

## CHAPTER XLI.

A moment afterward Maslova came out through a side door. With gentle step she came up to Nekhludoff; stopped and glanced at him from under her lowered eyebrows. Her black hair stood out on her forehead in curly ringlets; her unhealthy, bloated, white face was pretty and very calm, only her shining-black, squinting eyes sparkled from under their swollen lashes.

"You may talk here," said the inspector and went aside.

Nekhludoff moved toward a bench standing beside the wall.

Maslova glanced inquiringly at the inspector, and shrugging her shoulders, as if in wonder, followed Nekhludoff to the bench, and straightening her skirt, sat down beside him.

"I know that it is hard for you to forgive me," began Nekhludoff, but feeling the tears flooding his eyes, again stopped, "but if the past cannot be mended, I will do now everything in my power. Tell me----"

"How did you find me?" she asked without answering his question, her squinting eyes looking and not looking at him.

"Oh, Lord! Help me, teach me what to do!" Nekhludoff said to himself

as he looked at her face so completely changed.

"I was on the jury when you were tried," he said. "You did not recognize me?"

"No, I did not. I had no time to recognize you. Besides, I did not look," she answered.

"Wasn't there a child?" he asked, and he felt his face turning red.

"It died at that time, thank God," she said with bitterness, turning away her head.

"How did it happen?"

"I was ill myself--nearly died," she said without raising her eyes.

"How could the aunts let you go?"

"Who would keep a servant with a child? As soon as they noticed it they drove me out. But what is the use of talking! I don't remember anything. It is all over now."

"No, it is not over. I cannot leave it thus. I now wish to atone for my sin."

"There is nothing to atone for; what's gone is gone," she said, and, all unexpected to him, she suddenly looked at him and smiled in an alluring and piteous manner.

His appearance was entirely unexpected to Maslova, especially at this time and place, and therefore the astonishment of the first moment brought to her mind that of which she never thought before. At the first moment she hazily recalled that new, wonderful world of feeling and thought which had been opened to her by that charming young man who loved her, and whom she loved, and then his inexplicable cruelty and the long chain of humiliation and suffering which followed as the direct result of that enchanting bliss, and it pained her. But being unable to account for it all, she did the customary thing for her--banished all these recollections from her mind, and endeavored to obscure them by a life of dissipation. At first she associated this man who sat beside her with that young man whom she had loved once, but as the thought pained her, she drove it from her mind. And now this neatly dressed gentleman, with perfumed beard, was to her not that Nekhludoff whom she had loved, but one of those people who, as opportunity afforded, were taking advantage of such creatures as she, and of whom such creatures as she ought to take advantage as opportunity offers. For this reason she smiled alluringly.

She was silent, thinking how to profit by him.

"All that is over now," she said. "And here I am, sentenced to penal

servitude."

Her lips trembled as she spoke the terrible word.

"I knew, I was certain that you were innocent," said Nekhludoff.

"Of course I was innocent. I am no thief or robber. They say here that it all depends on the lawyer; that it is necessary to appeal. Only they say it comes very high----"

"Yes, certainly," said Nekhludoff. "I have already seen a lawyer."

"One must not be sparing, and get a good one," she said.

"I will do everything in my power."

They were silent. She again smiled as before.

"I would like to ask you--for some money, if you have it--not much, say ten rubles," she said suddenly.

"Yes, yes," said Nekhludoff, abashed, and thrust his hand in his pocket.

She quickly glanced at the inspector, who was walking up and down the aisle.

"Don't let him see it, or he will take it away."

Nekhludoff took out his pocketbook as soon as the director turned his back on them, but before he could hand her the ten-ruble bill the inspector turned round, facing them. He crumpled the bill in his hand.

"Why, she is a dead woman," thought Nekhludoff as he looked at her once lovely, but now defiled, bloated face with the unhealthy sparkle in her black, squinting eyes, which looked now at the inspector, now at Nekhludoff's hand with the crumpled bill. And a moment of hesitation came over him.

Again the tempter of the night before whispered in his soul, endeavoring to turn the question, What would be the best thing to do? into, What will be the end of it?

"You can do nothing with that woman," whispered the voice. "She will be like a stone around your neck, which will drag you down, and prevent your being useful to others. Give her all the money you have, bid her good-by and put an end to it for all time."

And immediately he became aware that something important was taking place in his soul; that his inner life was on a wavering scale, which could by the slightest effort be made to overbalance to one side or the other. And he made that effort, calling on that God whom the other

day he felt in his soul, and God immediately came to his aid. He resolved to tell her all.

"Katiusha! I came to ask your forgiveness, but you have not answered me whether you have forgiven me, or ever will forgive me," he said suddenly.

She was not listening to him, but looked now at his hand, now at the inspector. When the latter turned away, she quickly stretched forth her hand, seized the money from Nekhludoff's hand and stuck it behind her belt.

"How funny!" she said, smiling contemptuously as it seemed to him.

Nekhludoff saw that there was something inimical to him in her, which stood guard, as it were, over her as she was now, and prevented him from penetrating into her heart.

But--wonderful to relate--so far from repulsing him, this only drew him to her by some new peculiar force. He felt that he ought to awaken her spirit; that it was extremely difficult to do so; but the very difficulty of the undertaking attracted him. He experienced a feeling toward her which he had never experienced before, either toward her or any one else, and in which there was nothing personal. He desired nothing of her for himself, and only wished her to cease to be what she was now, and become what she had been before.

"Katiousha, why do you speak thus? I know you, I remember you as you were in Panoff----"

But she did not yield--she would not yield.

"Why recall the past!" she said dryly, frowning even more.

"Because I wish to efface, to expiate my sin. Katiousha----" he began, and was about to tell her that he would marry her, but he met her eyes in which he read something so terrible, rude and repulsive that he could not finish.

At that moment the visitors began to take leave. The inspector approached Nekhludoff and told him that the time for interviewing was ended. Maslova rose and submissively waited to be dismissed.

"Good-by. I have a great deal to tell you yet, but, as you see, I cannot do it now," said Nekhludoff, and extended his hand. "I will call again."

"I think you have said everything----"

She extended her hand, but did not press his.

"No. I will try to see you again, where we can speak together, and

then I will tell you something very important," said Nekhludoff.

"Well, all right," she said, smiling as she used to do when she wished to please a man.

"You are more to me than a sister," said Nekhludoff.

"Funny," she repeated, and, shaking her head, she went behind the grating.