

ALBERT

A Story by Leo Tolstoy

Translated from the Original Russian and edited by Leo Wiener
Assistant Professor of Slavic Languages at Harvard University

1857

I.

Five rich young men arrived in the third hour of the night to enjoy themselves at a small St. Petersburg party.

A great deal of champagne was drunk. The greater number of the gentlemen were very young ; the maidens were beautiful ; the piano and violin indefatigably played one polka after another, the dances and the din never stopped ; but it was somehow dull and awkward. Everybody felt, as often happens, that it all was not the right thing, and that it was unnecessary.

They tried several times to heighten the merriment, but the forced merriment was even worse than the ennui.

One of the five young men, more than the rest dissatisfied with himself, and the others, and the whole evening, rose with a feeling of disgust, found his hat, and went out with the intention of leaving without being noticed.

There was no one in the antechamber, but in the adjoining room, behind the door, he heard two altercationing voices.

" You can't, there are guests there," said a feminine voice.

" Let me, please. I won't do anything ! " implored a feeble masculine voice.

" I will not let you without the madame's permission," said the woman. "Where are you going? Oh, what a man ! "

The door opened wide, and on the threshold appeared a strange figure of a man. Upon noticing a guest, the maid no longer held him back, and the strange figure, bowing timidly, staggering on his bent legs, entered the room. It was a middle-sized man, with a narrow, stooping back and long, dishevelled hair. He wore a short overcoat and torn, tight pantaloons over rough, uncleaned boots. The necktie, twisted into the shape of a rope, wound around his long white neck. A dirty shirt stuck out from the sleeves over lean hands. Yet, in spite of the extraordinary leanness of the body, his face was tender and white, and a fresh ruddiness lay on the cheeks above the scanty black beard and side whiskers. The uncombed hair, thrown up,

revealed a low and exceedingly clear forehead. His dark, fatigued eyes looked softly, imploringly, and, at the same time, earnestly ahead of him. Their expression captivatingly blended with the expression of the fresh lips, bent at the corners, which could be seen back of the scanty moustache.

Having made a few steps, he stopped, turned around to the young man, and smiled. He smiled as though with difficulty; but when the smile brightened up his face, the young man – himself not knowing why – smiled too.

" Who is that ? " he asked the maid in a whisper, when the strange figure had entered the room from which came the sounds of dancing music.

" A demented musician from the theatre," replied the maid. " He sometimes calls on the lady of the house."

" Where did you go to, Delésov ? " some one just then called out in the parlour.

The young man, who was named Delésov, returned to the parlour.

The musician was standing at the door and, looking at the dancers, by his smile, his look, and the tapping of his foot expressed the satisfaction which this spectacle afforded him.

" Well, go and dance yourself," one of the guests said to him.

The musician bowed and looked interrogatively at the hostess.

" Go, go, the gentlemen want you to," interposed the hostess.

The lean, feeble limbs of the musician suddenly came into intensified motion, and he, winking, smiling, and jerking, began heavily and awkwardly to leap about in the room. In the middle of the quadrille, a merry officer, who was dancing beautifully and with animation, accidentally hit the musician with his back. The feeble, tired legs did not keep their balance, and the musician, having made a few swaying steps toward one side, fell bis whole length upon the floor. Notwithstanding the dull, dry sound produced by his fall, nearly all at first burst out laughing.

But the musician did not get up. The guests grew silent, even the piano ceased playing, and Delésov and the hostess were the first to run up to the prostrate man. He was lying bn his elbow and staring with a dull expression at the floor. When he was picked up and placed on a chair, he with a quick motion of his bony hand brushed aside the hair from his brow and began to smile, without answering any question.

" Mr. Albert ! Mr. Albert ! " said the hostess. " Are you hurt ? "Where ? I said he ought not to dance, – he is so feeble ! " she continued, addressing her guests. " He barely stands up, so how can

he ? ”

“ Who is he ? ” they asked the hostess.

“ A poor man, – an artist. A very good fellow, only wretched, as you see.”

She said this, not at all embarrassed by the presence of the musician. The musician came to and, as though frightened at something, curled all up and brushed aside the people standing near him.

“ All this is nothing,” he suddenly said, with obvious effort rising from his chair.

To prove that he was not hurt, he walked into the middle of the room and wanted to jump up, but staggered, and would have fallen again, if he had not been held up.

All felt ill at ease ; they looked at him and kept silent.

The musician’s look again became dimmed, and he, apparently forgetting all, rubbed his knee with his hand. Suddenly he raised his head, put forward his trembling foot, with the same trite gesture as before threw back his hair, and, walking up to the violinist, took his violin.

“ All this is nothing ! ” he repeated once more, swinging the violin. “ Gentlemen, we shall have music now.”

“ What a strange face ! ” the guests said to each other.

“ Maybe a great talent is perishing in this unfortunate creature ! ” said one of the guests.

“ Yes, he is miserable, miserable ! ” said another.

“ What a beautiful face ! There is something extraordinary in him,” said Delésov. “We shall see – ”

II.

In the meantime Albert, paying no attention to any one, pressed the violin to his shoulder and slowly walked up and down near the piano, tuning it. His lips were curved into an impassionate expression, his eyes could not be seen ; but his narrow, bony back, his long, white neck, his crooked legs and shaggy black head presented a queer, but for some reason not laughable, spectacle. Having tuned the violin, he briskly struck a chord and, tossing up his head, turned to the pianist, who was getting ready to play his accompaniment.

" Mélancolie G-dur ! " he said, turning with an imperative gesture to the pianist.

Soon after, as though begging pardon for his imperative gesture, he smiled meekly, and with this smile surveyed the audience. Throwing back his hair with the hand in which he held the bow, he stopped at the corner of the piano and touched the strings with a flowing motion of his bow. A clear, melodious sound passed through the room, and all grew silent.

The notes of the theme flowed freely, artistically, after the first chord, suddenly illuminating the inner world of each hearer with some unexpectedly clear and soothing light. Not one false or extravagant sound impaired the submissiveness of the listeners : all the notes were clear, artistic, and significant. Everybody followed their evolution in silence, with a trepidation of hope. From a condition of ennui, of noisy distraction, and of the soul's sleep, in which these people were, they were suddenly imperceptibly transferred into an entirely different, forgotten world.

Now there arose in their souls the contemplation of the past, of an impassioned recollection of some happiness, of an unlimited desire for power and splendour, of a feeling of humility, of unsatisfied love and sadness. Now the sadly tender and the impulsively despairing sounds, freely intermingling, flowed and flowed one after another so artistically, so strongly, and so unconsciously, that it was not the notes that were heard, but a beautiful stream of a long familiar, but now for the first time expressed, poetry, that flowed of its own accord into the soul of each.

With every note Albert grew out taller and taller. He was far from being misshapen or strange. Pressing down the violin with his chin and listening to his notes with the expression of impassioned attention, he convulsively changed the position of his feet. Now he would straighten himself up to his full stature, and now again he would carefully bend his back. His left, tensely bent hand seemed to have congealed in its place, and only the bony fingers convulsively moved over the strings ; his right moved smoothly, artistically, imperceptibly. His face was agleam with an uninterrupted, ecstatic joy ; his eyes burned with a bright, dry splendour, his nostrils were expanded, his red lips opened through sheer enjoyment.

Occasionally the head bent nearer to the violin, his eyes closed, and his face, half-covered by his hair, was lighted up with a smile of humble bliss. Occasionally he suddenly straightened himself up, put forward a foot, and his clear brow and shining look, which he cast upon the room, gleamed with pride, with majesty, with the consciousness of power. Once the pianist made a mistake and took a wrong chord. Physical suffering was expressed in the whole figure and face of the musician. He stopped for a second and, with an expression of malice, stamping his foot, he exclaimed : " Moll, ce moll ! " The pianist corrected himself, Albert closed his eyes, smiled, and, again forgetting himself, and others, and the whole world, blissfully abandoned himself to his work.

All those who were present in the room during Albert's playing preserved a submissive silence and seemed to live and breathe only by his sounds.

The merry officer sat motionless on a chair near the window, directing a lifeless glance upon the floor, and occasionally drawing a laboured breath. The maidens sat in absolute silence along the walls, and only rarely cast approving, nay, perplexed, glances at each other. The fat, smiling face of the hostess melted with joy. The pianist riveted his eyes upon Albert's face and, for fear of making a mistake, which found its expression in his stretched form, tried to keep up with him.

One of the guests, who had drunk more than the rest, lay with face downward upon a divan and tried not to move in order not to betray his agitation. Delésov experienced an unusual sensation. A cold circle, now compressing, now expanding, held his head as in a vice. The roots of his hair became sensitive ; a chill ran up his spine ; something seemed to rise higher and higher in his throat, stinging his nose and palate as though with needles, and tears imperceptibly moistened his cheeks. He shook himself, tried unnoticed to draw them in again and wipe them, but new ones came out again and coursed down his face.

By a strange concatenation of impressions, the first sounds of Albert's violin transferred Delésov to his first youth. He – no longer a young man, tired of life, an exhausted man – suddenly felt himself a seventeen-year-old, self-contentedly pretty, blissfully stupid, and unconsciously happy being. He recalled his first love for his cousin in a pink little dress ; he recalled his first confession in the linden avenue ; he recalled the heat and the incomprehensible charm of the first kiss ; he recalled the magic and unsolved mysteriousness of the Nature that then surrounded him. In his retrospective imagination, she gleamed through the mist of indefinite hopes, incomprehensible desires, and unquestioned faith in the possibility of an impossible happiness. All the unappreciated minutes of that time, one after another, arose before him, but not as insignificant moments of a fleeting present, but as arrested, expanding, reprobating forms of the past. He contemplated them with joy and wept, – he wept not because the time had passed which he might have employed to better advantage (if that time were given back to him, he would not undertake to make better use of it), but because that time was past and would never return.

The recollections arose of their own accord, and Albert's violin kept saying one and the same thing. It said : " Past is the time for you, for ever past the time of strength, of love, and of happiness, past, – and it shall never return. Weep for it, weep all your tears, die in the tears for that time, – this is the one, best happiness which is left for you."

Toward the end of the last variation Albert's face became red ; his eyes burned, without growing dim ; large drops of perspiration

coursed down his cheeks. The veins on his brow were swollen ; his whole body came into an ever increasing motion ; the pale lips no longer closed up, and his whole figure expressed an ecstatic eagerness of enjoyment.

Making a desperate flourish with his whole body and tossing his hair, he took down his violin and with a smile of proud majesty and happiness surveyed the audience. Then his back became bent, his lips were folded, his eyes were dimmed, and he, as though ashamed of himself, looking timidly about him and stumbling, went into another room.

III.

Something strange took place with all the persons present, and something strange was felt in the dead silence which ensued after Albert's play. It was as though each wanted to express what all this meant, but could not. What is meant by a bright and warm room, brilliant women, the dawn in the windows, agitated blood, and the pure impression of fleeting sound? Nobody attempted to say what all this meant ; on the contrary, nearly all, feeling themselves incapable of passing entirely over to the side of that which the new impression had revealed to them, were provoked against it.

" He really plays beautifully," said the officer.

" Wonderfully," replied Delésov, stealthily wiping off his cheeks with his sleeve.

" Gentlemen, it is about time to depart," said, adjusting himself a little, the one who was lying on the divan. " We outfit to give him something, gentlemen ! Let us take up a collection ! "

Albert was in the meantime sitting alone, in the other room, upon a couch. Leaning with his elbows on his bony knees, he stroked his face with his perspiring, dirty hands, dishevelled his hair, and smiled a happy smile to himself.

They took up a good collection, and Delésov offered to take it to him.

Besides, it had occurred to Delésov, upon whom the music had produced such a strong and unusual impression, to do the man some good. It occurred to him that he could take him to his rooms, dress him up, find some place for him, – in general, tear him away from his sordid position.

" Well, are you tired ? " asked Delésov, walking into the room where he was. Albert smiled.

" You have real talent : you ought to make a serious matter of

music ; you ought to play in public."

" I should like to have a drink of something," said Albert, as though awakening.

Delésov brought him wine, and the musician eagerly emptied two glasses.

" What excellent wine ! " he said.

" Melancholy, what a superb thing it is ! " said Delésov.

" Oh, yes, yes ! " Albert replied, smiling. " But excuse me : I do not know with whom I have the honour of speaking ; you may be a count, or a prince ; can't you loan me some money ? " He was silent for a moment. " I have none – I am a poor man. I cannot return it to you."

Delésov blushed ; he felt awkward, and he hastened to give the musician the collection.

« Thank you very much," said Albert, grasping the money. "Now let us have music: I will play for you as much as you wish. Only let me have something to drink, something to drink," he added, rising.

Delésov brought him some more wine and asked him to sit down near him.

" Excuse me for being frank with you," said Delésov, " your talent has interested me so much. It seems to me that you are not in a good position."

Albert looked now at Delésov, and now at the hostess, who had entered the room.

" Permit me to offer you my services," continued Delésov. " If you are in need of anything, I should be very happy if you took up your abode with me. I live all alone, and I might be useful to you."

Albert smiled and made no reply.

" Why don't you express your thanks ? " said the hostess. " Of course, this would be an advantage for you. Only, I should not advise you," she continued, turning to Delésov and giving a negative shake with her head.

" I am much obliged to you," said Albert, pressing Delésov's hands with his clammy hands, " but let us have music now, if you please."

The other guests were getting ready to leave and, no matter how much Albert begged them to stay, went out into the antechamber.

Albert bade the hostess good-bye and, putting on his shabby broad-brimmed hat and old summer cape, which was the only winter wrap he

had, went out on the porch with Delésov.

When Delésov seated himself with his new acquaintance in the carriage and smelled that unpleasant odour of intoxication and uncleanliness, with which this musician was saturated, he began to regret his act and to accuse himself of a childish softness of heart and lack of common sense. Besides, everything which Albert said was so stupid and trite, and he suddenly became so dirtily drunk in the air, that Delésov was nauseated. " What am I going to do with him ? " he thought.

After travelling fifteen minutes, Albert grew silent ; his hat fell down to his feet, and he threw himself down in the corner of the carriage and began to snore. The wheels creaked evenly over the frosty snow ; the feeble light of the dawn barely penetrated through the frozen windows.

Delésov looked at his neighbour. His long body, covered with the cape, lay lifelessly near him. It seemed to Delésov that the long head with the large, dark nose was shaking on that body ; but, upon looking more closely, he saw that that which he had taken for a nose and face was hair, and the real face was lower down. He bent over

and made out the features of Albert's face. The beauty of the brow and of the calmly shut mouth again startled him.

Under the influence of his tired nerves, of the irritating sleepless morning hour, and of the music which he had heard, Delésov, looking at that face, again was transferred to that blissful world into which he had taken a glance that same night ; again he thought of the happy and magnanimous time of youth, and he stopped regretting his deed. At that moment he sincerely, warmly loved Albert and firmly intended to do him some good.

IV.

On the following morning, when he was awakened to go to his office, Delésov, in disagreeable surprise, saw before him the same old screen, the same old servant, * and the watch on the little table. " What else is it that I should like to see, if it is not that which always surrounds me ? " he asked himself. He then recalled the black eyes and the happy smile of the musician ; the motive of the " melancholy " and the whole strange previous night passed through his imagination.

He had no time to consider whether he had acted right or wrong in taking with him the musician. As he dressed himself, he mentally apportioned his day ; he took his documents, gave the necessary orders about the house, and hurriedly put on his overcoat and galoshes. As he passed the dining-room, he looked in through the door. Albert, spreading out in his dirty and torn shirt, with his face stuck in a pillow, was sleeping the sleep of the dead on a

morocco leather divan, where he had been placed the night before. "Something is wrong," was the thought that involuntarily occurred to Delésov.

"Please go down to Boryuzévski and ask for his violin for two or three days. I want it for him," he said, to his servant. "When he wakes up, give him coffee and let him put on some of my underwear and old clothes. In general, satisfy his wishes, if you please."

Upon returning home late in the evening, Delésov, to his surprise, did not find Albert.

"Where is he?" he asked his servant.

"He went away directly after dinner," replied the servant. "He took the violin and went away. He promised to be back in an hour, but has not yet shown up."

"Tut, tut, this is annoying!" said Delésov. "How could you let him go, Zakhar?"

Zdkhar was a St. Petersburg lackey, who had been for eight years in Delésov's service. Being a lonely bachelor, Delésov involuntarily confided to him his intentions, and liked to know his opinion in regard to each of his undertakings.

"How could I dare not let him?" replied Zakhar, playing with the fob of his watch. "If you had told me, Dmitri Ivanovich, to keep him, I might have been able to hold him at home. But you only said something about his garments."

"Tut! This is annoying! Well, what was he doing here without me?"

Zakhar smiled.

"Really, he may be called an artist, Dmitri Ivanovich. When he awoke he asked for Madeira; then he passed all the time with the cook and with the neighbour's servant. He is so funny. Still, he has a good character. I gave him tea and brought him dinner; but he did not want to eat, and invited me in. But when it comes to playing the violin, you will find few such artists at Isler's. It is worth while keeping such a man. As he played 'Down the Mother Volga' for us, it was as though a man were weeping. It was too good! People came from all the stories to our vestibule to listen to him."

"Well, did you dress him up?" his master interrupted him.

"Of course. I gave him your nightshirt and put my overcoat on him. It is proper to help such a man, he is such a dear fellow!" Zakhar smiled. "He kept asking me what your rank was and whether you had influential acquaintances, and how many souls of peasants you had."

«All right, but we must find him now, and never again give him

anything to drink, or you will only make him worse."

" That is true," interposed Zakhar. " He is evidently feeble ; our master had just such a clerk - "

Delésov, who had long known the story of the desperately drinking clerk, did not give Zakhar a chance to finish his story, and, ordering everything fixed for the night, sent him out to find Albert and bring him back.

He lay down in his bed, put out the light, but could not fall asleep for a long time, thinking of Albert. " Although this may appear very strange to many of my acquaintances," thought Delésov, " it is so seldom that one does something for somebody else that one ought to thank God when an opportunity presents itself, and I will not miss it. I will do everything, absolutely everything I can in order to aid him. Maybe he is not at all insane, but only a drunkard. This will not cost me very much : where one has enough to eat, two may have. Let him first live with me, and then we will find him a place or will arrange a concert for him ; we will pull him off the shallow, and then we shall see."

A pleasant feeling of self-satisfaction took possession of him after this reflection.

" Really, I am not an entirely bad man, not at all a bad man," he thought. " I am positively a very good man if I compare myself with others - "

He was falling asleep, when the sounds of an opening door and of steps in the antechamber distracted him.

" Well, I will treat him a little more severely," he thought. • " That will be better ; I must do so."

He rang the bell.

"Well, has he come?" he asked Zakhar, who came in.

" He is a wretched man, Dmitri Ivanovich," said Zakhar, significantly shaking his head and closing his eyes.

" Well, is he drunk ? "

"He is very weak."

" Has he the violin with him ? "

" Yes, the lady gave it to me."

" Please do not let him in here ! Put him to bed, and to-morrow don't let him out under any consideration."

Zakhar had not yet gone away, when Albert entered the room.

V.

" You want to sleep ? " asked Albert, smiling. " I was there, at Anna Ivanovna's. I passed a very pleasant evening : we had music, and we laughed, and had pleasant company. Permit me to drink a glass of something," he added, taking hold of the water-bottle, which was standing on the table, " anything but water."

Albert was just as he was the night before : there was the same beautiful smile in his eyes and on his lips, the same bright, inspired brow and feeble limbs. Zakhar's overcoat fitted him well, and the clean, long, unstarched collar of the nightshirt picturesquely encircled his thin white neck, giving him a peculiarly childlike and innocent aspect. He sat down on Delésov's bed and looked at him in silence, with a joyous and grateful smile. Delésov looked into Albert's eyes, and suddenly again felt himself in the power of his smile. His sleepiness vanished ; he forgot that it was his duty to be severe ; on the contrary, he wanted to make merry, to listen to music, and to talk in a friendly way with Albert until morning, if possible. Delésov ordered Zakhar to bring a bottle of wine, cigarettes, and the violin.

" That is excellent," said Albert. " It is early yet, and we will have music. I will play for you as much as you please."

Zakhar with apparent pleasure brought a bottle of Lafitte, two glasses, weak cigarettes, which Albert smoked, and the violin ; but, instead of going to bed himself, as

his master had ordered him to, he lighted a cigar and sat down in the adjoining room.

"Let us talk together," Delésov said to the musician, as he took the violin.

Albert submissively sat down on the bed and again smiled joyfully.

" Ah, yes ! " he said, suddenly striking his brow with his hand and assuming a careworn and curious expression. (The expression of his face always preceded that which he was about to say.) " Permit me to ask you " - he hesitated awhile - " that gentleman who was with you last night, and whom you called N----, is he not the son

of the famous N----?"

" His son," replied Delésov, unable to understand how that could interest Albert.

" That's it," he said, with a self-satisfied smile. " I at once

noticed something peculiarly aristocratic in his manners. I love aristocrats : there is something beautiful and elegant in an aristocrat. And that officer who danced so well," he asked, " I liked him very much, too, - he was so jolly and so noble. He is Adjutant S----,

I think ? "

" Which one ? " asked Delésov.

" The one that knocked against me as we danced. He must be a very fine fellow."

" No, he is an empty-headed man," replied Delésov.

" Oh, no," Albert warmly defended him. " There is something very, very pleasant about him. He is a fine musician," added Albert. " He played there something from an opera. I have not taken such a liking to any one for a long time."

"Yes, he plays well, but I do not like his manner of playing," said Delésov, wishing to lead his interlocutor to a conversation on music. "He does not understand classical music ; Donizetti and Bellini are not music. You are, no doubt, of the same opinion."

" Oh, no, no, pardon me," said Albert, with a soft, interceding expression, "the old music is music, and so is the new. There are extraordinary beauties in the new music. What about ' Sonnambula ' ? and the finale in ' Lucia ' ? and Chopin ? and ' Roberto ' ? I often think " - he stopped, apparently collecting his thoughts - " that if Beethoven were alive he would weep for joy listening to ' Sonnambula.' There are beauties everywhere. I heard * Sonnambula ' for the first time when Viardot and Rubini were here, - it was like this," he said, with glistening eyes, making a gesture with both his hands, as though tearing something out of his breast. "A little longer, and it would have been impossible to endure it."

"And how do you find the opera now?" asked Delésov.

"Bosio is good, very good," he replied, "extremely elegant ; but she does not touch here," he said, pointing to his sunken breast. " A singer needs passion, and she has none. She gives pleasure, but does not torment you."

" Well, and Lablache ? "

" I heard him in Paris in the ' Barber of Seville ; ' then he was unexcelled, but now he is old, - he cannot be an artist, he is old."

" Even though he is old, he is good in morceaux d'ensemble" said Delésov, who always said that of Lablache.

" Even though he is old ? " Albert retorted, severely. " He must not be old. An artist must not be old. Much is needed for art, but above

everything else fire!" he said, with glistening eyes, uplifting both his hands.

Indeed, a terrible internal fire was burning in his whole figure.

" Ah, my God ! " he suddenly exclaimed, " do you not know Petrov, the artist ? "

" No, I don't," Delésov replied, smiling.

" How I wish you would make his acquaintance ! You would find pleasure in speaking with him. How well he, too, understands art! We used to meet often at Anna Ivanovna's, but she is now for some reason angry with him. I am very anxious for you to know him. He has great, great talent."

" What does he do, paint ? " asked Delésov.

" I do not know. I think not ; but he was an artist of the Academy. What ideas he has ! It is wonderful to hear him speak sometimes. Oh, Petrov is a great genius, but he leads too merry a life – It is a pity," added Albert, smiling. After that he arose from the bed, took the violin, and began to tune it.

" How long is it since you were last at the opera ? " Delésov asked him.

Albert looked around him and sighed.

" Ah, I can't," he said, clasping his head. He again sat down near Delésov. " I will tell you," he muttered, almost in a whisper : " I can't go there, I can't play there, – I have nothing, nothing ! I have no clothes, no lodging, no violin. It is a miserable life ! a miserable life ! " he repeated several times, " and why should I go there ? Why ? No, I must not," he said, smiling. " Ah, ' Don Juan ' ! "

He struck his head with his hand.

" We shall sometimes go there together," said Delésov.

Without making any reply, Albert leaped up, grasped the violin, and began to play the finale of the first act of " Don Juan," in his way telling the contents of the opera.

Delésov's hair began to stir on his head, as he played the voice of the dying commander.

" No, I cannot play to-day," he said, putting down the violin, " I have been drinking too much."

But immediately after he walked over to the table, poured out a full glass of wine for himself, gulped it down, and again seated himself on the bed near Delésov.

Delésov looked at Albert, without taking his eyes off him. Occasionally Albert smiled, and so did Delésov. They were both silent; but in their looks and smiles there grew up an ever closer relation of love. Delésov felt that he loved that man more and more, and he experienced an inexpressible joy. " Have you been in love ? " he suddenly asked him.

Albert fell to musing for a few seconds, then his face was lighted up by a melancholy smile. He bent down to Delésov, and looked him attentively in the eye.

" Why did you ask me that ? " he muttered, in a whisper. " I will tell you everything, because I like you," he continued, looking awhile at him and casting side glances. " I will not deceive you, but will tell you all from the beginning just as it was." He stopped, and his eyes stopped in a strange and wild manner. " You know that I am weak of intellect," he suddenly said. "Yes, yes," he continued, "Anna Ivanovna, no doubt, has told you so. She tells everybody that I am insane ! That is not so. She says it as a joke, – she is a good woman, – though it is true I have not been quite well for some time." Albert again grew silent and looked at the dark door with arrested, widely open eyes. " You asked me whether I ever was in love. Yes, I was," he whispered, raising his eyebrows. " It happened long ago, at the time when I was still connected with the theatre. I played second violin at the opera, and she used to come to a lettered parterre stall on the left."

Albert got up and bent down to Delésov's ear.

" No, there is no reason for giving her name," he said. " You, no doubt, know her, – everybody does. I was silent and only looked at her. I knew that I was a poor artist, and she an aristocratic lady. I knew it very well. I only looked at her, thinking nothing."

Albert became meditative at this recollection.

" I do not remember how it happened ; but I was once called to her house to accompany her on the violin – I, poor artist !" he said, shaking his head and smiling. " No, I can't tell it, I can't – " he added, clasping his head. " How happy I was ! "

" Well, did you often go there ? " asked Delésov.

" Once, only once – but it was my own fault. I lost my mind. I, poor artist, and she, an aristocratic lady. I ought not to have said anything to her. But I lost my mind, I did foolish things. Since then everything has been lost for me. Petrov told me the truth : it would have been better to see her in the theatre only – "

" What was it you did ? " asked Delésov.

" Ah, wait, wait, I cannot tell it."

He covered his face with his hands, and was silent for some time.

" I came late to the orchestra. Petrov and I had been drinking that evening, and I was distracted. She was sitting in her box, and talking to a general. I do not know who that general was. She sat at the very edge, and had placed her hand on the balustrade ; she wore a white dress and pearls around her neck. She spoke with him and looked at me. Her hair was made up like this. I was not playing, but standing near the bass and watching. It was then that I for the first time felt strange. She smiled at the general and looked at me. I felt that she was speaking about me, and suddenly I saw that I was not in the orchestra, but in her box and holding her hand, like this. What is this ? " asked Albert, growing silent.

" This is vividness of imagination," said Delésov.

" No, no- I do not know how to tell it," Albert replied, frowning. " I was poor even then ; I had no lodging, and when I went to the theatre, I generally remained there overnight."

" What ? In the theatre ? In the dark, empty hall ? " "Ah, I am not afraid of these foolish things. Ah, wait ! As soon as they had all gone away, I would go to the box which she used to occupy, and there I would sleep. This was my one joy. What nights I passed there! But once it started again. Many things appeared to me in the night, - I cannot tell you all." Albert looked at Delésov, with his pupils lowered. " What is it ? " he asked.

" It is strange ! " said Delésov.

" No, wait, wait ! " He continued to tell him the rest in a whisper, bending over his ear. " I kissed her hand ; I wept by her side; I talked much with her; I inhaled the odour of her perfume ; I heard her voice. She told me much one night. Then I took my violin and began to play softly. I played superbly. But I felt terribly. I am not afraid of these foolish things, and do not believe in them ; but I felt terribly about my head," he said, with a sweet smile, and touching his brow with his hand. " I felt terribly for my poor intellect ; I thought that something had happened to my head. Maybe that is nothing, - what do you say ? "

Both were silent for awhile.

" < Und wenn die Wolken sie verhüllen, Die Sonne bleibt doch ewig klar, ' "

Albert sang out, smiling softly. " Is it not so ? " he added.

" « Ich auch habe gelebt und genossen.*

Ah ! how well old Petrov could have explained it all to you ! "

Delésov in silence and terror looked at the agitated and pale face of his interlocutor.

" Do you know the ' Juristen-walzer ' ? " suddenly exclaimed Albert, and, without waiting for a reply, he jumped up, seized his violin, and began to play a merry waltz. Forgetting himself completely, and apparently imagining that a whole orchestra was playing with him, Albert smiled, swayed, changed the position of his feet, and played magnificently.

" Pshaw, enough of merrymaking ! " he said, finishing and swinging his violin.

" I will go," he said, after sitting silently for awhile.

" Won't you go ? "

" Whither? ' ' Delésov asked, in surprise.

"let us go again to Anna Ivanovna's; it is jolly there : there is a noise, people, music."

Delésov in the first moment almost consented. But, considering the matter, he began to persuade Albert not to go there that day.

" Only for a minute."

" Pteally, don't go ! "

Albert sighed and put down the violin.

" So I had better stay here ? "

He looked again at the table (there was no wine there) and went out, -wishing him a good night.

Delésov rang the bell. " Be sure and don't let Mr. Albert out anywhere without my special order," he said to Zakhar.

VI.

The following day was a holiday. Delésov, after waking, sat in his drawing-room at the coffee and read a book. Albert in the next room was not yet stirring.

Zakhar cautiously opened the door into the diningroom and looked in.

" Would you believe it, Dmitri Ivanovich, he is sleeping on the bare couch ! He did not want anything put under, upon my word. Like a little child. Truly, an artist."

At noon groaning and coughing were heard behind the door.

Zäkhar again went into the dining-room ; the master heard Zakhar's kind voice and Albert's voice of entreaty.

" Well, what is it ? " the master asked Zakhar, when he came out of it.

" He is melancholy, Dmitri Ivanovich. He does not want to wash himself, – he is so gloomy. He keeps asking for something to drink."

" Having undertaken it, I must stick to it," Delésov said to himself.

He ordered that no wine be given him, and again took up his book, involuntarily listening to what was going on in the dining-room. There was no motion there, but now and then was heard a heavy chest cough and expectoration. Two hours passed. Having dressed himself, previous to leaving the house, Delésov decided to look in on his house-mate. Albert was sitting motionless at the window, his head drooping on his hands. He looked around. His face was yellow, wrinkled, and not only sad, but profoundly unhappy. He endeavoured to smile as a greeting, but his face assumed a still more sorrowful expression. It seemed he was ready – to weep. He rose with difficulty and bowed.

"If I just could get a small glass of brandy," he said with an entreating look. " I am so weak, – please ! "

" Coffee will brace you up better. I advise you to take that."

Albert's face suddenly lost its childlike expression ; he looked coldly, dimly through the window, and feebly dropped back into his chair.

" Won't you eat your breakfast now ? "

" No, thank you, I have no appetite."

" If you wish to play on the violin, you will not disturb me," said Delésov, putting the violin on the table.

Albert looked at the violin with a contemptuous smile.

"No, I am too feeble, – I cannot play," he said, and pushed the instrument away from him.

After that, he only bowed humbly and kept stubborn silence in response to everything told him by Delésov, who proposed to go out with him and to take him to the opera in the evening. Delésov left the house, made several visits, dined out, and before the performance went home to change his clothes and to find out what the musician was doing. Albert was sitting in the dark antechamber, and, leaning with his head on his arms, was looking into the fire of the stove. He was cleanly dressed, washed, and groomed ; but his eyes were dim and dead, and his whole figure expressed feebleness and

exhaustion, even more than in the morning.

"Have you had your dinner, .Mr. Albert?" Delésov asked.

Albert made an affirmative answer with his head and, casting a frightened glance at Delésov's face, lowered his eyes. Delésov felt ill at ease.

" I told the director about you this evening," he said, himself lowering his eyes. " He will be very glad to accept you if you will allow yourself to be heard."

" Thank you, I cannot play," Albert muttered and went to his room, very softly closing the door behind him.

A few moments later, the door-knob was just as softly turned, and he came out from the room with the violin. Casting a malicious and passing glance at Delésov, he put the violin down on a chair and again disappeared.

Delésov shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

" What else am I to do ? What is my fault ? " he thought.

"Well, how is the musician?" was his first question when he returned home late.

" Badly," was Zakhar's short, sonorous answer. " He has been sighing and coughing all the time. He does not speak, except that five or six times he has asked for brandy. I gave him one glass, for fear that we should otherwise injure him, Dmitri Ivanovich. Just so the clerk - "

" Has he played any on the violin ? "

" He has not even touched it. I took it twice to him, but he picked it up and softly brought it out again," Zakhar answered, with a smile. " So had I not better give him something to drink ? "

" No, we shall wait another day and see what will happen. What is he doing now ? "

" He has locked himself up in the drawing-room."

Delésov went to his cabinet, where he picked up some French books and a German Gospel.

" Put these books to-morrow in his room, and be sure you don't let him out," he said to Zakhar.

On the following morning, Zakhar informed his master that the musician had not slept all night : he had walked all the time from one room to another, and had gone to the buffet-room, where he had tried to open the cupboard and the door, but everything, by Zakhar's

care, was locked. Zakhar said that while he pretended to be asleep he heard Albert in the darkness mumbling something and swaying his arms.

Albert grew gloomier from day to day. He seemed to be afraid of Delésov, and in his face there was an expression of morbid fright every time their eyes met. He never touched the books or the violin, and made no reply to the questions put to him.

Upon the third day of the musician's stay, Delésov returned home late in the evening, tired and unnerved. He had been driving about all day, attending to a matter which had seemed very simple and easy to him, and yet, as often happens, he had not been able to make a single step in advance, in spite of his special effort. Besides, having called at the club, he had lost at whist. He was out of sorts.

" God be with him!" he answered Zakhar, who had explained to him Albert's sad plight. " To-morrow I will find out definitely from him whether he wants to stay here and follow my advice, or not. If not, - all right ! I have done all I can, I think."

" Do a man a favour!" he thought to himself. " I am putting myself out for him. I keep in my house this dirty creature, so that in the morning I cannot receive strangers, I run around in his behalf, and he looks upon me as some kind of a rascal who for pleasure has locked him up in a cage. And, what is worse, he will not take a step in his own behalf. They are all like that" (this " all " referred to people in general, especially those with whom he on that day had had anything to do). " What is the matter with him now ? What is he thinking about and pining for ? Is he pining for the debauch from which I have torn him away ? For the humiliation, in which he was ? For the wretchedness, from which I saved him ? Evidently he has fallen so low that it is hard for him to look upon an honourable life - "

" No, it was a childish act," Delésov concluded to himself. " What business have I to mend others, when I ought to be thankful to God if I were able to get myself straightened out?" He wanted to let him go at once, but, after some reflection, he put it off until the next day.

In the night Delésov was wakened by the noise of a falling table in the antechamber, and by the sound of voices and of heavy steps. He lighted a candle and began to listen in wonderment:

" Wait, I will tell Dmitri Ivanovich," said Zakhar. Albert's voice muttered something excitedly and incoherently. Delésov jumped down from his bed and with the candle ran into the antechamber. Zakhar, in night costume, was standing against the door; Albert, in his hat and cape, was pushing him away from the door and calling out to him in a tearful voice:

" You cannot keep me here. I have a passport, and I have not taken

anything of yours. You may search me. I will go to the chief of police."

" Please, Dmitri Ivanovich ! " Zakhar turned to his master, still protecting the door with his back. " He got up in the night, found the key in my overcoat, and emptied a whole decanter of sweet brandy. Is that right ? And now he wants to go away. You ordered me not to let him go, and so I am keeping him back."

When Albert saw Delésov, he made for Zakhar in still greater excitement.

"Nobody dares keep me in! Nobody has the right to ! " he shouted, raising his voice higher and higher.

" Step aside, Zakhar," said Delésov. " I cannot and I will not keep you, but I should advise you to stay until the morning," he turned to Albert.

" Nobody can keep me. I will go to the chief of police," Albert cried louder and louder, addressing Zakhar alone and paying no attention to Delésov. " Help ! " he suddenly screamed, in a terrible voice.

" But why are you yelling so ? Nobody is keeping you," said Zakhar, opening the door.

Albert stopped crying. " You did not succeed, did you ? You wanted to starve me, - no ! " he muttered to himself, putting on the galoshes. Without taking leave, and continuing to mumble some incomprehensible words, he walked out through the door. Zakhar held the light for him until he reached the gate, and then returned.

" Thank the Lord, Dmitri Ivdnovich ! Who knows what misfortune might have befallen us. As it is, I shall have to count the silver."

Delésov only shook his head and made no reply. He now vividly recalled the first two evenings which he had passed with the musician ; he recalled the last sad days which Albert, through his fault, had passed here, and, above everything else, he recalled that sweet mixed feeling of surprise, love, and compassion, which this strange man had evoked in him from the very start, and he felt sorry for him. "What will become of him now?" he thought. " Without money, without warm clothes, alone in the night - " He was on the point of sending Zdkhar after him, but it was too late.

" Is it cold outside ? " asked Delésov.

" It is a stiff frost, Dmitri Ivdnovich," replied Zakhar. « I forgot to inform you that we shall have to get more wood to last us until spring."

" Why, then, did you say that there would be some left over ? "

VII.

It was indeed cold without, but Albert did not feel it, – he was so heated by the liquor he had drunk and by the quarrel.

Upon reaching the street, he looked around him and gleefully rubbed his hands. The streets were empty, but the long row of lamps still burned with ruddy flames, and the sky was clear and star-bedecked.

" What ? " he said, as he turned to the lighted window' in Delésov's quarters, and, putting his hands under the cape in the pockets of his pantaloons and bending forward, Albert with heavy and insecure steps walked down the street on the right. He felt an unusual weight in his feet and in his stomach ; his head was dinning ; an invisible power tossed him from side to side, but he continued walking ahead, in the direction of Anna Ivanovna's house.

Strange, incoherent thoughts passed through his head. Now he recalled his last altercation with Zakhar; now he for some reason thought of the sea and of his first arrival in Russia by steamer, and now a happy night passed with a friend in a small shop, past which he was walking now ; now suddenly a familiar motive went singing through his imagination, and he recalled the object of his passion and the terrible night in the theatre.

In spite of their incoherence, all these recollections presented themselves to his imagination with such clearness that he closed his eyes and was in doubt of what was the greater reality, that which he was doing, or that

which he was thinking. He did not remember, nor feel how his feet moved onward, how he staggered and struck the wall, how he looked about him, and how he crossed from street to street. He remembered and felt only that which, alternating and mingling fantastically, presented itself to him.

Passing the Small Morskaya Street, Albert stumbled and fell. Coming for a moment to his senses, he saw before him an immense, superb building, and he went on. In the sky were visible neither stars, nor the dawn, nor the moon, nor were there any lamps, and yet all objects were clearly defined. In the windows of the building, which towered in the corner of the street, lights were burning, but these lights quivered like reflections. The building grew out nearer and nearer, clearer and clearer, in front of Albert. But the lights disappeared the moment Albert entered through the wide door.

Within it was dark. Solitary steps sonorously rang out under the vaults, and shadows, gliding along, disappeared at his approach. " Why did I come here ? " thought Albert; but an insuperable force drew him onward into the depth of the immense hall –

There was some kind of an elevation, and around it silently stood some small men. " Who is going to speak?" Albert asked. Nobody answered him, except that one pointed to the elevation. On that elevation already was standing, in a motley morning-gown, a tall, spare man, with bristly hair. Albert at once recognized Petrov.

" How strange that he should be here ! " thought Albert.

" No, brothers ! " said Petrov, pointing to some one. " You did not understand the man who was living among you ! He is not a venal artist, not a mechanical performer, not an insane or deteriorated man. He is a genius, a great musical genius, who has perished among you, unnoticed and unappreciated."

Albert at once knew Ul » uuuä ____

but, not wishing to embarrass him, he modestly lowered his head.

" He has burned up, like a blade of straw, from that holy fire which we all serve," continued the voice, " but he has accomplished all that which God has imparted to him ; therefore he must be called a great man. You could have despised, tormented, humbled him," the voice continued louder and louder, " but he has been and ever will be incomparably higher than all of you. He is happy, he is good. He loves or despises all equally, which is the same ; he serves only that which has been imparted to him from above. He loves but one thing, beauty, – the only incontestable good in the world. Such is the man ! Fall prostrate before him, all of you ! On your knees ! " he cried aloud.

But another voice called out from the opposite corner of the hall.

" I do not wish to kneel before him," said the voice, in which Albert at once recognized that of Delésov. " What does his greatness consist in ? And why should we bend our knees before him ? Has he behaved honourably and correctly ? Has he been of any use to society ? Do we not know that he has borrowed money without returning it, and that he carried away a violin of a fellow artist and pawned it ? " (" O Lord, how does he know it all ! " thought Albert, still more lowering his head.) " Do we not know that he has flattered the most insignificant people, and that, too, for the sake of money ? " continued Delésov. " Do we not know that he was driven out of the theatre ? That Anna Ivanovna wanted to send for the police to take him away ? "

" O God, that is all true, but defend me," muttered Albert, " for you alone know why I did it."

" Stop, be ashamed," again spoke Petrév. " What right have you to accuse him ? Have you lived his life ?

Have you experienced his transports ? " (" That is so, that is so," whispered Albert.) " Art is the highest manifestation of power in man. It is given to a few chosen ones, and it lifts the chosen one

to such a height that his head begins to whirl and he with difficulty can keep his senses. In art, as in every struggle, there are heroes who have entirely given themselves over to serving it and who have perished without having reached the goal."

Petrov grew silent, and Albert raised his head and cried out aloud : " It is true, it is true ! " But his voice died away without a sound.

" It does not concern you," the artist Petrov sternly addressed him. " Yes, humiliate and despise him," he continued, " and yet of all of you he is the best and happiest."

Albert, who had listened to these words with bliss in his heart, could stand it no longer: he went up to his friend and wanted to kiss him.

" Get away, I do not know you," replied Petrov.

" Walk along, or you won't get there - "

" I declare you are tipsy ! You won't get there," called out a watchman at the corner of the street.

Albert stopped, collected all his strength, and, trying not to stagger, turned into a side street.

But a few steps were left to Anna Ivanovna's. From the vestibule of her house light fell on the snow of the courtyard, and sleighs and carriages were standing at the gate.

Grasping the balustrade with chilled hands, he ran up the stairs and rang the bell.

The sleepy face of a maid was thrust through the opening of the door and angrily looked at Albert. "You can't ! " she cried. " I am told not to let you in," and the opening was slammed to.

Sounds of music and of feminine voices reached him on the staircase. He sat down on the floor, leaned his head against the wall, and closed his eyes. Immediately swarms of incoherent but related visions beset him with new force, received him in their waves and carried him far away into the free and beautiful realm of dreams.

" Yes, he is the best and happiest ! " ran involuntarily through his imagination. The sounds of a polka were heard through the door. These sounds, too, said that he was the best and the happiest. A bell in the nearest church rang out, and this bell said : " Yes, he is the best and the happiest ! "

" I will go again into the hall," thought Albert. " Petrov has much to tell me."

There was now no one in the hall and, instead of the artist Petrov,

Albert himself was standing on the elevation and was himself playing on the violin all that which the voice had said before. But the violin was of a strange property : it was made of glass. It was necessary to embrace it with both hands and slowly to press it to the breast in order that it might utter sounds. The sounds were tender and charming, such as Albert had never before heard. The more firmly he pressed the violin to his breast, the more joyful and blissful he felt. The louder the sounds were, the swifter the shadows disappeared and the more were the walls of the hall lighted up by a transparent light.

It was necessary to play very carefully on the violin in order not to crush it. Albert played very carefully and well on the glass instrument. He was playing things which he felt no one would ever hear again.

He was beginning to grow tired when another distant, dull sound distracted his attention. It was the sound of the bell, but this sound uttered the word : " Yes," said the bell, dinning somewhere far and high, "he seems wretched to you and you despise him, but he is the best and happiest of men ! No one will ever again play on this instrument."

These familiar words suddenly appeared so clever, so new, and so just to Albert that he stopped playing and, trying not to move, raised his hands and eyes to heaven. He felt that he was beautiful and happy.

Although there was no one in the ball, Albert straightened out his chest and, proudly raising his head, stood upon the elevation in such a manner that all might see him. Suddenly somebody's hand lightly touched his shoulder ; he turned around and saw a woman in the half-light. She looked sadly at him and gave a negative shake with her head. He immediately understood that that which he was doing was bad, and he was ashamed of himself.

" Whither ? " he asked her. She once more cast a long, fixed look at him and sadly inclined her head. It was she, the very one he loved, and her garment was the same ; on her full, white neck there was a string of pearls, and her superb arms were bare above the elbow. She took his hands and led him out of the hall.

" The exit is from the other side," said Albert ; but she smiled, without making any reply, and led him out of the hall.

On the threshold of the hall Albert saw the moon and water. But the water was not below, as is generally the case, nor was the moon above a white circle, as it generally is. The moon and the water were together and everywhere, - above, below, on the sides, and all around them. Albert threw himself with her into the moon and the water, and he understood that now he could embrace her whom he loved more than all in the world. He embraced her and experienced an unutterable happiness.

" Is it not all a dream ? " he asked himself, –but no ! it was reality and a reminiscence. He felt that that unutterable happiness, which he was enjoying at that moment, had passed and would never again return.

" What am I weeping about ? " he asked her. She looked silently and sadly at him. Albert understood what it was she intended to say by it. " But how can it be, since I am alive ? " he muttered. She made no reply but looked motionless ahead of her. " It is terrible ! How can I explain to her that I am alive," he thought in terror. " O Lord, I am alive, understand me," he whispered.

" He is the best and the happiest," said a voice. But something pressed Albert harder and harder. Was it the moon and the water, or her embraces, or tears? He did not know ; but he felt that he should not say all that was necessary, and that soon all would be ended.

Two guests, who came out from Anna Ivanovna's, stumbled against Albert stretched out at the threshold. One of them went back and called out the hostess.

" This is inhuman," he said, " you might have allowed a man to freeze to death."

" Ah, this Albert ! Here he is sitting ! " replied the hostess. "Annushka, put him somewhere in a room," she addressed the maid.

" But I am alive, so why do you want to bury me ? " muttered Albert, while they carried him unconscious into a room.