stood looking upon the Golden One.

They saw us, and their hands closed into fists, and the fists pulled their arms down, as if they wished their arms to hold them, while their body swayed. And they could not speak.

We dared not come too close to them. We asked, and our voice trembled:

"How come you to be here, Golden One?"

But they whispered only:

"We have found you. . . ."

"How come you to be in the forest?" we asked.

They raised their head, and there was a great pride in their voice; they answered:

"We have followed you."

Then we could not speak, and they said:

"We heard that you had gone to the Uncharted Forest, for the whole City is speaking of it. So on the night of the day when we heard it, we ran away from the Home of the Peasants. We found the marks of your feet across the plain where no men walk. So we followed them, and we went into the forest, and we followed the path where the branches were broken by your body."

Their white tunic was torn, and the branches had cut the skin of their arms, but they spoke as if they had never taken notice of it, nor of weariness, nor of fear.

"We have followed you," they said, "and we shall follow you wherever you go. If danger threatens you, we shall face it also. If it be death, we shall die with you. You are damned, and we wish to share your damnation."

They looked upon us, and their voice was low, but there was bitterness and triumph in their voice:

"Your eyes are as a flame, but our brothers have neither hope nor fire. Your mouth is cut of granite, but our brothers are soft and humble. Your head is high, but our brothers crouch. You walk, but our brothers

crawl. We wish to be damned with you, rather than blessed with all our brothers. Do as you please with us, but do not send us away from you."

Then they knelt, and bowed their golden head before us.

We had never thought of that which we did. We bent to raise the Golden One to their feet, but when we touched them, it was as if madness had stricken us. We seized their body and we pressed our lips to theirs.

The Golden One breathed once, and their breath was a moan, and then their arms closed around us.

We stood together for a long time. And we were frightened that we had lived for twenty-one years and had never known what joy is possible to men.

Then we said:

"Our dearest one. Fear nothing of the forest. There is no danger in solitude. We have no need of our brothers. Let us forget their good and our evil, let us forget all things save that we are together and that there is joy as a bond between us. Give us your hand. Look ahead. It is our own world, Golden One, a strange, unknown world, but our own."

Then we walked on into the forest, their hand in ours.

And that night we knew that to hold the body of women in our arms is neither ugly nor shameful, but the one ecstasy granted to the race of men.

We have walked for many days. The forest has no end, and we seek no end. But each day added to the chain of days between us and the City is like an added blessing.

We have made a bow and many arrows. We can kill more birds than we need for our food; we find water and fruit in the forest. At night, we choose a clearing, and we build a ring of fires around it. We sleep in the midst of that ring, and the beasts dare not attack us. We can see their eyes, green and yellow as coals, watching us from the tree branches beyond. The fires smolder as a crown of jewels around us, and smoke stands still in the air, in columns made blue by the moonlight. We sleep together in the midst of the ring, the arms of the Golden One around us, their head upon our breast.

Some day, we shall stop and build a house, when we shall have gone far enough. But we do not have to hasten. The days before us are without end, like the forest.

We cannot understand this new life which we have found, yet it seems so clear and so simple. When questions come to puzzle us, we walk faster, then turn and forget all things as we watch the Golden One following. The shadows of leaves fall upon their arms, as they spread the branches apart, but their shoulders are in the sun. The skin of their arms is like a blue mist, but their shoulders are white and glowing, as if the light fell not from above, but rose from under their skin. We watch the leaf which has fallen upon their shoulder, and it lies at the curve of their neck, and a drop of dew glistens upon it like a jewel. They approach us, and they stop, laughing, knowing what we think, and they wait obediently, without questions, till it pleases us to turn and go on.

We go on and we bless the earth under our feet. But questions come to us again, as we walk in silence. If that which we have found is the corruption of solitude, then what can men wish for save corruption? If this is the great evil of being alone, then what is good and what is evil?

Everything which comes from the many is good. Everything which comes from one is evil. Thus have we been taught with our first breath. We have broken the law, but we have never doubted it. Yet now, as we walk through the forest, we are learning to doubt.

There is no life for men, save in useful toil for the good of all their brothers. But we lived not, when we toiled for our brothers, we were only weary. There is no joy for men, save the joy shared with all their brothers. But the only things which taught us joy were the power we created in our wires, and the Golden One. And both these joys belong to us alone, they come from us alone, they bear no relation to our brothers, and they do not concern our brothers in any way. Thus do we wonder.

There is some error, one frightful error, in the thinking of men. What is that error? We do not know, but the knowledge struggles within us, struggles to be born.

Today, the Golden One stopped suddenly and said:

"We love you."

But then they frowned and shook their head and looked at us helplessly.

"No," they whispered, "that is not what we wished to say."

They were silent, then they spoke slowly, and their words were halting, like the words of a child learning to speak for the first time:

"We are one . . . alone . . . and only . . . and we love you who are one . . . alone . . . and only."

We looked into each other's eyes and we knew that the breath of a miracle had touched us, and fled, and left us groping vainly.

And we felt torn, torn for some word we could not find.

Chapter Ten

We are sitting at a table and we are writing this upon paper made thousands of years ago. The light is dim, and we cannot see the Golden One, only one lock of gold on the pillow of an ancient bed. This is our home.

We came upon it today, at sunrise. For many days we had been crossing a chain of mountains. The forest rose among cliffs, and whenever we walked out upon a barren stretch of rock we saw great peaks before us in the west, and to the north of us, and to the south, as far as our eyes could see. The peaks were red and brown, with the green streaks of forests as veins upon them, with blue mists as veils over their heads. We had never heard of these mountains, nor seen them marked on any map. The Uncharted Forest has protected them from the Cities and from the men of the Cities.

We climbed paths where the wild goat dared not follow. Stones rolled from under our feet, and we heard them striking the rocks below, farther and farther down, and the mountains rang with each stroke, and long after the strokes had died. But we went on, for we knew that no men would ever follow our track nor reach us here.

Then today, at sunrise, we saw a white flame among the trees, high on a sheer peak before us. We thought that it was a fire and we stopped. But the flame was unmoving, yet blinding as liquid metal. So we climbed toward it through the rocks. And there, before us, on a broad summit, with the mountains rising behind it, stood a house such as we had never seen, and the white fire came from the sun on the glass of its windows.

The house had two stories and a strange roof flat as a floor. There was more window than wall upon its walls, and the windows went on straight around the corners, though how this kept the house standing we could not guess. The walls were hard and smooth, of that stone unlike stone which we had seen in our tunnel.

We both knew it without words: this house was left from the Unmentionable Times. The trees had protected it from time and weather, and from men who have less pity than time and weather. We turned to the Golden One and we asked:

"Are you afraid?"

But they shook their head. So we walked to the door, and we threw it open, and we stepped together into the house of the Unmentionable Times.

We shall need the days and the years ahead, to look, to learn and to understand the things of this house. Today, we could only look and try to believe the sight of our eyes. We pulled the heavy curtains from the windows and we saw that the rooms were small, and we thought that not more than twelve men could have lived here. We thought it strange that men had been permitted to build a house for only twelve.

Never had we seen rooms so full of light. The sunrays danced upon colors, colors, more colors than we thought possible, we who had seen no houses save the white ones, the brown ones and the grey. There were great pieces of glass on the walls, but it was not glass, for when we looked upon it we saw our own bodies and all the things behind us, as on the face of a lake. There were strange things which we had never seen and the use of which we do not know. And there were globes of glass everywhere, in each room, the globes with the metal cobwebs inside, such as we had seen in our tunnel.

We found the sleeping hall and we stood in awe upon its threshold. For it was a small room and there were only two beds in it. We found no other beds in the house, and then we knew that only two had lived here, and this passes understanding. What kind of world did they have, the men of the Unmentionable Times?

We found garments, and the Golden One gasped at the sight of them. For they were not white tunics, nor white togas; they were of all colors, no two of them alike. Some crumbled to dust as we touched them. But others were of heavier cloth, and they felt soft and new in our fingers.

We found a room with walls made of shelves, which held rows of manuscripts, from the floor to the ceiling. Never had we seen such a number of them, nor of such strange shape. They were not soft and rolled, they had hard shells of cloth and leather; and the letters on their pages were so small and so even that we wondered at the men who had such handwriting. We glanced through the pages, and we saw that they were written in our language, but we found many words which we could not understand. Tomorrow, we shall begin to read these scripts.

When we had seen all the rooms of the house, we looked at the Golden One and we both knew the thought in our minds.

"We shall never leave this house," we said, "nor let it be taken from us. This is our home and the end of our journey. This is your house, Golden One, and ours, and it belongs to no other men whatever as far as the earth may stretch. We shall not share it with others, as we share not our joy with them, nor our love, nor our hunger. So be it to the end of our days."

"Your will be done," they said.

Then we went out to gather wood for the great hearth of our home. We brought water from the stream which runs among the trees under our windows. We killed a mountain goat, and we brought its flesh to be cooked in a strange copper pot we found in a place of wonders, which must have been the cooking room of the house.

We did this work alone, for no words of ours could take the Golden One away from the big glass which is not glass. They stood before it and they looked and looked upon their own body.

When the sun sank beyond the mountains, the Golden One fell asleep on the floor, amidst jewels, and bottles of crystal, and flowers of silk. We lifted the Golden One in our arms and we carried them to a bed, their head falling softly upon our shoulder. Then we lit a candle, and we brought paper from the room of the manuscripts, and we sat by the window, for we knew that we could not sleep tonight.

And now we look upon the earth and sky. This spread of naked rock and peaks and moonlight is like a world ready to be born, a world that waits. It seems to us it asks a sign from us, a spark, a first commandment. We cannot know what word we are to give, nor what great deed this earth expects to witness. We know it waits. It seems to say it has great gifts to lay before us, but it wishes a greater gift from us. We are to speak. We are to give its goal, its highest meaning to all this glowing space of rock and sky.

We look ahead, we beg our heart for guidance in answering this call no voice has spoken, yet we have heard. We look upon our hands. We see the dust of centuries, the dust which hid great secrets and perhaps great evils. And yet it stirs no fear within our heart, but only silent reverence and pity.

May knowledge come to us! What is the secret our heart has understood and yet will not reveal to us, although it seems to beat as if it were endeavoring to tell it?

Chapter Eleven

I am. I think. I will.

My hands . . . My spirit . . . My sky . . . My forest . . . This earth of mine. . . .

What must I say besides? These are the words. This is the answer.

I stand here on the summit of the mountain. I lift my head and I spread my arms. This, my body and spirit, this is the end of the quest. I wished to know the meaning of things. I am the meaning. I wished to find a warrant for being. I need no warrant for being, and no word of sanction upon my being. I am the warrant and the sanction.

It is my eyes which see, and the sight of my eyes grants beauty to the earth. It is my ears which hear, and the hearing of my ears gives its song to the world. It is my mind which thinks, and the judgment of my mind is the only searchlight that can find the truth. It is my will which chooses, and the choice of my will is the only edict I must respect.

Many words have been granted me, and some are wise, and some are false, but only three are holy: "I will it!"

Whatever road I take, the guiding star is within me; the guiding star and the loadstone which point the way. They point in but one direction. They point to me.

I know not if this earth on which I stand is the core of the universe or if it is but a speck of dust lost in eternity. I know not and I care not. For I know what happiness is possible to me on earth. And my happiness needs no higher aim to vindicate it. My happiness is not the means to any end. It is the end. It is its own goal. It is its own purpose.

Neither am I the means to any end others may wish to accomplish. I am not a tool for their use. I am not a servant of their needs. I am not a bandage for their wounds. I am not a sacrifice on their altars.

I am a man. This miracle of me is mine to own and keep, and mine to guard, and mine to use, and mine to kneel before!

I do not surrender my treasures, nor do I share them. The fortune of my spirit is not to be blown into coins of brass and flung to the winds as alms for the poor of the spirit. I guard my treasures: my thought, my will, my freedom. And the greatest of these is freedom.

I owe nothing to my brothers, nor do I gather debts from them. I ask none to live for me, nor do I live for any others. I covet no man's soul, nor is my soul theirs to covet.

I am neither foe nor friend to my brothers, but such as each of them shall deserve of me. And to earn my love, my brothers must do more than to have been born. I do not grant my love without reason, nor to any chance passer-by who may wish to claim it. I honor men with my love. But honor is a thing to be earned.

I shall choose friends among men, but neither slaves nor masters. And I shall choose only such as please me, and them I shall love and respect, but neither command nor obey. And we shall join our hands when we wish, or walk alone when we so desire. For in the temple of his spirit, each man is alone. Let each man keep his temple untouched and undefiled. Then let him join hands with others if he wishes, but only beyond his holy threshold.

For the word "We" must never be spoken, save by one's choice and as a second thought. This word must never be placed first within man's soul, else it becomes a monster, the root of all the evils on earth, the root of man's torture by men, and of an unspeakable lie.

The word "We" is as lime poured over men, which sets and hardens to stone, and crushes all beneath it, and that which is white and that which is black are lost equally in the grey of it. It is the word by which the depraved steal the virtue of the good, by which the weak steal the might of the strong, by which the fools steal the wisdom of the sages.

What is my joy if all hands, even the unclean, can reach into it? What is my wisdom, if even the fools can dictate to me? What is my freedom, if all creatures, even the botched and impotent, are my masters? What is my life, if I am but to bow, to agree and to obey?

But I am done with this creed of corruption.

I am done with the monster of "We," the word of serfdom, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame.

And now I see the face of god, and I raise this god over the earth, this god whom men have sought since men came into being, this god who will grant them joy and peace and pride.

This god, this one word:

"I."

Chapter Twelve

It was when I read the first of the books I found in my house that I saw the word "I." And when I understood this word, the book fell from my hands, and I wept, I who had never known tears. I wept in deliverance and in pity for all mankind.

I understood the blessed thing which I had called my curse. I understood why the best in me had been my sins and my transgressions; and why I had never felt guilt in my sins. I understood that centuries of chains and lashes will not kill the spirit of man nor the sense of truth within him.

I read many books for many days. Then I called the Golden One, and I told her what I had read and what I had learned. She looked at me and the first words she spoke were:

"I love you." Then I said:

"My dearest one, it is not proper for men to be without names. There was a time when each man had a name of his own to distinguish him from all other men. So let us choose our names. I have read of a man who lived many thousands of years ago, and of all the names in these books, his is the one I wish to bear. He took the light of the gods and he brought it to men, and he taught men to be gods. And he suffered for his deed as all bearers of light must suffer. His name was Prometheus."

"It shall be your name," said the Golden One.

"And I have read of a goddess," I said, "who was the mother of the earth and of all the gods. Her name was Gaea. Let this be your name, my Golden One, for you are to be the mother of a new kind of gods."

"It shall be my name," said the Golden One.

Now I look ahead. My future is clear before me. The Saint of the pyre had seen the future when he chose me as his heir, as the heir of all the saints and all the martyrs who came before him and who died for the same cause, for the same word, no matter what name they gave to their cause and their truth.

I shall live here, in my own house. I shall take my food from the earth by the toil of my own hands. I shall learn many secrets from my books. Through the years ahead, I shall rebuild the achievements of the past, and open the way to carry them further, the achievements which are open to me, but closed forever to my brothers, for their minds are shackled to the weakest and dullest ones among them.

I have learned that my power of the sky was known to men long ago; they called it Electricity. It was the power that moved their greatest inventions. It lit this house with light which came from those globes of glass on the walls. I have found the engine which produced this light. I shall learn how to repair it and how to make it work again. I shall learn how to use the wires which carry this power. Then I shall build a barrier of wires around my home, and across the paths which lead to my home; a barrier light as a cobweb, more impassable than a wall of granite; a barrier my brothers will never be able to cross. For they have nothing to fight me with, save the brute force of their numbers. I have my mind.

Then here, on this mountaintop, with the world below me and nothing above me but the sun, I shall live my own truth. Gaea is pregnant with my child. Our son will be raised as a man. He will be taught to say "I" and to bear the pride of it. He will be taught to walk straight and on his own feet. He will be taught reverence for his own spirit.

When I shall have read all the books and learned my new way, when my home will be ready and my earth tilled, I shall steal one day, for the last time, into the cursed City of my birth. I shall call to me my friend who has no name save International 4-8818, and all those like him, Fraternity 2-5503, who cries without reason, and Solidarity 9-6347 who calls for help in the night, and a few others. I shall call to me all the men and the women whose spirit has not been killed within them and who suffer under the yoke of their brothers. They will follow me and I shall lead them to my fortress. And here, in this uncharted wilderness, I and they, my chosen friends, my fellow-builders, shall write the first chapter in the new history of man. These are the things before me. And as I stand here at the door of glory, I look behind me for the last time. I look upon the history of men, which I have learned from the Books, and I wonder: it was a long story, and the spirit which moved it was the spirit of man's freedom. But What is Freedom? Freedom From What?

There is nothing to take a man's freedom away from him, save other men. To be free, a man must be free of his brothers. That is freedom. That and nothingelse.

At first, man was enslaved by the gods. But he broke their chains. Then he was enslaved by the kings. But he broke their chains. He was enslaved by his birth, by his kin, by his race. But he broke their chains. He declared to all his brothers that a man has rights which neither god nor king nor other men can take away from him, no matter what their number, for his is the right of man, and there is no right on earth above this right. And he stood on the threshold of the freedom for which the blood of the centuries behind him had been spilled.

But then he gave up all he had won, and fell lower than his savage beginning.

What brought it to pass? What disaster took their reason away from men? What whip lashed them to their knees in shame and submission? The worship of the word "We."

When men accepted that worship, the structure of centuries collapsed about them, the structure whose every beam had come from the thought of some one man, each in his day down the ages, from the depth of someone spirit, such spirit as existed but for its own sake. Those men who survived -- those eager to obey, eager to live for one another, since they had nothing else to vindicate them -- those men could neither carry on, nor preserve what they had received. Thus did all thought, all science, all wisdom perish on earth. Thus did men -- men with nothing to offer save their great numbers -- lose the steel towers, the flying ships, the power wires, all the things they had not created and could never keep. Perhaps, later, some men had been born with the mind and the courage to recover these things which were lost; perhaps these men came before the Councils of Scholars. They were answered as I have been answered -- and for the samereasons.

But I still wonder how it was possible, in those graceless years of transition, long ago, that men did not see whither they were going, and went on, in blindness and cowardice, to their fate. I wonder, for it is hard for me to conceive how men who knew the word "I," could give it up and not know what they lost. But such has been the story, for I have lived in the City of the damned, and I know what horror men permitted to be brought upon them.

Perhaps, in those days, there were a few among men, a few of clear sight and clean soul, who refused to surrender that word. What agony must have been theirs before that which they saw coming and could not stop! Perhaps they cried out in protest and in warning. But men paid no heed to their warning. And they, these few, fought a hopeless battle, and they perished with their banners smeared by their own blood. And they chose to perish, for they knew. To them, I send my salute across the centuries, and my pity.

Theirs is the banner in my hand. And I wish I had the power to tell them that the despair of their hearts was not to be final, and their night was not without hope. For the battle they lost can never be lost. For that which they died to save can never perish. Through all the darkness, through all the shame of which men are capable, the spirit of man will remain alive on this earth. It may sleep, but it will awaken. It may wear chains, but it will break through. And man will go on. Man, notmen.

Here, on this mountain, I and my sons and my chosen friends shall build our new land and our fort. And it will become as the heart of the earth, lost and hidden at first, but beating, beating louder each day. And word of it will reach every corner of the earth. And the roads of the world will become as veins which will carry the best of the world's blood to my threshold. And all my brothers, and the Councils of my brothers, will hear of it, but they will be impotent against me. And the day will come when I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved, and my home will become the capital of a world where each man will be free to exist for his own sake.

For the coming of that day shall I fight, I and my sons and my chosen friends. For the freedom of Man. For his rights. For his life. For his honor.

And here, over the portals of my fort, I shall cut in the stone the word which is to be my beacon and my banner. The word which will not die, should we all perish in battle. The word which can never die on this earth, for it is the heart of it and the meaning and the glory.

The sacred word:

EGO

Exercises:

Descriptive answer type questions:

1. What is Ayn Rand's message in *Anthem*?
2. Explain the relationship of the Golden One and Equality 7-2521.

Short answer type questions:

1. What is Equality's crime?
2. Who is Liberty and what does she do?
3. What is Liberty's life mandate?
4. What did Equality intend to do with his discovery?"
5. Who follows Equality in the forest and why?
6. Why did Equality not try to escape earlier?
7. What has Equality discovered and what has he learnt from it?

Classroom activities:

1. Are the characters in *Anthem* too idealized to be believable? Can you relate to any one of them?
2. Is *Anthem* still relevant today? Why or why not??



Unit-VI

Remedial Grammar: Common Errors in English Usage

(Prepositions, Verb/Tense, Question Tag, Confused Words,
WordOrder, Un-EnglishExpressions)

1. Preposition:

Preposition is a word used before noun or a pronoun to show its relation with another noun or a pronoun. Such relationship may be of time, place, position, direction etc. The non-native learners under the impact of their mother tongue commit many mistakes in using correct prepositions. Following examples will help you to understand the usage of them:

1. Among/between

Incorrect: I could not decide among the two colours.

Correct: I could not decide between the two colours.

Reason: Use 'between' when there is a reference to two and use 'Among' when the reference is to three or more.

Examples: We had to choose the winner between the blue and the pink teams.

They had to choose the winner among the 5 participating teams.

2. Since/for

Incorrect: They've been living in Europe since sixmonths.

Correct: They've been living in Europe for sixmonths.

Reason: Preposition 'For' is used to indicates the period of time and preposition 'Since' is used to show point of time

Examples

for 20 minutes

for three days

for 6 months

for 4 years

since 9am

since Monday

since January

since 1997

3. During/for

Incorrect: She studied for the football game.

Correct: She studied during the football game.

Reason: During shows throughout the course or duration of a period of time.

For shows the length of a period of time.

Examples

The restaurant is open during the day.

My sister studied for five hours.

He was jailed for 12 years.

4. Before/ago

Incorrect: She arrived five minutes before.

Correct: She arrived five minutes ago.

Reason: Ago means before the present; earlier. For ago, a specific time must be mentioned. Before means during the period of time preceding (a particular event or time)

Examples

He met his wife twenty years ago.

Your father phoned five minutes ago.

They lived here unhappily for four days before they were arrested

5. Waiting on/waitingfor

Incorrect: He waited on the train, but it didn't come.

Correct: He waited for the train, but it didn't come.

Reason: Wait on means to serve. Wait for means waiting for someone or something.

Examples

A servant was appointed to wait on her.

The children are waiting for their parents.

6. Home /at home.

Incorrect: In the afternoon they stay home.

Correct: In the afternoon they stay at home.

Reason: Use the phrase at home to mean in the house. With such verbs as come or go no preposition is necessary

He wants to go home

7. In andInto.

(a) In.

Incorrect: Seema spent all the day into her room.

Correct: Seema spent all the day in her room.

(b) Into.

Incorrect: Rohan came in the room and sat down.

Correct: Rohan came into the room and sat down.

Reason: In denotes position inside something, while into denotes motion or direction towards the inside of something

8. From forSince.

Incorrect: Pawan has been ill from last Wednesday.

Correct: Pawan has been ill since last Wednesday.

Reason: We place the preposition 'since' before words or phrases denoting a point in time: since Monday, since yesterday, since eight o'clock, since Christmas. When we use since, the verb is usually in the present perfect tense, but it may be in the past perfect.

I was glad to see John. I hadn't seen him since last Christmas.

Note: From can also denote a point in time, but it must be followed by to or till:

He works from eight o'clock till one o'clock without a break

Note carefully the prepositions used after the verbs in the following words:

accuse of	guilty of
accustomed to	independent of
afraid of	indifferent to
aim at	insist on
angry with, at	interested in
arrive at	jealous of
ashamed of	look at
believe in	married to
boast of	no doubt of or about
careful of, with, about	pleased with

complain about	prefer to
compose of	proud of
conform to	related to
congratulate on	repent of
consist of	satisfied with
cure of	similar to
depend on	succeed in
deprive of	superior to
die of	sure of
different from	surprised at, by
dressed in	suspect of
fail in	tired of
full of	translate into
warn of, about	guard against

Exercise

Fill in the blanks with suitable prepositions:

- 1 I wasn't pleased -----her.
- 2 Cats are afraid -----dogs.
- 3 Look -----this new book.
- 4 We're proud----- our country.
- 5 He feels ashamed----- his low marks.
- 6 We arrived -----the station late.
- 7 She's very different----- her sister.
- 8 Are you satisfied -----your bicycle?
- 9 I'm not accustomed ----- life in a hotel.
- 10 Many people complain----- their low wages.

Rewrite the following sentences, using the correct prepositions:

- 1 He was accused for lying.
- 2 I'm surprised from the news.
- 3 I'm interested for football.
- 4 Water is composed from oxygen and hydrogen.
- 5 Are you sure for his honesty.
- 6 She's very good in English.
- 7 When is he leaving to England?
- 8 That depends entirely from you.
- 9 She was dressed with a yellow dress.
- 10 He did his best to comply to the requirements.

In the following sentences, choose the correct preposition in brackets:

- 1 He's been ill {from, since} last Friday.
- 2 You've sold your car (at, for) a good price.
- 3 I sold my bicycle (at, for) forty pounds.
- 4 I expect to return (after, in) a week.
- 5 I can wait (to, till) next Tuesday.
- 6 We draw lines (by, with) a ruler.
- 7 She's been absent (since, for) a month.
- 8 They spoke (for, about) the weather.
- 9 He worked (with, by) candlelight.

10 You can send the parcel (with, by)post.

2. Tense/ Verb

Tense is a grammatical category that tells of the time of action. In English we recognise only two tenses i.e. Present and Past tense. Simple, continuous, perfect and perfect continuous are the different angles to look at the action of the verb. Each tense has particular use and it is the most feared area in the English grammar. Let's have a look at some of the problem areas:

Incorrect: If I will visit London, I will meet you.

Correct: If I visit London, I will meet you.

Incorrect: I'll see you when I shall come back.

Correct: I'll see you when I come back.

Incorrect: If he'll ask me, I will/'ll stay.

Correct: If he asks me, I will/'ll stay.

Reason: Reason: The main clause has future marker 'will' so the subordinate clause shall be with simple present. Use the present tense in a future conditional in the if clause and the future marker in the main clause

Note : But the future marker may be used in an 'if clause' expressing a request :

If you will/'ll help me, I will/'ll buy you a drink

Examples

I will talk to him when I see him in the next two days.

I will call you as soon as I arrive at the airport.

If the plan succeeds, I will come.

1. Use of wrong form of verb

Incorrect: I did not saw him yesterday.

Correct: I did not see him yesterday.

Reason: We use base form after the auxiliary 'do' and all the modal auxiliaries (can, may shall, must etc.)

Incorrect: Does the gardener waters the trees?

Correct: Does the gardener water the trees?

Incorrect: The woman doesn't waters the flowers.

Correct: The woman doesn't water the flowers.

Incorrect: Mohan can speaks English very well.

Correct: Mohan can speak English very well.

Examples

I did not study Maths.

He doesn't get up early.

Do you like his paintings?

2. Wrong sequence of tenses.

Incorrect: Amit asked me what I am doing.

Correct: Amit asked me what I was doing.

Reason: When the verb in the main clause is in the past tense, we use a past tense in subordinate clauses.

3. Using will/ ll instead of would/'d in a subordinate clause.

Incorrect: He said (that) he will/'ll come tomorrow

Correct: He said (that) he would/'d come tomorrow.

Reason: it is a reported speech and the reporting verb is in past so all the other verbs behave accordingly.

4. Using the present perfect instead of the simple past tense.

Incorrect: I have seen a good movie yesterday.

Correct: I saw a good movie yesterday.

Reason: We use the simple past tense and not the present perfect for an action completed in the past. Yesterday as time marker is confined to past so the verb should be in past. When a sentence has a word or a phrase denoting past time, like yesterday, last night, last week, last year, then, ago, etc. , always use a simple past tense.

5. Using the simple present instead of the present perfect.

Incorrect: He is at this school for two years.

Correct: He has been at this school for two years.

Reason: Use the present perfect (and not the simple present) for an action begun in the past and continuing into the present. He has been at this school for two years means he is still there.

6. Using the simple present instead of the present perfect after a since clause of time.

Incorrect: Since he came, we're happy.

Correct: Since he came, we've been happy.

Reason: The verb after a since clause of time is generally in the present perfect tense.

7. Using the simple present instead of the present continuous.

Incorrect: Look! Two boys fight.

Correct: Look! Two boys are fighting.

Reason: Fight shows regularity but present continuous shows the action is happening at the moment of speaking. 'Look' suggests the use of 'are fighting.' We also use the present continuous for the future 'when something is pre-arranged or expected with some certainty Joseph is arriving tomorrow

8. The continuous form of the tense misused.

Incorrect: I'm understanding the grammar now.

Correct: I understand the grammar now.

Reason: As a rule, verbs denoting a state rather than an act have no continuous forms, like understand, know, believe, like, love, belong, prefer, consist, mean, hear, see. etc. They all are Stative verbs

9. Using the past tense instead of the past perfect.

Incorrect: The train already left before I arrived.

Correct: The train had already left before I arrived.

Reason: When two simultaneous actions happened in the past are stated, the first to take place is mentioned in past perfect and the other in simple past.

10. Using an intransitive verb in the passive form.

Incorrect: She was disappeared from the house.

Correct: She disappeared from the house.

Reason:

As a rule, don't use intransitive verbs, like appear , seem, become , consist , in the passive form.

Intransitive verbs don't have an object

Rewrite the following with the verbs in brackets in the correct tense:

1 After he (finish) his work he (go) home.

2 I (study) English for two years.

3 I (finish) my work this morning.

4 I (do) my homework before Tom (call) for me.

5 He said he (will) go to the cinema.

6 I not (see) her since Wednesday.

7 I (speak) to her five minutes ago.

8 I (study) grammar last year.

9 She always (whisper) during the lesson. 10 The courier (come) back.

Correct the following sentences, giving reasons for your corrections:

- 1 Richard said that he is workinghard.
- 2 How long did you waited for me yesterday?
- 3 She speaks English very well, but I'm not sure whether she can speaks French too.
- 4 He is on the team for two years.
- 5 I have seen her yesterday at church.
- 6 What do you do now? - I do my project.
- 7 I use to get up early.
- 8 Paul acts as if he is a richman.
- 9 I'll speak to him as soon as he will come.
- 10 I told Jill to come with us, but she says that she isn't feeling well.

Supply the correct tense in the following:

- 1 I (to go) to school every day.
- 2 He (to go) to the school now.
- 3 Look! They (to come) towards us.
- 4 Now I (to hear) her clearly.
- 5 Every morning I (to take) a walk by the river.
- 6 When I (come) in, it (rain).
- 7 Many years ago people (travel) on horseback.
- 8 I (meet) him as I (go) home.
- 9 He (go) to another school last year.
- 10 My father (play) football in his youth.
- 11 He (come) back last week.
- 12 I just (finish) my work.
- 13 I (live) in London last year.
- 14 The bell (ring) five minutes ago.
- 15 I (see) the Pyramids of Egypt.
- 16 I (want) to see you yesterday.
- 17 He (tell) me that he (see) me the day before yesterday.
- 18 There (be) a strong wind last night.
- 19 The girl (find) the book which she (lose).
- 20 When I (run) a mile, I (be) very tired.

3. Question tag:

Question tag is a minor type of question. It is used to get confirmation or consent of the listener on what the speaker has said. There are some simple things to remember about question tag.

1. If the statement is positive the tag should be negative (Many times in spoken this is not the case)
2. The auxiliary verb of the statement is repeated in the tag.
3. The subject of the statement is repeated in pronoun form in the tag.
4. If there is no auxiliary verb in the statement then 'do' is used
5. The tense of the statement is retained in tag with auxiliary
6. Tag is in contracted form
7. As there is no contracted form for 'am I not' so 'aren't I' is used

Here are some examples that will help you to use tags properly

1. The question phrase 'isn't it?' misused.

Incorrect: She played well yesterday, isn't it?

Correct: She played well yesterday, didn't she?

Reason: The question tag 'isn't it' is used only when the preceding statement contains the main verb 'is': It is a hot day, isn't it? In the above example the verb is in simple past (played). As there is no auxiliary we use do form in past (did) and the subject pronoun shall be repeated.

Examples:

You are on holiday, aren't you?

You aren't on holiday, are you?

You speak English, don't you?

You don't speak French; do you?

Complete the following, adding question phrases:

1 She sings well, -----?

2 He can't swim, -----?

3 You play the piano, -----?

4 It's cool today, -----?

5 It isn't warm today, -----?

4. Confused words:

Non- native learners often get confused while choosing appropriate words while using English language. Here are some examples that will help you to understand and use the language properly.

1. Amount/number

Incorrect: A greater amount of people are visiting the garden.

Correct: A greater number of people are visiting the garden.

Reason: "Amount" is used for uncountable commodities. "Number" is used for countable things. Garden is a countable noun

Examples

A large amount of soil is used for the project.

We can watch a number of cricket matches.

2. Fewer/less

Incorrect: There are less flowers.

Correct: There are fewer flowers.

Reason: Fewer is used with countable nouns.

Less is used with uncountable nouns.

Examples:

There was a less rainfall last year.

There are fewer students in the class.

3. Beside/besides

Incorrect: Tell him to sit besides me.

Correct: Tell him to sit beside me.

Reason: Beside means next to

Besides means in addition to

Examples

The groom was sitting beside the bride at the reception.

Besides her famous books, she will donate some amount to the library.

4. Drown /Sink.

Incorrect: The boat drowned in the river.

Correct: The boat sank in the river.

Reason: The verb “drown” refers to living things and it means to die in water but the verb “sink” refers to non-living things and it means to go down to the bottom of water.

5. Remember for Remind.

Incorrect: Please remember me to give your book back.

Correct: Please remind me to give your book back.

Reason: “To remember” is to have in mind.

To remind is to make a person remember something

6. Hardly for Hard.

Incorrect: She rubbed his palm hardly.

Correct: She rubbed his palm hard.

Reason: Hard means severely. Hardly means not quite or scarcely.

7. Many and Much.

(a) Many.

Incorrect: My brother hasn't much dogs.

Correct: My brother hasn't many dogs.

(b) Much.

Incorrect: Is there many dust in this hall?

Correct: Is there much dust in this hall?

Reason: Many is used with plural nouns 'many pens or many girls but we use much with uncountable nouns 'much milk or much sugar.'

8. Few and A Few.

(a) Few.

Incorrect: Although the paper was easy, a few boys were able to answer it.

Correct: Although the paper was easy, few boys were able to answer it.

(b) A few.

Incorrect: Although the paper was difficult, few boys were able to answer it.

Correct: Although the paper was difficult, a few boys were able to answer it.

Reason: ‘Few’ means not many and it has negative sense. It is distinguished from ‘a few’ which means at least some and it has positive sense.

8. Little and A Little.

(a) Little.

Incorrect: He took a little exercise and wasn't very fit.

Correct: He took little exercise and wasn't very fit.

(b) A little.

Incorrect: She took little exercise and felt much better.

Correct: She took a little exercise and felt much better.

Reason: ‘Little’ means not much and it has negative sense. It's distinguished from ‘a little’ which means at least some and it has positive sense

9. Less for Fewer.

Incorrect: She has less books than I have.

Correct: She has fewer books than I have.

Reason: ‘Less’ denotes amount, quantity, value, or degree, ‘fewer’ denotes number. Less shall be used with uncountable nouns and fewer shall be used with countable nouns. We may have less water, less food, less money, less education, but fewer books, fewer letters, fewer friends

10. High for Tall.

Incorrect: My younger brother is six feet high.

Correct: My younger brother is six feet tall.

Reason: We generally use tall with people, and it's the opposite of short. Use high when referring to trees, buildings, or mountains, and it's the opposite of low

11. House and Home.

Incorrect: They should go to their house now.

Correct: They should go home now.

Reason: We shall not say my house, his house, or your house. Whereas, we should say home. A house is any building used for dwelling in, and home is the particular house in which someone is living. With home one is emotionally attached.

12. Foot for Leg.

Incorrect: He has hurt his foot – (if the injury is anywhere above the ankle.)

Correct: He has hurt his leg.

Reason: Leg is the part of the body from the hip down to the ankle, and foot is the part below the ankle.

13. Finger for Toe.

Incorrect: She hurt a finger of her right foot.

Correct: She hurt a toe of her right foot.

Reason: Fingers are on the hand, and toes are on the foot.

14. Cost for Price.

Incorrect: What's the cost of this shirt?

Correct: What's the price of this shirt?

Reason: Price is the amount of money paid by the customer and cost is the expense incurred for a product or service that is sold by a company.

Use the correct form of lie or lay in the following:

1 I'll go and ----- down.

2 The book was----- ing on the floor.

3 He----- down to rest.

4 She told the dog to----- down.

5 The hen has----- an egg.

Use the correct form of rise or raise in the following:

1 Prices----- during the war.

2 He promised to----- his salary.

3 The balloon----- in the sky.

4 The sun ----- at six o'clock.

5 He ----- his hat to the teacher.

Use the correct form of wear, put on, or dress in the following:

1 She often wears a green coat.

2 I put on my coat and went out.

3 The mother dressed the child.

4 She wore a beautiful dress at the dance.

5 It takes him a long time to get dressed.

In the following sentences, choose the correct word from those in brackets:

1 Who (discovered, invented) the telephone?

2 The judge was (persuaded, convinced) that the man was guilty.

3 When will the meeting (take place, take part)?

4 He (took, received) a prize for his success.

5 It's not wise to (interfere with, interfere in) family quarrels.

6 He (is, is found) at the school in the morning.

7 At what time do you (sleep, go to bed)?

8 She didn't (accept, agree) to go.

- 9 How does that man (win, earn) his living?
10 Please (remember, remind) me to give you the change.

5. Word order:

Word order in English again is a problem area for many learners. This is so due to the structural differences among languages. Let's have a look at the following examples and understand the English word order.

1. The adverb of definite time misplaced.

Incorrect: We last night went to the cinema. **Correct: We went to the cinema last night.**

Reason: Adverbs or adverbial phrases of definite time, like yesterday, today, tomorrow, last week, two months ago, are usually placed at the end of the sentence. If we want to emphasise the time, we put the adverb at the beginning: Yesterday he was very busy.

2. The adverb of indefinite time misplaced.

Incorrect: They go always to school by bus.
Correct: They always go to school by bus.

Reason: Put adverbs of indefinite time, like ever, never, always, often, seldom, soon, sometimes and the adverbs almost, scarcely, hardly, nearly, even, before the main verb.

3. The adverb of time placed before the adverb of place.

Incorrect: The officers will be tomorrow here.
Correct: The officers will be here tomorrow.

Reason: When using an adverb of time and an adverb of place together in a sentence, the adverb of place must come first.

4. The subject misplaced in questions.

Incorrect: You were at the cinema last night? They'll come with me tomorrow?

Correct: Were you at the cinema last night? Will they come with me tomorrow?

Incorrect: Why you were absent last Monday?

Correct: Why were you absent last Monday?

Reason: In interrogative sentences the auxiliary verb or a question word begins the sentence followed by subject and main verb.

5. All... not used instead of Not

all Incorrect: All students are not hard-working.
Correct: Not all students are hard-working. Reason: The first sentence is wrong because it means all students are lazy. Similarly, everybody doesn't like dancing should be - Not everybody likes dancing.

1. The subject misplaced in indirect questions.

Incorrect: The teacher asked me what games did play?

Correct: The teacher asked me what game I played.

In indirect questions follow the usual order of words: subject first and then verb.

6. Un-English expressions:

Mistakes often result from carrying over mother tongue ideas and expressions into English. The following are examples of such mistakes:

1. Take an exam, not give an exam.

Incorrect: The student gave his exam.

Correct: The student took his exam.

Reason: In English the teacher gives or sets the exam, the student takes the exam or sits the exam.

2. Take an hour, not need an hour, etc.

Incorrect: I'll need half an hour to do that.

Correct: It'll take me half an hour to do that.

3. Have a dream, not see a dream.

Incorrect: He saw a strange dream yesterday.

Correct: He had a strange dream yesterday. Or: He dreamt a strange dream last night.

4. Smoke a cigarette, etc., not drink a cigarette, etc.

Incorrect: She drinks too many cigarettes.

Correct: She smokes too many cigarettes.

5. Make a mistake, not do a mistake.

Incorrect: I did one mistake in answer book.

Correct: I made one mistake in answer book. Incorrect: Kiran always says the truth.
Correct: Kiran always tells the truth. Or: Kiran always speaks the truth. Note Also to tell a lie (not to say a lie): He told me a lie.

6. Turn (switch) the light on or off, not open or shut the light.

Incorrect: Please open (or shut) the light.

Correct: Please turn on (or off) the light. Or: Please switch on (or off) the light.

Note: We light, blow out or put out a lamp, a candle, or a fire.

7. A watch is slow or fast, not goes behind or in front.

Incorrect: Her watch goes two minutes behind.

Correct: Her watch is two minutes slow.

8. This morning, etc., not today morning, etc.

Incorrect: I haven't meet him today morning.

Correct: I haven't meet him this morning.

Note: Avoid today morning, today afternoon, today evening, yesterday night, this night. Say: this morning, this afternoon, this evening, last night, tonight.

9. Quietly, not slowly, slowly.

Incorrect: The man came in slowly, slowly.

Correct: The man came in quietly.

10. Answer (= reply to).

Incorrect: Please answer to my question.

Correct: Please answer my question.

**Note: Here the verb answer is immediately followed by an object. The noun answer takes to.
His answer to my question was wrong.**

11. Approach (- come near to).

Incorrect: Don't approach to that building.
Correct: Don't approach that building.

12. Comprise (= consist of).

Incorrect: The book comprises of seven chapters.

Correct: The book comprises seven chapters. Or: The book is comprised of seven chapters.

13. Enter (= go into).

Incorrect: We entered into the room.

Correct: We entered the room.

Note: We enter into a conversation, a debate, or a discussion.

14. Reach (- arrive at).

Incorrect: We reached at the school late.

Correct: We reached the school late.

15. Resemble (- be similar to).

Incorrect: Does he resemble to his father?
Correct: Does he resemble his father?

Note: resemblance takes to or between. She bears no resemblance to her father. There is no resemblance between them

16. Inside (= in the interior of).

Incorrect: The group went inside of the room.

Correct: The group went inside the room.

17. Outside (= on the exterior of).

Incorrect: The group stood outside of the door.

Correct: The group stood outside the door.

18. Wrong use of 'the' with names of meals.

Incorrect: We'll start after the lunch.

Correct: We'll start after lunch.

We shall not use the definite article before the names of meals, breakfast, lunch, dinner, or supper unless we are referring to a particular meal: The lunch they provided was excellent

19. Return back used instead of return.

Incorrect: She has returned back to school.
Correct: She has returned to school

Note: Don't use the word back with return, because return means to come back

20. From where used instead of where.

Incorrect: From where can I buy good jeans?
Correct: Where can I buy good jeans?

Note: 'Where' means at what place 'while from' where denotes the point of origin From where do tourists come?

Correct the following sentences, giving the correct idiom:

- 1 Few people will admit that they have wrong.
- 2 Every day I put my watch with the school clock.
- 3 Will there be a game today afternoon?
- 4 He brought a good example.
- 5 Slowly, slowly, don't make a noise.
- 6 The teacher didn't put us a new lesson.
- 7 Come down from the bicycle.
- 8 When do you make your bath?
- 9 I have much work; I need an hour to finish it
- 10 Many young people drink cigarettes.



This text offers a close range of a variety of the choicest English short fiction along with lessons in Remedial Grammar to develop the English Language usage skills of the students.

Published for Swami Ramanand Teerth Marathwada University, Nanded

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