

The woman was reading a book written in small Cyrillic letters. Her face was not that of usual young bourgeoisie women when reading, noticed the observant man. The young women of wealth always, when reading, gave only a fraction of their attention towards the novel, and the rest towards the consciousness of the aesthetic of being a *bright young woman*, and actively trying to enhance this aesthetic to all possible onlookers. This enigma of a woman, however, was fully engaged in the pages of the book, and the idea of her appearance was evidently completely on the peripheral of her thoughts. She rapturously turned the pages in an unmaidenly manner, and unattractively inclined her head low so as to get a good glimpse of the words on the page. It was as though they were speaking to her. Such was the woman's attachment to her reading that she suddenly shook her head, put a book mark of a cross-stitched purple tulip in the book, and, closing the novel, gave a soft chuckle as she put it in her purse. Her humor was a scholarly kind—someone who knew much about a certain topic.

It was as though she was not aware of her social standing, and the reverence accorded it, for she kept on looking out the window, then out at the hall, then at her pocket watch, in the way a child might have. Then she would look out the window and smile contently at seemingly nothing, with a look of wonderment in her eyes. Normally a person of her age and furthermore of her class would have her back consciously rigid and her head fixed in a certain position for hours on end, sacrificing function for the need to *look respectable*. But this strange apparition sitting opposite the man was thus almost regardless, and looked wistfully out the window without thinking that it came across as rather unrefined. But in that she was even more enchanting, for she was real, and she had a personality which went deep to the core. This woman was in other ways, though, oddly mature, as though she could have been one hundred years old. Such an individual with a flare of uniqueness was as a needle in a haystack among the lofty crowd of bourgeoisie, and this had absolutely transfixed the man sitting opposite her.