

## CHAPTER VII

Next day, by Márya Dmítrievna's advice, Count Rostóv took Natásha to call on Prince Nicholas Bolkónski. The count did not set out cheerfully on this visit, at heart he felt afraid. He well remembered the last interview he had had with the old prince at the time of the enrollment, when in reply to an invitation to dinner he had had to listen to an angry reprimand for not having provided his full quota of men. Natásha, on the other hand, having put on her best gown, was in the highest spirits. "They can't help liking me," she thought. "Everybody always has liked me, and I am so willing to do anything they wish, so ready to be fond of him—for being his father—and of her—for being his sister—that there is no reason for them not to like me...."

They drove up to the gloomy old house on the Vozdvízhenka and entered the vestibule.

"Well, the Lord have mercy on us!" said the count, half in jest, half in earnest; but Natásha noticed that her father was flurried on entering the anteroom and inquired timidly and softly whether the prince and princess were at home.

When they had been announced a perturbation was noticeable among the servants. The footman who had gone to announce them was stopped by another in the large hall and they whispered to one another. Then a maidservant ran into the hall and hurriedly said something, mentioning the princess. At last an old, cross looking footman came and announced to the Rostóvs that the prince was not receiving, but that the princess begged them to walk up. The first person who came to meet the visitors was Mademoiselle Bourienne. She greeted the father and daughter with special politeness and showed them to the princess' room. The princess, looking excited and nervous, her face flushed in patches, ran in to meet the visitors, treading heavily, and vainly trying to appear cordial and at ease. From the first glance Princess Mary did not like Natásha. She thought her too fashionably dressed, frivolously gay and vain. She did not at all realize that before having seen her future sister-in-law she was prejudiced against her by involuntary envy of her beauty, youth, and happiness, as well as by jealousy of her brother's love for her. Apart from this insuperable antipathy to her, Princess Mary was agitated just then because on the Rostóvs' being announced, the old prince had shouted that he did not wish to see them, that Princess Mary might do so if she chose, but they were not to be admitted to him. She had decided to receive them, but feared lest the prince might at any moment indulge in some freak, as he seemed much upset by the Rostóvs' visit.

"There, my dear princess, I've brought you my songstress," said the count, bowing and looking round uneasily as if afraid the old prince might appear. "I am so glad you should get to know one another... very sorry the prince is still ailing," and after a few more commonplace remarks he rose. "If you'll allow me to leave my Natásha in your hands for a quarter of an hour, Princess, I'll drive round to see Anna

Semënovna, it's quite near in the Dogs' Square, and then I'll come back for her."

The count had devised this diplomatic ruse (as he afterwards told his daughter) to give the future sisters-in-law an opportunity to talk to one another freely, but another motive was to avoid the danger of encountering the old prince, of whom he was afraid. He did not mention this to his daughter, but Natásha noticed her father's nervousness and anxiety and felt mortified by it. She blushed for him, grew still angrier at having blushed, and looked at the princess with a bold and defiant expression which said that she was not afraid of anybody. The princess told the count that she would be delighted, and only begged him to stay longer at Anna Semënovna's, and he departed.

Despite the uneasy glances thrown at her by Princess Mary—who wished to have a tête-à-tête with Natásha—Mademoiselle Bourienne remained in the room and persistently talked about Moscow amusements and theaters. Natásha felt offended by the hesitation she had noticed in the anteroom, by her father's nervousness, and by the unnatural manner of the princess who—she thought—was making a favor of receiving her, and so everything displeased her. She did not like Princess Mary, whom she thought very plain, affected, and dry. Natásha suddenly shrank into herself and involuntarily assumed an offhand air which alienated Princess Mary still more. After five minutes of irksome, constrained conversation, they heard the sound of slippers rapidly approaching. Princess Mary looked frightened.

The door opened and the old prince, in a dressing gown and a white nightcap, came in.

"Ah, madam!" he began. "Madam, Countess... Countess Rostóva, if I am not mistaken... I beg you to excuse me, to excuse me... I did not know, madam. God is my witness, I did not know you had honored us with a visit, and I came in such a costume only to see my daughter. I beg you to excuse me... God is my witness, I didn't know—" he repeated, stressing the word "God" so unnaturally and so unpleasantly that Princess Mary stood with downcast eyes not daring to look either at her father or at Natásha.

Nor did the latter, having risen and curtsied, know what to do. Mademoiselle Bourienne alone smiled agreeably.

"I beg you to excuse me, excuse me! God is my witness, I did not know," muttered the old man, and after looking Natásha over from head to foot he went out.

Mademoiselle Bourienne was the first to recover herself after this apparition and began speaking about the prince's indisposition. Natásha and Princess Mary looked at one another in silence, and the longer they did so without saying what they wanted to say, the greater grew their antipathy to one another.

When the count returned, Natásha was impolitely pleased and hastened to get away: at that moment she hated the stiff, elderly princess, who

could place her in such an embarrassing position and had spent half an hour with her without once mentioning Prince Andrew. "I couldn't begin talking about him in the presence of that Frenchwoman," thought Natásha. The same thought was meanwhile tormenting Princess Mary. She knew what she ought to have said to Natásha, but she had been unable to say it because Mademoiselle Bourienne was in the way, and because, without knowing why, she felt it very difficult to speak of the marriage. When the count was already leaving the room, Princess Mary went up hurriedly to Natásha, took her by the hand, and said with a deep sigh:

"Wait, I must..."

Natásha glanced at her ironically without knowing why.

"Dear Natalie," said Princess Mary, "I want you to know that I am glad my brother has found happiness...."

She paused, feeling that she was not telling the truth. Natásha noticed this and guessed its reason.

"I think, Princess, it is not convenient to speak of that now," she said with external dignity and coldness, though she felt the tears choking her.

"What have I said and what have I done?" thought she, as soon as she was out of the room.

They waited a long time for Natásha to come to dinner that day. She sat in her room crying like a child, blowing her nose and sobbing. Sónya stood beside her, kissing her hair.

"Natásha, what is it about?" she asked. "What do they matter to you? It will all pass, Natásha."

"But if you only knew how offensive it was... as if I..."

"Don't talk about it, Natásha. It wasn't your fault so why should you mind? Kiss me," said Sónya.

Natásha raised her head and, kissing her friend on the lips, pressed her wet face against her.

"I can't tell you, I don't know. No one's to blame," said Natásha—"It's my fault. But it all hurts terribly. Oh, why doesn't he come?..."

She came in to dinner with red eyes. Márya Dmítrievna, who knew how the prince had received the Rostóvs, pretended not to notice how upset Natásha was and jested resolutely and loudly at table with the count and the other guests.