

V. MY RULES

I TOOK some sheets of paper, and tried, first of all, to make a list of my tasks and duties for the coming year. The paper needed ruling, but, as I could not find the ruler, I had to use a Latin dictionary instead. The result was that, when I had drawn the pen along the edge of the dictionary and removed the latter, I found that, in place of a line, I had only made an oblong smudge on the paper, since the dictionary was not long enough to reach across it, and the pen had slipped round the soft, yielding corner of the book. Thereupon I took another piece of paper, and, by carefully manipulating the dictionary, contrived to rule what at least RESEMBLED lines. Dividing my duties into three sections--my duties to myself, my duties to my neighbour, and my duties to God--I started to indite a list of the first of those sections, but they seemed to me so numerous, and therefore requiring to be divided into so many species and subdivisions, that I thought I had better first of all write down the heading of "Rules of My Life" before proceeding to their detailed inscription. Accordingly, I proceeded to write "Rules of My Life" on the outside of the six sheets of paper which I had made into a sort of folio, but the words came out in such a crooked and uneven scrawl that for long I sat debating the question, "Shall I write them again?"--for long, sat in agonised contemplation of the ragged handwriting and disfigured title-page. Why was it that all the beauty and clarity which my soul then contained came out so misshapenly on paper (as in life itself) just when I was wishing to apply those qualities to what I was thinking at the moment?

"The priest is here, so please come downstairs and hear his directions," said Nicola as he entered.

Hurriedly concealing my folio under the table-cloth, I looked at myself in the mirror, combed my hair upwards (I imagined this to give me a pensive air), and descended to the divannaia, [Room with divans, or ante-room] where the table stood covered with a cloth and had an ikon and candles placed upon it. Papa entered just as I did, but by another door: whereupon the priest--a grey-headed old monk with a severe, elderly face--blessed him, and Papa kissed his small, squat, wizened hand. I did the same.

"Go and call Woldemar," said Papa. "Where is he? Wait a minute, though. Perhaps he is preparing for the Communion at the University?"

"No, he is with the Prince," said Katenka, and glanced at Lubotshka. Suddenly the latter blushed for some reason or another, and then frowned. Finally, pretending that she was not well, she left the room, and I followed her. In the drawing-room she halted, and began to pencil something fresh on her paper of peccadilloes.

"Well, what new sin have you gone and committed?" I asked.

"Nothing," she replied with another blush. All at once we heard Dimitri's voice raised in the hall as he took his leave of Woloda.

"It seems to me you are always experiencing some new temptation," said Katenka, who had entered the room behind us, and now stood looking at Lubotshka.

What was the matter with my sister I could not conceive, but she was now so agitated that the tears were starting from her eyes. Finally her confusion grew uncontrollable, and vented itself in rage against both herself and Katenka, who appeared to be teasing her.

"Any one can see that you are a FOREIGNER!" she cried (nothing offended Katenka so much as to be called by that term, which is why Lubotshka used it). "Just because I have the secret of which you know," she went on, with anger ringing through her tone, "you purposely go and upset me! Please do understand that it is no joking matter."

"Do you know what she has gone and written on her paper, Nicolinka?" cried Katenka, much infuriated by the term "foreigner." "She has written down that--"

"Oh, I never could have believed that you could be so cruel!" exclaimed Lubotshka, now bursting into open sobbing as she moved away from us. "You chose that moment on purpose! You spend your whole time in trying to make me sin! I'll never go to YOU again for sympathy and advice!"