

#### IV -- LESSONS

Karl Ivanitch was in a bad temper, This was clear from his contracted brows, and from the way in which he flung his frockcoat into a drawer, angrily donned his old dressing-gown again, and made deep dints with his nails to mark the place in the book of dialogues to which we were to learn by heart. Woloda began working diligently, but I was too distracted to do anything at all. For a long while I stared vacantly at the book; but tears at the thought of the impending separation kept rushing to my eyes and preventing me from reading a single word. When at length the time came to repeat the dialogues to Karl (who listened to us with blinking eyes--a very bad sign), I had no sooner reached the place where some one asks, "Wo kommen Sie her?" ("Where do you come from?") and some one else answers him, "Ich komme vom Kaffeehaus" ("I come from the coffee-house"), than I burst into tears and, for sobbing, could not pronounce, "Haben Sie die Zeitung nicht gelesen?" ("Have you not read the newspaper?") at all. Next, when we came to our writing lesson, the tears kept falling from my eyes and, making a mess on the paper, as though some one had written on blotting-paper with water, Karl was very angry. He ordered me to go down upon my knees, declared that it was all obstinacy and "puppet-comedy playing" (a favourite expression of his) on my part, threatened me with the ruler, and commanded me to say that I was sorry. Yet for sobbing and crying I could not get a word out. At last--conscious, perhaps, that he was unjust--he departed to Nicola's pantry, and slammed the door behind him. Nevertheless their conversation there carried to the schoolroom.

"Have you heard that the children are going to Moscow, Nicola?" said Karl.

"Yes. How could I help hearing it?"

At this point Nicola seemed to get up for Karl said, "Sit down, Nicola," and then locked the door. However, I came out of my corner and crept to the door to listen.

"However much you may do for people, and however fond of them you may be, never expect any gratitude, Nicola," said Karl warmly. Nicola, who was shoe-cobbling by the window, nodded his head in assent.

"Twelve years have I lived in this house," went on Karl, lifting his eyes and his snuff-box towards the ceiling, "and before God I can say that I have loved them, and worked for them, even more than if they had been my own children. You recollect, Nicola, when Woloda had the fever? You recollect how, for nine days and nights, I never closed my eyes as I sat beside his bed? Yes, at that time I was 'the dear, good Karl Ivanitch'--I was wanted then; but now"--and he smiled ironically--"the children are growing up, and must go to study in earnest. Perhaps they never learnt anything with me, Nicola? Eh?"

"I am sure they did," replied Nicola, laying his awl down and straightening a piece of thread with his hands.

"No, I am wanted no longer, and am to be turned out. What good are promises and gratitude? Natalia Nicolaevna"--here he laid his hand upon his heart--"I love and revere, but what can SHE I do here? Her will is powerless in this house."

He flung a strip of leather on the floor with an angry gesture. "Yet I know who has been playing tricks here, and why I am no longer wanted. It is because I do not flatter and toady as certain people do. I am in the habit of speaking the truth in all places and to all persons," he continued proudly, "God be with these children, for my leaving them will benefit them little, whereas I--well, by God's help I may be able to earn a crust of bread somewhere. Nicola, eh?"

Nicola raised his head and looked at Karl as though to consider whether he would indeed be able to earn a crust of bread, but he said nothing. Karl said a great deal more of the same kind--in particular how much better his services had been appreciated at a certain general's where he had formerly lived (I regretted to hear that). Likewise he spoke of Saxony, his parents, his friend the tailor, Schönheit (beauty), and so on.

I sympathised with his distress, and felt dreadfully sorry that he and Papa (both of whom I loved about equally) had had a difference. Then I returned to my corner, crouched down upon my heels, and fell to thinking how a reconciliation between them might be effected.

Returning to the study, Karl ordered me to get up and prepare to write from dictation. When I was ready he sat down with a dignified air in his arm-chair, and in a voice which seemed to come from a profound abyss began to dictate: "Von al-len Lei-den-shaf-ten die grau-samste ist. Have you written that?" He paused, took a pinch of snuff, and began again: "Die grausamste ist die Un-dank-bar-keit [The most cruel of all passions is ingratitude.] a capital U, mind."

The last word written, I looked at him, for him to go on.

"Punctum" (stop), he concluded, with a faintly perceptible smile, as he signed to us to hand him our copy-books.

Several times, and in several different tones, and always with an expression of the greatest satisfaction, did he read out that sentence, which expressed his predominant thought at the moment, Then he set us to learn a lesson in history, and sat down near the window. His face did not look so depressed now, but, on the contrary, expressed eloquently the satisfaction of a man who had avenged himself for an injury dealt him.

By this time it was a quarter to one o'clock, but Karl Ivanitch never thought of releasing us, He merely set us a new lesson to learn. My fatigue and hunger were increasing in equal proportions, so that I eagerly followed every sign of the approach of luncheon. First came the

housemaid with a cloth to wipe the plates, Next, the sound of crockery resounded in the dining-room, as the table was moved and chairs placed round it, After that, Mimi, Lubotshka, and Katenka. (Katenka was Mimi's daughter, and twelve years old) came in from the garden, but Foka (the servant who always used to come and announce luncheon) was not yet to be seen. Only when he entered was it lawful to throw one's books aside and run downstairs.

Hark! Steps resounded on the staircase, but they were not Foka's. Foka's I had learnt to study, and knew the creaking of his boots well. The door opened, and a figure unknown to me made its appearance.