

CHAPTER XXVI.

"Walk in, Your Excellency, you are expected," said the fat porter, pushing open the swinging, oaken door of the entrance. "They are dining, but I was told to admit you."

The porter walked to the stairway and rang the bell.

"Are there any guests?" Nekhludoff asked, while taking off his coat.

"Mr. Kolossoff, also Michael Sergeievich, besides the family," answered the porter.

A fine-looking lackey in dress coat and white gloves looked down from the top of the stairs.

"Please to walk in, Your Excellency," he said.

Nekhludoff mounted the stairs, and through the spacious and magnificent parlor he entered the dining-room. Around the table were seated the entire family, except Princess Sophia Vasilievna, who never left her own apartments. At the head of the table sat old Korchagin, on his left the physician; on his right, a visitor, Ivan Ivanovich Kolossoff, an ex-district commander, and now a bank manager, who was a friend of the family, and of liberal tendencies; further to the left

was Miss Rader, governess to Missy's four-year-old sister, with the little girl herself; then to the right, Missy's only brother, Peter, a high-school pupil, on account of whose forthcoming examinations the entire family remained in the city, and his tutor, also a student; then again to the left, Katherine Alexeievna, a forty-year-old girl Slavophile; opposite to her was Michael Sergeievich, or Misha Telegin, Missy's cousin, and at the foot of the table, Missy herself, and beside her, on the table, lay an extra cover.

"Ah, very glad you came! Take a seat! We are still at the fish," chewing carefully with his false teeth old Korchagin said, lifting his bloodshot eyes on Nekhludoff. "Stepan!" he turned with a full mouth to the fat, majestic servant, pointing with his eyes to Nekhludoff's plate. Although Nekhludoff had often dined with and knew Korchagin well, this evening his old face, his sensual, smacking lips, the napkin stuck under his vest, the fat neck, and especially the well-fed, military figure made an unpleasant impression on him.

"It is all ready, Your Excellency," said Stepan, taking a soup ladle from the sideboard and nodding to the fine-looking servant with the side-whiskers, who immediately began to set the table beside Missy.

Nekhludoff went around the table shaking hands with every one. All, except Korchagin and the ladies, rose from their seats when he approached them. And this walking around the table and his handshaking, although most of the people were comparative strangers to

him, this evening seemed to Nekhludoff particularly unpleasant and ridiculous. He excused himself for his late coming, and was about to seat himself at the end of the table between Missy and Katherine Alexeievna, when old Korchagin demanded that, since he would not take any brandy, he should first take a bite at the table, on which were lobster, caviare, cheese and herring. Nekhludoff did not know he was as hungry as he turned out to be, and when he tasted of some cheese and bread he could not stop eating, and ate ravenously.

"Well? Have you been undermining the bases of society?" asked Kolossoff, ironically, using an expression of a retrogressive newspaper, which was attacking the jury system. "You have acquitted the guilty and condemned the innocent? Have you?"

"Undermining the bases--undermining the bases"--smilingly repeated the Prince, who had boundless confidence in the intelligence and honesty of his liberal comrade and friend.

Nekhludoff, at the risk of being impolite, did not answer Kolossoff, and, seating himself before the steaming soup, continued to eat.

"Do let him eat," said Missy, smiling. By the pronoun "him," she meant to call attention to her intimacy with Nekhludoff.

Meanwhile Kolossoff was energetically and loudly discussing the article against trial by jury which had roused his indignation. Michael

Sergeievich supported his contentions and quoted the contents of another similar article.

Missy, as usual, was very *_distingue_* and unobtrusively well dressed. She waited until Nekhludoff had swallowed the mouthful he was chewing, and then said: "You must be very tired and hungry."

"Not particularly. Are you? Have you been to the exhibition?" he asked.

"No, we postponed it. But we went to play lawn tennis at the Salamatoff's. Mister Crooks is really a remarkable player."

Nekhludoff had come here for recreation, and it was always pleasant to him to be in this house, not only because of the elegant luxury, which acted pleasantly on his senses, but because of the adulating kindnesses with which they invisibly surrounded him. To-day, however--it is wonderful to relate--everything in this house disgusted him; the porter, the broad stairway, the flowers, the lackeys, the table decorations, and even Missy herself, who, just now, seemed to him unattractive and unnatural. He was disgusted with that self-confident, vulgar, liberal tone of Kolosoff, the bull-like, sensual, figure of old Korchagin, the French phrases of the Slavophile maiden, the ceremonious faces of the governess and the tutor. But above all, he was disgusted with the pronoun "him" that Missy had used. Nekhludoff was always wavering between two different relations

he sustained toward Missy. Sometimes he looked at her as through blinking eyes or by moonlight, and then she seemed to him beautiful, fresh, pretty, clever and natural. At other times he looked at her as if under a bright sun, and then he saw only her defects. To-day was such a day. He saw the wrinkles on her face; saw the artificial arrangement of her hair; the pointed elbows, and, above all, her large thumb nail, resembling that of her father.

"It is the dullest game," Kolossoff said, speaking of tennis, "baseball, as we played it when we were boys, is much more amusing."

"You have not tried it. It is awfully interesting," retorted Missy, unnaturally accentuating the word "awfully," as it seemed to Nekhludoff.

A discussion arose in which Michael Sergeievich and Katherine Alexeievna took part. Only the governess, the tutor and the children were silent, evidently from ennui.

"They are eternally disputing!" laughing aloud, said old Korchagin. He pulled the napkin from his vest, and, noisily pushing back his chair, which was immediately removed by a servant, rose from the table. They all rose after him and went to a small table, on which stood figured bowls filled with perfumed water; then they washed their finger-tips and rinsed their mouths, and continued their conversation, in which no one took any interest.

"Is it not true?" Missy said to Nekhludoff, desiring to receive confirmation of her opinion that man's character can best be learned in play. She noticed on his thoughtful face an expression of reproach, which inspired her with fear, and she wished to know the cause of it.

"I really don't know. I never thought of it," answered Nekhludoff.

"Will you go to mamma?" asked Missy.

"Yes, yes," he said, producing a cigarette. The tone of his voice plainly betrayed that he did not wish to go.

She looked at him inquiringly, but was silent. He felt ashamed. "It is hardly proper for me to come here to put people out of temper," he thought, and, in an effort to be pleasant, he said that he would go with pleasure if the Princess were in a mood to receive him.

"Yes, yes; mamma will be glad. You can smoke there also. And Ivan Ivanovich is with her."

The mistress of the house, Sophia Vasilievna, was an invalid. For eight years she had reclined in laces and ribbons, amid velvet, gilding, ivory, bronzes and flowers. She never drove out, and received only her "friends," i. e., whoever, according to her view, in any way distinguished himself from the crowd. Nekhludoff was one of these

friends, not only because he was considered a clever young man, but also because his mother was a close friend of the family and he was a desirable match for Missy.

Her room was beyond the small and large drawing-rooms. In the large drawing-room Missy, who preceded Nekhludoff, suddenly stopped, and placing her hands on the back of a gilt chair, looked at him.

Missy was very anxious to be married, and Nekhludoff was a desirable party. Besides, she liked him, and had become accustomed to the thought that he would belong to her, and not she to him, and, with the unconscious but persistent craftiness of heart-sick persons, she gained her end. She addressed him now with the intention of bringing forth an explanation.

"I see that something has happened to you," she said. "What is the matter with you?"

The meeting in the court came to his mind, and he frowned and blushed.

"Yes, something has happened," he said, desiring to be truthful. "It was a strange, extraordinary and important event."

"What was it? Can't you tell me?"

"Not now. Don't press me for an answer. I have not had the time to

think over the matter," he said, blushing still more.

"And you will not tell me?" The muscles on her cheek quivered, and she pushed away the chair.

"No, I cannot," he answered, feeling that answering her thus he answered himself--admitted to himself that something very important had really happened to him.

"Well, then, come!"

She shook her head as if desiring to drive away undesirable thoughts, and walked forward with a quicker step than usual.

It seemed to him that she unnaturally compressed her lips in order to suppress her tears. It was painful to him to grieve her, but he knew that the slightest weakness would ruin him, i. e., bind him. And this he feared more than anything else to-day, so he silently followed her to the door of the Princess' apartments.