

CHAPTER II

After reaching home Nicholas was at first serious and even dull. He was worried by the impending necessity of interfering in the stupid business matters for which his mother had called him home. To throw off this burden as quickly as possible, on the third day after his arrival he went, angry and scowling and without answering questions as to where he was going, to Mítenska's lodge and demanded an account of everything. But what an account of everything might be Nicholas knew even less than the frightened and bewildered Mítenska. The conversation and the examination of the accounts with Mítenska did not last long. The village elder, a peasant delegate, and the village clerk, who were waiting in the passage, heard with fear and delight first the young count's voice roaring and snapping and rising louder and louder, and then words of abuse, dreadful words, ejaculated one after the other.

"Robber!... Ungrateful wretch!... I'll hack the dog to pieces! I'm not my father!... Robbing us!..." and so on.

Then with no less fear and delight they saw how the young count, red in the face and with bloodshot eyes, dragged Mítenska out by the scruff of the neck and applied his foot and knee to his behind with great agility at convenient moments between the words, shouting, "Be off! Never let me see your face here again, you villain!"

Mítenska flew headlong down the six steps and ran away into the shrubbery. (This shrubbery was a well-known haven of refuge for culprits at Otrádnoc. Mítenska himself, returning tipsy from the town, used to hide there, and many of the residents at Otrádnoc, hiding from Mítenska, knew of its protective qualities.)

Mítenska's wife and sisters-in-law thrust their heads and frightened faces out of the door of a room where a bright samovar was boiling and where the steward's high bedstead stood with its patchwork quilt.

The young count paid no heed to them, but, breathing hard, passed by with resolute strides and went into the house.

The countess, who heard at once from the maids what had happened at the lodge, was calmed by the thought that now their affairs would certainly improve, but on the other hand felt anxious as to the effect this excitement might have on her son. She went several times to his door on tiptoe and listened, as he lighted one pipe after another.

Next day the old count called his son aside and, with an embarrassed smile, said to him:

"But you know, my dear boy, it's a pity you got excited! Mítenska has told me all about it."

"I knew," thought Nicholas, "that I should never understand anything in this crazy world."

“You were angry that he had not entered those 700 rubles. But they were carried forward—and you did not look at the other page.”

“Papa, he is a blackguard and a thief! I know he is! And what I have done, I have done; but, if you like, I won’t speak to him again.”

“No, my dear boy” (the count, too, felt embarrassed. He knew he had mismanaged his wife’s property and was to blame toward his children, but he did not know how to remedy it). “No, I beg you to attend to the business. I am old. I…”

“No, Papa. Forgive me if I have caused you unpleasantness. I understand it all less than you do.”

“Devil take all these peasants, and money matters, and carryings forward from page to page,” he thought. “I used to understand what a ‘corner’ and the stakes at cards meant, but carrying forward to another page I don’t understand at all,” said he to himself, and after that he did not meddle in business affairs. But once the countess called her son and informed him that she had a promissory note from Anna Mikháylovna for two thousand rubles, and asked him what he thought of doing with it.

“This,” answered Nicholas. “You say it rests with me. Well, I don’t like Anna Mikháylovna and I don’t like Borís, but they were our friends and poor. Well then, this!” and he tore up the note, and by so doing caused the old countess to weep tears of joy. After that, young Rostóv took no further part in any business affairs, but devoted himself with passionate enthusiasm to what was to him a new pursuit—the chase—for which his father kept a large establishment.