

CHAPTER XIV.

Nekhludoff called at his aunts because their manor lay on the road through which his regiment had preceded him, and also because they requested him to do so, but principally in order that he might see Katiousha. It may be that in the depth of his soul there was already a mischievous intention toward Katiousha, prompted by his now unbridled animal ego, but he was not aware of it, he merely desired to visit those places in which he lived so happily, and see his somewhat queer, but amiable and good-natured, aunts, who always surrounded the atmosphere around him with love and admiration, and also to see the lovely Katiousha, of whom he had such pleasant recollections.

He arrived toward the end of March, on Good Friday, in the season of bad roads, when the rain was falling in torrents, and was wet all through, and chilled to the marrow of his bones, but courageous and excited, as he always felt at that time of the year.

"I wonder if she is still there?" he thought, as he drove into the familiar court-yard of the old manor, which was covered with snow that fell from the roofs, and was surrounded by a low brick wall. He expected that the ringing of the bell would bring her running to meet him, but on the perron of the servants' quarters appeared two bare-footed women with tucked-up skirts, carrying buckets, who were apparently scrubbing floors. She was not on the front perron, either;

only Timon, the lackey, came forth in an apron, also apparently occupied with cleaning. Sophia Ivanovna came into the ante-chamber, attired in a silk dress and cap.

"How glad I am that you came!" said Sophia Ivanovna. "Masheuka[B] is somewhat ill. We were to church, receiving the sacrament. She is very tired."

"I congratulate you, Aunt Sonia,"[C] said Nekhludoff, kissing the hand of Sophia Ivanovna. "Pardon me, I have soiled you."

"Go to your room. You are wet all through. Oh, what a mustache! Katiousha! Katiousha! Bring him some coffee quickly."

"All right!" responded a familiar, pleasant voice. Nekhludoff's heart fluttered. "She is here!" To him it was like the sun rising from behind the clouds, and he cheerfully went with Timon to his old room to change his clothing.

Nekhludoff wished to ask Timon about Katiousha. Was she well? How did she fare? Was she not engaged to be married? But Timon was so respectful, and at the same time so rigid; he so strictly insisted on himself pouring the water from the pitcher over Nekhludoff's hands, that the latter could not decide to ask him about Katiousha, and only inquired about his grand-children, about the old stallion, about the watch-dog Polkan. They were all well, except Polkan, who had gone mad

the previous year.

After he had thrown off his wet clothes, and as he was about to dress himself, Nekhludoff heard quick steps and a rapping at the door. He recognized both the steps and the rapping. Only she walked and rapped thus.

It was Katiousha--the same Katiousha--only more lovely than before. The naive, smiling, somewhat squinting black eyes still looked up; she wore a clean white apron, as before. She brought a perfumed piece of soap, just taken from the wrapper, and two towels--one Russian and the other Turkish. The freshly unpacked soap, the towels and she herself, were all equally clean, fresh, pure and pleasant. The lovely, firm, red lips became creased from unrestrainable happiness at sight of him.

"How do you do, Dmitri Ivanovich?" she said, with difficulty, her face becoming flushed.

"How art--how are you?" He did not know whether to "thou" her or not, and became as red in the face as she was.[D] "Are you well?"

"Very well. Your aunt sent you your favorite soap, rose-scented," she said, placing the soap on the table, and the towels on the arms of the chair.

"The gentleman has his own," Timon stood up for the independence of

the guest, proudly pointing to the open traveling bag with silver lids, containing a large number of bottles, brushes, perfumes and all sorts of toilet articles.

"My thanks to auntie. But how glad I am that I came," said Nekhludoff, feeling the old brightness and emotions recurring to his soul.

In answer to this she only smiled and left the room.

The aunts, who always loved Nekhludoff, received him this time with greater joy than usual. Dmitri was going to active service, where he might be wounded or killed. This affected the aunts.

Nekhludoff had arranged his trip so that he might spend twenty-four hours with his aunts, but, seeing Katiousha, decided to remain over Easter Sunday, which was two days later, and wired to his friend and commander Shenbok, whom he was to meet at Odessa, to come to his aunts.

From the very first day Nekhludoff experienced the old feeling toward Katiousha. Again he could not see without agitation the white apron of Katiousha; he could not listen without joy to her steps, her voice, her laugh; he could not, without emotion, look into her black eyes, especially when she smiled; he could not, above all, see, without confusion, how she blushed when they met. He felt that he was in love, but not as formerly, when this love was to him a mystery, and he had

not the courage to confess it to himself; when he was convinced that one can love only once. Now he loved knowingly, rejoiced at it, and confusedly knowing, though he concealed it from himself, what it consisted of, and what might come of it.

In Nekhludoff, as in all people, there were two beings; one spiritual, who sought only such happiness for himself as also benefited others; and the animal being, seeking his own happiness for the sake of which he is willing to sacrifice that of the world. During this period of his insane egotism, called forth by the life in the army and in St. Petersburg, the animal man dominated him and completely suppressed the spiritual man. But, seeing Katiousha, and being again imbued with the feelings he formerly experienced toward her, the spiritual man raised his head and began to assert his rights. And during the two days preceding Easter an incessant struggle was going on within Nekhludoff of which he was quite unconscious.

In the depth of his soul he knew that he had to depart; that his stay at his aunts was unnecessary, that nothing good could come of it, but it was so joyous and pleasant that he did not heed it, and remained.

On the eve of Easter Sunday, the priest and deacon who, as they afterward related, with difficulty covered the three miles from the church to the aunts' manor, arrived on a sleigh to perform the morning services.

Nekhludoff, with his aunts and the servants, went through the motions, without ceasing to look on Katiousha, who brought a censer and was standing at the door; then, in the customary fashion, kissed the priest and the aunts, and was about to retire to his room when he heard Matriena Pavlovna, the old servant of Maria Ivanovna, making preparations with Katiousha to go to church and witness the consecration of the paschal bread. "I will go there, too," he thought.

There was no wagon or sleigh road to the church, so Nekhludoff gave command, as he would in his own house, to have a horse saddled, and, instead of going to bed, donned a brilliant uniform and tight knee-breeches, threw on his military coat, and, mounting the snorting and constantly neighing, heavy stallion, he drove off to the church in the dark, over pools and snow mounds.

FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote B: Diminutive of Maria.]

[Footnote C: Diminutive of Sophia.]

[Footnote D: The Russian thou cannot be rendered into English with any degree of accuracy. The greeting to which the impulsive Nekhludoff was about to give expression is that used toward a beloved person.]