

## CHAPTER XIII

One night when the old countess, in nightcap and dressing jacket, without her false curls, and with her poor little knob of hair showing under her white cotton cap, knelt sighing and groaning on a rug and bowing to the ground in prayer, her door creaked and Natásha, also in a dressing jacket with slippers on her bare feet and her hair in curlpapers, ran in. The countess—her prayerful mood dispelled—looked round and frowned. She was finishing her last prayer: “Can it be that this couch will be my grave?” Natásha, flushed and eager, seeing her mother in prayer, suddenly checked her rush, half sat down, and unconsciously put out her tongue as if chiding herself. Seeing that her mother was still praying she ran on tiptoe to the bed and, rapidly slipping one little foot against the other, pushed off her slippers and jumped onto the bed the countess had feared might become her grave. This couch was high, with a feather bed and five pillows each smaller than the one below. Natásha jumped on it, sank into the feather bed, rolled over to the wall, and began snuggling up the bedclothes as she settled down, raising her knees to her chin, kicking out and laughing almost inaudibly, now covering herself up head and all, and now peeping at her mother. The countess finished her prayers and came to the bed with a stern face, but seeing that Natásha’s head was covered, she smiled in her kind, weak way.

“Now then, now then!” said she.

“Mamma, can we have a talk? Yes?” said Natásha. “Now, just one on your throat and another... that’ll do!” And seizing her mother round the neck, she kissed her on the throat. In her behavior to her mother Natásha seemed rough, but she was so sensitive and tactful that however she clasped her mother she always managed to do it without hurting her or making her feel uncomfortable or displeased.

“Well, what is it tonight?” said the mother, having arranged her pillows and waited until Natásha, after turning over a couple of times, had settled down beside her under the quilt, spread out her arms, and assumed a serious expression.

These visits of Natásha’s at night before the count returned from his club were one of the greatest pleasures of both mother, and daughter.

“What is it tonight?—But I have to tell you...”

Natásha put her hand on her mother’s mouth.

“About Borís... I know,” she said seriously; “that’s what I have come about. Don’t say it—I know. No, do tell me!” and she removed her hand. “Tell me, Mamma! He’s nice?”

“Natásha, you are sixteen. At your age I was married. You say Borís is nice. He is very nice, and I love him like a son. But what then?... What are you thinking about? You have quite turned his head, I can see that...”

As she said this the countess looked round at her daughter. Natásha was lying looking steadily straight before her at one of the mahogany sphinxes carved on the corners of the bedstead, so that the countess only saw her daughter's face in profile. That face struck her by its peculiarly serious and concentrated expression.

Natásha was listening and considering.

"Well, what then?" said she.

"You have quite turned his head, and why? What do you want of him? You know you can't marry him."

"Why not?" said Natásha, without changing her position.

"Because he is young, because he is poor, because he is a relation... and because you yourself don't love him."

"How do you know?"

"I know. It is not right, darling!"

"But if I want to..." said Natásha.

"Leave off talking nonsense," said the countess.

"But if I want to..."

"Natásha, I am in earnest..."

Natásha did not let her finish. She drew the countess' large hand to her, kissed it on the back and then on the palm, then again turned it over and began kissing first one knuckle, then the space between the knuckles, then the next knuckle, whispering, "January, February, March, April, May. Speak, Mamma, why don't you say anything? Speak!" said she, turning to her mother, who was tenderly gazing at her daughter and in that contemplation seemed to have forgotten all she had wished to say.

"It won't do, my love! Not everyone will understand this friendship dating from your childish days, and to see him so intimate with you may injure you in the eyes of other young men who visit us, and above all it torments him for nothing. He may already have found a suitable and wealthy match, and now he's half crazy."

"Crazy?" repeated Natásha.

"I'll tell you some things about myself. I had a cousin..."

"I know! Cyril Matvéich... but he is old."

"He was not always old. But this is what I'll do, Natásha, I'll have a talk with Borís. He need not come so often...."

“Why not, if he likes to?”

“Because I know it will end in nothing....”

“How can you know? No, Mamma, don’t speak to him! What nonsense!” said Natásha in the tone of one being deprived of her property.

“Well, I won’t marry, but let him come if he enjoys it and I enjoy it.” Natásha smiled and looked at her mother. “Not to marry, but just so,” she added.

“How so, my pet?”

“Just so. There’s no need for me to marry him. But... just so.”

“Just so, just so,” repeated the countess, and shaking all over, she went off into a good humored, unexpected, elderly laugh.

“Don’t laugh, stop!” cried Natásha. “You’re shaking the whole bed! You’re awfully like me, just such another giggler.... Wait...” and she seized the countess’ hands and kissed a knuckle of the little finger, saying, “June,” and continued, kissing, “July, August,” on the other hand. “But, Mamma, is he very much in love? What do you think? Was anybody ever so much in love with you? And he’s very nice, very, very nice. Only not quite my taste—he is so narrow, like the dining-room clock.... Don’t you understand? Narrow, you know—gray, light gray...”

“What rubbish you’re talking!” said the countess.

Natásha continued: “Don’t you really understand? Nicholas would understand.... Bezúkhov, now, is blue, dark-blue and red, and he is square.”

“You flirt with him too,” said the countess, laughing.

“No, he is a Freemason, I have found out. He is fine, dark-blue and red.... How can I explain it to you?”

“Little countess!” the count’s voice called from behind the door.

“You’re not asleep?” Natásha jumped up, snatched up her slippers, and ran barefoot to her own room.

It was a long time before she could sleep. She kept thinking that no one could understand all that she understood and all there was in her.

“Sónya?” she thought, glancing at that curled-up, sleeping little kitten with her enormous plait of hair. “No, how could she? She’s virtuous. She fell in love with Nicholas and does not wish to know anything more. Even Mamma does not understand. It is wonderful how clever I am and how... charming she is,” she went on, speaking of herself in the third person, and imagining it was some very wise man—the wisest and best of men—who was saying it of her. “There is everything, everything in her,” continued this man. “She is

unusually intelligent, charming... and then she is pretty, uncommonly pretty, and agile—she swims and rides splendidly... and her voice! One can really say it's a wonderful voice!"

She hummed a scrap from her favorite opera by Cherubini, threw herself on her bed, laughed at the pleasant thought that she would immediately fall asleep, called Dunyásha the maid to put out the candle, and before Dunyásha had left the room had already passed into yet another happier world of dreams, where everything was as light and beautiful as in reality, and even more so because it was different.

Next day the countess called Borís aside and had a talk with him, after which he ceased coming to the Rostóvs'.