

CHAPTER II.

The history of the prisoner Maslova was a very common one. Maslova was the daughter of an unmarried menial who lived with her mother, a cowherd, on the estate of two spinsters. This unmarried woman gave birth to a child every year, and, as is the custom in the villages, baptized them; then neglected the troublesome newcomers, and they finally starved to death.

Thus five children died. Every one of these was baptized, then it starved and finally died. The sixth child, begotten of a passing gypsy, was a girl, who would have shared the same fate, but it happened that one of the two old maidens entered the cow-shed to reprimand the milkmaids for carelessness in skimming the cream, and there saw the mother with the healthy and beautiful child. The old maiden chided them for the cream and for permitting the woman to lie in the cow-shed, and was on the point of departing, but noticing the child, was moved to pity, and afterward consented to stand godmother to the child. She baptized the child, and in pity for her god-daughter, furnished her with milk, gave the mother some money, and the babe thrived. Wherefore the old maidens called it "the saved one."

The child was three years old when the mother fell ill and died. She was a great burden to her grandmother, so the old maidens adopted her.

The dark-eyed girl became unusually lively and pretty, and her presence cheered them.

Of the two old maidens, the younger one--Sophia Ivanovna--was the kindlier, while the older one--Maria Ivanovna--was of austere disposition. Sophia Ivanovna kept the girl in decent clothes, taught her to read and intended to give her an education. Maria Ivanovna said that the girl ought to be taught to work that she might become a useful servant, was exacting, punished, and even beat her when in bad humor. Under such conditions the girl grew up half servant, half lady. Her position was reflected even in her name, for she was not called by the gentle Katinka, nor yet by the disdainful Katka, but Katiousha, which stands sentimentally between the two. She sewed, cleaned the rooms, cleaned the ikons with chalk, ground, cooked and served coffee, washed, and sometimes she read for the ladies.

She was wooed, but would marry no one, feeling that life with any one of her wooers would be hard, spoiled, as she was, more or less, by the comparative ease she enjoyed in the manor.

She had just passed her sixteenth year when the ladies were visited by their nephew, a rich student, and Katiousha, without daring to confess it to him, or even to herself, fell in love with him. Two years afterward, while on his way to the war, he again visited his aunts, and during his four days' stay, consummated her ruin. Before his departure he thrust a hundred ruble bill into her hand.

Thenceforward life ceased to have any charms for her, and her only thought was to escape the shame which awaited her, and not only did she become lax in her duties, but--and she did not know herself how it happened--all of a sudden she gave vent to her ill temper. She said some rude things to the ladies, of which she afterward repented, and left them.

Dissatisfied with her behavior, they did not detain her. She then obtained employment as servant in the house of the commissary of rural police, but was obliged to give up the position at the end of the third month, for the commissary, a fifty-year old man, pursued her with his attentions, and when, on one occasion, he became too persistent, she flared up, called him an old fool, and threw him to the ground. Then she was driven from the house. She was now so far advanced on the road to maternity that to look for a position was out of the question. Hence she took lodgings with an old midwife, who was also a wine dealer. The confinement came off painlessly. But the midwife was attending a sick woman in the village, infected Katiousha with puerperal fever, and the child, a boy, was taken to a foundling asylum where, she was told, he died immediately after his arrival there.

When Katiousha took lodgings with the midwife she had 127 rubles; 27 rubles of which she had earned, and 100 rubles which had been given her by her seducer. When she left her she had but six rubles left. She

was not economical, and spent on herself as well as others. She paid 40 rubles to the midwife for two months' board; 25 rubles it cost her to have the child taken away; 40 rubles the midwife borrowed of her to buy a cow with; the balance was spent on dresses, presents, etc., so that after the confinement she was practically penniless, and was compelled to look for a position. She was soon installed in the house of a forester who was married, and who, like the commissary, began to pay court to her. His wife became aware of it, and when, on one occasion, she found them both in the room, she fell on Katiousha and began to beat her. The latter resented it, and the result was a scrimmage, after which she was driven out of the house, without being paid the wages due her. Katiousha went to the city, where she stopped with her aunt. Her aunt's husband was a bookbinder. Formerly he used to earn a competence, but had lost his customers, and was now given to drink, spending everything that came into his hands.

With the aid of a small laundry she was keeping, her aunt supported her children as well as her husband. She offered Maslova work as a washerwoman, but seeing what a hard life the washerwomen at her aunt's establishment were leading, she searched through the intelligence offices for a position as servant. She found such a place with a lady who was living with her two student boys. A week after she had entered upon her duties, the oldest son neglected his studies and made life miserable for Maslova. The mother threw all blame upon Maslova and discharged her. She was some time without any occupation. In one of these intelligence offices she once met a lady richly

dressed and adorned with diamonds. This lady, learning of the condition of Maslova, who was looking for a position, gave her her card and invited her to call. The lady received Maslova affectionately, treated her to choice cakes and sweet wine, while she dispatched her servant somewhere with a note. In the evening a tall man with long hair just turning gray, and gray beard, came into the room. The old man immediately seated himself beside Maslova and began to jest. The hostess called him into an adjoining room, and Maslova overheard her say: "As fresh as a rose; just from the country." Then the hostess called in Maslova and told her that the man was an author, very rich, and will be very generous if he takes a liking to her. He did take a liking to her, gave her twenty-five rubles, and promised to call on her often. The money was soon spent in settling for her board at her aunt's, for a new dress, hat and ribbons. A few days afterward the author sent for her a second time. She called. He gave her another twenty-five ruble bill and offered to rent apartments for her where she could reside separately.

While living in the apartments rented by the author, Maslova became infatuated with a jolly clerk living in the same house. She herself told the author of her infatuation, and moved into a smaller apartment. The clerk, who had promised to marry her, without saying anything, left for Nijhni, evidently casting her off, and Maslova remained alone. She wished to remain in the apartment, but the landlord would not permit a single woman to occupy it, and she returned to her aunt. Her fashionable dress, cape and hat won her the

respect of her aunt, who no longer dared to offer her work as a washerwoman, considering her present position far above it. The question of working in the laundry did not even occur to Maslova now. She looked with compassion on the life of drudgery led by these pale, emaciated washerwomen, some of whom showed symptoms of consumption, washing and ironing in a stifling, steam-laden atmosphere with the windows open summer and winter, and she was horrified at the thought that she, too, might be driven to such drudgery.

Maslova had for a long time been addicted to cigarette smoking, but of late she had been getting more and more accustomed to drink. The wine attracted her, not because of its taste, but because it enabled her to forget her past life, to comfort herself with ease, and the confidence of her own worth that it gave her. Without wine she was despondent and abashed. There was the choice of two things before her; either the humiliating occupation of a servant, with the certain unwelcome attentions of the men, or a secure, quiet and legitimized position of everybody's mistress. She wished to revenge herself on her seducer, as well as the clerk, and all those that brought misfortune upon her. Besides, she could not withstand the temptation of having all the dresses her heart desired--dresses made of velvet, gauze and silk--ball dresses, with open neck and short sleeves. And when Maslova imagined herself in a bright yellow silk dress, with velvet trimmings, decolette, she made her choice.

From this day on Maslova began to lead a life to which hundreds of

thousands of women are driven, and which, in nine cases out of ten, ends in painful disease, premature decrepitude and death.

After a night's orgies there would come a deep slumber till three or four o'clock in the afternoon; then the weary rising from a dirty couch; seltzer-water to remove the effect of excessive drinking, coffee. Then came the sauntering through the rooms in dressing-gown, looking through the windows; the languid quarrels; then the perfuming of her body and hair, the trying on of dresses, and the quarrels with the mistress which they occasioned; contemplating herself in the mirror, rouging her face, darkening her eyebrows. Then came the sweet, rich food, the bright silk dress, the entry into the brightly lighted parlor, the arrival of the guests, music, dancing, confectionery, wine and cigarettes.

Thus Maslova lived for seven years. On the eighth, when she had reached her twenty-sixth year, there happened that for which she had been jailed, and for which she was now led to the court, after six months of confinement among thieves and murderers.