IV

Several days elapsed before I met Nathalie Haldin again. I was crossing the place in front of the theatre when I made out her shapely figure in the very act of turning between the gate pillars of the unattractive public promenade of the Bastions. She walked away from me, but I knew we should meet as she returned down the main alley--unless, indeed, she were going home. In that case, I don't think I should have called on her yet. My desire to keep her away from these people was as strong as ever, but I had no illusions as to my power. I was but a Westerner, and it was clear that Miss Haldin would not, could not listen to my wisdom; and as to my desire of listening to her voice, it were better, I thought, not to indulge overmuch in that pleasure. No, I should not have gone to the Boulevard des Philosophes; but when at about the middle of the principal alley I saw Miss Haldin coming towards me, I was too curious, and too honest, perhaps, to run away.

There was something of the spring harshness in the air. The blue sky was hard, but the young leaves clung like soft mist about the uninteresting range of trees; and the clear sun put little points of gold into the grey of Miss Haldin's frank eyes, turned to me with a friendly greeting.

I inquired after the health of her mother.

She had a slight movement of the shoulders and a little sad sigh.

"But, you see, I did come out for a walk...for exercise, as you English say."

I smiled approvingly, and she added an unexpected remark--

"It is a glorious day."

Her voice, slightly harsh, but fascinating with its masculine and bird-like quality, had the accent of spontaneous conviction. I was glad of it. It was as though she had become aware of her youth--for there was but little of spring-like glory in the rectangular railed space of grass and trees, framed visibly by the orderly roof-slopes of that town, comely without grace, and hospitable without sympathy. In the very air through which she moved there was but little warmth; and the sky, the sky of a land without horizons, swept and washed clean by the April showers, extended a cold cruel blue, without elevation, narrowed suddenly by the ugly, dark wall of the Jura where, here and there, lingered yet a few miserable trails and patches of snow. All the glory of the season must have been within herself--

and I was glad this feeling had come into her life, if only for a little time.

"I am pleased to hear you say these words." She gave me a quick look. Quick, not stealthy. If there was one thing of which she was absolutely incapable, it was stealthiness, Her sincerity was expressed in the very rhythm of her walk. It was I who was looking at her covertly--if I may say so. I knew where she had been, but I did not know what she had seen and heard in that nest of aristocratic conspiracies. I use the word aristocratic, for want of a better term. The Chateau Borel, embowered in the trees and thickets of its neglected grounds, had its fame in our day, like the residence of that other dangerous and exiled woman, Madame de Stael, in the Napoleonic era. Only the Napoleonic despotism, the booted heir of the Revolution, which counted that intellectual woman for an enemy worthy to be watched, was something quite unlike the autocracy in mystic vestments, engendered by the slavery of a Tartar conquest. And Madame de S-- was very far from resembling the gifted author of Corinne. She made a great noise about being persecuted. I don't know if she were regarded in certain circles as dangerous. As to being watched, I imagine that the Chateau Borel could be subjected only to a most distant observation. It was in its exclusiveness an ideal abode for hatching superior plots--whether serious or futile. But all this did not interest me. I wanted to know the effect its extraordinary inhabitants and its special atmosphere had produced on a girl like Miss Haldin, so true, so honest, but so dangerously inexperienced! Her unconsciously lofty ignorance of the baser instincts of mankind left her disarmed before her own impulses. And there was also that friend of her brother, the significant new arrival from Russia.... I wondered whether she had managed to meet him.

We walked for some time, slowly and in silence.

"You know," I attacked her suddenly, "if you don't intend telling me anything, you must say so distinctly, and then, of course, it shall be final. But I won't play at delicacy. I ask you point-blank for all the details."

She smiled faintly at my threatening tone.

"You are as curious as a child."

"No. I am only an anxious old man," I replied earnestly.

She rested her glance on me as if to ascertain the degree of my anxiety or the number of my years. My physiognomy has never been expressive, I believe, and as to my years I am not ancient enough as yet to be strikingly decrepit. I have no long beard like the good hermit of a romantic ballad; my footsteps are not tottering, my aspect not that of a slow, venerable sage. Those picturesque

advantages are not mine. I am old, alas, in a brisk, commonplace way. And it seemed to me as though there were some pity for me in Miss Haldin's prolonged glance. She stepped out a little quicker.

"You ask for all the details. Let me see. I ought to remember them. It was novel enough for a--a village girl like me."

After a moment of silence she began by saying that the Chateau Borel was almost as neglected inside as outside. It was nothing to wonder at, a Hamburg banker, I believe, retired from business, had it built to cheer his remaining days by the view of that lake whose precise, orderly, and well-to-do beauty must have been attractive to the unromantic imagination of a business man. But he died soon. His wife departed too (but only to Italy), and this house of moneyed ease, presumably unsaleable, had stood empty for several years. One went to it up a gravel drive, round a large, coarse grass-plot, with plenty of time to observe the degradation of its stuccoed front. Miss Haldin said that the impression was unpleasant. It grew more depressing as one came nearer.

She observed green stains of moss on the steps of the terrace. The front door stood wide open. There was no one about. She found herself in a wide, lofty, and absolutely empty hall, with a good many doors. These doors were all shut. A broad, bare stone staircase faced her, and the effect of the whole was of an untenanted house. She stood still, disconcerted by the solitude, but after a while she became aware of a voice speaking continuously somewhere.

"You were probably being observed all the time," I suggested. "There must have been eyes."

"I don't see how that could be," she retorted. "I haven't seen even a bird in the grounds. I don't remember hearing a single twitter in the trees. The whole place appeared utterly deserted except for the voice."

She could not make out the language--Russian, French, or German. No one seemed to answer it. It was as though the voice had been left behind by the departed inhabitants to talk to the bare walls. It went on volubly, with a pause now and then. It was lonely and sad. The time seemed very long to Miss Haldin. An invincible repugnance prevented her from opening one of the doors in the hall. It was so hopeless. No one would come, the voice would never stop. She confessed to me that she had to resist an impulse to turn round and go away unseen, as she had come.

"Really? You had that impulse?" I cried, full of regret. "What a pity you did not obey it."

She shook her head.

"What a strange memory it would have been for one. Those deserted grounds, that empty hall, that impersonal, voluble voice, and--nobody, nothing, not a soul."

The memory would have been unique and harmless. But she was not a girl to run away from an intimidating impression of solitude and mystery. "No, I did not run away," she said. "I stayed where I was--and I did see a soul. Such a strange soul."

As she was gazing up the broad staircase, and had concluded that the voice came from somewhere above, a rustle of dress attracted her attention. She looked down and saw a woman crossing the hall, having issued apparently through one of the many doors. Her face was averted, so that at first she was not aware of Miss Haldin.

On turning her head and seeing a stranger, she appeared very much startled. From her slender figure Miss Haldin had taken her for a young girl; but if her face was almost childishly round, it was also sallow and wrinkled, with dark rings under the eyes. A thick crop of dusty brown hair was parted boyishly on the side with a lateral wave above the dry, furrowed forehead. After a moment of dumb blinking, she suddenly squatted down on the floor.

"What do you mean by squatted down?" I asked, astonished. "This is a very strange detail."

Miss Haldin explained the reason. This person when first seen was carrying a small bowl in her hand. She had squatted down to put it on the floor for the benefit of a large cat, which appeared then from behind her skirts, and hid its head into the bowl greedily. She got up, and approaching Miss Haldin asked with nervous bluntness--

"What do you want? Who are you?"

Miss Haldin mentioned her name and also the name of Peter Ivanovitch. The girlish, elderly woman nodded and puckered her face into a momentary expression of sympathy. Her black silk blouse was old and even frayed in places; the black serge skirt was short and shabby. She continued to blink at close quarters, and her eyelashes and eyebrows seemed shabby too. Miss Haldin, speaking gently to her, as if to an unhappy and sensitive person, explained how it was that her visit could not be an altogether unexpected event to Madame de S--.

"Ah! Peter Ivanovitch brought you an invitation. How was I to know? A dame de compangnie is not consulted, as you may imagine."

The shabby woman laughed a little. Her teeth, splendidly white and admirably even, looked absurdly out of place, like a string of pearls on the neck of a ragged tramp. "Peter Ivanovitch is the greatest genius of the century perhaps, but he is the most inconsiderate man living. So if you have an appointment with him you must not be surprised to hear that he is not here."

Miss Haldin explained that she had no appointment with Peter Ivanovitch. She became interested at once in that bizarre person.

"Why should he put himself out for you or any one else? Oh! these geniuses. If you only knew! Yes! And their books--I mean, of course, the books that the world admires, the inspired books. But you have not been behind the scenes. Wait till you have to sit at a table for a half a day with a pen in your hand. He can walk up and down his rooms for hours and hours. I used to get so stiff and numb that I was afraid I would lose my balance and fall off the chair all at once."

She kept her hands folded in front of her, and her eyes, fixed on Miss Haldin's face, betrayed no animation whatever. Miss Haldin, gathering that the lady who called herself a dame de compangnie was proud of having acted as secretary to Peter Ivanovitch, made an amiable remark.

"You could not imagine a more trying experience," declared the lady. "There is an Anglo-American journalist interviewing Madame de S-- now, or I would take you up," she continued in a changed tone and glancing towards the staircase. "I act as master of ceremonies."

It appeared that Madame de S-- could not bear Swiss servants about her person; and, indeed, servants would not stay for very long in the Chateau Borel. There were always difficulties. Miss Haldin had already noticed that the hall was like a dusty barn of marble and stucco with cobwebs in the corners and faint tracks of mud on the black and white tessellated floor.

"I look also after this animal," continued the dame de compagnie, keeping her hands folded quietly in front of her; and she bent her worn gaze upon the cat. "I don't mind a bit. Animals have their rights; though, strictly speaking, I see no reason why they should not suffer as well as human beings. Do you? But of course they never suffer so much. That is impossible. Only, in their case it is more pitiful because they cannot make a revolution. I used to be a Republican. I suppose you are a Republican?"

Miss Haldin confessed to me that she did not know what to say. But she nodded slightly, and asked in her turn--

"And are you no longer a Republican?"

"After taking down Peter Ivanovitch from dictation for two years, it is difficult for me to be anything. First of all, you have to sit perfectly motionless. The slightest movement you make puts to flight the ideas of Peter Ivanovitch. You hardly dare to breathe. And as to coughing--God forbid! Peter Ivanovitch changed the position of the table to the wall because at first I could not help raising my eyes to look out of the window, while waiting for him to go on with his dictation. That was not allowed. He said I stared so stupidly. I was likewise not permitted to look at him over my shoulder. Instantly Peter Ivanovitch stamped his foot, and would roar, 'Look down on the paper!' It seems my expression, my face, put him off. Well, I know that I am not beautiful, and that my expression is not hopeful either. He said that my air of unintelligent expectation irritated him. These are his own words."

Miss Haldin was shocked, but admitted to me that she was not altogether surprised.

"Is it possible that Peter Ivanovitch could treat any woman so rudely?" she cried.

The dame de compagnie nodded several times with an air of discretion, then assured Miss Haldin that she did not mind in the least. The trying part of it was to have the secret of the composition laid bare before her; to see the great author of the revolutionary gospels grope for words as if he were in the dark as to what he meant to say.

"I am quite willing to be the blind instrument of higher ends. To give one's life for the cause is nothing. But to have one's illusions destroyed--that is really almost more than one can bear. I really don't exaggerate," she insisted. "It seemed to freeze my very beliefs in me--the more so that when we worked in winter Peter Ivanovitch, walking up and down the room, required no artificial heat to keep himself warm. Even when we move to the South of France there are bitterly cold days, especially when you have to sit still for six hours at a stretch. The walls of these villas on the Riviera are so flimsy. Peter Ivanovitch did not seem to be aware of anything. It is true that I kept down my shivers from fear of putting him out. I used to set my teeth till my jaws felt absolutely locked. In the moments when Peter Ivanovitch interrupted his dictation, and sometimes these intervals were very long--often twenty minutes, no less, while he walked to and fro behind my back muttering to himself--I felt I was dying by inches, I assure you. Perhaps if I had let my teeth rattle Peter Ivanovitch might have noticed my distress, but I

don't think it would have had any practical effect. She's very miserly in such matters."

The dame de compagnie glanced up the staircase. The big cat had finished the milk and was rubbing its whiskered cheek sinuously against her skirt. She dived to snatch it up from the floor.

"Miserliness is rather a quality than otherwise, you know," she continued, holding the cat in her folded arms. "With us it is misers who can spare money for worthy objects--not the so-called generous natures. But pray don't think I am a sybarite. My father was a clerk in the Ministry of Finances with no position at all. You may guess by this that our home was far from luxurious, though of course we did not actually suffer from cold. I ran away from my parents, you know, directly I began to think by myself. It is not very easy, such thinking. One has got to be put in the way of it, awakened to the truth. I am indebted for my salvation to an old apple-woman, who had her stall under the gateway of the house we lived in. She had a kind wrinkled face, and the most friendly voice imaginable. One day, casually, we began to talk about a child, a ragged little girl we had seen begging from men in the streets at dusk; and from one thing to another my eyes began to open gradually to the horrors from which innocent people are made to suffer in this world, only in order that governments might exist. After I once understood the crime of the upper classes, I could not go on living with my parents. Not a single charitable word was to be heard in our home from year's end to year's end; there was nothing but the talk of vile office intrigues, and of promotion and of salaries, and of courting the favour of the chiefs. The mere idea of marrying one day such another man as my father made me shudder. I don't mean that there was anyone wanting to marry me. There was not the slightest prospect of anything of the kind. But was it not sin enough to live on a Government salary while half Russia was dying of hunger? The Ministry of Finances! What a grotesque horror it is! What does the starving, ignorant people want with a Ministry of Finances? I kissed my old folks on both cheeks, and went away from them to live in cellars, with the proletariat. I tried to make myself useful to the utterly hopeless. I suppose you understand what I mean? I mean the people who have nowhere to go and nothing to look forward to in this life. Do you understand how frightful that is--nothing to look forward to! Sometimes I think that it is only in Russia that there are such people and such a depth of misery can be reached. Well, I plunged into it, and--do you know--there isn't much that one can do in there. No, indeed--at least as long as there are Ministries of Finances and such like grotesque horrors to stand in the way. I suppose I would have gone mad there just trying to fight the vermin, if it had not been for a man. It was my old friend and teacher, the poor saintly apple-woman, who discovered him for me, quite accidentally. She came to fetch me late one evening in her quiet way. I followed her where she would lead; that part of my life was in her hands altogether, and without her my

spirit would have perished miserably. The man was a young workman, a lithographer by trade, and he had got into trouble in connexion with that affair of temperance tracts--you remember. There was a lot of people put in prison for that. The Ministry of Finances again! What would become of it if the poor folk ceased making beasts of themselves with drink? Upon my word, I would think that finances and all the rest of it are an invention of the devil; only that a belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness. Finances indeed!"

Hatred and contempt hissed in her utterance of the word "finances," but at the very moment she gently stroked the cat reposing in her arms. She even raised them slightly, and inclining her head rubbed her cheek against the fur of the animal, which received this caress with the complete detachment so characteristic of its kind. Then looking at Miss Haldin she excused herself once more for not taking her upstairs to Madame S-- The interview could not be interrupted. Presently the journalist would be seen coming down the stairs. The best thing was to remain in the hall; and besides, all these rooms (she glanced all round at the many doors), all these rooms on the ground floor were unfurnished.

"Positively there is no chair down here to offer you," she continued. "But if you prefer your own thoughts to my chatter, I will sit down on the bottom step here and keep silent."

Miss Haldin hastened to assure her that, on the contrary, she was very much interested in the story of the journeyman lithographer. He was a revolutionist, of course.

"A martyr, a simple man," said the dame de compangnie, with a faint sigh, and gazing through the open front door dreamily. She turned her misty brown eyes on Miss Haldin.

"I lived with him for four months. It was like a nightmare."

As Miss Haldin looked at her inquisitively she began to describe the emaciated face of the man, his fleshless limbs, his destitution. The room into which the apple-woman had led her was a tiny garret, a miserable den under the roof of a sordid house. The plaster fallen off the walls covered the floor, and when the door was opened a horrible tapestry of black cobwebs waved in the draught. He had been liberated a few days before--flung out of prison into the streets. And Miss Haldin seemed to see for the first time, a name and a face upon the body of that suffering people whose hard fate had been the subject of so many conversations, between her and her brother, in the garden of their country house.

He had been arrested with scores and scores of other people in that affair of the lithographed temperance tracts. Unluckily, having got hold of a great many suspected persons, the police thought they could extract from some of them other information relating to the revolutionist propaganda.

"They beat him so cruelly in the course of investigation," went on the dame de compagnie, "that they injured him internally. When they had done with him he was doomed. He could do nothing for himself. I beheld him lying on a wooden bedstead without any bedding, with his head on a bundle of dirty rags, lent to him out of charity by an old rag-picker, who happened to live in the basement of the house. There he was, uncovered, burning with fever, and there was not even a jug in the room for the water to quench his thirst with. There was nothing whatever--just that bedstead and the bare floor."

"Was there no one in all that great town amongst the liberals and revolutionaries, to extend a helping hand to a brother?" asked Miss Haldin indignantly.

"Yes. But you do not know the most terrible part of that man's misery. Listen. It seems that they ill-used him so atrociously that, at last, his firmness gave way, and he did let out some information. Poor soul, the flesh is weak, you know. What it was he did not tell me. There was a crushed spirit in that mangled body. Nothing I found to say could make him whole. When they let him out, he crept into that hole, and bore his remorse stoically. He would not go near anyone he knew. I would have sought assistance for him, but, indeed, where could I have gone looking for it? Where was I to look for anyone who had anything to spare or any power to help? The people living round us were all starving and drunken. They were the victims of the Ministry of Finances. Don't ask me how we lived. I couldn't tell you. It was like a miracle of wretchedness. I had nothing to sell, and I assure you my clothes were in such a state that it was impossible for me to go out in the daytime. I was indecent. I had to wait till it was dark before I ventured into the streets to beg for a crust of bread, or whatever I could get, to keep him and me alive. Often I got nothing, and then I would crawl back and lie on the floor by the side of his couch. Oh yes, I can sleep quite soundly on bare boards. That is nothing, and I am only mentioning it to you so that you should not think I am a sybarite. It was infinitely less killing than the task of sitting for hours at a table in a cold study to take the books of Peter Ivanovitch from dictation. But you shall see yourself what that is like, so I needn't say any more about it."

"It is by no means certain that I will ever take Peter Ivanovitch from dictation," said Miss Haldin.

"No!" cried the other incredulously. "Not certain? You mean to say that you have not made up your mind?"

When Miss Haldin assured her that there never had been any question of that between her and Peter Ivanovitch, the woman with the cat compressed her lips tightly for a moment.

"Oh, you will find yourself settled at the table before you know that you have made up your mind. Don't make a mistake, it is disenchanting to hear Peter Ivanovitch dictate, but at the same time there is a fascination about it. He is a man of genius. Your face is certain not to irritate him; you may perhaps even help his inspiration, make it easier for him to deliver his message. As I look at you, I feel certain that you are the kind of woman who is not likely to check the flow of his inspiration."

Miss Haldin thought it useless to protest against all these assumptions.

"But this man--this workman did he die under your care?" she said, after a short silence.

The dame de compagnie, listening up the stairs where now two voices were alternating with some animation, made no answer for a time. When the loud sounds of the discussion had sunk into an almost inaudible murmur, she turned to Miss Haldin.

"Yes, he died, but not, literally speaking, in my arms, as you might suppose. As a matter of fact, I was asleep when he breathed his last. So even now I cannot say I have seen anybody die. A few days before the end, some young men found us out in our extremity. They were revolutionists, as you might guess. He ought to have trusted in his political friends when he came out of prison. He had been liked and respected before, and nobody would have dreamed of reproaching him with his indiscretion before the police. Everybody knows how they go to work, and the strongest man has his moments of weakness before pain. Why, even hunger alone is enough to give one queer ideas as to what may be done. A doctor came, our lot was alleviated as far as physical comforts go, but otherwise he could not be consoled--poor man. I assure you, Miss Haldin, that he was very lovable, but I had not the strength to weep. I was nearly dead myself. But there were kind hearts to take care of me. A dress was found to clothe my nakedness. I tell you, I was not decent--and after a time the revolutionists placed me with a Jewish family going abroad, as governess. Of course I could teach the children, I finished the sixth class of the Lyceum; but the real object was, that I should carry some important papers across the frontier. I was entrusted with a packet which I carried next my heart. The gendarmes at the station did not suspect the governess of a Jewish family, busy looking after three children. I don't suppose those Hebrews knew what I had on me, for I had been introduced to them in a

very roundabout way by persons who did not belong to the revolutionary movement, and naturally I had been instructed to accept a very small salary. When we reached Germany I left that family and delivered my papers to a revolutionist in Stuttgart; after this I was employed in various ways. But you do not want to hear all that. I have never felt that I was very useful, but I live in hopes of seeing all the Ministries destroyed, finances and all. The greatest joy of my life has been to hear what your brother has done."

She directed her round eyes again to the sunshine outside, while the cat reposed within her folded arms in lordly beatitude and sphinx-like meditation.

"Yes! I rejoiced," she began again. "For me there is a heroic ring about the very name of Haldin. They must have been trembling with fear in their Ministries--all those men with fiendish hearts. Here I stand talking to you, and when I think of all the cruelties, oppressions, and injustices that are going on at this very moment, my head begins to swim. I have looked closely at what would seem inconceivable if one's own eyes had not to be trusted. I have looked at things that made me hate myself for my helplessness. I hated my hands that had no power, my voice that could not be heard, my very mind that would not become unhinged. Ah! I have seen things. And you?"

Miss Haldin was moved. She shook her head slightly.

"No, I have seen nothing for myself as yet," she murmured "We have always lived in the country. It was my brother's wish."

"It is a curious meeting--this--between you and me," continued the other. "Do you believe in chance, Miss Haldin? How could I have expected to see you, his sister, with my own eyes? Do you know that when the news came the revolutionaries here were as much surprised as pleased, every bit? No one seemed to know anything about your brother. Peter Ivanovitch himself had not foreseen that such a blow was going to be struck. I suppose your brother was simply inspired. I myself think that such deeds should be done by inspiration. It is a great privilege to have the inspiration and the opportunity. Did he resemble you at all? Don't you rejoice, Miss Haldin?"

"You must not expect too much from me," said Miss Haldin, repressing an inclination to cry which came over her suddenly. She succeeded, then added calmly, "I am not a heroic person!"

"You think you couldn't have done such a thing yourself perhaps?"

"I don't know. I must not even ask myself till I have lived a little longer, seen

more...."

The other moved her head appreciatively. The purring of the cat had a loud complacency in the empty hall. No sound of voices came from upstairs. Miss Haldin broke the silence.

"What is it precisely that you heard people say about my brother? You said that they were surprised. Yes, I supposed they were. Did it not seem strange to them that my brother should have failed to save himself after the most difficult part--that is, getting away from the spot--was over? Conspirators should understand these things well. There are reasons why I am very anxious to know how it is he failed to escape."

The dame de compagnie had advanced to the open hall-door. She glanced rapidly over her shoulder at Miss Haldin, who remained within the hall.

"Failed to escape," she repeated absently. "Didn't he make the sacrifice of his life? Wasn't he just simply inspired? Wasn't it an act of abnegation? Aren't you certain?"

"What I am certain of," said Miss Haldin, "is that it was not an act of despair. Have you not heard some opinion expressed here upon his miserable capture?"

The dame de compagnie mused for a while in the doorway.

"Did I hear? Of course, everything is discussed here. Has not all the world been speaking about your brother? For my part, the mere mention of his achievement plunges me into an envious ecstasy. Why should a man certain of immortality think of his life at all?"

She kept her back turned to Miss Haldin. Upstairs from behind a great dingy white and gold door, visible behind the balustrade of the first floor landing, a deep voice began to drone formally, as if reading over notes or something of the sort. It paused frequently, and then ceased altogether.

"I don't think I can stay any longer now," said Miss Haldin. "I may return another day."

She waited for the dame de compagnie to make room for her exit; but the woman appeared lost in the contemplation of sunshine and shadows, sharing between themselves the stillness of the deserted grounds. She concealed the view of the drive from Miss Haldin. Suddenly she said--

"It will not be necessary; here is Peter Ivanovitch himself coming up. But he is not alone. He is seldom alone now."

Hearing that Peter Ivanovitch was approaching, Miss Haldin was not so pleased as she might have been expected to be. Somehow she had lost the desire to see either the heroic captive or Madame de S--, and the reason of that shrinking which came upon her at the very last minute is accounted for by the feeling that those two people had not been treating the woman with the cat kindly.

"Would you please let me pass?" said Miss Haldin at last, touching lightly the shoulder of the dame de compagnie.

But the other, pressing the cat to her breast, did not budge.

"I know who is with him," she said, without even looking back.

More unaccountably than ever Miss Haldin felt a strong impulse to leave the house.

"Madame de S-- may be engaged for some time yet, and what I have got to say to Peter Ivanovitch is just a simple question which I might put to him when I meet him in the grounds on my way down. I really think I must go. I have been some time here, and I am anxious to get back to my mother. Will you let me pass, please?"

The dame de compagnie turned her head at last.

"I never supposed that you really wanted to see Madame de S--," she said, with unexpected insight. "Not for a moment." There was something confidential and mysterious in her tone. She passed through the door, with Miss Haldin following her, on to the terrace, and they descended side by side the moss-grown stone steps. There was no one to be seen on the part of the drive visible from the front of the house.

"They are hidden by the trees over there," explained Miss Haldin's new acquaintance, "but you shall see them directly. I don't know who that young man is to whom Peter Ivanovitch has taken such a fancy. He must be one of us, or he would not be admitted here when the others come. You know what I mean by the others. But I must say that he is not at all mystically inclined. I don't know that I have made him out yet. Naturally I am never for very long in the drawing-room. There is always something to do for me, though the establishment here is not so extensive as the villa on the Riviera. But still there are plenty of opportunities for me to make myself useful."

To the left, passing by the ivy-grown end of the stables, appeared Peter Ivanovitch and his companion. They walked very slowly, conversing with some animation. They stopped for a moment, and Peter Ivanovitch was seen to gesticulate, while the young man listened motionless, with his arms hanging down and his head bowed a little. He was dressed in a dark brown suit and a black hat. The round eyes of the dame de compagnie remained fixed on the two figures, which had resumed their leisurely approach.

"An extremely polite young man," she said. "You shall see what a bow he will make; and it won't altogether be so exceptional either. He bows in the same way when he meets me alone in the hall."

She moved on a few steps, with Miss Haldin by her side, and things happened just as she had foretold. The young man took off his hat, bowed and fell back, while Peter Ivanovitch advanced quicker, his black, thick arms extended heartily, and seized hold of both Miss Haldin's hands, shook them, and peered at her through his dark glasses.

"That's right, that's right!" he exclaimed twice, approvingly. "And so you have been looked after by...." He frowned slightly at the dame de compagnie, who was still nursing the cat. "I conclude Eleanor--Madame de S-- is engaged. I know she expected somebody to-day. So the newspaper man did turn up, eh? She is engaged?"

For all answer the dame de compagnie turned away her head.

"It is very unfortunate--very unfortunate indeed. I very much regret that you should have been...." He lowered suddenly his voice. "But what is it--surely you are not departing, Natalia Victorovna? You got bored waiting, didn't you?"

"Not in the least," Miss Haldin protested. "Only I have been here some time, and I am anxious to get back to my mother."

"The time seemed long, eh? I am afraid our worthy friend here" (Peter Ivanovitch suddenly jerked his head sideways towards his right shoulder and jerked it up again),--"our worthy friend here has not the art of shortening the moments of waiting. No, distinctly she has not the art; and in that respect good intentions alone count for nothing."

The dame de compagnie dropped her arms, and the cat found itself suddenly on the ground. It remained quite still after alighting, one hind leg stretched backwards. Miss Haldin was extremely indignant on behalf of the lady

companion.

"Believe me, Peter Ivanovitch, that the moments I have passed in the hall of this house have been not a little interesting, and very instructive too. They are memorable. I do not regret the waiting, but I see that the object of my call here can be attained without taking up Madame de S--'s time."

At this point I interrupted Miss Haldin. The above relation is founded on her narrative, which I have not so much dramatized as might be supposed. She had rendered, with extraordinary feeling and animation, the very accent almost of the disciple of the old apple-woman, the irreconcilable hater of Ministries, the voluntary servant of the poor. Miss Haldin's true and delicate humanity had been extremely shocked by the uncongenial fate of her new acquaintance, that lady companion, secretary, whatever she was. For my own part, I was pleased to discover in it one more obstacle to intimacy with Madame de S--. I had a positive abhorrence for the painted, bedizened, dead-faced, glassy-eyed Egeria of Peter Ivanovitch. I do not know what was her attitude to the unseen, but I know that in the affairs of this world she was avaricious, greedy, and unscrupulous. It was within my knowledge that she had been worsted in a sordid and desperate quarrel about money matters with the family of her late husband, the diplomatist. Some very august personages indeed (whom in her fury she had insisted upon scandalously involving in her affairs) had incurred her animosity. I find it perfectly easy to believe that she had come to within an ace of being spirited away, for reasons of state, into some discreet maison de sante--a madhouse of sorts, to be plain. It appears, however, that certain high-placed personages opposed it for reasons which....

But it's no use to go into details.

Wonder may be expressed at a man in the position of a teacher of languages knowing all this with such definiteness. A novelist says this and that of his personages, and if only he knows how to say it earnestly enough he may not be questioned upon the inventions of his brain in which his own belief is made sufficiently manifest by a telling phrase, a poetic image, the accent of emotion. Art is great! But I have no art, and not having invented Madame de S--, I feel bound to explain how I came to know so much about her.

My informant was the Russian wife of a friend of mine already mentioned, the professor of Lausanne University. It was from her that I learned the last fact of Madame de S--'s history, with which I intend to trouble my readers. She told me, speaking positively, as a person who trusts her sources, of the cause of Madame de S--'s flight from Russia, some years before. It was neither more nor less than this: that she became suspect to the police in connexion with the assassination of

the Emperor Alexander. The ground of this suspicion was either some unguarded expressions that escaped her in public, or some talk overheard in her salon. Overheard, we must believe, by some guest, perhaps a friend, who hastened to play the informer, I suppose. At any rate, the overheard matter seemed to imply her foreknowledge of that event, and I think she was wise in not waiting for the investigation of such a charge. Some of my readers may remember a little book from her pen, published in Paris, a mystically bad-tempered, declamatory, and frightfully disconnected piece of writing, in which she all but admits the foreknowledge, more than hints at its supernatural origin, and plainly suggests in venomous innuendoes that the guilt of the act was not with the terrorists, but with a palace intrigue. When I observed to my friend, the professor's wife, that the life of Madame de S--, with its unofficial diplomacy, its intrigues, lawsuits, favours, disgrace, expulsions, its atmosphere of scandal, occultism, and charlatanism, was more fit for the eighteenth century than for the conditions of our own time, she assented with a smile, but a moment after went on in a reflective tone: "Charlatanism?--yes, in a certain measure. Still, times are changed. There are forces now which were non-existent in the eighteenth century. I should not be surprised if she were more dangerous than an Englishman would be willing to believe. And what's more, she is looked upon as really dangerous by certain people--chez nous."

Chez nous in this connexion meant Russia in general, and the Russian political police in particular. The object of my digression from the straight course of Miss Haldin's relation (in my own words) of her visit to the Chateau Borel, was to bring forward that statement of my friend, the professor's wife. I wanted to bring it forward simply to make what I have to say presently of Mr. Razumov's presence in Geneva, a little more credible--for this is a Russian story for Western ears, which, as I have observed already, are not attuned to certain tones of cynicism and cruelty, of moral negation, and even of moral distress already silenced at our end of Europe. And this I state as my excuse for having left Miss Haldin standing, one of the little group of two women and two men who had come together below the terrace of the Chateau Borel.

The knowledge which I have just stated was in my mind when, as I have said, I interrupted Miss Haldin. I interrupted her with the cry of profound satisfaction--

"So you never saw Madame de S--, after all?"

Miss Haldin shook her head. It was very satisfactory to me. She had not seen Madame de S--! That was excellent, excellent! I welcomed the conviction that she would never know Madame de S-- now. I could not explain the reason of the conviction but by the knowledge that Miss Haldin was standing face to face with her brother's wonderful friend. I preferred him to Madame de S-- as the

companion and guide of that young girl, abandoned to her inexperience by the miserable end of her brother. But, at any rate, that life now ended had been sincere, and perhaps its thoughts might have been lofty, its moral sufferings profound, its last act a true sacrifice. It is not for us, the staid lovers calmed by the possession of a conquered liberty, to condemn without appeal the fierceness of thwarted desire.

I am not ashamed of the warmth of my regard for Miss Haldin. It was, it must be admitted, an unselfish sentiment, being its own reward. The late Victor Haldin--in the light of that sentiment--appeared to me not as a sinister conspirator, but as a pure enthusiast. I did not wish indeed to judge him, but the very fact that he did not escape, that fact which brought so much trouble to both his mother and his sister, spoke to me in his favour. Meantime, in my fear of seeing the girl surrender to the influence of the Chateau Borel revolutionary feminism, I was more than willing to put my trust in that friend of the late Victor Haldin. He was nothing but a name, you will say. Exactly! A name! And what's more, the only name; the only name to be found in the correspondence between brother and sister. The young man had turned up; they had come face to face, and, fortunately, without the direct interference of Madame de S--. What will come of it? what will she tell me presently? I was asking myself.

It was only natural that my thought should turn to the young man, the bearer of the only name uttered in all the dream-talk of a future to be brought about by a revolution. And my thought took the shape of asking myself why this young man had not called upon these ladies. He had been in Geneva for some days before Miss Haldin heard of him first in my presence from Peter Ivanovitch. I regretted that last's presence at their meeting. I would rather have had it happen somewhere out of his spectacled sight. But I supposed that, having both these young people there, he introduced them to each other.

I broke the silence by beginning a question on that point--

"I suppose Peter Ivanovitch...."

Miss Haldin gave vent to her indignation. Peter Ivanovitch directly he had got his answer from her had turned upon the dame de compagnie in a shameful manner.

"Turned upon her?" I wondered. "What about? For what reason?"

"It was unheard of; it was shameful," Miss Haldin pursued, with angry eyes. "Il lui a fait une scene--like this, before strangers. And for what? You would never guess. For some eggs.... Oh!"

I was astonished. "Eggs, did you say?"

"For Madame de S--. That lady observes a special diet, or something of the sort. It seems she complained the day before to Peter Ivanovitch that the eggs were not rightly prepared. Peter Ivanovitch suddenly remembered this against the poor woman, and flew out at her. It was most astonishing. I stood as if rooted."

"Do you mean to say that the great feminist allowed himself to be abusive to a woman?" I asked.

"Oh, not that! It was something you have no conception of. It was an odious performance. Imagine, he raised his hat to begin with. He made his voice soft and deprecatory. 'Ah! you are not kind to us--you will not deign to remember....' This sort of phrases, that sort of tone. The poor creature was terribly upset. Her eyes ran full of tears. She did not know where to look. I shouldn't wonder if she would have preferred abuse, or even a blow."

I did not remark that very possibly she was familiar with both on occasions when no one was by. Miss Haldin walked by my side, her head up in scornful and angry silence.

"Great men have their surprising peculiarities," I observed inanely. "Exactly like men who are not great. But that sort of thing cannot be kept up for ever. How did the great feminist wind up this very characteristic episode?"

Miss Haldin, without turning her face my way, told me that the end was brought about by the appearance of the interviewer, who had been closeted with Madame de S--.

He came up rapidly, unnoticed, lifted his hat slightly, and paused to say in French: "The Baroness has asked me, in case I met a lady on my way out, to desire her to come in at once."

After delivering this message, he hurried down the drive. The dame de compagnie flew towards the house, and Peter Ivanovitch followed her hastily, looking uneasy. In a moment Miss Haldin found herself alone with the young man, who undoubtedly must have been the new arrival from Russia. She wondered whether her brother's friend had not already guessed who she was.

I am in a position to say that, as a matter of fact, he had guessed. It is clear to me that Peter Ivanovitch, for some reason or other, had refrained from alluding to these ladies' presence in Geneva. But Razumov had guessed. The trustful girl! Every word uttered by Haldin lived in Razumov's memory. They were like

haunting shapes; they could not be exorcised. The most vivid amongst them was the mention of the sister. The girl had existed for him ever since. But he did not recognize her at once. Coming up with Peter Ivanovitch, he did observe her; their eyes had met, even. He had responded, as no one could help responding, to the harmonious charm of her whole person, its strength, its grace, its tranquil frankness--and then he had turned his gaze away. He said to himself that all this was not for him; the beauty of women and the friendship of men were not for him. He accepted that feeling with a purposeful sternness, and tried to pass on. It was only her outstretched hand which brought about the recognition. It stands recorded in the pages of his self-confession, that it nearly suffocated him physically with an emotional reaction of hate and dismay, as though her appearance had been a piece of accomplished treachery.

He faced about. The considerable elevation of the terrace concealed them from anyone lingering in the doorway of the house; and even from the upstairs windows they could not have been seen. Through the thickets run wild, and the trees of the gently sloping grounds, he had cold, placid glimpses of the lake. A moment of perfect privacy had been vouchsafed to them at this juncture. I wondered to myself what use they had made of that fortunate circumstance.

"Did you have time for more than a few words?" I asked.

That animation with which she had related to me the incidents of her visit to the Chateau Borel had left her completely. Strolling by my side, she looked straight before her; but I noticed a little colour on her cheek. She did not answer me.

After some little time I observed that they could not have hoped to remain forgotten for very long, unless the other two had discovered Madame de S--swooning with fatigue, perhaps, or in a state of morbid exaltation after the long interview. Either would require their devoted ministrations. I could depict to myself Peter Ivanovitch rushing busily out of the house again, bareheaded, perhaps, and on across the terrace with his swinging gait, the black skirts of the frock-coat floating clear of his stout light grey legs. I confess to having looked upon these young people as the quarry of the "heroic fugitive." I had the notion that they would not be allowed to escape capture. But of that I said nothing to Miss Haldin, only as she still remained uncommunicative, I pressed her a little.

"Well--but you can tell me at least your impression."

She turned her head to look at me, and turned away again.

"Impression?" she repeated slowly, almost dreamily; then in a quicker tone--

"He seems to be a man who has suffered more from his thoughts than from evil fortune."

"From his thoughts, you say?"

"And that is natural enough in a Russian," she took me up. "In a young Russian; so many of them are unfit for action, and yet unable to rest."

"And you think he is that sort of man?"

"No, I do not judge him. How could I, so suddenly? You asked for my impression--I explain my impression. I--I--don't know the world, nor yet the people in it; I have been too solitary--I am too young to trust my own opinions."

"Trust your instinct," I advised her. "Most women trust to that, and make no worse mistakes than men. In this case you have your brother's letter to help you."

She drew a deep breath like a light sigh. "Unstained, lofty, and solitary existences," she quoted as if to herself. But I caught the wistful murmur distinctly.

"High praise," I whispered to her.

"The highest possible."

"So high that, like the award of happiness, it is more fit to come only at the end of a life. But still no common or altogether unworthy personality could have suggested such a confident exaggeration of praise and..."

"Ah!" She interrupted me ardently. "And if you had only known the heart from which that judgment has come!"

She ceased on that note, and for a space I reflected on the character of the words which I perceived very well must tip the scale of the girl's feelings in that young man's favour. They had not the sound of a casual utterance. Vague they were to my Western mind and to my Western sentiment, but I could not forget that, standing by Miss Haldin's side, I was like a traveller in a strange country. It had also become clear to me that Miss Haldin was unwilling to enter into the details of the only material part of their visit to the Chateau Borel. But I was not hurt. Somehow I didn't feel it to be a want of confidence. It was some other difficulty--a difficulty I could not resent. And it was without the slightest resentment that I said--

"Very well. But on that high ground, which I will not dispute, you, like anyone else in such circumstances, you must have made for yourself a representation of that exceptional friend, a mental image of him, and--please tell me--you were not disappointed?"

"What do you mean? His personal appearance?"

"I don't mean precisely his good looks, or otherwise."

We turned at the end of the alley and made a few steps without looking at each other.

"His appearance is not ordinary," said Miss Haldin at last.

"No, I should have thought not--from the little you've said of your first impression. After all, one has to fall back on that word. Impression! What I mean is that something indescribable which is likely to mark a 'not ordinary' person."

I perceived that she was not listening. There was no mistaking her expression; and once more I had the sense of being out of it--not because of my age, which at any rate could draw inferences--but altogether out of it, on another plane whence I could only watch her from afar. And so ceasing to speak I watched her stepping out by my side.

"No," she exclaimed suddenly, "I could not have been disappointed with a man of such strong feeling."

"Aha! Strong feeling," I muttered, thinking to myself censoriously: like this, at once, all in a moment!

"What did you say?" inquired Miss Haldin innocently.

"Oh, nothing. I beg your pardon. Strong feeling. I am not surprised."

"And you don't know how abruptly I behaved to him!" she cried remorsefully.

I suppose I must have appeared surprised, for, looking at me with a still more heightened colour, she said she was ashamed to admit that she had not been sufficiently collected; she had failed to control her words and actions as the situation demanded. She lost the fortitude worthy of both the men, the dead and the living; the fortitude which should have been the note of the meeting of Victor Haldin's sister with Victor Haldin's only known friend. He was looking at her keenly, but said nothing, and she was--she confessed--painfully affected by his

want of comprehension. All she could say was: "You are Mr. Razumov." A slight frown passed over his forehead. After a short, watchful pause, he made a little bow of assent, and waited.

At the thought that she had before her the man so highly regarded by her brother, the man who had known his value, spoken to him, understood him, had listened to his confidences, perhaps had encouraged him--her lips trembled, her eyes ran full of tears; she put out her hand, made a step towards him impulsively, saying with an effort to restrain her emotion, "Can't you guess who I am?" He did not take the proffered hand. He even recoiled a pace, and Miss Haldin imagined that he was unpleasantly affected. Miss Haldin excused him, directing her displeasure at herself. She had behaved unworthily, like an emotional French girl. A manifestation of that kind could not be welcomed by a man of stern, self-contained character.

He must have been stern indeed, or perhaps very timid with women, not to respond in a more human way to the advances of a girl like Nathalie Haldin--I thought to myself. Those lofty and solitary existences (I remembered the words suddenly) make a young man shy and an old man savage--often.

"Well," I encouraged Miss Haldin to proceed.

She was still very dissatisfied with herself.

"I went from bad to worse," she said, with an air of discouragement very foreign to her. "I did everything foolish except actually bursting into tears. I am thankful to say I did not do that. But I was unable to speak for quite a long time."

She had stood before him, speechless, swallowing her sobs, and when she managed at last to utter something, it was only her brother's name--"Victor--Victor Haldin!" she gasped out, and again her voice failed her.

"Of course," she commented to me, "this distressed him. He was quite overcome. I have told you my opinion that he is a man of deep feeling--it is impossible to doubt it. You should have seen his face. He positively reeled. He leaned against the wall of the terrace. Their friendship must have been the very brotherhood of souls! I was grateful to him for that emotion, which made me feel less ashamed of my own lack of self-control. Of course I had regained the power of speech at once, almost. All this lasted not more than a few seconds. 'I am his sister,' I said. 'Maybe you have heard of me.'"

"And had he?" I interrupted.

"I don't know. How could it have been otherwise? And yet.... But what does that matter? I stood there before him, near enough to be touched and surely not looking like an impostor. All I know is, that he put out both his hands then to me, I may say flung them out at me, with the greatest readiness and warmth, and that I seized and pressed them, feeling that I was finding again a little of what I thought was lost to me for ever, with the loss of my brother--some of that hope, inspiration, and support which I used to get from my dear dead...."

I understood quite well what she meant. We strolled on slowly. I refrained from looking at her. And it was as if answering my own thoughts that I murmured--

"No doubt it was a great friendship--as you say. And that young man ended by welcoming your name, so to speak, with both hands. After that, of course, you would understand each other. Yes, you would understand each other quickly."

It was a moment before I heard her voice.

"Mr. Razumov seems to be a man of few words. A reserved man--even when he is strongly moved."

Unable to forget---or even to forgive--the bass-toned expansiveness of Peter Ivanovitch, the Archpatron of revolutionary parties, I said that I took this for a favourable trait of character. It was associated with sincerity--in my mind.

"And, besides, we had not much time," she added.

"No, you would not have, of course." My suspicion and even dread of the feminist and his Egeria was so ineradicable that I could not help asking with real anxiety, which I made smiling--

"But you escaped all right?"

She understood me, and smiled too, at my uneasiness.

"Oh yes! I escaped, if you like to call it that. I walked away quickly. There was no need to run. I am neither frightened nor yet fascinated, like that poor woman who received me so strangely."

"And Mr.--Mr. Razumov...?"

"He remained there, of course. I suppose he went into the house after I left him. You remember that he came here strongly recommended to Peter Ivanovitch--possibly entrusted with important messages for him."

"Ah yes! From that priest who..."

"Father Zosim--yes. Or from others, perhaps."

"You left him, then. But have you seen him since, may I ask?"

For some time Miss Haldin made no answer to this very direct question, then--

"I have been expecting to see him here to-day," she said quietly.

"You have! Do you meet, then, in this garden? In that case I had better leave you at once."

"No, why leave me? And we don't meet in this garden. I have not seen Mr. Razumov since that first time. Not once. But I have been expecting him...."

She paused. I wondered to myself why that young revolutionist should show so little alacrity.

"Before we parted I told Mr. Razumov that I walked here for an hour every day at this time. I could not explain to him then why I did not ask him to come and see us at once. Mother must be prepared for such a visit. And then, you see, I do not know myself what Mr. Razumov has to tell us. He, too, must be told first how it is with poor mother. All these thoughts flashed through my mind at once. So I told him hurriedly that there was a reason why I could not ask him to see us at home, but that I was in the habit of walking here.... This is a public place, but there are never many people about at this hour. I thought it would do very well. And it is so near our apartments. I don't like to be very far away from mother. Our servant knows where I am in case I should be wanted suddenly."

"Yes. It is very convenient from that point of view," I agreed.

In fact, I thought the Bastions a very convenient place, since the girl did not think it prudent as yet to introduce that young man to her mother. It was here, then, I thought, looking round at that plot of ground of deplorable banality, that their acquaintance will begin and go on in the exchange of generous indignations and of extreme sentiments, too poignant, perhaps, for a non-Russian mind to conceive. I saw these two, escaped out of four score of millions of human beings ground between the upper and nether millstone, walking under these trees, their young heads close together. Yes, an excellent place to stroll and talk in. It even occurred to me, while we turned once more away from the wide iron gates, that when tired they would have plenty of accommodation to rest themselves. There

was a quantity of tables and chairs displayed between the restaurant chalet and the bandstand, a whole raft of painted deals spread out under the trees. In the very middle of it I observed a solitary Swiss couple, whose fate was made secure from the cradle to the grave by the perfected mechanism of democratic institutions in a republic that could almost be held in the palm of ones hand. The man, colourlessly uncouth, was drinking beer out of a glittering glass; the woman, rustic and placid, leaning back in the rough chair, gazed idly around.

There is little logic to be expected on this earth, not only in the matter of thought, but also of sentiment. I was surprised to discover myself displeased with that unknown young man. A week had gone by since they met. Was he callous, or shy, or very stupid? I could not make it out.

"Do you think," I asked Miss Haldin, after we had gone some distance up the great alley, "that Mr Razumov understood your intention?"

"Understood what I meant?" she wondered. "He was greatly moved. That I know! In my own agitation I could see it. But I spoke distinctly. He heard me; he seemed, indeed, to hang on my words..."

Unconsciously she had hastened her pace. Her utterance, too, became quicker.

I waited a little before I observed thoughtfully--

"And yet he allowed all these days to pass."

"How can we tell what work he may have to do here? He is not an idler travelling for his pleasure. His time may not be his own--nor yet his thoughts, perhaps."

She slowed her pace suddenly, and in a lowered voice added--

"Or his very life"--then paused and stood still "For all I know, he may have had to leave Geneva the very day he saw me."

"Without telling you!" I exclaimed incredulously.

"I did not give him time. I left him quite abruptly. I behaved emotionally to the end. I am sorry for it. Even if I had given him the opportunity he would have been justified in taking me for a person not to be trusted. An emotional, tearful girl is not a person to confide in. But even if he has left Geneva for a time, I am confident that we shall meet again."

"Ah! you are confident.... I dare say. But on what ground?"

"Because I've told him that I was in great need of some one, a fellow-countryman, a fellow-believer, to whom I could give my confidence in a certain matter."

"I see. I don't ask you what answer he made. I confess that this is good ground for your belief in Mr. Razumov's appearance before long. But he has not turned up to-day?"

"No," she said quietly, "not to-day;" and we stood for a time in silence, like people that have nothing more to say to each other and let their thoughts run widely asunder before their bodies go off their different ways. Miss Haldin glanced at the watch on her wrist and made a brusque movement. She had already overstayed her time, it seemed.

"I don't like to be away from mother," she murmured, shaking her head. "It is not that she is very ill now. But somehow when I am not with her I am more uneasy than ever."

Mrs. Haldin had not made the slightest allusion to her son for the last week or more. She sat, as usual, in the arm-chair by the window, looking out silently on that hopeless stretch of the Boulevard des Philosophes. When she spoke, a few lifeless words, it was of indifferent, trivial things.

"For anyone who knows what the poor soul is thinking of, that sort of talk is more painful than her silence. But that is bad too; I can hardly endure it, and I dare not break it."

Miss Haldin sighed, refastening a button of her glove which had come undone. I knew well enough what a hard time of it she must be having. The stress, its causes, its nature, would have undermined the health of an Occidental girl; but Russian natures have a singular power of resistance against the unfair strains of life. Straight and supple, with a short jacket open on her black dress, which made her figure appear more slender and her fresh but colourless face more pale, she compelled my wonder and admiration.

"I can't stay a moment longer. You ought to come soon to see mother. You know she calls you 'L'ami.' It is an excellent name, and she really means it. And now au revoir; I must run."

She glanced vaguely down the broad walk--the hand she put out to me eluded my grasp by an unexpected upward movement, and rested upon my shoulder. Her red lips were slightly parted, not in a smile, however, but expressing a sort of startled pleasure. She gazed towards the gates and said quickly, with a gasp--

"There! I knew it. Here he comes!"

I understood that she must mean Mr. Razumov. A young man was walking up the alley, without haste. His clothes were some dull shade of brown, and he carried a stick. When my eyes first fell on him, his head was hanging on his breast as if in deep thought. While I was looking at him he raised it sharply, and at once stopped. I am certain he did, but that pause was nothing more perceptible than a faltering check in his gait, instantaneously overcome. Then he continued his approach, looking at us steadily. Miss Haldin signed to me to remain, and advanced a step or two to meet him.

I turned my head away from that meeting, and did not look at them again till I heard Miss Haldin's voice uttering his name in the way of introduction. Mr. Razumov was informed, in a warm, low tone, that, besides being a wonderful teacher, I was a great support "in our sorrow and distress."

Of course I was described also as an Englishman. Miss Haldin spoke rapidly, faster than I have ever heard her speak, and that by contrast made the quietness of her eyes more expressive.

"I have given him my confidence," she added, looking all the time at Mr. Razumov. That young man did, indeed, rest his gaze on Miss Haldin, but certainly did not look into her eyes which were so ready for him. Afterwards he glanced backwards and forwards at us both, while the faint commencement of a forced smile, followed by the suspicion of a frown, vanished one after another; I detected them, though neither could have been noticed by a person less intensely bent upon divining him than myself. I don't know what Nathalie Haldin had observed, but my attention seized the very shades of these movements. The attempted smile was given up, the incipient frown was checked, and smoothed so that there should be no sign; but I imagined him exclaiming inwardly--

"Her confidence! To this elderly person--this foreigner!"

I imagined this because he looked foreign enough to me. I was upon the whole favourably impressed. He had an air of intelligence and even some distinction quite above the average of the students and other inhabitants of the Petite Russie. His features were more decided than in the generality of Russian faces; he had a line of the jaw, a clean-shaven, sallow cheek; his nose was a ridge, and not a mere protuberance. He wore the hat well down over his eyes, his dark hair curled low on the nape of his neck; in the ill-fitting brown clothes there were sturdy limbs; a slight stoop brought out a satisfactory breadth of shoulders. Upon the whole I was not disappointed. Studious--robust--shy.

Before Miss Haldin had ceased speaking I felt the grip of his hand on mine, a muscular, firm grip, but unexpectedly hot and dry. Not a word or even a mutter assisted this short and arid handshake.

I intended to leave them to themselves, but Miss Haldin touched me lightly on the forearm with a significant contact, conveying a distinct wish. Let him smile who likes, but I was only too ready to stay near Nathalie Haldin, and I am not ashamed to say that it was no smiling matter to me. I stayed, not as a youth would have stayed, uplifted, as it were poised in the air, but soberly, with my feet on the ground and my mind trying to penetrate her intention. She had turned to Razumov.

"Well. This is the place. Yes, it is here that I meant you to come. I have been walking every day.... Don't excuse yourself--I understand. I am grateful to you for coming to-day, but all the same I cannot stay now. It is impossible. I must hurry off home. Yes, even with you standing before me, I must run off. I have been too long away.... You know how it is?"

These last words were addressed to me. I noticed that Mr. Razumov passed the tip of his tongue over his lips just as a parched, feverish man might do. He took her hand in its black glove, which closed on his, and held it--detained it quite visibly to me against a drawing-back movement.

"Thank you once more for--for understanding me," she went on warmly. He interrupted her with a certain effect of roughness. I didn't like him speaking to this frank creature so much from under the brim of his hat, as it were. And he produced a faint, rasping voice quite like a man with a parched throat.

"What is there to thank me for? Understand you?... How did I understand you?... You had better know that I understand nothing. I was aware that you wanted to see me in this garden. I could not come before. I was hindered. And even to-day, you see...late."

She still held his hand.

"I can, at any rate, thank you for not dismissing me from your mind as a weak, emotional girl. No doubt I want sustaining. I am very ignorant. But I can be trusted. Indeed I can!"

"You are ignorant," he repeated thoughtfully. He had raised his head, and was looking straight into her face now, while she held his hand. They stood like this for a long moment. She released his hand.

"Yes. You did come late. It was good of you to come on the chance of me having loitered beyond my time. I was talking with this good friend here. I was talking of you. Yes, Kirylo Sidorovitch, of you. He was with me when I first heard of your being here in Geneva. He can tell you what comfort it was to my bewildered spirit to hear that news. He knew I meant to seek you out. It was the only object of my accepting the invitation of Peter Ivanovitch....

"Peter Ivanovitch talked to you of me," he interrupted, in that wavering, hoarse voice which suggested a horribly dry throat.

"Very little. Just told me your name, and that you had arrived here. Why should I have asked for more? What could he have told me that I did not know already from my brother's letter? Three lines! And how much they meant to me! I will show them to you one day, Kirylo Sidorovitch. But now I must go. The first talk between us cannot be a matter of five minutes, so we had better not begin...."

I had been standing a little aside, seeing them both in profile. At that moment it occurred to me that Mr. Razumov's face was older than his age.

"If mother"--the girl had turned suddenly to me, "were to wake up in my absence (so much longer than usual) she would perhaps question me. She seems to miss me more, you know, of late. She would want to know what delayed me--and, you see, it would be painful for me to dissemble before her."

I understood the point very well. For the same reason she checked what seemed to be on Mr. Razumov's part a movement to accompany her.

"No! No! I go alone, but meet me here as soon as possible." Then to me in a lower, significant tone--

"Mother may be sitting at the window at this moment, looking down the street. She must not know anything of Mr. Razumov's presence here till--till something is arranged." She paused before she added a little louder, but still speaking to me, "Mr. Razumov does not quite understand my difficulty, but you know what it is."

V

With a quick inclination of the head for us both, and an earnest, friendly glance at the young man, Miss Haldin left us covering our heads and looking after her straight, supple figure receding rapidly. Her walk was not that hybrid and uncertain gliding affected by some women, but a frank, strong, healthy movement forward. Rapidly she increased the distance--disappeared with suddenness at last. I discovered only then that Mr. Razumov, after ramming his hat well over his brow, was looking me over from head to foot. I dare say I was a very unexpected fact for that young Russian to stumble upon. I caught in his physiognomy, in his whole bearing, an expression compounded of curiosity and scorn, tempered by alarm--as though he had been holding his breath while I was not looking. But his eyes met mine with a gaze direct enough. I saw then for the first time that they were of a clear brown colour and fringed with thick black eyelashes. They were the youngest feature of his face. Not at all unpleasant eyes. He swayed slightly, leaning on his stick and generally hung in the wind. It flashed upon me that in leaving us together Miss Haldin had an intention--that something was entrusted to me, since, by a mere accident I had been found at hand. On this assumed ground I put all possible friendliness into my manner. I cast about for some right thing to say, and suddenly in Miss Haldin's last words I perceived the clue to the nature of my mission.

"No," I said gravely, if with a smile, "you cannot be expected to understand."

His clean-shaven lip quivered ever so little before he said, as if wickedly amused--

"But haven't you heard just now? I was thanked by that young lady for understanding so well."

I looked at him rather hard. Was there a hidden and inexplicable sneer in this retort? No. It was not that. It might have been resentment. Yes. But what had he to resent? He looked as though he had not slept very well of late. I could almost feel on me the weight of his unrefreshed, motionless stare, the stare of a man who lies unwinking in the dark, angrily passive in the toils of disastrous thoughts. Now, when I know how true it was, I can honestly affirm that this was the effect he produced on me. It was painful in a curiously indefinite way--for, of course, the definition comes to me now while I sit writing in the fullness of my knowledge. But this is what the effect was at that time of absolute ignorance. This new sort of uneasiness which he seemed to be forcing upon me I attempted to put down by assuming a conversational, easy familiarity.

"That extremely charming and essentially admirable young girl (I am--as you see--old enough to be frank in my expressions) was referring to her own feelings.

Surely you must have understood that much?"

He made such a brusque movement that he even tottered a little.

"Must understand this! Not expected to understand that! I may have other things to do. And the girl is charming and admirable. Well--and if she is! I suppose I can see that for myself."

This sally would have been insulting if his voice had not been practically extinct, dried up in his throat; and the rustling effort of his speech too painful to give real offence.

I remained silent, checked between the obvious fact and the subtle impression. It was open to me to leave him there and then; but the sense of having been entrusted with a mission, the suggestion of Miss Haldin's last glance, was strong upon me. After a moment of reflection I said--

"Shall we walk together a little?"

He shrugged his shoulders so violently that he tottered again. I saw it out of the corner of my eye as I moved on, with him at my elbow. He had fallen back a little and was practically out of my sight, unless I turned my head to look at him. I did not wish to indispose him still further by an appearance of marked curiosity. It might have been distasteful to such a young and secret refugee from under the pestilential shadow hiding the true, kindly face of his land. And the shadow, the attendant of his countrymen, stretching across the middle of Europe, was lying on him too, darkening his figure to my mental vision. "Without doubt," I said to myself, "he seems a sombre, even a desperate revolutionist; but he is young, he may be unselfish and humane, capable of compassion, of...."

I heard him clear gratingly his parched throat, and became all attention.

"This is beyond everything," were his first words. "It is beyond everything! I find you here, for no reason that I can understand, in possession of something I cannot be expected to understand! A confidant! A foreigner! Talking about an admirable Russian girl. Is the admirable girl a fool, I begin to wonder? What are you at? What is your object?"

He was barely audible, as if his throat had no more resonance than a dry rag, a piece of tinder. It was so pitiful that I found it extremely easy to control my indignation.

"When you have lived a little longer, Mr. Razumov, you will discover that no

woman is an absolute fool. I am not a feminist, like that illustrious author, Peter Ivanovitch, who, to say the truth, is not a little suspect to me...."

He interrupted me, in a surprising note of whispering astonishment.

"Suspect to you! Peter Ivanovitch suspect to you! To you!..."

"Yes, in a certain aspect he is," I said, dismissing my remark lightly. "As I was saying, Mr. Razumov, when you have lived long enough, you will learn to discriminate between the noble trustfulness of a nature foreign to every meanness and the flattered credulity of some women; though even the credulous, silly as they may be, unhappy as they are sure to be, are never absolute fools. It is my belief that no woman is ever completely deceived. Those that are lost leap into the abyss with their eyes open, if all the truth were known."

"Upon my word," he cried at my elbow, "what is it to me whether women are fools or lunatics? I really don't care what you think of them. I--I am not interested in them. I let them be. I am not a young man in a novel. How do you know that I want to learn anything about women?... What is the meaning of all this?"

"The object, you mean, of this conversation, which I admit I have forced upon you in a measure."

"Forced! Object!" he repeated, still keeping half a pace or so behind me. "You wanted to talk about women, apparently. That's a subject. But I don't care for it. I have never.... In fact, I have had other subjects to think about."

"I am concerned here with one woman only--a young girl--the sister of your dead friend--Miss Haldin. Surely you can think a little of her. What I meant from the first was that there is a situation which you cannot be expected to understand."

I listened to his unsteady footfalls by my side for the space of several strides.

"I think that it may prepare the ground for your next interview with Miss Haldin if I tell you of it. I imagine that she might have had something of the kind in her mind when she left us together. I believe myself authorized to speak. The peculiar situation I have alluded to has arisen in the first grief and distress of Victor Haldin's execution. There was something peculiar in the circumstances of his arrest. You no doubt know the whole truth...."

I felt my arm seized above the elbow, and next instant found myself swung so as to face Mr. Razumov.

"You spring up from the ground before me with this talk. Who the devil are you? This is not to be borne! Why! What for? What do you know what is or is not peculiar? What have you to do with any confounded circumstances, or with anything that happens in Russia, anyway?"

He leaned on his stick with his other hand, heavily; and when he let go my arm, I was certain in my mind that he was hardly able to keep on his feet.

"Let us sit down at one of these vacant tables," I proposed, disregarding this display of unexpectedly profound emotion. It was not without its effect on me, I confess. I was sorry for him.

"What tables? What are you talking about? Oh--the empty tables? The tables there. Certainly. I will sit at one of the empty tables."

I led him away from the path to the very centre of the raft of deals before the chalet. The Swiss couple were gone by that time. We were alone on the raft, so to speak. Mr. Razumov dropped into a chair, let fall his stick, and propped on his elbows, his head between his hands, stared at me persistently, openly, and continuously, while I signalled the waiter and ordered some beer. I could not quarrel with this silent inspection very well, because, truth to tell, I felt somewhat guilty of having been sprung on him with some abruptness--of having "sprung from the ground," as he expressed it.

While waiting to be served I mentioned that, born from parents settled in St. Petersburg, I had acquired the language as a child. The town I did not remember, having left it for good as a boy of nine, but in later years I had renewed my acquaintance with the language. He listened, without as much as moving his eyes the least little bit. He had to change his position when the beer came, and the instant draining of his glass revived him. He leaned back in his chair and, folding his arms across his chest, continued to stare at me squarely. It occurred to me that his clean-shaven, almost swarthy face was really of the very mobile sort, and that the absolute stillness of it was the acquired habit of a revolutionist, of a conspirator everlastingly on his guard against self-betrayal in a world of secret spies.

"But you are an Englishman--a teacher of English literature," he murmured, in a voice that was no longer issuing from a parched throat. "I have heard of you. People told me you have lived here for years."

"Quite true. More than twenty years. And I have been assisting Miss Haldin with her English studies."

"You have been reading English poetry with her," he said, immovable now, like another man altogether, a complete stranger to the man of the heavy and uncertain footfalls a little while ago--at my elbow.

"Yes, English poetry," I said. "But the trouble of which I speak was caused by an English newspaper."

He continued to stare at me. I don't think he was aware that the story of the midnight arrest had been ferreted out by an English journalist and given to the world. When I explained this to him he muttered contemptuously, "It may have been altogether a lie."

"I should think you are the best judge of that," I retorted, a little disconcerted. "I must confess that to me it looks to be true in the main."

"How can you tell truth from lies?" he queried in his new, immovable manner.

"I don't know how you do it in Russia," I began, rather nettled by his attitude. He interrupted me.

"In Russia, and in general everywhere--in a newspaper, for instance. The colour of the ink and the shapes of the letters are the same."

"Well, there are other trifles one can go by. The character of the publication, the general verisimilitude of the news, the consideration of the motive, and so on. I don't trust blindly the accuracy of special correspondents--but why should this one have gone to the trouble of concocting a circumstantial falsehood on a matter of no importance to the world?"

"That's what it is," he grumbled. "What's going on with us is of no importance--a mere sensational story to amuse the readers of the papers--the superior contemptuous Europe. It is hateful to think of. But let them wait a bit!"

He broke off on this sort of threat addressed to the western world. Disregarding the anger in his stare, I pointed out that whether the journalist was well- or ill-informed, the concern of the friends of these ladies was with the effect the few lines of print in question had produced--the effect alone. And surely he must be counted as one of the friends--if only for the sake of his late comrade and intimate fellow-revolutionist. At that point I thought he was going to speak vehemently; but he only astounded me by the convulsive start of his whole body. He restrained himself, folded his loosened arms tighter across his chest, and sat back with a smile in which there was a twitch of scorn and malice.

"Yes, a comrade and an intimate.... Very well," he said.

"I ventured to speak to you on that assumption. And I cannot be mistaken. I was present when Peter Ivanovitch announced your arrival here to Miss Haldin, and I saw her relief and thankfulness when your name was mentioned. Afterwards she showed me her brother's letter, and read out the few words in which he alludes to you. What else but a friend could you have been?"

"Obviously. That's perfectly well known. A friend. Quite correct.... Go on. You were talking of some effect."

I said to myself: "He puts on the callousness of a stern revolutionist, the insensibility to common emotions of a man devoted to a destructive idea. He is young, and his sincerity assumes a pose before a stranger, a foreigner, an old man. Youth must assert itself...." As concisely as possible I exposed to him the state of mind poor Mrs. Haldin had been thrown into by the news of her son's untimely end.

He listened--I felt it--with profound attention. His level stare deflected gradually downwards, left my face, and rested at last on the ground at his feet.

"You can enter into the sister's feelings. As you said, I have only read a little English poetry with her, and I won't make myself ridiculous in your eyes by trying to speak of her. But you have seen her. She is one of these rare human beings that do not want explaining. At least I think so. They had only that son, that brother, for a link with the wider world, with the future. The very groundwork of active existence for Nathalie Haldin is gone with him. Can you wonder then that she turns with eagerness to the only man her brother mentions in his letters. Your name is a sort of legacy."

"What could he have written of me?" he cried, in a low, exasperated tone.

"Only a few words. It is not for me to repeat them to you, Mr. Razumov; but you may believe my assertion that these words are forcible enough to make both his mother and his sister believe implicitly in the worth of your judgment and in the truth of anything you may have to say to them. It's impossible for you now to pass them by like strangers."

I paused, and for a moment sat listening to the footsteps of the few people passing up and down the broad central walk. While I was speaking his head had sunk upon his breast above his folded arms. He raised it sharply.

"Must I go then and lie to that old woman!"

It was not anger; it was something else, something more poignant, and not so simple. I was aware of it sympathetically, while I was profoundly concerned at the nature of that exclamation.

"Dear me! Won't the truth do, then? I hoped you could have told them something consoling. I am thinking of the poor mother now. Your Russia is a cruel country."

He moved a little in his chair.

"Yes," I repeated. "I thought you would have had something authentic to tell."

The twitching of his lips before he spoke was curious.

"What if it is not worth telling?"

"Not worth--from what point of view? I don't understand."

"From every point of view."

I spoke with some asperity.

"I should think that anything which could explain the circumstances of that midnight arrest...."

"Reported by a journalist for the amusement of the civilized Europe," he broke in scornfully.

"Yes, reported.... But aren't they true? I can't make out your attitude in this? Either the man is a hero to you, or..."

He approached his face with fiercely distended nostrils close to mine so suddenly that I had the greatest difficulty in not starting back.

"You ask me! I suppose it amuses you, all this. Look here! I am a worker. I studied. Yes, I studied very hard. There is intelligence here." (He tapped his forehead with his finger-tips.) "Don't you think a Russian may have sane ambitions? Yes--I had even prospects. Certainly! I had. And now you see me here, abroad, everything gone, lost, sacrificed. You see me here--and you ask! You see me, don't you?--sitting before you."

He threw himself back violently. I kept outwardly calm.

"Yes, I see you here; and I assume you are here on account of the Haldin affair?"

His manner changed.

"You call it the Haldin affair--do you?" he observed indifferently.

"I have no right to ask you anything," I said. "I wouldn't presume. But in that case the mother and the sister of him who must be a hero in your eyes cannot be indifferent to you. The girl is a frank and generous creature, having the noblest--well--illusions. You will tell her nothing--or you will tell her everything. But speaking now of the object with which I've approached you first, we have to deal with the morbid state of the mother. Perhaps something could be invented under your authority as a cure for a distracted and suffering soul filled with maternal affection."

His air of weary indifference was accentuated, I could not help thinking, wilfully.

"Oh yes. Something might," he mumbled carelessly.

He put his hand over his mouth to conceal a yawn. When he uncovered his lips they were smiling faintly.

"Pardon me. This has been a long conversation, and I have not had much sleep the last two nights."

This unexpected, somewhat insolent sort of apology had the merit of being perfectly true. He had had no nightly rest to speak of since that day when, in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, the sister of Victor Haldin had appeared before him. The perplexities and the complex terrors--I may say--of this sleeplessness are recorded in the document I was to see later--the document which is the main source of this narrative. At the moment he looked to me convincingly tired, gone slack all over, like a man who has passed through some sort of crisis.

"I have had a lot of urgent writing to do," he added.

I rose from my chair at once, and he followed my example, without haste, a little heavily.

"I must apologize for detaining you so long," I said.

"Why apologize? One can't very well go to bed before night. And you did not detain me. I could have left you at any time."

I had not stayed with him to be offended.

"I am glad you have been sufficiently interested," I said calmly. "No merit of mine, though--the commonest sort of regard for the mother of your friend was enough.... As to Miss Haldin herself, she at one time was disposed to think that her brother had been betrayed to the police in some way."

To my great surprise Mr. Razumov sat down again suddenly. I stared at him, and I must say that he returned my stare without winking for quite a considerable time.

"In some way," he mumbled, as if he had not understood or could not believe his ears.

"Some unforeseen event, a sheer accident might have done that," I went on. "Or, as she characteristically put it to me, the folly or weakness of some unhappy fellow-revolutionist."

"Folly or weakness," he repeated bitterly.

"She is a very generous creature," I observed after a time. The man admired by Victor Haldin fixed his eyes on the ground. I turned away and moved off, apparently unnoticed by him. I nourished no resentment of the moody brusqueness with which he had treated me. The sentiment I was carrying away from that conversation was that of hopelessness. Before I had got fairly clear of the raft of chairs and tables he had rejoined me.

"H'm, yes!" I heard him at my elbow again. "But what do you think?"

I did not look round even.

"I think that you people are under a curse."

He made no sound. It was only on the pavement outside the gate that I heard him again.

"I should like to walk with you a little."

After all, I preferred this enigmatical young man to his celebrated compatriot, the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I saw no reason for being particularly gracious.

"I am going now to the railway station, by the shortest way from here, to meet a friend from England," I said, for all answer to his unexpected proposal. I hoped

that something informing could come of it. As we stood on the curbstone waiting for a tramcar to pass, he remarked gloomily--

"I like what you said just now."

"Do you?"

We stepped off the pavement together.

"The great problem," he went on, "is to understand thoroughly the nature of the curse."

"That's not very difficult, I think."

"I think so too," he agreed with me, and his readiness, strangely enough, did not make him less enigmatical in the least.

"A curse is an evil spell," I tried him again. "And the important, the great problem, is to find the means to break it."

"Yes. To find the means."

That was also an assent, but he seemed to be thinking of something else. We had crossed diagonally the open space before the theatre, and began to descend a broad, sparely frequented street in the direction of one of the smaller bridges. He kept on by my side without speaking for a long time.

"You are not thinking of leaving Geneva soon?" I asked.

He was silent for so long that I began to think I had been indiscreet, and should get no answer at all. Yet on looking at him I almost believed that my question had caused him something in the nature of positive anguish. I detected it mainly in the clasping of his hands, in which he put a great force stealthily. Once, however, he had overcome that sort of agonizing hesitation sufficiently to tell me that he had no such intention, he became rather communicative--at least relatively to the former off-hand curtness of his speeches. The tone, too, was more amiable. He informed me that he intended to study and also to write. He went even so far as to tell me he had been to Stuttgart. Stuttgart, I was aware, was one of the revolutionary centres. The directing committee of one of the Russian parties (I can't tell now which) was located in that town. It was there that he got into touch with the active work of the revolutionists outside Russia.

"I have never been abroad before," he explained, in a rather inanimate voice now.

Then, after a slight hesitation, altogether different from the agonizing irresolution my first simple question "whether he meant to stay in Geneva" had aroused, he made me an unexpected confidence--

"The fact is, I have received a sort of mission from them."

"Which will keep you here in Geneva?"

"Yes. Here. In this odious...."

I was satisfied with my faculty for putting two and two together when I drew the inference that the mission had something to do with the person of the great Peter Ivanovitch. But I kept that surmise to myself naturally, and Mr. Razumov said nothing more for some considerable time. It was only when we were nearly on the bridge we had been making for that he opened his lips again, abruptly--

"Could I see that precious article anywhere?"

I had to think for a moment before I saw what he was referring to.

"It has been reproduced in parts by the Press here. There are files to be seen in various places. My copy of the English newspaper I have left with Miss Haldin, I remember, on the day after it reached me. I was sufficiently worried by seeing it lying on a table by the side of the poor mother's chair for weeks. Then it disappeared. It was a relief, I assure you."

He had stopped short.

"I trust," I continued, "that you will find time to see these ladies fairly often--that you will make time."

He stared at me so queerly that I hardly know how to define his aspect. I could not understand it in this connexion at all. What ailed him? I asked myself. What strange thought had come into his head? What vision of all the horrors that can be seen in his hopeless country had come suddenly to haunt his brain? If it were anything connected with the fate of Victor Haldin, then I hoped earnestly he would keep it to himself for ever. I was, to speak plainly, so shocked that I tried to conceal my impression by--Heaven forgive me--a smile and the assumption of a light manner.

"Surely," I exclaimed, "that needn't cost you a great effort."

He turned away from me and leaned over the parapet of the bridge. For a moment

I waited, looking at his back. And yet, I assure you, I was not anxious just then to look at his face again. He did not move at all. He did not mean to move. I walked on slowly on my way towards the station, and at the end of the bridge I glanced over my shoulder. No, he had not moved. He hung well over the parapet, as if captivated by the smooth rush of the blue water under the arch. The current there is swift, extremely swift; it makes some people dizzy; I myself can never look at it for any length of time without experiencing a dread of being suddenly snatched away by its destructive force. Some brains cannot resist the suggestion of irresistible power and of headlong motion.

It apparently had a charm for Mr. Razumov. I left him hanging far over the parapet of the bridge. The way he had behaved to me could not be put down to mere boorishness. There was something else under his scorn and impatience. Perhaps, I thought, with sudden approach to hidden truth, it was the same thing which had kept him over a week, nearly ten days indeed, from coming near Miss Haldin. But what it was I could not tell.