CHAPTER VIII.

With a faint heart and with horror at the thought that he might find Maslova in an inebriate condition and persistently antagonistic, and at the mystery which she was to him, Nekhludoff rang the bell and inquired of the inspector about Maslova. She was in the hospital.

A young physician, impregnated with carbolic acid, came out into the corridor and sternly asked Nekhludoff what he wanted. The physician indulged the prisoners' shortcomings and often relaxed the rules in their favor, for which he often ran afoul of the prison officials and even the head physician. Fearing that Nekhludoff might ask something not permitted by the rules, and, moreover, desiring to show that he made no exceptions in favor of anybody, he feigned anger.

"There are no women here; this is the children's ward," he said.

"I know it, but there is a nurse here who had been transferred from the prison."

"Yes, there are two. What do you wish, then?"

"I am closely related to one of them, Maslova," said Nekhludoff, "and would like to see her. I am going to St. Petersburg to enter an appeal in her case. I would like to hand her this; it is only a photograph,"

and he produced an envelope from his pocket.

"Yes, you may do that," said the softened physician, and turning to an old nurse in a white apron, told her to call Maslova. "Won't you take a seat, or come into the reception-room?"

"Thank you," said Nekhludoff, and taking advantage of the favorable change in the physician's demeanor, asked him what they thought of Maslova in the hospital.

"Her work is fair, considering the conditions amid which she had lived," answered the physician. "But there she comes."

The old nurse appeared at one of the doors, and behind her came Maslova. She wore a white apron over a striped skirt; a white cap on her head hid her hair. Seeing Nekhludoff she flushed, stopped waveringly, then frowned, and with downcast eyes approached him with quick step. Coming near him she stood for a moment without offering her hand, then she did offer her hand and became even more flushed. Nekhludoff had not seen her since the conversation in which she excused herself for her impetuosity, and he expected to find her in a similar mood. But she was entirely different to-day; there was something new in the expression of her face; something timid and reserved, and, as it seemed to him, malevolent toward him. He repeated the words he had said to the physician and handed her the envelope with the photograph which he had brought from Panov.

"It is an old picture which I came across in Panov. It may please you to have it. Take it."

Raising her black eyebrows she looked at him with her squinting eyes, as though asking, "What is that for?" Then she silently took the envelope and tucked it under her apron.

"I saw your aunt there," said Nekhludoff.

"Did you?" she said, with indifference.

"How do you fare here?" asked Nekhludoff.

"Fairly well," she said.

"It is not very hard?"

"Not very. I am not used to it yet."

"I am very glad. At any rate, it is better than there."

"Than where?" she said, and her face became purple.

"There, in the prison," Nekhludoff hastened to say.

"Why better?" she asked.

"I think the people here are better. There are no such people here as there."

"There are many good people there."

"I did what I could for the Menshovs and hope they will be freed," said Nekhludoff.

"May God grant it. Such a wonderful little woman," she said, repeating her description of the old woman, and slightly smiled.

"I am going to-day to St. Petersburg. Your case will be heard soon, and, I hope, will be reversed."

"It is all the same now, whether they reverse it or not," she said.

"Why now?"

"So," she answered, and stealthily glanced at him inquiringly.

Nekhludoff understood this answer and this glance as a desire on her part to know if he were still holding to his decision, or had changed it since her refusal.

"I don't know why it is all the same to you," he said, "but to me it really is all the same whether you are acquitted or not. In either case, I am ready to do what I said," he said, with determination.

She raised her head, and her black, squinting eyes fixed themselves on his face and past it, and her whole face became radiant with joy. But her words were in an entirely different strain.

"Oh, you needn't talk that way," she said.

"I say it that you may know."

"Everything has been already said, and there is no use talking any more," she said, with difficulty repressing a smile.

There was some noise in the ward. A child was heard crying.

"I think I am called," she said, looking around with anxiety.

"Well, then, good-by," he said.

She pretended not to see his extended hand, turned round, and endeavoring to hide her elation, she walked away with quick step.

"What is taking place in her? What is she thinking? What are her feelings? Is she putting me to a test, or is she really unable to

forgive me? Can she not say what she thinks and feels, or simply will not? Is she pacified or angered?" Nekhludoff asked himself, but could give no answer. One thing he knew, however, and that was that she had changed; that a spiritual transformation was taking place in her, and this transformation united him not only to her, but to Him in whose name it was taking place. And this union caused him joyful agitation.

Returning to the ward where eight children lay in their beds, Maslova began to remake one of the beds, by order of the Sister, and, leaning over too far with the sheet, slipped and nearly fell. The convalescing boy, wound in bandages to his neck, began to laugh. Maslova could restrain herself no longer, and seating herself on the bedstead she burst into loud laughter, infecting several children, who also began to laugh. The Sister angrily shouted:

"What are you roaring about? Think you this is like the place you came from? Go fetch the rations."

Maslova stopped laughing, and taking a dish went on her errand, but exchanging looks with the bandaged boy, who giggled again.

Several times during the day, when Maslova remained alone, she drew out a corner of the picture and looked at it with admiration, but in the evening, when she and another nurse retired for the night, she removed the picture from the envelope and immovably looked with admiration at the faces; her own, his and the aunt's, their dresses,

the stairs of the balcony, the bushes in the background, her eyes feasting especially on herself, her young, beautiful face with the hair hanging over her forehead. She was so absorbed that she failed to notice that the other nurse had entered.

"What is that? Did he give it you?" asked the stout, good-natured nurse, leaning over the photograph.

"Is it possible that that is you?"

"Who else?" Maslova said, smiling and looking into her companion's face.

"And who is that? He himself? And that is his mother?"

"His aunt. Couldn't you recognize me?" asked Maslova.

"Why, no. I could never recognize you. The face is entirely different. That must have been taken about ten years ago."

"Not years, but a lifetime," said Maslova, and suddenly her face became sullen and a wrinkle formed between her eyebrows.

"Yours was an easy life, wasn't it?"

"Yes, easy," Maslova repeated, closing her eyes and shaking her head.

"Worse than penal servitude."

"Why so?"

"Because. From eight in the evening to four in the morning--every day the same."

"Then why don't they get out?"

"They like to, but cannot. But what is the use of talking!" cried Maslova, and she sprang to her feet, threw the photograph into the drawer of the table, and suppressing her angry tears, ran into the corridor, slamming the door. Looking on the photograph she imagined herself as she had been at the time the photograph was made, and dreamed how happy she had been and might still be with him. The words of her companion reminded her what she was now--reminded her of all the horror of that life which she then felt but confusedly, and would not allow herself to admit. Only now she vividly recalled all those terrible nights, particularly one Shrovetide night. She recalled how she, in a low-cut, wine-bespattered, red silk dress, with a red bow in her dishevelled hair, weak, jaded and tipsy, after dancing attendance upon the guest, had seated herself, at two in the morning, near the thin, bony, pimpled girl-pianist and complained of her hard life. The girl said that her life was also disagreeable to her, and that she wished to change her occupation. Afterward their friend Clara joined them, and all three suddenly decided to change their life. They were

about to leave the place when the drunken guests became noisy, the fiddler struck up a lively song of the first figure of a Russian quadrille, the pianist began to thump in unison, a little drunken man in a white necktie and dress coat caught her up. Another man, stout and bearded, and also in a dress coat, seized Clara, and for a long time they whirled, danced, shouted and drank. Thus a year passed, a second and a third. How could she help changing! And the cause of it all was he. And suddenly her former wrath against him rose in her; and she felt like chiding and reproving him. She was sorry that she had missed the opportunity of telling him again that she knew him, and would not yield to him; that she would not allow him to take advantage of her spiritually as he had done corporeally; that she would not allow him to make her the subject of his magnanimity. And in order to deaden the painful feeling of pity for herself and the useless reprobation of him, she yearned for wine. And she would have broken her word and drunk some wine had she been in the prison. But here wine could only be obtained from the assistant surgeon, and she was afraid of him, because he pursued her with his attentions, and all relations with men were disgusting to her. For some time she sat on a bench in the corridor, and returning to her closet, without heeding her companion's questions, she wept for a long time over her ruined life.