

CHAPTER VIII

That evening the Rostóvs went to the Opera, for which Márya Dmítrievna had taken a box.

Natásha did not want to go, but could not refuse Márya Dmítrievna's kind offer which was intended expressly for her. When she came ready dressed into the ballroom to await her father, and looking in the large mirror there saw that she was pretty, very pretty, she felt even more sad, but it was a sweet, tender sadness.

“O God, if he were here now I would not behave as I did then, but differently. I would not be silly and afraid of things, I would simply embrace him, cling to him, and make him look at me with those searching inquiring eyes with which he has so often looked at me, and then I would make him laugh as he used to laugh. And his eyes—how I see those eyes!” thought Natásha. “And what do his father and sister matter to me? I love him alone, him, him, with that face and those eyes, with his smile, manly and yet childlike.... No, I had better not think of him; not think of him but forget him, quite forget him for the present. I can't bear this waiting and I shall cry in a minute!” and she turned away from the glass, making an effort not to cry. “And how can Sónya love Nicholas so calmly and quietly and wait so long and so patiently?” thought she, looking at Sónya, who also came in quite ready, with a fan in her hand. “No, she's altogether different. I can't!”

Natásha at that moment felt so softened and tender that it was not enough for her to love and know she was beloved, she wanted now, at once, to embrace the man she loved, to speak and hear from him words of love such as filled her heart. While she sat in the carriage beside her father, pensively watching the lights of the street lamps flickering on the frozen window, she felt still sadder and more in love, and forgot where she was going and with whom. Having fallen into the line of carriages, the Rostóvs' carriage drove up to the theater, its wheels squeaking over the snow. Natásha and Sónya, holding up their dresses, jumped out quickly. The count got out helped by the footmen, and, passing among men and women who were entering and the program sellers, they all three went along the corridor to the first row of boxes. Through the closed doors the music was already audible.

“Natásha, your hair!...” whispered Sónya.

An attendant deferentially and quickly slipped before the ladies and opened the door of their box. The music sounded louder and through the door rows of brightly lit boxes in which ladies sat with bare arms and shoulders, and noisy stalls brilliant with uniforms, glittered before their eyes. A lady entering the next box shot a glance of feminine envy at Natásha. The curtain had not yet risen and the overture was being played. Natásha, smoothing her gown, went in with Sónya and sat down, scanning the brilliant tiers of boxes opposite. A sensation she had not experienced for a long time—that of hundreds of eyes looking at her bare arms and neck—suddenly affected her both agreeably and

disagreeably and called up a whole crowd of memories, desires and emotions associated with that feeling.

The two remarkably pretty girls, Natásha and Sónya, with Count Rostóv who had not been seen in Moscow for a long time, attracted general attention. Moreover, everybody knew vaguely of Natásha's engagement to Prince Andrew, and knew that the Rostóvs had lived in the country ever since, and all looked with curiosity at a fiancée who was making one of the best matches in Russia.

Natásha's looks, as everyone told her, had improved in the country, and that evening thanks to her agitation she was particularly pretty. She struck those who saw her by her fullness of life and beauty, combined with her indifference to everything about her. Her black eyes looked at the crowd without seeking anyone, and her delicate arm, bare to above the elbow, lay on the velvet edge of the box, while, evidently unconsciously, she opened and closed her hand in time to the music, crumpling her program. "Look, there's Alénina," said Sónya, "with her mother, isn't it?"

"Dear me, Michael Kirílovich has grown still stouter!" remarked the count.

"Look at our Anna Mikháylovna—what a headdress she has on!"

"The Karágins, Julie—and Borís with them. One can see at once that they're engaged...."

"Drubetskóy has proposed?"

"Oh yes, I heard it today," said Shinshín, coming into the Rostóvs' box.

Natásha looked in the direction in which her father's eyes were turned and saw Julie sitting beside her mother with a happy look on her face and a string of pearls round her thick red neck—which Natásha knew was covered with powder. Behind them, wearing a smile and leaning over with an ear to Julie's mouth, was Borís' handsome smoothly brushed head. He looked at the Rostóvs from under his brows and said something, smiling, to his betrothed.

"They are talking about us, about me and him!" thought Natásha. "And he no doubt is calming her jealousy of me. They needn't trouble themselves! If only they knew how little I am concerned about any of them."

Behind them sat Anna Mikháylovna wearing a green headdress and with a happy look of resignation to the will of God on her face. Their box was pervaded by that atmosphere of an affianced couple which Natásha knew so well and liked so much. She turned away and suddenly remembered all that had been so humiliating in her morning's visit.

"What right has he not to wish to receive me into his family? Oh, better not think of it—not till he comes back!" she told herself,

and began looking at the faces, some strange and some familiar, in the stalls. In the front, in the very center, leaning back against the orchestra rail, stood Dólokhov in a Persian dress, his curly hair brushed up into a huge shock. He stood in full view of the audience, well aware that he was attracting everyone's attention, yet as much at ease as though he were in his own room. Around him thronged Moscow's most brilliant young men, whom he evidently dominated.

The count, laughing, nudged the blushing Sónya and pointed to her former adorer.

"Do you recognize him?" said he. "And where has he sprung from?" he asked, turning to Shinshín. "Didn't he vanish somewhere?"

"He did," replied Shinshín. "He was in the Caucasus and ran away from there. They say he has been acting as minister to some ruling prince in Persia, where he killed the Shah's brother. Now all the Moscow ladies are mad about him! It's 'Dólokhov the Persian' that does it! We never hear a word but Dólokhov is mentioned. They swear by him, they offer him to you as they would a dish of choice sterlet. Dólokhov and Anatole Kurágin have turned all our ladies' heads."

A tall, beautiful woman with a mass of plaited hair and much exposed plump white shoulders and neck, round which she wore a double string of large pearls, entered the adjoining box rustling her heavy silk dress and took a long time settling into her place.

Natásha involuntarily gazed at that neck, those shoulders, and pearls and coiffure, and admired the beauty of the shoulders and the pearls. While Natásha was fixing her gaze on her for the second time the lady looked round and, meeting the count's eyes, nodded to him and smiled. She was the Countess Bezúkhova, Pierre's wife, and the count, who knew everyone in society, leaned over and spoke to her.

"Have you been here long, Countess?" he inquired. "I'll call, I'll call to kiss your hand. I'm here on business and have brought my girls with me. They say Semënova acts marvelously. Count Pierre never used to forget us. Is he here?"

"Yes, he meant to look in," answered Héléne, and glanced attentively at Natásha.

Count Rostóv resumed his seat.

"Handsome, isn't she?" he whispered to Natásha.

"Wonderful!" answered Natásha. "She's a woman one could easily fall in love with."

Just then the last chords of the overture were heard and the conductor tapped with his stick. Some latecomers took their seats in the stalls, and the curtain rose.

As soon as it rose everyone in the boxes and stalls became silent, and

all the men, old and young, in uniform and evening dress, and all the women with gems on their bare flesh, turned their whole attention with eager curiosity to the stage. Natásha too began to look at it.