

Little Nex Classics

THE DAUGHTER OF THE COMMANDANT

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Translated by Milne Home



Book I

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CHAPTER I. SERGEANT OF THE GUARDS.

MY FATHER, Andrej Petrovitch Grineff, after serving in his youth under Count Muenich, had retired in 17—with the rank of senior major. Since that time he had always lived on his estate in the district of Simbirsk, where he married Avdotia, the eldest daughter of a poor gentleman in the neighbourhood. Of the nine children born of this union I alone survived; all my brothers and sisters died young. I had been enrolled as sergeant in the Semenofsky regiment by favour of the major of the Guard, Prince Banojik, our near relation. I was supposed to be away on leave till my education was finished. At that time we were brought up in another manner than is usual now.

From five years old I was given over to the care of the huntsman, Saveliitch, who from his steadiness and sobriety was considered worthy of becoming my attendant. Thanks to his care, at twelve years old I could read and write, and was considered a good judge of the points of a greyhound. At this time, to complete my education, my father hired a Frenchman, M. Beaupre, who was imported from Moscow at the same time as the annual provision of wine and Provence oil. His arrival displeased Saveliitch very much.

“It seems to me, thank heaven,” murmured he, “the child was washed, combed, and fed. What was the good of spending



money and hiring a *moussie*, as if there were not enough servants in the house?”

Beaupre, in his native country, had been a hairdresser, then a soldier in Prussia, and then had come to Russia to be *outchitel*, without very well knowing the meaning of this word. He was a good creature, but wonderfully absent and hare-brained. His greatest weakness was a love of the fair sex. Neither, as he said himself, was he averse to the bottle, that is, as we say in Russia, that his passion was drink. But, as in our house the wine only appeared at table, and then only in *liqueur* glasses, and as on these occasions it somehow never came to the turn of the *outchitel* to be served at all, my Beaupre soon accustomed himself to the Russian brandy, and ended by even preferring it to all the wines of his native country as much better for the stomach. We became great friends, and though, according to the contract, he had engaged himself to teach me *French, German, and all the sciences*, he liked better learning of me to chatter Russian indifferently. Each of us busied himself with our own affairs; our friendship was firm, and I did not wish for a better mentor. But Fate soon parted us, and it was through an event which I am going to relate.

The washerwoman, Polashka, a fat girl, pitted with small-pox, and the one-eyed cow-girl, Akoulka, came one fine day to my mother with such stories against the “*moussie*,” that she, who did not at all like these kind of jokes, in her turn complained to my father, who, a man of hasty temperament,



instantly sent for that *rascal of a Frenchman*. He was answered humbly that the “*moussie*” was giving me a lesson. My father ran to my room. Beaupre was sleeping on his bed the sleep of the just. As for me, I was absorbed in a deeply interesting occupation. A map had been procured for me from Moscow, which hung against the wall without ever being used, and which had been tempting me for a long time from the size and strength of its paper. I had at last resolved to make a kite of it, and, taking advantage of Beaupre's slumbers, I had set to work.

My father came in just at the very moment when I was tying a tail to the Cape of Good Hope.

At the sight of my geographical studies he boxed my ears sharply, sprang forward to Beaupre's bed, and, awaking him without any consideration, he began to assail him with reproaches. In his trouble and confusion Beaupre vainly strove to rise; the poor *outchitel* was dead drunk. My father pulled him up by the collar of his coat, kicked him out of the room, and dismissed him the same day, to the inexpressible joy of Saveliitch.

Thus was my education finished.

I lived like a stay-at-home son, amusing myself by scaring the pigeons on the roofs, and playing leapfrog with the lads of the courtyard, till I was past the age of sixteen. But at this age my life underwent a great change.

One autumn day, my mother was making honey jam in her parlour, while, licking my lips, I was watching the operations,



and occasionally tasting the boiling liquid. My father, seated by the window, had just opened the *Court Almanack*, which he received every year. He was very fond of this book; he never read it except with great attention, and it had the power of upsetting his temper very much. My mother, who knew all his whims and habits by heart, generally tried to keep the unlucky book hidden, so that sometimes whole months passed without the *Court Almanack* falling beneath his eye. On the other hand, when he did chance to find it, he never left it for hours together. He was now reading it, frequently shrugging his shoulders, and muttering, half aloud—

“General! He was sergeant in my company. Knight of the Orders of Russia! Was it so long ago that we—”

At last my father threw the *Almanack* away from him on the sofa, and remained deep in a brown study, which never betokened anything good.

“Avdotia Vassilieva,” said he, sharply addressing my mother, “how old is Petrousha?”

“His seventeenth year has just begun,” replied my mother. “Petrousha was born the same year our Aunt Anastasia Garasimofna lost an eye, and that—”

“All right,” resumed my father; “it is time he should serve. 'Tis time he should cease running in and out of the maids' rooms and climbing into the dovecote.”

The thought of a coming separation made such an impression on my mother that she dropped her spoon into her



saucepan, and her eyes filled with tears. As for me, it is difficult to express the joy which took possession of me. The idea of service was mingled in my mind with the liberty and pleasures offered by the town of Petersburg. I already saw myself officer of the Guard, which was, in my opinion, the height of human happiness.

My father neither liked to change his plans, nor to defer the execution of them. The day of my departure was at once fixed. The evening before my father told me that he was going to give me a letter for my future superior officer, and bid me bring him pen and paper.

“Don't forget, Andrej Petrovitch,” said my mother, “to remember me to Prince Banojik; tell him I hope he will do all he can for my Petrousha.”

“What nonsense!” cried my father, frowning. “Why do you wish me to write to Prince Banojik?”

“But you have just told us you are good enough to write to Petrousha's superior officer.”

“Well, what of that?”

“But Prince Banojik is Petrousha's superior officer. You know very well he is on the roll of the Semenofsky regiment.”

“On the roll! What is it to me whether he be on the roll or no? Petrousha shall not go to Petersburg! What would he learn there? To spend money and commit follies. No, he shall serve with the army, he shall smell powder, he shall become a soldier



and not an idler of the Guard, he shall wear out the straps of his knapsack. Where is his commission? Give it to me.”

My mother went to find my commission, which she kept in a box with my christening clothes, and gave it to my father with, a trembling hand. My father read it with attention, laid it before him on the table, and began his letter.

Curiosity pricked me.

“Where shall I be sent,” thought I, “if not to Petersburg?”

I never took my eyes off my father's pen as it travelled slowly over the paper. At last he finished his letter, put it with my commission into the same cover, took off his spectacles, called me, and said—

“This letter is addressed to Andrej Karlovitch R., my old friend and comrade. You are to go to Orenburg to serve under him.”

All my brilliant expectations and high hopes vanished. Instead of the gay and lively life of Petersburg, I was doomed to a dull life in a far and wild country. Military service, which a moment before I thought would be delightful, now seemed horrible to me. But there was nothing for it but resignation. On the morning of the following day a travelling *kibitka* stood before the hall door. There were packed in it a trunk and a box containing a tea service, and some napkins tied up full of rolls and little cakes, the last I should get of home pampering.

My parents gave me their blessing, and my father said to me—



“Good-bye, Petr'; serve faithfully he to whom you have sworn fidelity; obey your superiors; do not seek for favours; do not struggle after active service, but do not refuse it either, and remember the proverb, 'Take care of your coat while it is new, and of your honour while it is young.'“

My mother tearfully begged me not to neglect my health, and bade Saveliitch take great care of the darling. I was dressed in a short *touloup* of hareskin, and over it a thick pelisse of foxskin. I seated myself in the *kibitka* with Saveliitch, and started for my destination, crying bitterly.

I arrived at Simbirsk during the night, where I was to stay twenty-four hours, that Saveliitch might do sundry commissions entrusted to him. I remained at an inn, while Saveliitch went out to get what he wanted. Tired of looking out at the windows upon a dirty lane, I began wandering about the rooms of the inn. I went into the billiard room. I found there a tall gentleman, about forty years of age, with long, black moustachios, in a dressing-gown, a cue in his hand, and a pipe in his mouth. He was playing with the marker, who was to have a glass of brandy if he won, and, if he lost, was to crawl under the table on all fours. I stayed to watch them; the longer their games lasted, the more frequent became the all-fours performance, till at last the marker remained entirely under the table. The gentleman addressed to him some strong remarks, as a funeral sermon, and proposed that I should play a game with him. I replied that I did not know how to play billiards. Probably



it seemed to him very odd. He looked at me with a sort of pity. Nevertheless, he continued talking to me. I learnt that his name was Ivan Ivanovitch Zourine, that he commanded a troop in the —th Hussars, that he was recruiting just now at Simbirsk, and that he had established himself at the same inn as myself. Zourine asked me to lunch with him, soldier fashion, and, as we say, on what Heaven provides. I accepted with pleasure; we sat down to table; Zourine drank a great deal, and pressed me to drink, telling me I must get accustomed to the service. He told good stories, which made me roar with laughter, and we got up from table the best of friends. Then he proposed to teach me billiards.

“It is,” said he, “a necessity for soldiers like us. Suppose, for instance, you come to a little town; what are you to do? One cannot always find a Jew to afford one sport. In short, you must go to the inn and play billiards, and to play you must know how to play.”

These reasons completely convinced me, and with great ardour I began taking my lesson. Zourine encouraged me loudly; he was surprised at my rapid progress, and after a few lessons he proposed that we should play for money, were it only for a “*groch*” (two kopeks), not for the profit, but that we might not play for nothing, which, according to him, was a very bad habit.



I agreed to this, and Zourine called for punch; then he advised me to taste it, always repeating that I must get accustomed to the service.

“And what,” said he, “would the service be without punch?”

I followed his advice. We continued playing, and the more I sipped my glass, the bolder I became. My balls flew beyond the cushions. I got angry; I was impertinent to the marker who scored for us. I raised the stake; in short, I behaved like a little boy just set free from school. Thus the time passed very quickly. At last Zourine glanced at the clock, put down his cue, and told me I had lost a hundred roubles. This disconcerted me very much; my money was in the hands of Saveliitch. I was beginning to mumble excuses, when Zourine said—

“But don't trouble yourself; I can wait, and now let us go to Arinushka's.”

What could you expect? I finished my day as foolishly as I had begun it. We supped with this Arinushka. Zourine always filled up my glass, repeating that I must get accustomed to the service.

Upon leaving the table I could scarcely stand. At midnight Zourine took me back to the inn.

Saveliitch came to meet us at the door.

“What has befallen you?” he said to me in a melancholy voice, when he saw the undoubted signs of my zeal for the service. “Where did you thus swill yourself? Oh! good heavens! such a misfortune never happened before.”



“Hold your tongue, old owl,” I replied, stammering; “I am sure you are drunk. Go to bed, ... but first help me to bed.”

The next day I awoke with a bad headache. I only remembered confusedly the occurrences of the past evening. My meditations were broken by Saveliitch, who came into my room with a cup of tea.

“You begin early making free, Petr' Andrejitch,” he said to me, shaking his head. “Well, where do you get it from? It seems to me that neither your father nor your grandfather were drunkards. We needn't talk of your mother; she has never touched a drop of anything since she was born, except *kvass*. So whose fault is it? Whose but the confounded *moussie*; he taught you fine things, that son of a dog, and well worth the trouble of taking a Pagan for your servant, as if our master had not had enough servants of his own!”

I was ashamed. I turned round and said to him—

“Go away, Saveliitch; I don't want any tea.”

But it was impossible to quiet Saveliitch when once he had begun to sermonize.

“Do you see now, Petr' Andrejitch,” said he, “what it is to commit follies? You have a headache; you won't take anything. A man who gets drunk is good for nothing. Do take a little pickled cucumber with honey or half a glass of brandy to sober you. What do you think?”

At this moment a little boy came in, who brought me a note from Zourine. I unfolded it and read as follows:—



DEAR PETR' ANDREJITCH,

Oblige me by sending by bearer the hundred roubles you lost to me yesterday. I want money dreadfully.

*Your devoted
IVAN ZOURINE.*

There was nothing for it. I assumed a look of indifference, and, addressing myself to Saveliitch, I bid him hand over a hundred roubles to the little boy.

“What—why?” he asked me in great surprise.

“I owe them to him,” I answered as coldly as possible.

“You owe them to him!” retorted Saveliitch, whose surprise became greater. “When had you the time to run up such a debt? It is impossible. Do what you please, excellency, but I will not give this money.”

I then considered that, if in this decisive moment I did not oblige this obstinate old man to obey me, it would be difficult for me in future to free myself from his tutelage. Glancing at him haughtily, I said to him—

“I am your master; you are my servant. The money is mine; I lost it because I chose to lose it. I advise you not to be headstrong, and to obey your orders.”

My words made such an impression on Saveliitch that he clasped his hands and remained dumb and motionless.

“What are you standing there for like a stock?” I exclaimed, angrily.



Saveliitch began to weep.

“Oh! my father, Petr' Andrejitch,” sobbed he, in a trembling voice; “do not make me die of sorrow. Oh! my light, hearken to me who am old; write to this robber that you were only joking, that we never had so much money. A hundred roubles! Good heavens! Tell him your parents have strictly forbidden you to play for anything but nuts.”

“Will you hold your tongue?” said I, hastily, interrupting him. “Hand over the money, or I will kick you out of the place.”

Saveliitch looked at me with a deep expression of sorrow, and went to fetch my money. I was sorry for the poor old man, but I wished to assert myself, and prove that I was not a child. Zourine got his hundred roubles.

Saveliitch was in haste to get me away from this unlucky inn; he came in telling me the horses were harnessed. I left Simbirsk with an uneasy conscience, and with some silent remorse, without taking leave of my instructor, whom I little thought I should ever see again.



CHAPTER II. THE GUIDE.

MY REFLECTIONS DURING THE JOURNEY were not very pleasant. According to the value of money at that time, my loss was of some importance. I could not but confess to myself that my conduct at the Simbirsk Inn had been most foolish, and I felt guilty toward Saveliitch. All this worried me. The old man sat, in sulky silence, in the forepart of the sledge, with his face averted, every now and then giving a cross little cough. I had firmly resolved to make peace with him, but I did not know how to begin. At last I said to him—

“Look here, Saveliitch, let us have done with all this; let us make peace.”

“Oh! my little father, Petr' Andrejitch,” he replied, with a deep sigh, “I am angry with myself; it is I who am to blame for everything. What possessed me to leave you alone in the inn? But what could I do; the devil would have it so, else why did it occur to me to go and see my gossip the deacon's wife, and thus it happened, as the proverb says, 'I left the house and was taken to prison.' What ill-luck! What ill-luck! How shall I appear again before my master and mistress? What will they say when they hear that their child is a drunkard and a gamester?”

To comfort poor Saveliitch, I gave him my word of honour that in future I would not spend a single kopek without his



consent. Gradually he calmed down, though he still grumbled from time to time, shaking his head—

“A hundred roubles, it is easy to talk!”

I was approaching my destination. Around me stretched a wild and dreary desert, intersected by little hills and deep ravines. All was covered with snow. The sun was setting. My *kibitka* was following the narrow road, or rather the track, left by the sledges of the peasants. All at once my driver looked round, and addressing himself to me—

“Sir,” said he, taking off his cap, “will you not order me to turn back?”

“Why?”

“The weather is uncertain. There is already a little wind. Do you not see how it is blowing about the surface snow.”

“Well, what does that matter?”

“And do you see what there is yonder?”

The driver pointed east with his whip.

“I see nothing more than the white steppe and the clear sky.”

“There, there; look, that little cloud!”

I did, in fact, perceive on the horizon a little white cloud which I had at first taken for a distant hill. My driver explained to me that this little cloud portended a *bourane*. I had heard of the snowstorms peculiar to these regions, and I knew of whole caravans having been sometimes buried in the tremendous drifts of snow. Saveliitch was of the same opinion as the driver,



and advised me to turn back, but the wind did not seem to me very violent, and hoping to reach in time the next posting station, I bid him try and get on quickly. He put his horses to a gallop, continually looking, however, towards the east. But the wind increased in force, the little cloud rose rapidly, became larger and thicker, at last covering the whole sky. The snow began to fall lightly at first, but soon in large flakes. The wind whistled and howled; in a moment the grey sky was lost in the whirlwind of snow which the wind raised from the earth, hiding everything around us.

“How unlucky we are, excellency,” cried the driver; “it is the *bourane*.”

I put my head out of the *kibitka*; all was darkness and confusion. The wind blew with such ferocity that it was difficult not to think it an animated being.

The snow drifted round and covered us. The horses went at a walk, and soon stopped altogether.

“Why don't you go on?” I said, impatiently, to the driver.

“But where to?” he replied, getting out of the sledge.

“Heaven only knows where we are now. There is no longer any road, and it is all dark.”

I began to scold him, but Saveliitch took his part.

“Why did you not listen to him?” he said to me, angrily.

“You would have gone back to the post-house; you would have had some tea; you could have slept till morning; the storm



would have blown over, and we should have started. And why such haste? Had it been to get married, now!”

Saveliitch was right. What was there to do? The snow continued to fall—a heap was rising around the *kibitka*. The horses stood motionless, hanging their heads and shivering from time to time.

The driver walked round them, settling their harness, as if he had nothing else to do. Saveliitch grumbled. I was looking all round in hopes of perceiving some indication of a house or a road; but I could not see anything but the confused whirling of the snowstorm.

All at once I thought I distinguished something black.

“Hullo, driver!” I exclaimed, “what is that black thing over there?”

The driver looked attentively in the direction I was pointing out.

“Heaven only knows, excellency,” replied he, resuming his seat.

“It is not a sledge, it is not a tree, and it seems to me that it moves. It must be a wolf or a man.”

I ordered him to move towards the unknown object, which came also to meet us. In two minutes I saw it was a man, and we met.

“Hey, there, good man,” the driver hailed him, “tell us, do you happen to know the road?”



“This is the road,” replied the traveller. “I am on firm ground; but what the devil good does that do you?”

“Listen, my little peasant,” said I to him, “do you know this part of the country? Can you guide us to some place where we may pass the night?”

“Do I know this country? Thank heaven,” rejoined the stranger, “I have travelled here, on horse and afoot, far and wide. But just look at this weather! One cannot keep the road. Better stay here and wait; perhaps the hurricane will cease and the sky will clear, and we shall find the road by starlight.”

His coolness gave me courage, and I resigned myself to pass the night on the steppe, commending myself to the care of Providence, when suddenly the stranger, seating himself on the driver's seat, said—

“Grace be to God, there *is* a house not far off. Turn to the right, and go on.”

“Why should I go to the right?” retorted my driver, ill-humouredly.

“How do you know where the road is that you are so ready to say, 'Other people's horses, other people's harness—whip away!'“

It seemed to me the driver was right.

“Why,” said I to the stranger, “do you think a house is not far off?”

“The wind blew from that direction,” replied he, “and I smelt smoke, a sure sign that a house is near.”



His cleverness and the acuteness of his sense of smell alike astonished me. I bid the driver go where the other wished. The horses ploughed their way through the deep snow. The *kibitka* advanced slowly, sometimes upraised on a drift, sometimes precipitated into a ditch, and swinging from side to side. It was very like a boat on a stormy sea.

Saveliitch groaned deeply as every moment he fell upon me. I lowered the *tsinofka*, I rolled myself up in my cloak and I went to sleep, rocked by the whistle of the storm and the lurching of the sledge. I had then a dream that I have never forgotten, and in which I still see something prophetic, as I recall the strange events of my life. The reader will forgive me if I relate it to him, as he knows, no doubt, by experience how natural it is for man to retain a vestige of superstition in spite of all the scorn for it he may think proper to assume.

I had reached the stage when the real and unreal begin to blend into the first vague visions of drowsiness. It seemed to me that the snowstorm continued, and that we were wandering in the snowy desert. All at once I thought I saw a great gate, and we entered the courtyard of our house. My first thought was a fear that my father would be angry at my involuntary return to the paternal roof, and would attribute it to a premeditated disobedience. Uneasy, I got out of my *kibitka*, and I saw my mother come to meet me, looking very sad.

“Don't make a noise,” she said to me. “Your father is on his death-bed, and wishes to bid you farewell.”



Struck with horror, I followed her into the bedroom. I look round; the room is nearly dark. Near the bed some people were standing, looking sad and cast down. I approached on tiptoe. My mother raised the curtain, and said—

“Andrej Petrovitch, Petrousha has come back; he came back having heard of your illness. Give him your blessing.”

I knelt down. But to my astonishment instead of my father I saw in the bed a black-bearded peasant, who regarded me with a merry look. Full of surprise, I turned towards my mother.

“What does this mean?” I exclaimed. “It is not my father. Why do you want me to ask this peasant's blessing?”

“It is the same thing, Petrousha,” replied my mother. “That person is your *godfather*. Kiss his hand, and let him bless you.”

I would not consent to this. Whereupon the peasant sprang from the bed, quickly drew his axe from his belt, and began to brandish it in all directions. I wished to fly, but I could not. The room seemed to be suddenly full of corpses. I stumbled against them; my feet slipped in pools of blood. The terrible peasant called me gently, saying to me—

“Fear nothing, come near; come and let me bless you.”

Fear had stupified me....

At this moment I awoke. The horses had stopped; Saveliitch had hold of my hand.

“Get out, excellency,” said he to me; “here we are.”

“Where?” I asked, rubbing my eyes.



“At our night's lodging. Heaven has helped us; we came by chance right upon the hedge by the house. Get out, excellency, as quick as you can, and let us see you get warm.”

I got out of the *kibitka*. The snowstorm still raged, but less violently. It was so dark that one might, as we say, have as well been blind. The host received us near the entrance, holding a lantern beneath the skirt of his caftan, and led us into a room, small but prettily clean, lit by a *loutchina*. On the wall hung a long carbine and a high Cossack cap.

Our host, a Cossack of the Yaik, was a peasant of about sixty, still fresh and hale. Saveliitch brought the tea canister, and asked for a fire that he might make me a cup or two of tea, of which, certainly, I never had more need. The host hastened to wait upon him.

“What has become of our guide? Where is he?” I asked Saveliitch.

“Here, your excellency,” replied a voice from above.

I raised my eyes to the recess above the stove, and I saw a black beard and two sparkling eyes.

“Well, are you cold?”

“How could I not be cold,” answered he, “in a little caftan all holes? I had a *touloup*, but, it's no good hiding it, I left it yesterday in pawn at the brandy shop; the cold did not seem to me then so keen.”



At this moment the host re-entered with the boiling *samovar*. I offered our guide a cup of tea. He at once jumped down.

I was struck by his appearance. He was a man about forty, middle height, thin, but broad-shouldered. His black beard was beginning to turn grey; his large quick eyes roved incessantly around. In his face there was an expression rather pleasant, but slightly mischievous. His hair was cut short. He wore a little torn *armak*, and wide Tartar trousers.

I offered him a cup of tea; he tasted it, and made a wry face.

“Do me the favour, your excellency,” said he to me, “to give me a glass of brandy; we Cossacks do not generally drink tea.”

I willingly acceded to his desire. The host took from one of the shelves of the press a jug and a glass, approached him, and, having looked him well in the face—

“Well, well,” said he, “so here you are again in our part of the world. Where, in heaven's name, do you come from now?”

My guide winked in a meaning manner, and replied by the well-known saying—

“The sparrow was flying about in the orchard; he was eating hempseed; the grandmother threw a stone at him, and missed him. And you, how are you all getting on?”

“How are we all getting on?” rejoined the host, still speaking in proverbs.



“Vespers were beginning to ring, but the wife of the *pope* forbid it; the pope went away on a visit, and the devils are abroad in the churchyard.”

“Shut up, uncle,” retorted the vagabond. “When it rains there will be mushrooms, and when you find mushrooms you will find a basket to put them in. But now” (he winked a second time) “put your axe behind your back, the gamekeeper is abroad. To the health of your excellency.”

So saying he took the glass, made the sign of the cross, and swallowed his brandy at one gulp, then, bowing to me, returned to his lair above the stove.

I could not then understand a single word of the thieves' slang they employed. It was only later on that I understood that they were talking about the army of the Yaik, which had only just been reduced to submission after the revolt of 1772.

Saveliitch listened to them talking with a very discontented manner, and cast suspicious glances, sometimes on the host and sometimes on the guide.

The kind of inn where we had sought shelter stood in the very middle of the steppe, far from the road and from any dwelling, and certainly was by no means unlikely to be a robber resort. But what could we do? We could not dream of resuming our journey. Saveliitch's uneasiness amused me very much. I stretched myself on a bench. My old retainer at last decided to get up on the top of the stove, while the host lay down on the



floor. They all soon began to snore, and I myself soon fell dead asleep.

When I awoke, somewhat late, on the morrow I saw that the storm was over. The sun shone brightly; the snow stretched afar like a dazzling sheet. The horses were already harnessed. I paid the host, who named such a mere trifle as my reckoning that Saveliitch did not bargain as he usually did. His suspicions of the evening before were quite gone. I called the guide to thank him for what he had done for us, and I told Saveliitch to give him half a rouble as a reward.

Saveliitch frowned.

“Half a rouble!” cried he. “Why? Because you were good enough to bring him yourself to the inn? I will obey you, excellency, but we have no half roubles to spare. If we take to giving gratuities to everybody we shall end by dying of hunger.”

I could not dispute the point with Saveliitch; my money, according to my solemn promise, was entirely at his disposal. Nevertheless, I was annoyed that I was not able to reward a man who, if he had not brought me out of fatal danger, had, at least, extricated me from an awkward dilemma.

“Well,” I said, coolly, to Saveliitch, “if you do not wish to give him half a rouble give him one of my old coats; he is too thinly clad. Give him my hareskin *touloup*.”

“Have mercy on me, my father, Petr' Andrejitch!” exclaimed Saveliitch. “What need has he of your *touloup*? He



will pawn it for drink, the dog, in the first tavern he comes across.”

“That, my dear old fellow, is no longer your affair,” said the vagabond, “whether I drink it or whether I do not. His excellency honours me with a coat off his own back. It is his excellency's will, and it is your duty as a serf not to kick against it, but to obey.”

“You don't fear heaven, robber that you are,” said Saveliitch, angrily. “You see the child is still young and foolish, and you are quite ready to plunder him, thanks to his kind heart. What do you want with a gentleman's *touloup*? You could not even put it across your cursed broad shoulders.”

“I beg you will not play the wit,” I said to my follower. “Get the cloak quickly.”

“Oh! good heavens!” exclaimed Saveliitch, bemoaning himself. “A *touloup* of hareskin, and still quite new! And to whom is it given?—to a drunkard in rags.”

However, the *touloup* was brought. The vagabond began trying it on directly. The *touloup*, which had already become somewhat too small for me, was really too tight for him. Still, with some trouble, he succeeded in getting it on, though he cracked all the seams. Saveliitch gave, as it were, a subdued howl when he heard the threads snapping.

As to the vagabond, he was very pleased with my present. He ushered me to my *kibitka*, and saying, with a low bow, “Thanks, your excellency; may Heaven reward you for your



goodness; I shall never forget, as long as I live, your kindnesses,” went his way, and I went mine, without paying any attention to Saveliitch's sulkiness.

I soon forgot the snowstorm, the guide, and my hareskin *touloup*.

Upon arrival at Orenburg I immediately waited on the General. I found a tall man, already bent by age. His long hair was quite white; his old uniform reminded one of a soldier of Tzarina Anne's time, and he spoke with a strongly-marked German accent. I gave him my father's letter. Upon reading his name he cast a quick glance at me.

“Ah,” said he, “it was but a short time Andrej Petrovitch was your age, and now he has got a fine fellow of a son. Well, well—time, time.”

He opened the letter, and began reading it half aloud, with a running fire of remarks—

“'Sir, I hope your excellency'—What's all this ceremony? For shame! I wonder he's not ashamed of himself! Of course, discipline before everything; but is it thus one writes to an old comrade? 'Your excellency will not have forgotten'—Humph! 'And when under the late Field Marshal Muenich during the campaign, as well as little Caroline'—Eh! eh! *bruder!* So he still remembers our old pranks? 'Now for business. I send you my rogue'—Hum! 'Hold him with gloves of porcupine-skin'—What does that mean—'gloves of porcupine-skin?' It must be a Russian proverb.



“What does it mean, 'hold with gloves of porcupine-skin?'” resumed he, turning to me.

“It means,” I answered him, with the most innocent face in the world, “to treat someone kindly, not too strictly, to leave him plenty of liberty; that is what holding with gloves of porcupine-skin means.”

“Humph! I understand.”

“'And not give him any liberty'—No; it seems that porcupine-skin gloves means something quite different.' Enclosed is his commission'—Where is it then? Ah! here it is!—'in the roll of the Semenofsky Regiment'—All right; everything necessary shall be done. 'Allow me to salute you without ceremony, and like an old friend and comrade'—Ah! he has at last remembered it all,” etc., etc.

“Well, my little father,” said he, after he had finished the letter and put my commission aside, “all shall be done; you shall be an officer in the —th Regiment, and you shall go to-morrow to Fort Belogorsk, where you will serve under the orders of Commandant Mironoff, a brave and worthy man. There you will really serve and learn discipline. There is nothing for you to do at Orenburg; amusement is bad for a young man. To-day I invite you to dine with me.”

“Worse and worse,” thought I to myself. “What good has it done me to have been a sergeant in the Guard from my cradle? Where has it brought me? To the —th Regiment, and to a fort stranded on the frontier of the Kirghiz-Kaisak Steppes!”



I dined at Andrej Karlovitch's, in the company of his old aide de camp. Strict German economy was the rule at his table, and I think that the dread of a frequent guest at his bachelor's table contributed not a little to my being so promptly sent away to a distant garrison.

The next day I took leave of the General, and started for my destination.



CHAPTER III. THE LITTLE POET.

THE LITTLE FORT OF BELOGORSK lay about forty *versts* from Orenburg. From this town the road followed along by the rugged banks of the R. Yaik. The river was not yet frozen, and its lead-coloured waves looked almost black contrasted with its banks white with snow. Before me stretched the Kirghiz Steppes. I was lost in thought, and my reverie was tinged with melancholy. Garrison life did not offer me much attraction. I tried to imagine what my future chief, Commandant Mironoff, would be like. I saw in my mind's eye a strict, morose old man, with no ideas beyond the service, and prepared to put me under arrest for the smallest trifle.

Twilight was coming on; we were driving rather quickly.

“Is it far from here to the fort?” I asked the driver.

“Why, you can see it from here,” replied he.

I began looking all round, expecting to see high bastions, a wall, and a ditch. I saw nothing but a little village, surrounded by a wooden palisade. On one side three or four haystacks, half covered with snow; on another a tumble-down windmill, whose sails, made of coarse lime tree bark, hung idly down.

“But where is the fort?” I asked, in surprise.

“There it is yonder, to be sure,” rejoined the driver, pointing out to me the village which we had just reached.



I noticed near the gateway an old iron cannon. The streets were narrow and crooked, nearly all the *izbas* were thatched. I ordered him to take me to the Commandant, and almost directly my *kibitka* stopped before a wooden house, built on a knoll near the church, which was also in wood.

No one came to meet me. From the steps I entered the ante-room. An old pensioner, seated on a table, was busy sewing a blue patch on the elbow of a green uniform. I begged him to announce me.

“Come in, my little father,” he said to me; “we are all at home.”

I went into a room, very clean, but furnished in a very homely manner. In one corner there stood a dresser with crockery on it. Against the wall hung, framed and glazed, an officer's commission. Around this were arranged some bark pictures, representing the “Taking of Kustrin” and of “Otchakof,” “The Choice of the Betrothed,” and the “Burial of the Cat by the Mice.” Near the window sat an old woman wrapped in a shawl, her head tied up in a handkerchief. She was busy winding thread, which a little, old, one-eyed man in an officer's uniform was holding on his outstretched hands.

“What do you want, my little father?” she said to me, continuing her employment.

I answered that I had been ordered to join the service here, and that, therefore, I had hastened to report myself to the Commandant. With these words I turned towards the little, old,



one-eyed man, whom I had taken for the Commandant. But the good lady interrupted the speech with which I had prepared myself.

“Ivan Kouzmitch is not at home,” said she. “He is gone to see Father Garassim. But it's all the same, I am his wife. Be so good as to love us and take us into favour. Sit down, my little father.”

She called a servant, and bid her tell the *ouriadnik* to come. The little, old man was looking curiously at me with his one eye.

“Might I presume to ask you,” said he to me, “in what regiment you have deigned to serve?”

I satisfied his curiosity.

“And might I ask you,” continued he, “why you have condescended to exchange from the Guard into our garrison?”

I replied that it was by order of the authorities.

“Probably for conduct unbecoming an officer of the Guard?” rejoined my indefatigable questioner.

“Will you be good enough to stop talking nonsense?” the wife of the Commandant now said to him. “You can see very well that this young man is tired with his journey. He has something else to do than to answer your questions. Hold your hands better. And you, my little father,” she continued, turning to me, “do not bemoan yourself too much because you have been shoved into our little hole of a place; you are not the first, and you will not be the last. One may suffer, but one gets



accustomed to it. For instance, Chvabrine, Alexey Ivanytch, was transferred to us four years ago on account of a murder. Heaven knows what ill-luck befell him. It happened one day he went out of the town with a lieutenant, and they had taken swords, and they set to pinking one another, and Alexey Ivanytch killed the lieutenant, and before a couple of witnesses. Well, well, there's no heading ill-luck!”

At this moment the *ouriadnik*, a young and handsome Cossack, came in.

“Maximitch,” the Commandant's wife said to him, “find a quarter for this officer, and a clean one.”

“I obey, Vassilissa Igorofna,” replied the *ouriadnik*. “Ought not his excellency to go to Iwan Polejaieff?”

“You are doting, Maximitch,” retorted the Commandant's wife; “Polejaieff has already little enough room; and, besides, he is my gossip; and then he does not forget that we are his superiors. Take the gentleman—What is your name, my little father?”

“Petr' Andrejitch.”

“Take Petr' Andrejitch to Semeon Kouzoff's. The rascal let his horse get into my kitchen garden. Is everything in order, Maximitch?”

“Thank heaven! all is quiet,” replied the Cossack. “Only Corporal Prokoroff has been fighting in the bathhouse with the woman Oustinia Pegoulina for a pail of hot water.”



“Iwan Ignatiitch,” said the Commandant's wife to the little one-eyed man, “you must decide between Prokoroff and Oustinia which is to blame, and punish both of them; and you, Maximitch, go, in heaven's name! Petr' Andrejitch, Maximitch will take you to your lodging.”

I took leave. The *ouriadnik* led me to an *izba*, which stood on the steep bank of the river, quite at the far end of the little fort. Half the *izba* was occupied by the family of Semeon Kouzoff, the other half was given over to me. This half consisted of a tolerably clean room, divided into two by a partition.

Saveliitch began to unpack, and I looked out of the narrow window. I saw stretching out before me a bare and dull steppe; on one side there stood some huts. Some fowls were wandering down the street. An old woman, standing on a doorstep, holding in her hand a trough, was calling to some pigs, the pigs replying by amicable grunts.

And it was in such a country as this I was condemned to pass my youth!

Overcome by bitter grief, I left the window, and went to bed supperless, in spite of Saveliitch's remonstrances, who continued to repeat, in a miserable tone—

“Oh, good heavens! he does not deign to eat anything. What would my mistress say if the child should fall ill?”

On the morrow, I had scarcely begun to dress before the door of my room opened, and a young officer came in. He was



undersized, but, in spite of irregular features, his bronzed face had a remarkably gay and lively expression.

“I beg your pardon,” said he to me in French, “for coming thus unceremoniously to make your acquaintance. I heard of your arrival yesterday, and the wish to see at last a human being took such possession of me that I could not resist any longer. You will understand that when you have been here some time!”

I easily guessed that this was the officer sent away from the Guard in consequence of the duel.

We made acquaintance. Chvabrine was very witty. His conversation was lively and interesting. He described to me, with, much raciness and gaiety, the Commandant's family, the society of the fort, and, in short, all the country where my fate had led me.

I was laughing heartily when the same pensioner whom I had seen patching his uniform in the Commandant's ante-room, came in with an invitation to dinner for me from Vassilissa Igorofna.

Chvabrine said he should accompany me.

As we drew near the Commandant's house we saw in the square about twenty little old pensioners, with long pigtailed and three-cornered hats. They were drawn up in line. Before them stood the Commandant, a tall, old man, still hale, in a dressing-gown and a cotton nightcap.

As soon as he perceived us he came up, said a few pleasant words to me, and went back to the drill. We were going to stop



and see the manoeuvres, but he begged us to go at once to Vassilissa Igorofna's, promising to follow us directly. "Here," said he, "there's really nothing to see."

Vassilissa Igorofna received us with simplicity and kindness, and treated me as if she had known me a long time. The pensioner and Palashka were laying the cloth.

"What possesses my Ivan Kouzmitch to-day to drill his troops so long?" remarked the Commandant's wife. "Palashka, go and fetch him for dinner. And what can have become of Masha?"

Hardly had she said the name than a young girl of sixteen came into the room. She had a fresh, round face, and her hair was smoothly put back behind her ears, which were red with shyness and modesty. She did not please me very much at first sight; I looked at her with prejudice. Chvabrine had described Marya, the Commandant's daughter, to me as being rather silly. She went and sat down in a corner, and began to sew. Still the "*chtchi*" had been brought in. Vassilissa Igorofna, not seeing her husband come back, sent Palashka for the second time to call him.

"Tell the master that the visitors are waiting, and the soup is getting cold. Thank heaven, the drill will not run away. He will have plenty of time to shout as much as he likes."

The Commandant soon appeared, accompanied by the little old one-eyed man.



“What does all this mean, my little father?” said his wife to him. “Dinner has been ready a long time, and we cannot make you come.”

“But don't you see, Vassilissa Igorofna,” replied Ivan Kouzmitch, “I was very busy drilling my little soldiers.”

“Nonsense,” replied she, “that's only a boast; they are past service, and you don't know much about it. You should have stayed at home, and said your prayers; that would have been much better for you. My dear guests, pray sit down to table.”

We took our places. Vassilissa Igorofna never ceased talking for a moment, and overwhelmed me with questions. Who were my parents, were they alive, where did they live, and what was their income? When she learnt that my father had three hundred serfs—

“Well!” she exclaimed, “there are rich people in this world! And as to us, my little father, we have as to souls only the servant girl, Palashka. Well, thank heaven, we get along little by little. We have only one care on our minds—Masha, a girl who must be married. And what dowry has she got? A comb and two-pence to pay for a bath twice a year. If only she could light on some honest man! If not she must remain an old maid!”

I glanced at Marya Ivanofna. She had become quite red, and tears were rolling down, even into her plate. I was sorry for her, and I hastened to change the conversation.

“I have heard,” I exclaimed (very much to the point), “that the Bashkirs intend to attack your fort.”



“Who told you that, my little father?” replied Ivan Kouzmitch.

“I heard it said at Orenburg,” replied I.

“That's all rubbish,” said the Commandant. “We have not heard a word of it for ever so long. The Bashkir people have been thoroughly awed, and the Kirghiz, too, have had some good lessons. They won't dare to attack us, and if they venture to do so I'll give them such a fright that they won't stir for ten years at least.”

“And you are not afraid,” I continued, addressing the Commandant's wife, “to stay in a fort liable to such dangers?”

“It's all a question of custom, my little father,” answered she. “It's twenty years ago now since we were transferred from the regiment here. You would never believe how frightened I used to be of those confounded Pagans. If ever I chanced to see their hairy caps, or hear their howls, believe me, my little father, I nearly died of it. And now I am so accustomed to it that I should not budge an inch if I was told that the rascals were prowling all around the fort.”

“Vassilissa Igorofna is a very brave lady,” remarked Chvabrine, gravely. “Ivan Kouzmitch knows something of that.”

“Oh! yes, indeed,” said Ivan Kouzmitch, “she's no coward.”

“And Marya Ivanofna,” I asked her mother, “is she as bold as you?”

“Masha!” replied the lady; “no, Masha is a coward. Till now she has never been able to hear a gun fired without trembling all



over. It is two years ago now since Ivan Kouzmitch took it into his head to fire his cannon on my birthday; she was so frightened, the poor little dove, she nearly ran away into the other world. Since that day we have never fired that confounded cannon any more.”

We got up from table; the Commandant and his wife went to take their siesta, and I went to Chvabrine's quarters, where we passed the evening together.



CHAPTER IV. THE DUEL.

SEVERAL WEEKS PASSED, during which my life in Fort Belogorsk became not merely endurable, but even pleasant. I was received like one of the family in the household of the Commandant. The husband and wife were excellent people. Ivan Kouzmitch, who had been a child of the regiment, had become an officer, and was a simple, uneducated man, but good and true. His wife led him completely, which, by the way, very well suited his natural laziness.

It was Vassilissa Igorofna who directed all military business as she did that of her household, and commanded in the little fort as she did in her house. Marya Ivanofna soon ceased being shy, and we became better acquainted. I found her a warm-hearted and sensible girl. By degrees I became attached to this honest family, even to Iwan Ignatiitch, the one-eyed lieutenant, whom Chvabrine accused of secret intrigue with Vassilissa Igorofna, an accusation which had not even a shadow of probability. But that did not matter to Chvabrine.

I became an officer. My work did not weigh heavily upon me. In this heaven-blest fort there was no drill to do, no guard to mount, nor review to pass. Sometimes the Commandant instructed his soldiers for his own pleasure. But he had not yet succeeded in teaching them to know their right hand from their left. Chvabrine had some French books; I took to reading, and I



acquired a taste for literature. In the morning I used to read, and I tried my hand at translations, sometimes even at compositions in verse. Nearly every day I dined at the Commandant's, where I usually passed the rest of the day. In the evening, Father Garasim used to drop in, accompanied by his wife, Akoulina, who was the sturdiest gossip of the neighbourhood. It is scarcely necessary to say that every day we met, Chvabrine and I. Still hour by hour his conversation pleased me less. His everlasting jokes about the Commandant's family, and, above all, his witty remarks upon Marya Ivanofna, displeased me very much. I had no other society but that of this family within the little fort, but I did not want any other.

In spite of all the prophecies, the Bashkirs did not revolt. Peace reigned around our little fort. But this peace was suddenly troubled by war within.

I have already said I dabbled a little in literature. My attempts were tolerable for the time, and Soumarokoff himself did justice to them many years later. One day I happened to write a little song which pleased me. It is well-known that under colour of asking advice, authors willingly seek a benevolent listener; I copied out my little song, and took it to Chvabrine, the only person in the fort who could appreciate a poetical work.

After a short preface, I drew my manuscript from my pocket, and read to him the following verses:

“By waging war with thoughts of love



I try to forget my beauty;
Alas! by flight from Masha,
I hope my freedom to regain!

“But the eyes which enslaved me are ever before me.
My soul have they troubled and ruined my rest.

“Oh! Masha, who knowest my sorrows,

Seeing me in this miserable plight,

Take pity on thy captive.”

“What do you think of that?” I said to Chvabrine, expecting praise as a tribute due to me. But to my great displeasure Chvabrine, who usually showed kindness, told me flatly my song was worth nothing.

“Why?” I asked, trying to hide my vexation.

“Because such verses,” replied he, “are only worthy of my master Trediakofski, and, indeed, remind me very much of his little erotic couplets.”

He took the MSS. from my hand and began unmercifully criticizing each verse, each word, cutting me up in the most spiteful way. That was too much for me; I snatched the MSS. out of his hands, and declared that never, no never, would I ever



again show him one of my compositions. Chvabrine did not laugh the less at this threat.

“Let us see,” said he, “if you will be able to keep your word; poets have as much need of an audience as Ivan Kouzmitch has need of his '*petit verre*' before dinner. And who is this Masha to whom you declare your tender sentiments and your ardent flame? Surely it must be Marya Ivanofna?”

“That does not concern you,” replied I, frowning; “I don't ask for your advice nor your suppositions.”

“Oh! oh! a vain poet and a discreet lover,” continued Chvabrine, irritating me more and more. “Listen to a little friendly advice: if you wish to succeed, I advise you not to stick at songs.”

“What do you mean, sir?” I exclaimed; “explain yourself if you please.”

“With pleasure,” rejoined he. “I mean that if you want to be well with Masha Mironoff, you need only make her a present of a pair of earrings instead of your languishing verses.”

My blood boiled.

“Why have you such an opinion of her?” I asked him, restraining with difficulty my indignation.

“Because,” replied he, with a satanic smile, “because I know by experience her views and habits.”

“You lie, you rascal!” I shouted at him, in fury. “You are a shameless liar.”



Chvabrine's face changed.

“This I cannot overlook,” he said; “you shall give me satisfaction.”

“Certainly, whenever you like,” replied I, joyfully; for at that moment I was ready to tear him in pieces.

I rushed at once to Iwan Ignatiitch, whom I found with a needle in his hand. In obedience to the order of the Commandant's wife, he was threading mushrooms to be dried for the winter.

“Ah! Petr' Andrejitch,” said he, when he saw me; “you are welcome. On what errand does heaven send you, if I may presume to ask?”

I told him in a few words that I had quarrelled with Alexey Ivanytch, and that I begged him, Iwan Ignatiitch, to be my second. Iwan Ignatiitch heard me till I had done with great attention, opening wide his single eye.

“You deign to tell me,” said he, “that you wish to kill Alexey Ivanytch, and that I am to be witness? Is not that what you mean, if I may presume to ask you?”

“Exactly.”

“But, good heavens, Petr' Andrejitch, what folly have you got in your head? You and Alexey Ivanytch have insulted one another; well, a fine affair! You needn't wear an insult hung round your neck. He has said silly things to you, give him some impertinence; he in return will give you a blow, give him in return a box on the ear; he another, you another, and then you



part. And presently we oblige you to make peace. Whereas now—is it a good thing to kill your neighbour, if I may presume to ask you? Even if it were *you* who should kill *him*! May heaven be with him, for I do not love him. But if it be he who is to run you through, you will have made a nice business of it. Who will pay for the broken pots, allow me to ask?”

The arguments of the prudent officer did not deter me. My resolution remained firm.

“As you like,” said Iwan Ignatiitch, “do as you please; but what good should I do as witness? People fight; what is there extraordinary in that, allow me to ask? Thank heaven I have seen the Swedes and the Turks at close quarters, and I have seen a little of everything.”

I endeavoured to explain to him as best I could the duty of a second, but I found Iwan Ignatiitch quite unmanageable.

“Do as you like,” said he; “if I meddled in the matter, it would be to go and tell Ivan Kouzmitch, according to the rules of the service, that a criminal deed is being plotted in the fort, in opposition to the interests of the crown, and remark to the Commandant how advisable it would be that he should think of taking the necessary measures.”

I was frightened, and I begged Iwan Ignatiitch not to say anything to the Commandant. With great difficulty I managed to quiet him, and at last made him promise to hold his tongue, when I left him in peace.



As usual I passed the evening at the Commandant's. I tried to appear lively and unconcerned in order not to awaken any suspicions, and avoid any too curious questions. But I confess I had none of the coolness of which people boast who have found themselves in the same position. All that evening I felt inclined to be soft-hearted and sentimental.

Marya Ivanofna pleased me more than usual. The thought that perhaps I was seeing her for the last time gave her, in my eyes, a touching grace.

Chvabrine came in. I took him aside and told him about my interview with Iwan Ignatiitch.

“Why any seconds?” he said to me, dryly. “We shall do very well without them.”

We decided to fight on the morrow behind the haystacks, at six o'clock in the morning.

Seeing us talking in such a friendly manner, Iwan Ignatiitch, full of joy, nearly betrayed us.

“You should have done that long ago,” he said to me, with a face of satisfaction. “Better a hollow peace than an open quarrel.”

“What is that you say, Iwan Ignatiitch?” said the Commandant's wife, who was playing patience in a corner. “I did not exactly catch what you said.”

Iwan Ignatiitch, who saw my face darken, recollected his promise, became confused, and did not know what to say. Chvabrine came to the rescue.



“Iwan Ignatiitch,” said he, “approves of the compact we have made.”

“And with whom, my little father, did you quarrel?”

“Why, with Petr' Andrejitch, to be sure, and we even got to high words.”

“What for?”

“About a mere trifle, over a little song.”

“Fine thing to quarrel over—a little song! How did it happen?”

“Thus. Petr' Andrejitch lately composed a song, and he began singing it to me this morning. So I—I struck up mine, 'Captain's daughter, don't go abroad at dead of night!' As we did not sing in the same key, Petr' Andrejitch became angry. But afterwards he reflected that 'every one is free to sing what he pleases,' and that's all.”

Chvabrine's insolence made me furious, but no one else, except myself, understood his coarse allusions. Nobody, at least, took up the subject. From poetry the conversation passed to poets in general, and the Commandant made the remark that they were all rakes and confirmed drunkards; he advised me as a friend to give up poetry as a thing opposed to the service, and leading to no good.

Chvabrine's presence was to me unbearable. I hastened to take leave of the Commandant and his family. After coming home I looked at my sword; I tried its point, and I went to bed



after ordering Saveliitch to wake me on the morrow at six o'clock.

On the following day, at the appointed hour, I was already behind the haystacks, waiting for my foeman. It was not long before he appeared.

“We may be surprised,” he said to me; “we must make haste.”

We laid aside our uniforms, and in our waistcoats we drew our swords from the scabbard.

At this moment Iwan Ignatiitch, followed by five pensioners, came out from behind a heap of hay. He gave us an order to go at once before the Commandant. We sulkily obeyed. The soldiers surrounded us, and we followed Iwan Ignatiitch who brought us along in triumph, walking with a military step, with majestic gravity.

We entered the Commandant's house. Iwan Ignatiitch threw the door wide open, and exclaimed, emphatically—

“They are taken!”

Vassilissa Igorofna ran to meet us.

“What does all this mean? Plotting assassination in our very fort! Ivan Kouzmitch, put them under arrest at once. Petr' Andrejitch, Alexey Ivanytch, give up your swords, give them up—give them up. Palashka, take away the swords to the garret. Petr' Andrejitch, I did not expect this of you; aren't you ashamed of yourself? As to Alexey Ivanytch, it's different; he was transferred from the Guard for sending a soul into the other



world. He does not believe in our Lord! But do you wish to do likewise?”

Ivan Kouzmitch approved of all his wife said, repeating—
“Look there, now, Vassilissa Igorofna is quite right—duels are formally forbidden by martial law.”

Palashka had taken away our swords, and had carried them to the garret. I could not help laughing. Chvabrine looked grave.

“In spite of all the respect I have for you,” he said, coolly, to the Commandant's wife, “I cannot help remarking that you are giving yourself useless trouble by trying us at your tribunal. Leave this cure do Ivan Kouzmitch—it is his business.”

“What! what! my little father!” retorted the Commandant's wife, “are not husband and wife the same flesh and spirit? Ivan Kouzmitch, are you trifling? Lock them up separately, and keep them on bread and water till this ridiculous idea goes out of their heads. And Father Garasim shall make them do penance that they may ask pardon of heaven and of men.”

Ivan Kouzmitch did not know what to do. Marya Ivanofna was very pale. Little by little the storm sank. The Commandant's wife became more easy to deal with. She ordered us to make friends. Palashka brought us back our swords. We left the house apparently reconciled. Ivan Ignatiitch accompanied us.

“Weren't you ashamed,” I said to him, angrily, “thus to denounce us to the Commandant after giving me your solemn word not to do so?”



“As God is holy,” replied he, “I said nothing to Ivan Kouzmitch; it was Vassilissa Igorofna who wormed it all out of me. It was she who took all the necessary measures unknown to the Commandant. As it is, heaven be praised that it has all ended in this way.”

After this reply he returned to his quarters, and I remained alone with Chvabrine.

“Our affair can't end thus,” I said to him.

“Certainly not,” rejoined Chvabrine. “You shall wash out your insolence in blood. But they will watch us; we must pretend to be friends for a few days. Good-bye.”

And we parted as if nothing had happened.

Upon my return to the Commandant's, I sat down according to my custom by Marya Ivanofna; her father was not at home, and her mother was engaged with household cares. We spoke in a low voice Marya Ivanofna reproached me tenderly for the anxiety my quarrel with Chvabrine had occasioned her.

“My heart failed me,” said she, “when they came to tell us that you were going to draw swords on each other. How strange men are! For a word forgotten the next week they are ready to cut each other's throats, and to sacrifice not only their life, but their honour, and the happiness of those who—But I am sure it was not you who began the quarrel; it was Alexey Ivanytch who was the aggressor.”

“What makes you think so, Marya?”



“Why, because—because he is so sneering. I do not like Alexey Ivanytch; I even dislike him. Yet, all the same, I should not have liked him to dislike me; it would have made me very uneasy.”

“And what do you think, Marya Ivanofna, does he dislike you or no?”

Marya Ivanofna looked disturbed, and grew very red.

“I think,” she said, at last, “I think he likes me.”

“Why?”

“Because he proposed to me.”

“Proposed to you! When?”

“Last year, two months before you came.”

“And you did not consent?”

“As you see, Alexey Ivanytch is a man of wit, and of good family, to be sure, well off, too; but only to think of being obliged to kiss him before everybody under the marriage crown! No, no; nothing in the world would induce me.”

The words of Marya Ivanofna enlightened me, and made many things clear to me. I understood now why Chvabrine so persistently followed her up. He had probably observed our mutual attraction, and was trying to detach us one from another.

The words which had provoked our quarrel seemed to me the more infamous when, instead of a rude and coarse joke, I saw in them a premeditated calumny.



The wish to punish the barefaced liar took more entire possession of me, and I awaited impatiently a favourable moment. I had not to wait long. On the morrow, just as I was busy composing an elegy, and I was biting my pen as I searched for a rhyme, Chvabrine tapped at my window. I laid down the pen, and I took up my sword and left the house.

“Why delay any longer?” said Chvabrine. “They are not watching us any more. Let us go to the river-bank; there nobody will interrupt us.”

We started in silence, and after having gone down a rugged path we halted at the water's edge and crossed swords.

Chvabrine was a better swordsman than I was, but I was stronger and bolder, and M. Beaupre, who had, among other things, been a soldier, had given me some lessons in fencing, by which I had profited.

Chvabrine did not in the least expect to find in me such a dangerous foeman. For a long while we could neither of us do the other any harm, but at last, noticing that Chvabrine was getting tired, I vigorously attacked him, and almost forced him backwards into the river.

Suddenly I heard my own name called in a loud voice. I quickly turned my head, and saw Saveliitch running towards me down the path. At this moment I felt a sharp prick in the chest, under the right shoulder, and I fell senseless.



CHAPTER V. LOVE.

WHEN I CAME TO MYSELF I remained some time without understanding what had befallen me, nor where I chanced to be. I was in bed in an unfamiliar room, and I felt very weak indeed. Saveliitch was standing by me, a light in his hand. Someone was unrolling with care the bandages round my shoulder and chest. Little by little my ideas grew clearer. I recollected my duel and guessed without any difficulty that I had been wounded. At this moment the door creaked slightly on its hinges.

“Well, how is he getting on?” whispered a voice which thrilled through me.

“Always the same still,” replied Saveliitch, sighing; “always unconscious, as he has now been these four days.”

I wished to turn, but I had not strength to do so.

“Where am I? Who is there?” I said, with difficulty. Marya Ivanofna came near to my bed and leaned gently over me.

“How do you feel?” she said to me.

“All right, thank God!” I replied in a weak voice. “It is you, Marya Ivanofna; tell me—”

I could not finish. Saveliitch exclaimed, joy painted on his face—

“He is coming to himself!—he is coming to himself! Oh! thanks be to heaven! My father Petr' Andrejitch, have you



frightened me enough? Four days! That seems little enough to say, but—”

Marya Ivanofna interrupted him.

“Do not talk to him too much, Saveliitch; he is still very weak.”

She went away, shutting the door carefully.

I felt myself disturbed with confused thoughts. I was evidently in the house of the Commandant, as Marya Ivanofna could thus come and see me! I wished to question Saveliitch; but the old man shook his head and turned a deaf ear. I shut my eyes in displeasure, and soon fell asleep. Upon waking I called Saveliitch, but in his stead I saw before me Marya Ivanofna, who greeted me in her soft voice. I cannot describe the delicious feeling which thrilled through me at this moment, I seized her hand and pressed it in a transport of delight, while bedewing it with my tears. Marya did not withdraw it, and all of a sudden I felt upon my cheek the moist and burning imprint of her lips. A wild flame of love thrilled through my whole being.

“Dear, good Marya Ivanofna,” I said to her, “be my wife. Consent to give me happiness.”

She became reasonable again.

“For heaven's sake, calm yourself,” she said, withdrawing her hand. “You are still in danger; your wound may reopen; be careful of yourself—were it only for my sake.”

After these words she went away, leaving me at the height of happiness. I felt that life was given back to me.



“She will be mine! She loves me!”

This thought filled all my being.

From this moment I hourly got better. It was the barber of the regiment who dressed my wound, for there was no other doctor in all the fort, and, thank God, he did not attempt any doctoring. Youth and nature hastened my recovery. All the Commandant's family took the greatest care of me. Marya Ivanofna scarcely ever left me. It is unnecessary to say that I seized the first favourable opportunity to resume my interrupted proposal, and this time Marya heard me more patiently. She naively avowed to me her love, and added that her parents would, in all probability, rejoice in her happiness.

“But think well about it,” she used to say to me. “Will there be no objections on the part of your family?”

These words made me reflect. I had no doubt of my mother's tenderness; but knowing the character and way of thinking of my father, I foresaw that my love would not touch him very much, and that he would call it youthful folly. I frankly confessed this to Marya Ivanofna, but in spite of this I resolved to write to my father as eloquently as possible to ask his blessing. I showed my letter to Marya Ivanofna, who found it so convincing and touching that she had no doubt of success, and gave herself up to the feelings of her heart with all the confidence of youth and love.



I made peace with Chvabrine during the early days of my convalescence. Ivan Kouzmitch said to me, reproaching me for the duel—

“You know, Petr' Andrejitch, properly speaking, I ought to put you under arrest; but you are already sufficiently punished without that. As to Alexey Ivanytch, he is confined by my order, and under strict guard, in the corn magazine, and Vassilissa Igorofna has his sword under lock and key. He will have time to reflect and repent at his ease.”

I was too happy to cherish the least rancour. I began to intercede for Chvabrine, and the good Commandant, with his wife's leave, agreed to set him at liberty. Chvabrine came to see me. He expressed deep regret for all that had occurred, declared it was all his fault, and begged me to forget the past. Not being of a rancorous disposition, I heartily forgave him both our quarrel and my wound. I saw in his slander the irritation of wounded vanity and rejected love, so I generously forgave my unhappy rival.

I was soon completely recovered, and was able to go back to my quarters. I impatiently awaited the answer to my letter, not daring to hope, but trying to stifle sad forebodings that would arise. I had not yet attempted any explanation as regarded Vassilissa Igorofna and her husband. But my courtship could be no surprise to them, as neither Marya nor myself made any secret of our feelings before them, and we were sure beforehand of their consent.



At last, one fine day, Saveliitch came into my room with a letter in his hand.

I took it trembling. The address was written in my father's hand.

This prepared me for something serious, since it was usually my mother who wrote, and he only added a few lines at the end. For a long time I could not make up my mind to break the seal. I read over the solemn address:—

“To my son, Petr' Andrejitch Grineff, District of Orenburg, Fort Belogorsk.”

I tried to guess from my father's handwriting in what mood he had written the letter. At last I resolved to open it, and I did not need to read more than the first few lines to see that the whole affair was at the devil. Here are the contents of this letter:—

“My Son Petr',—

“We received the 15th of this month the letter in which you ask our parental blessing and our consent to your marriage with Marya Ivanofna, the Mironoff daughter. And not only have I no intention of giving you either my blessing or my consent, but I intend to come and punish you well for your follies, like a little boy, in spite of your officer's rank, because you have shown me that you are not fit to wear the sword entrusted to you for the defence of your country, and not for fighting duels with fools like yourself. I shall write immediately to Andrej Karlovitch to



beg him to send you away from Fort Belogorsk to some place still further removed, so that you may get over this folly.

“Upon hearing of your duel and wound your mother fell ill with sorrow, and she is still confined to her bed.

“What will become of you? I pray God may correct you, though I scarcely dare trust in His goodness.

“Your father,

“A.G.”

The perusal of this letter aroused in me a medley of feelings. The harsh expressions which my father had not scrupled to make use of hurt me deeply; the contempt which he cast on Marya Ivanofna appeared to me as unjust as it was unseemly; while, finally, the idea of being sent away from Fort Belogorsk dismayed me. But I was, above all, grieved at my mother's illness.

I was disgusted with Saveliitch, never doubting that it was he who had made known my duel to my parents. After walking up and down awhile in my little room, I suddenly stopped short before him, and said to him, angrily—

“It seems that it did not satisfy you that, thanks to you, I've been wounded and at death's door, but that you must also want to kill my mother as well.”

Saveliitch remained motionless, as if struck by a thunderbolt.

“Have pity on me, sir,” he exclaimed, almost sobbing.
“What is it you deign to tell me—that I am the cause of your



wound? But God knows I was only running to stand between you and Alexey Ivanytch's sword. Accursed old age alone prevented me. What have I now done to your mother?"

"What did you do?" I retorted. "Who told you to write and denounce me? Were you put in my service to be a spy upon me?"

"I denounce you!" replied Saveliitch, in tears. "Oh, good heavens! Here, be so good as to read what master has written to me, and see if it was I who denounced you."

With this he drew from his pocket a letter, which he offered to me, and I read as follows:—

"Shame on you, you old dog, for never writing and telling me anything about my son, Petr' Andrejitch, in spite of my strict orders, and that it should be from strangers that I learn his follies! Is it thus you do your duty and act up to your master's wishes? I shall send you to keep the pigs, old rascal, for having hid from me the truth, and for your weak compliance with the lad's whims. On receipt of this letter, I order you to let me know directly the state of his health, which, judging by what I hear, is improving, and to tell me exactly the place where he was hit, and if the wound be well healed."

Evidently Saveliitch had not been the least to blame, and it was I who had insulted him by my suspicions and reproaches. I begged his pardon, but the old man was inconsolable.

"That I should have lived to see it!" repeated he. "These be the thanks that I have deserved of my masters for all my long



service. I am an old dog. I'm only fit, to keep pigs, and in addition to all this I am the cause of your wound. No, my father, Petr' Andrejitch, 'tis not I who am to blame, it is rather the confounded '*mossoo*;' it was he who taught you to fight with those iron spits, stamping your foot, as though by ramming and stamping you could defend yourself from a bad man. It was, indeed, worth while spending money upon a '*mossoo*' to teach you that."

But who could have taken the trouble to tell my father what I had done. The General? He did not seem to trouble himself much about me; and, indeed, Ivan Kouzmitch had not thought it necessary to report my duel to him. I could not think. My suspicions fell upon Chvabrine; he alone could profit by this betrayal, which might end in my banishment from the fort and my separation from the Commandant's family. I was going to tell all to Marya Ivanofna when she met me on the doorstep.

"What has happened?" she said to me. "How pale you are!"

"All is at an end," replied I, handing her my father's letter.

In her turn she grew pale. After reading the letter she gave it me back, and said, in a voice broken by emotion—

"It was not my fate. Your parents do not want me in your family; God's will be done! God knows better than we do what is fit for us. There is nothing to be done, Petr' Andrejitch; may you at least be happy."

"It shall not be thus!" I exclaimed, seizing her hand. "You love me; I am ready for anything. Let us go and throw ourselves



at your parents' feet. They are honest people, neither proud nor hard; they—they will give us their blessing—we will marry, and then with time, I am sure, we shall succeed in mollifying my father. My mother will intercede for us, and he will forgive me.”

“No, Petr' Andrejitch,” replied Marya, “I will not marry you without the blessing of your parents. Without their blessing you would not be happy. Let us submit to the will of God. Should you meet with another betrothed, should you love her, *God be with you*, Petr' Andrejitch, I—I will pray for you both.”

She began to cry, and went away. I meant to follow her to her room; but I felt unable to control myself, and I went home. I was seated, deep in melancholy reflections, when Saveliitch suddenly came and interrupted me.

“Here, sir,” said he, handing me a sheet of paper all covered with writing, “see if I be a spy on my master, and if I try to sow discord betwixt father and son.”

I took the paper from his hand; it was Saveliitch's reply to the letter he had received. Here it is word for word—

“My lord, Andrej Petrovitch, our gracious father, I have received your gracious letter, in which you deign to be angered with me, your serf, bidding me be ashamed of not obeying my master's orders. And I, who am not an old dog, but your faithful servant, I do obey my master's orders, and I have ever served you zealously, even unto white hairs. I did not write to you about Petr' Andrejitch's wound in order not to frighten you without cause, and now we hear that our mistress, our mother,



Avdotia Vassilieva is ill of fright, and I shall go and pray heaven for her health. Petr' Andrejitch has been wounded in the chest, beneath the right shoulder, under one rib, to the depth of a *verchok* and a half, and he has been taken care of in the Commandant's house, whither we brought him from the river bank, and it was the barber here, Stepan Paramonoff, who treated him; and now Petr' Andrejitch, thank God, is going on well, and there is nothing but good to tell of him. His superiors, according to hearsay, are well pleased with him, and Vassilissa Igorofna treats him as her own son; and because such an affair should have happened to him you must not reproach him; the horse may have four legs and yet stumble. And you deign to write that you will send me to keep the pigs. My lord's will be done. And now I salute you down to the ground.

“Your faithful serf,

“ARKHIP SAVELIEFF.”

I could not help smiling once or twice as I read the good old man's letter. I did not feel equal to writing to my father. And to make my mother easy the letter of Saveliitch seemed to me amply sufficient.

From this day my position underwent a change. Marya Ivanofna scarcely ever spoke to me, and even tried to avoid me. The Commandant's house became unbearable to me; little by little I accustomed myself to stay alone in my quarters.

At first Vassilissa Igorofna remonstrated, but, seeing I persisted in my line of conduct, she left me in peace. I only saw



Ivan Kouzmitch when military duties brought us in contact. I had only rare interviews with Chvabrine, whom I disliked the more that I thought I perceived in him a secret enmity, which confirmed all the more my suspicions. Life became a burden to me. I gave myself up, a prey to dark melancholy, which was further fed by loneliness and inaction. My love burnt the more hotly for my enforced quiet, and tormented me more and more. I lost all liking for reading and literature. I was allowing myself to be completely cast down, and I dreaded either becoming mad or dissolute, when events suddenly occurred which strongly influenced my life, and gave my mind a profound and salutary rousing.

End of Book I.

