

creature! All the same, I shall take a hundred and eighty rubles off you . . . I will, you know . . . (*He dances.*) A hundred and eighty tiny rubles . . .

*They have passed through into the ballroom.*

YASHA (*sings quietly*). 'And will you know just how my heart beats faster . . .?'

*In the ballroom a figure in a grey top hat and check trousers waves its arms and leaps about.*

VOICES (*off*). It's Charlotta Ivanovna! Bravo!

DUNYASHA (*who has stopped to powder her nose*). Miss told me to dance because there are too many gentlemen and not enough ladies, and now my head's spinning, my heart's pounding. And the postmaster just told me something that quite took my breath away.

*The music becomes quieter.*

FIRS. What did he tell you?

DUNYASHA. He said, You're like a flower.

YASHA (*yawns*). The ignorance of these people . . . (*Goes out.*)

DUNYASHA. Like a flower . . . I'm such a sensitive girl – I do terribly love it when people say nice things to me.

FIRS. You'll have your head turned, you will.

*Enter YEPIKHODOV.*

YEPIKHODOV (*to DUNYASHA*). You've no wish to see me, have you . . . As if I was some kind of insect. (*Sighs.*) Ah, life!

DUNYASHA. What do you want?

YEPIKHODOV. And you're right, no doubt, possibly. (*Sighs.*)

Though, of course, if you look at it from one point of view, then I mean you have reduced me – and forgive me for saying this, but I mean I'm not going to mince my words – you have reduced me to, well, let's put it like this, to a complete and utter state of mind. I know what's in my stars – every day some dis-

aster happens – I've long been used to it – I look upon my fate now with a smile. I mean, you gave me your word, and although I . . .

DUNYASHA. Please, we'll talk about it later. Leave me in peace now. I'm busy dreaming. (*Plays with a fan.*)

YEPIKHODOV. Every day another disaster, and I mean, all I do is smile. Laugh, even.

*Enter VARYA from the ballroom.*

VARYA (*to YEPIKHODOV*). Are you still here? Have you no respect? (*To DUNYASHA.*) Out of here, Dunyasha. (*To YEPIKHODOV.*) First you play billiards and break the cue, and now you parade about the drawing-room as if you were a guest.

YEPIKHODOV. I'm not going to account for my behaviour to you, if I may say so.

VARYA. I'm not asking you to account for your behaviour. I'm telling you. All you do is wander about from place to place. You never get down to any work. We keep a clerk, but what for, heaven only knows.

YEPIKHODOV (*offended*). Whether I do any work or not – whether I wander about or eat or play billiards – these are questions that can only be judged by people older and wiser than you.

VARYA. You dare to talk to me like that! (*Flaring up.*) You dare! Are you trying to tell me I don't know what's right and wrong? Clear off out of here! This minute!

YEPIKHODOV (*cowering*). Kindly express yourself with more refinement.

VARYA (*beside herself*). Out of here! This instant! Out!

*He goes to the door, and she after him.*

Disasters by the Dozen – that's right! I want neither sight nor sound of you in here!

*YEPIKHODOV is by now out of the room.*