

CHAPTER I

The Bible legend tells us that the absence of labor—idleness—was a condition of the first man's blessedness before the Fall. Fallen man has retained a love of idleness, but the curse weighs on the race not only because we have to seek our bread in the sweat of our brows, but because our moral nature is such that we cannot be both idle and at ease. An inner voice tells us we are in the wrong if we are idle. If man could find a state in which he felt that though idle he was fulfilling his duty, he would have found one of the conditions of man's primitive blessedness. And such a state of obligatory and irreproachable idleness is the lot of a whole class—the military. The chief attraction of military service has consisted and will consist in this compulsory and irreproachable idleness.

Nicholas Rostóv experienced this blissful condition to the full when, after 1807, he continued to serve in the Pávlograd regiment, in which he already commanded the squadron he had taken over from Denísov.

Rostóv had become a bluff, good-natured fellow, whom his Moscow acquaintances would have considered rather bad form, but who was liked and respected by his comrades, subordinates, and superiors, and was well contented with his life. Of late, in 1809, he found in letters from home more frequent complaints from his mother that their affairs were falling into greater and greater disorder, and that it was time for him to come back to gladden and comfort his old parents.

Reading these letters, Nicholas felt a dread of their wanting to take him away from surroundings in which, protected from all the entanglements of life, he was living so calmly and quietly. He felt that sooner or later he would have to re-enter that whirlpool of life, with its embarrassments and affairs to be straightened out, its accounts with stewards, quarrels, and intrigues, its ties, society, and with Sónya's love and his promise to her. It was all dreadfully difficult and complicated; and he replied to his mother in cold, formal letters in French, beginning: "My dear Mamma," and ending: "Your obedient son," which said nothing of when he would return. In 1810 he received letters from his parents, in which they told him of Natásha's engagement to Bolkónski, and that the wedding would be in a year's time because the old prince made difficulties. This letter grieved and mortified Nicholas. In the first place he was sorry that Natásha, for whom he cared more than for anyone else in the family, should be lost to the home; and secondly, from his hussar point of view, he regretted not to have been there to show that fellow Bolkónski that connection with him was no such great honor after all, and that if he loved Natásha he might dispense with permission from his dotard father. For a moment he hesitated whether he should not apply for leave in order to see Natásha before she was married, but then came the maneuvers, and considerations about Sónya and about the confusion of their affairs, and Nicholas again put it off. But in the spring of that year, he received a letter from his mother, written without his father's knowledge, and that letter persuaded him to return. She wrote that if he did not come and take matters in hand, their whole property would be sold by auction and

they would all have to go begging. The count was so weak, and trusted Mítienka so much, and was so good-natured, that everybody took advantage of him and things were going from bad to worse. "For God's sake, I implore you, come at once if you do not wish to make me and the whole family wretched," wrote the countess.

This letter touched Nicholas. He had that common sense of a matter-of-fact man which showed him what he ought to do.

The right thing now was, if not to retire from the service, at any rate to go home on leave. Why he had to go he did not know; but after his after-dinner nap he gave orders to saddle Mars, an extremely vicious gray stallion that had not been ridden for a long time, and when he returned with the horse all in a lather, he informed Lavrúshka (Denísov's servant who had remained with him) and his comrades who turned up in the evening that he was applying for leave and was going home. Difficult and strange as it was for him to reflect that he would go away without having heard from the staff—and this interested him extremely—whether he was promoted to a captaincy or would receive the Order of St. Anne for the last maneuvers; strange as it was to think that he would go away without having sold his three roans to the Polish Count Golukhovski, who was bargaining for the horses Rostóv had betted he would sell for two thousand rubles; incomprehensible as it seemed that the ball the hussars were giving in honor of the Polish Mademoiselle Przazdziecka (out of rivalry to the Uhlans who had given one in honor of their Polish Mademoiselle Borzozowska) would take place without him—he knew he must go away from this good, bright world to somewhere where everything was stupid and confused. A week later he obtained his leave. His hussar comrades—not only those of his own regiment, but the whole brigade—gave Rostóv a dinner to which the subscription was fifteen rubles a head, and at which there were two bands and two choirs of singers. Rostóv danced the Trepák with Major Básov; the tipsy officers tossed, embraced, and dropped Rostóv; the soldiers of the third squadron tossed him too, and shouted "hurrah!" and then they put him in his sleigh and escorted him as far as the first post station.

During the first half of the journey—from Kremenchúg to Kiev—all Rostóv's thoughts, as is usual in such cases, were behind him, with the squadron; but when he had gone more than halfway he began to forget his three roans and Dozhoyvéyko, his quartermaster, and to wonder anxiously how things would be at Otrádnoe and what he would find there. Thoughts of home grew stronger the nearer he approached it—far stronger, as though this feeling of his was subject to the law by which the force of attraction is in inverse proportion to the square of the distance. At the last post station before Otrádnoe he gave the driver a three-ruble tip, and on arriving he ran breathlessly, like a boy, up the steps of his home.

After the rapture of meeting, and after that odd feeling of unsatisfied expectation—the feeling that "everything is just the same, so why did I hurry?"—Nicholas began to settle down in his old home world. His father and mother were much the same, only a little older. What was new in them was a certain uneasiness and occasional discord, which there

used not to be, and which, as Nicholas soon found out, was due to the bad state of their affairs. Sónya was nearly twenty; she had stopped growing prettier and promised nothing more than she was already, but that was enough. She exhaled happiness and love from the time Nicholas returned, and the faithful, unalterable love of this girl had a gladdening effect on him. Pétya and Natásha surprised Nicholas most. Pétya was a big handsome boy of thirteen, merry, witty, and mischievous, with a voice that was already breaking. As for Natásha, for a long while Nicholas wondered and laughed whenever he looked at her.

“You’re not the same at all,” he said.

“How? Am I uglier?”

“On the contrary, but what dignity? A princess!” he whispered to her.

“Yes, yes, yes!” cried Natásha, joyfully.

She told him about her romance with Prince Andrew and of his visit to Otrádnoe and showed him his last letter.

“Well, are you glad?” Natásha asked. “I am so tranquil and happy now.”

“Very glad,” answered Nicholas. “He is an excellent fellow.... And are you very much in love?”

“How shall I put it?” replied Natásha. “I was in love with Borís, with my teacher, and with Denísov, but this is quite different. I feel at peace and settled. I know that no better man than he exists, and I am calm and contented now. Not at all as before.”

Nicholas expressed his disapproval of the postponement of the marriage for a year; but Natásha attacked her brother with exasperation, proving to him that it could not be otherwise, and that it would be a bad thing to enter a family against the father’s will, and that she herself wished it so.

“You don’t at all understand,” she said.

Nicholas was silent and agreed with her.

Her brother often wondered as he looked at her. She did not seem at all like a girl in love and parted from her affianced husband. She was even-tempered and calm and quite as cheerful as of old. This amazed Nicholas and even made him regard Bolkónski’s courtship skeptically. He could not believe that her fate was sealed, especially as he had not seen her with Prince Andrew. It always seemed to him that there was something not quite right about this intended marriage.

“Why this delay? Why no betrothal?” he thought. Once, when he had touched on this topic with his mother, he discovered, to his surprise

and somewhat to his satisfaction, that in the depth of her soul she too had doubts about this marriage.

“You see he writes,” said she, showing her son a letter of Prince Andrew’s, with that latent grudge a mother always has in regard to a daughter’s future married happiness, “he writes that he won’t come before December. What can be keeping him? Illness, probably! His health is very delicate. Don’t tell Natásha. And don’t attach importance to her being so bright: that’s because she’s living through the last days of her girlhood, but I know what she is like every time we receive a letter from him! However, God grant that everything turns out well!” (She always ended with these words.) “He is an excellent man!”