

CHAPTER VI

At the end of January old Count Rostóv went to Moscow with Natásha and Sónya. The countess was still unwell and unable to travel but it was impossible to wait for her recovery. Prince Andrew was expected in Moscow any day, the trousseau had to be ordered and the estate near Moscow had to be sold, besides which the opportunity of presenting his future daughter-in-law to old Prince Bolkónski while he was in Moscow could not be missed. The Rostóvs' Moscow house had not been heated that winter and, as they had come only for a short time and the countess was not with them, the count decided to stay with Márya Dmítrievna Akhrosíмова, who had long been pressing her hospitality on them.

Late one evening the Rostóvs' four sleighs drove into Márya Dmítrievna's courtyard in the old Konyúsheny street. Márya Dmítrievna lived alone. She had already married off her daughter, and her sons were all in the service.

She held herself as erect, told everyone her opinion as candidly, loudly, and bluntly as ever, and her whole bearing seemed a reproach to others for any weakness, passion, or temptation—the possibility of which she did not admit. From early in the morning, wearing a dressing jacket, she attended to her household affairs, and then she drove out: on holy days to church and after the service to jails and prisons on affairs of which she never spoke to anyone. On ordinary days, after dressing, she received petitioners of various classes, of whom there were always some. Then she had dinner, a substantial and appetizing meal at which there were always three or four guests; after dinner she played a game of boston, and at night she had the newspapers or a new book read to her while she knitted. She rarely made an exception and went out to pay visits, and then only to the most important persons in the town.

She had not yet gone to bed when the Rostóvs arrived and the pulley of the hall door squeaked from the cold as it let in the Rostóvs and their servants. Márya Dmítrievna, with her spectacles hanging down on her nose and her head flung back, stood in the hall doorway looking with a stern, grim face at the new arrivals. One might have thought she was angry with the travelers and would immediately turn them out, had she not at the same time been giving careful instructions to the servants for the accommodation of the visitors and their belongings.

“The count's things? Bring them here,” she said, pointing to the portmanteaus and not greeting anyone. “The young ladies'? There to the left. Now what are you dawdling for?” she cried to the maids. “Get the samovar ready!... You've grown plumper and prettier,” she remarked, drawing Natásha (whose cheeks were glowing from the cold) to her by the hood. “Foo! You are cold! Now take off your things, quick!” she shouted to the count who was going to kiss her hand. “You're half frozen, I'm sure! Bring some rum for tea!... Bonjour, Sónya dear!” she added, turning to Sónya and indicating by this French greeting her slightly contemptuous though affectionate attitude toward her.

When they came in to tea, having taken off their outdoor things and tidied themselves up after their journey, Márya Dmítrievna kissed them all in due order.

“I’m heartily glad you have come and are staying with me. It was high time,” she said, giving Natásha a significant look. “The old man is here and his son’s expected any day. You’ll have to make his acquaintance. But we’ll speak of that later on,” she added, glancing at Sónya with a look that showed she did not want to speak of it in her presence. “Now listen,” she said to the count. “What do you want tomorrow? Whom will you send for? Shinshín?” she crooked one of her fingers. “The sniveling Anna Mikháylovna? That’s two. She’s here with her son. The son is getting married! Then Bezúkhov, eh? He is here too, with his wife. He ran away from her and she came galloping after him. He dined with me on Wednesday. As for them”—and she pointed to the girls—“tomorrow I’ll take them first to the Iberian shrine of the Mother of God, and then we’ll drive to the Super-Rogue’s. I suppose you’ll have everything new. Don’t judge by me: sleeves nowadays are this size! The other day young Princess Irína Vasílevna came to see me; she was an awful sight—looked as if she had put two barrels on her arms. You know not a day passes now without some new fashion.... And what have you to do yourself?” she asked the count sternly.

“One thing has come on top of another: her rags to buy, and now a purchaser has turned up for the Moscow estate and for the house. If you will be so kind, I’ll fix a time and go down to the estate just for a day, and leave my lassies with you.”

“All right. All right. They’ll be safe with me, as safe as in Chancery! I’ll take them where they must go, scold them a bit, and pet them a bit,” said Márya Dmítrievna, touching her goddaughter and favorite, Natásha, on the cheek with her large hand.

Next morning Márya Dmítrievna took the young ladies to the Iberian shrine of the Mother of God and to Madame Suppert-Roguet, who was so afraid of Márya Dmítrievna that she always let her have costumes at a loss merely to get rid of her. Márya Dmítrievna ordered almost the whole trousseau. When they got home she turned everybody out of the room except Natásha, and then called her pet to her armchair.

“Well, now we’ll talk. I congratulate you on your betrothed. You’ve hooked a fine fellow! I am glad for your sake and I’ve known him since he was so high.” She held her hand a couple of feet from the ground. Natásha blushed happily. “I like him and all his family. Now listen! You know that old Prince Nicholas much dislikes his son’s marrying. The old fellow’s crotchety! Of course Prince Andrew is not a child and can shift without him, but it’s not nice to enter a family against a father’s will. One wants to do it peacefully and lovingly. You’re a clever girl and you’ll know how to manage. Be kind, and use your wits. Then all will be well.”

Natásha remained silent, from shyness Márya Dmítrievna supposed, but really because she disliked anyone interfering in what touched her love

of Prince Andrew, which seemed to her so apart from all human affairs that no one could understand it. She loved and knew Prince Andrew, he loved her only, and was to come one of these days and take her. She wanted nothing more.

“You see I have known him a long time and am also fond of Mary, your future sister-in-law. ‘Husbands’ sisters bring up blisters,’ but this one wouldn’t hurt a fly. She has asked me to bring you two together. Tomorrow you’ll go with your father to see her. Be very nice and affectionate to her: you’re younger than she. When he comes, he’ll find you already know his sister and father and are liked by them. Am I right or not? Won’t that be best?”

“Yes, it will,” Natásha answered reluctantly.