

III -- PAPA

He was standing near his writing-table, and pointing angrily to some envelopes, papers, and little piles of coin upon it as he addressed some observations to the bailiff, Jakoff Michaelovitch, who was standing in his usual place (that is to say, between the door and the barometer) and rapidly closing and unclosing the fingers of the hand which he held behind his back, The more angry Papa grew, the more rapidly did those fingers twirl, and when Papa ceased speaking they came to rest also. Yet, as soon as ever Jakoff himself began to talk, they flew here, there, and everywhere with lightning rapidity. These movements always appeared to me an index of Jakoff's secret thoughts, though his face was invariably placid, and expressive alike of dignity and submissiveness, as who should say, "I am right, yet let it be as you wish." On seeing us, Papa said, "Directly--wait a moment," and looked towards the door as a hint for it to be shut.

"Gracious heavens! What can be the matter with you to-day, Jakoff?" he went on with a hitch of one shoulder (a habit of his). "This envelope here with the 800 roubles enclosed,"--Jacob took out a set of tablets, put down "800" and remained looking at the figures while he waited for what was to come next--"is for expenses during my absence. Do you understand? From the mill you ought to receive 1000 roubles. Is not that so? And from the Treasury mortgage you ought to receive some 8000 roubles. From the hay--of which, according to your calculations, we shall be able to sell 7000 poods [The pood = 40 lbs.]at 45 copecks a

piece there should come in 3000, Consequently the sum-total that you ought to have in hand soon is--how much?--12,000 roubles. Is that right?"

"Precisely," answered Jakoff, Yet by the extreme rapidity with which his fingers were twitching I could see that he had an objection to make. Papa went on:

"Well, of this money you will send 10,000 roubles to the Petrovskoe local council, As for the money already at the office, you will remit it to me, and enter it as spent on this present date." Jakoff turned over the tablet marked "12,000," and put down "21,000"--seeming, by his action, to imply that 12,000 roubles had been turned over in the same fashion as he had turned the tablet. "And this envelope with the enclosed money," concluded Papa, "you will deliver for me to the person to whom it is addressed."

I was standing close to the table, and could see the address. It was "To Karl Ivanitch Mayer." Perhaps Papa had an idea that I had read something which I ought not, for he touched my shoulder with his hand and made me aware, by a slight movement, that I must withdraw from the table. Not sure whether the movement was meant for a caress or a command, I kissed the large, sinewy hand which rested upon my shoulder.

"Very well," said Jakoff. "And what are your orders about the accounts for the money from Chabarovska?" (Chabarovska was Mamma's village.)

"Only that they are to remain in my office, and not to be taken thence without my express instructions."

For a minute or two Jakoff was silent. Then his fingers began to twitch with extraordinary rapidity, and, changing the expression of deferential vacancy with which he had listened to his orders for one of shrewd intelligence, he turned his tablets back and spoke.

"Will you allow me to inform you, Peter Alexandritch," he said, with frequent pauses between his words, "that, however much you wish it, it is out of the question to repay the local council now. You enumerated some items, I think, as to what ought to come in from the mortgage, the mill, and the hay (he jotted down each of these items on his tablets again as he spoke). Yet I fear that we must have made a mistake somewhere in the accounts." Here he paused a while, and looked gravely at Papa.

"How so?"

"Well, will you be good enough to look for yourself? There is the account for the mill. The miller has been to me twice to ask for time, and I am afraid that he has no money whatever in hand. He is here now. Would you like to speak to him?"

"No. Tell me what he says," replied Papa, showing by a movement of his

head that he had no desire to have speech with the miller.

"Well, it is easy enough to guess what he says. He declares that there is no grinding to be got now, and that his last remaining money has gone to pay for the dam. What good would it do for us to turn him out? As to what you were pleased to say about the mortgage, you yourself are aware that your money there is locked up and cannot be recovered at a moment's notice. I was sending a load of flour to Ivan Afanovitch to-day, and sent him a letter as well, to which he replies that he would have been glad to oblige you, Peter Alexandritch, were it not that the matter is out of his hands now, and that all the circumstances show that it would take you at least two months to withdraw the money. From the hay I understood you to estimate a return of 3000 roubles?" (Here Jakoff jotted down "3000" on his tablets, and then looked for a moment from the figures to Papa with a peculiar expression on his face.) "Well, surely you see for yourself how little that is? And even then we should lose if we were to sell the stuff now, for you must know that--"

It was clear that he would have had many other arguments to adduce had not Papa interrupted him.

"I cannot make any change in my arrangements," said Papa. "Yet if there should REALLY have to be any delay in the recovery of these sums, we could borrow what we wanted from the Chabarovska funds."

"Very well, sir." The expression of Jakoff's face and the way in which

he twitched his fingers showed that this order had given him great satisfaction. He was a serf, and a most zealous, devoted one, but, like all good bailiffs, exacting and parsimonious to a degree in the interests of his master. Moreover, he had some queer notions of his own. He was forever endeavouring to increase his master's property at the expense of his mistress's, and to prove that it would be impossible to avoid using the rents from her estates for the benefit of Petrovskoe (my father's village, and the place where we lived). This point he had now gained and was delighted in consequence.

Papa then greeted ourselves, and said that if we stayed much longer in the country we should become lazy boys; that we were growing quite big now, and must set about doing lessons in earnest,

"I suppose you know that I am starting for Moscow to-night?" he went on, "and that I am going to take you with me? You will live with Grandmamma, but Mamma and the girls will remain here. You know, too, I am sure, that Mamma's one consolation will be to hear that you are doing your lessons well and pleasing every one around you."

The preparations which had been in progress for some days past had made us expect some unusual event, but this news left us thunderstruck, Woloda turned red, and, with a shaking voice, delivered Mamma's message to Papa.

"So this was what my dream foreboded!" I thought to myself. "God send

that there come nothing worse!" I felt terribly sorry to have to leave Mamma, but at the same rejoiced to think that I should soon be grown up, "If we are going to-day, we shall probably have no lessons to do, and that will be splendid, However, I am sorry for Karl Ivanitch, for he will certainly be dismissed now. That was why that envelope had been prepared for him. I think I would almost rather stay and do lessons here than leave Mamma or hurt poor Karl. He is miserable enough already."

As these thoughts crossed my mind I stood looking sadly at the black ribbons on my shoes, After a few words to Karl Ivanitch about the depression of the barometer and an injunction to Jakoff not to feed the hounds, since a farewell meet was to be held after luncheon, Papa disappointed my hopes by sending us off to lessons--though he also consoled us by promising to take us out hunting later.

On my way upstairs I made a digression to the terrace. Near the door leading on to it Papa's favourite hound, Milka, was lying in the sun and blinking her eyes.

"Miloshka," I cried as I caressed her and kissed her nose, "we are going away today. Good-bye. Perhaps we shall never see each other again." I was crying and laughing at the same time.