

## CHAPTER XI

On the third day after Christmas Nicholas dined at home, a thing he had rarely done of late. It was a grand farewell dinner, as he and Denísov were leaving to join their regiment after Epiphany. About twenty people were present, including Dólokhov and Denísov.

Never had love been so much in the air, and never had the amorous atmosphere made itself so strongly felt in the Rostóvs' house as at this holiday time. "Seize the moments of happiness, love and be loved! That is the only reality in the world, all else is folly. It is the one thing we are interested in here," said the spirit of the place.

Nicholas, having as usual exhausted two pairs of horses, without visiting all the places he meant to go to and where he had been invited, returned home just before dinner. As soon as he entered he noticed and felt the tension of the amorous air in the house, and also noticed a curious embarrassment among some of those present. Sónya, Dólokhov, and the old countess were especially disturbed, and to a lesser degree Natásha. Nicholas understood that something must have happened between Sónya and Dólokhov before dinner, and with the kindly sensitiveness natural to him was very gentle and wary with them both at dinner. On that same evening there was to be one of the balls that Iogel (the dancing master) gave for his pupils during the holidays.

"Nicholas, will you come to Iogel's? Please do!" said Natásha. "He asked you, and Vasíli Dmítrich \* is also going."

\* Denísov.

"Where would I not go at the countess' command!" said Denísov, who at the Rostóvs' had jocularly assumed the role of Natásha's knight. "I'm even weedy to dance the pas de châte."

"If I have time," answered Nicholas. "But I promised the Arkhárovs; they have a party."

"And you?" he asked Dólokhov, but as soon as he had asked the question he noticed that it should not have been put.

"Perhaps," coldly and angrily replied Dólokhov, glancing at Sónya, and, scowling, he gave Nicholas just such a look as he had given Pierre at the club dinner.

"There is something up," thought Nicholas, and he was further confirmed in this conclusion by the fact that Dólokhov left immediately after dinner. He called Natásha and asked her what was the matter.

"And I was looking for you," said Natásha running out to him. "I told you, but you would not believe it," she said triumphantly. "He has proposed to Sónya!"

Little as Nicholas had occupied himself with Sónya of late, something

seemed to give way within him at this news. Dólokhov was a suitable and in some respects a brilliant match for the dowerless, orphan girl. From the point of view of the old countess and of society it was out of the question for her to refuse him. And therefore Nicholas' first feeling on hearing the news was one of anger with Sónya.... He tried to say, "That's capital; of course she'll forget her childish promises and accept the offer," but before he had time to say it Natásha began again.

"And fancy! she refused him quite definitely!" adding, after a pause, "she told him she loved another."

"Yes, my Sónya could not have done otherwise!" thought Nicholas.

"Much as Mamma pressed her, she refused, and I know she won't change once she has said..."

"And Mamma pressed her!" said Nicholas reproachfully.

"Yes," said Natásha. "Do you know, Nicholas—don't be angry—but I know you will not marry her. I know, heaven knows how, but I know for certain that you won't marry her."

"Now you don't know that at all!" said Nicholas. "But I must talk to her. What a darling Sónya is!" he added with a smile.

"Ah, she is indeed a darling! I'll send her to you."

And Natásha kissed her brother and ran away.

A minute later Sónya came in with a frightened, guilty, and scared look. Nicholas went up to her and kissed her hand. This was the first time since his return that they had talked alone and about their love.

"Sophie," he began, timidly at first and then more and more boldly, "if you wish to refuse one who is not only a brilliant and advantageous match but a splendid, noble fellow... he is my friend..."

Sónya interrupted him.

"I have already refused," she said hurriedly.

"If you are refusing for my sake, I am afraid that I..."

Sónya again interrupted. She gave him an imploring, frightened look.

"Nicholas, don't tell me that!" she said.

"No, but I must. It may be arrogant of me, but still it is best to say it. If you refuse him on my account, I must tell you the whole truth. I love you, and I think I love you more than anyone else...."

"That is enough for me," said Sónya, blushing.

“No, but I have been in love a thousand times and shall fall in love again, though for no one have I such a feeling of friendship, confidence, and love as I have for you. Then I am young. Mamma does not wish it. In a word, I make no promise. And I beg you to consider Dólokhov’s offer,” he said, articulating his friend’s name with difficulty.

“Don’t say that to me! I want nothing. I love you as a brother and always shall, and I want nothing more.”

“You are an angel: I am not worthy of you, but I am afraid of misleading you.”

And Nicholas again kissed her hand.