

CHAPTER XII

The day after the opera the Rostóvs went nowhere and nobody came to see them. Márya Dmítrievna talked to the count about something which they concealed from Natásha. Natásha guessed they were talking about the old prince and planning something, and this disquieted and offended her. She was expecting Prince Andrew any moment and twice that day sent a manservant to the Vozdvízhenka to ascertain whether he had come. He had not arrived. She suffered more now than during her first days in Moscow. To her impatience and pining for him were now added the unpleasant recollection of her interview with Princess Mary and the old prince, and a fear and anxiety of which she did not understand the cause. She continually fancied that either he would never come or that something would happen to her before he came. She could no longer think of him by herself calmly and continuously as she had done before. As soon as she began to think of him, the recollection of the old prince, of Princess Mary, of the theater, and of Kurágin mingled with her thoughts. The question again presented itself whether she was not guilty, whether she had not already broken faith with Prince Andrew, and again she found herself recalling to the minutest detail every word, every gesture, and every shade in the play of expression on the face of the man who had been able to arouse in her such an incomprehensible and terrifying feeling. To the family Natásha seemed livelier than usual, but she was far less tranquil and happy than before.

On Sunday morning Márya Dmítrievna invited her visitors to Mass at her parish church—the Church of the Assumption built over the graves of victims of the plague.

“I don’t like those fashionable churches,” she said, evidently priding herself on her independence of thought. “God is the same everywhere. We have an excellent priest, he conducts the service decently and with dignity, and the deacon is the same. What holiness is there in giving concerts in the choir? I don’t like it, it’s just self-indulgence!”

Márya Dmítrievna liked Sundays and knew how to keep them. Her whole house was scrubbed and cleaned on Saturdays; neither she nor the servants worked, and they all wore holiday dress and went to church. At her table there were extra dishes at dinner, and the servants had vodka and roast goose or suckling pig. But in nothing in the house was the holiday so noticeable as in Márya Dmítrievna’s broad, stern face, which on that day wore an invariable look of solemn festivity.

After Mass, when they had finished their coffee in the dining room where the loose covers had been removed from the furniture, a servant announced that the carriage was ready, and Márya Dmítrievna rose with a stern air. She wore her holiday shawl, in which she paid calls, and announced that she was going to see Prince Nicholas Bolkónski to have an explanation with him about Natásha.

After she had gone, a dressmaker from Madame Suppert-Roguet waited on the Rostóvs, and Natásha, very glad of this diversion, having shut

herself into a room adjoining the drawing room, occupied herself trying on the new dresses. Just as she had put on a bodice without sleeves and only tacked together, and was turning her head to see in the glass how the back fitted, she heard in the drawing room the animated sounds of her father's voice and another's—a woman's—that made her flush. It was H  l  ne. Nat  sha had not time to take off the bodice before the door opened and Countess Bez  khova, dressed in a purple velvet gown with a high collar, came into the room beaming with good-humored amiable smiles.

“Oh, my enchantress!” she cried to the blushing Nat  sha.

“Charming! No, this is really beyond anything, my dear count,” said she to Count Rost  v who had followed her in. “How can you live in Moscow and go nowhere? No, I won't let you off! Mademoiselle George will recite at my house tonight and there'll be some people, and if you don't bring your lovely girls—who are prettier than Mademoiselle George—I won't know you! My husband is away in Tver or I would send him to fetch you. You must come. You positively must! Between eight and nine.”

She nodded to the dressmaker, whom she knew and who had curtsied respectfully to her, and seated herself in an armchair beside the looking glass, draping the folds of her velvet dress picturesquely. She did not cease chattering good-naturedly and gaily, continually praising Nat  sha's beauty. She looked at Nat  sha's dresses and praised them, as well as a new dress of her own made of “metallic gauze,” which she had received from Paris, and advised Nat  sha to have one like it.

“But anything suits you, my charmer!” she remarked.

A smile of pleasure never left Nat  sha's face. She felt happy and as if she were blossoming under the praise of this dear Countess Bez  khova who had formerly seemed to her so unapproachable and important and was now so kind to her. Nat  sha brightened up and felt almost in love with this woman, who was so beautiful and so kind. H  l  ne for her part was sincerely delighted with Nat  sha and wished to give her a good time. Anatole had asked her to bring him and Nat  sha together, and she was calling on the Rost  vs for that purpose. The idea of throwing her brother and Nat  sha together amused her.

Though at one time, in Petersburg, she had been annoyed with Nat  sha for drawing Bor  s away, she did not think of that now, and in her own way heartily wished Nat  sha well. As she was leaving the Rost  vs she called her prot  g  e aside.

“My brother dined with me yesterday—we nearly died of laughter—he ate nothing and kept sighing for you, my charmer! He is madly, quite madly, in love with you, my dear.”

Nat  sha blushed scarlet when she heard this.

“How she blushes, how she blushes, my pretty!” said H  l  ne. “You must certainly come. If you love somebody, my charmer, that is not a

reason to shut yourself up. Even if you are engaged, I am sure your fiancé would wish you to go into society rather than be bored to death.”

“So she knows I am engaged, and she and her husband Pierre—that good Pierre—have talked and laughed about this. So it’s all right.” And again, under Hélène’s influence, what had seemed terrible now seemed simple and natural. “And she is such a grande dame, so kind, and evidently likes me so much. And why not enjoy myself?” thought Natásha, gazing at Hélène with wide-open, wondering eyes.

Márya Dmítrievna came back to dinner taciturn and serious, having evidently suffered a defeat at the old prince’s. She was still too agitated by the encounter to be able to talk of the affair calmly. In answer to the count’s inquiries she replied that things were all right and that she would tell about it next day. On hearing of Countess Bezúkhova’s visit and the invitation for that evening, Márya Dmítrievna remarked:

“I don’t care to have anything to do with Bezúkhova and don’t advise you to; however, if you’ve promised—go. It will divert your thoughts,” she added, addressing Natásha.