

CHAPTER XXXI.

When with a rattling of chains the cell door was unlocked and Maslova admitted, all eyes were turned toward her. Even the chanter's daughter stopped for a moment and looked at her with raised eyebrows, but immediately resumed walking with long, resolute strides. Korableva stuck her needle into the sack she was sewing and gazed inquiringly through her glasses at Maslova.

"Ah me! So she has returned," she said in a hoarse basso voice. "And I was sure she would be set right. She must have got it."

She removed her glasses and placed them with her sewing beside her.

"I have been talking with auntie, dear, and we thought that they might discharge you at once. They say it happens. And they sometimes give you money, if you strike the right time," the watch-woman started in a singing voice. "What ill-luck! It seems we were wrong. God has His own way, dear," she went on in her caressing and melodious voice.

"It is possible that they convicted you?" asked Theodosia, with gentle compassion, looking at Maslova with her childish, light-blue eyes, and her cheerful, young face changed, and she seemed to be ready to cry.

Maslova made no answer, but silently went to her place, next to

Korableva's, and sat down.

"You have probably not eaten anything," said Theodosia, rising and going over to Maslova.

Again Maslova did not answer, but placed the two lunch-rolls at the head of the cot and began to undress. She took off the dusty coat, and the 'kerchief from her curling black hair and sat down.

The hunch-backed old woman also came and stopped in front of Maslova, compassionately shaking her head.

The boy came behind the old woman, and, with a protruding corner of the upper lip and wide-open eyes, gazed on the rolls brought by Maslova. Seeing all these compassionate faces, after what had happened, Maslova almost cried and her lips began to twitch. She tried to and did restrain herself until the old woman and the child approached. When, however, she heard the kind, compassionate exclamation of pity from the old woman, and, especially, when her eyes met the serious eyes of the boy who looked now at her, now at the rolls, she could restrain herself no longer. Her whole face began to twitch and she burst into sobs.

"I told her to take a good lawyer," said Korableva. "Well? To Siberia?" she asked.

Maslova wished to answer but could not, and, crying, she produced from the roll the box of cigarettes, on which a picture of a red lady with a high chignon and triangle-shaped, low cut neck was printed, and gave it to Korableva. The latter looked at the picture, disapprovingly shook her head, chiefly because Maslova spent money so foolishly, and, lighting a cigarette over the lamp, inhaled the smoke several times, then thrust it at Maslova. Maslova, without ceasing to cry, eagerly began to inhale the smoke.

"Penal servitude," she murmured, sobbing.

"They have no fear of God, these cursed blood-suckers!" said Korableva. "They have condemned an innocent girl."

At this moment there was a loud outburst of laughter among those standing near the window. The delicate laughter of the little girl mingled with the hoarse and shrill laughter of the women. This merriment was caused by some act of a prisoner without.

"Oh, the scoundrel! See what he is doing!" said the red-headed woman, pressing her face against the grating, her whole massive frame shaking.

"What is that drum-hide shouting about?" said Korableva, shaking her head at the red-haired woman, and then again turning to Maslova. "How many years?"

"Four," said Maslova, and the flow of her tears was so copious that one of them fell on the cigarette. She angrily crushed it, threw it away and took another.

The watch-woman, although she was no smoker, immediately picked up the cigarette-end and began to straighten it, talking at the same time.

"As I said to Matveievna, dear," she said, "it is ill-luck. They do what they please. And we thought they would discharge you. Matveievna said you would be discharged, and I said that you would not, I said. 'My heart tells me,' I said, 'that they will condemn her,' and so it happened," she went on, evidently listening to the sounds of her own voice with particular pleasure.

The prisoners had now passed through the court-yard, and the four women left the window and approached Maslova. The larged-eyed illicit seller of spirits was the first to speak.

"Well, is the sentence very severe?" she asked, seating herself near Maslova and continuing to knit her stocking.

"It is severe because she has no money. If she had money to hire a good lawyer, I am sure they would not have held her," said Korableva. "That lawyer--what's his name?--that clumsy, big-nosed one can, my dear madam, lead one out of the water dry. That's the man you should

take."

"To hire him!" grinned Miss Dandy. "Why, he would not look at you for less than a thousand rubles."

"It seems to be your fate," said the old woman who was charged with incendiarism. "I should say he is severe! He drove my boy's wife from her; put him in jail, and me, too, in my old age," for the hundredth time she began to repeat her story. "Prison and poverty are our lot. If it is not prison, it is poverty."

"Yes, it is always the same with them," said the woman-moonshiner, and, closely inspecting the girl's head, she put her stocking aside, drew the girl over between her overhanging legs and with dexterous fingers began to search in her head. "Why do you deal in wine? But I have to feed my children," she said, continuing her search.

These words reminded Maslova of wine.

"Oh, for a drop of wine," she said to Korableva, wiping her tears with the sleeve of her shirt and sobbing from time to time.

"Some booze? Why, of course!" said Korableva.