

## Chapter XXXIX

It was already late in the night when Olenin came out of Beletski's hut following Maryanka and Ustenka. He saw in the dark street before him the gleam of the girl's white kerchief. The golden moon was descending towards the steppe. A silvery mist hung over the village. All was still; there were no lights anywhere and one heard only the receding footsteps of the young women. Olenin's heart beat fast. The fresh moist atmosphere cooled his burning face. He glanced at the sky and turned to look at the hut he had just come out of: the candle was already out. Then he again peered through the darkness at the girls' retreating shadows. The white kerchief disappeared in the mist. He was afraid to remain alone, he was so happy. He jumped down from the porch and ran after the girls.

'Bother you, someone may see...' said Ustenka.

'Never mind!'

Olenin ran up to Maryanka and embraced her.

Maryanka did not resist.

'Haven't you kissed enough yet?' said Ustenka. 'Marry and then kiss, but now you'd better wait.'

'Good-night, Maryanka. To-morrow I will come to see your father and tell him. Don't you say anything.'

'Why should I!' answered Maryanka.

Both the girls started running. Olenin went on by himself thinking over all that had happened. He had spent the whole evening alone with her in a corner by the oven. Ustenka had not left the hut for a single moment, but had romped about with the other girls and with Beletski all the time. Olenin had talked in whispers to Maryanka.

'Will you marry me?' he had asked.

'You'd deceive me and not have me,' she replied cheerfully and calmly.

'But do you love me? Tell me for God's sake!'

'Why shouldn't I love you? You don't squint,' answered Maryanka, laughing and with her hard hands squeezing his....

'What whi-ite, whi-i-ite, soft hands you've got--so like clotted cream,' she said.

'I am in earnest. Tell me, will you marry me?'

'Why not, if father gives me to you?'

'Well then remember, I shall go mad if you deceive me. To-morrow I will tell your mother and father. I shall come and propose.'

Maryanka suddenly burst out laughing.

'What's the matter?'

'It seems so funny!'

'It's true! I will buy a vineyard and a house and will enroll myself as a Cossack.'

'Mind you don't go after other women then. I am severe about that.'

Olenin joyfully repeated all these words to himself. The memory of them now gave him pain and now such joy that it took away his breath. The pain was because she had remained as calm as usual while talking to him. She did not seem at all agitated by these new conditions. It was as if she did not trust him and did not think of the future. It seemed to him that she only loved him for the present moment, and that in her mind there was no future with him. He was happy because her words sounded to him true, and she had consented to be his. 'Yes,' thought he to himself, 'we shall only understand one another when she is quite mine. For such love there are no words. It needs life--the whole of

life. To-morrow everything will be cleared up. I cannot live like this any longer; to-morrow I will tell everything to her father, to Beletski, and to the whole village.'

Lukashka, after two sleepless nights, had drunk so much at the fete that for the first time in his life his feet would not carry him, and he slept in Yamka's house.