

HOW SOKOLOF PAID HIS DEBT 293

There was a light in the cottage, and Pavlof trod softly as he drew near, and peered through the window.

Anna Roskova, and Marya Verskaïa, and Hope, were sitting at the table with the samovar before them. He wondered, in the vague way in which one's mind, when tightly strung, wanders off at times on inconsequent trifles, which of them had slept on the hearth the previous night. He thought it would be Marya. He was sure it was not Hope.

But none of the three looked as if they had slept for a week, and there was little speech between them. They had had time to say all that could be said, and now only a dull and hopeless expectation was left to them.

He turned the handle and walked in, and the three speechless women were changed, after one moment of breathless wonder, into incarnate questions. They all talked at once and literally fell on his neck in their excitement, till Marya, unable to express her feelings in any other way, began to scream and beat her knees with her hands, and the floor with her feet.

He got them quieted at last by declining to say a word till they gave him a cup of tea, and Hope's hand shook so as she poured it out that there was as much tea on the table as in the cup. Then—