

## CHAPTER XVII.

Immediately upon his arrival in Moskow, Nekhludoff made his way to the prison hospital, intending to make known to Maslova the Senate's decision and to tell her to prepare for the journey to Siberia.

Of the petition which he brought for Maslova's signature, he had little hope. And, strange to say, he no longer wished to succeed. He had accustomed himself to the thought of going to Siberia, and living among the exiles and convicts, and it was difficult for him to imagine how he should order his life and that of Maslova if she were freed.

The door-keeper at the hospital, recognizing Nekhludoff, immediately informed him that Maslova was no longer there.

"Where is she, then?"

"Why, again in the prison."

"Why was she transferred?" asked Nekhludoff.

"Your Excellency knows their kind," said the door-keeper, with a contemptuous smile. "She was making love to the assistant, so the chief physician sent her back."

Nekhludoff did not suspect that Maslova and her spiritual condition were so close to him. This news stunned him. The feeling he experienced was akin to that which people experience when hearing suddenly of some great misfortune. He was deeply grieved. The first feeling he experienced was that of shame. His joyful portraying of her spiritual awakening now seemed to him ridiculous. Her reluctance to accept his sacrifice, the reproaches and the tears, were the mere cunning, he thought, of a dissolute woman who wished to make the most use of him. It seemed to him now that at his last visit he had seen in her the symptoms of incorrigibility which were now evident. All this flashed through his mind at the time he instinctively donned his hat and left the hospital.

"But what's to be done now?" he asked himself. "Am I bound to her? Am I not released now by this, her act?"

But no sooner did he form the question than he understood that in considering himself released and leaving her to her fate he would be punishing not her, which he desired, but himself, and he was terrified.

"No! That will not alter my decision--it will only strengthen it. Let her do whatever her soul prompts her to do; if she would make love to the assistant, let her do so. It is her business. It is my business to do what my conscience demands," he said to himself. "And my conscience demands that I sacrifice my liberty in expiation of my sin, and my

decision to marry her, although but fictitiously, and follow her wherever she may be sent, remains unaltered," he said to himself, with spiteful obstinacy, and, leaving the hospital, he made his way with resolute step to the prison gate.

Coming to the gate, he asked the officer on duty to tell the inspector that he wished to see Maslova. The officer knew Nekhludoff, and told him an important piece of prison news. The captain had resigned, and another man, who was very strict, had taken his place.

The inspector, who was in the prison at the time, soon made his appearance. He was tall, bony, very slow in his movements, and gloomy.

"Visitors are allowed only on certain days," he said, without looking at Nekhludoff.

"But I have a petition here which she must sign."

"You may give it to me."

"I must see the prisoner myself. I was always permitted to see her before."

"That was before," said the inspector, glancing at Nekhludoff.

"I have a pass from the Governor," Nekhludoff insisted, producing his

pocket-book.

"Let me see it," said the inspector, without looking in Nekhludoff's eyes, and taking the document with his skinny, long, white hand, on the index finger of which there was a gold ring, he slowly read it.

"Walk into the office, please," he said.

On this occasion there was no one in the office. The inspector seated himself at the table, looking through the papers that lay on it, evidently intending to stay through the meeting. When Nekhludoff asked him if Bogodukhovskaia could be seen, he answered: "Visiting the politicals is not allowed," and again buried his head in the papers.

When Maslova entered the room, the inspector raised his eyes, and, without looking either at Maslova or Nekhludoff, said: "You may go ahead," and continued to busy himself with his papers.

Maslova was again dressed in a white skirt, waist and 'kerchief.

Coming near Nekhludoff and seeing his cold, angry face, her own turned a purple color, and, with downcast eyes, she began to pick a corner of her waist. Her confusion Nekhludoff considered as confirmation of the hospital porter's words.

So abhorrent was she to him now that he could not extend his hand to her, as he desired.

"I bring you bad news," he said in an even voice, without looking at her. "The Senate affirmed the verdict."

"I knew it would be so," she said in a strange voice, as if choking.

If it had happened before, Nekhludoff would have asked her why she knew it; now he only looked at her. Her eyes were filled with tears, but this not only did not soften him, but made him even more inflamed against her.

The inspector rose and began to walk up and down the room.

Notwithstanding the abhorrence Nekhludoff felt for Maslova, he thought it proper to express his regret at the Senate's action.

"Do not despair," he said. "This petition may be more successful, and I hope that----"

"Oh, it is not that," she said, looking at him with the tearful and squinting eyes.

"What, then?"

"You have been in the hospital, and they must have told you there about me."

"What of it? That is your business," frowning, Nekhludoff said with indifference. The cruel feeling of offended pride rose in him with greater force at her mention of the hospital. "I, a man of the world, whom any girl of the upper class would be only too happy to marry, offered to become the husband of that woman, and she could not wait, but made love to the assistant surgeon," he thought, looking at her with hatred.

"Sign this petition," he said, and, taking from his pocket a large envelope, placed it on the table. She wiped her tears with a corner of her kerchief, seated herself at the table, and asked him where to sign.

He showed her where, and she, seating herself, smoothed with her left hand the sleeve of the right. He stood over her, silently looking at her back bent over the table, and now and then shaking from the sobs she tried to suppress, and his soul was convulsed by a struggle between good and evil, between offended pride and pity for her sufferings. The feeling of pity conquered.

Whether it was the feeling of pity that first asserted itself, or the recollection of his own deeds of the same character for which he reproached her, he scarcely knew, but suddenly he felt himself guilty and pitied her.

Having signed the petition and wiped her soiled fingers on her skirt,

she rose and glanced at him.

"Whatever the result, and no matter what happens, I shall keep my word," said Nekhludoff.

The thought that he was forgiving her strengthened in him the feeling of pity and tenderness for her, and he wished to console her.

"I will do what I said. I will be with you wherever you may be."

"That's no use," she hastened to say, and her face became radiant.

"Make note of what you need for the road."

"Nothing particular, I think. Thank you."

The inspector approached them, and Nekhludoff, without waiting to be told that the time was up, took leave of her, experiencing a new feeling of quiet happiness, calmness and love for all mankind. It was the consciousness that no act of Maslova could alter his love for her that raised his spirit and made him feel happy. Let her make love to the assistant--that was her business. He loved her not for himself, but for her and for God.

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The love-making for which Maslova was expelled from the hospital, and to which Nekhludoff gave credence, consisted only in that, when Maslova, coming to the drug department for some pectoral herbs, prescribed by her superior, she found there an assistant, named Ustinoff. This Ustinoff had been pursuing her with his attentions for a long time, and as he tried to embrace her she pushed him away with such force that he struck the shelving, and two bottles came crashing to the floor.

The chief physician was passing at the time, and, hearing the sound of the breaking glass, and seeing Maslova running out, all flushed, he angrily shouted to her:

"Well, girl, if you begin to flirt here, I will send you back. What is the matter?" he turned to the assistant, sternly looking over his spectacles.

The assistant, smiling, began to apologize. The doctor, without hearing him to the last, raised his head so that he began to look through the glasses, and walked into the ward. On the same day he asked the inspector to send a more sedate nurse in place of Maslova. Maslova's expulsion from the hospital on the ground of flirting was particularly painful to her by reason of the fact that, after her meeting with Nekhludoff, all association with men, which had been so repugnant to her, became even more disgusting.



The fact that, judging her by her past and present condition, everybody, including the pimply assistant, thought that they had the right to insult her, and were surprised when she refused their attentions, was very painful to her and called forth her tears and pity for herself. Now, coming out to see Nekhludoff, she wished to explain the injustice of the charge which he had probably heard. But as she attempted to do so, she felt that he would not believe her; that her explanation would only tend to corroborate the suspicion, and her tears welled up in her throat, and she became silent.

Maslova was still thinking, and continued to assure herself that, as she had told him on his second visit, she had not forgiven him; that she hated him, but, in reality, she had long since begun to love him again, and loved him so that she involuntarily carried out his wishes. She ceased to drink and smoke, she gave up flirting, and willingly went as servant to the hospital. All this she did because she knew he wished it. Her repeated refusal to accept his sacrifice was partly due to the fact that she wished to repeat those proud words which she had once told him, and mainly because she knew that their marriage would make him unhappy. She was firmly resolved not to accept his sacrifice, and yet it was painful for her to think that he despised her; that he thought her to be the same as she had been, and did not see the change she was undergoing. The fact that he was at that moment thinking that she did something wrong in the hospital pained her more than the news that she was finally sentenced to hard labor.