

# PART I

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## I

**B**aklanov was coming down the iron staircase from his apartment on the third floor. He appeared as he always did: not bad looking, and although it couldn't be said that he was well built, handsome, or elegantly dressed, he was rather agreeable. Everything he wore sat easily on him, even looked a bit baggy; in any case, it wasn't fashionable: his coat was long, although the dandies on Nevsky Prospect were sporting short ones; his trousers were wide and striped; meanwhile the latest fashion was checked and narrow; his hat was soft, and light-colored, which didn't match his dark-gray coat at all; but all of this suited his handsome face with its rounded light-brown beard, his ruddy cheeks, and his very kind gray eyes, which regarded the whole world in friendly fashion and continually said, "Never mind, never mind; of course, not everything on earth is splendid: there are many imperfections, injustices, and insults; nevertheless—never mind—I still live well enough and I love God's world!" When he reached the last step, the respectable gray-bearded doorman, in spite of his height and weight, bustled about, quickly pulled open a drawer of an ash-wood table, took out a small packet, and handed it to Baklanov.

“This is for you, sir, Nikolai Alekseich! They just brought it and I didn’t have time to deliver it.”

Baklanov took the packet, raised his eyelids and brows pleasantly, as if asking, “For me? Who could it be from?” He slowly began to unseal the packet, at the same time continuing his way along the footpath of Furshtadtskaya Street. He really couldn’t imagine from whom and for what purpose he would receive a telegram.

“Ah, that’s who it is! That’s who!” he muttered aloud, having torn it open and first read the signature. It said: Racheev. The telegram briefly announced his arrival tomorrow morning at eleven o’clock at the Nikolaevsky Station.

“Racheev, Racheev! An old friend, a sincere friendship, from school . . .” thought Baklanov, continuing his way along Liteyny Prospect in the direction of Nevsky. He himself didn’t notice how his own steps had become faster and firmer, and how agitated he’d become. He hadn’t seen Racheev in seven years or so, and hadn’t thought about him during all that time. The last time he’d visited from Moscow he’d stayed only two weeks. He’d been gloomy and angry about everything. Baklanov remembered the heated scene in Palkin’s Restaurant, when the two of them, together with Polzikov, were drinking in a private room. They were all flushed with drink, Racheev most of all, because he drank not for pleasure, but for the sole purpose of getting drunk, and, as he said, “seeing the world turned upside down.” At that time Racheev was suffering from the usual illness of decent Russians—not knowing where to apply his strengths so they wouldn’t be wasted. Baklanov and Polzikov were having a conversation about some beginning author; Baklanov was arguing that he undoubtedly had talent while Polzikov, with his usual Mephistophelian malice, was saying that all persons lacking talent were once beginning authors. All of a sudden Racheev banged his fist on the table with such force that a bottle jumped and fell onto its side; red wine poured onto Polzikov’s light vest.

“Devil take your talents, your lack of talents, and all your literature, with all your noble ideas on paper! It’s no good, no good, no good! It’s good for nothing!” he shouted in an agitated, trembling

voice, and he ran his fingers through his thick dark hair with a kind of despair.

“Let’s assume that it’s not worth a brass farthing; but why break the furniture?”<sup>1</sup> Polzikov observed, shrugging his shoulders, swiftly moving his chair away from the table; he set about urgently wiping his vest with a napkin. “You’ve ruined my vest!”

“Yes, that’s so!” Racheev continued in a tone of irritation, bitterness, and mockery: “It’s a pity, since your vest was not to blame. . . . Your vest. . . . It’s perhaps more honest than all the rest of us taken together! It’s without any feelings or a soul, while we have intelligence, abilities, strengths, and aspirations. . . . And we waste all this on drink, food, and friendly conversations . . . for nothing and no one! No, let there be no more of this!” once again, with even greater force, he banged his fist on the table. “I’ll either take the bull by the horns, or—I’ll put a bullet through my head!”

He shook himself off, stood up, and extended his hand to his interlocutors. He seemed to have sobered up completely; his feet were planted firmly, his eyes looked simply and sensibly.

“I’m leaving tomorrow. Farewell!” he said affably. “You can keep your Petersburg . . .”

“Where are you going?” asked Baklanov.

“To my own estate. I shall remain there in solitude, rest my head on my hands, and ponder the Hamletic question. And you will hear something about me in the future.”

The next day the friends saw Racheev off on his train. For about a year Baklanov didn’t hear anything about his friend; then rumors reached him that Racheev was living on his estate, not far from Moscow and in the vicinity of the estate of Baklanov’s aunt, almost without leaving. Rumors were divided: the Moscow correspondents who’d been his schoolmates portrayed Racheev almost as a hero, who’d devoted all his strengths to good deeds, which they, the correspondents, also loved, even though they didn’t devote their own

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1. A variation on a famous line from Nikolai Gogol’s comic play *The Government Inspector* (1836): “Of course Alexander the Great was a hero, but why break the chairs?”

energy to the cause; the aunt wrote (at that time she still had use of her right hand) that Racheev was simply a madman. Baklanov, of course, didn't believe his aunt, and regarded the views of his correspondents as some of those ennobling exaggerations that generous people offer so readily, because it doesn't cost them a thing. Racheev himself didn't write a word and all of this taken together helped Baklanov completely forget about his friend. During this time he'd managed to get married, firmly establish himself in a literary career, and become close to the rank of a favorite writer, a rank that the capricious public does not bestow all that easily.

Then, all of a sudden, a telegram from Racheev! At once all the decent, even sometimes tender feelings, which he had long nourished for his school friend, rose to the surface. What a fine fellow! Genuine, by no means stupid, sincere, easily carried away. He had no particular talent, but isn't that a talent in itself—to be a good man, who attracts public approval? And the main thing was whether perhaps he might be bringing with him something new, some characteristic of the present that would be useful for refreshing his own observations. This was very important.

Baklanov got as far as Nevsky Prospect and then turned in the direction of the Admiralty. "Where shall I go?" he wondered. He had gone out for a walk before breakfast, which he did every day. "Here's what: I'll go to see Evgeniya Konstantinovna! This will give me a chance to tell her about tomorrow's event. Racheev, of course, will be introduced to her, and she will fall upon him, as an interesting hero. She's always looking for something novel, something that doesn't resemble reality. And this will give him a chance to be of use to her."

He took a cab and headed toward Nikolaevskaya Street. But before he arrived at the entrance, he saw a carriage harnessed to a pair of black horses and recognized them. The carriage rolled out of the gates and smoothly approached the entrance. The door opened and there emerged a graceful woman of average height, wearing a long fashionable gray blouse, embroidered with glass beads, with a small gray cap adorning her light golden hair, with a tiny green bird on

it that perfectly matched her pleasant, cheerful, lively face, more slender than full, with clear, somehow unusually direct eyes.

“Nikolai Alekseich!” she called in a melodious voice, which was somehow lacking in gentleness. Her eyes opened wider; a welcoming smile appeared on her rosy, full lips, but at the same time it was a sly smile, as if it contained some secret thought. The expression of her eyes, which now looked not so simple and honest, deviated from this smile. “I’m glad to see you. Come here!” and she motioned to the door, which was still open. “I was on my way to the Shopping Arcade, but I’m in no hurry!”

“No, no, please! I knew that you were leaving, and I stood up just so, almost automatically!” he replied, squeezing her small gloved hand that was just extended. “Let’s go down. . . . I only wanted to see if you were well!”

“Oh, I am, though I’m bored because all my friends have forsaken me.”

“Your friends? Which ones?”

He asked with an apparent grin; she blushed slightly, her smile becoming even more expressive, almost sarcastic.

They walked slowly down the stairs.

“You still can’t forgive me for this, can you?” she asked.

“Our splitting up? Oh, my goodness! What wouldn’t I forgive you for? You know, Evgeniya Konstantinovna: there isn’t anything like that on earth. . . . Don’t you know that?”

“I do, unfortunately!”

“Unfortunately? Why unfortunately?”

Evgeniya Konstantinovna signaled to her driver that he should follow them as they walked along the sidewalk.

“As if you didn’t know?” She asked, casting him a sidelong glance. The smile had already disappeared from her lips. “Because everything’s all the same and there’s nothing of interest to me, nothing instructive; all of you are the same in this regard, and everything resembles . . . all the rest. . . . All of you, more or less . . . how can I say it more gently . . . you don’t tell me the truth and by not doing so, you offend me!”

Baklanov burst out laughing.

“In general the truth is a bitter pill—I’m not saying this as applied to you—and I’m not used to upsetting my friends. Ah, yes, here’s what: I can offer you the chance to make the acquaintance of a certain person, who is, if not something new, then at least not too ordinary. . . .”

“Some literary talent, young, and inspiring hope?” she asked in the same lighthearted manner as his.

“Oh, no, this time I’ll spare you from that. Besides, that sort of person is not unusual in your living room. It’s even noted that if a young man appears in your house, he lays all his talents at your feet and reserves for himself the title of a man inspiring hope.”

“My goodness, these literary figures who have managed to justify those hopes are so wicked and merciless,” she observed with a humorous sigh. “But who is it—your unusual person?”

“He’s my old schoolmate and friend, by the name of Racheev, Dmitry Petrovich. . . .”

“You’ve never said anything about him. . . .”

“Yes, I’d lost sight of him; I considered that he, so to speak, had vanished from the earth. But he’s suddenly returned, and how? I received a telegram from him—he’s arriving tomorrow and, of course, he’ll put all of us to shame and disgrace us. . . .”

“It’s high time! But how’s this friend of yours different from Baklanov, Polzikov, Mamurin, and the others?”

“Evgeniya Konstantinovna!” Baklanov said pretending to be hurt, and even paused for a moment. “Is there really no spot in your heart for Baklanov, apart from Polzikov, Mamurin, and *tutti quanti*?<sup>2</sup> That’s painful. . . .”

“Ha, ha, ha! We were talking about your friend. . . . Go on!”

“If you please!” Nikolai Alekseevich muttered with a look of sad submission. “My friend Racheev has been searching for a long time and rather energetically, so to speak, for a genuine way of life, and has found it in the countryside. . . .”

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2. “All the rest” (Ital).

“There’s nothing unusual about that so far. . . .”

“Wait a moment, there will be. . . . He lives in the country not for the cool temperatures, nor for the fresh air, but rather for the implementation of his wide-ranging humanitarian ideals.”

“Now that’s interesting, but there’s still nothing unusual about it. . . .”

“Well, perhaps there won’t be, I don’t know. . . . There’s nothing that can astonish you, Evgeniya Konstantinovna, because you’ve been around. But I’ll add that my friend is an intelligent fellow, educated, passionate, and unusually convinced of his own views. To finish characterizing him, I’ll say that he’s thirty-two years old, a brunet, and very handsome. . . .”

“What’s that addition for? To offend me?”

“No, but that’s so important for a woman: youth and beauty. Not one eminent and ecstatic prophet can move her in the least if he has a face full of wrinkles and is missing his front teeth. That’s my opinion. . . .”

“It’s a rather repugnant opinion and besides, it’s not original! Nevertheless, you’ve got me interested in your friend. Bring him to meet me. . . .”

She extended her hand and then hurried toward her carriage. Baklanov lifted his hat and with his eyes followed the carriage, which turned onto Nevsky Prospect. He headed home because the breakfast hour was fast approaching. His wife didn’t like it when he was late. All the while a barely visible smile played on his lips and he thought: “If Racheev isn’t stupid, some entertaining episodes can occur on Nikolaveksaya Street.” And in his head, which, on the basis of some two or three scarcely noticeable situations, was used to creating entire novels, there already flashed an outline of a broad picture with a beginning and ending, a multitude of beautiful and interesting episodes, the heroine of which was Evgeniya Konstantinovna Vysotskaya. For a long time, almost from his first meeting with her, he’d imagined her as the heroine of a novel. Her history and her present life, her appearance, her views and habits—all these so suited this goal and inscribed themselves in his notebook. There was only one thing missing from

this novel: the heroine didn't reveal herself by some definitive step, at least not in his presence, and he couldn't guess in advance, what sort of turn this original, independent, supple nature, would take, which time and time again evades a positive identification with the help of the usual psychological judgment. And for some reason it seemed to him that Racheev was fated to cause a crisis in this nature, which then, as he thought, would unfurl in all its powerful breadth.

"However, the devil knows what this is!" thought Baklanov, stepping onto Furshtadtskaya Street and approaching his apartment. "What a foolish habit—to regard the world from the point of view of its suitability for a work of literature! Here I am, it seems, waiting for an old friend; and I relate to him sincerely, genuinely, but the first thoughts occasioned by his arrival—would there emerge a social-psychological novel, of say, some twenty printer's sheets? The devil knows what direction my brain's taken! They say that a cobbler, when he meets a new person, first of all looks him not in the face, but examines his boots, and a tailor, his jacket, and they judge people from that point of view. It can't be said that this is a flattering analogy for a writer!"

## II

Baklanov went to his study first, but since the small clock over the fireplace was chiming one o'clock, he returned and walked through the hall to the dining room. In similar circumstances Katerina Sergeevna demanded punctual precision, and when he was late for breakfast or dinner, she knew how to ruin the two meals. She would become stern, and even reply to his questions unwillingly, wouldn't laugh or even smile when Baklanov made a witty remark or recounted amusing things, and when it was really necessary to laugh, she generally took on the appearance and tone of voice of a guiltless, offended woman, and this depressed Nikolai Alekseevich and spoiled his appetite. She considered that the punctual arrival of all family members at the table was an essential condition of orderliness, which she upheld assiduously in the household.



But Baklanov was not late and found her fresh, cheerful, content, and interesting in her white dressing gown, with her lovely and carefully arranged coiffure of thick, dark hair, and with a rosy color on her usually pale cheeks. He kissed her and she met him with a polite, welcoming smile. He also kissed his pretty, four-year-old daughter, who was sitting next to her mother on a wicker high chair, and he merely nodded to the young woman with a pretty pink face with little freckles, with two heavy golden-red braids, who was sitting at the end of the table. This was his sister; they were on amicable terms, but without tenderness.

“Did you sleep well? When did you wake up?” he addressed everyone at once in a tone of humorous substance, as he sat down at the table and poured himself some reddish vodka from the decanter.

“I just got up, and Liza got up with Tanya, as is appropriate, very early this morning!” Katerina Sergeevna replied with a little laughter. She was cheerful for no reason at all, simply because she woke up after a good sleep, felt healthy, strong, and lovely, and she didn’t expect anything from the day ahead but a series of calm and more or less pleasant impressions.

“Very early, for you—that means around eleven, isn’t that right? Well, by that time I’d managed to write almost four printer’s sheets.”

“I should think so! You get up at an unseemly early hour! Have some of the mushroom sauce. It’s the creation of our new cook, Ak-sinya. . . . And are you writing something again?”

“Of course, how could it be different? We always eat something and wear something. . . . Well, that means it’s necessary to write something.”

“And once again something rural?”

“Not especially, but the action takes place for the most part in the countryside.”

“What a bore! Aren’t your readers fed up with that by now, and you, too?”

Nikolai Alekseevich raised his eyebrows slightly.

“I’ve asked you more than once, Katya, not to raise this subject,”

he said with badly concealed dissatisfaction. "It's precisely that point where our agreement ends and there begins. . . ."

"Our disagreement? Ha-ha-ha! So what's so bad about that or . . . dangerous? If people agreed about everything, it would be very boring!"

Nikolai Alekseevich furrowed his brows even more and regarded his wife sullenly.

"Well, it turns out too merrily when intimate people, living, apparently, a life in common, disagree on the most basic principles," he said, and once again he looked at his wife almost with hostility.

"Oh, my goodness!" cried Katerina Sergeevna in her previous cheerful tone of voice, apparently, paying no attention to her husband's mood. "But I can't profess my love for your countryside, when I can't stand it and even simply despise it from the bottom of my heart! I'm merely being sincere and nothing else. I find the countryside with its residents, your beloved heroes—boring, stupid, crude, vile, and worthless; I'm saying this in all honesty, and I'm surprised that you have the desire to write about it, and that your readers want to read about it. . . . However, I'm deeply convinced that if you, a countryside-lover and a populist, were settled in the country and forced to live there with those Pakhoms and Akulinas for two years, and if you were deprived of everything that you do here, you'd howl like a wolf. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

"That's a completely different question," Baklanov remarked in a softer tone.

"That's just the point: for your own convenience you make two questions out of it, one for the soul, and one for the body. . . . But I have a question. That's all there is to it."

During this dialogue the young girl was looking at her parents with an expression of obvious misgiving. At home, and especially with his wife, Baklanov was always even-tempered, moderately cheerful, genially lighthearted, and very concise in those instances when a serious question was under consideration. He knew how to subordi-

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3. Pakhom and Akulina are typical Russian peasant names.

nate his mood to necessity; and necessity consisted in having peace and quiet predominate at home, and having a family life that was not disturbed by disagreements or tumultuous scenes. Disagreeing with his wife about many things, even very many things, he almost never argued with her, and if he did, it was gently and meekly, yielding point after point. Katerina Sergeevna didn't know how to argue objectively; taking every disagreement as a personal insult, she very quickly adopted a hostile tone, began throwing out caustic remarks and reproaches, and frequently wound up with tears in her eyes, and somehow a saucer or a plate would get broken. Why allow things to reach that point? There was no hope of convincing her of anything; meanwhile, several hours would be spoiled for him, for his sister, for Tanya, for the servants, and the guests who happened to drop in on them at that time. Therefore, Nikolai Alekseevich maintained a rule of retreating, and in every instance he practiced that until, under the specious excuse of wanting to smoke a cigar, he could manage to withdraw to his study and there consider himself the winner.

But the young girl always looked frightened when conversation turned to the countryside or to her brother's literary works. It seemed that in these cases Nikolai Alekseevich was incapable of controlling himself; these, perhaps, were the only questions that compelled him to argue and defend his position passionately. After a whole series of squabbles, which ended when Katerina Sergeevna, trembling, with flashing eyes, declared herself to be the unhappiest woman in the whole world and, of course, refused food, drink, and other earthly things, and Nikolai Alekseevich had retreated to his study and was pacing energetically from corner to corner, sighing deeply from time to time, running his fingers through his hair tragically—Baklanov triumphantly asked his wife never to raise these questions. Therefore, Liza awaited the storm, all the more so since there appeared on Nikolai Alekseevich's face a malevolent sign—his brows were furrowed, something that she had occasion to see very rarely on her brother's face.

But on this day everything turned out happily. Katerina Sergeevna rarely felt so hale and hearty as she did then. Constantly com-

plaining about her nerves and becoming easily upset for the most insignificant reasons, rarely socializing on other days, she seemed to be a completely different person, and the world seemed to be not that bad a place; in her soul there prevailed a desire to see the pleasant and cheerful side of everything. Today was just that sort of day, and she could utter her tirade about the countryside in a completely serene and kindhearted tone of voice. Having noticed that her words affected her husband not quite favorably, she stopped in good time and ceased entirely. Thus a family squabble did not ensue, and the look of alarm disappeared from Lizaveta Alekseevna's face.

Katerina Sergeevna busied herself with Tanya, who was insistently demanding attention, since her pinafore was covered with mushroom sauce. Nikolai Alekseevich took out a small cigar, cut off its end, and started smoking; they served him a miniature cup of black coffee.

"Here's what I wanted to tell you, Katya!" he said in a completely calm and kindhearted tone: "I received a telegram from my friend Racheev. He's arriving tomorrow; I don't know if he plans to stay with us; in all likelihood, he won't; but I still consider it my duty to invite him here. . . ."

Once again a look of alarm appeared in the young lady's eyes. She was even surprised at how her brother had dared to make such a proposal. Nothing upset Katerina Sergeevna more than the presence of an outsider in her house. There was the time when one of Baklanov's friends came from Moscow and spent four days with them, and those four days were blighted for the entire household. Katerina Sergeevna used to say that in such circumstances she felt that an outsider's eyes were constantly looking into her soul, and that she felt uncomfortable even when she was left alone in her own room. And at those times her look always becomes stern and hostile toward all the members of the family, and in particular toward the guest; it's impossible to please her, everything seems unfortunate and everyone finds it difficult to be with her.

But such was the good fortune of that day. Katerina Sergeevna didn't say a word in protest. She merely expressed the doubt that the

guest would be comfortable in the corner room, and she expressed surprise that Baklanov had friends about whom she'd never heard a thing.

"There was never the chance to tell you!" remarked Nikolai Alekseevich. "Racheev is not only an acquaintance, but my friend . . . and an old friend!"

"Ah! I don't believe in old friendships, when you haven't mentioned him once in the past five years!" said Katerina Sergeevna. "Where is he coming from and what for? Is he a man of letters?"

"Not really. I recall two or three articles of his, not at all remarkable, by the way. He lives on his small estate not far from Aunt Marya Antipovna."

"Then what do you have in common with him?"

"What do you mean? In the first place—our past. We were at the gymnasium together and then at university. Next—our convictions, our views. . . . He's a convinced populist, moreover—on practical grounds. I've heard that on his country estate he's actually implemented his convictions."

"So that's it? For the first time in my life I'll see a man who not only expounds on his convictions, but actually implements them!" Katerina Sergeevna remarked with gentle irony in her voice. "That's intriguing. . . . However, this Racheev must be a very boring person."

"I can't promise anything in advance!" Baklanov replied good-naturedly, sitting down on the wide, soft sofa and enjoying his cigar.

"Perhaps he can serve as a source of discovery for Liza—she's also quite a populist in a fashionable hat!"

These words were uttered, however, not at all in an offensive tone. Katerina Sergeevna frequently made jokes at Liza's expense. They lived amicably and never quarreled. Perhaps this occurred because Liza was able to put up with it and concede. When Katerina Sergeevna was subject to an uncontrolled nervous mood, sometimes resulting from some insignificant reason, and began carping about trifles with a cruel and agonizing enjoyment even for her, seeking in them a new cause for her irritation, Liza, clearly noticing that protests in such circumstances would achieve the opposite aim,

regarded all of this in silence, with a slight smile. Katerina Sergeevna valued this, and the two women, so much alike, got along with each other. Nikolai Alekseevich also appreciated this. When three years ago, Liza expressed a desire to settle in Petersburg and live with them, he, naturally, hastened to write to her with the warmest invitation, adding that his wife would be very pleased. Katerina Sergeevna, for her part, also expressed her pleasure. She considered that her husband's sister had the right to do so. But in the depths of his soul, Baklanov concealed the apprehension that this would upset their quiet family life. He had almost no conception of his sister. She grew up in the provinces under her aunt's care, and that's where she attended school. He left when she was a little girl, unattractive, round-faced, and ungainly; and he was very surprised, when, arriving after this marriage, he visited his aunt and beheld a grown young woman, well brought up, who met him simply and naturally, and began talking about his works with enthusiasm. She was his admirer, sharing his views, for which her aunt called her a "little fool," while her brother looked at her with affection. However, he issued the invitation to her to come to Petersburg in passing, incidentally.

"Why would you want to stay here, sister? You could come and live with us, really!" he said in passing during one of their conversations.

"What for?" she asked. But he was already speaking to his aunt, didn't hear her question, and didn't return to this subject.

A year passed, Liza turned twenty, and the aunt began talking about her marriage.

"You, let's say, are not bad looking; you're a redhead, and men like redheads, especially with your golden red hair. . . . Nevertheless, it's difficult to make a good match here. There are no suitable people; they're all boors. . . . You should write to Nikolai; let him invite you to live with him. There are many suitors in the capital, an overabundance of them!"

Liza wasn't planning to get married, but she didn't have anything against moving to the capital. An exchange of letters took place, and Liza was now in Petersburg. Her brother met her with restrained joy;

up to the last moment he was hoping that something might prevent her, or that she would reconsider. He valued the peace and quiet of his small family circle, and he related to his sister more with formal, brotherly affection, than with love. Meanwhile, he had rarely heard that two young women could live amicably under one roof.

But Lizaveta Alekseevna managed to make her presence in her brother's house pleasant and very quickly dispelled all of Baklanov's fears. She had a special skill of getting involved in everything concerning the running of the household and in so doing, relieving the lady of the house of her domestic role, while also remaining entirely outside the Baklanovs' exclusive family matters. In such a manner, her presence was viewed as that of a useful and pleasant helper, and the inner, personal lives of the Baklanovs were not affected in any way. During arguments between the spouses, accompanying Katerina Sergeevna's capricious outbursts, she would disappear unnoticed and not reappear until the sky had cleared. When they turned to her with some complaint, she always delicately, but very decidedly took up the wife's cause, which earned her the wife's good favor and the husband's gratitude. More than anything on earth she loved her little room, where, sitting in her armchair or lying on her bed, she became engrossed in books, of which her brother had a large collection. But of everything she had occasion to read, in the forefront she placed the works of her brother Nikolai Alekseevich, considering them the height of perfection.

Liza smiled at Katerina Sergeevna's remark.

"What sort of populist am I, really . . ." she said in a gentle, weak voice. "You do me too much honor, Katya! I don't know Racheev very well. I've seen him only twice. Once he came to visit my aunt when our warden seized the peasants' livestock. He made efforts to get them freed. . . ."

"That's exactly what constitutes the implementation of lofty ideals," Katerina Sergeevna observed ironically.

"No, it's a long story!" Liza continued and her face, usually cold and serene, came to life and her voice became sonorous. "He says to our aunt: you demand three rubles from each of them, but for a

peasant, three rubles is a week's work. Besides, the cows didn't ruin anything, they merely trampled the grass. And our aunt laughs and replies: if you sympathize with them, then you pay the money for them, and I don't intend to waive my rights. Racheev didn't say a word in reply; he took out his wallet and paid the sum of twenty-four rubles for the eight cows."

"Extremely generous!" Katerina Sergeevna muttered with her previous irony.

"That's not all. About three weeks later an unfortunate incident happened to our aunt. Racheev's men rounded up our cows and their calves, around fifteen head altogether. They informed our aunt, and she became indignant: how dare he? It wasn't neighborly and not what gentry do! But Racheev never had the habit of rounding up others' cattle. Our aunt wrote to him: a misunderstanding has occurred, but I trust that you will behave honorably and release the cattle. But he replied: I'm also not inclined to waive my rights. Be so kind as to pay me three rubles for each one. She had to pay! Since then our aunt can't stand the sight of him. . . ."

"Well, so, all I can say is: he's not a milquetoast, and that's good! By the way, we'll get to see him tomorrow, this hero of yours! I imagine how angry he'll be!"

"At what, Katya?" asked Baklanov, regarding her in surprise.

"What do you mean? At life and the setting of a populist writer, his frivolous wife, who loves her comforts and who dresses decently. . . . For heaven's sake—we have six rooms, when we could all live in one: I would sleep on the bed, you on the stove, Liza on a sleeping bench, and Tanya in a hanging cradle. . . . We spend three rubles for dinner every day, when we could be satisfied by a pair of Dutch herrings, three pounds of bread, and a bottle of kvass; we go to the theater, arrange receptions, oh, Lord! I think that when he sees all of this there'll be a quarrel on his first day here, if not a real fight."

All of this was said in a half-sarcastic and half-joking tone, but without any malice. Liza, naturally, had already folded her napkin, inserted it into a napkin ring, and anticipating the possibility of a more or less major discussion between the spouses, she sensibly



returned to her own room. But Baklanov said not one word in reply to his wife's outburst. He leaned his elbow on the back of the sofa and smoked his cigar as if Katerina Sergeevna's words hadn't offended him in any way. But there occurred to him a series of thoughts and comparisons. It seemed to him that his friend really would be very surprised. If Racheev read his works in which he so intensely and eloquently preached the simplicity of life and mocked the empty, meaningless passion for the temptations of comfort—then, of course, this contradiction would be immediately apparent.

And what an anxious feeling stirred in his heart. Why? He himself couldn't explain it. What's this? Was it really remorse or cowardice before a friend's reproaches? But he'd earned all this by his honest and hard work and his God-given talent. This thought, however, didn't provide much comfort, and when he went back to his study, and took out from his desk drawer a notebook half-filled with his small script, he felt at once that he wouldn't write anything sensible. A feeling of vague anxiety hampered him.

### III

Baklanov took up a position near the exit from the railway platform and looked unhurriedly and carefully, without any noticeable rush, at all the passengers who were passing him with their suitcases and bundles. "Did I really miss him?" he asked himself after the crowd had significantly lessened.

Just then a tall, broad-shouldered man who was approaching, wearing a dusty gray coat, under which peeked the pointed collar of a blue cotton shirt. Baklanov looked at him and thought: "Could that be him? But when did he grow such an enormous beard?" In spite of the fact that his long, broad black beard was unexpected, he recognized his friend at once; he knew him primarily by his restrained smile, which played on his lips somewhere under his thick mustache.

"My, my, my! When did you grow such a gigantic beard? I could hardly recognize you!" Baklanov said in astonishment, while at the same time exchanging kisses with his friend. "It's amazing!"