

CHAPTER XX

The card tables were drawn out, sets made up for boston, and the count's visitors settled themselves, some in the two drawing rooms, some in the sitting room, some in the library.

The count, holding his cards fanwise, kept himself with difficulty from dropping into his usual after-dinner nap, and laughed at everything. The young people, at the countess' instigation, gathered round the clavichord and harp. Julie by general request played first. After she had played a little air with variations on the harp, she joined the other young ladies in begging Natásha and Nicholas, who were noted for their musical talent, to sing something. Natásha, who was treated as though she were grown up, was evidently very proud of this but at the same time felt shy.

"What shall we sing?" she said.

"The Brook," suggested Nicholas.

"Well, then, let's be quick. Borís, come here," said Natásha.
"But where is Sónya?"

She looked round and seeing that her friend was not in the room ran to look for her.

Running into Sónya's room and not finding her there, Natásha ran to the nursery, but Sónya was not there either. Natásha concluded that she must be on the chest in the passage. The chest in the passage was the place of mourning for the younger female generation in the Rostóv household. And there in fact was Sónya lying face downward on Nurse's dirty feather bed on the top of the chest, crumpling her gauzy pink dress under her, hiding her face with her slender fingers, and sobbing so convulsively that her bare little shoulders shook. Natásha's face, which had been so radiantly happy all that saint's day, suddenly changed: her eyes became fixed, and then a shiver passed down her broad neck and the corners of her mouth drooped.

"Sónya! What is it? What is the matter?... Oo... Oo... Oo...!" And Natásha's large mouth widened, making her look quite ugly, and she began to wail like a baby without knowing why, except that Sónya was crying. Sónya tried to lift her head to answer but could not, and hid her face still deeper in the bed. Natásha wept, sitting on the blue-striped feather bed and hugging her friend. With an effort Sónya sat up and began wiping her eyes and explaining.

"Nicholas is going away in a week's time, his... papers... have come... he told me himself... but still I should not cry," and she showed a paper she held in her hand—with the verses Nicholas had written, "still, I should not cry, but you can't... no one can understand... what a soul he has!"

And she began to cry again because he had such a noble soul.

“It’s all very well for you... I am not envious... I love you and Borís also,” she went on, gaining a little strength; “he is nice... there are no difficulties in your way.... But Nicholas is my cousin... one would have to... the Metropolitan himself... and even then it can’t be done. And besides, if she tells Mamma” (Sónya looked upon the countess as her mother and called her so) “that I am spoiling Nicholas’ career and am heartless and ungrateful, while truly... God is my witness,” and she made the sign of the cross, “I love her so much, and all of you, only Véra... And what for? What have I done to her? I am so grateful to you that I would willingly sacrifice everything, only I have nothing....”

Sónya could not continue, and again hid her face in her hands and in the feather bed. Natásha began consoling her, but her face showed that she understood all the gravity of her friend’s trouble.

“Sónya,” she suddenly exclaimed, as if she had guessed the true reason of her friend’s sorrow, “I’m sure Véra has said something to you since dinner? Hasn’t she?”

“Yes, these verses Nicholas wrote himself and I copied some others, and she found them on my table and said she’d show them to Mamma, and that I was ungrateful, and that Mamma would never allow him to marry me, but that he’ll marry Julie. You see how he’s been with her all day... Natásha, what have I done to deserve it?...”

And again she began to sob, more bitterly than before. Natásha lifted her up, hugged her, and, smiling through her tears, began comforting her.

“Sónya, don’t believe her, darling! Don’t believe her! Do you remember how we and Nicholas, all three of us, talked in the sitting room after supper? Why, we settled how everything was to be. I don’t quite remember how, but don’t you remember that it could all be arranged and how nice it all was? There’s Uncle Shinshín’s brother has married his first cousin. And we are only second cousins, you know. And Borís says it is quite possible. You know I have told him all about it. And he is so clever and so good!” said Natásha. “Don’t you cry, Sónya, dear love, darling Sónya!” and she kissed her and laughed. “Véra’s spiteful; never mind her! And all will come right and she won’t say anything to Mamma. Nicholas will tell her himself, and he doesn’t care at all for Julie.”

Natásha kissed her on the hair.

Sónya sat up. The little kitten brightened, its eyes shone, and it seemed ready to lift its tail, jump down on its soft paws, and begin playing with the ball of worsted as a kitten should.

“Do you think so?... Really? Truly?” she said, quickly smoothing her frock and hair.

“Really, truly!” answered Natásha, pushing in a crisp lock that had

strayed from under her friend's plaits.

Both laughed.

"Well, let's go and sing 'The Brook.'"

"Come along!"

"Do you know, that fat Pierre who sat opposite me is so funny!" said Natásha, stopping suddenly. "I feel so happy!"

And she set off at a run along the passage.

Sónya, shaking off some down which clung to her and tucking away the verses in the bosom of her dress close to her bony little chest, ran after Natásha down the passage into the sitting room with flushed face and light, joyous steps. At the visitors' request the young people sang the quartette, "The Brook," with which everyone was delighted. Then Nicholas sang a song he had just learned:

At nighttime in the moon's fair glow
How sweet, as fancies wander free,
To feel that in this world there's one
Who still is thinking but of thee!

That while her fingers touch the harp
Wafting sweet music o'er the lea,
It is for thee thus swells her heart,
Sighing its message out to thee...

A day or two, then bliss unspoilt,
But oh! till then I cannot live!...

He had not finished the last verse before the young people began to get ready to dance in the large hall, and the sound of the feet and the coughing of the musicians were heard from the gallery.

Pierre was sitting in the drawing room where Shinshín had engaged him, as a man recently returned from abroad, in a political conversation in which several others joined but which bored Pierre. When the music began Natásha came in and walking straight up to Pierre said, laughing and blushing:

"Mamma told me to ask you to join the dancers."

"I am afraid of mixing the figures," Pierre replied; "but if you will be my teacher..." And lowering his big arm he offered it to the slender little girl.

While the couples were arranging themselves and the musicians tuning up, Pierre sat down with his little partner. Natásha was perfectly happy; she was dancing with a grown-up man, who had been abroad. She was sitting in a conspicuous place and talking to him like a grown-up lady.

She had a fan in her hand that one of the ladies had given her to hold. Assuming quite the pose of a society woman (heaven knows when and where she had learned it) she talked with her partner, fanning herself and smiling over the fan.

“Dear, dear! Just look at her!” exclaimed the countess as she crossed the ballroom, pointing to Natáša.

Natáša blushed and laughed.

“Well, really, Mamma! Why should you? What is there to be surprised at?”

In the midst of the third *écossaise* there was a clatter of chairs being pushed back in the sitting room where the count and Márya Dmítrievna had been playing cards with the majority of the more distinguished and older visitors. They now, stretching themselves after sitting so long, and replacing their purses and pocketbooks, entered the ballroom. First came Márya Dmítrievna and the count, both with merry countenances. The count, with playful ceremony somewhat in ballet style, offered his bent arm to Márya Dmítrievna. He drew himself up, a smile of debonair gallantry lit up his face and as soon as the last figure of the *écossaise* was ended, he clapped his hands to the musicians and shouted up to their gallery, addressing the first violin:

“Semën! Do you know the Daniel Cooper?”

This was the count’s favorite dance, which he had danced in his youth. (Strictly speaking, Daniel Cooper was one figure of the *anglaise*.)

“Look at Papa!” shouted Natáša to the whole company, and quite forgetting that she was dancing with a grown-up partner she bent her curly head to her knees and made the whole room ring with her laughter.

And indeed everybody in the room looked with a smile of pleasure at the jovial old gentleman, who standing beside his tall and stout partner, Márya Dmítrievna, curved his arms, beat time, straightened his shoulders, turned out his toes, tapped gently with his foot, and, by a smile that broadened his round face more and more, prepared the onlookers for what was to follow. As soon as the provocatively gay strains of Daniel Cooper (somewhat resembling those of a merry peasant dance) began to sound, all the doorways of the ballroom were suddenly filled by the domestic serfs—the men on one side and the women on the other—who with beaming faces had come to see their master making merry.

“Just look at the master! A regular eagle he is!” loudly remarked the nurse, as she stood in one of the doorways.

The count danced well and knew it. But his partner could not and did not want to dance well. Her enormous figure stood erect, her powerful arms hanging down (she had handed her reticule to the countess), and only her stern but handsome face really joined in the dance. What was expressed

by the whole of the count's plump figure, in Márya Dmítrievna found expression only in her more and more beaming face and quivering nose. But if the count, getting more and more into the swing of it, charmed the spectators by the unexpectedness of his adroit maneuvers and the agility with which he capered about on his light feet, Márya Dmítrievna produced no less impression by slight exertions—the least effort to move her shoulders or bend her arms when turning, or stamp her foot—which everyone appreciated in view of her size and habitual severity. The dance grew livelier and livelier. The other couples could not attract a moment's attention to their own evolutions and did not even try to do so. All were watching the count and Márya Dmítrievna. Natásha kept pulling everyone by sleeve or dress, urging them to "look at Papa!" though as it was they never took their eyes off the couple. In the intervals of the dance the count, breathing deeply, waved and shouted to the musicians to play faster. Faster, faster, and faster; lightly, more lightly, and yet more lightly whirled the count, flying round Márya Dmítrievna, now on his toes, now on his heels; until, turning his partner round to her seat, he executed the final pas, raising his soft foot backwards, bowing his perspiring head, smiling and making a wide sweep with his arm, amid a thunder of applause and laughter led by Natásha. Both partners stood still, breathing heavily and wiping their faces with their cambric handkerchiefs.

"That's how we used to dance in our time, ma chère," said the count.

"That was a Daniel Cooper!" exclaimed Márya Dmítrievna, tucking up her sleeves and puffing heavily.