

CHAPTER XLVII.

"So, that is how it is!" thought Nekhludoff as he made his way out of the prison, and he only now realized the extent of his guilt. Had he not attempted to efface and atone for his conduct, he should never have felt all the infamy of it, nor she all the wrong perpetrated against her. Only now it all came out in all its horror. He now for the first time perceived how her soul had been debased, and she finally understood it. At first Nekhludoff had played with his feelings and delighted in his own contrition; now he was simply horrified. He now felt that to abandon her was impossible. And yet he could not see the result of these relations.

At the prison gate some one handed Nekhludoff a note. He read it when on the street. The note was written in a bold hand, with pencil, and contained the following:

"Having learned that you are visiting the prison I thought it would be well to see you. You can see me by asking the authorities for an interview with me. I will tell you something very important to your protege as well as to the politicals. Thankfully, Vera Bogodukhovskaia"

"Bogodukhovskaia! Who is Bogodukhovskaia?" thought Nekhludoff, entirely absorbed in the impression of his meeting with Maslova, and

failing at the first moment to recall either the name or the handwriting. "Oh, yes!" he suddenly recalled. "The deacon's daughter at the bear-hunt."

Vera Bogodukhovskaia was a teacher in the obscure district of Novgorod, whither Nekhludoff, on one occasion, went bear hunting with his friends. This teacher had asked Nekhludoff to give her some money to enable her to study. He gave it to her, and the incident dropped from his memory. And now it seemed that this lady was a political prisoner, had probably learned his history in prison, and was now offering her services. At that time everything was easy and simple; now everything was difficult and complex. Nekhludoff readily and joyfully recalled that time and his acquaintance with Bogodukhovskaia. It was on the eve of Shrovetide, in the wilds about sixty versts from the railroad. The hunt was successful; two bears were bagged, and they were dining before their journey home, when the woodsman, in whose hut they were stopping, came to tell them that the deacon's daughter had come and wished to see Prince Nekhludoff.

"Is she good looking?" some one asked.

"Come, come!" said Nekhludoff, rising, and wondering why the deacon's daughter should want him, assumed a grave expression and went to the woodsman's hut.

In the hut there was a girl in a felt hat and short fur coat, sinewy,

and with an ugly and unpleasant face, relieved, however, by her pleasant eyes and raised eyebrows.

"This is the Prince, Vera Efremovna," said the old hostess. "I will leave you."

"What can I do for you?" asked Nekhludoff.

"I--I--You see, you are rich and throw away your money on trifles, on a chase. I know," began the girl, becoming confused, "but I wish but one thing; I wish to be useful to people, and can do nothing because I know nothing."

"What, then, can I do for you?"

"I am a teacher, and would like to enter college, but they don't let me. It is not exactly that they don't let me, but we have no means. Let me have some money; when I am through with my studies I shall return it to you."

Her eyes were truthful and kindly, and the expression of resolution and timidity on her face was so touching that Nekhludoff, as it was usual with him, suddenly mentally placed himself in her position, understood and pitied her.

"I think it is wrong for rich people to kill bears and get the

peasants drunk. Why don't they make themselves useful? I only need eighty rubles. Oh, if you don't wish to, it is all the same to me," she said, angrily, interpreting the grave expression on Nekhludoff's face to her disadvantage.

"On the contrary, I am very thankful to you for the opportunity----"

When she understood that he consented her face turned a purple color and she became silent.

"I will fetch it immediately," said Nekhludoff.

He went into the entrance hall where he found an eavesdropping friend. Without taking notice of his comrade's jests, he took the money from his hand-bag and brought it to her.

"Please don't be thanking me. It is I who ought to be thankful to you."

It was pleasant to Nekhludoff to recall all that; it was pleasant to recall how he came near quarreling with the army officer who attempted to make a bad joke of it; how another comrade sided with him, which drew them more closely together; how merry and successful was the hunt, and how happy he felt that night returning to the railroad station. A long file of sleighs moved noiselessly in pairs at a gentle trot along the narrow fir-lined path of the forests, which were

covered with a heavy layer of snowflakes. Some one struck a red light in the dark, and the pleasant aroma of a good cigarette was wafted toward him. Osip, the sleigh-tender, ran from sleigh to sleigh, knee-deep in snow, telling of the elks that were roaming in the deep snow, nibbling the bark of aspen trees, and of the bears emitting their warm breath through the airholes of their wild haunts.

Nekhludoff remembered all that, and above all the happy consciousness of his own health, strength and freedom from care. His lungs, straining his tight-fitting fur coat, inhaled the frosty air; the trees, grazed by the shaft, sent showers of white flakes into his face; his body was warm, his face ruddy; his soul was without a care or blemish, or fear or desire. How happy he was! But now? My God! How painful and unbearable it all was!