

## XXI. PRINCE IVAN IVANOVITCH

"Now for the last call--the visit to Nikitskaia Street," I said to Kuzma, and we started for Prince Ivan Ivanovitch's mansion.

Towards the end, a round of calls usually brings one a certain amount of self-assurance: consequently I was approaching the Prince's abode in quite a tranquil frame of mind, when suddenly I remembered the Princess Kornakoff's words that I was his heir, and at the same moment caught sight of two carriages waiting at the portico. Instantly, my former nervousness returned.

Both the old major-domo who opened the door to me, and the footman who took my coat, and the two male and three female visitors whom I found in the drawing-room, and, most of all, Prince Ivan Ivanovitch himself (whom I found clad in a "company" frockcoat and seated on a sofa) seemed to look at me as at an HEIR, and so to eye me with ill-will. Yet the Prince was very gracious and, after kissing me (that is to say, after pressing his cold, dry, flabby lips to my cheek for a second), asked me about my plans and pursuits, jested with me, inquired whether I still wrote verses of the kind which I used to indite in honour of my grandmother's birthdays, and invited me to dine with him that day. Nevertheless, in proportion as he grew the kinder, the more did I feel persuaded that his civility was only intended to conceal from me the fact that he disliked the idea of my being his heir. He had a custom (due to his false teeth, of which his mouth possessed a complete set) of raising his upper lip a

little as he spoke, and producing a slight whistling sound from it; and whenever, on the present occasion, he did so it seemed to me that he was saying to himself: "A boy, a boy--I know it! And my heir, too--my heir!"

When we were children, we had been used to calling the Prince "dear Uncle;" but now, in my capacity of heir, I could not bring my tongue to the phrase, while to say "Your Highness," as did one of the other visitors, seemed derogatory to my self-esteem. Consequently, never once during that visit did I call him anything at all. The personage, however, who most disturbed me was the old Princess who shared with me the position of prospective inheritor, and who lived in the Prince's house. While seated beside her at dinner, I felt firmly persuaded that the reason why she would not speak to me was that she disliked me for being her co-heir, and that the Prince, for his part, paid no attention to our side of the table for the reason that the Princess and myself hoped to succeed him, and so were alike distasteful in his sight.

"You cannot think how I hated it all!" I said to Dimitrieff the same evening, in a desire to make a parade of disliking the notion of being an heir (somehow I thought it the thing to do). "You cannot think how I loathed the whole two hours that I spent there!--Yet he is a fine-looking old fellow, and was very kind to me," I added--wishing, among other things, to disabuse my friend of any possible idea that my loathing had arisen out of the fact that I had felt so small. "It is only the idea that people may be classing me with the Princess who lives with him, and who licks the dust off his boots. He is a wonderful old

man, and good and considerate to everybody, but it is awful to see how he treats the Princess. Money is a detestable thing, and ruins all human relations.

"Do you know, I think it would be far the best thing for me to have an open explanation with the Prince," I went on; "to tell him that I respect him as a man, but think nothing of being his heir, and that I desire him to leave me nothing, since that is the only condition on which I can, in future, visit his house."

Instead of bursting out laughing when I said this, Dimitri pondered awhile in silence, and then answered:

"You are wrong. Either you ought to refrain from supposing that people may be classing you with this Princess of whom you speak, or, if you DO suppose such a thing, you ought to suppose further that people are thinking what you yourself know quite well--namely, that such thoughts are so utterly foreign to your nature that you despise them and would never make them a basis for action. Suppose, however, that people DO suppose you to suppose such a thing--Well, to sum up," he added, feeling that he was getting a little mixed in his pronouncements, "you had much better not suppose anything of the kind."

My friend was perfectly right, though it was not until long, long afterwards that experience of life taught me the evil that comes of thinking--still worse, of saying--much that seems very fine; taught me

that there are certain thoughts which should always be kept to oneself, since brave words seldom go with brave deeds. I learnt then that the mere fact of giving utterance to a good intention often makes it difficult, nay, impossible, to carry that good intention into effect. Yet how is one to refrain from giving utterance to the brave, self-sufficient impulses of youth? Only long afterwards does one remember and regret them, even as one incontinently plucks a flower before its blooming, and subsequently finds it lying crushed and withered on the ground.

The very next morning I, who had just been telling my friend Dimitri that money corrupts all human relations, and had (as we have seen) squandered the whole of my cash on pictures and Turkish pipes, accepted a loan of twenty roubles which he suggested should pay for my travelling expenses into the country, and remained a long while thereafter in his debt!