

Another Man's Wife
or

THE HUSBAND UNDER THE BED

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AN EXTRAORDINARY ADVENTURE

1

“Be so kind, sir . . . allow me to ask you. . . .”

The gentleman so addressed started and looked with some alarm at the gentleman in raccoon furs who had accosted him so abruptly at eight o'clock in the evening in the street. We all know that if a Petersburg gentleman suddenly in the street speaks to another gentleman with whom he is unacquainted, the second gentleman is invariably alarmed.

And so the gentleman addressed started and was somewhat alarmed.

“Excuse me for troubling you,” said the gentleman in raccoon, “but I . . . I really don't know . . . you will pardon me, no doubt; you see, I am a little upset. . . .”

Only then the young man in the wadded overcoat observed that this gentleman in the raccoon furs certainly was upset. His wrinkled face was rather pale, his voice was trembling. He was evidently in some confusion of mind, his words did not flow easily from his tongue, and it could be seen that it cost him a terrible effort to present a very humble request to a personage possibly his inferior in rank or condition, in spite of the urgent necessity of addressing his request to somebody. And indeed the request was in any case unseemly, undignified, strange, coming from a man who had such a dignified fur coat, such a respectable jacket of a superb dark green colour, and such distinguished decorations adorning that jacket. It was evident that the gentleman in raccoon was himself confused by all this, so that at last he could not stand it, but made up his mind to suppress his emotion and politely to put an end to the unpleasant position he had himself brought about.

“Excuse me, I am not myself: but it is true you don't know me . . . forgive me

for disturbing you; I have changed my mind.”

Here, from politeness, he raised his hat and hurried off.

“But allow me. . . .”

The little gentleman had, however, vanished into the darkness, leaving the gentleman in the wadded overcoat in a state of stupefaction.

“What a queer fellow!” thought the gentleman in the wadded overcoat. After wondering, as was only natural, and recovering at last from his stupefaction, he bethought him of his own affairs, and began walking to and fro, staring intently at the gates of a house with an endless number of storeys. A fog was beginning to come on, and the young man was somewhat relieved at it, for his walking up and down was less noticeable in the fog, though indeed no one could have noticed him but some cabman who had been waiting all day without a fare.

“Excuse me!”

The young man started again; again the gentleman in raccoon was standing before him.

“Excuse me again . . .” he began, “but you . . . you are no doubt an honourable man! Take no notice of my social position . . . but I am getting muddled . . . look at it as man to man . . . you see before you, sir, a man craving a humble favour. . . .”

“If I can. . . . What do you want?”

“You imagine, perhaps, that I am asking for money,” said the mysterious gentleman, with a wry smile, laughing hysterically and turning pale.

“Oh, dear, no.”

“No, I see that I am tiresome to you! Excuse me, I cannot bear myself; consider that you are seeing a man in an agitated condition, almost of insanity, and do not draw any conclusion. . . .”

“But to the point, to the point,” responded the young man, nodding his head encouragingly and impatiently.

“Now think of that! A young man like you reminding me to keep to the point, as though I were some heedless boy! I must certainly be doting! . . . How do I seem to you in my degrading position? Tell me frankly.”

The young man was overcome with confusion, and said nothing.

“Allow me to ask you openly: have you not seen a lady? That is all that I have to ask you,” the gentleman in the raccoon coat said resolutely at last.

“Lady?”

“Yes, a lady.”

“Yes, I have seen . . . but I must say lots of them have passed. . . .”

“Just so,” answered the mysterious gentleman, with a bitter smile. “I am muddled, I did not mean to ask that; excuse me, I meant to say, haven’t you seen a lady in a fox fur cape, in a dark velvet hood and a black veil?”

“No, I haven’t noticed one like that . . . no. I think I haven’t seen one.”

“Well, in that case, excuse me!”

The young man wanted to ask a question, but the gentleman in raccoon vanished again; again he left his patient listener in a state of stupefaction.

“Well, the devil take him!” thought the young man in the wadded overcoat, evidently troubled.

With annoyance he turned up his beaver collar, and began cautiously walking to and fro again before the gates of the house of many storeys. He was raging inwardly.

“Why doesn’t she come out?” he thought. “It will soon be eight o’clock.”

The town clock struck eight.

“Oh, devil take you!”

“Excuse me! . . .”

“Excuse me for speaking like that . . . but you came upon me so suddenly that you quite frightened me,” said the young man, frowning and apologising.

“Here I am again. I must strike you as tiresome and queer.”

“Be so good as to explain at once, without more ado; I don’t know what it is you want. . . .”

“You are in a hurry. Do you see, I will tell you everything openly, without wasting words. It cannot be helped. Circumstances sometimes bring together people of very different characters. . . . But I see you are impatient, young man. . . . So here . . . though I really don’t know how to tell you: I am looking for a lady (I

have made up my mind to tell you all about it). You see, I must know where that lady has gone. Who she is—I imagine there is no need for you to know her name, young man.”

“Well, well, what next?”

“What next? But what a tone you take with me! Excuse me, but perhaps I have offended you by calling you young man, but I had nothing . . . in short, if you are willing to do me a very great service, here it is: a lady—that is, I mean a gentlewoman of a very good family, of my acquaintance . . . I have been commissioned . . . I have no family, you see. . . .”

“Oh!”

“Put yourself in my position, young man (ah, I’ve done it again; excuse me, I keep calling you young man). Every minute is precious. . . . Only fancy, that lady . . . but cannot you tell me who lives in this house?”

“But . . . lots of people live here.”

“Yes, that is, you are perfectly right,” answered the gentleman in raccoon, giving a slight laugh for the sake of good manners. “I feel I am rather muddled. . . . But why do you take that tone? You see, I admit frankly that I am muddled, and however haughty you are, you have seen enough of my humiliation to satisfy you. . . . I say a lady of honourable conduct, that is, of light tendencies—excuse me, I am so confused; it is as though I were speaking of literature—Paul de Kock is supposed to be of light tendencies, and all the trouble comes from him, you see. . . .”

The young man looked compassionately at the gentleman in raccoon, who seemed in a hopeless muddle and pausing, stared at him with a meaningless smile and with a trembling hand for no apparent reason gripped the lappet of his wadded overcoat.

“You ask who lives here?” said the young man, stepping back a little.

“Yes; you told me lots of people live here.”

“Here . . . I know that Sofya Ostafyevna lives here, too,” the young man brought out in a low and even commiserating tone.

“There, you see, you see! You know something, young man?”

“I assure you I don’t, I know nothing . . . I judged from your troubled air. . . .”

“I have just learned from the cook that she does come here; but you are on the wrong tack, that is, with Sofya Ostafyevna . . . she does not know her. . . .”

“No? Oh . . . I beg your pardon, then. . . .”

“I see this is of no interest to you, young man,” said the queer man, with bitter irony.

“Listen,” said the young man, hesitating. “I really don’t understand why you are in such a state, but tell me frankly, I suppose you are being deceived?” The young man smiled approvingly. “We shall understand one another, anyway,” he added, and his whole person loftily betrayed an inclination to make a half-bow.

“You crush me! But I frankly confess that is just it . . . but it happens to every one! . . . I am deeply touched by your sympathy. To be sure, among young men . . . though I am not young; but you know, habit, a bachelor life, among bachelors, we all know. . . .”

“Oh, yes, we all know, we all know! But in what way can I be of assistance to you?”

“Why, look here: admitting a visit to Sofya Ostafyevna . . . though I don’t know for a fact where the lady has gone, I only know that she is in that house; but seeing you walking up and down, and I am walking up and down on the same side myself, I thought . . . you see, I am waiting for that lady . . . I know that she is there. I should like to meet her and explain to her how shocking and improper it is! . . . In fact, you understand me. . . .”

“H’m! Well?”

“I am not acting for myself; don’t imagine it; it is another man’s wife! Her husband is standing over there on the Voznesensky Bridge; he wants to catch her, but he doesn’t dare; he is still loath to believe it, as every husband is.” (Here the gentleman in raccoon made an effort to smile.) “I am a friend of his; you can see for yourself I am a person held in some esteem; I could not be what you take me for.”

“Oh, of course. Well, well!”

“So, you see, I am on the look out for her. The task has been entrusted to me (the unhappy husband!). But I know that the young lady is sly (Paul de Kock for

ever under her pillow); I am certain she scurries off somewhere on the sly. . . . I must confess the cook told me she comes here; I rushed off like a madman as soon as I heard the news; I want to catch her. I have long had suspicions, and so I wanted to ask you; you are walking here . . . you—you—I don't know. . . .”

“Come, what is it you want?”

“Yes . . . I have not the honour of your acquaintance; I do not venture to inquire who and what you may be. . . . Allow me to introduce myself, anyway; glad to meet you! . . .”

The gentleman, quivering with agitation, warmly shook the young man's hand.

“I ought to have done this to begin with,” he added, “but I have lost all sense of good manners.”

The gentleman in raccoon could not stand still as he talked; he kept looking about him uneasily, fidgeted with his feet, and like a drowning man clutched at the young man's hand.

“You see,” he went on, “I meant to address you in a friendly way. . . . Excuse the freedom. . . . I meant to ask you to walk along the other side and down the side street, where there is a back entrance. I, too, on my side, will walk from the front entrance, so that we cannot miss her; I'm afraid of missing her by myself; I don't want to miss her. When you see her, stop her and shout to me. . . . But I'm mad! Only now I see the foolishness and impropriety of my suggestion! . . .”

“No, why, no! It's all right! . . .”

“Don't make excuses for me; I am so upset. I have never been in such a state before. As though I were being tried for my life! I must own indeed—I will be straightforward and honourable with you, young man; I actually thought you might be the lover.”

“That is, to put it simply, you want to know what I am doing here?”

“You are an honourable man, my dear sir. I am far from supposing that you are *he*, I will not insult you with such a suspicion; but . . . give me your word of honour that you are not the lover. . . .”

“Oh, very well, I'll give you my word of honour that I am a lover, but not of your wife; otherwise I shouldn't be here in the street, but should be with her now!”

“Wife! Who told you she was my wife, young man? I am a bachelor, I—that is, I am a lover myself. . . .”

“You told me there is a husband on Voznesensky Bridge. . . .”

“Of course, of course, I am talking too freely; but there are other ties! And you know, young man, a certain lightness of character, that is. . . .”

“Yes, yes, to be sure, to be sure. . . .”

“That is, I am not her husband at all. . . .”

“Oh, no doubt. But I tell you frankly that in reassuring you now, I want to set my own mind at rest, and that is why I am candid with you; you are upsetting me and in my way. I promise that I will call you. But I most humbly beg you to move further away and let me alone. I am waiting for some one too.”

“Certainly, certainly, I will move further off. I respect the passionate impatience of your heart. Oh, how well I understand you at this moment!”

“Oh, all right, all right. . . .”

“Till we meet again! . . . But excuse me, young man, here I am again . . . I don’t know how to say it . . . give me your word of honour once more, as a gentleman, that you are not her lover.”

“Oh, mercy on us!”

“One more question, the last: do you know the surname of the husband of your . . . that is, I mean the lady who is the object of your devotion?”

“Of course I do; it is not your name, and that is all about it.”

“Why, how do you know my name?”

“But, I say, you had better go; you are losing time; she might go away a thousand times. Why, what do you want? Your lady’s in a fox cape and a hood, while mine is wearing a plaid cloak and a pale blue velvet hat. . . . What more do you want? What else?”

“A pale blue velvet hat! She has a plaid cloak and a pale blue velvet hat!” cried the pertinacious man, instantly turning back again.

“Oh, hang it all! Why, that may well be. . . . And, indeed, my lady does not come here!”

“Where is she, then—your lady?”

“You want to know that? What is it to you?”

“I must own, I am still. . . .”

“Tfoo! Mercy on us! Why, you have no sense of decency, none at all. Well, my lady has friends here, on the third storey looking into the street. Why, do you want me to tell you their names?”

“My goodness, I have friends too, who live on the third storey, and their windows look on to the street. . . . General. . . .”

“General!”

“A general. If you like I will tell you what general: well, then . . . General Polovitsyn.”

“You don’t say so! No, that is not the same! (Oh, damnation, damnation!).”

“Not the same?”

“No, not the same.”

Both were silent, looking at each other in perplexity.

“Why are you looking at me like that?” exclaimed the young man, shaking off his stupefaction and air of uncertainty with vexation.

The gentleman was in a fluster.

“I . . . I must own. . . .”

“Come, allow me, allow me; let us talk more sensibly now. It concerns us both. Explain to me . . . whom do you know there?”

“You mean, who are my friends?”

“Yes, your friends. . . .”

“Well, you see . . . you see! . . . I see from your eyes that I have guessed right!”

“Hang it all! No, no, hang it all! Are you blind? Why, I am standing here before you, I am not with her. Oh, well! I don’t care, whether you say so or not!”

Twice in his fury the young man turned on his heel with a contemptuous wave of his hand.

“Oh, I meant nothing, I assure you. As an honourable man I will tell you all

about it. At first my wife used to come here alone. They are relatives of hers; I had no suspicions; yesterday I met his Excellency: he told me that he had moved three weeks ago from here to another flat, and my wi . . . that is, not mine, but somebody else's (the husband's on the Voznesensky Bridge) . . . that lady had told me that she was with them the day before yesterday, in this flat I mean . . . and the cook told me that his Excellency's flat had been taken by a young man called Bobynitsyn. . . .”

“Oh, damn it all, damn it all! . . .”

“My dear sir, I am in terror, I am in alarm!”

“Oh, hang it! What is it to me that you are in terror and in alarm? Ah! Over there . . . some one flitted by . . . over there. . . .”

“Where, where? You just shout, ‘Ivan Andreyitch,’ and I will run. . . .”

“All right, all right. Oh, confound it! Ivan Andreyitch!”

“Here I am,” cried Ivan Andreyitch, returning, utterly breathless. “What is it, what is it? Where?”

“Oh, no, I didn't mean anything . . . I wanted to know what this lady's name is.”

“Glaf. . . .”

“Glafira?”

“No, not Glafira. . . . Excuse me, I cannot tell you her name.”

As he said this the worthy man was as white as a sheet.

“Oh, of course it is not Glafira, I know it is not Glafira, and mine's not Glafira; but with whom can she be?”

“Where?”

“There! Oh, damn it, damn it!” (The young man was in such a fury that he could not stand still.)

“There, you see! How did you know that her name was Glafira?”

“Oh, damn it all, really! To have a bother with you, too! Why, you say—that yours is not called Glafira! . . .”

“My dear sir, what a way to speak!”

“Oh, the devil! As though that mattered now! What is she? Your wife?”

“No—that is, I am not married. . . . But I would not keep flinging the devil at a respectable man in trouble, a man, I will not say worthy of esteem, but at any rate a man of education. You keep saying, ‘The devil, the devil!’”

“To be sure, the devil take it; so there you are, do you understand?”

“You are blinded by anger, and I say nothing. Oh, dear, who is that?”

“Where?”

There was a noise and a sound of laughter; two pretty girls ran down the steps; both the men rushed up to them.

“Oh, what manners! What do you want?”

“Where are you shoving?”

“They are not the right ones!”

“Aha, so you’ve pitched on the wrong ones! Cab!”

“Where do you want to go, mademoiselle?”

“To Pokrov. Get in, Annushka; I’ll take you.”

“Oh, I’ll sit on the other side; off! Now, mind you drive quickly.”

The cab drove off.

“Where did they come from?”

“Oh, dear, oh, dear! Hadn’t we better go there?”

“Where?”

“Why, to Bobynitsyn’s. . . .”

“No, that’s out of the question.”

“Why?”

“I would go there, of course, but then she would tell me some other story; she would . . . get out of it. She would say that she had come on purpose to catch me with some one, and I should get into trouble.”

“And, you know, she may be there! But you—I don’t know for what reason—why, you might go to the general’s. . . .”

“But, you know, he has moved!”

“That doesn’t matter, you know. She has gone there; so you go, too—don’t you understand? Behave as though you didn’t know the general had gone away. Go as though you had come to fetch your wife, and so on.”

“And then?”

“Well, and then find the person you want at Bobynitsyn’s. Tfoo, damnation take you, what a senseless. . . .”

“Well, and what is it to you, my finding? You see, you see!”

“What, what, my good man? What? You are on the same old tack again. Oh, Lord have mercy on us! You ought to be ashamed, you absurd person, you senseless person!”

“Yes, but why are you so interested? Do you want to find out. . . .”

“Find out what? What? Oh, well, damnation take you! I have no thoughts for you now; I’ll go alone. Go away; get along; look out; be off!”

“My dear sir, you are almost forgetting yourself!” cried the gentleman in raccoon in despair.

“Well, what of it? What if I am forgetting myself?” said the young man, setting his teeth and stepping up to the gentleman in raccoon in a fury. “What of it? Forgetting myself before whom?” he thundered, clenching his fists.

“But allow me, sir. . . .”

“Well, who are you, before whom I am forgetting myself? What is your name?”

“I don’t know about that, young man; why do you want my name? . . . I cannot tell it you. . . . I better come with you. Let us go; I won’t hang back; I am ready for anything. . . . But I assure you I deserve greater politeness and respect! You ought never to lose your self-possession, and if you are upset about something—I can guess what about—at any rate there is no need to forget yourself. . . . You are still a very, very young man! . . .”

“What is it to me that you are old? There’s nothing wonderful in that! Go away. Why are you dancing about here?”

“How am I old? Of course, in position; but I am not dancing about. . . .”

“I can see that. But get away with you.”

“No, I’ll stay with you; you cannot forbid me; I am mixed up in it, too; I will come with you. . . .”

“Well, then, keep quiet, keep quiet, hold your tongue. . . .”

They both went up the steps and ascended the stairs to the third storey. It was rather dark.

“Stay; have you got matches?”

“Matches! What matches?”

“Do you smoke cigars?”

“Oh, yes, I have, I have; here they are, here they are; here, stay. . . .” The gentleman in raccoon rummaged in a fluster.

“Tfoo, what a senseless . . . damnation! I believe this is the door. . . .”

“This, this, this?”

“This, this, this . . . Why are you bawling? Hush! . . .”

“My dear sir, overcoming my feelings, I . . . you are a reckless fellow, so there! . . .”

The light flared up.

“Yes, so it is; here is the brass plate. This is Bobynitsyn’s; do you see Bobynitsyn?”

“I see it, I see it.”

“Hu-ush!”

“Why, has it gone out?”

“Yes, it has.”

“Should we knock?”

“Yes, we must,” responded the gentleman in raccoon.

“Knock, then.”

“No, why should I? You begin, you knock!”

“Coward!”

“You are a coward yourself!”

“G-et a-way with you!”

“I almost regret having confided my secret to you; you. . . .”

“I—what about me?”

“You take advantage of my distress; you see that I am upset. . . .”

“But do I care? I think it’s ridiculous, that’s all about it!”

“Why are you here?”

“Why are you here, too? . . .”

“Delightful morality!” observed the gentleman in raccoon, with indignation.

“What are you saying about morality? What are you?”

“Well, it’s immoral!”

“What? . . .”

“Why, to your thinking, every deceived husband is a noodle!”

“Why, are you the husband? I thought the husband was on Voznesensky Bridge? So what is it to you? Why do you meddle?”

“I do believe that you are the lover! . . .”

“Listen: if you go on like this I shall be forced to think you are a noodle! That is, do you know who?”

“That is, you mean to say that I am the husband,” said the gentleman in raccoon, stepping back as though he were scalded with boiling water.

“Hush, hold your tongue. Do you hear? . . .”

“It is she.”

“No!”

“Tfoo, how dark it is!”

There was a hush; a sound was audible in Bobynitsyn’s flat.

“Why should we quarrel, sir?” whispered the gentleman in raccoon.

“But you took offence yourself, damn it all!”

“But you drove me out of all patience.”

“Hold your tongue!”

“You must admit that you are a very young man.”

“Hold your tongue!”

“Of course I share your idea, that a husband in such a position is a noodle.”

“Oh, will you hold your tongue? Oh! . . .”

“But why such savage persecution of the unfortunate husband? . . .”

“It is she!”

But at that moment the sound ceased.

“Is it she?”

“It is, it is, it is! But why are you—you worrying about it? It is not your trouble!”

“My dear sir, my dear sir,” muttered the gentleman in raccoon, turning pale and gulping, “I am, of course, greatly agitated . . . you can see for yourself my abject position; but now it’s night, of course, but tomorrow . . . though indeed we are not likely to meet tomorrow, though I am not afraid of meeting you—and besides, it is not I, it is my friend on the Voznesensky Bridge, it really is he! It is his wife, it is somebody else’s wife. Poor fellow! I assure you, I know him very intimately; if you will allow me I will tell you all about it. I am a great friend of his, as you can see for yourself, or I shouldn’t be in such a state about him now—as you see for yourself. Several times I said to him: ‘Why are you getting married, dear boy? You have position, you have means, you are highly respected. Why risk it all at the caprice of coquetry? You must see that.’ ‘No, I am going to be married,’ he said; ‘domestic bliss.’ . . . Here’s domestic bliss for you! In old days he deceived other husbands . . . now he is drinking the cup . . . you must excuse me, but this explanation was absolutely necessary. . . . He is an unfortunate man, and is drinking the cup—now! . . .” At this point the gentleman in raccoon gave such a gulp that he seemed to be sobbing in earnest.

“Ah, damnation take them all! There are plenty of fools. But who are you?”

The young man ground his teeth in anger.

“Well, you must admit after this that I have been gentlemanly and open with

you . . . and you take such a tone!”

“No, excuse me . . . what is your name?”

“Why do you want to know my name? . . . ”

“Ah!”

“I cannot tell you my name. . . . ”

“Do you know Shabrin?” the young man said quickly.

“Shabrin!!!”

“Yes, Shabrin! Ah!!!” (Saying this, the gentleman in the wadded overcoat mimicked the gentleman in raccoon.) “Do you understand?”

“No, what Shabrin?” answered the gentleman in raccoon, in a fluster. “He’s not Shabrin; he is a very respectable man! I can excuse your discourtesy, due to the tortures of jealousy.”

“He’s a scoundrel, a mercenary soul, a rogue that takes bribes, he steals government money! He’ll be had up for it before long!”

“Excuse me,” said the gentleman in raccoon, turning pale, “you don’t know him; I see that you don’t know him at all.”

“No, I don’t know him personally, but I know him from others who are in close touch with him.”

“From what others, sir? I am agitated, as you see. . . . ”

“A fool! A jealous idiot! He doesn’t look after his wife! That’s what he is, if you like to know!”

“Excuse me, young man, you are grievously mistaken. . . . ”

“Oh!”

“Oh!”

A sound was heard in Bobynitsyn’s flat. A door was opened, voices were heard.

“Oh, that’s not she! I recognise her voice; I understand it all now, this is not she!” said the gentleman in raccoon, turning as white as a sheet.

“Hush!”

The young man leaned against the wall.

“My dear sir, I am off. It is not she, I am glad to say.”

“All right! Be off, then!”

“Why are you staying, then?”

“What’s that to you?”

The door opened, and the gentleman in raccoon could not refrain from dashing headlong downstairs.

A man and a woman walked by the young man, and his heart stood still. . . . He heard a familiar feminine voice and then a husky male voice, utterly unfamiliar.

“Never mind, I will order the sledge,” said the husky voice.

“Oh, yes, yes; very well, do. . . .”

“It will be here directly.”

The lady was left alone.

“Glafira! Where are your vows?” cried the young man in the wadded overcoat, clutching the lady’s arm.

“Oh, who is it? It’s you, Tvorogov? My goodness! What are you doing here?”

“Who is it you have been with here?”

“Why, my husband. Go away, go away; he’ll be coming out directly . . . from . . . in there . . . from the Polovitsyns’. Go away; for goodness’ sake, go away.”

“It’s three weeks since the Polovitsyns moved! I know all about it!”

”Aïe!“ The lady dashed downstairs. The young man overtook her.

“Who told you?” asked the lady.

“Your husband, madam, Ivan Andreyitch; he is here before you, madam. . . .”

Ivan Andreyitch was indeed standing at the front door.

”Aïe, it’s you,” cried the gentleman in raccoon.

“Ah! *C’est vous*,” cried Glafira Petrovna, rushing up to him with unfeigned delight. “Oh, dear, you can’t think what has been happening to me. I went to see

the Polovitsyns; only fancy . . . you know they are living now by Izmailovsky Bridge; I told you, do you remember? I took a sledge from there. The horses took fright and bolted, they broke the sledge, and I was thrown out about a hundred yards from here; the coachman was taken up; I was in despair. Fortunately Monsieur Tvorogov . . . ”

“What!”

Monsieur Tvorogov was more like a fossil than like Monsieur Tvorogov.

“Monsieur Tvorogov saw me here and undertook to escort me; but now you are here, and I can only express my warm gratitude to you, Ivan Ilyitch. . . . ”

The lady gave her hand to the stupefied Ivan Ilyitch, and almost pinched instead of pressing it.

“Monsieur Tvorogov, an acquaintance of mine; it was at the Skorlupovs’ ball we had the pleasure of meeting; I believe I told you; don’t you remember, Koko?”

“Oh, of course, of course! Ah, I remember,” said the gentleman in raccoon addressed as Koko. “Delighted, delighted!” And he warmly pressed the hand of Monsieur Tvorogov.

“Who is it? What does it mean? I am waiting. . . . ” said a husky voice.

Before the group stood a gentleman of extraordinary height; he took out a lorgnette and looked intently at the gentleman in the raccoon coat.

“Ah, Monsieur Bobynitsyn!” twittered the lady. “Where have you come from? What a meeting! Only fancy, I have just had an upset in a sledge . . . but here is my husband! Jean! Monsieur Bobynitsyn, at the Karpovs’ ball. . . . ”

“Ah, delighted, very much delighted! . . . But I’ll take a carriage at once, my dear.”

“Yes, do, Jean, do; I still feel frightened; I am all of a tremble, I feel quite giddy. . . . At the masquerade to-night,” she whispered to Tvorogov. . . . “Good-bye, good-bye, Mr. Bobynitsyn! We shall meet tomorrow at the Karpovs’ ball, most likely.”

“No, excuse me, I shall not be there tomorrow; I don’t know about tomorrow, if it is like this now. . . . ” Mr. Bobynitsyn muttered something between his teeth, made a scrape with his boot, got into his sledge and drove away.

A carriage drove up; the lady got into it. The gentleman in the raccoon coat stopped, seemed incapable of making a movement and gazed blankly at the gentleman in the wadded coat. The gentleman in the wadded coat smiled rather foolishly.

“I don’t know. . . .”

“Excuse me, delighted to make your acquaintance,” answered the young man, bowing with curiosity and a little intimidated.

“Delighted, delighted! . . .”

“I think you have lost your galosh. . . .”

“I—oh, yes, thank you, thank you. I keep meaning to get rubber ones.”

“The foot gets so hot in rubbers,” said the young man, apparently with immense interest.

”*Jean!* Are you coming?”

“It does make it hot. Coming directly, darling; we are having an interesting conversation! Precisely so, as you say, it does make the foot hot. . . . But excuse me, I . . .”

“Oh, certainly.”

“Delighted, very much delighted to make your acquaintance! . . .”

The gentleman in raccoon got into the carriage, the carriage set off, the young man remained standing looking after it in astonishment.

2

The following evening there was a performance of some sort at the Italian opera. Ivan Andreyitch burst into the theatre like a bomb. Such furore, such a passion for music had never been observed in him before. It was known for a positive fact, anyway, that Ivan Andreyitch used to be exceeding fond of a nap for an hour or two at the Italian opera; he even declared on several occasions how sweet and pleasant it was. “Why, the prima donna,” he used to say to his friends, “mews a lullaby to you like a little white kitten.” But it was a long time ago, last season, that he used to say this; now, alas! even at home Ivan Andreyitch did not sleep at nights. Nevertheless he burst into the crowded opera-house like a bomb. Even the

conductor started suspiciously at the sight of him, and glanced out of the corner of his eye at his side-pocket in the full expectation of seeing the hilt of a dagger hidden there in readiness. It must be observed that there were at that time two parties, each supporting the superior claims of its favourite prima donna. They were called the —sists and the —nists. Both parties were so devoted to music, that the conductors actually began to be apprehensive of some startling manifestation of the passion for the good and the beautiful embodied in the two prima donnas. This was how it was that, looking at this youthful dash into the parterre of a grey-haired senior (though, indeed, he was not actually grey-haired, but a man about fifty, rather bald, and altogether of respectable appearance), the conductor could not help recalling the lofty judgment of Hamlet Prince of Denmark upon the evil example set by age to youth, and, as we have mentioned above, looking out of the corner of his eye at the gentleman's side-pocket in the expectation of seeing a dagger. But there was a pocket-book and nothing else there.

Darting into the theatre, Ivan Andreyitch instantly scanned all the boxes of the second tier, and, oh—horror! His heart stood still, she was here! She was sitting in the box! General Polovitsyn, with his wife and sister-in-law, was there too. The general's adjutant—an extremely alert young man, was there too; there was a civilian too. . . . Ivan Andreyitch strained his attention and his eyesight, but—oh, horror! The civilian treacherously concealed himself behind the adjutant and remained in the darkness of obscurity.

She was here, and yet she had said she would not be here!

It was this duplicity for some time displayed in every step Glafira Petrovna took which crushed Ivan Andreyitch. This civilian youth reduced him at last to utter despair. He sank down in his stall utterly overwhelmed. Why? one may ask. It was a very simple matter. . . .

It must be observed that Ivan Andreyitch's stall was close to the baignoire, and to make matters worse the treacherous box in the second tier was exactly above his stall, so that to his intense annoyance he was utterly unable to see what was going on over his head. At which he raged, and got as hot as a samovar. The whole of the first act passed unnoticed by him, that is, he did not hear a single note of it. It is maintained that what is good in music is that musical impressions can be made to fit any mood. The man who rejoices finds joy in its strains, while

he who grieves finds sorrow in it; a regular tempest was howling in Ivan Andreyitch's ears. To add to his vexation, such terrible voices were shouting behind him, before him and on both sides of him, that Ivan Andreyitch's heart was torn. At last the act was over. But at the instant when the curtain was falling, our hero had an adventure such as no pen can describe.

It sometimes happens that a playbill flies down from the upper boxes. When the play is dull and the audience is yawning this is quite an event for them. They watch with particular interest the flight of the extremely soft paper from the upper gallery, and take pleasure in watching its zigzagging journey down to the very stalls, where it infallibly settles on some head which is quite unprepared to receive it. It is certainly very interesting to watch the embarrassment of the head (for the head is invariably embarrassed). I am indeed always in terror over the ladies' opera-glasses which usually lie on the edge of the boxes; I am constantly fancying that they will fly down on some unsuspecting head. But I perceive that this tragic observation is out of place here, and so I shall send it to the columns of those newspapers which are filled with advice, warnings against swindling tricks, against unconscientiousness, hints for getting rid of beetles if you have them in the house, recommendations of the celebrated Mr. Princhipi, sworn foe of all beetles in the world, not only Russian but even foreign, such as Prussian cockroaches, and so on.

But Ivan Andreyitch had an adventure, which has never hitherto been described. There flew down on his—as already stated, somewhat bald—head, not a playbill; I confess I am actually ashamed to say what did fly down upon his head, because I am really loath to remark that on the respectable and bare—that is, partly hairless—head of the jealous and irritated Ivan Andreyitch there settled such an immoral object as a scented love-letter. Poor Ivan Andreyitch, utterly unprepared for this unforeseen and hideous occurrence, started as though he had caught upon his head a mouse or some other wild beast.

That the note was a love-letter of that there could be no mistake. It was written on scented paper, just as love-letters are written in novels, and folded up so as to be treacherously small so that it might be slipped into a lady's glove. It had probably fallen by accident at the moment it had been handed to her. The playbill might have been asked for, for instance, and the note, deftly folded in the playbill, was being put into her hands; but an instant, perhaps an accidental, nudge from

the adjutant, extremely adroit in his apologies for his awkwardness, and the note had slipped from a little hand that trembled with confusion, and the civilian youth, stretching out his impatient hand, received instead of the note, the empty playbill, and did not know what to do with it. A strange and unpleasant incident for him, no doubt, but you must admit that for Ivan Andreyitch it was still more unpleasant.

”*Prédestiné*,” he murmured, breaking into a cold sweat and squeezing the note in his hands, ”*prédestiné!* The bullet finds the guilty man,” the thought flashed through his mind. “No, that’s not right! In what way am I guilty? But there is another proverb, ‘Once out of luck, never out of trouble.’ . . . ”

But it was not enough that there was a ringing in his ears and a dizziness in his head at this sudden incident. Ivan Andreyitch sat petrified in his chair, as the saying is, more dead than alive. He was persuaded that his adventure had been observed on all sides, although at that moment the whole theatre began to be filled with uproar and calls of encore. He sat overwhelmed with confusion, flushing crimson and not daring to raise his eyes, as though some unpleasant surprise, something out of keeping with the brilliant assembly had happened to him. At last he ventured to lift his eyes.

“Charmingly sung,” he observed to a dandy sitting on his left side.

The dandy, who was in the last stage of enthusiasm, clapping his hands and still more actively stamping with his feet, gave Ivan Andreyitch a cursory and absent-minded glance, and immediately putting up his hands like a trumpet to his mouth, so as to be more audible, shouted the prima donna’s name. Ivan Andreyitch, who had never heard such a roar, was delighted. “He has noticed nothing!” he thought, and turned round; but the stout gentleman who was sitting behind him had turned round too, and with his back to him was scrutinising the boxes through his opera-glass. “He is all right too!” thought Ivan Andreyitch. In front, of course, nothing had been seen. Timidly and with a joyous hope in his heart, he stole a glance at the baignoire, near which was his stall, and started with the most unpleasant sensation. A lovely lady was sitting there who, holding her handkerchief to her mouth and leaning back in her chair, was laughing as though in hysterics.

“Ugh, these women!” murmured Ivan Andreyitch, and treading on people’s feet, he made for the exit.

Now I ask my readers to decide, I beg them to judge between me and Ivan Andreyitch. Was he right at that moment? The Grand Theatre, as we all know, contains four tiers of boxes and a fifth row above the gallery. Why must he assume that the note had fallen from one particular box, from that very box and no other? Why not, for instance, from the gallery where there are often ladies too? But passion is an exception to every rule, and jealousy is the most exceptional of all passions.

Ivan Andreyitch rushed into the foyer, stood by the lamp, broke the seal and read:

“To-day immediately after the performance, in G. Street at the corner of X. Lane, K. buildings, on the third floor, the first on the right from the stairs. The front entrance. Be there, *sans faute*; for God’s sake.”

Ivan Andreyitch did not know the handwriting, but he had no doubt it was an assignation. “To track it out, to catch it and nip the mischief in the bud,” was Ivan Andreyitch’s first idea. The thought occurred to him to unmask the infamy at once on the spot; but how could it be done? Ivan Andreyitch even ran up to the second row of boxes, but judiciously came back again. He was utterly unable to decide where to run. Having nothing clear he could do, he ran round to the other side and looked through the open door of somebody else’s box at the opposite side of the theatre. Yes, it was so, it was! Young ladies and young men were sitting in all the seats vertically one above another in all the five tiers. The note might have fallen from all tiers at once, for Ivan Andreyitch suspected all of them of being in a plot against him. But nothing made him any better, no probabilities of any sort. The whole of the second act he was running up and down all the corridors and could find no peace of mind anywhere. He would have dashed into the box office in hope of finding from the attendant there the names of the persons who had taken boxes on all the four tiers, but the box office was shut. At last there came an outburst of furious shouting and applause. The performance was over. Calls for the singers began, and two voices from the top gallery were particularly deafening—the leaders of the opposing factions. But they were not what mattered to Ivan Andreyitch. Already thoughts of what he was to do next flitted through his mind. He put on his overcoat and rushed off to G. Street to surprise them there, to catch them unawares, to unmask them, and in general to behave somewhat more energetically than he had done the day before. He soon found the house, and was

just going in at the front door, when the figure of a dandy in an overcoat darted forward right in front of him, passed him and went up the stairs to the third storey. It seemed to Ivan Andreyitch that this was the same dandy, though he had not been able at the time to distinguish his features in the theatre. His heart stood still. The dandy was two flights of stairs ahead of him. At last he heard a door opened on the third floor, and opened without the ringing of a bell, as though the visitor was expected. The young man disappeared into the flat. Ivan Andreyitch mounted to the third floor, before there was time to shut the door. He meant to stand at the door, to reflect prudently on his next step, to be rather cautious, and then to determine upon some decisive course of action; but at that very minute a carriage rumbled up to the entrance, the doors were flung open noisily, and heavy footsteps began ascending to the third storey to the sound of coughing and clearing of the throat. Ivan Andreyitch could not stand his ground, and walked into the flat with all the majesty of an injured husband. A servant-maid rushed to meet him much agitated, then a man-servant appeared. But to stop Ivan Andreyitch was impossible. He flew in like a bomb, and crossing two dark rooms, suddenly found himself in a bedroom facing a lovely young lady, who was trembling all over with alarm and gazing at him in utter horror as though she could not understand what was happening around her. At that instant there was a sound in the adjoining room of heavy footsteps coming straight towards the bedroom; they were the same footsteps that had been mounting the stairs.

“Goodness! It is my husband!” cried the lady, clasping her hands and turning whiter than her dressing-gown.

Ivan Andreyitch felt that he had come to the wrong place, that he had made a silly, childish blunder, that he had acted without due consideration, that he had not been sufficiently cautious on the landing. But there was no help for it. The door was already opening, already the heavy husband, that is if he could be judged by his footsteps, was coming into the room. . . . I don't know what Ivan Andreyitch took himself to be at that moment! I don't know what prevented him from confronting the husband, telling him that he had made a mistake, confessing that he had unintentionally behaved in the most unseemly way, making his apologies and vanishing—not of course with flying colours, not of course with glory, but at any rate departing in an open and gentlemanly manner. But no, Ivan Andreyitch again behaved like a boy, as though he considered himself a Don Juan or a Lovelace! He first hid himself behind the curtain of the bed, and finally, feeling

utterly dejected and hopeless, he dropped on the floor and senselessly crept under the bed. Terror had more influence on him than reason, and Ivan Andreyitch, himself an injured husband, or at any rate a husband who considered himself such, could not face meeting another husband, but was afraid to wound him by his presence. Be this as it may, he found himself under the bed, though he had no idea how it had come to pass. But what was most surprising, the lady made no opposition. She did not cry out on seeing an utterly unknown elderly gentleman seek a refuge under her bed. Probably she was so alarmed that she was deprived of all power of speech.

The husband walked in gasping and clearing his throat, said good-evening to his wife in a singsong, elderly voice, and flopped into an easy chair as though he had just been carrying up a load of wood. There was a sound of a hollow and prolonged cough. Ivan Andreyitch, transformed from a ferocious tiger to a lamb, timid and meek as a mouse before a cat, scarcely dared to breathe for terror, though he might have known from his own experience that not all injured husbands bite. But this idea did not enter his head, either from lack of consideration or from agitation of some sort. Cautiously, softly, feeling his way he began to get right under the bed so as to lie more comfortably there. What was his amazement when with his hand he felt an object which, to his intense amazement, stirred and in its turn seized his hand! Under the bed there was another person!

“Who’s this?” whispered Ivan Andreyitch.

“Well, I am not likely to tell you who I am,” whispered the strange man. “Lie still and keep quiet, if you have made a mess of things!”

“But, I say! . . . ”

“Hold your tongue!”

And the extra gentleman (for one was quite enough under the bed) the extra gentleman squeezed Ivan Andreyitch’s hand in his fist so that the latter almost shrieked with pain.

“My dear sir. . . . ”

“Sh!”

“Then don’t pinch me so, or I shall scream.”

“All right, scream away, try it on.”

Ivan Andreyitch flushed with shame. The unknown gentleman was sulky and ill-humoured. Perhaps it was a man who had suffered more than once from the persecutions of fate, and had more than once been in a tight place; but Ivan Andreyitch was a novice and could not breathe in his constricted position. The blood rushed to his head. However, there was no help for it; he had to lie on his face. Ivan Andreyitch submitted and was silent.

“I have been to see Pavel Ivanitch, my love,” began the husband. “We sat down to a game of preference. Khee-khee-khee!” (he had a fit of coughing). “Yes . . . khee! So my back . . . khee! Bother it . . . khee-khee-khee!”

And the old gentleman became engrossed in his cough.

“My back,” he brought out at last with tears in his eyes, “my spine began to ache. . . . A damned hæmorrhoid, I can’t stand nor sit . . . or sit. Akkhee-khee-khee!” . . .

And it seemed as though the cough that followed was destined to last longer than the old gentleman in possession of it. The old gentleman grumbled something in its intervals, but it was utterly impossible to make out a word.

“Dear sir, for goodness’ sake, move a little,” whispered the unhappy Ivan Andreyitch.

“How can I? There’s no room.”

“But you must admit that it is impossible for me. It is the first time that I have found myself in such a nasty position.”

“And I in such unpleasant society.”

“But, young man! . . . ”

“Hold your tongue!”

“Hold my tongue? You are very uncivil, young man. . . . If I am not mistaken, you are very young; I am your senior.”

“Hold your tongue!”

“My dear sir! You are forgetting yourself. You don’t know to whom you are talking!”

“To a gentleman lying under the bed.”

“But I was taken by surprise . . . a mistake, while in your case, if I am not mistaken, immorality. . . .”

“That’s where you are mistaken.”

“My dear sir! I am older than you, I tell you. . . .”

“Sir, we are in the same boat, you know. I beg you not to take hold of my face!”

“Sir, I can’t tell one thing from another. Excuse me, but I have no room.”

“You shouldn’t be so fat!”

“Heavens! I have never been in such a degrading position.”

“Yes, one couldn’t be brought more low.”

“Sir, sir! I don’t know who you are, I don’t understand how this came about; but I am here by mistake; I am not what you think. . . .”

“I shouldn’t think about you at all if you didn’t shove. But hold your tongue, do!”

“Sir, if you don’t move a little I shall have a stroke; you will have to answer for my death, I assure you. . . . I am a respectable man, I am the father of a family. I really cannot be in such a position! . . .”

“You thrust yourself into the position. Come, move a little! I’ve made room for you, I can’t do more!”

“Noble young man! Dear sir! I see I was mistaken about you,” said Ivan Andreyitch, in a transport of gratitude for the space allowed him, and stretching out his cramped limbs. “I understand your constricted condition, but there’s no help for it. I see you think ill of me. Allow me to redeem my reputation in your eyes, allow me to tell you who I am. I have come here against my will, I assure you; I am not here with the object you imagine. . . . I am in a terrible fright.”

“Oh, do shut up! Understand that if we are overheard it will be the worse for us. Sh! . . . He is talking.”

The old gentleman’s cough did, in fact, seem to be over.

“I tell you what, my love,” he wheezed in the most lachrymose chant, “I tell you what, my love . . . khee-khee! Oh, what an affliction! Fedosey Ivanovitch said

to me: 'You should try drinking yarrow tea,' he said to me; do you hear, my love?"

"Yes, dear."

"Yes, that was what he said, 'You should try drinking yarrow tea,' he said. I told him I had put on leeches. But he said, 'No, Alexandr Demyanovitch, yarrow tea is better, it's a laxative, I tell you' . . . Khee-khee. Oh, dear! What do you think, my love? Khee! Oh, my God! Khee-khee! Had I better try yarrow tea? . . . Khee-khee-khee! Oh . . . Khee!" and so on.

"I think it would be just as well to try that remedy," said his wife.

"Yes, it would be! 'You may be in consumption,' he said. "Khee-khee! And I told him it was gout and irritability of the stomach . . . Khee-khee! But he would have it that it might be consumption. What do you think . . . khee-khee! What do you think, my love; is it consumption?"

"My goodness, what are you talking about?"

"Why, consumption! You had better undress and go to bed now, my love . . . khee-khee! I've caught a cold in my head today."

"Ouf!" said Ivan Andreyitch. "For God's sake, do move a little."

"I really don't know what is the matter with you; can't you lie still? . . ."

"You are exasperated against me, young man, you want to wound me, I see that. You are, I suppose, this lady's lover?"

"Shut up!"

"I will not shut up! I won't allow you to order me about! You are, no doubt, her lover. If we are discovered I am not to blame in any way; I know nothing about it."

"If you don't hold your tongue," said the young man, grinding his teeth, "I will say that you brought me here. I'll say that you are my uncle who has dissipated his fortune. Then they won't imagine I am this lady's lover, anyway."

"Sir, you are amusing yourself at my expense. You are exhausting my patience."

"Hush, or I will make you hush! You are a curse to me. Come, tell me what you are here for? If you were not here I could lie here somehow till morning, and then get away."

“But I can’t lie here till morning. I am a respectable man, I have family ties, of course. . . . What do you think, surely he is not going to spend the night here?”

“Who?”

“Why, this old gentleman. . . .”

“Of course he will. All husbands aren’t like you. Some of them spend their nights at home.”

“My dear sir, my dear sir!” cried Ivan Andreyitch, turning cold with terror, “I assure you I spend my nights at home too, and this is the first time; but, my God, I see you know me. Who are you, young man? Tell me at once, I beseech you, from disinterested friendship, who are you?”

“Listen, I shall resort to violence. . . .”

“But allow me, allow me, sir, to tell you, allow me to explain all this horrid business.”

“I won’t listen to any explanation. I don’t want to know anything about it. Be silent or. . . .”

“But I cannot. . . .”

A slight skirmish took place under the bed, and Ivan Andreyitch subsided.

“My love, it sounds as though there were cats hissing.”

“Cats! What will you imagine next?”

Evidently the lady did not know what to talk to her husband about. She was so upset that she could not pull herself together. Now she started and pricked up her ears.

“What cats?”

“Cats, my love. The other day I went into my study, and there was the tom-cat in my study, and hissing shoo-shoo-shoo! I said to him: ‘What is it, pussy?’ and he went shoo-shoo-shoo again, as though he were whispering. I thought, ‘Merciful heavens! isn’t he hissing as a sign of my death?’”

“What nonsense you are talking today! You ought to be ashamed, really!”

“Never mind, don’t be cross, my love. I see, you don’t like to think of me dying; I didn’t mean it. But you had better undress and get to bed, my love, and I’ll

sit here while you go to bed.”

“For goodness’ sake, leave off; afterwards. . . .”

“Well, don’t be cross, don’t be cross; but really I think there must be mice here.”

“Why, first cats and then mice, I really don’t know what is the matter with you.”

“Oh, I am all right . . . Khee . . . I . . . khee! Never mind . . . khee-khee-khee-khee! Oh! Lord have mercy on me . . . khee.”

“You hear, you are making such an upset that he hears you,” whispers the young man.

“But if you knew what is happening to me. My nose is bleeding.”

“Let it bleed. Shut up. Wait till he goes away.”

“But, young man, put yourself in my place. Why, I don’t know with whom I am lying.”

“Would you be any better off if you did? Why, I don’t want to know your name. By the way, what is your name?”

“No; what do you want with my name? . . . I only want to explain the senseless way in which. . . .”

“Hush . . . he is speaking again. . . .”

“Really, my love, there is whispering.”

“Oh, no, it’s the cotton wool in your ears has got out of place.”

“Oh, by the way, talking of the cotton wool, do you know that upstairs . . . khee-khee . . . upstairs . . . khee-khee . . .” and so on.

“Upstairs!” whispered the young man. “Oh, the devil! I thought that this was the top storey; can it be the second?”

“Young man,” whispered Ivan Andreyitch, “what did you say? For goodness’ sake why does it concern you? I thought it was the top storey too. Tell me, for God’s sake, is there another storey?”

“Really some one is stirring,” said the old man, leaving off coughing at last.

“Hush! Do you hear?” whispered the young man, squeezing Ivan Andreyitch’s hands.

“Sir, you are holding my hands by force. Let me go!”

“Hush!”

A slight struggle followed and then there was a silence again.

“So I met a pretty woman . . . ” began the old man.

“A pretty woman!” interrupted his wife.

“Yes. . . . I thought I told you before that I met a pretty woman on the stairs, or perhaps I did not mention it? My memory is weak. Yes, St. John’s wort . . . khee!”

“What?”

“I must drink St. John’s wort; they say it does good . . . khee-khee-khee! It does good!”

“It was you interrupted him,” said the young man, grinding his teeth again.

“You said, you met some pretty woman today?” his wife went on.

“Eh?”

“Met a pretty woman?”

“Who did?”

“Why, didn’t you?”

“I? When?”

“Oh, yes! . . . ”

“At last! What a mummy! Well!” whispered the young man, inwardly raging at the forgetful old gentleman.

“My dear sir, I am trembling with horror. My God, what do I hear? It’s like yesterday, exactly like yesterday! . . . ”

“Hush!”

“Yes, to be sure! I remember, a sly puss, such eyes . . . in a blue hat. . . . ”

“In a blue hat! *Aïe, aïe!*“

“It’s she! She has a blue hat! My God!” cried Ivan Andreyitch.

“She? Who is she?” whispered the young man, squeezing Ivan Andreyitch’s hands.

“Hush!” Ivan Andreyitch exhorted in his turn. “He is speaking.”

“Ah, my God, my God!”

“Though, after all, who hasn’t a blue hat?”

“And such a sly little rogue,” the old gentleman went on “She comes here to see friends. She is always making eyes. And other friends come to see those friends too. . . .”

“Foo! how tedious!” the lady interrupted. “Really, how can you take interest in that?”

“Oh, very well, very well, don’t be cross,” the old gentleman responded in a wheedling chant. “I won’t talk if you don’t care to hear me. You seem a little out of humour this evening.”

“But how did you get here?” the young man began.

“Ah, you see, you see! Now you are interested, and before you wouldn’t listen!”

“Oh, well, I don’t care! Please don’t tell me. Oh, damnation take it, what a mess!”

“Don’t be cross, young man; I don’t know what I am saying. I didn’t mean anything; I only meant to say that there must be some good reason for your taking such an interest. . . . But who are you, young man? I see you are a stranger, but who are you? Oh, dear, I don’t know what I am saying!”

“Ugh, leave off, please!” the young man interrupted, as though he were considering something.

“But I will tell you all about it. You think, perhaps, that I will not tell you. That I feel resentment against you. Oh, no! Here is my hand. I am only feeling depressed, nothing more. But for God’s sake, first tell me how you came here yourself? Through what chance? As for me, I feel no ill-will; no, indeed, I feel no ill-will, here is my hand. I have made it rather dirty, it is so dusty here; but that’s nothing, when the feeling is true.”

“Ugh, get away with your hand! There is no room to turn, and he keeps thrusting his hand on me!”

“But, my dear sir, but you treat me, if you will allow me to say so, as though I were an old shoe,” said Ivan Andreyitch in a rush of the meekest despair, in a voice full of entreaty. “Treat me a little more civilly, just a little more civilly, and I will tell you all about it! We might be friends; I am quite ready to ask you home to dinner. We can’t lie side by side like this, I tell you plainly. You are in error, young man, you do not know. . . .”

“When was it he met her?” the young man muttered, evidently in violent emotion. “Perhaps she is expecting me now. . . . I’ll certainly get away from here!”

“She? Who is she? My God, of whom are you speaking, young man? You imagine that upstairs. . . . My God, my God! Why am I punished like this?”

Ivan Andreyitch tried to turn on his back in his despair.

“Why do you want to know who she is? Oh, the devil whether it was she or not, I will get out.”

“My dear sir! What are you thinking about? What will become of me?” whispered Ivan Andreyitch, clutching at the tails of his neighbour’s dress coat in his despair.

“Well, what’s that to me? You can stop here by yourself. And if you won’t, I’ll tell them that you are my uncle, who has squandered all his property, so that the old gentleman won’t think that I am his wife’s lover.”

“But that is utterly impossible, young man; it’s unnatural I should be your uncle. Nobody would believe you. Why, a baby wouldn’t believe it,” Ivan Andreyitch whispered in despair.

“Well, don’t babble then, but lie as flat as a pancake! Most likely you will stay the night here and get out somehow tomorrow; no one will notice you. If one creeps out, it is not likely they would think there was another one here. There might as well be a dozen. Though you are as good as a dozen by yourself. Move a little, or I’ll get out.”

“You wound me, young man. . . . What if I have a fit of coughing? One has to think of everything.”

“Hush!”

“What’s that? I fancy I hear something going on upstairs again,” said the old gentleman, who seemed to have had a nap in the interval.

“Upstairs?”

“Do you hear, young man? I shall get out.”

“Well, I hear.”

“My goodness! Young man, I am going.”

“Oh, well, I am not, then! I don’t care. If there is an upset I don’t mind! But do you know what I suspect? I believe you are an injured husband—so there.”

“Good heavens, what cynicism! . . . Can you possibly suspect that? Why a husband? . . . I am not married.”

“Not married? Fiddlesticks!”

“I may be a lover myself!”

“A nice lover.”

“My dear sir, my dear sir! Oh, very well, I will tell you the whole story. Listen to my desperate story. It is not I—I am not married. I am a bachelor like you. It is my friend, a companion of my youth. . . . I am a lover. . . . He told me that he was an unhappy man. ‘I am drinking the cup of bitterness,’ he said; ‘I suspect my wife.’ ‘Well,’ I said to him reasonably, ‘why do you suspect her?’ . . . But you are not listening to me. Listen, listen! ‘Jealousy is ridiculous,’ I said to him; ‘jealousy is a vice!’ . . . ‘No,’ he said; ‘I am an unhappy man! I am drinking . . . that is, I suspect my wife.’ ‘You are my friend,’ I said; ‘you are the companion of my tender youth. Together we culled the flowers of happiness, together we rolled in featherbeds of pleasure.’ My goodness, I don’t know what I am saying. You keep laughing, young man. You’ll drive me crazy.”

“But you are crazy now. . . .”

“There, I knew you would say that . . . when I talked of being crazy. Laugh away, laugh away, young man. I did the same in my day; I, too, went astray! Ah, I shall have inflammation of the brain!”

“What is it, my love? I thought I heard some one sneeze,” the old man chanted. “Was that you sneezed, my love?”

“Oh, goodness!” said his wife.

“Tch!” sounded from under the bed.

“They must be making a noise upstairs,” said his wife, alarmed, for there certainly was a noise under the bed.

“Yes, upstairs!” said the husband. “Upstairs, I told you just now, I met a . . . khee-khee . . . that I met a young swell with moustaches—oh, dear, my spine!—a young swell with moustaches.”

“With moustaches! My goodness, that must have been you,” whispered Ivan Andreyitch.

“Merciful heavens, what a man! Why, I am here, lying here with you! How could he have met me? But don’t take hold of my face.”

“My goodness, I shall faint in a minute.”

There certainly was a loud noise overhead at this moment.

“What can be happening there?” whispered the young man.

“My dear sir! I am in alarm, I am in terror, help me.”

“Hush!”

“There really is a noise, my love; there’s a regular hubbub. And just over your bedroom, too. Hadn’t I better send up to inquire?”

“Well, what will you think of next?”

“Oh, well, I won’t; but really, how cross you are today! . . .”

“Oh, dear, you had better go to bed.”

“Liza, you don’t love me at all.”

“Oh, yes, I do! For goodness’ sake, I am so tired.”

“Well, well; I am going!”

“Oh, no, no; don’t go!” cried his wife; “or, no, better go!”

“Why, what is the matter with you! One minute I am to go, and the next I’m not! Khee-khee! It really is bedtime, khee-khee! The Panafidins’ little girl . . . khee-khee . . . their little girl . . . khee . . . I saw their little girl’s Nuremburg doll . . . khee-khee. . . .”

“Well, now it’s dolls!”

“Khee-khee . . . a pretty doll . . . khee-khee.”

“He is saying good-bye,” said the young man; “he is going, and we can get away at once. Do you hear? You can rejoice!”

“Oh, God grant it!”

“It’s a lesson to you. . . .”

“Young man, a lesson for what! . . . I feel it . . . but you are young, you cannot teach me.”

“I will, though. . . . Listen.”

“Oh, dear, I am going to sneeze! . . .”

“Hush, if you dare.”

“But what can I do, there is such a smell of mice here; I can’t help it. Take my handkerchief out of my pocket; I can’t stir. . . . Oh, my God, my God, why am I so punished?”

“Here’s your handkerchief! I will tell you what you are punished for. You are jealous. Goodness knows on what grounds, you rush about like a madman, burst into other people’s flats, create a disturbance. . . .”

“Young man, I have not created a disturbance.”

“Hush!”

“Young man, you can’t lecture to me about morals, I am more moral than you.”

“Hush!”

“Oh, my God—oh, my God!”

“You create a disturbance, you frighten a young lady, a timid woman who does not know what to do for terror, and perhaps will be ill; you disturb a venerable old man suffering from a complaint and who needs repose above everything—and all this what for? Because you imagine some nonsense which sets you running all over the neighbourhood! Do you understand what a horrid position you are in now?”

“I do very well, sir! I feel it, but you have not the right. . . .”

“Hold your tongue! What has right got to do with it? Do you understand that

this may have a tragic ending? Do you understand that the old man, who is fond of his wife, may go out of his mind when he sees you creep out from under the bed? But no, you are incapable of causing a tragedy! When you crawl out, I expect every one who looks at you will laugh. I should like to see you in the light; you must look very funny.”

“And you. You must be funny, too, in that case. I should like to have a look at you too.”

“I dare say you would!”

“You must carry the stamp of immorality, young man.”

“Ah! you are talking about morals, how do you know why I’m here? I am here by mistake, I made a mistake in the storey. And the deuce knows why they let me in, I suppose she must have been expecting some one (not you, of course). I hid under the bed when I heard your stupid footsteps, when I saw the lady was frightened. Besides, it was dark. And why should I justify myself to you. You are a ridiculous, jealous old man, sir. Do you know why I don’t crawl out? Perhaps you imagine I am afraid to come out? No, sir, I should have come out long ago, but I stay here from compassion for you. Why, what would you be taken for, if I were not here? You’d stand facing them, like a post, you know you wouldn’t know what to do. . . .”

“Why like that object? Couldn’t you find anything else to compare me with, young man? Why shouldn’t I know what to do? I should know what to do.”

“Oh, my goodness, how that wretched dog keeps barking!”

“Hush! Oh, it really is. . . . That’s because you keep jabbering. You’ve waked the dog, now there will be trouble.”

The lady’s dog, who had till then been sleeping on a pillow in the corner, suddenly awoke, sniffed strangers and rushed under the bed with a loud bark.

“Oh, my God, what a stupid dog!” whispered Ivan Andreyitch; “it will get us all into trouble. Here’s another affliction!”

“Oh, well, you are such a coward, that it may well be so.”

“Ami, Ami, come here,” cried the lady; “*ici, ici.*” But the dog, without heeding her, made straight for Ivan Andreyitch.

“Why is it Amishka keeps barking?” said the old gentleman. “There must be mice or the cat under there. I seem to hear a sneezing . . . and pussy had a cold this morning.”

“Lie still,” whispered the young man. “Don’t twist about! Perhaps it will leave off.”

“Sir, let go of my hands, sir! Why are you holding them?”

“Hush! Be quiet!”

“But mercy on us, young man, it will bite my nose. Do you want me to lose my nose?”

A struggle followed, and Ivan Andreyitch got his hands free. The dog broke into volleys of barking. Suddenly it ceased barking and gave a yelp.

”Aïe!“ cried the lady.

“Monster! what are you doing?” cried the young man. “You will be the ruin of us both! Why are you holding it? Good heavens, he is strangling it! Let it go! Monster! You know nothing of the heart of women if you can do that! She will betray us both if you strangle the dog.”

But by now Ivan Andreyitch could hear nothing. He had succeeded in catching the dog, and in a paroxysm of self-preservation had squeezed its throat. The dog yelled and gave up the ghost.

“We are lost!” whispered the young man.

“Amishka! Amishka,” cried the lady. “My God, what are they doing with my Amishka? Amishka! Amishka! *Ici!* Oh, the monsters! Barbarians! Oh, dear, I feel giddy!”

“What is it, what is it?” cried the old gentleman, jumping up from his easy chair. “What is the matter with you, my darling? Amishka! here, Amishka! Amishka! Amishka!” cried the old gentleman, snapping with his fingers and clicking with his tongue, and calling Amishka from under the bed. “Amishka, *ici, ici.* The cat cannot have eaten him. The cat wants a thrashing, my love, he hasn’t had a beating for a whole month, the rogue. What do you think? I’ll talk to Praskovya Zaharyevna. But, my goodness, what is the matter, my love? Oh, how white you are! Oh, oh, servants, servants!” and the old gentleman ran about the room.

“Villains! Monsters!” cried the lady, sinking on the sofa.

“Who, who, who?” cried the old gentleman.

“There are people there, strangers, there under the bed! Oh, my God, Amishka, Amishka, what have they done to you?”

“Good heavens, what people? Amishka. . . . Servants, servants, come here! Who is there, who is there?” cried the old gentleman, snatching up a candle and bending down under the bed. “Who is there?”

Ivan Andreyitch was lying more dead than alive beside the breathless corpse of Amishka, but the young man was watching every movement of the old gentleman. All at once the old gentleman went to the other side of the bed by the wall and bent down. In a flash the young man crept out from under the bed and took to his heels, while the husband was looking for his visitors on the other side.

“Good gracious!” exclaimed the lady, staring at the young man. “Who are you? Why, I thought. . . .”

“That monster’s still there,” whispered the young man. “He is guilty of Amishka’s death!”

”Aïe!“ shrieked the lady, but the young man had already vanished from the room.

”Aïe! There is some one here. Here are somebody’s boots!“ cried the husband, catching Ivan Andreyitch by the leg.

“Murderer, murderer!” cried the lady. “Oh, Ami! Ami!”

“Come out, come out!” cried the old gentleman, stamping on the carpet with both feet; “come out. Who are you? Tell me who you are! Good gracious, what a queer person!”

“Why, it’s robbers! . . .”

“For God’s sake, for God’s sake,” cried Ivan Andreyitch creeping out, “for God’s sake, your Excellency, don’t call the servants! Your Excellency, don’t call any one. It is quite unnecessary. You can’t kick me out! . . . I am not that sort of person. I am a different case. Your Excellency, it has all been due to a mistake! I’ll explain directly, your Excellency,” exclaimed Ivan Andreyitch, sobbing and gasping. “It’s all my wife that is not my wife, but somebody else’s wife. I am not

married, I am only. . . . It's my comrade, a friend of youthful days."

"What friend of youthful days?" cried the old gentleman, stamping. "You are a thief, you have come to steal . . . and not a friend of youthful days."

"No, I am not a thief, your Excellency; I am really a friend of youthful days. . . . I have only blundered by accident, I came into the wrong place."

"Yes, sir, yes; I see from what place you've crawled out."

"Your Excellency! I am not that sort of man. You are mistaken. I tell you, you are cruelly mistaken, your Excellency. Only glance at me, look at me, and by signs and tokens you will see that I can't be a thief. Your Excellency! Your Excellency!" cried Ivan Andreyitch, folding his hands and appealing to the young lady. "You are a lady, you will understand me. . . . It was I who killed Amishka. . . . But it was not my fault. . . . It was really not my fault. . . . It was all my wife's fault. I am an unhappy man, I am drinking the cup of bitterness!"

"But really, what has it to do with me that you are drinking the cup of bitterness? Perhaps it's not the only cup you've drunk. It seems so, to judge from your condition. But how did you come here, sir?" cried the old gentleman, quivering with excitement, though he certainly was convinced by certain signs and tokens that Ivan Andreyitch could not be a thief. "I ask you: how did you come here? You break in like a robber. . . ."

"Not a robber, your Excellency. I simply came to the wrong place; I am really not a robber! It is all because I was jealous. I will tell you all about it, your Excellency, I will confess it all frankly, as I would to my own father; for at your venerable age I might take you for a father."

"What do you mean by venerable age?"

"Your Excellency! Perhaps I have offended you? Of course such a young lady . . . and your age . . . it is a pleasant sight, your Excellency, it really is a pleasant sight such a union . . . in the prime of life. . . . But don't call the servants, for God's sake, don't call the servants . . . servants would only laugh. . . . I know them . . . that is, I don't mean that I am only acquainted with footmen, I have a footman of my own, your Excellency, and they are always laughing . . . the asses! Your Highness . . . I believe I am not mistaken, I am addressing a prince. . . ."

"No, I am not a prince, sir, I am an independent gentleman. . . . Please do not

flatter me with your 'Highness.' How did you get here, sir? How did you get here?"

"Your Highness, that is, your Excellency. . . . Excuse me, I thought that you were your Highness. I looked . . . I imagined . . . it does happen. You are so like Prince Korotkouhov whom I have had the honour of meeting at my friend Mr. Pusyrev's. . . . You see, I am acquainted with princes, too, I have met princes, too, at the houses of my friends; you cannot take me for what you take me for. I am not a thief. Your Excellency, don't call the servants; what will be the good of it if you do call them?"

"But how did you come here?" cried the lady. "Who are you?"

"Yes, who are you?" the husband chimed in. "And, my love, I thought it was pussy under the bed sneezing. And it was he. Ah, you vagabond! Who are you? Tell me!"

And the old gentleman stamped on the carpet again.

"I cannot speak, your Excellency, I am waiting till you are finished, I am enjoying your witty jokes. As regards me, it is an absurd story, your Excellency; I will tell you all about it. It can all be explained without more ado, that is, I mean, don't call the servants, your Excellency! Treat me in a gentlemanly way. . . . It means nothing that I was under the bed, I have not sacrificed my dignity by that. It is a most comical story, your Excellency!" cried Ivan Andreyitch, addressing the lady with a supplicating air. "You, particularly, your Excellency, will laugh! You behold upon the scene a jealous husband. You see, I abase myself, I abase myself of my own free will. I did indeed kill Amishka, but . . . my God, I don't know what I am saying!"

"But how, how did you get here?"

"Under cover of night, your Excellency, under cover of night. . . . I beg your pardon! Forgive me, your Excellency! I humbly beg your pardon! I am only an injured husband, nothing more! Don't imagine, your Excellency, that I am a lover! I am not a lover! Your wife is virtue itself, if I may venture so to express myself. She is pure and innocent!"

"What, what? What did you have the audacity to say?" cried the old gentleman, stamping his foot again. "Are you out of your mind or not? How dare you talk about my wife?"

“He is a villain, a murderer who has killed Amishka,” wailed the lady, dissolving into tears. “And then he dares! . . . ”

“Your Excellency, your Excellency! I spoke foolishly,” cried Ivan Andreyitch in a fluster. “I was talking foolishly, that was all! Think of me as out of my mind. . . . For goodness’ sake, think of me as out of my mind. . . . I assure you that you will be doing me the greatest favour. I would offer you my hand, but I do not venture to. . . . I was not alone, I was an uncle. . . . I mean to say that you cannot take me for the lover. . . . Goodness! I have put my foot in it again. . . . Do not be offended, your Excellency,” cried Ivan Andreyitch to the lady. “You are a lady, you understand what love is, it is a delicate feeling. . . . But what am I saying? I am talking nonsense again; that is, I mean to say that I am an old man—that is, a middle-aged man, not an old man; that I cannot be your lover; that a lover is a Richardson—that is, a Lovelace. . . . I am talking nonsense, but you see, your Excellency, that I am a well-educated man and know something of literature. You are laughing, your Excellency. I am delighted, delighted that I have *provoked* your mirth, your Excellency. Oh, how delighted I am that I have provoked your mirth.”

“My goodness, what a funny man!” cried the lady, exploding with laughter.

“Yes, he is funny, and in such a mess,” said the old man, delighted that his wife was laughing. “He cannot be a thief, my love. But how did he come here?”

“It really is strange, it really is strange, it is like a novel! Why! At the dead of night, in a great city, a man under the bed. Strange, funny! Rinaldo—Rinaldini after a fashion. But that is no matter, no matter, your Excellency. I will tell you all about it. . . . And I will buy you a new lapdog, your Excellency. . . . A wonderful lapdog! Such a long coat, such short little legs, it can’t walk more than a step or two: it runs a little, gets entangled in its own coat, and tumbles over. One feeds it on nothing but sugar. I will bring you one, I will certainly bring you one.”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!” The lady was rolling from side to side with laughter. “Oh, dear, I shall have hysterics! Oh, how funny he is!”

“Yes, yes! Ha-ha-ha! Khee-khee-khee! He is funny and he is in a mess—khee-khee-khee!”

“Your Excellency, your Excellency, I am now perfectly happy. I would offer you my hand, but I do not venture to, your Excellency. I feel that I have been in error, but now I am opening my eyes. I am certain my wife is pure and innocent! I

was wrong in suspecting her.”

“Wife—his wife!” cried the lady, with tears in her eyes through laughing.

“He married? Impossible! I should never have thought it,” said the old gentleman.

“Your Excellency, my wife—it is all her fault; that is, it is my fault: I suspected her; I knew that an assignation had been arranged here—here upstairs; I intercepted a letter, made a mistake about the storey and got under the bed. . . .”

“He-he-he-he!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!”

“Ha-ha-ha-ha!” Ivan Andreyitch began laughing at last. “Oh, how happy I am! Oh, how wonderful to see that we are all so happy and harmonious! And my wife is entirely innocent. That must be so, your Excellency!”

“He-he-he! Khee-khee! Do you know, my love, who it was?” said the old man at last, recovering from his mirth.

“Who? Ha-ha-ha.”

“She must be the pretty woman who makes eyes, the one with the dandy. It’s she, I bet that’s his wife!”

“No, your Excellency, I am certain it is not she; I am perfectly certain.”

“But, my goodness! You are losing time,” cried the lady, leaving off laughing. “Run, go upstairs. Perhaps you will find them.”

“Certainly, your Excellency, I will fly. But I shall not find any one, your Excellency; it is not she, I am certain of it beforehand. She is at home now. It is all my fault! It is simply my jealousy, nothing else. . . . What do you think? Do you suppose that I shall find them there, your Excellency?”

“Ha-ha-ha!”

“He-he-he! Khee-khee!”

“You must go, you must go! And when you come down, come in and tell us!” cried the lady; “or better still, tomorrow morning. And do bring her too, I should like to make her acquaintance.”

“Good-bye, your Excellency, good-bye! I will certainly bring her, I shall be

very glad for her to make your acquaintance. I am glad and happy that it was all ended so and has turned out for the best.”

“And the lapdog! Don’t forget it: be sure to bring the lapdog!”

“I will bring it, your Excellency, I will certainly bring it,” responded Ivan Andreyitch, darting back into the room, for he had already made his bows and withdrawn. “I will certainly bring it. It is such a pretty one. It is just as though a confectioner had made it of sweet-meats. And it’s such a funny little thing—gets entangled in its own coat and falls over. It really is a lapdog! I said to my wife: ‘How is it, my love, it keeps tumbling over?’ ‘It is such a little thing,’ she said. As though it were made of sugar, of sugar, your Excellency! Good-bye, your Excellency, very, very glad to make your acquaintance, very glad to make your acquaintance!”

Ivan Andreyitch bowed himself out.

“Hey, sir! Stay, come back,” cried the old gentleman, after the retreating Ivan Andreyitch.

The latter turned back for the third time.

“I still can’t find the cat, didn’t you meet him when you were under the bed?”

“No, I didn’t, your Excellency. Very glad to make his acquaintance, though, and I shall look upon it as an honour. . . .”

“He has a cold in his head now, and keeps sneezing and sneezing. He must have a beating.”

“Yes, your Excellency, of course; corrective punishment is essential with domestic animals.”

“What?”

“I say that corrective punishment is necessary, your Excellency, to enforce obedience in the domestic animals.”

“Ah! . . . Well, good-bye, good-bye, that is all I had to say.”

Coming out into the street, Ivan Andreyitch stood for a long time in an attitude that suggested that he was expecting to have a fit in another minute. He took off his hat, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, screwed up his eyes, thought a minute, and set off homewards.

What was his amazement when he learned at home that Glafira Petrovna had come back from the theatre a long, long time before, that she had toothache, that she had sent for the doctor, that she had sent for leeches, and that now she was lying in bed and expecting Ivan Andreyitch.

Ivan Andreyitch slapped himself on the forehead, told the servant to help him wash and to brush his clothes, and at last ventured to go into his wife's room.

“Where is it you spend your time? Look what a sight you are! What do you look like? Where have you been lost all this time? Upon my word, sir; your wife is dying and you have to be hunted for all over the town. Where have you been? Surely you have not been tracking me, trying to disturb a rendezvous I am supposed to have made, though I don't know with whom. For shame, sir, you are a husband! People will soon be pointing at you in the street.”

“My love . . .” responded Ivan Andreyitch.

But at this point he was so overcome with confusion that he had to feel in his pocket for his handkerchief and to break off in the speech he was beginning, because he had neither words, thoughts or courage. . . . What was his amazement, horror and alarm when with his handkerchief fell out of his pocket the corpse of Amishka. Ivan Andreyitch had not noticed that when he had been forced to creep out from under the bed, in an access of despair and unreasoning terror he had stuffed Amishka into his pocket with a far-away idea of burying the traces, concealing the evidence of his crime, and so avoiding the punishment he deserved.

“What's this?” cried his spouse; “a nasty dead dog! Goodness! where has it come from? . . . What have you been up to? . . . Where have you been? Tell me at once where have you been?”

“My love,” answered Ivan Andreyitch, almost as dead as Amishka, “my love. . . .”

But here we will leave our hero—till another time, for a new and quite different adventure begins here. Some day we will describe all these calamities and misfortunes, gentlemen. But you will admit that jealousy is an unpardonable passion, and what is more, it is a positive misfortune.

