

CHAPTER XVI

It was long since Rostóv had felt such enjoyment from music as he did that day. But no sooner had Natásha finished her barcarolle than reality again presented itself. He got up without saying a word and went downstairs to his own room. A quarter of an hour later the old count came in from his club, cheerful and contented. Nicholas, hearing him drive up, went to meet him.

“Well—had a good time?” said the old count, smiling gaily and proudly at his son.

Nicholas tried to say “Yes,” but could not: and he nearly burst into sobs. The count was lighting his pipe and did not notice his son’s condition.

“Ah, it can’t be avoided!” thought Nicholas, for the first and last time. And suddenly, in the most casual tone, which made him feel ashamed of himself, he said, as if merely asking his father to let him have the carriage to drive to town:

“Papa, I have come on a matter of business. I was nearly forgetting. I need some money.”

“Dear me!” said his father, who was in a specially good humor. “I told you it would not be enough. How much?”

“Very much,” said Nicholas flushing, and with a stupid careless smile, for which he was long unable to forgive himself, “I have lost a little, I mean a good deal, a great deal—forty three thousand.”

“What! To whom?... Nonsense!” cried the count, suddenly reddening with an apoplectic flush over neck and nape as old people do.

“I promised to pay tomorrow,” said Nicholas.

“Well!...” said the old count, spreading out his arms and sinking helplessly on the sofa.

“It can’t be helped! It happens to everyone!” said the son, with a bold, free, and easy tone, while in his soul he regarded himself as a worthless scoundrel whose whole life could not atone for his crime. He longed to kiss his father’s hands and kneel to beg his forgiveness, but said, in a careless and even rude voice, that it happens to everyone!

The old count cast down his eyes on hearing his son’s words and began bustlingly searching for something.

“Yes, yes,” he muttered, “it will be difficult, I fear, difficult to raise... happens to everybody! Yes, who has not done it?”

And with a furtive glance at his son’s face, the count went out of the

room.... Nicholas had been prepared for resistance, but had not at all expected this.

“Papa! Pa-pa!” he called after him, sobbing, “forgive me!” And seizing his father’s hand, he pressed it to his lips and burst into tears.

While father and son were having their explanation, the mother and daughter were having one not less important. Natásha came running to her mother, quite excited.

“Mamma!... Mamma!... He has made me...”

“Made what?”

“Made, made me an offer, Mamma! Mamma!” she exclaimed.

The countess did not believe her ears. Denísov had proposed. To whom? To this chit of a girl, Natásha, who not so long ago was playing with dolls and who was still having lessons.

“Don’t, Natásha! What nonsense!” she said, hoping it was a joke.

“Nonsense, indeed! I am telling you the fact,” said Natásha indignantly. “I come to ask you what to do, and you call it ‘nonsense!’”

The countess shrugged her shoulders.

“If it is true that Monsieur Denísov has made you a proposal, tell him he is a fool, that’s all!”

“No, he’s not a fool!” replied Natásha indignantly and seriously.

“Well then, what do you want? You’re all in love nowadays. Well, if you are in love, marry him!” said the countess, with a laugh of annoyance. “Good luck to you!”

“No, Mamma, I’m not in love with him, I suppose I’m not in love with him.”

“Well then, tell him so.”

“Mamma, are you cross? Don’t be cross, dear! Is it my fault?”

“No, but what is it, my dear? Do you want me to go and tell him?” said the countess smiling.

“No, I will do it myself, only tell me what to say. It’s all very well for you,” said Natásha, with a responsive smile. “You should have seen how he said it! I know he did not mean to say it, but it came out accidentally.”

“Well, all the same, you must refuse him.”

“No, I mustn’t. I am so sorry for him! He’s so nice.”

“Well then, accept his offer. It’s high time for you to be married,” answered the countess sharply and sarcastically.

“No, Mamma, but I’m so sorry for him. I don’t know how I’m to say it.”

“And there’s nothing for you to say. I shall speak to him myself,” said the countess, indignant that they should have dared to treat this little Natásha as grown up.

“No, not on any account! I will tell him myself, and you’ll listen at the door,” and Natásha ran across the drawing room to the dancing hall, where Denísov was sitting on the same chair by the clavichord with his face in his hands.

He jumped up at the sound of her light step.

“Nataly,” he said, moving with rapid steps toward her, “decide my fate. It is in your hands.”

“Vasíli Dmítrich, I’m so sorry for you!... No, but you are so nice... but it won’t do...not that... but as a friend, I shall always love you.”

Denísov bent over her hand and she heard strange sounds she did not understand. She kissed his rough curly black head. At this instant, they heard the quick rustle of the countess’ dress. She came up to them.

“Vasíli Dmítrich, I thank you for the honor,” she said, with an embarrassed voice, though it sounded severe to Denísov—“but my daughter is so young, and I thought that, as my son’s friend, you would have addressed yourself first to me. In that case you would not have obliged me to give this refusal.”

“Countess...” said Denísov, with downcast eyes and a guilty face. He tried to say more, but faltered.

Natásha could not remain calm, seeing him in such a plight. She began to sob aloud.

“Countess, I have done wrong,” Denísov went on in an unsteady voice, “but believe me, I so adore your daughter and all your family that I would give my life twice over...” He looked at the countess, and seeing her severe face said: “Well, good-bye, Countess,” and kissing her hand, he left the room with quick resolute strides, without looking at Natásha.

Next day Rostóv saw Denísov off. He did not wish to stay another day in Moscow. All Denísov’s Moscow friends gave him a farewell entertainment at the gypsies’, with the result that he had no

recollection of how he was put in the sleigh or of the first three stages of his journey.

After Denísov's departure, Rostóv spent another fortnight in Moscow, without going out of the house, waiting for the money his father could not at once raise, and he spent most of his time in the girls' room.

Sónya was more tender and devoted to him than ever. It was as if she wanted to show him that his losses were an achievement that made her love him all the more, but Nicholas now considered himself unworthy of her.

He filled the girls' albums with verses and music, and having at last sent Dólokhov the whole forty-three thousand rubles and received his receipt, he left at the end of November, without taking leave of any of his acquaintances, to overtake his regiment which was already in Poland.