

CHAPTER IX

The floor of the stage consisted of smooth boards, at the sides was some painted cardboard representing trees, and at the back was a cloth stretched over boards. In the center of the stage sat some girls in red bodices and white skirts. One very fat girl in a white silk dress sat apart on a low bench, to the back of which a piece of green cardboard was glued. They all sang something. When they had finished their song the girl in white went up to the prompter's box and a man with tight silk trousers over his stout legs, and holding a plume and a dagger, went up to her and began singing, waving his arms about.

First the man in the tight trousers sang alone, then she sang, then they both paused while the orchestra played and the man fingered the hand of the girl in white, obviously awaiting the beat to start singing with her. They sang together and everyone in the theater began clapping and shouting, while the man and woman on the stage—who represented lovers—began smiling, spreading out their arms, and bowing.

After her life in the country, and in her present serious mood, all this seemed grotesque and amazing to Natásha. She could not follow the opera nor even listen to the music; she saw only the painted cardboard and the queerly dressed men and women who moved, spoke, and sang so strangely in that brilliant light. She knew what it was all meant to represent, but it was so pretentiously false and unnatural that she first felt ashamed for the actors and then amused at them. She looked at the faces of the audience, seeking in them the same sense of ridicule and perplexity she herself experienced, but they all seemed attentive to what was happening on the stage, and expressed delight which to Natásha seemed feigned. "I suppose it has to be like this!" she thought. She kept looking round in turn at the rows of pomaded heads in the stalls and then at the seminude women in the boxes, especially at Héléne in the next box, who—apparently quite unclothed—sat with a quiet tranquil smile, not taking her eyes off the stage. And feeling the bright light that flooded the whole place and the warm air heated by the crowd, Natásha little by little began to pass into a state of intoxication she had not experienced for a long while. She did not realize who and where she was, nor what was going on before her. As she looked and thought, the strangest fancies unexpectedly and disconnectedly passed through her mind: the idea occurred to her of jumping onto the edge of the box and singing the aria the actress was singing, then she wished to touch with her fan an old gentleman sitting not far from her, then to lean over to Héléne and tickle her.

At a moment when all was quiet before the commencement of a song, a door leading to the stalls on the side nearest the Rostóvs' box creaked, and the steps of a belated arrival were heard. "There's Kurágin!" whispered Shinshín. Countess Bezúkhova turned smiling to the newcomer, and Natásha, following the direction of that look, saw an exceptionally handsome adjutant approaching their box with a self-assured yet courteous bearing. This was Anatole Kurágin whom she had seen and noticed long ago at the ball in Petersburg. He was now in an adjutant's uniform with one epaulet and a shoulder knot. He moved with

a restrained swagger which would have been ridiculous had he not been so good-looking and had his handsome face not worn such an expression of good-humored complacency and gaiety. Though the performance was proceeding, he walked deliberately down the carpeted gangway, his sword and spurs slightly jingling and his handsome perfumed head held high. Having looked at Natásha he approached his sister, laid his well gloved hand on the edge of her box, nodded to her, and leaning forward asked a question, with a motion toward Natásha.

“Mais charmante!” said he, evidently referring to Natásha, who did not exactly hear his words but understood them from the movement of his lips. Then he took his place in the first row of the stalls and sat down beside Dólokhov, nudging with his elbow in a friendly and offhand way that Dólokhov whom others treated so fawningly. He winked at him gaily, smiled, and rested his foot against the orchestra screen.

“How like the brother is to the sister,” remarked the count. “And how handsome they both are!”

Shinshín, lowering his voice, began to tell the count of some intrigue of Kurágin’s in Moscow, and Natásha tried to overhear it just because he had said she was “charmante.”

The first act was over. In the stalls everyone began moving about, going out and coming in.

Borís came to the Rostóvs’ box, received their congratulations very simply, and raising his eyebrows with an absent-minded smile conveyed to Natásha and Sónya his fiancée’s invitation to her wedding, and went away. Natásha with a gay, coquettish smile talked to him, and congratulated on his approaching wedding that same Borís with whom she had formerly been in love. In the state of intoxication she was in, everything seemed simple and natural.

The scantily clad Héléne smiled at everyone in the same way, and Natásha gave Borís a similar smile.

Héléne’s box was filled and surrounded from the stalls by the most distinguished and intellectual men, who seemed to vie with one another in their wish to let everyone see that they knew her.

During the whole of that entr’acte Kurágin stood with Dólokhov in front of the orchestra partition, looking at the Rostóvs’ box. Natásha knew he was talking about her and this afforded her pleasure. She even turned so that he should see her profile in what she thought was its most becoming aspect. Before the beginning of the second act Pierre appeared in the stalls. The Rostóvs had not seen him since their arrival. His face looked sad, and he had grown still stouter since Natásha last saw him. He passed up to the front rows, not noticing anyone. Anatole went up to him and began speaking to him, looking at and indicating the Rostóvs’ box. On seeing Natásha Pierre grew animated and, hastily passing between the rows, came toward their box. When he got there he leaned on his elbows and, smiling, talked to her for a long time. While conversing with Pierre, Natásha heard a man’s voice in

Countess Bezúkhova's box and something told her it was Kurágin. She turned and their eyes met. Almost smiling, he gazed straight into her eyes with such an enraptured caressing look that it seemed strange to be so near him, to look at him like that, to be so sure he admired her, and not to be acquainted with him.

In the second act there was scenery representing tombstones, there was a round hole in the canvas to represent the moon, shades were raised over the footlights, and from horns and contrabass came deep notes while many people appeared from right and left wearing black cloaks and holding things like daggers in their hands. They began waving their arms. Then some other people ran in and began dragging away the maiden who had been in white and was now in light blue. They did not drag her away at once, but sang with her for a long time and then at last dragged her off, and behind the scenes something metallic was struck three times and everyone knelt down and sang a prayer. All these things were repeatedly interrupted by the enthusiastic shouts of the audience.

During this act every time Natásha looked toward the stalls she saw Anatole Kurágin with an arm thrown across the back of his chair, staring at her. She was pleased to see that he was captivated by her and it did not occur to her that there was anything wrong in it.

When the second act was over Countess Bezúkhova rose, turned to the Rostóvs' box—her whole bosom completely exposed—beckoned the old count with a gloved finger, and paying no attention to those who had entered her box began talking to him with an amiable smile.

“Do make me acquainted with your charming daughters,” said she. “The whole town is singing their praises and I don't even know them!”

Natásha rose and curtsied to the splendid countess. She was so pleased by praise from this brilliant beauty that she blushed with pleasure.

“I want to become a Moscovite too, now,” said Héléne. “How is it you're not ashamed to bury such pearls in the country?”

Countess Bezúkhova quite deserved her reputation of being a fascinating woman. She could say what she did not think—especially what was flattering—quite simply and naturally.

“Dear count, you must let me look after your daughters! Though I am not staying here long this time—nor are you—I will try to amuse them. I have already heard much of you in Petersburg and wanted to get to know you,” said she to Natásha with her stereotyped and lovely smile. “I had heard about you from my page, Drubetskóy. Have you heard he is getting married? And also from my husband's friend Bolkónski, Prince Andrew Bolkónski,” she went on with special emphasis, implying that she knew of his relation to Natásha. To get better acquainted she asked that one of the young ladies should come into her box for the rest of the performance, and Natásha moved over to it.

The scene of the third act represented a palace in which many candles were burning and pictures of knights with short beards hung on the walls. In the middle stood what were probably a king and a queen. The king waved his right arm and, evidently nervous, sang something badly and sat down on a crimson throne. The maiden who had been first in white and then in light blue, now wore only a smock, and stood beside the throne with her hair down. She sang something mournfully, addressing the queen, but the king waved his arm severely, and men and women with bare legs came in from both sides and began dancing all together. Then the violins played very shrilly and merrily and one of the women with thick bare legs and thin arms, separating from the others, went behind the wings, adjusted her bodice, returned to the middle of the stage, and began jumping and striking one foot rapidly against the other. In the stalls everyone clapped and shouted "bravo!" Then one of the men went into a corner of the stage. The cymbals and horns in the orchestra struck up more loudly, and this man with bare legs jumped very high and waved his feet about very rapidly. (He was Duport, who received sixty thousand rubles a year for this art.) Everybody in the stalls, boxes, and galleries began clapping and shouting with all their might, and the man stopped and began smiling and bowing to all sides. Then other men and women danced with bare legs. Then the king again shouted to the sound of music, and they all began singing. But suddenly a storm came on, chromatic scales and diminished sevenths were heard in the orchestra, everyone ran off, again dragging one of their number away, and the curtain dropped. Once more there was a terrible noise and clatter among the audience, and with rapturous faces everyone began shouting: "Duport! Duport! Duport!" Natásha no longer thought this strange. She looked about with pleasure, smiling joyfully.

"Isn't Duport delightful?" H  l  ne asked her.

"Oh, yes," replied Natásha.