

## Chapter XII

Vanyusha, who meanwhile had finished his housekeeping arrangements and had even been shaved by the company's barber and had pulled his trousers out of his high boots as a sign that the company was stationed in comfortable quarters, was in excellent spirits. He looked attentively but not benevolently at Eroshka, as at a wild beast he had never seen before, shook his head at the floor which the old man had dirtied and, having taken two bottles from under a bench, went to the landlady.

'Good evening, kind people,' he said, having made up his mind to be very gentle. 'My master has sent me to get some chikhir. Will you draw some for me, good folk?'

The old woman gave no answer. The girl, who was arranging the kerchief on her head before a little Tartar mirror, looked round at Vanyusha in silence.

'I'll pay money for it, honoured people,' said Vanyusha, jingling the coppers in his pocket. 'Be kind to us and we, too will be kind to you,' he added.

'How much?' asked the old woman abruptly. 'A quart.'

'Go, my own, draw some for them,' said Granny Ulitka to her daughter.

'Take it from the cask that's begun, my precious.'

The girl took the keys and a decanter and went out of the hut with Vanyusha.

'Tell me, who is that young woman?' asked Olenin, pointing to Maryanka, who was passing the window. The old man winked and nudged the young man with his elbow.

'Wait a bit,' said he and reached out of the window. 'Khm,' he coughed, and bellowed, 'Maryanka dear. Hallo, Maryanka, my girlie, won't you love me, darling? I'm a wag,' he added in a whisper to Olenin. The girl, not turning her head and swinging her arms regularly and vigorously, passed the window with the peculiarly smart and bold gait of a Cossack woman and only turned her dark shaded eyes slowly towards the old man.

'Love me and you'll be happy,' shouted Eroshka, winking, and he looked questioningly at the cadet.

'I'm a fine fellow, I'm a wag!' he added. 'She's a regular queen, that girl. Eh?'

'She is lovely,' said Olenin. 'Call her here!'

'No, no,' said the old man. 'For that one a match is being arranged with Lukashka, Luke, a fine Cossack, a brave, who killed an abrek the other day. I'll find you a better one. I'll find you one that will be all dressed up in silk and silver. Once I've said it I'll do it. I'll get you a regular beauty!'

'You, an old man--and say such things,' replied Olenin. 'Why, it's a sin!'

'A sin? Where's the sin?' said the old man emphatically. 'A sin to look at a nice girl? A sin to have some fun with her? Or is it a sin to love her? Is that so in your parts? ... No, my dear fellow, it's not a sin, it's salvation! God made you and God made the girl too. He made it all; so it is no sin to look at a nice girl. That's what she was made for; to be loved and to give joy. That's how I judge it, my good fellow.'

Having crossed the yard and entered a cool dark storeroom filled with barrels, Maryanka went up to one of them and repeating the usual prayer plunged a dipper into it. Vanyusha standing in the doorway smiled as he looked at her. He thought it very funny that she had only a smock on, close-fitting behind and tucked up in front, and still funnier that she wore a necklace of silver coins. He thought this quite un-Russian and that they would all laugh in the serfs' quarters at home if they saw a girl like that. 'La fille comme c'est tres bien, for a change,' he thought. 'I'll tell that to my master.'

'What are you standing in the light for, you devil!' the girl suddenly shouted. 'Why don't you pass me the decanter!'

Having filled the decanter with cool red wine, Maryanka handed it to Vanyusha.

'Give the money to Mother,' she said, pushing away the hand in which he held the money.

Vanyusha laughed.

'Why are you so cross, little dear?' he said good-naturedly, irresolutely shuffling with his feet while the girl was covering the barrel.

She began to laugh.

'And you! Are you kind?'

'We, my master and I, are very kind,' Vanyusha answered decidedly. 'We are so kind that wherever we have stayed our hosts were always very grateful. It's because he's generous.'

The girl stood listening.

'And is your master married?' she asked.

'No. The master is young and unmarried, because noble gentlemen can never marry young,' said Vanyusha didactically.

'A likely thing! See what a fed-up buffalo he is--and too young to marry! Is he the chief of you all?' she asked.

'My master is a cadet; that means he's not yet an officer, but he's more important than a general--he's an important man! Because not only our colonel, but the Tsar himself, knows him,' proudly explained Vanyusha. 'We are not like those other beggars in the line regiment, and our papa himself was a Senator. He had more than a thousand serfs, all his own, and they send us a thousand rubles at a time. That's why everyone likes us. Another may be a captain but have no money. What's the use of that?'

'Go away. I'll lock up,' said the girl, interrupting him.

Vanyusha brought Olenin the wine and announced that 'La fille c'est tres joulie,' and, laughing stupidly, at once went out.