

Fyodor
Dostoyevsky

Netochka
Nezvanova



FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOYEVSKY was born in Moscow in 1821, the second of a physician's seven children. When he left his private boarding school in Moscow he studied from 1838 to 1843 at the Military Engineering College in St Petersburg, graduating with officer's rank. His first story to be published, 'Poor Folk' (1846), was a great success. In 1849 he was arrested and sentenced to death for participating in the 'Petrashevsky circle'; he was reprieved at the last moment but sentenced to penal servitude, and until 1854 he lived in a convict prison at Omsk, Siberia. Out of this experience he wrote *The House of the Dead* (1860). In 1861 he began the review *Vremya (Time)* with his brother; in 1862 and 1863 he went abroad, where he strengthened his anti-European outlook, met Mlle Suslova, who was the model for many of his heroines, and gave way to his passion for gambling. In the following years he fell deeply in debt, but in 1867 he married Anna Grigoryevna Snitkina (his second wife), who helped to rescue him from his financial morass. They lived abroad for four years, then in 1873 he was invited to edit *Grazhdanin (The Citizen)*, to which he contributed his *Diary of a Writer*. From 1876 the latter was issued separately and had a large circulation. In 1880 he delivered his famous address at the unveiling of Pushkin's memorial in Moscow; he died six months later in 1881. Most of his important works were written after 1864: *Notes from Underground* (1864), *Crime and Punishment* (1865–6), *The Gambler* (1866), *The Idiot* (1869), *The Devils* (1871) and *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880).

JANE KENTISH was born in 1953 and took a B.A. in Russian Literature in 1974 at the University of Sussex, where two years later she gained her M.A. in Byzantine and Russian Art and Architecture. Since then she has worked as a researcher. She gives occasional lectures in Byzantine History and Art and has published various articles on Far and Middle Eastern art. Her translation of Tolstoy's *A Confession and Other Religious Writings* is also published in the Penguin Classics.

Contents

About the Author
Title Page
Copyright
Translator's Introduction

Chapter One
Chapter Two
Chapter Three
Chapter Four
Chapter Five
Chapter Six
Chapter Seven

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

NETOCHKA NEZVANOVA



TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JANE KENTISH

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Private Bag 102902, NSMC, Auckland, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

This translation first published 1985

19

Copyright © Jane Kentish, 1985

All rights reserved

Except in the United States of America, this book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

ISBN:978-0-14-193629-1

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Netochka Nezvanova, which can be loosely translated as 'nameless nobody', was Dostoyevsky's first attempt at writing a novel. The idea is first aired in the year 1846 in a letter written to his brother where he says that he intends to write a 'big novel' in the form of a 'confession'. It seems that he hoped to finish the work by the end of the following year, but the design of the novel was so ambitious and conceived on such a grandiose scale that the young writer was unable to meet all its demands; it was not until the end of 1849 that the first completed section of the book was published. This fragment, the story of a young girl's childhood, was intended as no more than a prologue to the novel. Dostoyevsky's work on it was terminated shortly after the first serialized publication; he was arrested for alleged 'revolutionary' activities as a member of the Petrashevsky group (Utopian Socialists) and subsequently imprisoned and exiled to Siberia, after being spared the firing squad at the last moment.

Neither during his period of exile nor on his return from Siberia in 1859 did Dostoyevsky resume work on *Netochka Nezvanova*. All we have is the first, unfinished section which is, however, intriguing as a record of the great author's earliest attempt to embody his thoughts and ideas in the novel form. Although *Netochka Nezvanova* lacks some of the artistic coherence of his later, more mature works, it nevertheless presents an exhaustive display of those themes which characterize Dostoyevsky's major works: grotesque pictures of both the seedy and the more noble side of Petersburg life and society; chronically sick and suffering people whose delirium and fantasy lead to a state of heightened consciousness bordering on madness; incestuous relationships; the impoverished artist struggling in a garret; murder and martyrdom; guilt and atonement for sin; the 'meek' woman and the 'proud' woman; will-power and mental inertia. All these ideas, present here in embryonic form, were explored, developed and reworked by Dostoyevsky for the rest of his literary career.

The translation of *Netochka Nezvanova* has presented certain difficulties, mainly owing to a lack of stylistic unity in the original text. The story is in autobiographical form, related by Netochka, as she recalls her childhood. Dostoyevsky makes a deliberate attempt to record and interpret events initially in the manner of a child and later in the manner of a young adult, which leads to a sharp change in the style and tone of the narration, so that it falls into three distinct and rather detached sections. This has been a source of some difficulty, since it is impossible to adopt one consistent style of translation. A further problem has been the search for an idiom appropriate to the period, for my aim has been to follow the original text as closely as possible in all respects.

Despite these difficulties it has been a most rewarding task to translate this book, particularly since it uncovers the author's earliest struggles with the form of the novel, the emergence of a style that is so typically his own and, above all, his youthful experiments with philosophical and psychological ideas and themes that become even more compelling in his later works.

1984

J.L.

CHAPTER ONE

I cannot remember my father. He died when I was two years old. My mother remarried, but it was a marriage that brought her great suffering, although she had married for love. My stepfather was a musician and was destined to lead a most remarkable life. He was the strangest and most extraordinary person I have ever known. He had too powerful an influence over my early childhood, and this certainly affected my whole life. In order to make my story more comprehensible I must first give an account of his life, the details of which I only learnt later from the famous musician B. who was a companion and close friend of my stepfather's in his youth.

My stepfather's name was Efimov. He was born in a village on the estate of a very rich landowner. He was the son of a poor musician who after many years of wandering had settled on this landowner's estate and was hired to play in his orchestra. The landowner surrounded his life with luxury and above all was passionately devoted to music. It was said of him that he had never once left his estate, not even to go to Moscow, but one day he suddenly decided to take the waters at some spa abroad and ended up by staying there for several weeks with the express purpose of listening to a famous violinist who, as he gathered from the newspapers, was giving three concerts there at the spa. He himself owned a fairly respectable orchestra on which he spent almost his entire income. It was with this orchestra that my stepfather played the clarinet.

When he was twenty-two years old my stepfather made the acquaintance of a very strange man. Living in the same district was a rich Count who had ruined himself through the upkeep of a private orchestra. The Count had dismissed the conductor of the orchestra, an Italian by birth, for misconduct. Indeed the conductor was a very bad man. After his dismissal he sank into complete degradation, frequenting the village taverns, constantly getting drunk, sometimes even begging for money, and there was certainly no one in the district anxious to employ him. It was to this man that my stepfather became a friend. It was a rather strange and vague relationship, by all accounts, since no one seemed to notice how my stepfather changed his ways somewhat under the influence of this friend. Even the landowner, who at first had forbidden him to associate with the Italian, soon turned a blind eye to them. Then, all of a sudden, the conductor died. He was found one morning by some peasants in a ditch close to a weir. An inquest was held which showed that he had died of an apopleptic fit. My stepfather, who was looking after his belongings, immediately produced evidence to show that he was fully entitled to inherit them all. The dead man had left a note written in his own hand, in which he left everything to Efimov in the event of his death. The inheritance consisted of a black tail-coat which the deceased had painstakingly preserved, since he always maintained the hope of finding work, and a rather ordinary-looking violin. No one contested the inheritance and it was not until some time later that the first violinist of the Count's orchestra appeared, bringing a letter from his master to the landowner. In the letter the Count begged him to persuade Efimov to sell him the violin left by the Italian because the Count very much wished to acquire it for his own orchestra. He offered the sum of three thousand roubles, adding that he had already on several occasions sent for Efimov in order to

conduct the sale personally but Efimov had stubbornly refused to come. The Count concluded by saying that the sum he offered was an honest one, that he was not trying to get it for less than its worth and that he could only see in Efimov's obstinacy an insulting suspicion that he, the Count, was trying to take advantage of his simplicity and ignorance. He thus begged the landowner to try to bring him to reason.

The landowner instantly sent for my stepfather.

'Why don't you want to part with your violin?' he asked him. 'It's no use to you. You've been offered three thousand roubles, which is a good price. It's ridiculous to think you can get more. The Count isn't trying to trick you.'

Efimov replied that he would never go to the Count of his own accord, but that if he were sent there he would obey his master's orders. He said that he himself would never sell the violin, but that if it were taken from him by force then that again was his master's affair.

This answer made it quite clear that he had touched on one of the landowner's more sensitive spots. The landowner had always prided himself on knowing how to treat his musicians properly, for after all they were all true artists and it was to their credit that his orchestra was not only superior to the Count's but was as good as any that could be found in Moscow or Petersburg.

'Very well!' answered the landowner. 'Then I shall inform the Count that you don't wish to sell the violin because you don't feel like it and that you have the sole right to sell it or not to sell it. Is that all right? But I myself should like to ask: what use is the violin to you? Your instrument is the clarinet, although you are a poor clarinetist. Let me have it and I'll give you three thousand – whoever would have guessed it was such a valuable instrument!'

Efimov chuckled.

'No sir, I won't give it to you, unless of course you insist...'

'Come now, you know I won't compel you to, you know I won't use force,' shouted the landowner, who was quite beside himself, the more so since the conversation was taking place in the presence of one of the Count's musicians and he might draw some very unfavourable conclusions regarding the position of the musicians in the landowner's orchestra from witnessing this exchange.

'Be off with you, you ungrateful creature! And I don't want to set eyes on you again. And where do you think you would have got to without me, with that clarinet of yours that you cannot even play properly? I've fed you, clothed you, paid you a wage. Here you live like a gentleman – like an artist – only you choose to ignore it. Be off with you, and don't exasperate me with your presence any longer!'

The landowner always chased away anyone with whom he was angry because he was so afraid of his own temper, and not for anything in the world did he wish to be too stern with his 'artists', as he called his musicians.

So the sale did not take place, and it seemed that the matter was over when suddenly, a month later, the Count's first violinist instigated a terrible affair. Quite of his own accord he lodged a complaint against my stepfather in which he accused him of being responsible for the death of the Italian. He claimed that he had killed him because of a greedy desire to acquire his legacy. He maintained that the will had been made under duress and he promised to produce witnesses to testify to this. Neither the pleas and entreaties of the Count and the

landowner, both of whom stood up for my stepfather, nor anything else that was done could deter the accuser. It was pointed out that all the medical examinations performed on the body of the dead man had been carried out quite properly and it was suggested that the accuser, in questioning the evidence, was perhaps motivated by personal malice and disappointment at not having acquired the precious instrument himself. But the man stood his ground, swearing that he was in the right and insisting that the fit had not been caused by drunkenness but through poisoning, and he demanded a second inquest. At first glance the allegations looked serious and of course the matter was put in motion. Efimov was arrested and taken off to the town prison. A trial, which aroused the interest of the whole town, began. It was over very quickly and ended in the musician being accused of giving false testimony. He was sentenced to an appropriate term but nevertheless stood his ground throughout, insisting that he was right. It was only at the very end that he admitted to not really having had any evidence, of having invented it all himself, concocting it out of supposition and guesswork. He declared that until the second inquest, when Efimov's innocence was formally proven, he had been firmly convinced that the latter had murdered the poor Italian, although he had possibly used a method other than poisoning. However, before the informer had completed his prison sentence he was suddenly taken ill with inflammation of the brain, lost his senses and died in the prison hospital.

The landowner behaved most nobly throughout the affair, doing everything he could for my stepfather, acting as if he were his own son. He visited him in the prison several times, comforting him, giving him money and bringing him the best cigars once he discovered his partiality for smoking. When he was acquitted the whole orchestra was given a free day; the landowner saw the Efimov affair as something concerning all of them because he valued good behaviour in all his musicians as much as, if not more than, their ability.

A year had passed by when it was suddenly rumoured in the province that a certain well-known violinist, a Frenchman, had arrived in town and was intending to give a few concerts before passing on. The landowner immediately began thinking of a way to entice him to his estate. His efforts seemed successful and the Frenchman promised to come. However, just as soon as all the preparations for his visit had been made and almost the entire province notified, things suddenly took a different turn.

It was reported one morning that Efimov had disappeared, and no one knew where he had gone. A search was begun, but there was not a trace to be found. The orchestra was in an awful pickle: they had no clarinettist. Then suddenly, three days after Efimov's disappearance, the landowner received a letter from the Frenchman in which the latter haughtily declined the invitation – adding, through implication of course, that in future he would be much more careful in his relations with those gentlemen who kept their own orchestras, that it offended his aesthetic sensibility to see true talent under the control of a man who was incapable of recognizing its worth and, finally, that the example of Efimov, a genuine artist and the best violinist he had ever come across in Russia, served as sufficient proof of the truth of what he said.

The landowner was completely dumbfounded by the letter. He was profoundly mortified. What! Could it be true that Efimov, the same Efimov for whom he had gone to so much trouble and to whom he had shown so much kindness, could now so mercilessly and unscrupulously slander him, and, moreover, to a European artist whose opinion he regarded

so highly? Besides, the letter was baffling in another respect: it said that Efimov was not only a talented artist but that he was a violinist whose talent had been ignored and who had been forced to play another instrument. So, astonished by all this, the landowner hastily prepared to go into town to talk to the Frenchman. At this moment, however, a letter arrived from the Count inviting him to come over to his estate immediately; he said he knew everything, and that the Frenchman was with him together with Efimov, whose audacity and slander had so stunned him that he had decided to detain him. Finally, he requested the presence of the landowner, because Efimov's remarks involved the Count himself; he said that it was an important matter that should be resolved as quickly as possible.

The landowner instantly set off to see the Count and soon made the acquaintance of the Frenchman. He publicly explained everything he knew about my stepfather, adding that he had never suspected Efimov of having any real talent; on the contrary, while in his service Efimov had never proved himself to be more than a mediocre clarinetist, and this was the first he had heard of his being a neglected violinist; he added that Efimov was a free man who had always been at liberty to leave him at any time had he really felt so oppressed. The Frenchman was surprised. They summoned Efimov, who was barely recognizable. My stepfather held himself arrogantly, answered their questions insolently and insisted on the truth of all he had managed to tell the Frenchman. All this annoyed the Count beyond belief. He told my stepfather, in no uncertain terms, that he was a rascal and a liar and fit for nothing but the most ignominious punishment.

'Don't excite yourself, your excellency, I know you well enough by now, oh yes, I know you well enough,' answered my stepfather. 'Thanks to you I came within an inch of being sentenced to death. And I know who it was that persuaded Alexei Nikorovitch, your former musician, to trump up a charge against me!'

These horrible accusations put the Count into a wild rage. He was barely able to control himself, but it so happened that a government official, visiting the Count on business, was in the room, and he declared that he could not let this pass without taking action. He maintained that Efimov's offensive remarks amounted to malice, wilful slander and libel and he respectfully asked permission to arrest him on the spot. Expressing tremendous indignation, the Frenchman said that he could not understand such base ingratitude, whereupon my stepfather announced that even if it was on a charge of murder any trial, any punishment, would be better than the existence he had experienced until now, living on the landowner's estate as a member of the orchestra and unable to leave before because of his extreme poverty. With these words he left the room accompanied by the man who had arrested him. He was locked in a remote room with the threat of being taken to town the following day. At about midnight the prisoner's door was opened and the landowner entered. He was wearing his nightgown and slippers and holding a lamp in his hands. It seemed that his tormenting worries had prevented him from sleeping and that he had finally been compelled to get up. Efimov, who was not sleeping either, looked up in surprise at his visitor who put down his lamp and, deeply agitated, seated himself in a chair opposite.

'Egor,' he addressed him, 'why have you done me this injustice?'

Efimov gave no reply. The landowner repeated his question in a voice expressing deep feeling and a sort of strange grief.

‘God knows,’ said my stepfather eventually, making a gesture of despair. ‘It must have been the devil’s got inside me. I don’t know myself who drove me to do it... But I really cannot go on living with you, I can’t bear it... The devil himself has got inside me...’

‘Egor!’ the landowner began again. ‘Come back to me. I’ll forget everything, I’ll forgive everything. Listen, you’ll be my leading musician, you’ll be paid more than anyone else...’

‘No, sir, and please don’t speak of it. It’s no life for me there! I’m telling you the devil has taken hold of me. I’ll set fire to your house or something if I stay. There are times when I’m overcome with such terrible despair that I wish I’d never been born. Just now I can’t be responsible for my actions and you’d be better to leave me alone, sir. It all began when that fiend made a friend of me...’

‘Who?’ asked the landowner.

‘Why, the one who died like a dog, snuffed it, the Italian.’

‘Was it he who taught you to play, Egorushka?’

‘Yes! Yes, he taught me more than enough to ruin me. I wish I’d never set eyes on him.’

‘Was he really a master of the violin, Egorushka?’

‘No, he wasn’t much good himself, but he was a good teacher. I taught myself to play; he just showed me one or two things. But it would have been better to have lost my hand than to have learnt those things. I don’t know what I want now. And you, sir, may ask: “Egorushka, what do you want – I can give you anything”, and I, sir, cannot offer a single word in reply because I do not know what I want. No! I repeat, sir, it would be better for you to leave me alone. I might really go and do something to you which would get me put away for years and that would be the end of it!’

‘Egor!’ began the landowner after a short silence, ‘I can’t leave you like this. If you don’t want to work for me then go, you’re a free man, I won’t force you to do anything. But I can’t leave you like this. Play something for me, Egor, play something on your violin. For God’s sake play something. I’m not ordering you to, do you understand, I’m not forcing you to, I’m only begging you, with tears in my eyes. Oh, for God’s sake! Egorushka, play me the piece you played for the Frenchman. Just do this for me... We are both being obstinate. I too have an obstinate streak, Egorushka. I can sympathize with you, but you must try to understand my feelings. I don’t think I can live unless you play me the piece you played for the Frenchman. But you must do it willingly.’

‘Well, all right then,’ said Efimov. ‘I swore to myself that I would never perform in front of you, sir, never ever before you. But my heart is melting. I’ll play you something, but it will be the first time and the last time. After this you’ll never hear me again, not even for a thousand roubles.’

Thereupon he picked up his violin and began playing his own variations on Russian songs. B. said that these variations were his first and his best pieces for the violin and that he never played them so well or with so much inspiration. The landowner, who always gave a display of emotion on listening to any music, was on this occasion reduced to tears. When the performance was over he got up from his chair, took out three thousand roubles and handed them to my stepfather, saying, ‘Now be on your way, Egor. I am releasing you – leave it to me to settle everything with the Count. But listen a moment: you won’t see me again. There is a wide road lying ahead and it would be painful for us both if we should meet. So,

farewell. No, wait a little. I have just one piece of advice to give you before you start your journey: don't give way to drink but study, study as much as possible and don't let yourself grow conceited! I'm talking to you like father to son. I repeat: take care of yourself, study and keep away from the bottle. Once you start to drown your sorrows in drink – and mind you, there will be plenty of sorrow – you're as good as finished. Everything will be lost to the devil and you'll more than likely die in the ditch like that Italian friend of yours. Farewell now. Stop! One minute, kiss me.'

They embraced one another and then my stepfather walked out into freedom.

No sooner had he tasted liberty than he squandered the three thousand roubles in a nearby town where he fell into the company of the most disreputable and sordid gang of hooligans. He eventually found himself penniless, alone and with no means of earning any money. He was compelled to join a miserable band attached to a provincial travelling company as the first, and possibly the only, violinist. Of course none of this conformed to his original intention of reaching Petersburg as quickly as possible and once there studying, finding a good job, and developing his artistic talents to the full. He found life with the band uncongenial. He quarrelled with the manager and left. After this he lost heart completely and resolved to take desperate measures, although it wounded his pride terribly. He wrote a letter to the landowner explaining his predicament and asking him for money. But the letter was written in a rather arrogant manner and he received no answer. Then he wrote again, this time using the most cringing language, hailing the landowner as his true benefactor and as a supreme connoisseur of the arts; again he asked him to send money. Finally he received an answer. The landowner sent him a hundred roubles together with a brief note written by his valet in which he asked him not to trouble him with any more requests. It was my stepfather's intention that having received the money he would set off for Petersburg at once but after settling all his debts he found that he did not have enough money for the journey. Once again he was compelled to remain in the provinces and join a provincial band, but once again he could not get along in the company and thus ended up by continually moving on from one place to the next, always cherishing the hope that sooner or later he would reach Petersburg. Six years had passed in this way when he suddenly began to grow afraid that as result of his chaotic and impoverished existence he was losing his talent. So one morning, abandoning his manager, he left and set off for Petersburg, almost begging his way there. He settled himself in some garret or other somewhere in Petersburg and it was there that he first met B., who had himself recently arrived from Germany and was also trying to establish a career. They soon made friends, and even to this day B. remembers the friendship with deep feeling. They were both young and had similar hopes and aspirations. However, B. was still in his first youth and had as yet suffered little hardship or sorrow, and above all he was a German through and through and strove to achieve his ambition methodically and with a great deal of perseverance. He was fully aware of the limits to his ability and was almost capable of predicting the degree of success attainable. On the other hand his companion, Efimov, was already thirty and tired and weary; his patience was spent and his health and vigour exhausted by those six years when he was forced to live a vagabond's existence moving from one provincial theatre company or band to the next, simply in order to obtain his daily bread. He had been sustained by his singular determination to quit this frightful existence and save enough money to reach Petersburg. But this had really been only a vague

and rather obscure idea, a sort of irresistible inner calling which over the years had lost most of its original clarity. By the time he reached Petersburg he was acting almost unconsciously simply following an old and familiar habit of constantly dreaming and brooding over that journey, without having very much of an idea of what he might do once he reached the capital. By now his enthusiasm was rather spasmodic, jaundiced and erratic, as if he were trying to deceive only himself, trying to convince himself that his energy, his vigour, his original inspiration and fire were not really burnt out. These fits of rapture impressed B. who though he was cold and methodical, was blinded by them and worshipped my stepfather as the great musical genius of years to come. He could see no other future for his friend, but it was not long before his eyes were opened to the truth. He saw clearly that all his impetuosity, impatience and feverish haste amounted to nothing more than an unconscious despair at the memory of his squandered talent and that it was more than likely that this talent had never been anything very special, not even in the beginning, that there had been a great deal of blindness, of vain complacency and premature self-satisfaction, and of dreaming and fantasizing about his genius. 'But,' B. used to say, 'I couldn't help marvelling at my friend's strange temperament. I saw before my own eyes a desperate, feverish contest taking place between a violently over-strained will and inner impotence. For seven miserable years he had contented himself with mere dreams of future fame, to the extent that he failed to notice how he was losing sight of what was essential to our art and was forgetting even the most elementary mechanics of the matter. And yet in the meantime the most colossal plans for the future were taking place in his disordered mind. Not only did he wish to become a first-rate genius, to be known as one of top violinists in the world – which, incidentally, he already considered himself – but on top of all of this he dreamed of becoming a composer, although he knew nothing about counterpoint. And what astonished me most,' added B., 'was that this man, with his complete impotence and totally inadequate knowledge of musical technique, had nevertheless such a deep and lucid – one might even say instinctive – understanding of art. He had such intense feeling and appreciation for it that it is hardly surprising if he confused himself in his own mind and mistook himself for a genius, a high priest of art rather than a sympathetic, natural critic. Sometimes, in his crude and rather simple language, he would utter such profound truths that I was struck dumb and could not believe that a man who had never read anything or even studied under anyone could have worked these things out for himself. I was deeply indebted to him for my own progress and for his advice. As far as I myself was concerned I felt fairly secure about my future. I also passionately loved my art, but I knew when I embarked upon my career that I was not tremendously gifted and that I could never expect to be more than a humble labourer in the field. But still I pride myself for not behaving like the ungrateful servant. I did not bury what I was given; instead I made the best of everything I had and, if my playing and the precision of my technique is praised, I owe it to ceaseless, unending work, to a clear understanding of the limits to which I could use my talents, to voluntary self-subordination and a constant struggle against complacency, over-confidence and the laziness that is the natural consequence of such things.

B., in turn, tried to advise his friend, by whom he had been so dominated in the beginning but he succeeded only in annoying him. The friendship began to cool off. Soon B. noticed that Efimov was increasingly overcome by apathy, grief and boredom, and his bouts of

enthusiasm were becoming more and more rare, which was all leading to a state of gloomy and savage depression. And then Efimov started neglecting his violin, sometimes not touching it for weeks on end. He was verging on total moral collapse and rapidly succumbing to every vice. Exactly what the landowner had forewarned happened: he took to drink. B. looked on in horror, advising him to no avail and too afraid to reproach him. Little by little Efimov turned into an utter cynic. He had no qualms about living off B. and even behaved as if he had every right to do so. In the meantime they ran out of money. B. managed to make ends meet by giving private lessons and by performing at private evening parties given by merchants, Germans and petty officials, who paid something, though not very much. Efimov chose to ignore his friend's needs; he behaved haughtily with him and for long periods he refused to speak to him. One day, in the gentlest terms, B. pointed out that it might not be such a bad thing if he were to pay a bit of attention to his violin, in order not to forget everything. Efimov really lost his temper at this and declared that he had no intention of touching his violin again, as if supposing that someone would go down on his knees begging him to. On another occasion B. needed someone to accompany him at an evening party and asked Efimov, but the invitation only threw him into a rage. He screamed that he was no street musician and would never, like B., sink so low as to play for vulgar tradesmen who were quite incapable of appreciating his talent. B. did not utter a word in reply but Efimov, after pondering his friend's words, decided that it had been meant as a hint to point out that he was living off B. and that perhaps he too ought to be earning some money. When B. returned from the evening party Efimov began criticizing him for his meanness and declared that he would not stay with him a minute longer. And he did actually disappear for two days although he turned up on the third acting as if nothing had happened. They went on living as before.

It was only his former friendship and attachment, not to mention his compassion for the ruined man, that prevented B. from carrying out his intention of bringing this ghastly life to an end by parting from Efimov for ever. In the end they did part. B. had a stroke of good fortune: he found an influential patron and succeeded in giving a brilliant concert performance. By this time he was already a first-rate player and his rapidly growing fame earned him a place in the orchestra of the opera house, where he soon achieved the success he deserved. When he parted from Efimov he gave him some money and with tears in his eyes begged him to return to the true path. Even now B. cannot remember him without special feeling; his friendship with Efimov had made a deep impression on his youth. They had embarked on their careers together and they had formed such an ardent attachment for one another that Efimov's strange ways, his coarse and glaring defects, had only bound B. more closely to him. B. was able to appreciate this. He saw through him and knew well in advance how it would all end up. At the farewell they wept and embraced each other. Through his sobs Efimov confessed that he was an unfortunate man, that he was finished, that he had known it for a long time but had only now come to understand it properly.

'I have no talent!' he said, turning ash-white. This moved B. dreadfully.

'Listen, Egor Petrovitch. Whatever do you think you're doing to yourself? You can only destroy yourself with this despair. Where's your courage? Where's your patience? Now, in a fit of depression, you're saying that you have no talent: you're wrong! You have talent, I can see it from the way you can understand and appreciate music. I can show you how your

whole life is a proof of it. You've told me about your earlier years and it's obvious that even then you were haunted by a similar kind of despair. And then your first teacher, the man about whom you've told me so much, aroused the first love of music in you and recognized that you have ability. You felt it just as strongly and oppressively then as you do now. The only difference is that at that time you didn't understand what was happening to you. You realized that you couldn't go on living with the landowner and yet you didn't know quite what it was you did want to do. Your teacher died too soon. He left you with just a vague yearning and, what's more important, he didn't teach you how to understand yourself. You sensed that you should be following a different path, a more ambitious one, you felt that you were destined for other things but you had no idea how to achieve them and in your misery you began to hate everything around you. But you didn't waste those six years; you studied, you thought, you became aware of yourself and your strengths. Now you're able to understand art and your vocation in art. You need patience and courage, my friend... Achievement far greater than mine awaits you. You're a hundred times greater an artist than I, if only you had my endurance! Study and stop drinking, as your good landowner said to you. And above all make a new beginning. Begin with the basics. What is it that torments you so? Poverty? Deprivation? But it's precisely poverty and deprivation that mould the true artist. They are inevitable at the beginning. Just now no one wants you, no one is bothered about knowing you, but that's the way of the world. Just wait a while and you'll see how different it is once they've discovered you. The envy, the petty meanness and, worst of all, the stupidity will be a greater burden to you than any hardship. Talent needs sympathy and understanding, but wait until you see the sort of people who will flock around you when you've achieved just the tiniest bit of fame. All that you've gained through labour, sleepless nights, hunger and hardship will be looked on with contempt and disdain. These future friends of yours will give you neither comfort nor encouragement. They won't point out your good sides. Oh no! They'll take a malicious delight in spotting every one of your mistakes. They'll only be interested in your faults and errors. They'll celebrate over them – as if anyone could be perfect. You see, you're too conceited. Sometimes you're proud when there's no need to be and you may go and offend some important little nobody, and then there'll be trouble, for you are alone and they are many. They'll torment you; they'll prod you like a pincushion. Even I have begun experiencing all this. But now you must cheer up. You aren't completely destitute and you'll get by as long as you don't turn your nose up at humble work. Go and chop wood as I did at those evening parties. You're too impatient, it's a kind of sickness of yours. Try to be simpler – you're too subtle and you think too much; you give your brain a lot of work. You're bold with words but feeble with your bow. You're too vain and you lack fortitude. Have courage and find patience to study diligently. If you don't trust your own strength, then put your trust in luck. You still have fire and feeling. Perhaps you'll reach your goal, but, if not, trust in luck. Whichever way, you can't lose, because the stake is too great. It's a wonderful thing, my friend, to trust in luck!

Efimov listened to his comrade with deep feeling. While the latter spoke the pallor left his cheeks; they flushed red and his eyes sparkled with unaccustomed fire, courage and hope. But this noble courage soon turned into arrogance and then to his usual impertinence, so that by the time B. had reached the end of his admonitions Efimov was already distracted and impatient. He warmly shook B. by the hand and, ever rapid in his transitions from deep self-

abasement and humiliation to extreme arrogance and defiance, declared confidently that his friend need not trouble himself on his behalf, that he was perfectly capable of managing his own affairs and that very soon he would be giving a concert that would bring him instant fame and money. B. shrugged his shoulders but did not contradict him. And thus they parted although it was not for long. Efimov was quick to spend all the money that B. had given him and came back a second, a third, a fourth time until finally on the tenth occasion B. lost patience and did not answer the door. After that they no longer saw each other.

Several years went by. Once, when B. was walking down a side-street on his way home from a rehearsal, in the entrance to a squalid tavern he bumped into a drunken, shabbily dressed man who called him by his name. It was Efimov. The man was greatly changed; his face was yellow and puffy and it was clearly visible that his dissipated life was leaving a permanent mark on him. B. was overjoyed to see him and before he had time to open his mouth he found himself being dragged into the tavern by Efimov. There, in a grimy little back-room, he started scrutinizing his friend more carefully. Efimov's clothes were in tatters his boots worn out and his frayed shirt front was covered in wine stains. His thin hair was greying.

'What have you been doing? How did you end up here?' asked B. Efimov seemed confused and even frightened at first. He answered so jerkily and incoherently that B. wondered if he were looking at a madman. Efimov confessed that he could not talk until he had drunk some vodka but that they had long since refused him credit in the tavern. He flushed as he spoke. He tried making a gesture of reassurance but the flamboyant hand movements only produced an effect of insolence, superficiality and importunity. B. found it pitiful and, full of compassion and sympathy, he realized that his fears were justified. Nevertheless he ordered the vodka. Efimov's face was transformed with gratitude and he was so beside himself that, with tears in his eyes, he almost begged to kiss the hand of his benefactor. During dinner B. learnt that, to his great surprise, the pathetic man was married. But he was still further surprised to learn that his wife was the source of all his unhappiness and grief and that his marriage had completely destroyed his talent.

'How is that?' asked B.

'My friend, it's two years now since I've touched my violin,' said Efimov. 'She's a peasant, a cook, a coarse uneducated thing. Damn her! We do nothing but quarrel.'

'Why did you marry her, then?'

'When I met her I was starving and she had about a thousand roubles, so I rushed headlong into marriage. Mind you, she was in love with me. She grabbed me by the neck. Who forced her? The money has all gone on food and drink, brother. Eaten it. And as for my talent, gone, gone!'

B. noticed that Efimov was hurriedly trying to vindicate himself.

'I've given it all up. I've lost everything,' he added. He explained that not long before he had nearly reached perfection on the violin and that although B. might be said to be one of the finest violinists in town, he could outshine him completely.

'Then what's your problem?' said B. 'You should have found a good post.'

'It's not worth it!' cried Efimov, waving his hands in the air. 'Is there no one who can

understand anything! What do you know? Rubbish! Nothing! That's what you know! Strumming a dance tune for some ballet, that's your kind of work. You've never seen or heard a decent violinist. What's the point in talking to you? Carry on as you are!' With this, Efimov gesticulated again and lurched forwards drunkenly in his chair. Then he began inviting B. to stay with him, but the latter declined, took his address and promised to come and see him the following day. Efimov, who had by this time eaten his fill, was glancing mockingly at his friend, trying his best to wound him. As they were leaving he grabbed hold of B.'s expensive fur coat and handled it like a grovelling servant. As they passed through the outer room he introduced him to the innkeeper and patrons as one of the first and foremost violinists in the capital. In short, his behaviour was extremely repulsive.

B. did, however, seek him out the following morning, finding him in the one-roomed attic where we were living at this time in great poverty. I was four years old then and my mother had been married to Efimov for two years. She was an unhappy woman. Formerly she had worked as a governess, and she was well educated and attractive. She had married my father, an elderly government official, because she was poor. But she only spent a year with him. My father died suddenly, leaving a meagre inheritance which was divided among his heirs. My mother was left on her own with me and only a small sum of money, her share of the inheritance. With a small child to take care of, it was difficult for her to get another position as a governess. It was at this point that she happened to meet Efimov and she really did fall in love with him. She was an enthusiast and a dreamer, who saw in Efimov some kind of genius, and she believed his arrogant talk of a brilliant future. She was flattered by the glamorous image of becoming the firm guiding hand and support of a genius, and she married him.

All her hopes and dreams vanished within a month and she was forced to face the pitiful reality. Efimov, who had more than probably married her because she had a thousand roubles, sat back and folded his arms after the money was spent, and, as if glad of an excuse declared to all and sundry that marriage was the death of talent, that he could not work in a stuffy room face to face with a starving family, that these surroundings were not conducive to inspiration and that it was clear that he was destined for this kind of misfortune. It seems that he himself had come to believe in the truth of what he was saying and was only too pleased to find another line of defence. The unhappy, ruined genius was searching for an inner cause on which to put the blame for his misfortune and disaster.

He did not seem capable of accepting the fact that he had long ago irreversibly lost his chance of becoming an artist. He struggled convulsively with this terrible conviction, as with a deadly nightmare, and when at last reality overwhelmed him, when his eyes were opened for just a minute, he almost went crazy with fear. It was not easy for him to forget everything that had for so long given a meaning to his life and until the final moment he believed that all hope was not yet lost. In times of doubt he gave himself up to drunkenness, which drove away his grief, drowning his sorrows with intoxicating fumes. I do not think he ever realized how necessary his wife was to him at that time. She was a living pretext and, in truth, my stepfather never moved from his conviction that once he had buried his wife, *who had ruined him*, everything would be put right. My poor mother did not understand him. Like the true dreamer, she broke down at the first contact with reality. She became hot-tempered irritable and shrewish, and was always quarrelling with her husband, who in his turn

delighted in tormenting her; and she was continually badgering him to work. But my stepfather's blind obsession, his irrationality and his mental wanderings made him almost inhuman and unfeeling. He used to laugh and swear that he would not touch his violin again until his wife was dead, and he even told her this with a cruel frankness. My mother, who loved him despite everything right up to her death, simply could not endure this life. She became chronically ill, lived in perpetual torment and suffering, and on top of all this misery the anxiety of maintaining a family rested on her shoulders alone. She began preparing food at home and started a kind of service whereby people could come and collect their food, but Efimov stole her money on the sly and she often found herself compelled to send her customers' dishes back empty. When B. visited us she was busy washing linen and remaking old clothes. In this way we managed to live, from hand to mouth, in our attic.

B. was struck by our poverty.

'Listen, you're talking utter nonsense,' he said to my step-father. 'Where is this destroyed talent? She's keeping you, what are you doing?'

'Nothing!' answered my stepfather.

B. had yet to learn of all my mother's troubles. Her husband often brought home whole gangs of drunkards and ragamuffins and then all hell was let loose!

B. spent a long time trying to persuade his old friend; finally he told him that if he would do nothing to mend his ways there was no point in trying to help him. He told him quite bluntly that he was not going to give him any money because it would only be spent on drink. He asked him to play something on the violin so that he might see what could be done for him on that level. While my stepfather was fetching his violin, B. secretly handed some money to my mother, but she would not take it. She had never before been asked to accept charity! B. then gave it to me and my poor mother burst into tears. My stepfather returned with the violin but instantly demanded some vodka, saying that he could not play without it. The vodka was sent for. He drank it and mellowed.

'I'll play you something of my own, since you're a friend,' he said to B., pulling a thick, dusty exercise book out from the chest of drawers.

'I wrote all that myself,' he said, pointing at the book. 'There, you see, my friend, it's very different from your ballets.'

B. studied a few pages in silence and then unfolded the music he had brought with him and asked my stepfather to forget his own compositions and to play something he had brought instead.

My stepfather was a little offended but, fearing to lose his new benefactor, he complied. B. realized that his friend really had been studying and had made considerable progress since their last parting, despite his boast of not having touched his violin since he married. It was such a joy to see my poor mother's face. She looked at my stepfather and felt proud of him again. B. too was genuinely pleased and resolved to try to fix him up with a job. He already had a great many connections and he promptly began getting in touch with them, recommending his poor friend from whom he had obtained a promise to behave. Meanwhile, at his own expense, he equipped Efimov with proper clothes and took him to see several prominent people upon whom the appointment could depend. The truth was that Efimov's bravado was nothing but empty talk and he was only too pleased to follow his friend's proposals. B. told

me that the flattery and cringing obsequiousness with which my stepfather tried to conciliate him for fear of losing his good fortune was embarrassing. Aware that he was being set on the right path, Efimov even gave up drinking and finally managed to get a position in the theatre orchestra. He made good use of the opportunity and after one month of hard work and diligence he regained all that he had lost in a year and a half's worth of laziness. He promised that from then onwards he would be honest and meticulous in the performance of his duties. But our family situation did not improve at all. My stepfather did not give my mother a copeck out of his salary; he spent it all on himself, eating and drinking with his new companions, of which he soon had a regular circle. He mostly mixed with theatre people: attendants, chorus singers and extras – in other words with those among whom he felt superior and not with people of any talent. He succeeded in inspiring them with a special kind of respect for himself; he immediately impressed upon them that he was a neglected man, that he had enormous talent but that his wife had destroyed it, and, finally, that their conductor knew absolutely nothing about music. He laughed at all the other members of the orchestra, at the selection of plays produced and even at the composers of the operas performed. Finally he began to propound a new theory of music and succeeded in boring everyone around him. He quarrelled with his colleagues and with the conductor; he was rude to the manager and generally acquired a reputation for being the most troublesome, the most cantankerous and the most worthless of men. Everyone found him insufferable.

Indeed it was very strange to see such an insignificant man, such a stupid and useless performer, such a negligent musician full of such vast pretences, boasts, conceits and ugly manners.

It all came to an end when he quarrelled with B. Efimov had concocted and circularized some very ugly gossip and horrible slander concerning him. After six months of unsatisfactory service he was dismissed from the orchestra on charges of drunkenness and laziness. But it proved more difficult to get rid of him. He soon reappeared, dressed in his former rags, for his decent clothes were all sold or pawned. He started loafing about with his former workmates, indifferent to whether they were pleased to see him or not. He spread spiteful gossip, babbled nonsense, wept over his miserable predicament and invited them all to come and see for themselves what a diabolical wife he had.

Of course he found an audience, those who took pleasure in offering a drink to a dismissed colleague, and they made him talk all kinds of rubbish. Moreover he always spoke poignantly and wittily, filling his talk with caustic quips and cynical digressions, which please a certain type of listener. He was taken for a crackpot fool who could at times be made to chatter if there was nothing better to do. They enjoyed provoking him by talking about some new violinist about to arrive in Petersburg. Whenever he heard this, Efimov's face would fall; he would grow diffident and try to discover who it was that was coming and whether or not he was talented. He always became very envious. I believe it was at this time that his real, permanent madness set in; he had an unshakeable belief that he was the finest violinist in Petersburg but was persecuted by ill luck and that owing to various intrigues he had been misunderstood and left in obscurity. He flattered himself with this notion because he was one of those people who are very fond of seeing themselves among the insulted and injured, of complaining aloud about it and finding secret comfort in gloating over their unrecognized genius. He knew the names of all the violinists in Petersburg and he did not consider one of

them to be a rival. Connoisseurs and dilettantes who knew the unfortunate madman enjoyed talking in front of him about some respected violinist, simply to see his reactions. They enjoyed his malicious, impertinent remarks and they liked the apt and rather clever things he said in criticism of his imaginary rivals. They were frequently unable to understand him, but they were convinced that no one else could so audaciously and smartly caricature the musical celebrities of the day. Even the musicians he mocked were a little afraid of him, for they knew his biting wit. They recognized the pertinence of his attacks and the aptness of his judgements in the instances where criticism was valid. And they grew accustomed to seeing him in the corridors of the theatre and behind the scenes. The attendants allowed him to wander around as freely as if he were indispensable and he became something of a household Thersites. This continued for two or three years until finally everyone grew bored with him again. He was completely ostracized, and during the last two years of his life he disappeared like a fish in the ocean, never to be seen again. B., however, stumbled across him a couple of times but in such a pitiful plight that again his compassion prevailed over repugnance. He called out his name, but my stepfather felt so mortified that he pretended not to hear, pulled his battered hat down over his eyes and passed by. At last, on the morning of an important holiday B. was informed that his former friend, Efimov, had come with his greetings. B. went out to see him. Efimov stood there drunk and began making extremely low bows, almost to the ground, and – murmuring something inaudibly – refused to enter the house. It was as if he were saying: ‘How can the likes of me mix with important people like you? The lackey’s place will do for us. We can greet you and be off.’ The whole affair was very obscene, silly and revoltingly offensive. After that B. did not see him again, not until the time of the catastrophe that ended this miserable, morbid, delirious life.

It all ended in a very strange way. The catastrophe is closely related not only to my first childhood impressions, but also to all the rest of my life. This is what happened... But first I must explain the sort of childhood I had and what sort of person it was who left such a torturous mark on my early memories and was also the cause of my poor mother’s death.

CHAPTER TWO

I cannot remember my life before the age of about nine. I do not know quite why, but nothing that happened before then left a very strong impression. From the time when I was eight and a half I begin to remember everything very clearly, day by day without a break, as if it all happened only yesterday. It is true there are one or two things I can remember from my early childhood, but in a dreamlike fashion – a little lamp always burning before an old-fashioned icon in a dark corner of the room; then being knocked down in the street by a horse, after which I am told I lay ill for three months; then, too, times during that illness when I would wake up in the night, lying beside my mother in her bed and frightened by morbid dreams, by the stillness of the night and by the mice scratching in the corner, and all the time trembling with fear, huddling terrified under the bedclothes but never daring to wake her up – from which I concluded that my fear of her was the greatest terror. But from that moment when I suddenly became aware of myself I developed remarkably quickly and was more than capable of contending with many unchildlike impressions. Everything became clear to me and I understood things swiftly and easily. The feelings I remember well are vivid and miserable; it was these feelings I began experiencing every day, growing stronger and stronger as time went by and leaving indelible impressions. The whole time during which I lived with my parents is shrouded in a strange gloomy colour, as is my entire childhood.

It feels now as if I had suddenly become conscious, as if I had woken from a deep sleep (although at the time, of course, the change cannot have been so startling). I found myself in a large low-ceilinged room that was dusty and dirty. The walls were coloured a dirty grey; in the corner stood a large Russian stove; the windows looked out on the street, or more accurately on the roof of the house opposite, and were short and broad like chinks. The windowsills were so high above the floor that I remember having to push a table and chair underneath them in order to clamber up to the window. I was very fond of sitting there when no one was at home. Since the room was the attic of a big six-storeyed house I could see half the town from it. Our furniture consisted of nothing but the remains of an oilcloth sofa with the stuffing coming out and covered in dust, a simple white table, two chairs, my mother's bed, a little corner cupboard with something in it, a chest of drawers which always stood tilted to one side and a torn paper screen.

I remember it was dusk; everything was in a disordered mess – brushes, rags, wooden bowls, a broken bottle and God knows what else. I remember that my mother was terribly excited and crying about something. My stepfather was sitting in the corner dressed in the tattered frock-coat he always wore. He made some sarcastic remark which made her angrier than ever, and then the brushes and bowls began to fly. I burst into tears, screaming and rushing over to them both. I was in a terrible state of panic and clung tightly to my stepfather to protect him. Goodness knows why, but I felt that my mother had no reason to be angry with him, that he was not to blame, and I wanted to beg forgiveness for him and bear whatever punishment myself. I was dreadfully afraid of my mother and presumed that everyone was. At first she was stunned by my behaviour and then, grabbing me by the arm, she dragged me behind the screen. I knocked my arm rather painfully against the bedstead,

but my terror was greater than the pain and I did not even wince. I remember too that my mother began speaking to my father, heatedly and bitterly, and pointing at me (from now onwards I shall refer to my stepfather as my father, for it was actually much later on that I discovered he was not my real father). This whole scene lasted a couple of hours; shaking in anticipation, I tried as hard as I could to guess how it would all end up. At last the arguing subsided and mother went out somewhere. Then my father called me to him, kissed me, stroked my hair, put me on his knee and let me nestle close to him. It was, I suppose, the first time I had received any parental caress and perhaps that is why I started, from that moment, to remember everything so distinctly. I realized too that I had won my father's favour through defending him and for the first time it occurred to me that he had a great deal to put up with from my mother. That idea stayed with me, troubling me more and more by the day.

From that moment there arose in me a boundless love for my father, but it was a strange sort of love, not a childlike feeling. I would say that it was more like a compassionate *motherly* feeling, if one can use that expression of a child! My father always seemed to me so pitiful, so unbearably tormented, such a crushed creature and so full of suffering that it would have been horribly unnatural for me not to have loved him passionately, not to have comforted him and been tender towards him, not to have done everything possible for him. But even now I cannot understand how I got the idea into my head that my father was such a martyr and the unhappiest man in the world. Whatever can have inspired that idea! How could I, a child, have had any understanding of his personal misfortunes? Yet in my own way I did understand something, although it all became twisted and refashioned in my imagination. But still today I cannot conceive how I came to have these impressions. Perhaps my mother was a bit too stern with me and so I clung to my father as if to a fellow-sufferer.

I have already described my first awakening from childhood sleep; my first engagement with life. My heart was wounded from the very beginning and my development began with incomprehensible and exhausting rapidity. I was no longer satisfied by external impressions alone and I began to think, to reason, to observe. But these faculties were put into use at such an unnaturally early age that my mind could not really interpret things properly and I found myself living in a world of my own. Everything around me started turning into the fairy tale which my father frequently told me and which I interpreted as reality. A strange idea arose in me. I became fully aware, although I do not know how it came about, that I was living in an unusual family situation and that my parents were quite unlike any of the other people whom I chanced to meet. 'Why,' I used to wonder, 'why are other people so unlike my parents, even in appearance? Why do I see laughter on the faces of others, while in our little corner no one laughs or shows any happiness? What power, what force has caused me, a child of nine, to analyse every word spoken to me by anyone I chance to meet on the stairs, or in the street when, wrapping mother's old jacket around me to cover my rags, I go out with a few copecks to buy the odd ounce of sugar, tea or bread?' I understood, and again I do not know how I came to understand, that there was an everlasting, unbearable air of sorrow in our attic room. I searched for an answer and I do not know who it was that helped me to unravel the riddle in the way I did. I blamed my mother and I saw her as my father's evil genius, but, I repeat, I have no idea how such a monstrous image developed. And the more attached I grew to my father the more I came to loathe my mother. Still now this memory torments me

sorely. There was another incident which, even more than the first, contributed to this strange devotion I had for my father. One day, at about nine o'clock in the evening, my mother sent me to the shop to buy some yeast. My father was not at home. On the way back I slipped in the street and spilled the whole cupful. The first thing that came to my mind was my mother's wrath, but at the same time I felt a horrible pain in my left arm and I could not get up. Passers-by gathered around me; an old woman was helping me and a boy running by knocked my head with a key. At last I was on my feet. I picked up the fragments of broken cup and set off, swaying and staggering, when I suddenly caught sight of my father. He was standing in a crowd before a grand house opposite our lodgings. The house belonged to a well-to-do family and was splendidly illuminated. A number of carriages had driven up to the entrance, and strains of music drifted down from the windows into the street. I clutched my father by the tails of his frock-coat, pointed to the pieces of broken cup and began tearfully telling him that I was afraid of going back to mother. I felt sure he would stand up for me. But why, I wonder, was I so sure that he loved me more than my mother did? Why was it that I could approach him without fear? Taking me by the hand, he began comforting me and then, lifting me up in his arms, he said he wanted to show me something. He was holding me by my bruised arm, which hurt terribly, and I was unable to see anything. But I did not cry, through fear of offending him. He kept asking me whether I could see anything and, doing my utmost to give him an answer that would please him, I said that I could see some red curtains. He wanted to carry me over to the other side of the street, closer to the house, when suddenly, I don't know why, I started crying, hugging him and begging to be taken to mother. I remember that at the time my father's caresses were upsetting me and I could not bear the thought that one of the two people whom I so longed to love did love me and treated me kindly, while the other intimidated me and made me afraid of even approaching her. However, my mother was hardly angry at all and immediately sent me to bed. I remember that the pain in my arm grew worse and worse, making me feverish, and yet I was particularly happy because it had all turned out so well. I dreamed of the house with the red curtains throughout the night.

When I woke up the following day my first thought and concern was for the house with the red curtains. As soon as mother had gone outside I clambered up to the little window and gazed out at the house. For a long time it had fascinated my childish curiosity. I particularly liked looking at it in the evening when the street was lit up and the crimson-red curtains behind the plate-glass windows gleamed with a peculiar blood-red glow. Sumptuous carriages drawn by handsome proud horses, were continually driving up to the front door, and everything aroused my curiosity: the clamour and commotion at the entrance, the different-coloured lamps of the carriages and the lavishly dressed women who drove up in them. In my child's imagination all this assumed an image of regal magnificence and fairy-tale enchantment. However, after the encounter with my father outside the house, it all became doubly magical and intriguing. My inflamed imagination started conjuring up the most incredible thoughts and suppositions. And it is hardly surprising that, living as I did amid two people as strange as my father and mother, I did become a rather unusual and peculiar child. I was always struck by the contrast in their characters, the way, for instance, that my mother fussed incessantly and worried over our miserable household, reproaching my father for the fact that it was she alone who provided for us all. I could not help asking why he did nothing,

to help her, why he lived like a stranger in the house. I gained a little insight from some of the things my mother said and it was with surprise that I learnt that my father was an artist (the word stuck in my mind) and a man of genius. I soon formed a clear concept of an artist as being a man unique and apart from the others. Possibly my father's behaviour contributed to this idea. There was something he once said that made an exceptionally strong impression upon me. He said: 'The time will come when I shall no longer live in poverty, when I shall be a gentleman. When mother dies I shall be born again.' I remember how these words frightened me terribly at first. I could not bear to stay in the same room as him and ran out into the chilly hallway, where I leant against a windowsill, buried my face in my hands and sobbed. Later on, when I thought it over and reconciled myself to my father's terrible wish, my wild imagination came to my assistance. I could not be tormented by uncertainty for long and had to reach some mode of acceptance. And so – goodness knows how it all began – I fastened on to the idea that when my mother died my father would leave this miserable attic room and go away somewhere, taking me with him. But where? Not even my fantasy could find an answer to that. I only remember that I used to dream of adorning this place with the most brilliant, luxurious and splendid things that my mind could conjure. It seemed to me that we would soon be rich. I would not be sent on errands to the shops, which I always found very burdensome because the children living next door invariably teased me when I left the house, and I would be so nervous, especially if I was carrying milk or oil, knowing that, if I spilt it, I would pay for it dearly. Then I resolved, dreaming, that my father would immediately dress himself well and we would move into a magnificent house. And here the grand house with the crimson curtains, and the experience there with my father, came to the assistance of my imagination. And I soon conjectured everything in terms of moving to that house and enjoying uninterrupted peace and comfort. From then on I used to look out of the window in the evenings, gazing with intense curiosity at the enchanted house, familiarizing myself with the flow of visitors, who were dressed with an elegance and refinement such as I had never seen before. I imagined the harmonious strains of music drifting through the windows and I watched the shadows flitting across the curtains, always trying to guess what was going on there and always convinced that this was the realm of paradise and eternal joy. I loathed our miserable lodgings and the rags I had to wear. One day my mother scolded me and ordered me to come down from the window. It was then that the idea occurred to me that she disliked my looking at that house, that she did not want me to think about it, that she disliked the thought of our happiness and wanted to interfere even with this... I looked at my mother intently and suspiciously for the rest of the evening.

How did I develop such cruel feelings towards a creature who suffered so eternally as my mother? It is only now that I begin to understand what a misery her life was, and I cannot think of her tortured existence without feeling pain in my heart. Even then, in that dark strange period of my childhood, a period of quite abnormal development, my heart often ached from pain and pity; fear, confusion and doubt weighed heavily on my soul. Pangs of conscience and self-reproach rose up within me and I felt distressed and miserable on account of my unjust feelings towards my mother. For some reason we were estranged from one another and I cannot remember feeling affectionate towards her. To this day there are some trifling memories that still lacerate my heart. I remember how once (and what I am now describing is trivial and elementary and not really of a great deal of importance, but it is

- [click The Crystal Mountain \(Forgotten Realms: The Empyrean Odyssey, Book 3\)](#)
- [download online The Social Structures of the Economy book](#)
- **[download online The Hall of Uselessness: Collected Essays](#)**
- [The Barefoot Executive: The Ultimate Guide for Being Your Own Boss and Achieving Financial Freedom pdf, azw \(kindle\)](#)
- [click Anathema book](#)
- [download online Wuthering Heights online](#)

- <http://honareavalmusic.com/?books/The-Crystal-Mountain--Forgotten-Realms--The-Empyrean-Odyssey--Book-3-.pdf>
- <http://www.rap-wallpapers.com/?library/Connectography--Mapping-the-Future-of-Global-Civilization.pdf>
- <http://yachtwebsitedemo.com/books/The-Hall-of-Uselessness--Collected-Essays.pdf>
- <http://www.uverp.it/library/The-Barefoot-Executive--The-Ultimate-Guide-for-Being-Your-Own-Boss-and-Achieving-Financial-Freedom.pdf>
- <http://omarnajmi.com/library/Reason-and-Revolution--Hegel-and-the-Rise-of-Social-Theory--2nd-Edition-.pdf>
- <http://fitnessfatale.com/freebooks/Cassada.pdf>