On the Eve
On the Eve

Ivan Turgenev

Translated by Michael Pursglove
## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>VII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Eve</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note on the Text</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extra Material</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan Turgenev’s Life</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ivan Turgenev’s Works</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Bibliography</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Ivan Turgenev (1818–83)
Pauline Viardot

Louis Viardot

“Paulinette”, Turgenev’s daughter

Marya Savina as Verochka in *A Month in the Country*
Bougival, France, where Turgenev spent the end of his life

Turgenev’s funeral procession in Petersburg in 1883
Drawing of Ivan Turgenev
by Adolph Menzel
Introduction

_On the Eve_ was the third of Turgenev’s six novels to be published. He had, however, begun to plan it as early as 1853, before he had published a single novel. Work on _Rudin_ and _A Nest of the Gentry_ then took priority, and he did not return to _On the Eve_ until 1859; on the manuscript he wrote: “Begun in Vichy 16th/28th June 1859. Finished at Spasskoye Sunday 25th October/6th November 1859.” He had completed the second half of the novel in a little over two weeks. A few days later he sent a fair copy to Countess Yelizaveta Lambert (1821-83), the recipient of over one hundred letters from Turgenev, a devout Christian who had had a decisive influence on the writing of _A Nest of the Gentry_. She thoroughly disliked the novel, so much so that Turgenev was briefly tempted to burn the manuscript. He did not burn it, however; nor did he offer it to the _Contemporary_, in which _A Nest of the Gentry_ had been published. Instead, _On the Eve_ was published in the first two numbers of the _Russian Herald_ for 1860. It appeared in book form shortly afterwards. Meanwhile the _Contemporary_ had to make do with Turgenev’s article ‘Hamlet and Don Quixote’ which, like _On the Eve_ was published in January 1860. The novel demonstrates, in the character of Insarov, Turgenev’s growing interest in the Quixotic type, the man who, above all else, has faith in the truth, the enthusiast, the idealist prepared to make any sacrifice to obtain that ideal. Of all Turgenev’s characters, Insarov is probably the most Quixotic, although one critic, while lambasting Yelena’s supposed immorality, inadvertently hit on a truth when he called Yelena a “Don Quixote in a skirt”. The Hamlet type is represented to a
greater or lesser degree by Bersenev and Shubin, and also by Kurnatovsky who, in early versions of the novel, had a much bigger role than the relatively minor role assigned to him in the published version.

Almost immediately after its publication in Russia, On the Eve was translated into French (by Pierre-Paul Douhaire) as La Veille, although Turgenev had a very low opinion of Douhaire's efforts. By 1886 two more French translations had appeared, as well as the first English translation (by Charles Turner, 1871) and translations into six other European languages.

As Turgenev makes clear in a letter of 1871, the title of the novel refers in the first instance to the Emancipation of the Serfs. Ever since the accession of Alexander II in 1855, it had become clear that some solution to the serf problem was needed, on both moral and economic grounds. However, Turgenev set his novel between summer 1853 and spring 1854—on the eve of the Crimean War, to which there are a number of references. The war was seen by the Slav peoples of south-east Europe as an opportunity to throw off the Ottoman yoke, and this, of course, is Insarov's primary concern in life. However, the events of 1853–54 did not turn out to be the hoped for “eve of liberation”. The Turks dealt harshly with an insurrection, and Bulgaria did not gain its independence until 1882. While Turgenev introduces the single Russian word which means “on the eve” (nakanune) several times in more mundane, less symbolic contexts, it is surely no accident that it is the concluding word of Chapter 10, in which Bersenev first introduces Yelena to Insarov.

The novel produced what Turgenev himself called an “epidemic” of critical reaction, most of it centred on Yelena. In 1860 alone there were at least fifteen reviews of the novel in ten different publications, with one weekly, Our Time, responsible for no less than four of them. The concern of
most critics was the propriety or otherwise of Yelena’s behaviour, an aspect of the novel which Turgenev refused point-blank to change. By far the most important of the critical responses was the article by the young radical critic of the *Contemporary*, Nikolai Dobrolyubov, entitled ‘When Will the Real Day Come?’ (a paraphrase of Shubin’s question to Uvar Ivanovich at the end of Chapter 30) and published in the *Contemporary* in 1860. Turgenev asked the editor, his old friend Nikolai Nekrasov, not to publish it, and when his request was declined he, like other liberals, broke with the *Contemporary*.

Dobrolyubov was not concerned with Yelena’s behaviour; rather he saw in her, rather than in Insarov, the main protagonist of the story. He devotes almost a quarter of his article to justifying this thesis and to analysing her character in sentences such as: “In her was manifested that obscure longing for something, that unconscious, yet irresistible demand for new life, for new people, which is now gripping the whole of Russian society... In Yelena we find a vivid reflection of the highest aspirations of contemporary life.”

It was not only in Russia that critics felt that Yelena, rather than Insarov, was the most interesting, not to say controversial character. In the French translation by Henri-Hippolyte Delaveau, published in Paris in 1863, under an umbrella title *Nouvelles scènes de la vie russe* (the volume includes *First Love*), Turgenev’s novel is given the title Éléna. Turgenev heartily approved of this translation. The first translation into German, published in 1871, bore the title *Helene*, with a literal translation of Turgenev’s title (*Am Vorabend*) in brackets. Such titles seem justified when one considers that Yelena appears in person, or is mentioned by name, in thirty-two of the novel’s thirty-five chapters.

All Turgenev’s major characters are drawn from life, but this is not to say that individual prototypes can be identified.
In all his novels his characters are composite characters, and this is particularly true of Yelena. Turgenev had many real-life examples, Russian and foreign, of self-sacrificing young women to choose from. These included the Decembrist wives who followed their husbands into Siberian exile in 1826 and did not return until 1856, or Garibaldi’s first wife, Ana Maria de Jesus Ribeiro, a Brazilian, who left friends and family and died in Italy fleeing from Austrian and French troops. Both in life and in his fiction, Turgenev was drawn to strong-willed, independent women. His first two novels provide classic variants of the type: Natalya Lasunskaya (Rudin) and Liza Kalitina (A Nest of the Gentry), and there are equally striking examples in his post-1860 novels. Turgenev was probably equally, if not more, influenced by fictional examples, both Russian and foreign, of the strong-willed woman: George Sand’s heroines and, from Russian literature, a number of such characters from the 1820s onwards, the most famous of which is Pushkin’s Tatyana, the heroine of Eugene Onegin. Turgenev was a great admirer of Pushkin and, only three years after the publication of On the Eve, completed, with Louis Viardot, a translation of Pushkin’s masterpiece into French.

Dobrolyubov’s emphasis on Yelena leaves open at least three obvious questions. Why is Insarov not the hero? Why are there no Russian Insaros? Are strong-willed people to be found among Russian women rather than Russian men? The very premise of the first question is rejected by some critics, for whom Insarov is the hero. They point to a neat linear development from Rudin to Fathers and Children and beyond in Turgenev’s search for the “new man” who would be a leader of society in the new, post-Emancipation Russia. He begins with two variants of the Romantic “superfluous man” (a term which he himself had popularized): Rudin and Lavretsky. Conscious that they were “men of the Forties”
rather than “men of the Sixties”, and that the radical critic Nikolai Chernyshevsky, in a famous article, ‘A Russian at the Rendezvous’ (1858), had excoriated the vacillating, ineffectual heroes of Asya and Rudin, Turgenev set about trying to portray a “new man”. He was, however, unable to detect the presence of any “new men” in the Russia of his day. In a letter of 1859, he said that the underlying idea of On the Eve was “the need for consciously heroic natures... so that the thing could move forward”. He found the germ of such a heroic nature in a document that fell into his hands almost fortuitously. In 1853 his neighbour, a young landowner called Vasily Alexandrovich Karateyev, who was leaving home to join Russian forces in the Crimea and feared he would be killed there, presented Turgenev with a small notebook and asked him to arrange for its publication. The notebook has not survived, and its contents can only partially be reconstructed from subsequent comments by Turgenev and others. It appears to have been a fictional tale, based on Karateyev’s own experiences. The story was badly written and ultimately unpublishable; only the episode at Tsaritsyno was sufficiently well written to be later incorporated into Turgenev’s novel as Chapter 15. Turgenev was, however, able to include the broad outlines of Karateyev’s notebook in his new novel: an affair between two Russians; the girl, a Muscovite, rejects the Russian in favour of a Bulgarian student; they leave for Bulgaria; the Bulgarian falls ill with tuberculosis and the pair go to Venice in a vain attempt to retrieve his health. The Bulgarian in the story was based on Nikolai Dimitrov Katranov (1829-53), a Russian-educated Bulgarian poet, translator of Byron and Goethe and revolutionary, who, like Insarov, died in Venice of tuberculosis. Karateyev himself did in fact survive the Crimean War, but died in 1859, before the publication of On the Eve. Writing in 1880, Turgenev recalled his reaction to reading Karateyev’s notebook: “That’s the hero I’ve been
looking for.” Having found the next best thing to a Russian “new man” – the Bulgarian Insarov – Turgenev, so the argument runs, went on to create a Russian “new man” in Bazarov, the hero of Fathers and Children.

Dobrolyubov himself addresses the second question and, in effect, repeats explicitly the question and answer that Turgenev puts into the mouth of Yelena in Chapter 16: “Why is he not a Russian? No, he couldn’t be a Russian.” Given the impossibility of proving a negative, the reader has to take such assertions on trust. Turgenev had not, of course, ever met Katranov: he knew him only from the clumsily written pages of Karateyev’s notebook. In the view of many, Turgenev’s attempt to flesh out Katranov/Insarov into a three-dimensional, believable, sympathetic character is not wholly successful. Dobrolyubov makes this point at some length, complaining that Insarov’s “inner world is inaccessible to us”, while his fellow radical Dmitry Pisarev wondered why Turgenev “wrote away to Bulgaria for the impossible and unnecessary Insarov”, adding that he could not “accept Insarov as a living being”. Turgenev’s portrayal of the other important Russian males in the novel – Bersenev, Shubin, Nikolai Artemyevich Stakhov and the enigmatic Uvar Ivanovich – is far more convincing. Indeed, so well is the character of the half-French, half-Russian sculptor Shubin drawn that Turgenev’s friend and translator William Ralston was moved to say: “Scarcely any other novelist has been able to produce a striking portrait by so few strokes”. Yelena, however, has no hesitation in rejecting her Russian suitors to elope with her Bulgarian. It is only the parting with her mother which causes her any grief.

Any assessment of the novel has to take account of several dominant themes: guilt, fate, art, nature, happiness and, especially, death. The latter theme comes to the fore in what is in effect the epilogue to the novel, the three final chapters – the Venice chapters – in which Insarov and Yelena attend a
performance of *La traviata*. Turgenev had attended the last performance of Angiolina Bosio – the Italian soprano famous for her portrayal of Violetta, who died in Moscow in 1859 at the age of twenty-nine – and been profoundly moved. What Richard Freeborn calls “the pessimistic futility of his vision of the world” is more marked in this novel than in any of Turgenev’s other works.

Whether the reader focuses on Insarov or Yelena, *On the Eve* is still likely to be read as primarily a love story. The nature of love – as pleasure or sacrifice – is an important element in the conversation between Bersenev and Shubin in the first chapter of the novel. All six of Turgenev’s novels, even the more satirical and politically engaged *Smoke* and *Virgin Soil*, as well as many of his shorter works, are basically love stories – although it is true that they all have satirical elements in them to a greater or lesser degree. Here, for instance, in the characters of the complacent high official Kurnatovsky and the ludicrously garrulous and ill-informed Lupoyarov, Turgenev indirectly laments the lack of Russian Insaros. Whereas for Dobrolyubov, “the real day will come” in the shape of a real-life personage, a revolutionary after his own heart, for Turgenev – although he subsequently revised his opinion – it was to come in the shape of Bazarov, the “ nihilist” (another word popularized by Turgenev) who dominates *Fathers and Children*. However, when, at the end of the novel, Uvar Ivanovich is asked to repeat his assertion in Chapter 30 that “there will be” real people produced in Russia, he declines to do so and merely wags his fingers again.

* * *

It is an unwise translator who fails to take account of the work of previous translators. The work of Constance Garnett (1895) and the more recent translations of Gilbert Gardiner (1950) and David McDuff (1999) have all played their part in
ON THE EVE

the preparation of this translation. So too did the late Felix Abramovich Litvin, who elucidated a number of linguistic problems which had escaped the notice of previous editors, and Christian Müller, who, on behalf of Alma Classics, edited the translation with his usual thoroughness and expertise.

– Michael Pursglove
On the Eve
On one of the hottest of summer days of 1853, on the bank of the Moscow River, not far from Kuntsevo, two young men lay on the grass in the shade of a tall lime tree. One, who looked about twenty-three years old, was tall and swarthy, had a sharp and somewhat bent nose, a high forehead and a suppressed smile on his wide lips. He was lying on his back and gazing thoughtfully into the distance, his small grey eyes half-closed. The other lay prone, supporting his head, with its mop of fair curls, on his hands, and also gazing into the distance. He was three years older than his companion, but seemed much younger; his moustache was barely visible and his chin was covered with wispy down. There was something childishly appealing, something attractively refined in the delicate features of his fresh, round face, in his soft brown eyes, handsome thick lips and small white hands. Everything about him exuded the joy and happiness of health, the youthfulness, insouciance, self-confidence, indulgence and charm of youth. He even rolled his eyes, smiled and propped up his head, as little boys do when they know they are the object of admiring looks. He was wearing a capacious white top, rather like a blouse; a blue kerchief was encircled round his thin neck and a battered straw hat was lying about in the grass beside him.

Compared with him, his companion seemed an old man, and no one, looking at his angular figure, would have thought that he was happy and enjoying himself. He was lying awkwardly; his large head, broad at its top and pointed at its base, sat awkwardly on his long neck; this awkwardness could be seen in the very position of his arms, of his body – which was tightly
wrapped in a short black coat – and of the raised knees of his long legs, which were like the back legs of a grasshopper. For all that, he could not fail to be acknowledged as an educated man; the stamp of “orderliness” lay on his whole clumsy being; his face, unlovely and even somewhat comical, was expressive of kindness and habitual thoughtfulness. His name was Andrei Petrovich Bersenev; the fair-haired young man was called Pavel Yakovlevich Shubin.

“Why don’t you lie on your front, like me?” Shubin began. “It’s much better that way. Especially when you lift your legs up and bang your heels together – like this. Grass under your nose; if you get fed up of looking at the landscape, look at some fat-bellied beetle crawling up a blade of grass or an ant scurrying about. It’s true – it’s much better. But you’ve adopted some sort of pseudo-classical pose, for all the world like a ballerina resting her elbows on a cardboard rock. Just remember that you’re now perfectly entitled to relax. Not everyone gets a third-class degree! Relax, sir; stop straining yourself. Stretch your limbs!”

Shubin delivered this speech through his nose, half lethargically, half jokingly (spoilt children speak like this to friends of the family who bring them sweets) and, without waiting for an answer, went on:

“What amazes me most of all in ants, beetles and other members of the insect race is their remarkable seriousness: they run back and forth with such serious physiognomies, as if their lives too mean something! You wouldn’t credit it, but Man, the king of creation, the highest of beings, looks at them, yet they’ve no time for him; then again, some gnat will settle on the nose of the king of creation and begin to feed off it. It’s an insult. But, on the other hand, how is their life any worse than ours? And why shouldn’t they put on airs if we allow ourselves to do likewise? Go on, then, Mr Philosopher, solve that problem for me! Why are you silent, eh?”
“What?” said Bersenev with a start.
“What!” Shubin echoed. “Your friend expounds deep thoughts to you and you’re not listening!”
“I was admiring the view. Look how those fields shimmer in the heat of the sun!” (Bersenev had a slight lisp.)
“That’s a fine palette,” said Shubin. “In short, nature.”
Bersenev shook his head.
“You ought to take delight in all this more than me. It’s your forte: you’re an artist.”
“No, sir, it’s not my forte,” Shubin retorted, pushing his hat to the back of his head. “I’m a meat man, sir; my business is meat, modelling meat: shoulders, arms, legs, but here there’s no form, no completeness; it’s here, there and everywhere, so go and catch it!”
“But there’s beauty there too,” remarked Bersenev. “Incidentally, have you finished your bas-relief?”
“Which one?”
“Child with Goat.”
“To hell with that! To hell with it!” intoned Shubin. “I’ve looked at present-day artists, at old-timers, at antique ones, and I’ve smashed my rubbish up. You direct my attention to nature and say: ‘There’s beauty there too.’ Of course, there’s beauty in everything – there’s even beauty in your nose – but you can’t pursue every type of beauty. Even the old-timers didn’t pursue it: it came down of its own accord into their creations – God knows where from. From heaven maybe. The whole world belonged to them; we mustn’t spread ourselves so thinly: our arms are too short. We cast our bait at one tiny spot and watch. If we get a bite – bravo! If we don’t…”
Shubin stuck out his tongue.
“Wait a minute, wait a minute,” Bersenev interposed. “That’s a paradox. If you won’t empathize with beauty, won’t love her wherever you encounter her, she will not yield herself up to you even in your art. If a superb view or superb music
does not speak to your soul, I mean to say, if you do not empathize—"

“Oh, you empathist,” said Shubin vehemently, bursting out laughing at the word he had coined; Bersenev, however, reacted pensively. “No, brother,” Shubin went on, “you’re clever, you’re a philosopher, you’ve a third from Moscow University; arguing with you is frightening, especially for me, a drop-out student; but this is what I will say to you: outside my art, I love beauty only in women… in girls, and that’s only a recent development…”

He turned over onto his back and placed his hands behind his head.

A few moments passed when neither man spoke. The silence of the midday heat weighed down on the gleaming, dormant earth.

“By the way, apropos of women,” Shubin began again. “Why doesn’t someone take Stakhov in hand? Have you seen him in Moscow?”

“No.”

“The old boy’s gone completely mad. He sits for days on end at his Avgustina Khristianovna’s place, gets bored stiff, but still sits there. They gaze at one another so stupidly… it’s repellent even to watch them. Can you imagine! What a family God has blessed the man with, but no, he wants Avgustina Khristianovna! I don’t know anything more repulsive than her duck-like features! Recently I made a caricature model of her in the Dantan* manner. It didn’t come out at all badly. I’ll show you it.”

“What about the bust of Yelena Nikolayevna? Is that coming along?”

“No, brother, it isn’t. That face could drive you to despair. When you look at it, you see clean lines, severe, regular lines; you’d think it wasn’t difficult to catch the likeness. But it didn’t happen… It escapes your grasp, like buried treasure. Have you
noticed how she listens to you? Not a muscle moves in her face, but the expression in her eyes changes constantly, and that makes her whole visage change. What can a sculptor – and a bad one at that – do? A remarkable being… a strange being,” he added after a short silence.

“Yes, she’s a remarkable girl,” echoed Bersenev.

“And a daughter of Nikolai Artemyevich Stakhov! Talk about blood and breeding after that. The funny thing is, she clearly is his daughter, looks just like him. Looks like her mother, Anna Vasilyevna, too. I respect Anna Vasilyevna with all my heart – she’s my benefactor, after all. But actually she’s a timorous creature. Where did Yelena get her spirited nature from? Who lit that fire? Here’s another problem for you, Mr Philosopher!”

But, as before, Mr Philosopher made no reply. In general Bersenev did not transgress into verbosity and, when he did speak, he expressed himself awkwardly, with hesitation and unnecessary arm-waving. On this occasion, however, a particular kind of stillness had descended on his soul, a stillness akin to weariness and sorrow. He had recently moved out of town after a long and difficult work stint which had occupied him for several hours a day. Inactivity, mild, pure air, consciousness of a goal achieved, whimsical, casual conversation with a friend, sudden evocation of a loved one – all these contrasting and, at the same time, somehow similar impressions coalesced in him into one general feeling which soothed, agitated and enervated him. He was a very highly strung young man.

Under the lime tree it was cool and peaceful; the flies and bees which flew into the circle of its shade seemed to buzz more quietly; the fine-leaved, clean, emerald-green grass did not sway, nor was it shot through with gold; its tall stalks stood motionless, as if spellbound. Apparently lifeless and spellbound, small clusters of yellow flowers hung from the lower branches of the tree. With every breath, a sweet fragrance infiltrated the very depths of the lungs and was willingly inhaled by
them. In the distance, beyond the river, as far as the horizon, everything blazed and shone. Occasionally a breeze would get up there, fragmenting and intensifying the glow. A luminous haze hovered over the earth. No birds could be heard – they do not sing in the heat of the day – but the grasshoppers were chirring everywhere and it was pleasant to sit in a cool, quiet place and listen to that warm, vital sound, inclining one to sleep and stimulating daydreams.

“Have you noticed,” Bersenev began suddenly, accompanying his words with gesticulations, “what a strange feeling Nature evokes in us? Everything about her is so complete, so clear – I mean to say, so self-satisfied – and we both understand and admire this; yet, at the same time she always evokes, in me at least, a certain uneasiness, a certain anxiety, sadness even. What does this mean? Is it that, in her presence, face to face with her, we are conscious of all our lack of completeness, our lack of clarity, or do we lack that sense of satisfaction with which she is satisfied, while we do have another sense, I mean to say, the sense we need, which she does not have?”

“H’m,” replied Shubin, “I’ll tell you, Andrei Petrovich, what all this springs from. You’ve described the feelings of an isolated individual, who is not alive, but merely observes, exhilarated. Why observe? Live, and you’ll feel the excitement. However much you knock at Nature’s door, she won’t respond intelligibly, because she’s mute. She will resound achingly, like a vibrating string, but don’t expect a song from her. A living soul – and predominantly a woman’s soul – will respond. And so, my noble friend, I advise you to furnish yourself with a soulmate, and all these mournful feelings of yours will disappear. This is what we ‘need’, as you put it. After all, this anxiety, this sadness, is simply a kind of hunger. Give the stomach real food and everything will immediately come right. Take your place as a celestial body, brother. But what is Nature? What is the purpose of Nature? Listen for yourself: love… what a warm,
 CHAPTER 1

powerful word! Nature... what a cold, schoolboy expression! And so” – Shubin began to sing – “Long live Marya Petrovna!” Or rather, not Marya Petrovna,” he added, “but what does it matter! Vous me comprenez.”

Bersenev sat up and clasped his hands under his chin.

“Why the sarcasm?” he said, not looking at his companion.

“Why the scoffing? Yes, you’re right: love is a great word, a great feeling... But what sort of love are you talking about?”

Shubin also sat up.

“What sort of love? Any sort you like, as long as it’s really there. I must confess that in my opinion there are no different kinds of love at all. If you’re in love—”

“With all your heart,” Bersenev interposed.

“Well, yes, that goes without saying. Your heart isn’t an apple – you can’t divide it up. If you’re in love, you’re right too. And I didn’t mean to scoff. My heart is so full of tenderness it has softened... I merely wanted to explain why you think Nature acts on us like this. It’s because she wakens in us a need for love and is not able to satisfy it. She quietly propels us into other living embraces, but we don’t understand her and expect something from her personally. Oh, Andrei, Andrei, how splendid this sun and this sky are; everything, absolutely everything around us is splendid; but you’re sad. However, if, at this moment, you were holding in your hand the hand of a woman you love, if this hand and this woman were wholly yours, if you even saw with her eyes, if you felt, not with your own solitary feelings, but with hers – it would not be sadness, Andrei, not anxiety that Nature aroused in you, and you would not begin to notice her beauty. She would rejoice and sing herself, would echo your hymn because you would have given mute Nature a voice!”

Shubin leapt to his feet and took a couple of paces up and down, while Bersenev lowered his head and coloured slightly.
“I don’t entirely agree with you,” he began. “Nature does not always give us intimations of... love.” (He hesitated before pronouncing the word.) “She also threatens us; she reminds us of dreadful and, yes, insoluble mysteries. Is it not she who must consume us? Does she not constantly consume us? In her are both life and death, and death speaks in her as loudly as life.”

“In love too there is life and death, “ Shubin interrupted.

“Then,” Bersenev went on, “when, for example, I’m standing in a green glade in the forest in the spring, when I imagine I hear the romantic sounds of Oberon’s horn”* – Bersenev was somewhat embarrassed when he said these words – “can that too be—”

“It’s the yearning for love, the yearning for happiness, nothing else!” Shubin rejoined. “I too know these sounds, I too know that tenderness and sense of expectancy which come over the soul in the shady heart of the forest, or in the evening in the open fields when the sun is setting and the mist rising over the river beyond the bushes. But from the forest, the river, the earth, the sky, from every little cloud, from every blade of grass, I want happiness, I expect happiness; I sense its approach and hear its call in everything. ‘My God – the God of light and happiness!’ I tried to begin a poem like that: it’s a splendid first line, but I couldn’t produce a second line at all. Happiness! Happiness! So long as life is not over, so long as we have control of our limbs, so long as we are going uphill and not down! Damn it,” Shubin went on in a sudden outburst, “we’re young, we’re not stupid and we’re not freaks: we’ll win happiness for ourselves!”

He shook his curls and looked up at the sky self-confidently, almost challengingly. Bersenev raised his eyes to him.

“Is it possible there’s nothing higher than happiness?” he said quietly.

“For example?” Shubin asked, then paused.

“Well, for example, you and I. As you say, we’re young, we’re fine fellows. Let’s assume each of us wants happiness
for himself... but is this word ‘happiness’ the sort of word to unite us, to enthuse us both, to compel us to join hands? Isn’t it an egotistical word? I mean, isn’t it a divisive word?”

“Do you know any words which unite people?”

“Yes, and there’s no shortage of them. You know them as well.”

“Really? What are these words?”


“And ‘love’?” Shubin asked.

“‘Love’ is also a word which unites; but not the love which you yearn for now: not love as pleasure but love as sacrifice.”* Shubin frowned.

“That’s all right for Germans, but I want to love for myself: I want to be Number One.”

“Number One,” Bersenev echoed. “But I think being Number Two is the whole purpose of our life.”

“If everyone acted as you recommend,” said Shubin with a plaintive grimace, “no one in the world would eat pineapples: everyone would offer them to other people.”

“That means no one needs pineapples – but don’t worry: there’ll always be people who like taking even the bread from other people’s mouths.”

The two friends fell silent.

“The other day I saw Insarov again,” Bersenev began. “I’ve invited him round; I definitely want to introduce him to you... and to Stakhov.”

“Who is this Insarov? Oh yes, is he that Serbian or Bulgarian fellow you were telling me about? That patriot? Is he the one who’s been putting all these philosophical notions in your head?”

“Maybe.”

“Is he an exceptional individual, then?”

“Yes.”
“Clever? Gifted?”
“Clever? Yes, he is. Gifted? I don’t know. I don’t think so.”
“He’s not? What’s so remarkable about him then?”
“You’ll see for yourself. But now I think it’s time for us to be going. I expect Anna Vasilyevna will be waiting for us. What’s the time?”
“Gone two. Let’s go. How muggy it is! This conversation has inflamed my blood. And there was a moment when you too… I’m not an artist for nothing: I don’t miss anything. Admit it, you’ve got a woman on your mind.”
Shubin tried to look Bersenev in the eye, but he turned away and came out from under the lime tree. Shubin set off after him, swaggering gracefully on his small feet. Bersenev moved awkwardly, raising his shoulders high as he walked and extending his neck. All the same, he seemed more refined than Shubin, more of a gentleman, it could be said, if that word had not become so debased.