

CHAPTER XVII.

Thus the entire evening passed, and when night came the doctor went to bed. The aunts were also preparing to retire. Nekhludoff knew that Matriena Pavlovna was in the aunts' dormitory, and that Katiousha was in the servants' quarters--alone. He again went out on the perron. It was dark, damp and warm, and that white mist which in the spring thaws the last snow, filled the air. Strange noises came from the river, which was a hundred feet from the house. It was the breaking up of the ice.

Nekhludoff came down from the perron, and stepping over pools and the thin ice-covering formed on the snow, walked toward the window of the servants' quarters. His heart beat so violently that he could hear it; his breathing at times stopped, at others it escaped in a heavy sigh. A small lamp was burning in the maid-servants' room.

Katiousha was sitting at the table alone, musing and looking at the wall before her. Without moving Nekhludoff for some time stood gazing at her, wishing to know what she would do while thinking herself unobserved. For about two minutes she sat motionless, then raised her eyes, smiled, reproachfully shook her head, at herself apparently, and, changing her position, with a start placed both hands on the table and fixed her eyes before her.

He remained looking at her, and involuntarily listened to the beating of his heart and the strange sounds coming from the river. There, on the misty river some incessant, slow work was going on. Now something snuffled, then it crackled, and again the thin layer of ice resounded like a mass of crushed glass.

He stood looking at the thoughtful face of Katiousha, tormented by an internal struggle, and he pitied her. But, strange to say, this pity only increased his longing for her.

He rapped at the window. She trembled from head to foot, as if an electric current had passed through her, and terror was reflected on her face. Then she sprang up, and, going to the window, placed her face against the window-pane. The expression of terror did not leave her even when, shading her eyes with the palms of her hands, she recognized him. Her face was unusually grave--he had never seen such an expression on it. When he smiled she smiled also--she smiled as if only in submission to him, but in her soul, instead of a smile, there was terror. He motioned her with his hand to come out. But she shook her head and remained at the window. Again he leaned toward the window and was about to speak when she turned toward the door. Some one had apparently called her. Nekhludoff moved away from the window. The fog was so dense that when five feet away he saw only a darkening mass from which a red, seemingly large, light of the lamp was reflected. From the river came the same strange sounds of snuffling, crackling and grinding of the ice. In the court-yard a cock crowed, others near

by responded; then from the village, first singly, interrupting each other, then mingling into one chorus, was heard the crowing of all the cocks. Except for the noise of the river, it was perfectly quiet all around.

After walking twice around the corner of the house, and stepping several times into mud-pools, Nekhludoff returned to the window of the maid-servants' quarters. The lamp was still burning, and Katiousha sat alone at the table as if in indecision. As soon as he came near the window she looked at him. He rapped. Without stopping to see who had rapped, she immediately ran from the room, and he heard the opening and closing of the door. He was already waiting for her in the passage, and immediately silently embraced her. She pressed against his bosom, lifted her head, and with her lips met his kiss.

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When Nekhludoff returned to his room it was getting brighter. Below, the noises on the river increased, and a buzzing was added to the other sounds. The mist began to settle, and from behind the wall of mist the waning moon appeared, gloomily, lighting up something dark and terrible.

"Is it good fortune or a great misfortune that has happened to me?" he asked himself. "It is always thus; they all act in that way," and he returned to his room.