

## CHAPTER XLVI.

The warden who brought Maslova to the office seated himself on the window-sill, away from the table. This was a decisive moment for Nekhludoff. He had been constantly reproaching himself for not telling her at their first meeting of his intention to marry her, and was now determined to do so. She was sitting on one side of the table, and Nekhludoff seated himself on the other side, opposite her. The room was well lighted, and for the first time Nekhludoff clearly saw her face from a short distance, and noticed wrinkles around the eyes and lips and a slight swelling under her eyes, and he pitied her even more than before.

Resting his elbows on the table so that he should not be heard by the warden, whose face was of a Jewish type, with grayish side-whiskers, he said:

"If this petition fails we will appeal to His Majesty. Nothing will be left undone."

"If it had been done before--if I had had a good lawyer"--she interrupted him. "That lawyer of mine was such a little fool. He was only making me compliments," she said, and began to laugh. "If they had only known that I was your acquaintance, it would have been different. They think that everybody is a thief."

"How strange she is to-day," thought Nekhludoff, and was about to tell her what he had on his mind when she again began to speak.

"I wanted to tell you. There is an old woman here--we are even surprised--such a good little woman, but there she is--she and her son, both in prison, and everybody knows that they are innocent. They are accused of setting fire, so they are in prison. She learned, you know, that I am acquainted with you," said Maslova, turning her head and casting glances at him, "and she says to me: 'Tell him,' she says, 'to call my son; he will tell him the whole story.' Menshoff is his name. Well, will you do it? Such a good little woman. You can see for yourself that she is not guilty. You will help them, dear, won't you?" she said, glancing at him; then she lowered her eyes and smiled.

"Very well; I will do it," said Nekhludoff, his surprise at her easy manner growing, "but I would like to talk to you about my own affair. Do you remember what I told you that time?"

"You have spoken so much. What did you say that time?" she said, continuing to smile and turning her head now to one side, now to the other.

"I said that I came to ask your forgiveness," he said.

"Oh! Forgiveness, forgiveness! That is all nonsense. You had better----"

"That I wish to atone for my sin," continued Nekhludoff, "and to atone not by words but by deed. I have decided to marry you."

Her face suddenly showed fright. Her squinting eyes became fixed, and they looked and did not look at him.

"What is that for?" And she frowned maliciously.

"I feel that before God I must do it."

"What God, now, are you talking about? You are not talking to the point. God? What God? Why didn't you think of God then?" she said, and opening her mouth, stopped short.

Nekhludoff only now smelled a strong odor of liquor and understood the cause of her excitement.

"Be calm," he said.

"I have nothing to be calm about. You think I am drunk? Yes, I am drunk, but I know what I am talking about," she said quickly, and her face became purple. "I am a convict, while you are a lord, a prince, and needn't stay here to soil your hands. Go to your princesses----"

"You cannot be too cruel to me; you do not know how I feel," he said

in a low voice, his whole body trembling. "You cannot imagine how strongly I feel my guilt before you!"

"Feel my guilt," she mocked him maliciously. "You did not feel it then, but thrust a hundred rubles in my hands. 'That's your price----'"

"I know, I know, but what am I to do now? I have decided not to leave you," he repeated; "and what I say I will do."

"And I say that you will not!" she said, and laughed aloud.

"Katinsha!" he began.

"Leave me. I am a convict, and you are a prince; and you have no business here," she shrieked, violently releasing her hand from his, her wrath knowing no limit.

"You wish to save yourself through me," she continued, hastening to pour out all that had accumulated in her soul. "You have made me the means of your enjoyment in life, and now you wish to make me the means of saving you after death! You disgust me, as do your eye-glasses and that fat, dirty face of yours. Go, go away!" she shrieked, energetically springing to her feet.

The warden approached them.

"Don't you make so much noise! You know whom----"

"Please desist," said Nekhludoff.

"She must not forget herself," said the warden.

"Please wait a while," said Nekhludoff.

The warden returned to his seat on the window-sill.

Maslova again seated herself, her eyes downcast and her little hands clutching each other.

Nekhludoff stood over her, not knowing what to do.

"You do not believe me," he said.

"That you wish to marry me? That will never happen. I will sooner hang myself."

"But I will serve you anyway."

"That is your business. Only I don't want anything from you. Now, that is certain," she said. "Oh, why did I not die then!" she added, and began to cry piteously.

Nekhludoff could not speak; her tears called forth tears in his own eyes.

She raised her eyes, looked at him, as if surprised, and with her 'kerchief began to wipe the tears streaming down her cheeks.

The warden again approached them and reminded them that it was time to part. Maslova rose.

"You are excited now. If possible I will call to-morrow. Meantime, think it over," said Nekhludoff.

She made no answer, and without looking at him left the room, preceded by the warden.

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"Well, girl, good times are coming," said Korableva to Maslova when the latter returned to the cell. "He seems to be stuck on you, so make the most of it while he is calling. He will get you released. The rich can do anything."

"That's so," drawled the watch-woman. "The poor man will think ten times before he will marry, while the rich man can satisfy his every whim. Yes, my dear; there was a respectable man in our village, and he----"

"Have you spoken to him of my case?" asked the old woman.

But Maslova was silent. She lay down on her bunk, gazing with her squinting eyes into the corner, and remained in that position till evening. Her soul was in torment. That which Nekhludoff told her opened to her that world in which she had suffered and which she had left, hating without understanding it. She had now lost that forgetfulness in which she had lived, and to live with a clear recollection of the past was painful. In the evening she again bought wine, which she drank with her fellow-prisoners.