

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Maslova produced the money from one of the lunch-rolls and gave it to Korableva, who climbed up to the draught-hole of the oven for a flask of wine she had hidden there. Seeing which, those women who were not her immediate neighbors went to their places. Meantime Maslova shook the dust from her kerchief and coat, climbed up on her cot and began to eat a roll.

"I saved some tea for you, but I fear it is cold," said Theodosia, bringing down from a shelf a pot, wrapped in a rag, and a tin cup.

The beverage was perfectly cold, and tasted more of tin than of tea, but Maslova poured out a cupful and began to drink.

"Here, Finashka!" she called, and breaking a piece from the roll thrust it toward the boy, who gazed at her open-mouthed.

Korableva, meanwhile, brought the flask of wine. Maslova offered some to Korableva and Miss Dandy. These three prisoners constituted the aristocracy of the cell, because they had money and divided among themselves what they had.

In a few minutes Maslova became brighter and energetically began to relate what had transpired at the court, mockingly imitating the

prosecutor and rehearsing such parts as had appealed to her most. She was particularly impressed by the fact that the men paid considerable attention to her wherever she went. In the court-room every one looked at her, she said, and for that purpose constantly came into the prisoners' room.

"Even the guard said: 'It is to look at you that they come here.' Some one would come and ask for some document or something, but I saw that it was not for the document that he came. He would devour me with his eyes," she said, smiling and shaking her head as if perplexed. "They are good ones!"

"Yes, that is how it is," chimed in the watch-woman in her melodious voice. "They are like flies on sugar. If you needed them for any other purpose, be sure they would not come so quickly. They know a good thing when they see it."

"It was the same here," interrupted Maslova. "As soon as I was brought here I met with a party coming from the depot. They gave me no rest, and I could hardly get rid of them. Luckily the warden drove them off. One of them bothered me particularly."

"How did he look?" asked Miss Dandy.

"He had a dark complexion, and wore a mustache."

"It is he."

"Who?"

"Stchegloff. He passed here just now."

"Who is Stchegloff?"

"She don't know Stchegloff! He twice escaped from Siberia. Now he has been caught, but he will escape again. Even the officers fear him," said Miss Dandy, who delivered notes to prisoners, and knew everything that transpired in the jail. "He will surely escape."

"If he does he won't take either of us with him," said Korableva.

"You'd better tell me this: What did the lawyer say to you about a petition--you must send one now."

Maslova said that she did not know anything about a petition.

At this moment the red-haired woman, burying her two freckled hands into her tangled, thick hair, and scratching her head with her nails, approached the wine-drinking aristocrats.

"I will tell you, Katherine, everything," she began. "First of all, you must write on paper: 'I am not satisfied with the trial,' and then hand it to the prosecutor."

"What do you want here?" Korableva turned to her, speaking in an angry basso. "You have smelled the wine! We know you. We don't need your advice; we know what we have to do."

"Who is talking to you?"

"You want some wine--that's what you want."

"Let her alone. Give her some," said Maslova, who always divided with others what she had.

"Yes, I will give her," and Korableva clenched her fist.

"Try it! Try it!" moving toward Korableva, said the red-haired woman.

"I am not afraid of you."

"You jail bird!"

"You are another!"

"You gutter rake!"

"I am a rake--am I? You convict, murderess!" shrieked the red-haired woman.

"Go away, I tell you!" said Korableva frowning.

But the red-haired woman only came nearer, and Korableva gave her a push on the open, fat breast. The other seemingly only waited for this, for with an unexpected, quick movement of one hand she seized Korableva's hair and was about to strike her in the face with the other, when Korableva seized this hand. Maslova and Miss Dandy sprang up and took hold of the hands of the red-haired woman, endeavoring to release her hold on Korableva, but the hand that clutched the hair would not open. For a moment she released the hair, but only to wind it around her fist. Korableva, her head bent, with one hand kept striking her antagonist over the body and catching the latter's hand with her teeth. The women crowded around the fighters, parting them and shouting. Even the consumptive came near them, and, coughing, looked on. The children huddled together and cried. The noise attracted the warden and the matron. They were finally parted. Korableva loosened her gray braid and began to pick out the pieces of torn hair, while the other held the tattered remnant of her shirt to her breast--both shouting, explaining and complaining against one another.

"I know it is the wine--I can smell it," said the matron. "I will tell the superintendent to-morrow. Now, remove everything, or there will be trouble. There is no time to listen to you. To your places, and be silent!"

But for a long time there was no silence. The women continued to curse each other; they began to relate how it all commenced, and whose fault it was. The warden and matron finally departed; the women quieted down and took to their cots. The old woman stood up before the image and began to pray.

"Two Siberian convicts," suddenly said the red-haired woman in a hoarse voice, accompanying every word with a torrent of abuse.

"Look out, or you will get it again," quickly answered Korableva, adding similar revilement. Then they became silent.

"If they had not prevented me, I should have knocked out your eyes," the red-haired one began again, and again came a quick and sharp retort.

Then came another interval of silence, followed by more abuse. The intervals became longer and longer, and finally silence settled over the cell.

They were all falling asleep; some began to snore; only the old woman, who always prayed for a long time, was still bowing before the image, while the chanter's daughter, as soon as the matron left the cell, came down from her cot and began to walk up and down the cell.

Maslova was awake and incessantly thinking of herself as a convict,

the word which had been twice applied to her--once by Bochkova, and again by the red-haired woman. She could not be reconciled to the thought. Korableva, who was lying with her back turned toward Maslova, turned around.

"I never dreamed of such a thing," she said, in a low voice. "Others commit heaven knows what crimes, and they go scot free, while I must suffer for nothing."

"Don't worry, girl. People live also in Siberia. You will not be lost even there," Korableva consoled her.

"I know that I will not be lost, but it is painful to be treated that way. I deserved a better fate. I am used to a comfortable life."

"You can do nothing against God's will," Korableva said, with a sigh.

"You can do nothing against His will."

"I know, auntie, but it is hard, nevertheless."

They became silent.

"Listen to that wanton," said Korableva, calling Maslova's attention to the strange sounds that came from the other end of the cell.

These sounds were the suppressed sobbing of the red-haired woman. She

wept because she had just been abused, beaten, and got no wine, for which she so yearned. She also wept because her whole life was one round of abuse, scorn, insults and blows. She meant to draw some consolation from the recollection of her first love for the factory hand, Fedka Molodenkoff, but, recalling this first love, she also recalled the manner of its ending. The end of it was that this Molodenkoff, while in his cups, by way of jest, smeared her face with vitriol, and afterward laughed with his comrades as he watched her writhing in pain. She remembered this, and she pitied herself; and, thinking that no one heard her, she began to weep, and wept like a child--moaning, snuffling and swallowing salty tears.