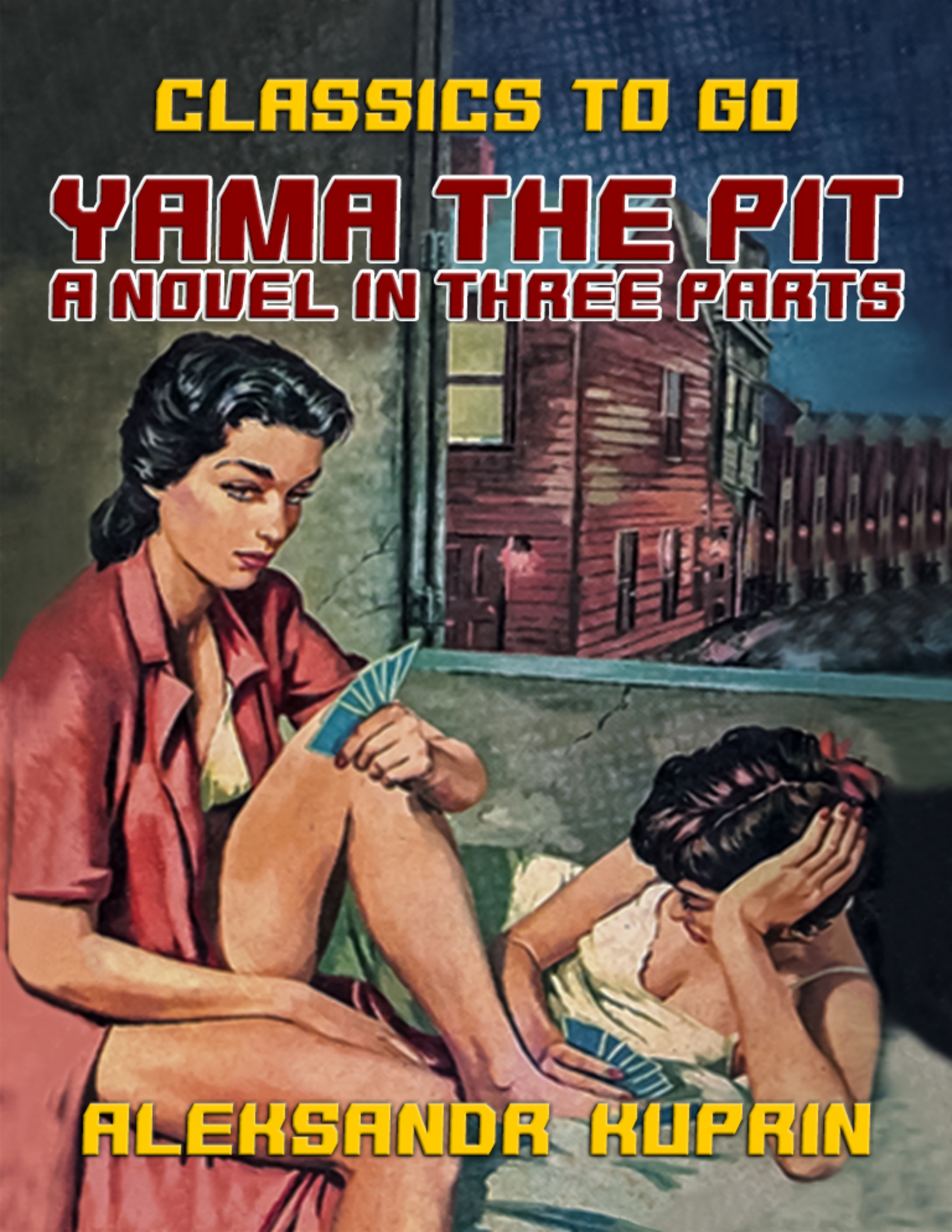
CLASSICS TO GO

YAMA THE PIT

A NOVEL IN THREE PARTS



ALEKSANDR KUPRIN

Yama The Pit

A Novel in three Parts

Aleksandr Kuprin

INTRODUCTION

"With us, you see," Kuprin makes the reporter Platonov, his mouthpiece, say in Yama, "they write about detectives, about lawyers, about inspectors of the revenue, about pedagogues, about attorneys, about the police, about officers, about sensual ladies, about engineers, about baritones—and really, by God, altogether well—cleverly, with finesse and talent. But, after all, all these people are rubbish, and their life is not life, but some sort of conjured up, spectral, unnecessary delirium of world culture. But there are two singular realities—ancient as humanity itself: the prostitute and the moujik. And about them we know nothing, save some tinsel, gingerbread, debauched depictions in literature..."

Tinsel, gingerbread, debauched depictions... Let us consider some of the ways in which this monstrous reality has been approached by various writers. There is, first, the purely sentimental: Prevost's Manon Les caut. Then there is the slobberingly sentimental: Dumas' Dame aux Camelias. A third is the necrophilically romantic: Louys' Aphrodite. The fertile Balzac has given us no less than two: the purely romantic, in his fascinating portraits of the Fair Imperia; and the romantically realistic, in his Splendeurs et Miseres des Courtisanes. Reade's Peg Woffington may be called the literary parallel of the costume drama; Defoe's Moll Flanders is honestly realistic; Zola's Nana is rabidly so.

There is one singular fact that must be noted in connection with the vast majority of such depictions. Punk or bona roba, lorette or drab—put her before an artist in letters, and, lo and behold ye! such is the strange allure emanating from the hussy, that the resultant portrait is

either that of a martyred Magdalene, or, at the very least, has all the enigmatic piquancy of a Monna Lisa... Not a slut, but what is a hetaera; and not a hetaera, but what is well-nigh Kypris herself! I know of but one depiction in all literature that possesses the splendour of implacable veracity as well as undiminished artistry; where the portrait is that of a prostitute, despite all her tirings and trappings; a depiction truly deserving to be designated a portrait: the portrait supreme of the harlot eternal—Shakespeare's Cleopatra.

Furthermore, it will be observed that such depictions, for the most part, are primarily portraits of prostitutes, and not pictures of prostitution. It is also a singular fact that war, another scourge has met with similar treatment. We have the pretty, spotless grenadiers and cuirassiers of Meissonier in plenty; Vereshchagin is still alone in the grim starkness of his wind-swept, snow-covered battle-fields, with black crows wheeling over the crumpled masses of gray...

And, curiously enough, it is another great Russian, Kuprin, who is supreme—if not unique—as a painter of the universal scourge of prostitution, per se; and not as an incidental background for portraits. True, he may not have entirely escaped the strange allure, aforementioned, of the femininity he paints; for femininity—even though fallen, corrupt, abased, is still femininity, one of the miracles of life, to Kuprin, the lover of life. But, even if he may be said to have used too much of the oil of sentimentality in mixing his colours for the portraits, his portraits are subordinate to the background; and there his eye is true and keen, his hand steady and unflinching, his colours and brushwork unimpeachable. Whether, like his own Platonov—who may be called to some extent an autobiographical figure, and many of whose experiences are Kuprin's own—"came upon

the brothel" and gathered his material unconsciously, "without any ulterior thoughts of writing," we do not know, nor need we rummage in his dirty linen, as he puts it. Suffice it to say here—to cite but two instances—that almost anyone acquainted with Russia will tell you the full name of the rich, gay, southern port city of K—; that any Odessite will tell you that Treppel's is merely transplanted, for fictional reasons, from his own city to K—…

Alexandre I. Kuprin was born in 1870; 1909 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of his literary activity. He attained his fame only upon the publication of his amazing, epical novel, "The Duel"—which, just like "YAMA," is an arraignment; an arraignment of militaristic corruption. Russian criticism has styled him the poet of life. If Chekhov was the Wunderkind of Russian letters, Kuprin is its enfant terrible. His range of subjects is enormous; his power of observation and his versatility extraordinary. Gambrinus alone would justify his place among the literary giants of Europe. Some of his picaresques, "THE INSULT," "HORSE-THIEVES," and "OFF THE STREET"—the last in the form of a monologue—are sheer tours de force. "Olessiya" is possessed of a weird, unearthly beauty; "The Shulamite" is a prose-poem of antiquity. He deals with the life of the moujik in "Back-woods" and "The Swamp"; of the Jews, in "The Jewess" and "The Coward"; of the soldiers, in "The Cadets," "The Interrogation," "The Night Watch," "Delirium"; of the actors, in "How I Was an Actor" and "In Retirement." We have circus life in "'Allez!'" "In The Circus," "Lolly," "The Clown"—the last a one-act playlet; factory life, in "Moloch"; provincial life, in "Small Fry"; bohemian life, in "Captain Ribnicov" and "The River of Life"—which no one but Kuprin could have written. There are animal stories and flower stories; stories for children—and for neuropaths; one story is dedicated to a jockey; another to a circus clown; a third, if I remember rightly, to

a race-horse... "Yama" created an enormous sensation upon the publication of the first part in volume three of the "Sbornik Zemliya"—"The Earth Anthology"—in 1909; the second part appeared in volume fifteen, in 1914; the third, in volume sixteen, in 1915. Both the original parts and the last revised edition have been followed in this translation. The greater part of the stories listed above are available in translations, under various titles; the list, of course, is merely a handful from the vast bulk of the fecund Kuprin's writings, nor is any group of titles exhaustive of its kind. "The Star of Solomon," his latest collection of stories, bears the imprint of Helsingfors, 1920.

It must not be thought, despite its locale, that Kuprin's "Yama" is a picture of Russian prostitution solely; it is intrinsically universal. All that is necessary is to change the kopecks into cents, pennies, sous or pfennings; compute the versts into miles or metres; Jennka may be Eugenie or Jeannette; and for Yama, simply read Whitechapel, Montmartre, or the Barbary Coast. That is why "Yama" is a "tremendous, staggering, and truthful book—a terrific book." It has been called notorious, lurid—even oleographic. So are, perhaps, the picaresques of Murillo, the pictorial satires of Hogarth, the bizarreries of Goya...

The best introduction to "Yama," however, can be given in Kuprin's own words, as uttered by the reporter Platonov. "They do write," he says, "... but it is all either a lie, or theatrical effects for children of tender years, or else a cunning symbolism, comprehensible only to the sages of the future. But the life itself no one as yet has touched...

"But the material here is in reality tremendous, downright crushing, terrible... And not at all terrible are the loud phrases about the traffic in women's flesh, about the white slaves, about prostitution being a corroding

fester of large cities, and so on, and so on... an old hurdy-gurdy of which all have tired! No, horrible are the everyday, accustomed trifles; these business-like, daily, commercial reckonings; this thousand-year-old science of amatory practice; this prosaic usage, determined by the ages. In these unnoticeable nothings are completely dissolved such feelings as resentment, humiliation, shame. There remains a dry profession, a contract, an agreement, a well-nigh honest petty trade, no better, no worse than, say, the trade in groceries. Do you understand, gentlemen, that all the horror is in just this—that there is no horror! Bourgeois work days—and that is all...

"More awful than all awful words, a hundredfold more awful—is some such little prosaic stroke or other as will suddenly knock you all in a heap, like a blow on the forehead..."

It is in such little prosaic strokes; everyday, accustomed, characteristic trifles; minute particles of life, that Kuprin excels. The detailism which crowds his pages is like the stippling of Whistler; or the enumerations of the Bible; or the chiselling of Rodin, that endows the back of the Thinker with meaning.

"We all pass by these characteristic trifles indifferently, like the blind, as though not seeing them scattered about under our feet. But an artist will come, and he will look over them carefully, and he will pick them up. And suddenly he will so skillfully turn in the sun a minute particle of life, that we shall all cry out: 'Oh, my God! But I myself—myself! —have seen this with my own eyes. Only it simply did not enter my head to turn my close attention upon it.' But our Russian artists of the word—the most conscientious and sincere artists in the whole world—for some reason have up to this time passed over prostitution and the brothel. Why?

Really, it is difficult for me to answer that. Perhaps because of squeamishness, perhaps out of pusillanimity, out of fear of being signalized as a pornographic writer; finally from the apprehension that our gossiping criticism will identify the artistic work of the writer with his personal life and will start rummaging in his dirty linen. Or perhaps they can find neither the time, nor the self-denial, nor the self-possession to plunge in head first into this life and to watch it right up close, without prejudice, without sonorous phrases, without a sheepish pity, in all its monstrous simplicity and everyday activity... That material... is truly unencompassable in its significance and weightiness... The words of others do not suffice—even though they be the most exact—even observations, made with a little note-book and a bit of pencil, do not suffice. One must grow accustomed to this life, without being cunningly wise..."

"I believe, that not now, not soon—after fifty years or so—but there will come a writer of genius, and precisely a Russian one, who will absorb within himself all the burdens and all the abominations of this life and will cast them forth to us in the form of simple, fine, and deathlessly—caustic images. And we shall all say: 'Why, now, we ourselves have seen and known all this, but we could not even suppose that this is so horrible! In this coming artist I believe with all my heart."

Kuprin is too sincere, too big, to have written this with himself in mind; yet no reader of the scathing, searing arraignment called "Yama," will question that the great, the gigantic Kuprin has shown "the burdens and abominations" of prostitution, in "simple, fine, and deathlessly-caustic images"; has shown that "all the horror is in just this—that there is no horror..." For it is as a pitiless reflection of a "singular," sinister reality that "Yama" stands unsurpassed.

B. G. GUERNEY.
New York City, January, 1922.

PART ONE

CHAPTER I.

A long, long time ago, long before the railroads, the stage-drivers—both government and private—used to live, from generation to generation, at the very farthest confine of a large southern city. And that is why the entire region was called the Yamskaya Sloboda—the Stage-drivers' Borough; or simply Yamskaya, or Yamkas—Little Ditches, or, shorter still, Yama—The Pit. In the course of time, when hauling by steam killed off transportation by horses, the mettlesome tribe of the stage-drivers little by little lost its boisterous ways and its brave customs, went over into other occupations, fell apart and scattered. But for many years—even up to this time—a shady renown has remained to Yama, as of a place exceedingly gay, tipsy, brawling, and in the night-time not without danger.

Somehow it came about of itself, that on the ruins of those ancient, long-warmed nests, where of yore the rosy-cheeked, sprightly wives of the soldiery and the plump widows of Yama, with their black eyebrows, had secretly traded in vodka and free love, there began to spring up wide-open brothels, permitted by the authorities, regulated by official supervision and subject to express, strict rules. Towards the end of the nineteenth century both streets of Yama—Great Yamskaya and Little Yamskaya—proved to be entirely occupied, on one side of the street as well as the other, exclusively with houses of ill-fame. Of the private houses no more than five or six were left, but even they were taken up by public houses, beer halls, and general stores, catering to the needs of Yama prostitution.

"Houses of Suffrance"—i.e., Houses of the Necessary Evil.—Trans.

The course of life, the manners and customs, are almost identical in all the thirty-odd establishments; the difference is only in the charges exacted for the briefly-timed love, and consequently in certain external minutiae as well: in the assortment of more or less handsome women, in the comparative smartness of the costumes, in the magnificence of the premises and the luxuriousness of the furnishings.

The most chic establishment is that of Treppel, the first house to the left upon entering Great Yamskaya. This is an old firm. Its present owner bears an entirely different name, and fills the post of an elector in the city council and is even a member of the city board. The house is of two stories, green and white, built in the debauched pseudo-Russian style a la Ropetovsky, with little horses, carved facings, roosters, and wooden towels bordered with lace-also of wood; a carpet with a white runner on the stairs; in the front hall a stuffed bear, holding a wooden platter for visiting cards in his out-stretched paws; a parquet floor in the ballroom, heavy raspberry silk curtains and tulle on the windows, along the walls white and gold chairs and mirrors with gilt frames; there are two private cabinets with carpets, divans, and soft satin puffs; in the bedrooms blue and rose lanterns, blankets of raw silk stuff and clean pillows; the inmates are clad in low-cut ball gowns, bordered with fur, or in expensive masquerade costumes of hussars, pages, fisher lasses, school-girls; and the majority of them are Germans from the Baltic provinces—large, handsome women, white of body and with ample breasts. At Treppel's three roubles are taken for a visit, and for the whole night, ten.

Three of the two-rouble establishments—Sophie Vassilievna's, The Old Kiev, and Anna Markovna's—are somewhat worse, somewhat poorer. The remaining houses on Great Yamskaya are rouble ones; they are furnished still worse. While on Little Yamskaya, which is frequented by soldiers, petty thieves, artisans, and drab folk In general, and where fifty kopecks or less are taken for time, things are altogether filthy and poor-the floor in the parlor is crooked, warped, and full of splinters, the windows are hung with pieces of red fustian; the bedrooms, just like stalls, are separated by thin partitions, which do not reach to the ceiling, and on the beds, on top of the shaken down hay-mattresses, are scattered torn, spotted bed-sheets and flannel blankets, dark from time, crumpled any old way, full of holes; the air is sour and full of fumes, with a mixture of alcohol vapours and the smell of human emanations; the women, dressed in rags of coloured printed calico or in sailor costumes, are for the greater part hoarse or snuffling, with noses half fallen through, with faces preserving traces of yesterday's blows and scratches and naively bepainted with the aid of a red cigarette box moistened with spit.

All the year round, every evening—with the exception of the last three days of Holy Week and the night before Annunciation, when no bird builds its nest and a shorn wench does not plait her braid—when it barely grows dark out of doors, hanging red lanterns are lit before every house, above the tented, carved street doors. It is just like a holiday out on the street—like Easter. All the windows are brightly lit up, the gay music of violins and pianos floats out through the panes, cabmen drive up and drive off without cease. In all the houses the entrance doors are opened wide, and through them one may see from the street a steep staircase with a narrow corridor on top, and the white flashing of the many-facetted reflector of the lamp,

and the green walls of the front hall, painted over with Swiss landscapes. Till the very morning hundreds and thousands of men ascend and descend these staircases. Here everybody frequents: half-shattered, slavering ancients, seeking artificial excitements, and boys-military cadets and high-school lads—almost children; bearded paterfamiliases; honourable pillars of society, in golden spectacles; and newly-weds, and enamoured bridegrooms, and honourable professors with renowned names; and thieves, and murderers, and liberal lawyers; and strict guardians of morals—pedagogues, and foremost writers—the authors of fervent, impassioned articles on the equal rights of women; and catchpoles, and spies, and escaped convicts, and officers, and students, and Social Democrats, and hired patriots; the timid and the brazen, the sick and the well, those knowing woman for the first time, and old libertines frayed by all species of vice; clear-eyed, handsome fellows and monsters maliciously distorted by nature, deaf-mutes, blind men, men without noses, with flabby, pendulous bodies, with malodorous breath, bald, trembling, covered with parasites—pot-bellied, hemorrhoidal apes. They come freely and simply, as to a restaurant or a depot; they sit, smoke, drink, convulsively pretend to be merry; they dance, executing abominable movements of the body imitative of the act of sexual love. At times attentively and long, at times with gross haste, they choose any woman they like and know beforehand that they will never meet refusal. Impatiently they pay their money in advance, and on the public bed, not yet grown cold after the body of their predecessor, aimlessly commit the very greatest and most beautiful of all universal mysteries—the mystery of the conception of new life. And the women with indifferent readiness, with uniform words, with practiced professional movements, satisfy their desires, like machines—only to receive, right after them, during the same night, with the very same words, smiles

and gestures, the third, the fourth, the tenth man, not infrequently already biding his turn in the waiting room.

So passes the entire night. Towards daybreak Yama little by little grows quiet, and the bright morning finds it depopulated, spacious, plunged into sleep, with doors shut tightly, with shutters fixed on the windows. But toward evening the women awaken and get ready for the following night.

And so without end, day after day, for months and years, they live a strange, incredible life in their public harems, outcast by society, accursed by the family, victims of the social temperament, cloacas for the excess of the city's sensuality, the guardians of the honour of the family—four hundred foolish, lazy, hysterical, barren women.

CHAPTER II.

Two in the afternoon. In the second-rate, two-rouble establishment of Anna Markovna everything is plunged in sleep. The large square parlor with mirrors in gilt frames, with a score of plush chairs placed decorously along the walls, with oleograph pictures of Makovsky's Feast of the Russian Noblemen, and Bathing, with a crystal lustre in the middle, is also sleeping, and in the quiet and semi-darkness it seems unwontedly pensive, austere, strangely sad. Yesterday here, as on every evening, lights burned, the most rollicking of music rang out, blue tobacco smoke swirled, men and women careered in couples, shaking their hips and throwing their legs on high. And the entire street shone on the outside with the red lanterns over the street doors and with the light from the windows, and it seethed with people and carriages until morning.

Now the street is empty. It is glowing triumphantly and joyously in the glare of the summer sun. But in the parlor all the window curtains are lowered, and for that reason it is dark within, cool, and as peculiarly uninviting as the interiors of empty theatres, riding academies and court buildings usually are in the middle of the day.

The pianoforte glimmers dully with its black, bent, glossy side; the yellow, old, time-eaten, broken, gap-toothed keys glisten faintly. The stagnant, motionless air still retains yesterday's odour; it smells of perfumes, tobacco, the sour dampness of a large uninhabited room, the perspiration of unclean and unhealthy feminine flesh, face-powder, boracic-thymol soap, and the dust of the yellow mastic with which the parquet floor had been polished yesterday. And with a strange charm the smell of withering swamp grass is blended with these smells. To-day is Trinity. In accordance

with an olden custom, the chambermaids of the establishment, while their ladies were still sleeping, had bought a whole waggon of sedge on the market, and had strewn its long, thick blades, that crunch underfoot, everywhere about—in the corridors, in the private cabinets, in the drawing room. They, also, had lit the lamps before all the images. The girls, by tradition, dare not do this with their hands, which have been denied during the night.

And the house-porter has adorned the house-entrance, which is carved in the Russian style, with two little felled birch-trees. And so with all the houses—the thin white trunks with their scant dying verdure adorn the exterior near the stoops, bannisters and doors.

The entire house is quiet, empty and drowsy. The chopping of cutlets for dinner can be heard from the kitchen. Liubka, one of the girls, barefooted, in her shift, with bare arms, not good-looking, freckled, but strong and fresh of body, has come out into the inner court. Yesterday she had had but six guests on time, but no one had remained for the night with her, and because of that she had slept her fill—splendidly, delightfully, all alone, upon a wide bed. She had risen early, at ten o'clock, and had with pleasure helped the cook scrub the floor and the tables in the kitchen. Now she is feeding the chained dog Amour with the sinews and cuttings of the meat. The big, rusty hound, with long glistening hair and black muzzle, jumps up on the girl—with his front paws, stretching the chain tightly and rattling in the throat from shortness of breath, then, with back and tail undulating all over, bends his head down to the ground, wrinkles his nose, smiles, whines and sneezes from the excitement. But she, teasing him with the meat, shouts at him with pretended severity:

"There, you—stupid! I'll—I'll give it to you! How dare you?"

But she rejoices with all her soul over the tumult and caresses of Amour and her momentary power over the dog, and because she had slept her fill, and passed the night without a man, and because of the Trinity, according to dim recollections of her childhood, and because of the sparkling sunny day, which it so seldom befalls her to see.

All the night guests have already gone their ways. The most business-like, quiet and workaday hour is coming on.

They are drinking coffee in the room of the proprietress. The company consists of five people. The proprietress herself, in whose name the house is registered, is Anna Markovna. She is about sixty. She is very small of stature, but dumpy: she may be visualized by imagining, from the bottom up, three soft, gelatinous globes—large, medium and small, pressed into each other without any interstices; this—her skirt, torso and head. Strange, her eyes are a faded blue, girlish, even childish, but the mouth is that of an old person, with a moist lower lip of a raspberry colour, impotently hanging down. Her husband—Isaiah Savvich—is also small, a grayish, quiet, silent little old man. He is under his wife's thumb; he was doorkeeper in this very house even at the time when Anna Markovna served here as housekeeper. In order to be useful in some way, he has learned, through self-instruction, to play the fiddle, and now at night plays dance tunes, as well as a funeral march for shopmen far gone on a spree and craving some maudlin tears.

Then, there are the two housekeepers—senior and junior. The senior is Emma Edwardovna. She is a tall, full woman of forty-six, with chestnut hair, and a fat goitre of three

chins. Her eyes are encircled with black rings of hemorrhoidal origin. The face broadens out like a pear from the forehead down to the cheeks, and is of an earthen colour; the eyes are small, black; the nose humped, the lips sternly pursed; the expression of the face calmly authoritative. It is no mystery to anyone in the house that in a year or two Anna Markovna will go into retirement, and sell her the establishment with all its rights and furnishings, when she will receive part in cash, and part on terms—by promissory note. Because of this the girls honour her equally with the proprietress and fear her somewhat. Those who fall into error she beats with her own hands, beats cruelly, coolly, and calculatingly, without changing the calm expression of her face. Among the girls there is always a favourite of hers, whom she tortures with her exacting love and fantastic jealousy. And this is far harder than her beatings.

The other one is called Zociya. She has just struggled out of the ranks of the common girls. The girls, as yet, call her impersonally, flatteringly and familiarly, "little housekeeper." She is spare, spry, just a trifle squinting, with a rosy complexion, and hair dressed in a little curly pompadour; she adores actors—preferably stout comedians. Toward Emma Edwardovna she is ingratiating.

The fifth person, finally, is the local district inspector, Kerbesh. This is an athletic man; he is kind of bald, has a red beard like a fan, vividly blue slumbrous eyes, and a thin, slightly hoarse, pleasant voice. Everybody knows that he formerly served in the secret service division and was the terror of crooks, thanks to his terrible physical strength and cruelty in interrogations.

He has several shady transactions on his conscience. The whole town knows that two years back he married a rich

old woman of seventy, and that last year he strangled her; however, he was somehow successful in hushing up this affair. But for that matter, the remaining four have also seen a thing or two in their chequered life. But, just as the bretteurs of old felt no twinges of conscience at the recollection of their victims, even so do these people regard the dark and bloody things in their past, as the unavoidable little unpleasantness of their professions.

They are drinking coffee with rich, boiled cream—the inspector with Benedictine. But he, strictly speaking, is not drinking, but merely conveying the impression that he is doing it to oblige.

"Well, what is it to be, Phoma Phornich?" asks the proprietress searchingly. "This business isn't worth an empty eggshell, now... Why, you have only to say a word..."

Kerbesh slowly draws in half a wine-glass of liqueur, works the oily, strong, pungent liquid slightly with his tongue over the roof of his mouth, swallows it, chases it down, without hurrying, with coffee, and then passes the ring finger of his left hand over his moustaches, to the right and left.

"Think it over for yourself, Madam Shoibes," he says, looking down at the table, spreading out his hands and screwing up his eyes. "Think of the risk to which I'm exposed! The girl through means of deception was enticed into this... what-you-may-call-it... well, in a word, into a house of ill-fame, to express it in lofty style. Now the parents are searching for her through the police. Ve-ery well. She gets into one place after another, from the fifth into the tenth... Finally the trail is picked up with you, and most important of all—think of it!—in my district! What can I do?"

"Mr. Kerbesh, but she is of age," says the proprietress.

"They are of age," confirms Isaiah Savvich. "They gave an acknowledgment, that it was of their own will..."

Emma Edwardovna pronounces in a bass, with cool assurance:

"Honest to God, she's the same here as an own daughter."

"But that's not what I am talking about," the inspector frowns in vexation. "Just consider my position... Why, this is duty. Lord, there's no end of unpleasantnesses without that!"

The proprietress suddenly arises, shuffles in her slippers to the door, and says, winking to the inspector with a sleepy, expressionless eye of faded blue:

"Mr. Kerbesh, I would ask you to have a look at our alterations. We want to enlarge the place a bit."

"A-ah! With pleasure..."

After ten minutes both return, without looking at each other. Kerbesh's hand is crunching a brand-new hundred rouble note in his pocket. The conversation about the seduced girl is not renewed. The inspector, hastily finishing his Benedictine, complains of the present decline in manners.

"I have a son, now, a schoolboy—Paul. He comes to me, the scoundrel, and declares: 'Papa, the pupils swear at me, because you are a policeman, and because you serve on Yamskaya, and because you take bribes from brothels.'

Well, tell me, for God's sake, Madam Shoibes, if that isn't effrontery?"

"Ai, ai, ai! ... And what bribes can there be? Now with me..."

"I say to him: 'Go, you good-for-nothing, and let the principal know, that there should be no more of this, otherwise papa will inform on all of you to the governor.' And what do you think? He comes to me and says: 'I am no longer a son to you—seek another son for yourself.' What an argument! Well, I gave him enough to last till the first of the month! Oho-ho! Now he doesn't want to speak with me. Well, I'll show him yet!"

"Ah, you don't have to tell us," sighs Anna Markovna, letting her lower, raspberry-coloured lip hang down and with a mist coming over her faded eyes. "We keep our Birdie—she is in Fleisher's high school—we purposely keep her in town, in a respectable family. You understand, it is awkward, after all. And all of a sudden she brings such words and expressions from the high school that I just simply turned all red."

"Honest to God, Annochka turned all red," confirms Isaiah Savvich.

"You'll turn red, all right!" warmly agrees the inspector. "Yes, yes, yes, I understand you fully. But, my God, where are we going! Where are we only going? I ask you, what are these revolutionaries and all these various students, or... what-you-may-call-'ems? ... trying to attain? And let them put the blame on none but themselves. Corruption is everywhere, morality is falling, there is no respect for parents. They ought to be shot."

"Well, now, the day before yesterday we had a case," Zociya mixes in bustlingly. "A certain guest came, a stout man..."

"Drop it!" Emma Edwardovna, who was listening to the inspector, piously nodding with her head bowed to one side, cuts her short in the jargon of the brothels. "You'd better go and see about breakfast for the young ladies."

"And not a single person can be relied upon," continues the proprietress grumblingly. "Not a servant but what she's a stiff, a faker. And all the girls ever think about is their lovers. Just so's they may have their own pleasure. But about their duties they don't even think."

There is an awkward silence. Some one knocks on the door. A thin, feminine voice speaks on the other side of the door:

"Housekeeper, dear, take the money and be kind enough to give me the stamps. Pete's gone."

The inspector gets up and adjusts his sabre.

"Well, it's time I was going to work. Best regards, Anna Markovna. Best wishes, Isaiah Savvich."

"Perhaps you'll have one more little glass for a stirrup cup?" the nearly blind Isaiah Savvich thrusts himself over the table.

"Tha-ank you. I can't. Full to the gills. Honoured, I'm sure! ..."

"Thanks for your company. Drop in some time."

"Always glad to be your guest, sir. Au revoir!"

But in the doorway he stops for a minute and says significantly:

"But still, my advice to you is—you'd better pass this girl on to some place or other in good time. Of course, it's your affair, but as a good friend of yours I give you warning."

He goes away. When his steps are abating on the stairs and the front door bangs to behind him, Emma Edwardovna snorts through her nose and says contemptuously:

"Stool-pigeon! He wants to take money both here and there..."

Little by little they all crawl apart out of the room. It is dark in the house. It smells sweetly of the half-withered sedge. Quiet reigns.

CHAPTER III.

Until dinner, which is served at six in the evening, the time drags endlessly long and with intolerable monotony. And, in general, this daily interval is the heaviest and emptiest in the life of the house. It remotely resembles in its moods those slothful, empty hours which are lived through during the great holidays in scholastic institutes and other private institutions for females, when all the friends have dispersed, when there is much leisure and much indolence, and a radiant, agreeable tedium reigns the whole day. In only their petticoats and white shifts, with bare arms, sometimes barefooted, the women aimlessly ramble from room to room, all of them unwashed, uncombed; lazily strike the keys of the old pianoforte with the index finger, lazily lay out cards to tell their fortune, lazily exchange curses, and with a languishing irritation await the evening.

Liubka, after breakfast, had carried out the leavings of bread and the cuttings of ham to Amour, but the dog had soon palled upon her. Together with Niura she had bought some barberry bon-bons and sunflower seeds, and now both are standing behind the fence separating the house from the street, gnawing the seeds, the shells of which remain on their chins and bosoms, and speculate indifferently about those who pass on the street: about the lamp-lighter, pouring kerosene into the street lamps, about the policeman with the daily registry book under his arm, about the housekeeper from somebody else's establishment, running across the road to the general store.

Niura is a small girl, with goggle-eyes of blue; she has white, flaxen hair and little blue veins on her temples. In

her face there is something stolid and innocent, reminiscent of a white sugar lamb on a Paschal cake. She is lively, bustling, curious, puts her nose into everything, agrees with everybody, is the first to know the news, and, when she speaks, she speaks so much and so rapidly that spray flies out of her mouth and bubbles effervescence on the red lips, as in children.

Opposite, out of the dram-shop, a servant pops out for a minute—a curly, besotted young fellow with a cast in his eye—and runs into the neighbouring public house.

"Prokhor Ivanovich, oh Prokhor Ivanovich," shouts Niura, "don't you want some?—I'll treat you to some sunflower seeds!"

"Come on in and pay us a visit," Liubka chimes in.

Niura snorts and adds through the laughter which suffocates her:

"Warm your feet for a while!"

But the front door opens; in it appears the formidable and stern figure of the senior housekeeper.

"Pfui! What sort of indecency is this!" she cries commandingly. "How many times must it be repeated to you, that you must not jump out on the street during the day, and also—pfui!—only in your underwear. I can't understand how you have no conscience yourselves. Decent girls, who respect themselves, must not demean themselves that way in public. It seems, thank God, that you are not in an establishment catering to soldiers, but in a respectable house. Not in Little Yamskaya."

A German exclamation of disgust or contempt, corresponding to the English fie.—Trans.

The girls return into the house, get into the kitchen, and for a long time sit there on tabourets, contemplating the angry cook Prascoviya, swinging their legs and silently gnawing the sunflower seeds.

In the room of Little Manka, who is also called Manka the Scandaliste and Little White Manka, a whole party has gathered. Sitting on the edge of the bed, she and another girl—Zoe, a tall handsome girl, with arched eyebrows, with grey, somewhat bulging eyes, with the most typical, white, kind face of the Russian prostitute—are playing at cards, playing at "sixty-six." Little Manka's closest friend, Jennie, is lying behind their backs on the bed, prone on her back, reading a tattered book, The Queen's Necklace, the work of Monsieur Dumas, and smoking. In the entire establishment she is the only lover of reading and reads intoxicatingly and without discrimination. But, contrary to expectation, the forced reading of novels of adventure has not at all made her sentimental and has not vitiated her imagination. Above all, she likes in novels a long intrigue, cunningly thought out and deftly disentangled; magnificent duels, before which the viscount unties the laces of his shoes to signify that he does not intend to retreat even a step from his position, and after which the marquis, having spitted the count through, apologizes for having made an opening in his splendid new waistcoat; purses, filled to the full with gold, carelessly strewn to the left and right by the chief heroes; the love adventures and witticisms of Henry IV—in a word, all this spiced heroism, in gold and lace, of the past centuries of French history. In everyday life, on the contrary, she is sober of mind, jeering, practical and cynically malicious. In her relation to the other girls of the establishment she occupies the same place that in private

educational institutions is accorded to the first strong man, the man spending a second year in the same grade, the first beauty in the class—tyrannizing and adored. She is a tall, thin brunette, with beautiful hazel eyes, a small proud mouth, a little moustache on the upper lip and with a swarthy, unhealthy pink on her cheeks.

Probably a sly dig at Gautier's Captain Fracasse.—Trans.

Without letting the cigarette out of her mouth and screwing up her eyes from the smoke, all she does is to turn the pages constantly with a moistened finger. Her legs are bare to the knees; the enormous balls of the feet are of the most vulgar form; below the big toes stand out pointed, ugly, irregular tumours.

Here also, with her legs crossed, slightly bent, with some sewing, sits Tamara—a quiet, easy-going, pretty girl, slightly reddish, with that dark and shining tint of hair which is to be found on the back of a fox in winter. Her real name is Glycera, or Lukeria, as the common folk say it. But it is already an ancient usage of the houses of ill-fame to replace the uncouth names of the Matrenas, Agathas, Cyclitinias with sonorous, preferably exotic names. Tamara had at one time been a nun, or, perhaps, merely a novice in a convent, and to this day there have been preserved on her face timidity and a pale puffiness—a modest and sly expression, which is peculiar to young nuns. She holds herself aloof in the house, does not chum with any one, does not initiate any one into her past life. But in her case there must have been many more adventures besides having been a nun: there is something mysterious, taciturn and criminal in her unhurried speech, in the evasive glance of her deep and dark-gold eyes from under the long, lowered eyelashes, in her manners, her sly smiles and intonations of a modest but wanton would-be saint. There

was one occurrence when the girls, with well-nigh reverent awe, heard that Tamara could talk fluently in French and German. She has within her some sort of an inner, restrained power. Notwithstanding her outward meekness and complaisance, all in the establishment treat her with respect and circumspection—the proprietress, and her mates, and both housekeepers, and even the doorkeeper, that veritable sultan of the house of ill-fame, that general terror and hero.

"I've covered it," says Zoe and turns over the trump which had been lying under the pack, wrong side up. "I'm going with forty, going with an ace of spades—a ten-spot, Mannechka, if you please. I'm through. Fifty-seven, eleven, sixty-eight. How much have you?"

"Thirty," says Manka in an offended tone, pouting her lips; "oh, it's all very well for you—you remember all the plays. Deal ... Well, what's after that, Tamarochka?" she turns to her friend. "You talk on—I'm listening."

Zoe shuffles the old, black, greasy cards, allows Manya to cut, then deals, having first spat upon her fingers.

Tamara in the meanwhile is narrating to Manya in a quiet voice, without dropping her sewing.

"We embroidered with gold, in flat embroidery—altar covers, palls, bishops' vestments... With little grasses, with flowers, little crosses. In winter, you'd be sitting near a casement; the panes are small, with gratings, there isn't much light, it smells of lamp oil, incense, cypress; you mustn't talk—the mother superior was strict. Some one from weariness would begin droning a pre-Lenten first verse of a hymn ... 'When I consider thy heavens ...' We sang fine, beautifully, and it was such a quiet life, and the

smell was so fine; you could see the flaky snow out the windows—well, now, just like in a dream..."

Jennie puts the tattered novel down on her stomach, throws the cigarette over Zoe's head, and says mockingly:

"We know all about your quiet life. You chucked the infants into toilets. The Evil One is always snooping around your holy places."

"I call forty. I had forty-six. Finished!" Little Manka exclaims excitedly and claps her palms. "I open with three."

Tamara, smiling at Jennie's words, answers with a scarcely perceptible smile, which barely distends her lips, but makes little, sly, ambiguous depressions at their corners, altogether as with Monna Lisa in the portrait by Leonardo da Vinci.

"Lay folk say a lot of things about nuns ... Well, even if there had been sin once in a while ..."

"If you don't sin—you don't repent," Zoe puts in seriously, and wets her finger in her mouth.

"You sit and sew, the gold eddies before your eyes, while from standing in the morning at prayer your back just aches, and your legs ache. And at evening there is service again. You knock at the door of the mother superior's cell: 'Through prayers of Thy saints, oh Lord, our Father, have mercy upon us.' And the mother superior would answer from the cell, in a little bass-like 'A-men.'"

Jennie looks at her intently for some time, shakes her head and says with great significance:

"You're a queer girl, Tamara. Here I'm looking at you and wondering. Well, now, I can understand how these fools, on the manner of Sonka, play at love. That's what they're fools for. But you, it seems, have been roasted on all sorts of embers, have been washed in all sorts of lye, and yet you allow yourself foolishness of that sort. What are you embroidering that shirt for?"

Tamara, without haste, with a pin refastens the fabric more conveniently on her knee, smooths the seam down with the thimble, and speaks, without raising the narrowed eyes, her head bent just a trifle to one side:

"One's got to be doing something. It's wearisome just so. I don't play at cards, and I don't like them."

Jennie continues to shake her head.

"No, you're a queer girl, really you are. You always have more from the guests than all of us get. You fool, instead of saving money, what do you spend it on? You buy perfumes at seven roubles the bottle. Who needs it? And now you have bought fifteen roubles' worth of silk. Isn't this for your Senka, now?"

"Of course, for Sennechka."

"What a treasure you've found, to be sure! A miserable thief. He rides up to this establishment like some general. How is it he doesn't beat you yet? The thieves—they like that. And he plucks you, have no fear?"

"More than I want to, I won't give," meekly answers Tamara and bites the thread in two.

"Now that is just what I wonder at. With your mind, your beauty, I would put such rings-around-a-rosie about a guest