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It was nearly a fortnight after her mother's funeral that I saw Natalia Haldin for the last time.

In those silent, sombre days the doors of the appartement on the Boulevard des Philosophes were closed to every one but myself. I believe I was of some use, if only in this, that I alone was aware of the incredible part of the situation. Miss Haldin nursed her mother alone to the last moment. If Razumov's visit had anything to do with Mrs. Haldin's end (and I cannot help thinking that it hastened it considerably), it is because the man, trusted impulsively by the ill-fated Victor Haldin, had failed to gain the confidence of Victor Haldin's mother. What tale, precisely, he told her cannot be known--at any rate, I do not know it--but to me she seemed to die from the shock of an ultimate disappointment borne in silence. She had not believed him. Perhaps she could not longer believe any one, and consequently had nothing to say to any one--not even to her daughter. I suspect that Miss Haldin lived the heaviest hours of her life by that silent death-bed. I confess I was angry with the broken-hearted old woman passing away in the obstinacy of her mute distrust of her daughter.

When it was all over I stood aside. Miss Haldin had her compatriots round her then. A great number of them attended the funeral. I was there too, but afterwards managed to keep away from Miss Haldin, till I received a short note rewarding my self-denial. "It is as you would have it. I am going back to Russia at once. My mind is made up. Come and see me."

Verily, it was a reward of discretion. I went without delay to receive it. The appartement of the Boulevard des Philosophes presented the dreary signs of impending abandonment. It looked desolate and as if already empty to my eyes.

Standing, we exchanged a few words about her health, mine, remarks as to some people of the Russian colony, and then Natalia Haldin, establishing me on the sofa, began to talk openly of her future work, of her plans. It was all to be as I had wished it. And it was to be for life. We should never see each other again. Never!

I gathered this success to my breast. Natalia Haldin looked matured by her open and secret experiences. With her arms folded she walked up and down the whole length of the room, talking slowly, smooth-browed, with a resolute profile. She gave me a new view of herself, and I marvelled at that something grave and measured in her voice, in her movements, in her manner. It was the perfection of

collected independence. The strength of her nature had come to surface because the obscure depths had been stirred.

"We two can talk of it now," she observed, after a silence and stopping short before me. "Have you been to inquire at the hospital lately?"

"Yes, I have." And as she looked at me fixedly, "He will live, the doctors say. But I thought that Tekla...."

"Tekla has not been near me for several days," explained Miss Haldin quickly. "As I never offered to go to the hospital with her, she thinks that I have no heart. She is disillusioned about me."

And Miss Haldin smiled faintly.

"Yes. She sits with him as long and as often as they will let her," I said. "She says she must never abandon him--never as long as she lives. He'll need somebody--a hopeless cripple, and stone deaf with that."

"Stone deaf? I didn't know," murmured Natalia Haldin.

"He is. It seems strange. I am told there were no apparent injuries to the head. They say, too, that it is not very likely that he will live so very long for Tekla to take care of him."

Miss Haldin shook her head.

"While there are travellers ready to fall by the way our Tekla shall never be idle. She is a good Samaritan by an irresistible vocation. The revolutionists didn't understand her. Fancy a devoted creature like that being employed to carry about documents sewn in her dress, or made to write from dictation."

"There is not much perspicacity in the world."

No sooner uttered, I regretted that observation. Natalia Haldin, looking me straight in the face, assented by a slight movement of her head. She was not offended, but turning away began to pace the room again. To my western eyes she seemed to be getting farther and farther from me, quite beyond my reach now, but undiminished in the increasing distance. I remained silent as though it were hopeless to raise my voice. The sound of hers, so close to me, made me start a little.

"Tekla saw him picked up after the accident. The good soul never explained to me

really how it came about. She affirms that there was some understanding between them--some sort of compact--that in any sore need, in misfortune, or difficulty, or pain, he was to come to her."

"Was there?" I said. "It is lucky for him that there was, then. He'll need all the devotion of the good Samaritan."

It was a fact that Tekla, looking out of her window at five in the morning, for some reason or other, had beheld Razumov in the grounds of the Chateau Borel, standing stockstill, bare-headed in the rain, at the foot of the terrace. She had screamed out to him, by name, to know what was the matter. He never even raised his head. By the time she had dressed herself sufficiently to run downstairs he was gone. She started in pursuit, and rushing out into the road, came almost directly upon the arrested tramcar and the small knot of people picking up Razumov. That much Tekla had told me herself one afternoon we happened to meet at the door of the hospital, and without any kind of comment. But I did not want to meditate very long on the inwardness of this peculiar episode.

"Yes, Natalia Victorovna, he shall need somebody when they dismiss him, on crutches and stone deaf from the hospital. But I do not think that when he rushed like an escaped madman into the grounds of the Chateau Borel it was to seek the help of that good Tekla."

"No," said Natalia, stopping short before me, "perhaps not." She sat down and leaned her head on her hand thoughtfully. The silence lasted for several minutes. During that time I remembered the evening of his atrocious confession--the plaint she seemed to have hardly enough life left in her to utter, "It is impossible to be more unhappy..." The recollection would have given me a shudder if I had not been lost in wonder at her force and her tranquillity. There was no longer any Natalia Haldin, because she had completely ceased to think of herself. It was a great victory, a characteristically Russian exploit in self-suppression.

She recalled me to myself by getting up suddenly like a person who has come to a decision. She walked to the writing-table, now stripped of all the small objects associated with her by daily use--a mere piece of dead furniture; but it contained something living, still, since she took from a recess a flat parcel which she brought to me.

"It's a book," she said rather abruptly. "It was sent to me wrapped up in my veil. I told you nothing at the time, but now I've decided to leave it with you. I have the right to do that. It was sent to me. It is mine. You may preserve it, or destroy it after you have read it. And while you read it, please remember that I was

defenceless. And that he.."

"Defenceless!" I repeated, surprised, looking hard at her.

"You'll find the very word written there," she whispered. "Well, it's true! I was defenceless--but perhaps you were able to see that for yourself." Her face coloured, then went deadly pale. "In justice to the man, I want you to remember that I was. Oh, I was, I was!"

I rose, a little shakily.

"I am not likely to forget anything you say at this our last parting."

Her hand fell into mine.

"It's difficult to believe that it must be good-bye with us."

She returned my pressure and our hands separated.

"Yes. I am leaving here to-morrow. My eyes are open at last and my hands are free now. As for the rest--which of us can fail to hear the stifled cry of our great distress? It may be nothing to the world."

"The world is more conscious of your discordant voices," I said. "It is the way of the world."

"Yes." She bowed her head in assent, and hesitated for a moment. "I must own to you that I shall never give up looking forward to the day when all discord shall be silenced. Try to imagine its dawn! The tempest of blows and of execrations is over; all is still; the new sun is rising, and the weary men united at last, taking count in their conscience of the ended contest, feel saddened by their victory, because so many ideas have perished for the triumph of one, so many beliefs have abandoned them without support. They feel alone on the earth and gather close together. Yes, there must be many bitter hours! But at last the anguish of hearts shall be extinguished in love."

And on this last word of her wisdom, a word so sweet, so bitter, so cruel sometimes, I said good-bye to Natalia Haldin. It is hard to think I shall never look any more into the trustful eyes of that girl--wedded to an invincible belief in the advent of loving concord springing like a heavenly flower from the soil of men's earth, soaked in blood, torn by struggles, watered with tears.

It must be understood that at that time I didn't know anything of Mr. Razumov's confession to the assembled revolutionists. Natalia Haldin might have guessed what was the "one thing more" which remained for him to do; but this my western eyes had failed to see.

Tekla, the ex-lady companion of Madame de S--, haunted his bedside at the hospital. We met once or twice at the door of that establishment, but on these occasions she was not communicative. She gave me news of Mr. Razumov as concisely as possible. He was making a slow recovery, but would remain a hopeless cripple all his life. Personally, I never went near him: I never saw him again, after the awful evening when I stood by, a watchful but ignored spectator of his scene with Miss Haldin. He was in due course discharged from the hospital, and his "relative"--so I was told--had carried him off somewhere.

My information was completed nearly two years later. The opportunity, certainly, was not of my seeking; it was quite accidentally that I met a much-trusted woman revolutionist at the house of a distinguished Russian gentleman of liberal convictions, who came to live in Geneva for a time.

He was a quite different sort of celebrity from Peter Ivanovitch--a dark-haired man with kind eyes, high-shouldered, courteous, and with something hushed and circumspect in his manner. He approached me, choosing the moment when there was no one near, followed by a grey-haired, alert lady in a crimson blouse.

"Our Sophia Antonovna wishes to be made known to you," he addressed me, in his guarded voice. "And so I leave you two to have a talk together."

"I would never have intruded myself upon your notice," the grey-haired lady began at once, "if I had not been charged with a message for you."

It was a message of a few friendly words from Natalia Haldin. Sophia Antonovna had just returned from a secret excursion into Russia, and had seen Miss Haldin. She lived in a town "in the centre," sharing her compassionate labours between the horrors of overcrowded jails, and the heartrending misery of bereaved homes. She did not spare herself in good service, Sophia Antonovna assured me.

"She has a faithful soul, an undaunted spirit and an indefatigable body," the woman revolutionist summed it all up, with a touch of enthusiasm.

A conversation thus engaged was not likely to drop from want of interest on my side. We went to sit apart in a corner where no one interrupted us. In the course of our talk about Miss Haldin, Sophia Antonovna remarked suddenly--

"I suppose you remember seeing me before? That evening when Natalia came to ask Peter Ivanovitch for the address of a certain Razumov, that young man who..."

"I remember perfectly," I said. When Sophia Antonovna learned that I had in my possession that young man's journal given me by Miss Haldin she became intensely interested. She did not conceal her curiosity to see the document.

I offered to show it to her, and she at once volunteered to call on me next day for that purpose.

She turned over the pages greedily for an hour or more, and then handed me the book with a faint sigh. While moving about Russia, she had seen Razumov too. He lived, not "in the centre," but "in the south." She described to me a little two-roomed wooden house, in the suburb of some very small town, hiding within the high plank-fence of a yard overgrown with nettles. He was crippled, ill, getting weaker every day, and Tekla the Samaritan tended him unweariedly with the pure joy of unselfish devotion. There was nothing in that task to become disillusioned about.

I did not hide from Sophia Antonovna my surprise that she should have visited Mr. Razumov. I did not even understand the motive. But she informed me that she was not the only one.

"Some of us always go to see him when passing through. He is intelligent. We has ideas.... He talks well, too."

Presently I heard for the first time of Razumov's public confession in Laspara's house. Sophia Antonovna gave me a detailed relation of what had occurred there. Razumov himself had told her all about it, most minutely.

Then, looking hard at me with her brilliant black eyes--

"There are evil moments in every life. A false suggestion enters one's brain, and then fear is born--fear of oneself, fear for oneself. Or else a false courage--who knows? Well, call it what you like; but tell me, how many of them would deliver themselves up deliberately to perdition (as he himself says in that book) rather than go on living, secretly debased in their own eyes? How many?... And please mark this--he was safe when he did it. It was just when he believed himself safe and more--infinitely more--when the possibility of being loved by that admirable girl first dawned upon him, that he discovered that his bitterest railings, the worst wickedness, the devil work of his hate and pride, could never cover up the

ignominy of the existence before him. There's character in such a discovery."

I accepted her conclusion in silence. Who would care to question the grounds of forgiveness or compassion? However, it appeared later on, that there was some compunction, too, in the charity extended by the revolutionary world to Razumov the betrayer. Sophia Antonovna continued uneasily--

"And then, you know, he was the victim of an outrage. It was not authorized. Nothing was decided as to what was to be done with him. He had confessed voluntarily. And that Nikita who burst the drums of his ears purposely, out on the landing, you know, as if carried away by indignation--well, he has turned out to be a scoundrel of the worst kind--a traitor himself, a betrayer--a spy! Razumov told me he had charged him with it by a sort of inspiration...."

"I had a glimpse of that brute," I said. "How any of you could have been deceived for half a day passes my comprehension!"

She interrupted me.

"There! There! Don't talk of it. The first time I saw him, I, too, was appalled. They cried me down. We were always telling each other, 'Oh! you mustn't mind his appearance.' And then he was always ready to kill. There was no doubt of it. He killed--yes! in both camps. The fiend...."

Then Sophia Antonovna, after mastering the angry trembling of her lips, told me a very queer tale. It went that Councillor Mikulin, travelling in Germany (shortly after Razumov's disappearance from Geneva), happened to meet Peter Ivanovitch in a railway carriage. Being alone in the compartment, these two talked together half the night, and it was then that Mikulin the Police Chief gave a hint to the Arch-Revolutionist as to the true character of the arch-slayer of gendarmes. It looks as though Mikulin had wanted to get rid of that particular agent of his own! He might have grown tired of him, or frightened of him. It must also be said that Mikulin had inherited the sinister Nikita from his predecessor in office.

And this story, too, I received without comment in my character of a mute witness of things Russian, unrolling their Eastern logic under my Western eyes. But I permitted myself a question--

"Tell me, please, Sophia Antonovna, did Madame de S-- leave all her fortune to Peter Ivanovitch?"

"Not a bit of it." The woman revolutionist shrugged her shoulders in disgust. "She died without making a will. A lot of nephews and nieces came down from St.

Petersburg, like a flock of vultures, and fought for her money amongst themselves. All beastly Kammerherrns and Maids of Honour--abominable court flunkeys. Tfui!"

"One does not hear much of Peter Ivanovitch now," I remarked, after a pause.

"Peter Ivanovitch," said Sophia Antonovna gravely, "has united himself to a peasant girl."

I was truly astonished.

"What! On the Riviera?"

"What nonsense! Of course not."

Sophia Antonovna's tone was slightly tart.

"Is he, then, living actually in Russia? It's a tremendous risk--isn't it?" I cried. "And all for the sake of a peasant girl. Don't you think it's very wrong of him?"

Sophia Antonovna preserved a mysterious silence for a while, then made a statement. "He just simply adores her."

"Does he? Well, then, I hope that she won't hesitate to beat him."

Sophia Antonovna got up and wished me good-bye, as though she had not heard a word of my impious hope; but, in the very doorway, where I attended her, she turned round for an instant, and declared in a firm voice--

"Peter Ivanovitch is an inspired man."