

THE QUEEN OF SPADES

by Alexander Pushkin

CHAPTER I.

There was a card party at the rooms of Narumoff, a lieutenant in the Horse Guards. A long winter night had passed unnoticed, and it was five o'clock in the morning when supper was served. The winners sat down to table with an excellent appetite; the losers let their plates remain empty before them. Little by little, however, with the assistance of the champagne, the conversation became animated, and was shared by all.

"How did you get on this evening, Surin?" said the host to one of his friends.

"Oh, I lost, as usual. I really have no luck. I play *mirandole*. You know that I keep cool. Nothing moves me; I never change my play, and yet I always lose."

"Do you mean to say that all the evening you did not once back the red? Your firmness of character surprises me."

"What do you think of Hermann?" said one of the party, pointing to a young Engineer officer.

"That fellow never made a bet or touched a card in his life, and yet he watches us playing until five in the morning."

"It interests me," said Hermann; "but I am not disposed to risk the necessary in view of the superfluous."

"Hermann is a German, and economical; that is the whole of the secret," cried Tomski. "But what is really astonishing is the Countess Anna Fedotovna!"

"How so?" asked several voices.

"Have you not remarked," said Tomski, "that she never plays?"

"Yes," said Narumoff, "a woman of eighty, who never touches a card; that is indeed something extraordinary!"

"You do not know why?"

"No; is there a reason for it?"

"Just listen. My grandmother, you know, some sixty years ago, went to Paris, and became the rage there. People ran after her in the streets, and called her the 'Muscovite Venus.' Richelieu made love to her, and my grandmother makes out that, by her rigorous demeanour, she almost drove him to suicide. In those days women used to play at faro. One evening at the court she lost, on *parole*, to the Duke of Orleans, a very considerable sum. When she got home, my grandmother removed her beauty spots, took off her hoops, and in this tragic costume went to my grandfather, told him of her misfortune, and asked him for the money she had to pay. My grandfather, now no more, was, so to say, his wife's steward. He feared her like fire; but the sum she named made him leap into the air. He flew into a rage, made a brief calculation, and proved to my grandmother that in six months she had got through half a million rubles. He told her plainly that he had no villages to sell in Paris, his domains being situated in the neighbourhood of Moscow and of Saratoff; and finally refused point blank. You may imagine the fury of my grandmother. She boxed his ears, and passed the night in another room.



"THE OLD MAGICIAN CAME AT ONCE."

"The next day she returned to the charge. For the first time in her life, she condescended to arguments and explanations. In vain did she try to prove to her husband that there were debts and debts, and that she could not treat a prince of the blood like her coachmaker.

"All this eloquence was lost. My grandfather was inflexible. My grandmother did not know where to turn. Happily she was acquainted with a man who was very celebrated at this time. You have heard of the Count of St. Germain, about whom so many marvellous stories were told. You know that he passed for a sort of Wandering Jew, and that he was said to possess an elixir of life and the philosopher's stone.

"Some people laughed at him as a charlatan. Casanova, in his memoirs, says that he was a spy. However that may be, in spite of the mystery of his life, St. Germain was much sought after in good society, and was really an agreeable man. Even to this day my grandmother has preserved a genuine affection for him, and she becomes quite angry when anyone speaks of him with disrespect.

"It occurred to her that he might be able to advance the sum of which she was in need, and she wrote a note begging him to call. The old magician came at once, and found her plunged in the deepest despair. In two or three words she told him everything; related to him her misfortune and the cruelty of her husband, adding that she had no hope except in his friendship and his obliging disposition.

"'Madam,' said St. Germain, after a few moments' reflection, 'I could easily advance you the money you want, but I am sure that you would have no rest until you had repaid me, and I do not want to get you out of one trouble in order to place you in another. There is another way of settling the matter. You must regain the money you have lost.'

"But, my dear friend," answered my grandmother, "I have already told you that I have nothing left."

"That does not matter," answered St. Germain. "Listen to me, and I will explain."

"He then communicated to her a secret which any of you would, I am sure, give a good deal to possess."

All the young officers gave their full attention. Tomski stopped to light his Turkish pipe, swallowed a mouthful of smoke, and then went on.

"That very evening my grandmother went to Versailles to play at the Queen's table. The Duke of Orleans held the bank. My grandmother invented a little story by way of excuse for not having paid her debt, and then sat down at the table, and began to stake. She took three cards. She won with the first; doubled her stake on the second, and won again; doubled on the third, and still won."

"Mere luck!" said one of the young officers.

"What a tale!" cried Hermann.

"Were the cards marked?" said a third.

"I don't think so," replied Tomski, gravely.

"And you mean to say," exclaimed Narumoff, "that you have a grandmother who knows the names of three winning cards, and you have never made her tell them to you?"

"That is the very deuce of it," answered Tomski. "She had three sons, of whom my father was one; all three were determined gamblers, and not one of them was able to extract her secret from her, though it would have been of immense advantage to them, and to me also. Listen to what my uncle told me about it, Count Ivan Ilitch, and he told me on his word of honour.

"Tchaplitzki—the one you remember who died in poverty after devouring millions—lost one day, when he was a young man, to Zoritch about three hundred thousand roubles. He was in despair. My grandmother, who had no mercy for the extravagance of young men, made an exception—I do not know why—in favour of Tchaplitzki. She gave him three cards, telling him to play them one after the other, and exacting from him at the same time his word of honour that he would never afterwards touch a card as long as he lived. Accordingly Tchaplitzki went to Zoritch and asked for his revenge. On the first card he staked fifty thousands rubles. He won, doubled the stake, and won again. Continuing his system he ended by gaining more than he had lost.

"But it is six o'clock! It is really time to go to bed."

Everyone emptied his glass and the party broke up.

CHAPTER II.

The old Countess Anna Fedotovna was in her dressing-room, seated before her looking-glass. Three maids were in attendance. One held her pot of rouge, another a box of black

pins, a third an enormous lace cap, with flaming ribbons. The Countess had no longer the slightest pretence to beauty, but she preserved all the habits of her youth. She dressed in the style of fifty years before, and gave as much time and attention to her toilet as a fashionable beauty of the last century. Her companion was working at a frame in a corner of the window.



"SEATED BEFORE HER LOOKING-GLASS."

"Good morning, grandmother," said the young officer, as he entered the dressing-room.

"Good morning, Mademoiselle Lise. Grandmother, I have come to ask you a favour."

"What is it, Paul?"

"I want to introduce to you one of my friends, and to ask you to give him an invitation to your ball."

"Bring him to the ball and introduce him to me there. Did you go yesterday to the Princess's?"

"Certainly. It was delightful! We danced until five o'clock in the morning. Mademoiselle Eletzki was charming."

"My dear nephew, you are really not difficult to please. As to beauty, you should have seen her grandmother, the Princess Daria Petrovna. But she must be very old the Princess Daria Petrovna!"

"How do you mean old?" cried Tomski thoughtlessly; "she died seven years ago."

The young lady who acted as companion raised her head and made a sign to the officer, who then remembered that it was an understood thing to conceal from the Princess the death of any of her contemporaries. He bit his lips. The Countess, however, was not in any way disturbed on hearing that her old friend was no longer in this world.

"Dead!" she said, "and I never knew it! We were maids of honour in the same year, and when we were presented, the Empress"—and the old Countess related for the hundredth time an anecdote of her young days. "Paul," she said, as she finished her story, "help me to get up. Lisaveta, where is my snuff-box?"

And, followed by the three maids, she went behind a great screen to finish her toilet. Tomski was now alone with the companion.

"Who is the gentleman you wish to introduce to madame?" asked Lisaveta.

"Narumoff. Do you know him?"

"No. Is he in the army?"

"Yes."

"In the Engineers?"

"No, in the Horse Guards. Why did you think he was in the Engineers?"

The young lady smiled, but made no answer.

"Paul," cried the Countess from behind the screen, "send me a new novel; no matter what. Only see that it is not in the style of the present day."

"What style would you like, grandmother?"

"A novel in which the hero strangles neither his father nor his mother, and in which no one gets drowned. Nothing frightens me so much as the idea of getting drowned."



PAUL AND LISAVETA.

"But how is it possible to find you such a book? Do you want it in Russian?"

"Are there any novels in Russian? However, send me something or other. You won't forget?"

"I will not forget, grandmother. I am in a great hurry. Good-bye, Lisaveta. What made you fancy Narumoff was in the Engineers?" and Tomski took his departure.

Lisaveta, left alone, took out her embroidery, and sat down close to the window. Immediately afterwards, in the street, at the corner of a neighbouring house, appeared a young officer. The sight of him made the companion blush to her ears. She lowered her head, and almost concealed it in the canvas. At this moment the Counters returned, fully dressed.

"Lisaveta," she said "have the horses put in; we will go out for a drive."

Lisaveta rose from her chair, and began to arrange her embroidery.

"Well, my dear child, are you deaf? Go and tell them to put the horses in at once."

"I am going," replied the young lady, as she went out into the ante-chamber.

A servant now came in, bringing some books from Prince Paul Alexandrovitch.

"Say I am much obliged to him. Lisaveta! Lisaveta! Where has she run off to?"

"I was going to dress."

"We have plenty of time, my dear. Sit down, take the first volume, and read to me."

The companion took the book and read a few lines.

"Louder," said the Countess. "What is the matter with you? Have you a cold? Wait a moment; bring me that stool. A little closer; that will do."

Lisaveta read two pages of the book.

"Throw that stupid book away," said the Countess. "What nonsense! Send it back to Prince Paul, and tell him I am much obliged to him; and the carriage, is it never coming?"

"Here it is," replied Lisaveta, going to the window.

"And now you are not dressed. Why do you always keep me waiting? It is intolerable."

Lisaveta ran to her room. She had scarcely been there two minutes when the Countess rang with all her might. Her maids rushed in at one door and her valet at the other.

"You do not seem to hear me when I ring," she cried. "Go and tell Lisaveta that I am waiting for her."

At this moment Lisaveta entered, wearing a new walking dress and a fashionable bonnet.

"At last, miss," cried the Countess. "But what is that you have got on? and why? For whom are you dressing? What sort of weather is it? Quite stormy, I believe."

"No, your Excellency," said the valet; "it is exceedingly fine."

"What do you know about it? Open the ventilator. Just what I told you! A frightful wind, and as icy as can be. Unharness the horses. Lisaveta, my child, we will not go out to-day. It was scarcely worth while to dress so much."

"What an existence!" said the companion to herself.

Lisaveta Ivanovna was, in fact, a most unhappy creature. "The bread of the stranger is bitter," says Dante, "and his staircase hard to climb." But who can tell the torments of a poor little companion attached to an old lady of quality? The Countess had all the caprices of a woman spoiled by the world. She was avaricious and egotistical, and thought all the more of herself now that she had ceased to play an active part in society. She never missed a ball, and she dressed and painted in the style of a bygone age. She remained in a corner of the room, where she seemed to have been placed expressly to serve as a scarecrow. Every one on coming in went to her and made her a low bow, but this ceremony once at an end no one spoke a word to her. She received the whole city at her house, observing the strictest etiquette, and never failing to give to everyone his or her proper name. Her innumerable servants, growing pale and fat in the ante-chamber, did absolutely as they liked, so that that the house was pillaged as if its owner were really dead. Lisaveta passed her life in continual torture. If she made tea she was reproached with wasting the sugar. If she read a novel to the Countess she was held responsible for all the absurdities of the author. If she went out with the noble lady for a walk or drive, it was she who was to blame if the weather was bad or the pavement muddy. Her salary, more than modest, was never punctually paid, and she was expected to dress "like every one else," that is to say, like very few people indeed. When she went into society her position was sad. Everyone knew her; no one paid her any attention. At a ball she sometimes danced, but only when a *vis-à-vis* was wanted. Women would come up to her, take her by the arm,

and lead her out of the room if their dress required attending to. She had her portion of self-respect, and felt deeply the misery of her position. She looked with impatience for a liberator to break her chain. But the young men, prudent in the midst of their affected giddiness, took care not to honour her with their attentions, though Lisaveta Ivanovna was a hundred times prettier than the shameless or stupid girls whom they surrounded with their homage. More than once she slunk away from the splendour of the drawing-room to shut herself up alone in her little bed-room, furnished with an old screen and a pieced carpet, a chest of drawers, a small looking-glass, and a wooden bedstead. There she shed tears at her ease by the light of a tallow candle in a tin candlestick.

One morning—it was two days after the party at Narumoff's, and a week before the scene we have just sketched—Lisaveta was sitting at her embroidery before the window, when, looking carelessly into the street, she saw an officer, in the uniform of the Engineers, standing motionless with his eyes fixed upon her. She lowered her head, and applied herself to her work more attentively than ever. Five minutes afterwards she looked mechanically into the street, and the officer was still in the same place. Not being in the habit of exchanging glances with young men who passed by her window, she remained with her eyes fixed on her work for nearly two hours, until she was told that lunch was ready. She got up to put her embroidery away, and while doing so, looked into the street, and saw the officer still in the same place. This seemed to her very strange. After lunch she went to the window with a certain emotion, but the officer of Engineers was no longer in the street.



"THERE SHE SHED TEARS."

She thought no more of him. But two days afterwards, just as she was getting into the carriage with the Countess, she saw him once more, standing straight before the door. His face was half concealed by a fur collar, but his black eyes sparkled beneath his helmet. Lisaveta was afraid, without knowing why, and she trembled as she took her seat in the carriage.

On returning home, she rushed with a beating heart towards the window. The officer was in his habitual place, with his eyes fixed ardently upon her. She at once withdrew, burning at the same time with curiosity, and moved by a strange feeling which she now experienced for the first time.

No day now passed but the young officer showed himself beneath the window. Before long a dumb acquaintance was established between them. Sitting at her work she felt his presence, and when she raised her head she looked at him for a long time every day. The young man seemed full of gratitude for these innocent favours.

She observed, with the deep and rapid perceptions of youth, that a sudden redness covered the officer's pale cheeks as soon as their eyes met. After about a week she would smile at seeing him for the first time.

When Tomski asked his grandmother's permission to present one of his friends, the heart of the poor young girl beat strongly, and when she heard that it was Narumoff, she bitterly repented having compromised her secret by letting it out to a giddy young man like Paul.

Hermann was the son of a German settled in Russia, from whom he had inherited a small sum of money. Firmly resolved to preserve his independence, he had made it a principle not to touch his private income. He lived on his pay, and did not allow himself the slightest luxury. He was not very communicative; and his reserve rendered it difficult for his comrades to amuse themselves at his expense.

Under an assumed calm he concealed strong passions and a highly-imaginative disposition. But he was always master of himself, and kept himself free from the ordinary faults of young men. Thus, a gambler by temperament, he never touched a card, feeling, as he himself said, that his position did not allow him to "risk the necessary in view of the superfluous." Yet he would pass entire nights before a card-table, watching with feverish anxiety the rapid changes of the game. The anecdote of Count St. Germaines three cards had struck his imagination, and he did nothing but think of it all that night.

"If," he said to himself next day as he was walking along the streets of St. Petersburg, "if she would only tell me her secret—if she would only name the three winning cards! I must get presented to her, that I may pay my court and gain her confidence. Yes! And she is eighty-seven! She may die this week—to-morrow perhaps. But after all, is there a word of truth in the story? No! Economy, Temperance, Work; these are my three winning cards. With them I can double my capital; increase it tenfold. They alone can ensure my independence and prosperity."

Dreaming in this way as he walked along, his attention was attracted by a house built in an antiquated style of architecture. The street was full of carriages, which passed one by one before the old house, now brilliantly illuminated. As the people stepped out of the carriages Hermann saw now the little feet of a young woman, now the military boot of a general. Then came a clocked stocking; then, again, a diplomatic pump. Fur-lined cloaks and coats passed in procession before a gigantic porter.

Hermann stopped. "Who lives here?" he said to a watchman in his box.

"The Countess Anna Fedotovna." It was Tomski's grandmother.

Hermann started. The story of the three cards came once more upon his imagination. He walked to and fro before the house, thinking of the woman to whom it belonged, of her wealth and her mysterious power. At last he returned to his den. But for some time he could not get to sleep; and when at last sleep came upon him, he saw, dancing before his eyes, cards, a green table, and heaps of rubles and bank-notes. He saw himself doubling stake after stake, always winning, and then filling his pockets with piles of coin, and stuffing his pocket-book with countless bank-notes. When he awoke, he sighed to find that his treasures were but creations of a disordered fancy; and, to drive such thoughts from him, he went out for a walk. But he had not gone far when he found himself once more before the house of the Countess. He seemed to have been attracted there by some irresistible force. He stopped, and looked up at the windows. There he saw a girl's head with beautiful black hair, leaning gracefully over a book or an embroidery-frame. The head was lifted, and he saw a fresh complexion and black eyes.

This moment decided his fate.

CHAPTER III.

Lisaveta was just taking off her shawl and her bonnet, when the Countess sent for her. She had had the horses put in again.

While two footmen were helping the old lady into the carriage, Lisaveta saw the young officer at her side. She felt him take her by the hand, lost her head, and found, when the young officer had walked away, that he had left a paper between her fingers. She hastily concealed it in her glove.

During the whole of the drive she neither saw nor heard. When they were in the carriage together the Countess was in the habit of questioning Lisaveta perpetually.

"Who is that man that bowed to us? What is the name of this bridge? What is there written on that signboard?"

Lisaveta now gave the most absurd answers, and was accordingly scolded by the Countess.

"What is the matter with you, my child?" she asked. "What are you thinking about? Or do you really not hear me? I speak distinctly enough, however, and I have not yet lost my head, have I?"

Lisaveta was not listening. When she got back to the house, she ran to her room, locked the door, and took the scrap of paper from her glove. It was not sealed, and it was impossible, therefore, not to read it. The letter contained protestations of love. It was tender, respectful, and translated word for word from a German novel. But Lisaveta did not read German, and she was quite delighted. She was, however, much embarrassed. For the first time in her life she had a secret. Correspond with a young man! The idea of such a thing frightened her. How imprudent she had been! She had reproached herself, but knew not now what to do.

Cease to do her work at the window, and by persistent coldness try and disgust the *young officer*? Send him back his letter? Answer him in a firm, decided manner? What line of conduct was she to pursue? She had no friend, no one to advise her. She at last decided to send an answer. She sat down at her little table, took pen and paper, and began to think. More than once she wrote a sentence and then tore up the paper. What she had written seemed too stiff, or else it was wanting in reserve. At last, after much trouble, she succeeded in composing a few lines which seemed to meet the case.

"I believe," she wrote, "that your intentions are those of an honourable man, and that you would not wish to offend me by any thoughtless conduct. But you must understand that our acquaintance cannot begin in this way. I return your letter, and trust that you will not give me cause to regret my imprudence."

Next day, as soon as Hermann made his appearance, Lisaveta left her embroidery, and went into the drawing-room, opened the ventilator, and threw her letter into the street, making sure that the young officer would pick it up.



SHE TORE IT INTO A HUNDRED PIECES.

Hermann, in fact, at once saw it, and picking it up, entered a confectioner's shop in order to read it. Finding nothing discouraging in it, he went home sufficiently pleased with the first step in his love adventure.

Some days afterwards, a young person with lively eyes called to see Miss Lisaveta, on the part of a milliner. Lisaveta wondered what she could want, and suspected, as she received her, some secret intention. She was much surprised, however, when she recognised, on the letter that was now handed to her, the writing of Hermann.

"You make a mistake," she said; "this letter is not for me."

"I beg your pardon," said the milliner, with a slight smile; "be kind enough to read it."

Lisaveta glanced at it. Hermann was asking for an appointment.

"Impossible!" she cried, alarmed both at the boldness of the request, and at the manner in which it was made. "This letter is not for me," she repeated; and she tore it into a hundred pieces.

"If the letter was not for you, why did you tear it up? You should have given it me back, that I might take it to the person it was meant for."

"True," said Lisaveta, quite disconcerted.

"But bring me no more letters, and tell the person who gave you this one that he ought to blush for his conduct."

Hermann, however, was not a man to give up what he had once undertaken. Every day Lisaveta received a fresh letter from him, sent now in one way, now in another. They were no longer translated from the German. Hermann wrote under the influence of a commanding passion, and spoke a language which was his own. Lisaveta could not hold out against such torrents of eloquence. She received the letters, kept them, and at last answered them. Every day her answers were longer and more affectionate, until at last she threw out of the window a letter couched as follows:—

"This evening there is a ball at the Embassy. The Countess will be there. We shall remain until two in the morning. You may manage to see me alone. As soon as the Countess leaves home, that is to say towards eleven o'clock, the servants are sure to go out, and there will be no one left but the porter, who will be sure to be asleep in his box. Enter as soon as it strikes eleven, and go upstairs as fast as possible. If you find anyone in the ante-chamber, ask whether the Countess is at home, and you will be told that she is out, and, in that case, you must resign yourself, and go away. In all probability, however, you will meet no one. The Countess's women are together in a distant room. When you are once in the ante-chamber, turn to the left, and walk straight on, until you reach the Countess's bedroom. There, behind a large screen, you will see two doors. The one on the right leads to a dark room. The one on the left leads to a corridor, at the end of which is a little winding staircase, which leads to my parlour."

At ten o'clock Hermann was already on duty before the Countess's door. It was a frightful night. The winds had been unloosed, and the snow was falling in large flakes; the lamps gave an uncertain light; the streets were deserted; from time to time passed a sledge, drawn by a wretched hack, on the look-out for a fare. Covered by a thick overcoat, Hermann felt neither the wind nor the snow. At last the Countess's carriage drew up. He saw two huge footmen come forward and take beneath the arms a dilapidated spectre, and place it on the cushions well wrapped up in an enormous fur cloak. Immediately afterwards, in a cloak of lighter make, her head crowned with natural flowers, came Lisaveta, who sprang into the carriage like a dart. The door was closed, and the carriage rolled on softly over the snow.

The porter closed the street door, and soon the windows of the first floor became dark. Silence reigned throughout the house. Hermann walked backwards and forwards; then coming to a lamp he looked at his watch. It was twenty minutes to eleven. Leaning against

the lamp-post, his eyes fixed on the long hand of his watch, he counted impatiently the minutes which had yet to pass. At eleven o'clock precisely Hermann walked up the steps, pushed open the street door, and went into the vestibule, which was well lighted. As it happened the porter was not there. With a firm and rapid step he rushed up the staircase and reached the ante-chamber. There, before a lamp, a footman was sleeping, stretched out in a dirty greasy dressing-gown. Hermann passed quickly before him and crossed the dining-room and the drawing-room, where there was no light. But the lamp of the ante-chamber helped him to see. At last he reached the Countess's bedroom. Before a screen covered with old icons (sacred pictures) a golden lamp was burning. Gilt arm-chairs, sofas of faded colours, furnished with soft cushions, were arranged symmetrically along the walls, which were hung with China silk. He saw two large portraits painted by Madame le Brun. One represented a man of forty, stout and full coloured, dressed in a light green coat, with a decoration on his breast. The second portrait was that of an elegant young woman, with an aquiline nose, powdered hair rolled back on the temples, and with a rose over her ear. Everywhere might be seen shepherds and shepherdesses in Dresden china, with vases of all shapes, clocks by Leroy, work-baskets, fans, and all the thousand playthings for the use of ladies of fashion, discovered in the last century, at the time of Montgolfier's balloons and Mesmer's animal magnetism.



"A FOOTMAN IN A GREASY DRESSING GOWN."

Hermann passed behind the screen, which concealed a little iron bedstead. He saw the two doors; the one on the right leading to the dark room, the one on the left to the corridor. He opened the latter, saw the staircase which led to the poor little companion's parlour, and then, closing this door, went into the dark room.

The time passed slowly. Everything was quiet in the house. The drawing-room clock struck midnight, and again there was silence. Hermann was standing up, leaning against the stove, in which there was no fire. He was calm; but his heart beat with quick pulsations, like that of a man determined to brave all dangers he might have to meet, because he knows them to be inevitable. He heard one o'clock strike; then two; and soon afterwards the distant roll of a carriage. He now, in spite of himself, experienced some emotion. The carriage approached rapidly and stopped. There was at once a great noise of servants running about the staircases, and a confusion of voices. Suddenly the rooms were all lit up, and the Countess's three antiquated maids came at once into the bed-room. At last appeared the Countess herself.

The walking mummy sank into a large Voltaire arm-chair. Hermann looked through the crack in the door; he saw Lisaveta pass close to him, and heard her hurried step as she went up the little winding staircase. For a moment he felt something like remorse; but it soon passed off, and his heart was once more of stone.



"A STRANGE MAN HAD APPEARED."

The Countess began to undress before a looking-glass. Her head-dress of roses was taken off, and her powdered wig separated from her own hair, which was very short and quite white. Pins fell in showers around her. At last she was in her dressing-gown and night cap, and in this costume, more suitable to her age, was less hideous than before.

Like most old people, the Countess was tormented by sleeplessness. She had her armchair rolled towards one of the windows, and told her maids to leave her. The lights were put out, and the room was lighted only by the lamp which burned before the holy images. The Countess, sallow and wrinkled, balanced herself gently from right to left. In her dull eyes could be read an utter absence of thought; and as she moved from side to side, one might have said that she did so not by any action of the will, but through some secret mechanism.

Suddenly this death's-head assumed a new expression; the lips ceased to tremble, and the eyes became alive. A strange man had appeared before the Countess!

It was Hermann.

"Do not be alarmed, madam," said Hermann, in a low voice, but very distinctly. "For the love of Heaven, do not be alarmed. I do not wish to do you the slightest harm; on the contrary, I come to implore a favour of you."

The old woman looked at him in silence, as if she did not understand. Thinking she was deaf, he leaned towards her ear and repeated what he had said; but the Countess still remained silent.

"You can ensure the happiness of my whole life, and without its costing you a farthing. I know that you can name to me three cards——"

The Countess now understood what he required.

"It was a joke," she interrupted. "I swear to you it was only a joke."

"No, madam," replied Hermann in an angry tone. "Remember Tchaplitzki, and how you enabled him to win."

The Countess was agitated. For a moment her features expressed strong emotion; but they soon resumed their former dulness.

"Cannot you name to me," said Hermann, "three winning cards?"

The Countess remained silent. "Why keep this secret for your great-grandchildren," he continued. "They are rich enough without; they do not know the value of money. Of what profit would your three cards be to them? They are debauchees. The man who cannot keep his inheritance will die in want, though he had the science of demons at his command. I am a steady man. I know the value of money. Your three cards will not be lost upon me. Come!"

He stopped tremblingly, awaiting a reply. The Countess did not utter a word. Hermann went upon his knees.

"If your heart has ever known the passion of love; if you can remember its sweet ecstasies; if you have ever been touched by the cry of a newborn babe; if any human feeling has ever caused your heart to beat, I entreat you by the love of a husband, a lover, a mother, by all that is sacred in life, not to reject my prayer. Tell me your secret! Reflect! You are old; you have not long to live! Remember that the happiness of a man is in your hands; that not only myself, but my children and my grandchildren will bless your memory as a saint."

The old Countess answered not a word.

Hermann rose, and drew a pistol from his pocket.

"Hag!" he exclaimed, "I will make you speak."

At the sight of the pistol the Countess for the second time showed agitation. Her head shook violently she stretched out her hands as if to put the weapon aside. Then suddenly she fell back motionless.

"Come, don't be childish!" said Hermann. "I adjure you for the last time; will you name the three cards?"

The Countess did not answer. Hermann saw that she was dead!



"ONE GLANCE SHOWED HER
THAT HE WAS NOT THERE."

the time to know much more than he really did, hazarded purely in fun a few guesses which were so happy that Lisaveta thought her secret must have been discovered.

"But who tells you all this?" she said with a smile. "A friend of the very officer you know, a most original man."

"And who is this man that is so original?"

CHAPTER IV.

Lisaveta was sitting in her room, still in her ball dress, lost in the deepest meditation. On her return to the house, she had sent away her maid, and had gone upstairs to her room, trembling at the idea of finding Hermann there; desiring, indeed, *not* to find him. One glance showed her that he was not there, and she gave thanks to Providence that he had missed the appointment. She sat down pensively, without thinking of taking off her cloak, and allowed to pass through her memory all the circumstances of the intrigue which had begun such a short time back, and had already advanced so far. Scarcely three weeks had passed since she had first seen the young officer from her window, and already she had written to him, and he had succeeded in inducing her to make an appointment. She knew his name, and that was all. She had received a quantity of letters from him, but he had never spoken to her; she did not know the sound of his voice, and until that evening, strangely enough, she had never heard him spoken of.

But that very evening Tomski, fancying he had noticed that the young Princess Pauline, to whom he had been paying assiduous court, was flirting, contrary to her custom, with, another man, had wished to revenge himself by making a show of indifference. With this noble object he had invited Lisaveta to take part in an interminable mazurka; but he teased her immensely about her partiality for Engineer officers, and pretending all

"His name is Hermann."

She answered nothing, but her hands and feet seemed to be of ice.

"Hermann is a hero of romance," continued Tomski. "He has the profile of Napoleon, and the soul of Mephistopheles. I believe he has at least three crimes on his conscience.... But how pale you are!"

"I have a bad headache. But what did this Mr. Hermann tell you? Is not that his name?"

"Hermann is very much displeased with his friend, with the Engineer officer who has made your acquaintance. He says that in his place he would behave very differently. But I am quite sure that Hermann himself has designs upon you. At least, he seems to listen with remarkable interest to all that his friend tells him about you."

"And where has he seen me?"

"Perhaps in church, perhaps in the street; heaven knows where."

At this moment three ladies came forward according to the custom of the mazurka, and asked Tomski to choose between "forgetfulness and regret."^[1]

And the conversation which had so painfully excited the curiosity of Lisaveta came to an end.

The lady who, in virtue of the infidelities permitted by the mazurka, had just been chosen by Tomski, was the Princess Pauline. During the rapid evolutions which the figure obliged them to make, there was a grand explanation between them, until at last he conducted her to a chair, and returned to his partner.

But Tomski could now think no more, either of Hermann or Lisaveta, and he tried in vain to resume the conversation. But the mazurka was coming to an end, and immediately afterwards the old Countess rose to go.

Tomski's mysterious phrases were nothing more than the usual platitudes of the mazurka, but they had made a deep impression upon the heart of the poor little companion. The portrait sketched by Tomski had struck her as very exact; and with her romantic ideas, she saw in the rather ordinary countenance of her adorer something to fear and admire. She was now sitting down with her cloak off, with bare shoulders; her head, crowned with flowers, falling forward from fatigue, when suddenly the door opened and Hermann entered. She shuddered.

"Where were you?" she said, trembling all over.

"In the Countess's bedroom. I have just left her," replied Hermann. "She is dead."

"Great Heavens! What are you saying?"

"I am afraid," he said, "that I am the cause of her death."

Lisaveta looked at him in consternation, and remembered Tomski's words: "He has at least three crimes on his conscience."

Hermann sat down by the window, and told everything. The young girl listened with terror.

So those letters so full of passion, those burning expressions, this daring obstinate pursuit—all this had been inspired by anything but love! Money alone had inflamed the man's soul. She, who had nothing but a heart to offer, how could she make him happy? Poor child! she had been the blind instrument of a robber, of the murderer of her old benefactress. She wept bitterly in the agony of her repentance. Hermann watched her in silence; but neither the tears of the unhappy girl, nor her beauty, rendered more touching by her grief,

could move his heart of iron. He had no remorse in thinking of the Countess's death. One sole thought distressed him—the irreparable loss of the secret which was to have made his fortune.

"You are a monster!" said Lisaveta, after a long silence.

"I did not mean to kill her," replied Hermann coldly. "My pistol was not loaded."

They remained for some time without speaking, without looking at one another. The day was breaking, and Lisaveta put out her candle. She wiped her eyes, drowned in tears, and raised them towards Hermann. He was standing close to the window, his arms crossed, with a frown on his forehead. In this attitude he reminded her involuntarily of the portrait of Napoleon. The resemblance overwhelmed her.

"How am I to get you away?" she said at last. "I thought you might go out by the back stairs. But it would be necessary to go through the Countess's bedroom, and I am too frightened."

"Tell me how to get to the staircase, and I will go alone."

She went to a drawer, took out a key, which she handed to Hermann, and gave him the necessary instructions. Hermann took her icy hand, kissed her on the forehead, and departed.

He went down the staircase, and entered the Countess's bedroom. She was seated quite stiff in her armchair; but her features were in no way contracted. He stopped for a moment, and gazed into her face as if to make sure of the terrible reality. Then he entered the dark room, and, feeling behind the tapestry, found the little door which, opened on to a staircase. As he went down it, strange ideas came into his head. "Going down this staircase," he said to himself, "some sixty years ago, at about this time, may have been seen some man in an embroidered coat with powdered wig, pressing to his breast a cocked hat: some gallant who has long been buried; and now the heart of his aged mistress has ceased to beat."

At the end of the staircase he found another door, which his key opened, and he found himself in the corridor which led to the street.

[1]The figures and fashions of the mazurka are reproduced in the cotillon of Western Europe.—TRANSLATOR.

CHAPTER V.

Three days after this fatal night, at nine o'clock in the morning, Hermann entered the convent where the last respects were to be paid to the mortal remains of the old Countess. He felt no remorse, though he could not deny to himself that he was the poor woman's assassin. Having no religion, he was, as usual in such cases, very superstitious; believing that the dead Countess might exercise a malignant influence on his life, he thought to appease her spirit by attending her funeral.

The church was full of people, and it was difficult to get in. The body had been placed on a rich catafalque, beneath a canopy of velvet. The Countess was reposing in an open coffin, her hands joined on her breast, with a dress of white satin, and head-dress of lace. Around the catafalque the family was assembled, the servants in black caftans with a knot of ribbons on the shoulder, exhibiting the colours of the Countesses coat of arms. Each of

them held a wax candle in his hand. The relations, in deep mourning—children grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—were all present; but none of them wept.

To have shed tears would have looked like affectation. The Countess was so old that her death could have taken no one by surprise, and she had long been looked upon as already out of the world. The funeral sermon was delivered by a celebrated preacher. In a few simple, touching phrases he painted the final departure of the just, who had passed long years of contrite preparation, for a Christian end. The service concluded in the midst of respectful silence. Then the relations went towards the defunct to take a last farewell. After them, in a long procession, all who had been, invited to the ceremony bowed, for the last time, to her who for so many years had been a scarecrow at their entertainments. Finally came the Countess's household; among them was remarked an old governess, of the same age as the deceased, supported by two women. She had not strength enough to kneel down, but tears flowed from her eyes, as she kissed the hand of her old mistress.

In his turn Hermann advanced towards the coffin. He knelt down for a moment on the flagstones, which were strewn with branches of yew. Then he rose, as pale as death, and walked up the steps of the catafalque. He bowed his head. But suddenly the dead woman seemed to be staring at him; and with a mocking look she opened and shut one eye. Hermann by a sudden movement started and fell backwards. Several persons hurried towards him. At the same moment, close to the church door, Lisaveta fainted.

Throughout the day Hermann suffered from a strange indisposition. In a quiet restaurant, where he took his meals, he, contrary to his habit, drank a great deal of wine, with the object of stupefying himself. But the wine had no effect but to excite his imagination, and give fresh activity to the ideas with which he was preoccupied.

He went home earlier than usual, lay down with his clothes on upon the bed, and fell into a leaden sleep. When he woke up it was night, and the room was lighted up by the rays of the moon. He looked at his watch; it was a quarter to three. He could sleep no more. He sat up on the bed and thought of the old Countess. At this moment someone in the street passed the window, looked into the room, and then went on. Hermann scarcely noticed it; but in another minute he heard the door of the ante-chamber open. He thought, that his orderly, drunk as usual, was returning from some nocturnal excursion; but the step was one to which he was not accustomed. Somebody seemed to be softly walking over the floor in slippers.



"HERMANN STARTED AND FELL BACKWARDS."

The door opened, and a woman, dressed entirely in white, entered the bedroom. Hermann thought it must be his old nurse, and he asked himself what she could want at that time of night.

But the woman in white, crossing the room with a rapid step, was now at the foot of his bed, and Hermann recognised the Countess.

"I come to you against my wish," she said in a firm voice. "I am forced to grant your prayer. Three, seven, ace, will win, if played one after the other; but you must not play more than one card in twenty-four hours, and afterwards, as long as you live, you must never touch a card again. I forgive you my death on condition of your marrying my companion, Lisaveta Ivanovna."

With these words she walked towards the door, and gliding with her slippers over the floor, disappeared. Hermann heard the door of the ante-chamber open, and soon afterwards saw a white figure pass along the street. It stopped for a moment before his window, as if to look at him.

Hermann remained, for some time astounded. Then he got up and went into the next room. His orderly, drunk as usual, was asleep on the floor. He had much difficulty in waking him, and then could not obtain from him the least explanation. The door of the ante-chamber was locked.

Hermann went back to his bedroom, and wrote down all the details of his vision.

CHAPTER VI.

Two fixed ideas can no more exist together in the moral world, than in the physical two bodies can occupy the same place at the same time; and "Three, seven, ace" soon drove away Hermann's recollection of the old Countess's last moments. "Three, seven, ace" were now in his head to the exclusion of everything else.

They followed him in his dreams, and appeared to him under strange forms. Threes seemed to be spread before him like magnolias, sevens took the form of Gothic doors, and aces became gigantic spiders.

His thoughts concentrated themselves on one single point. How was he to profit by the secret so dearly purchased? What if he applied for leave to travel? At Paris, he said to himself, he would find some gambling-house where, with his three cards, he could at once make his fortune.

Chance soon came to his assistance. There was at Moscow a society of rich gamblers, presided over by the celebrated Tchekalinski, who had passed all his life playing at cards, and had amassed millions. For while he lost silver only, he gained bank-notes. His magnificent house, his excellent kitchen, his cordial manners, had brought him numerous friends and secured for him general esteem.

When he came to St. Petersburg, the young men of the capital filled his rooms, forsaking balls for his card-parties, and preferring the emotions of gambling to the fascinations of flirting. Hermann was taken to Tchekalinski by Narumoff. They passed through a long suite of rooms, full of the most attentive, obsequious servants. The place was crowded. Generals and high officials were playing at whist; young men were stretched out on the sofas, eating ices and smoking long pipes. In the principal room at the head of a long table, around which were assembled a score of players, the master of the house held a faro bank.

He was a man of about sixty, with a sweet and noble expression of face, and hair white as snow. On his full, florid countenance might be read good humour and benevolence. His eyes shone with a perpetual smile. Narumoff introduced Hermann. Tchekalinski took him by the hand, told him that he was glad to see him, that no one stood on ceremony in his house; and then went on dealing. The deal occupied some time, and stakes were made on more than thirty cards. Tchekalinski waited patiently to allow the winners time to double their stakes, paid what he had lost, listened politely to all observations, and, more politely still, put straight the corners of cards, when in a fit of absence some one had taken the liberty of turning them down. At last when the game was at an end, Tchekalinski collected the cards, shuffled them again, had them cut, and then dealt anew.

"Will you allow me to take a card?" said Hermann, stretching out his arm above a fat man who occupied nearly the whole of one side of the table. Tchekalinski, with a gracious smile, bowed in consent. Narumoff complimented Hermann, with a laugh, on the cessation of the austerity by which his conduct had hitherto been marked, and wished him all kinds of happiness on the occasion of his first appearance in the character of a gambler.

"There!" said Hermann, after writing some figures on the back of his card.

"How much?" asked the banker, half closing his eyes. "Excuse me, I cannot see."

"Forty-seven thousand rubles," said Hermann.

Everyone's eyes were directed toward the new player.

"He has lost his head," thought Harumoff.

"Allow me to point out to you," said Tchekalinski, with his eternal smile, "that you are playing rather high. We never put down here, as a first stake, more than a hundred and seventy-five rubles."

"Very well," said Hermann; "but do you accept my stake or not?"

Tchekalinski bowed in token of acceptance. "I only wish to point out to you," he said, "that although I am perfectly sure of my friends, I can only play against ready money. I am quite convinced that your word is as good as gold; but to keep up the rules of the game, and to facilitate calculations, I should be obliged to you if you would put the money on your card."

Hermann took a bank-note from his pocket and handed it to Tchekalinski, who, after examining it with a glance, placed it on Hermann's card.

Then he began to deal. He turned up on the right a ten, and on the left a three.

"I win," said Hermann, exhibiting his three.

A murmur of astonishment ran through the assembly. The banker knitted his eyebrows, but speedily his face resumed its everlasting smile.

"Shall I settle at once?" he asked.

"If you will be kind enough to do so," said Hermann.

Tchekalinski took a bundle of bank-notes from his pocket-book, and paid. Hermann pocketed His winnings and left the table.

Narumoff was lost in astonishment. Hermann drank a glass of lemonade and went home.

The next evening he returned to the house. Tchekalinski again held the bank. Hermann went to the table, and this time the players hastened to make room for him. Tchekalinski received him with a most gracious bow. Hermann waited, took a card, and staked on it his forty-seven thousand roubles, together with the like sum which he had gained the evening before.

Tchekalinski began to deal. He turned up on the right a knave, and on the left a seven.

Hermann exhibited a seven.

There was a general exclamation. Tchekalinski was evidently ill at ease, but he counted out the ninety-four thousand roubles to Hermann, who took them in the calmest manner, rose from the table, and went away.





"HE SAW BEFORE HIM A QUEEN OF SPADES."

The next evening, at the accustomed hour, he again appeared. Everyone was expecting him. Generals and high officials had left their whist to watch this extraordinary play. The young officers had quitted their sofas, and even the servants of the house pressed round the table.

When Hermann took his seat, the other players ceased to stake, so impatient were they to see him have it out with the banker, who, still smiling, watched the approach of his antagonist and prepared to meet him. Each of them untied at the same time a pack of cards. Tchekalinski shuffled, and Hermann cut. Then the latter took up a card and covered it with a heap of banknotes. It was like the preliminaries of a duel. A deep silence reigned through the room.

Tchekalinski took up the cards with trembling hands and dealt. On one side he put down a queen and on the other side an ace.

"Ace wins," said Hermann.

"No. Queen loses," said Tchekalinski.

Hermann looked. Instead of ace, he saw a queen of spades before him. He could not trust his eyes! And now as he gazed, in fascination, on the fatal card, he fancied that he saw the queen of spades open and then close her eye, while at the same time she gave a mocking smile. He felt a thrill of nameless horror. The queen of spades resembled the dead Countess!

Hermann is now at the Obukhoff Asylum, room No. 17 a hopeless madman! He answers no questions which we put to him. Only he mumbles to himself without cessation, "Three, seven, ace; three, seven, *queen!*"

