

## CHAPTER I

Early in the year 1806 Nicholas Rostóv returned home on leave. Denísov was going home to Vorónezh and Rostóv persuaded him to travel with him as far as Moscow and to stay with him there. Meeting a comrade at the last post station but one before Moscow, Denísov had drunk three bottles of wine with him and, despite the jolting ruts across the snow-covered road, did not once wake up on the way to Moscow, but lay at the bottom of the sleigh beside Rostóv, who grew more and more impatient the nearer they got to Moscow.

“How much longer? How much longer? Oh, these insufferable streets, shops, bakers’ signboards, street lamps, and sleighs!” thought Rostóv, when their leave permits had been passed at the town gate and they had entered Moscow.

“Denísov! We’re here! He’s asleep,” he added, leaning forward with his whole body as if in that position he hoped to hasten the speed of the sleigh.

Denísov gave no answer.

“There’s the corner at the crossroads, where the cabman, Zakhár, has his stand, and there’s Zakhár himself and still the same horse! And here’s the little shop where we used to buy gingerbread! Can’t you hurry up? Now then!”

“Which house is it?” asked the driver.

“Why, that one, right at the end, the big one. Don’t you see? That’s our house,” said Rostóv. “Of course, it’s our house! Denísov, Denísov! We’re almost there!”

Denísov raised his head, coughed, and made no answer.

“Dmíttri,” said Rostóv to his valet on the box, “those lights are in our house, aren’t they?”

“Yes, sir, and there’s a light in your father’s study.”

“Then they’ve not gone to bed yet? What do you think? Mind now, don’t forget to put out my new coat,” added Rostóv, fingering his new mustache. “Now then, get on,” he shouted to the driver. “Do wake up, Váska!” he went on, turning to Denísov, whose head was again nodding. “Come, get on! You shall have three rubles for vodka—get on!” Rostóv shouted, when the sleigh was only three houses from his door. It seemed to him the horses were not moving at all. At last the sleigh bore to the right, drew up at an entrance, and Rostóv saw overhead the old familiar cornice with a bit of plaster broken off, the porch, and the post by the side of the pavement. He sprang out before the sleigh stopped, and ran into the hall. The house stood cold and silent, as if quite regardless of who had come to it. There was no one in the hall. “Oh God! Is everyone all right?”

he thought, stopping for a moment with a sinking heart, and then immediately starting to run along the hall and up the warped steps of the familiar staircase. The well-known old door handle, which always angered the countess when it was not properly cleaned, turned as loosely as ever. A solitary tallow candle burned in the anteroom.

Old Michael was asleep on the chest. Prokófý, the footman, who was so strong that he could lift the back of the carriage from behind, sat plaiting slippers out of cloth selvages. He looked up at the opening door and his expression of sleepy indifference suddenly changed to one of delighted amazement.

“Gracious heavens! The young count!” he cried, recognizing his young master. “Can it be? My treasure!” and Prokófý, trembling with excitement, rushed toward the drawing room door, probably in order to announce him, but, changing his mind, came back and stooped to kiss the young man’s shoulder.

“All well?” asked Rostóv, drawing away his arm.

“Yes, God be thanked! Yes! They’ve just finished supper. Let me have a look at you, your excellency.”

“Is everything quite all right?”

“The Lord be thanked, yes!”

Rostóv, who had completely forgotten Denísov, not wishing anyone to forestall him, threw off his fur coat and ran on tiptoe through the large dark ballroom. All was the same: there were the same old card tables and the same chandelier with a cover over it; but someone had already seen the young master, and, before he had reached the drawing room, something flew out from a side door like a tornado and began hugging and kissing him. Another and yet another creature of the same kind sprang from a second door and a third; more hugging, more kissing, more outcries, and tears of joy. He could not distinguish which was Papa, which Natásha, and which Pétya. Everyone shouted, talked, and kissed him at the same time. Only his mother was not there, he noticed that.

“And I did not know... Nicholas... My darling!...”

“Here he is... our own... Kólya, \* dear fellow... How he has changed!... Where are the candles?... Tea!...”

\* Nicholas.

“And me, kiss me!”

“Dearest... and me!”

Sónya, Natásha, Pétya, Anna Mikháylovna, Véra, and the old count were all hugging him, and the serfs, men and maids, flocked into the room, exclaiming and oh-ing and ah-ing.

Pétya, clinging to his legs, kept shouting, "And me too!"

Natásha, after she had pulled him down toward her and covered his face with kisses, holding him tight by the skirt of his coat, sprang away and pranced up and down in one place like a goat and shrieked piercingly.

All around were loving eyes glistening with tears of joy, and all around were lips seeking a kiss.

Sónya too, all rosy red, clung to his arm and, radiant with bliss, looked eagerly toward his eyes, waiting for the look for which she longed. Sónya now was sixteen and she was very pretty, especially at this moment of happy, rapturous excitement. She gazed at him, not taking her eyes off him, and smiling and holding her breath. He gave her a grateful look, but was still expectant and looking for someone. The old countess had not yet come. But now steps were heard at the door, steps so rapid that they could hardly be his mother's.

Yet it was she, dressed in a new gown which he did not know, made since he had left. All the others let him go, and he ran to her. When they met, she fell on his breast, sobbing. She could not lift her face, but only pressed it to the cold braiding of his hussar's jacket. Denísov, who had come into the room unnoticed by anyone, stood there and wiped his eyes at the sight.

"Vasíli Denísov, your son's friend," he said, introducing himself to the count, who was looking inquiringly at him.

"You are most welcome! I know, I know," said the count, kissing and embracing Denísov. "Nicholas wrote us... Natásha, Véra, look! Here is Denísov!"

The same happy, rapturous faces turned to the shaggy figure of Denísov.

"Darling Denísov!" screamed Natásha, beside herself with rapture, springing to him, putting her arms round him, and kissing him. This escapade made everybody feel confused. Denísov blushed too, but smiled and, taking Natásha's hand, kissed it.

Denísov was shown to the room prepared for him, and the Rostóvs all gathered round Nicholas in the sitting room.

The old countess, not letting go of his hand and kissing it every moment, sat beside him: the rest, crowding round him, watched every movement, word, or look of his, never taking their blissfully adoring eyes off him. His brother and sisters struggled for the places nearest to him and disputed with one another who should bring him his tea, handkerchief, and pipe.

Rostóv was very happy in the love they showed him; but the first moment of meeting had been so beatific that his present joy seemed insufficient, and he kept expecting something more, more and yet more.

Next morning, after the fatigues of their journey, the travelers slept till ten o'clock.

In the room next to their bedroom there was a confusion of sabers, satchels, sabretaches, open portmanteaus, and dirty boots. Two freshly cleaned pairs with spurs had just been placed by the wall. The servants were bringing in jugs and basins, hot water for shaving, and their well-brushed clothes. There was a masculine odor and a smell of tobacco.

“Hallo, Gwíska—my pipe!” came Vasíli Denísov’s husky voice.  
“Wostóv, get up!”

Rostóv, rubbing his eyes that seemed glued together, raised his disheveled head from the hot pillow.

“Why, is it late?”

“Late! It’s nearly ten o’clock,” answered Natáša’s voice. A rustle of starched petticoats and the whispering and laughter of girls’ voices came from the adjoining room. The door was opened a crack and there was a glimpse of something blue, of ribbons, black hair, and merry faces. It was Natáša, Sónya, and Pétya, who had come to see whether they were getting up.

“Nicholas! Get up!” Natáša’s voice was again heard at the door.

“Directly!”

Meanwhile, Pétya, having found and seized the sabers in the outer room, with the delight boys feel at the sight of a military elder brother, and forgetting that it was unbecoming for the girls to see men undressed, opened the bedroom door.

“Is this your saber?” he shouted.

The girls sprang aside. Denísov hid his hairy legs under the blanket, looking with a scared face at his comrade for help. The door, having let Pétya in, closed again. A sound of laughter came from behind it.

“Nicholas! Come out in your dressing gown!” said Natáša’s voice.

“Is this your saber?” asked Pétya. “Or is it yours?” he said, addressing the black-mustached Denísov with servile deference.

Rostóv hurriedly put something on his feet, drew on his dressing gown, and went out. Natáša had put on one spurred boot and was just getting her foot into the other. Sónya, when he came in, was twirling round and was about to expand her dresses into a balloon and sit down. They were dressed alike, in new pale-blue frocks, and were both fresh, rosy, and bright. Sónya ran away, but Natáša, taking her brother’s arm, led him into the sitting room, where they began talking. They hardly gave one another time to ask questions and give replies concerning a thousand little matters which could not interest anyone but themselves. Natáša laughed at every word he said or that she said herself, not because what

they were saying was amusing, but because she felt happy and was unable to control her joy which expressed itself by laughter.

“Oh, how nice, how splendid!” she said to everything.

Rostóv felt that, under the influence of the warm rays of love, that childlike smile which had not once appeared on his face since he left home now for the first time after eighteen months again brightened his soul and his face.

“No, but listen,” she said, “now you are quite a man, aren’t you? I’m awfully glad you’re my brother.” She touched his mustache. “I want to know what you men are like. Are you the same as we? No?”

“Why did Sónya run away?” asked Rostóv.

“Ah, yes! That’s a whole long story! How are you going to speak to her—thou or you?”

“As may happen,” said Rostóv.

“No, call her you, please! I’ll tell you all about it some other time. No, I’ll tell you now. You know Sónya’s my dearest friend. Such a friend that I burned my arm for her sake. Look here!”

She pulled up her muslin sleeve and showed him a red scar on her long, slender, delicate arm, high above the elbow on that part that is covered even by a ball dress.

“I burned this to prove my love for her. I just heated a ruler in the fire and pressed it there!”

Sitting on the sofa with the little cushions on its arms, in what used to be his old schoolroom, and looking into Natásha’s wildly bright eyes, Rostóv re-entered that world of home and childhood which had no meaning for anyone else, but gave him some of the best joys of his life; and the burning of an arm with a ruler as a proof of love did not seem to him senseless, he understood and was not surprised at it.

“Well, and is that all?” he asked.

“We are such friends, such friends! All that ruler business was just nonsense, but we are friends forever. She, if she loves anyone, does it for life, but I don’t understand that, I forget quickly.”

“Well, what then?”

“Well, she loves me and you like that.”

Natásha suddenly flushed.

“Why, you remember before you went away?... Well, she says you are to forget all that.... She says: ‘I shall love him always, but let him be

free.' Isn't that lovely and noble! Yes, very noble? Isn't it?" asked Natásha, so seriously and excitedly that it was evident that what she was now saying she had talked of before, with tears.

Rostóv became thoughtful.

"I never go back on my word," he said. "Besides, Sónya is so charming that only a fool would renounce such happiness."

"No, no!" cried Natásha, "she and I have already talked it over. We knew you'd say so. But it won't do, because you see, if you say that—if you consider yourself bound by your promise—it will seem as if she had not meant it seriously. It makes it as if you were marrying her because you must, and that wouldn't do at all."

Rostóv saw that it had been well considered by them. Sónya had already struck him by her beauty on the preceding day. Today, when he had caught a glimpse of her, she seemed still more lovely. She was a charming girl of sixteen, evidently passionately in love with him (he did not doubt that for an instant). Why should he not love her now, and even marry her, Rostóv thought, but just now there were so many other pleasures and interests before him! "Yes, they have taken a wise decision," he thought, "I must remain free."

"Well then, that's excellent," said he. "We'll talk it over later on. Oh, how glad I am to have you!"

"Well, and are you still true to Borís?" he continued.

"Oh, what nonsense!" cried Natásha, laughing. "I don't think about him or anyone else, and I don't want anything of the kind."

"Dear me! Then what are you up to now?"

"Now?" repeated Natásha, and a happy smile lit up her face. "Have you seen Duport?"

"No."

"Not seen Duport—the famous dancer? Well then, you won't understand. That's what I'm up to."

Curving her arms, Natásha held out her skirts as dancers do, ran back a few steps, turned, cut a caper, brought her little feet sharply together, and made some steps on the very tips of her toes.

"See, I'm standing! See!" she said, but could not maintain herself on her toes any longer. "So that's what I'm up to! I'll never marry anyone, but will be a dancer. Only don't tell anyone."

Rostóv laughed so loud and merrily that Denísov, in his bedroom, felt envious and Natásha could not help joining in.

"No, but don't you think it's nice?" she kept repeating.

“Nice! And so you no longer wish to marry Borís?”

Natásha flared up. “I don’t want to marry anyone. And I’ll tell him so when I see him!”

“Dear me!” said Rostóv.

“But that’s all rubbish,” Natásha chattered on. “And is Denísov nice?” she asked.

“Yes, indeed!”

“Oh, well then, good-by: go and dress. Is he very terrible, Denísov?”

“Why terrible?” asked Nicholas. “No, Váska is a splendid fellow.”

“You call him Váska? That’s funny! And is he very nice?”

“Very.”

“Well then, be quick. We’ll all have breakfast together.”

And Natásha rose and went out of the room on tiptoe, like a ballet dancer, but smiling as only happy girls of fifteen can smile. When Rostóv met Sónya in the drawing room, he reddened. He did not know how to behave with her. The evening before, in the first happy moment of meeting, they had kissed each other, but today they felt it could not be done; he felt that everybody, including his mother and sisters, was looking inquiringly at him and watching to see how he would behave with her. He kissed her hand and addressed her not as thou but as you—Sónya. But their eyes met and said thou, and exchanged tender kisses. Her looks asked him to forgive her for having dared, by Natásha’s intermediacy, to remind him of his promise, and then thanked him for his love. His looks thanked her for offering him his freedom and told her that one way or another he would never cease to love her, for that would be impossible.

“How strange it is,” said Véra, selecting a moment when all were silent, “that Sónya and Nicholas now say you to one another and meet like strangers.”

Véra’s remark was correct, as her remarks always were, but, like most of her observations, it made everyone feel uncomfortable, not only Sónya, Nicholas, and Natásha, but even the old countess, who—dreading this love affair which might hinder Nicholas from making a brilliant match—blushed like a girl.

Denísov, to Rostóv’s surprise, appeared in the drawing room with pomaded hair, perfumed, and in a new uniform, looking just as smart as he made himself when going into battle, and he was more amiable to the ladies and gentlemen than Rostóv had ever expected to see him.