THE BRIGADIER

Ivan Turgenev

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I

READER, do you know those little homesteads of country gentlefolks, which were plentiful in our Great Russian Oukraïne twenty−five or thirty years ago? Now one rarely comes across them, and in another ten years the last of them will, I suppose, have disappeared for ever. The running pond overgrown with reeds and rushes, the favourite haunt of fussy ducks, among whom one may now and then come across a wary "teal"; beyond the pond a garden with avenues of lime−trees, the chief beauty and glory of our black−earth plains, with smothered rows of "Spanish" strawberries, with dense thickets of gooseberries, currants, and raspberries, in the midst of which, in the languid hour of the stagnant noonday heat, one would be sure to catch glimpses of a serf−girl's striped kerchief, and to hear the shrill ring of her voice. Close by would be a summer−house standing on four legs, a conservatory, a neglected kitchen garden, with flocks of sparrows hung on stakes, and a cat curled up on the tumble−down well; a little further, leafy apple−trees in the high grass, which is green below and grey above, straggling cherry−trees, pear−trees, on which there is never any fruit; then flower−beds, poppies, peonies, pansies, milkwort, "maids in green," bushes of Tartar honeysuckle, wild jasmine, lilac and acacia, with the continual hum of bees and wasps among their thick, fragrant, sticky branches. At last comes the manor−house, a one−storied building on a brick foundation, with greenish window−panes in narrow frames, a sloping, once painted roof, a little balcony from which the vases of the balustrade are always jutting out, a crooked gable, and a husky old dog in the recess under

the steps at the door. Behind the house a wide yard with nettles, wormwood, and burdocks in the corners, outbuildings with doors that stick, doves and rooks on the thatched roofs, a little storehouse with a rusty weathercock, two or three birch−trees with rooks' nests in their bare top branches, and beyond the road with cushions of soft dust in the ruts and a field and the long hurdles of the hemp patches, and the grey little huts of the village, and the cackle of geese in the far−away rich meadows. . . . Is all this familiar to you, reader? In the house itself everything is a little awry, a little rickety but no matter. It stands firm and keeps warm; the stoves are like elephants, the furniture is of all sorts, home−made. Little paths of white footmarks run from the doors over the painted floors. In the hall siskins and larks in tiny cages; in the corner of the dining−room an immense English clock in the form of a tower, with the inscription, "Strike silent"; in the drawing−room portraits of the family, painted in oils, with an expression of ill−tempered alarm on the brick−coloured faces, and sometimes too an old warped picture of flowers and fruit or a mythological subject. Everywhere there is the smell of kvas, of apples, of linseed−oil and of leather. Flies buzz and hum about the ceiling and the windows. A daring cockroach suddenly shows his countenance from behind the looking−glass frame. . . . No matter, one can live here and live very well too.

II

JUST such a homestead it was my lot to visit thirty years ago . . . it was in days long past, as you perceive. The little estate in which this house stood belonged to a friend of mine at the university; it had only recently come to him on the death of a bachelor cousin, and he was not living in it himself. . . . But at no great distance from it there were wide tracts of steppe bog, in which at the time of summer migration, when they are on the wing, there are great numbers of snipe; my friend and I, both enthusiastic sportsmen, agreed therefore to go on St. Peter's day, he from Moscow, I from my own village, to his little house. My friend lingered in Moscow, and was two days late; I did not care to start shooting without him. I was received by an old servant, Narkiz Semyonov, who had had notice of my coming. This old servant was not in the least like "Savelitch" or "Caleb"; my friend used to call him in joke "Marquis." There was something of conceit, even of affectation, about him; he looked down on us young men with a certain dignity, but cherished no particularly respectful sentiments for other landowners either; of his old master he spoke slightingly, while his own class he simply scorned for their ignorance. He could read and write, expressed himself correctly and with judgment, and did not drink. He seldom went to church, and so was looked upon as a dissenter. In appearance he was thin and tall, had a long and good−looking face, a sharp nose, and overhanging eyebrows, which he was continually either knitting or lifting; he wore a neat, roomy coat, and boots to his knees with heart−shaped scallops at the tops.

III

ON the day of my arrival, Narkiz, having given me lunch and cleared the table, stood in the doorway, looked intently at me, and with some play of the eyebrows observed:

"What are you going to do now, sir?"

"Well, really, I don't know. If Nikolai Petrovitch had kept his word and come, we should have gone shooting together."

"So you really expected, sir, that he would come at the time he promised?"

"Of course I did."

"H'm." Narkiz looked at me again and shook his head as it were with commiseration. "If you'd care to amuse yourself with reading," he continued: "there are some books left of my old master's; I'll get them you, if you like; only you won't read them, I expect."

"Why?"

"They're books of no value; not written for the gentlemen of these days."

"Have you read them?"

"If I hadn't read them, I wouldn't have spoken about them. A dream−book, for instance . . . that's not much of a book, is it? There are others too, of course . . . only you won't read them either."

"Why?"

"They are religious books."

I was silent for a space. . . . Narkiz was silent too.

"What vexes me most," I began, "is staying in the house in such weather."

"Take a walk in the garden; or go into the copse. We've a copse here beyond the threshing−floor. Are you fond of fishing?"

"Are there fish here?"

"Yes, in the pond. Loaches, sand−eels, and perches are caught there. Now, to be sure, the best time is over; July's here. But anyway, you might try. . . . Shall I get the tackle ready?"

"Yes, do please."

"I'll send a boy with you . . . to put on the worms. Or maybe I'd better come myself?" Narkiz obviously doubted whether I knew how to set about things properly by myself.

"Come, please, come along."

Narkiz, without a word, grinned from ear to ear, then suddenly knitted his brows . . and went out of the room.

IV

HALF an hour later we set off to catch fish. Narkiz had put on an extraordinary sort of cap with ears, and was more dignified than ever. He walked in front with a steady, even step; two rods swayed regularly up and down on

his shoulders; a bare−legged boy followed him carrying a can and a pot of worms.

"Here, near the dike, there's a seat, put up on the floating platform on purpose," Narkiz was beginning to explain to me, but he glanced ahead, and suddenly exclaimed: "Aha! but our poor folk are here already .. they keep it up, it seems."

I craned my head to look from behind him, and saw on the floating platform, on the very seat of which he had been speaking, two persons sitting with their backs to us; they were placidly fishing.

"Who are they?" I asked.

"Neighbours," Narkiz responded, with displeasure. "They've nothing to eat at home, and so here they come to us."

"Are they allowed to?"

"The old master allowed them. . . . Nikolai Petrovitch maybe won't give them permission. . . . The long one is a superannuated deacon quite a silly creature; and as for the other, that's a little stouter he's a brigadier."

"A brigadier?" I repeated, wondering. This "brigadier's" attire was almost worse than the deacon's.

"I assure you he's a brigadier. And he did have a fine property once. But now he has only a corner given him out of charity, and he lives . . . on what God sends him. But, by the way, what are we to do? They've taken the best place. . . . We shall have to disturb our precious visitors."

"No, Narkiz, please don't disturb them. We'll sit here a little aside; they won't interfere with us. I should like to make acquaintance with the brigadier."

"As you like. Only, as far as acquaintance goes . . . you needn't expect much satisfaction from it, sir; he's grown very weak in his head, and in conversation he's silly as a little child. As well he may be; he's past his eightieth year."

"What's his name?"

"Vassily Fomitch. Guskov's his surname."

"And the deacon?"

"The deacon? . . . his nickname's Cucumber. Every one about here calls him so; but what his real name is God knows! A foolish creature! A regular ne'er−do−weel."

"Do they live together?"

"No; but there the devil has tied them together, it seems."

V

WE approached the platform. The brigadier cast one glance upon us . . . and promptly fixed his eyes on the float; Cucumber jumped up, pulled back his rod, took off his worn−out clerical hat, passed a trembling hand over his rough yellow hair, made a sweeping bow, and gave vent to a feeble little laugh. His bloated face betrayed him an inveterate drunkard; his staring little eyes blinked humbly. He gave his neighbour a poke in the ribs, as though to let him know that they must clear out. . . . The brigadier began to move on the seat.

"Sit still, I beg; don't disturb yourselves," I hastened to say. "You won't interfere with us in the least. We'll take up our position here; sit still."

Cucumber wrapped his ragged smock round him, twitched his shoulders, his lips, his beard. . . . Obviously he felt our presence oppressive and he would have been glad to slink away. . . . but the brigadier was again lost in the contemplation of his float. . . . The "ne'er−do−weel" coughed twice, sat down on the very edge of the seat, put his hat on his knees, and, tucking his bare legs up under him, he discreetly dropped in his line.

"Any bites?" Narkiz inquired haughtily, as in leisurely fashion he unwound his reel.

"We've caught a matter of five loaches," answered Cucumber in a cracked and husky voice: "and he took a good−sized perch."

"Yes, a perch," repeated the brigadier in a shrill pipe.

VI

I FELL to watching closely not him, but his reflection in the pond. It was as clearly reflected as in a looking−glass a little darker, a little more silvery. The wide stretch of pond wafted a refreshing coolness upon us; a cool breath of air seemed to rise, too, from the steep, damp bank; and it was the sweeter, as in the dark blue, flooded with gold, above the tree tops, the stagnant sultry heat hung, a burden that could be felt, over our heads. There was no stir in the water near the dike; in the shade cast by the drooping bushes on the bank, water spiders gleamed, like tiny bright buttons, as they described their everlasting circles; at long intervals there was a faint ripple just perceptible round the floats, when a fish was "playing" with the worm. Very few fish were taken; during a whole hour we drew up only two loaches and an eel. I could not say why the brigadier aroused my curiosity; his rank could not have any influence on me; ruined noblemen were not even at that time looked upon as a rarity, and his appearance presented nothing remarkable. Under the warm cap, which covered the whole upper part of his head down to his ears and his eyebrows, could be seen a smooth, red, clean−shaven, round face, with a little nose, little lips, and small, clear grey eyes. Simplicity and weakness of character, and a sort of long−standing, helpless sorrow, were visible in that meek, almost childish face; the plump, white little hands with short fingers had something helpless, incapable about them too. . . . I could not conceive how this forlorn old man could once have been an officer, could have maintained discipline, have given his commands and that, too, in the stern days of Catherine! I watched him; now and then he puffed out his cheeks and uttered a feeble whistle, like a little child; sometimes he screwed up his eyes painfully, with effort, as all decrepit people will. Once he opened his eyes wide and lifted them. . . . They stared at me from out of the depths of the water and strangely touching and even full of meaning their dejected glance seemed to me.

VII

I TRIED to begin a conversation with the brigadier . . . but Narkiz had not misinformed me; the poor old man certainly had become weak in his intellect. He asked me my surname, and after repeating his inquiry twice, pondered and pondered, and at last brought out: "Yes, I fancy there was a judge of that name here. Cucumber, wasn't there a judge about here of that name, hey?" "To be sure there was, Vassily Fomitch, your honour," responded Cucumber, who treated him altogether as a child. "There was, certainly. But let me have your hook; your worm must have been eaten off. . . . Yes, so it is."

"Did you know the Lomov family?" the brigadier suddenly asked me in a cracked voice.

"What Lomov family is that?"

"Why, Fiodor Ivanitch, Yevstigney Ivanitch, Alexey Ivanitch the Jew, and Fedulia Ivanovna the plunderer. . . . and then, too. . . ."

The brigadier suddenly broke off and looked down confused.

"They were the people he was most intimate with," Narkiz whispered, bending towards me; "it was through them, through that same Alexey Ivanitch, that he called a Jew, and through a sister of Alexey Ivanitch's, Agrafena Ivanovna, as you may say, that he lost all his property."

"What are you saying there about Agrafena Ivanovna?" the brigadier called out suddenly, and his head was raised, his white eyebrows were frowning. . . . "You'd better mind! And why Agrafena, pray? Agrippina Ivanovna that's what you should call her."

"There there there, sir," Cucumber was beginning to falter.

"Don't you know the verses the poet Milonov wrote about her?" the old man went on, suddenly getting into a state of excitement, which was a complete surprise to me. "No hymeneal lights were kindled," he began chanting, pronouncing all the vowels through his nose, giving the syllables "an," "en," the nasal sound they have in French; and it was strange to hear this connected speech from his lips: "No torches . . . No, that's not it:

> 'Not vain Corruption's idols frail
> Not amaranth nor porphyry
> Rejoiced their hearts . .
> One thing in them . .

"That was about us. Do you hear?

> 'One thing in them unquenchable,
> Subduing, sweet, desirable,
> To nurse their mutual flame in love!'

And you talk about Agrafena!"

Narkiz chuckled half−contemptuously, half−indifferently. "What a queer fish it is!" he said to himself. But the brigadier had again relapsed into dejection, the rod had dropped from his hands and slipped into the water.

VIII

"WELL, to my thinking, our fishing is a poor business," observed Cucumber; "the fish, see, don't bite at all. It's got fearfully hot, and there's a fit of 'mencholy' come over our gentleman. It's clear we must be going home; that will be best." He cautiously drew out of his pocket a tin bottle with a wooden stopper, uncorked it, scattered snuff on his wrist, and sniffed it up in both nostrils at once. . . . "Ah, what good snuff!" he moaned, as he recovered himself. "It almost made my tooth ache! Now, my dear Vassily Fomitch, get up it's time to be off!"

The brigadier got up from the bench.

"Do you live far from here?" I asked Cucumber.

"No, our gentleman lives not far . . . it won't be as much as a mile."

"Will you allow me to accompany you?" I said, addressing the brigadier. I felt disinclined to let him go.

He looked at me, and with that peculiar, stately, courteous, and rather affected smile, which I don't know how it is with others to me always suggests powder, French full−skirted coats with paste buttons the eighteenth century, in fact he replied, with the old−fashioned drawl, that he would be "high−ly de−lighted" . . . and at once sank back into his former condition again. The grand gentleman of the old Catherine days flickered up in him for an instant and vanished.

Narkiz was surprised at my intention; but I paid no attention to the disapproving shake of his long−eared cap, and walked out of the garden with the brigadier, who was supported by Cucumber. The old man moved fairly quickly, with a motion as though he were on stilts.

IX

WE walked along a scarcely trodden path, through a grassy glade between two birch copses. The sun was blazing; the orioles called to each other in the green thicket; corn−crakes chattered close to the path; blue butterflies fluttered in crowds about the white and red flowers of the low−growing clover; in the perfectly still grass bees hung, as though asleep, languidly buzzing. Cucumber seemed to pull himself together, and brightened up; he was afraid of Narkiz he lived always under his eye; I was a stranger a new comer with me he was soon quite at home.

"Here's our gentleman," he said in a rapid flow; "he's a small eater and no mistake! but only one perch, is that enough for him? Unless, your honour, you would like to contribute something? Close here round the corner, at the little inn, there are first−rate white wheaten rolls. And if so, please your honour, this poor sinner, too, will gladly drink on this occasion to your health, and may it be of long years and long days." I gave him a little silver, and was only just in time to pull away my hand, which he was falling upon to kiss. He learned that I was a sportsman,

and fell to talking of a very good friend of his, an officer, who had a "Mindindenger" Swedish gun, with a copper stock, just like a cannon, so that when you fire it off you are almost knocked senseless it had been left behind by the French and a dog simply one of Nature's marvels! that he himself had always had a great passion for the chase, and his priest would have made no trouble about it he used in fact to catch quails with him but the ecclesiastical superior had pursued him with endless persecution; "and as for Narkiz Semyonitch," he observed in a sing−song tone, "if according to his notions I'm not a trustworthy person well, what I say is: he's let his eyebrows grow till he's like a woodcock, and he fancies all the sciences are known to him." By this time we had reached the inn, a solitary tumble−down, one−roomed little hut without backyard or outbuildings; an emaciated dog lay curled up under the window; a hen was scratching in the dust under his very nose. Cucumber sat the brigadier down on the bank, and darted instantly into the hut. While he was buying the rolls and emptying a glass, I never took my eyes off the brigadier, who, God knows why, struck me as something of an enigma. In the life of this man so I mused there must certainly have been something out of the ordinary. But he, it seemed, did not notice me at all. He was sitting huddled up on the bank, and twisting in his fingers some pinks which he had gathered in my friend's garden. Cucumber made his appearance, at last, with a bundle of rolls in his hand; he made his appearance, all red and perspiring, with an expression of gleeful surprise on his face, as though he had just seen something exceedingly agreeable and unexpected. He at once offered the brigadier a roll to eat, and the latter at once ate it. We proceeded on our way.

X

ON the strength of the spirits he had drunk, Cucumber quite "unbent," as it is called. He began trying to cheer up the brigadier, who was still hurrying forward with a tottering motion as though he were on stilts. "Why are you so downcast, sir, and hanging your head? Let me sing you a song. That'll cheer you up in a minute." He turned to me: "Our gentleman is very fond of a joke, mercy on us, yes! Yesterday, what did I see? a peasant−woman washing a pair of breeches on the platform, and a great fat woman she was, and he stood behind her, simply all of a shake with laughter yes, indeed! . . . In minute, allow me: do you know the song of the hare? You mustn't judge me by my looks; there's a gypsy woman living here in the town, a perfect fright, but sings 'pon my soul! one's ready to lie down and die." He opened wide his moist red lips and began singing, his head on one side, his eyes shut, and his beard quivering:

"The hare beneath the bush lies still,
The hunters vainly scour the hill;
The hare lies hid and holds his breath,
His ears pricked up, he lies there still
  Waiting for death.
O hunters! what harm have I done,
To vex or injure you? Although
Among the cabbages I run,
One leaf I nibble only one,
 And that's not yours!
  Oh, no!"

Cucumber went on with ever−increasing energy:

"Into the forest dark he fled,
His tail he let the hunters see;

'Excuse me, gentlemen,' says he,
'That so I turn my back on you
I am not yours!'"

Cucumber was not singing now . . . he was bellowing:

"The hunters hunted day and night,
And still the hare was out of sight.
So, talking over his misdeeds,
They ended by disputing quite
Alas, the hare is not for us!
The squint−eye is too sharp for us!"

The first two lines of each stanza Cucumber sang with each syllable drawn out; the other three, on the contrary, very briskly, and accompanied them with little hops and shuffles of his feet; at the conclusion of each verse he cut a caper, in which he kicked himself with his own heels. As he shouted at the top of his voice: "The squint−eye is too sharp for us!" he turned a somersault. . . . His expectations were fulfilled. The brigadier suddenly went off into a thin, tearful little chuckle, and laughed so heartily that he could not go on, and stayed still in a half−sitting posture, helplessly slapping his knees with his hands. I looked at his face, flushed crimson, and convulsively working, and felt very sorry for him at that instant especially. Encouraged by his success, Cucumber fell to capering about in a squatting position, singing the refrain of: "Shildi−budildi!" and "Natchiki−tchikaldi!" He stumbled at last with his nose in the dust. . . . The brigadier suddenly ceased laughing and hobbled on.

XI

WE went on another quarter of a mile. A little village came into sight on the edge of a not very deep ravine; on one side stood the "lodge," with a half−ruined roof and a solitary chimney; in one of the two rooms of this lodge lived the brigadier. The owner of the village, who always resided in Petersburg, the widow of the civil councillor Lomov, had so I learned later bestowed this little nook upon the brigadier. She had given orders that he should receive a monthly pension, and had also assigned for his service a half−witted serf−girl living in the same village, who, though she barely understood human speech, was yet capable, in the lady's opinion, of sweeping a floor and cooking cabbage−soup. At the door of the lodge the brigadier again addressed me with the same eighteenth−century smile: would I be pleased to walk into his "apartement"? We went into this "apartement." Everything in it was exceedingly filthy and poor, so filthy and so poor that the brigadier, noticing, probably, by the expression of my face, the impression it made on me, observed, shrugging his shoulders, and half closing his eyelids: "Ce n'est pas . . . oeil de perdrix." . . . What precisely he meant by this remained a mystery to me. . . . When I addressed him in French, I got no reply from him in that language. Two objects struck me especially in the brigadier's abode: a large officer's cross of St. George in a black frame, under glass, with an inscription in an old−fashioned handwriting: "Received by the Colonel of the Tchernigov regiment, Vassily Guskov, for the storming of Prague in the year 1794"; and secondly, a half−length portrait in oils of a handsome, black−eyed woman with a long, dark face, hair turned up high and powdered, with postiches on the temple and chin, in a flowered, low−cut bodice, with blue frills, the style of 1780. The portrait was badly painted, but was probably a good likeness; there was a wonderful look of life and will, something extraordinarily living and resolute, about the face. It was not looking at the spectator; it was, as it were, turning away and not smiling; the curve of the thin nose, the regular but flat lips, the almost unbroken straight line of the thick eyebrows, all showed an imperious, haughty, fiery temper. No great effort was needed to picture that face glowing with passion or with rage. Just

below the portrait on a little pedestal stood a half−withered bunch of simple wild flowers in a thick glass jar. The brigadier went up to the pedestal, stuck the pinks he was carrying into the jar, and turning to me, and lifting his hand in the direction of the portrait, he observed: "Agrippina Ivanovna Teliegin, by birth Lomov." The words of Narkiz came back to my mind; and I looked with redoubled interest at the expressive and evil face of the woman for whose sake the brigadier had lost all his fortune.

"You took part, I see, sir, in the storming of Prague," I began, pointing to the St. George cross, "and won a sign of distinction, rare at any time, but particularly so then; you must remember Suvorov?"

"Alexander Vassilitch?" the brigadier answered, after a brief silence, in which he seemed to be pulling his thoughts together; "to be sure, I remember him; he was a little, brisk old man. Before one could stir a finger, he'd be here and there and everywhere (the brigadier chuckled). He rode into Warsaw on a Cossack horse; he was all in diamonds, and he says to the Poles: 'I've no watch, I forgot it in Petersburg no watch!' and they shouted and huzzaed for him. Queer chaps! Hey! Cucumber! lad!" he added suddenly, changing and raising his voice (the deacon−buffoon had remained standing at the door), "where's the rolls, eh? And tell Grunka . . . to bring some kvas!"

"Directly, your honour," I heard Cucumber's voice reply. He handed the brigadier the bundle of rolls, and, going out of the lodge, approached a dishevelled creature in rags the half−witted girl, Grunka, I suppose and as far as I could make out through the dusty little window, proceeded to demand kvas from her at least, he several times raised one hand like a funnel to his mouth, and waved the other in our direction.

XII

I MADE another attempt to get into conversation with the brigadier; but he was evidently tired: he sank, sighing and groaning, on the little couch, and moaning, "Oy, oy, my poor bones, my poor bones," untied his garters. I remember I wondered at the time how a man came to be wearing garters. I did not realise that in former days every one wore them. The brigadier began yawning with prolonged, unconcealed yawns, not taking his drowsy eyes off me all the time; so very little children yawn. The poor old man did not even seem quite to understand my question. . . . And he had taken Prague! He, sword in hand, in the smoke and the dust at the head of Suvorov's soldiers, the bullet−pierced flag waving above him, the hideous corpses under his feet. . . . He . . . he! Wasn't it wonderful! But yet I could not help fancying that there had been events more extraordinary in the brigadier's life. Cucumber brought white kvas in an iron jug; the brigadier drank greedily his hands shook. Cucumber supported the bottom of the jug. The old man carefully wiped his toothless mouth with both hands and again staring at me, fell to chewing and munching his lips. I saw how it was, bowed, and went out of the room.

"Now he'll have a nap," observed Cucumber, coming out behind me. "He's terribly knocked up to−day he went to the grave early this morning."

"To whose grave?"

"To Agrafena Ivanovna's, to pay his devotions. . . She is buried in our parish cemetery here; it'll be four miles from here. Vassily Fomitch visits it every week without fail. Indeed, it was he who buried her and put the fence up at his own expense."

"Has she been dead long?"

"Well, let's think twenty years about."

"Was she a friend of his, or what?"

"Her whole life, you may say, she passed with him . . . really. I myself, I must own never knew the lady, but they do say . . . what there was between them . . . well, well, well! Sir," the deacon added hurriedly, seeing I had turned away, "wouldn't you like to give me something for another drop, for it's time I was home in my hut and rolled up in my blanket?"

I thought it useless to question Cucumber further, so gave him a few coppers, and set off homewards.

XIII

AT home I betook myself for further information to Narkiz. He, as I might have anticipated, was somewhat unapproachable, stood a little on his dignity, expressed his surprise that such paltry matters could "interest" me, and, finally, told me what he knew. I heard the following details.

Vassily Fomitch Guskov had become acquainted with Agrafena Ivanovna Teliegin at Moscow soon after the suppression of the Polish insurrection; her husband had had a post under the governor−general, and Vassily Fomitch was on furlough. He fell in love with her there and then, but did not leave the army at once; he was a man of forty with no family, with a fortune. Her husband soon after died. She was left without children, poor, and in debt. . . . Vassily Fomitch heard of her position, threw up the service (he received the rank of brigadier on his retirement) and sought out his charming widow, who was not more than five−and−twenty, paid all her debts, redeemed her estate. . . . From that time he had never parted from her, and finished by living altogether in her house. She, too, seems to have cared for him, but would not marry him. "She was froward, the deceased lady," was Narkiz's comment on this: "My liberty," she would say, "is dearer to me than anything." But as for making use of him she made use of him "in every possible way," and whatever money he had, he dragged to her like an ant. But the frowardness of Agrafena Ivanovna at times assumed extreme proportions; she was not of a mild temper, and somewhat too ready with her hand. . . . Once she pushed her page−boy down the stairs, and he went and broke two of his ribs and one leg. . . . Agrafena Ivanovna was frightened . . she promptly ordered the page to be shut up in the lumber−room, and she did not leave the house nor give up the key of the room to any one, till the moans within had ceased. . . . The page was secretly buried. . . . "And had it been in the Empress Catherine's time," Narkiz added in a whisper, bending down, "maybe the affair would have ended there many such deeds were hidden under a bushel in those days, but as . . ." here Narkiz drew himself up and raised his voice: "as our righteous Tsar Alexander the Blessed was reigning then . . . well, a fuss was made. . . . A trial followed, the body was dug up . . . signs of violence were found on it . . . and a great to−do there was. And what do you think? Vassily Fomitch took it all on himself. 'I,' said he, ' am responsible for it all; it was I pushed him down, and I too shut him up.' Well, of course, all the judges then, and the lawyers and the police . . . fell on him directly . . . fell on him and never let him go . . . I can assure you . . . till the last farthing was out of his purse. They'd leave him in peace for a while, and then attack him again. Down to the very time when the French came into Russia they were worrying at him, and only dropped him then. Well, he managed to provide for Agrafena Ivanovna to be sure, he saved her that one must say. Well, and afterwards, up to her death, indeed, he lived with her, and they do say she

led him a pretty dance the brigadier, that is; sent him on foot from Moscow into the country by God, she did to get her rents in, I suppose. It was on her account, on account of this same Agrafena Ivanovna he fought a duel with the English milord Hugh Hughes; and the English milord was forced to make a formal apology too. But later on the brigadier went down hill more and more. . . . Well, and now he can't be reckoned a man at all."

"Who was that Alexey Ivanitch the Jew," I asked, "through whom he was brought to ruin?"

"Oh, the brother of Agrafena Ivanovna. A grasping creature, Jewish indeed. He lent his sister money at interest, and Vassily Fomitch was her security. He had to pay for it too . . . pretty heavily!"

"And Fedulia Ivanovna the plunderer who was she?"

"Her sister too . . . and a sharp one too, as sharp as a lance. A terrible woman!"

XIV

"WHAT a place to find a Werter!" I thought next day, as I set off again towards the brigadier's dwelling. I was at that time very young, and that was possibly why I thought it my duty not to believe in the lasting nature of love. Still, I was impressed and somewhat puzzled by the story I had heard, and felt an intense desire to stir up the old man, to make him talk freely. "I'll first refer to Suvorov again," so I resolved within myself; "there must be some spark of his former fire hidden within him still . . . and then, when he's warmed up, I'll turn the conversation on that . . . what's her name? . . . Agrafena Ivanovna. A queer name for a 'Charlotte' Agrafena!"

I found my Werter−Guskov in the middle of a tiny kitchen−garden, a few steps from the lodge, near the old framework of a never−finished hut, overgrown with nettles. On the mildewed upper beams of this skeleton hut some miserable−looking turkey poults were scrambling, incessantly slipping and flapping their wings and cackling. There was some poor sort of green stuff growing in two or three borders. The brigadier had just pulled a young carrot out of the ground, and rubbing it under his arm "to clean it," proceeded to chew its thin tail. . . . I bowed to him, and inquired after his health.

He obviously did not recognise me, though he returned my greeting that is to say, touched his cap with his hand, though without leaving off munching the carrot.

"You didn't go fishing to−day?" I began, in the hope of recalling myself to his memory by this question.

"To−day?" he repeated and pondered . . . while the carrot, stuck into his mouth, grew shorter and shorter. "Why, I suppose it's Cucumber fishing! . . . But I'm allowed to, too."

"Of course, of course, most honoured Vassily Fomitch. . . . I didn't mean that. . . . But aren't you hot . . . like this in the sun."

The brigadier was wearing a thick wadded dressing−gown.

"Eh? Hot?" he repeated again, as though puzzled over the question, and, having finally swallowed the carrot, he gazed absently upwards.

"Would you care to step into my apartement?" he said suddenly. The poor old man had, it seemed, only this phrase still left him always at his disposal.

We went out of the kitchen−garden . . . but there involuntarily I stopped short. Between us and the lodge stood a huge bull. With his head down to the ground, and a malignant gleam in his eyes, he was snorting heavily and furiously, and with a rapid movement of one fore−leg, he tossed the dust up in the air with his broad cleft hoof, lashed his sides with his tail, and suddenly backing a little, shook his shaggy neck stubbornly, and bellowed not loud, but plaintively, and at the same time menacingly. I was, I confess, alarmed; but Vassily Fomitch stepped forward with perfect composure, and saying in a stern voice, "Now then, country bumpkin," shook his handkerchief at him. The bull backed again, bowed his horns . . . suddenly rushed to one side and ran away, wagging his head from side to side.

"There's no doubt he took Prague," I thought.

We went into the room. The brigadier pulled his cap off his hair, which was soaked with perspiration, ejaculated, "Fa!" . . . squatted down on the edge of a chair . . . bowed his head gloomily. . . .

"I have come to you, Vassily Fomitch," I began my diplomatic approaches, "because, as you have served under the leadership of the great Suvorov have taken part altogether in such important events it would be very interesting for me to hear some particulars of your past."

The brigadier stared at me. . . . His face kindled strangely I began to expect, if not a story, at least some word of approval, of sympathy. . . .

"But I, sir, must be going to die soon," he said in an undertone.

I was utterly nonplussed.

"Why, Vassily Fomitch," I brought out at last, "what makes you . . . suppose that?"

The brigadier suddenly flung his arms violently up and down.

"Because, sir . . . I, as maybe you know . . . often in my dreams see Agrippina Ivanovna Heaven's peace be with her! and never can I catch her; I am always running after her but cannot catch her. But last night I dreamed she was standing, as it were, before me, half−turned away, and laughing. . . . I ran up to her at once and caught her . . . and she seemed to turn round quite and said to me: 'Well, Vassinka, now you have caught me.'"

"What do you conclude from that, Vassily Fomitch?"

"Why, sir, I conclude: it has come, that we shall be together. And glory to God for it, I tell you; glory be to God Almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (the brigadier fell into a chant): as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, Amen!"

The brigadier began crossing himself. I could get nothing more out of him, so I went away.

XV

THE next day my friend arrived. . . I mentioned the brigadier, and my visits to him. . . . "Oh yes! of course! I know his story," answered my friend; "I know Madame Lomov very well, the privy councillor's widow, by whose favour he obtained a home here. Oh, wait a minute; I believe there must be preserved here his letter to the privy councillor's widow; it was on the strength of that letter that she assigned him his little cot." My friend rummaged among his papers and actually found the brigadier's letter. Here it is word for word, with the omission of the mistakes in spelling. The brigadier, like every one of his epoch, was a little hazy in that respect. But to preserve these errors seemed unnecessary; his letter bears the stamp of his age without them.

"HONOURED MADAM, RAÏSSA PAVLOVNA!

On the decease of my friend, and your aunt, I had the happiness of addressing to you two letters, the first on the first of June, the second on the sixth of July, of the year 1815, while she expired on the sixth of May in that year; in them I discovered to you the feelings of my soul and of my heart, which were crushed under deadly wrongs, and they reflected in full my bitter despair, in truth deserving of commiseration; both letters were despatched by the imperial mail registered, and hence I cannot conceive that they have not been perused by your eye. By the genuine candour of my letters, I had counted upon winning your benevolent attention; but the compassionate feelings of your heart were far removed from me in my woe! Left on the loss of my one only friend, Agrippina Ivanovna, in the most distressed and poverty−stricken circumstances, I rested, by her instructions, all my hopes on your bounty; she, aware of her end approaching, said to me in these words, as it were from the grave, and never can I forget them: 'My friend, I have been your serpent, and am guilty of all your unhappiness. I feel how much you have sacrificed for me, and in return I leave you in a disastrous and truly destitute situation; on my death have recourse to Raïssa Pavlovna' that is, to you 'and implore her aid, invite her succour! She has a feeling heart, and I have confidence in her, that she will not leave you forlorn.' Honoured madam, let me call to witness the all−high Creator of the world that those were her words, and I am speaking with her tongue; and, therefore, trusting firmly in your goodness, to you first of all I addressed myself with my open−hearted and candid letters; but after protracted expectation, receiving no reply to them, I could not conceive otherwise than that your benevolent heart had left me without attention! Such your unfavourable disposition towards me, reduced me to the depths of despair whither, and to whom, was I to turn in my misfortune I knew not; my soul was troubled, my intellect went astray; at last, for the completion of my ruin, it pleased Providence to chastise me in a still more cruel manner, and to turn my thoughts to your deceased aunt, Fedulia Ivanovna, sister of Agrippina Ivanovna, one in blood, but not one in heart! Having present to myself, before my mind's eye, that I had been for twenty years devoted to the whole family of your kindred, the Lomovs, especially to Fedulia Ivanovna, who never called Agrippina Ivanovna otherwise than 'my heart's precious treasure,' and me 'the most honoured and zealous friend of our family'; picturing all the above, among abundant tears and sighs in the stillness of sorrowful night watches, I thought: 'Come, brigadier! so, it seems, it is to be!' and, addressing myself by letter to the said Fedulia Ivanovna, I received a positive assurance that she would share her last crumb with me! The presents sent on by me, more than five hundred roubles' worth in value, were accepted with supreme satisfaction; and afterwards the money too which I brought with me for my maintenance, Fedulia Ivanovna was pleased, on the pretext of guarding it, to take into her care, to the which, to gratify her, I offered no opposition. If you ask me whence, and on what ground I conceived such confidence to the above, madam, there is but one reply: she was sister of Agrippina Ivanovna, and a member of the Lomov family! But alas and alas! all the money aforesaid I was very soon deprived of, and the hopes which I had rested on Fedulia Ivanovna that she would share her last crumb with me turned out to be empty and vain; on the contrary, the said Fedulia Ivanovna enriched herself with my property. To wit, on her saint's day, the fifth of February, I brought her fifty roubles' worth of green French material, at five roubles the

yard; I myself received of all that was promised five roubles' worth of white piqué for a waistcoat and a muslin handkerchief for my neck, which gifts were purchased in my presence, as I was aware, with my own money and that was all that I profited by Fedulia Ivanovna's bounty! So much for the last crumb! And I could further, in all sincerity, disclose the malignant doings of Fedulia Ivanovna to me; and also my expenses, exceeding all reason, as, among the rest, for sweetmeats and fruits, of which Fedulia Ivanovna was exceedingly fond; but upon all this I am silent, that you may not take such disclosures against the dead in bad part; and also, seeing that God has called her before His judgment seat and all that I suffered at her hands is blotted out from my heart and I, as a Christian, forgave her long ago, and pray to God to forgive her!

"But, honoured madam, Raïssa Pavlovna! Surely you will not blame me for that I was a true and loyal friend of your family, and that I loved Agrippina Ivanovna with a love so great and so insurmountable that I sacrificed to her my life, my honour, and all my fortune! that I was utterly in her hands, and hence could not dispose of myself nor of my property, and she disposed at her will of me and also of my estate! It is known to you also that, owing to her action with her servant, I suffer, though innocent, a deadly wrong this affair I brought after her death before the senate, before the sixth department it is still unsettled now in consequence of which I was made accomplice with her, my estate put under guardianship, and I am still lying under a criminal charge! In my position, at my age, such disgrace is intolerable to me; and it is only left me to console my heart with the mournful reflection that thus, even after Agrippina Ivanovna's death, I suffer for her sake, and so prove my immutable love and loyal gratitude to her!

"In my letters, above mentioned, to you, I gave you an account with every detail of Agrippina Ivanovna's funeral, and what masses were read for her my affection and love for her spared no outlay! For all the aforesaid, and for the forty days' requiems, and the reading of the psalter six weeks after for her (in addition to above, fifty roubles of mine were lost, which were given as security for payment for the stone, of which I sent you a description) on all the aforesaid was spent of my money seven hundred and fifty roubles, in which is included, by way of donation to the church, a hundred and fifty roubles.

"In the goodness of your heart, hear the cry of a desperate man, crushed beneath a load of the cruelest calamities! Only your commiseration and humanity can restore the life of a ruined man! Though living in the suffering of my heart and soul I am as one dead; dead when I think what I was, and what I am; I was a soldier, and served my country in all fidelity and uprightness, as is the bounden duty of a loyal Russian and faithful subject, and was rewarded with the highest honours, and had a fortune befitting my birth and station; and now I must cringe and beg for a morsel of dry bread; dead above all I am when I think what a friend I have lost . . . and what is life to me after that? But there is no hastening one's end, and the earth will not open, but rather seems turned to stone! And so I call upon you, in the benevolence of your heart, hush the talk of the people, do not expose yourself to universal censure, that for all my unbounded devotion I have not where to lay my head; confound them by your bounty to me, turn the tongues of the evil speakers and slanderers to glorifying your good works and I make bold in all humility to add, comfort in the grave your most precious aunt, Agrippina Ivanovna, who can never be forgotten, and who for your speedy succour, in answer to my sinful prayers, will spread her protecting wings about your head, and comfort in his declining days a lonely old man, who had every reason to expect a different fate! . . . And, with the most profound respect, I have the honour to be, dear madam, your most devoted servant,

VASSILY GUSKOV,

Brigadier and cavalier."

SEVERAL years later I paid another visit to my friend's little place. . . . Vassily Fomitch had long been dead; he died soon after I made his acquaintance. Cucumber was still flourishing. He conducted me to the tomb of Agrafena Ivanovna. An iron railing enclosed a large slab with a detailed and enthusiastically laudatory epitaph on

the deceased woman; and there, beside it, as it were at her feet, could be seen a little mound with a slanting cross on it; the servant of God, the brigadier and cavalier, Vassily Guskov, lay under this mound. . . . His ashes found rest at last beside the ashes of the creature he had loved with such unbounded, almost undying, love.

1867.