

CHAPTER LIV.

Their conversation was interrupted by the inspector, who announced that it was time to depart. Nekhludoff rose, took leave of Vera Efremovna, and strode to the door, where he stopped to observe what was taking place before him.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the time is up," said the inspector as he was going out. But neither visitors nor prisoners stirred.

The inspector's demand only called forth greater animation, but no one thought of departing. Some got up and talked standing; some continued to talk sitting; others began to cry and take leave. The young man continued to crumple the bit of paper, and he made such a good effort to remain calm that his face seemed to bear an angry expression. His mother, hearing that the visit was over, fell on his shoulder and began to sob. The girl with the sheep eyes--Nekhludoff involuntarily followed her movements--stood before the sobbing mother, pouring words of consolation into her ear. The old man with the blue eye-glasses held his daughter by the hand and nodded affirmatively to her words. The young lovers rose, holding each other's hands and silently looking into each other's eyes.

"Those are the only happy people here," said the young man in the rubber jacket who stood near Nekhludoff, pointing to the young lovers.

Seeing the glances of Nekhludoff and the young man, the lovers--the convict and the flaxen-haired girl--stretched their clasping hands, threw back their heads, and began to dance in a circle.

"They will be married this evening in the prison, and she will go with him to Siberia," said the young man.

"Who is he, then?"

"He is a penal convict. Although they are making merry, it is very painful to listen," added the young man, listening to the sobbing of the old man with the blue eye-glasses.

"Please, please don't compel me to take severe measures," said the inspector, several times repeating the same thing. "Please, please," he said, weakly and irresolutely. "Well, now, this cannot go on. Please, now come. For the last time I repeat it," he said, in a sad voice, seating himself and rising again; lighting and then extinguishing his cigarette.

Finally the prisoners and visitors began to depart--the former passing through the inner, the latter through the outer, door. First the man in the rubber coat passed out; then the consumptive and the dark-featured convict; next Vera Efremovna and Maria Pavlovna, and the

boy who was born in the prison.

The visitors also filed out. The old man with the blue eye-glasses started with a heavy gait, and after him came Nekhludoff.

"What a peculiar state of things!" said the talkative young man to Nekhludoff on the stairs, as though continuing the interrupted conversation. "It is fortunate that the captain is a kind-hearted man, and does not enforce the rules. But for him it would be tantalizing. As it is, they talk together and relieve their feelings."

When Nekhludoff, talking to this man, who gave his name as Medyntzev, reached the entrance-hall, the inspector, with weary countenance, approached him.

"So, if you wish to see Maslova, then please call to-morrow," he said, evidently desiring to be pleasant.

"Very well," said Nekhludoff, and hastened away. As on the former occasion, besides pity he was seized with a feeling of doubt and a sort of moral nausea.

"What is all that for?" he asked himself, but found no answer.