

CHAPTER XII

Iogel's were the most enjoyable balls in Moscow. So said the mothers as they watched their young people executing their newly learned steps, and so said the youths and maidens themselves as they danced till they were ready to drop, and so said the grown-up young men and women who came to these balls with an air of condescension and found them most enjoyable. That year two marriages had come of these balls. The two pretty young Princesses Gorchakóv met suitors there and were married and so further increased the fame of these dances. What distinguished them from others was the absence of host or hostess and the presence of the good-natured Iogel, flying about like a feather and bowing according to the rules of his art, as he collected the tickets from all his visitors. There was the fact that only those came who wished to dance and amuse themselves as girls of thirteen and fourteen do who are wearing long dresses for the first time. With scarcely any exceptions they all were, or seemed to be, pretty—so rapturous were their smiles and so sparkling their eyes. Sometimes the best of the pupils, of whom Natásha, who was exceptionally graceful, was first, even danced the pas de châte, but at this last ball only the écossaise, the anglaise, and the mazurka, which was just coming into fashion, were danced. Iogel had taken a ballroom in Bezúkhov's house, and the ball, as everyone said, was a great success. There were many pretty girls and the Rostóv girls were among the prettiest. They were both particularly happy and gay. That evening, proud of Dólokhov's proposal, her refusal, and her explanation with Nicholas, Sónya twirled about before she left home so that the maid could hardly get her hair plaited, and she was transparently radiant with impulsive joy.

Natásha no less proud of her first long dress and of being at a real ball was even happier. They were both dressed in white muslin with pink ribbons.

Natásha fell in love the very moment she entered the ballroom. She was not in love with anyone in particular, but with everyone. Whatever person she happened to look at she was in love with for that moment.

"Oh, how delightful it is!" she kept saying, running up to Sónya.

Nicholas and Denísov were walking up and down, looking with kindly patronage at the dancers.

"How sweet she is—she will be a weal beauty!" said Denísov.

"Who?"

"Countess Natásha," answered Denísov.

"And how she dances! What gwace!" he said again after a pause.

"Who are you talking about?"

"About your sister," ejaculated Denísov testily.

Rostóv smiled.

“My dear count, you were one of my best pupils—you must dance,” said little Iogel coming up to Nicholas. “Look how many charming young ladies—” He turned with the same request to Denísov who was also a former pupil of his.

“No, my dear fellow, I’ll be a wallflower,” said Denísov.
“Don’t you recollect what bad use I made of your lessons?”

“Oh no!” said Iogel, hastening to reassure him. “You were only inattentive, but you had talent—oh yes, you had talent!”

The band struck up the newly introduced mazurka. Nicholas could not refuse Iogel and asked Sónya to dance. Denísov sat down by the old ladies and, leaning on his saber and beating time with his foot, told them something funny and kept them amused, while he watched the young people dancing. Iogel with Natáša, his pride and his best pupil, were the first couple. Noiselessly, skillfully stepping with his little feet in low shoes, Iogel flew first across the hall with Natáša, who, though shy, went on carefully executing her steps. Denísov did not take his eyes off her and beat time with his saber in a way that clearly indicated that if he was not dancing it was because he would not and not because he could not. In the middle of a figure he beckoned to Rostóv who was passing:

“This is not at all the thing,” he said. “What sort of Polish mazurka is this? But she does dance splendidly.”

Knowing that Denísov had a reputation even in Poland for the masterly way in which he danced the mazurka, Nicholas ran up to Natáša:

“Go and choose Denísov. He is a real dancer, a wonder!” he said.

When it came to Natáša’s turn to choose a partner, she rose and, tripping rapidly across in her little shoes trimmed with bows, ran timidly to the corner where Denísov sat. She saw that everybody was looking at her and waiting. Nicholas saw that Denísov was refusing though he smiled delightedly. He ran up to them.

“Please, Vasíli Dmítrich,” Natáša was saying, “do come!”

“Oh no, let me off, Countess,” Denísov replied.

“Now then, Váška,” said Nicholas.

“They coax me as if I were Váška the cat!” said Denísov jokingly.

“I’ll sing for you a whole evening,” said Natáša.

“Oh, the fairy! She can do anything with me!” said Denísov, and he unhooked his saber. He came out from behind the chairs, clasped his partner’s hand firmly, threw back his head, and advanced his foot,

waiting for the beat. Only on horse back and in the mazurka was Denísov's short stature not noticeable and he looked the fine fellow he felt himself to be. At the right beat of the music he looked sideways at his partner with a merry and triumphant air, suddenly stamped with one foot, bounded from the floor like a ball, and flew round the room taking his partner with him. He glided silently on one foot half across the room, and seeming not to notice the chairs was dashing straight at them, when suddenly, clinking his spurs and spreading out his legs, he stopped short on his heels, stood so a second, stamped on the spot clanking his spurs, whirled rapidly round, and, striking his left heel against his right, flew round again in a circle. Natáša guessed what he meant to do, and abandoning herself to him followed his lead hardly knowing how. First he spun her round, holding her now with his left, now with his right hand, then falling on one knee he twirled her round him, and again jumping up, dashed so impetuously forward that it seemed as if he would rush through the whole suite of rooms without drawing breath, and then he suddenly stopped and performed some new and unexpected steps. When at last, smartly whirling his partner round in front of her chair, he drew up with a click of his spurs and bowed to her, Natáša did not even make him a curtsy. She fixed her eyes on him in amazement, smiling as if she did not recognize him.

“What does this mean?” she brought out.

Although Iogel did not acknowledge this to be the real mazurka, everyone was delighted with Denísov's skill, he was asked again and again as a partner, and the old men began smilingly to talk about Poland and the good old days. Denísov, flushed after the mazurka and mopping himself with his handkerchief, sat down by Natáša and did not leave her for the rest of the evening.