

CHAPTER XXX.

The cell in which Maslova was confined was an oblong room, twenty feet by fifteen. The kalsomining of the walls was peeled off, and the dry boards of the cots occupied two-thirds of the space. In the middle of the room, opposite the door, was a dark iron, with a wax candle stuck on it, and a dusty bouquet of immortelles hanging under it. To the left, behind the door, on a darkened spot of the floor, stood an ill-smelling vat. The women had been locked up for the night.

There were fifteen inmates of this cell, twelve women and three children.

It was not dark yet, and only two women lay in their cots; one a foolish little woman--she was constantly crying--who had been arrested because she had no written evidence of her identity, had her head covered with her coat; the other, a consumptive, was serving a sentence for theft. She was not sleeping, but lay, her coat under her head, with wide-open eyes, and with difficulty retaining in her throat the tickling, gurgling phlegm, so as not to cough. The other women were with bare heads and skirts of coarse linen; some sat on their cots sewing; others stood at the window gazing on the passing prisoners. Of the three women who were sewing, one, Korableva, was the one who had given Maslova the instructions when the latter left the cell. She was a tall, strong woman, with a frowning, gloomy face, all

wrinkled, a bag of skin hanging under her chin, a short braid of light hair, turning gray at the temples, and a hairy wart on her cheek. This old woman was sentenced to penal servitude for killing her husband with an axe. The killing was committed because he annoyed her daughter with improper advances. She was the overseer of the cell, and also sold wine to the inmates. She was sewing with eye-glasses, and held the needle, after the fashion of the peasants, with three fingers, the sharp point turned toward her breast. Beside her, also sewing, sat a little woman, good-natured and talkative, dark, snub-nosed and with little black eyes. She was the watch-woman at a flag-station, and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for negligently causing an accident on the railroad. The third of the women who were occupied with sewing was Theodosia--called Fenichka by her fellow-prisoners--of light complexion, and with rosy cheeks; young, lovely, with bright, childish blue eyes, and two long, flaxen braids rolled up on her small head. She was imprisoned for attempting to poison her husband. She was sixteen years old when she was married, and she made the attempt immediately after her marriage. During the eight months that she was out on bail, she not only became reconciled to her husband, but became so fond of him that the court officers found them living in perfect harmony. In spite of all the efforts of her husband, her father-in-law, and especially her mother-in-law, who had grown very fond of her, to obtain her discharge, she was sentenced to hard labor in Siberia. The kind, cheerful and smiling Theodosia, whose cot was next to Maslova's, not only took a liking to her, but considered it her duty to help her in every possible way. Two other women were

sitting idly on their cots; one of about forty years, who seemed to have been pretty in her youth, but was now pale and slim, was feeding a child with her long, white breast. Her crime consisted in that, when the people of the village she belonged to attempted to stop a recruiting officer who had drafted, illegally, as they thought, her nephew, she was the first to take hold of the bridle of his horse. There was another little white-haired, wrinkled woman, good-natured and hunch-backed, who sat near the oven and pretended to be catching a four-year-old, short-haired and stout boy, who, in a short little shirt, was running past her, laughing and repeating: "You tan't tatch me!" This old woman, who, with her son, was charged with incendiarism, bore her confinement good-naturedly, grieving only over her son, who was also in jail, but above all, her heart was breaking for her old man who, she feared, would be eaten up by lice, as her daughter-in-law had returned to her parents, and there was no one to wash him.

Besides these seven women, there were four others who stood near the open windows, their hands resting on the iron gratings, and conversing by signs and shouts with the prisoners whom Maslova had met in the passageway. One of these, who was serving a sentence for theft, was a flabby, large, heavy, red-haired woman with white-yellow freckles over her face, and a stout neck which was exposed by the open waist collar. In a hoarse voice she shouted indecent words through the window. Beside her stood a woman of the size of a ten-year-old girl, very dark, with a long back and very short legs. Her face was red and blotched; her black eyes wide open, and her short, thick lips failed

to hide her white, protruding teeth. She laughed in shrill tones at the antics of the prisoners. This prisoner, who was nicknamed Miss Dandy, because of her stylishness, was under indictment for theft and incendiarism. Behind them, in a very dirty, gray shirt, stood a wretched-looking woman, big with child, who was charged with concealing stolen property. This woman was silent, but she approvingly smiled at the actions of the prisoners without. The fourth of the women who stood at the window, and was undergoing sentence for illicit trading in spirits, was a squat little country woman with bulging eyes and kindly face. She was the mother of the boy who was playing with the old woman, and of another seven-year-old girl, both of whom were in jail with her, because they had no one else to take care of them. Knitting a stocking, she was looking through the window and disapprovingly frowned and closed her eyes at the language used by the passing prisoners. The girl who stood near the red-haired woman, with only a shirt on her back, and clinging with one hand to the woman's skirt, attentively listened to the abusive words the men were exchanging with the women, and repeated them in a whisper, as if committing them to memory. The twelfth was the daughter of a church clerk and chanter who had drowned her child in a well. She was a tall and stately girl, with large eyes and tangled hair sticking out of her short, thick, flaxen braid. She paid no attention to what was going on around her, but paced, bare-footed, and in a dirty gray shirt, over the floor of the cell, making sharp and quick turns when she reached the wall.