

CHAPTER XIII

Count Rostóv took the girls to Countess Bezúkhova's. There were a good many people there, but nearly all strangers to Natásha. Count Rostóv was displeased to see that the company consisted almost entirely of men and women known for the freedom of their conduct. Mademoiselle George was standing in a corner of the drawing room surrounded by young men. There were several Frenchmen present, among them Métivier who from the time Hélène reached Moscow had been an intimate in her house. The count decided not to sit down to cards or let his girls out of his sight and to get away as soon as Mademoiselle George's performance was over.

Anatole was at the door, evidently on the lookout for the Rostóvs. Immediately after greeting the count he went up to Natásha and followed her. As soon as she saw him she was seized by the same feeling she had had at the opera—gratified vanity at his admiration of her and fear at the absence of a moral barrier between them.

Hélène welcomed Natásha delightedly and was loud in admiration of her beauty and her dress. Soon after their arrival Mademoiselle George went out of the room to change her costume. In the drawing room people began arranging the chairs and taking their seats. Anatole moved a chair for Natásha and was about to sit down beside her, but the count, who never lost sight of her, took the seat himself. Anatole sat down behind her.

Mademoiselle George, with her bare, fat, dimpled arms, and a red shawl draped over one shoulder, came into the space left vacant for her, and assumed an unnatural pose. Enthusiastic whispering was audible.

Mademoiselle George looked sternly and gloomily at the audience and began reciting some French verses describing her guilty love for her son. In some places she raised her voice, in others she whispered, lifting her head triumphantly; sometimes she paused and uttered hoarse sounds, rolling her eyes.

“Adorable! divine! delicious!” was heard from every side.

Natásha looked at the fat actress, but neither saw nor heard nor understood anything of what went on before her. She only felt herself again completely borne away into this strange senseless world—so remote from her old world—a world in which it was impossible to know what was good or bad, reasonable or senseless. Behind her sat Anatole, and conscious of his proximity she experienced a frightened sense of expectancy.

After the first monologue the whole company rose and surrounded Mademoiselle George, expressing their enthusiasm.

“How beautiful she is!” Natásha remarked to her father who had also risen and was moving through the crowd toward the actress.

“I don't think so when I look at you!” said Anatole, following Natásha. He said this at a moment when she alone could hear him. “You

are enchanting... from the moment I saw you I have never ceased..."

"Come, come, Natásha!" said the count, as he turned back for his daughter. "How beautiful she is!" Natásha without saying anything stepped up to her father and looked at him with surprised inquiring eyes.

After giving several recitations, Mademoiselle George left, and Countess Bezúkhova asked her visitors into the ballroom.

The count wished to go home, but Héléne entreated him not to spoil her improvised ball, and the Rostóvs stayed on. Anatole asked Natásha for a valse and as they danced he pressed her waist and hand and told her she was bewitching and that he loved her. During the écossaise, which she also danced with him, Anatole said nothing when they happened to be by themselves, but merely gazed at her. Natásha lifted her frightened eyes to him, but there was such confident tenderness in his affectionate look and smile that she could not, whilst looking at him, say what she had to say. She lowered her eyes.

"Don't say such things to me. I am betrothed and love another," she said rapidly.... She glanced at him.

Anatole was not upset or pained by what she had said.

"Don't speak to me of that! What can I do?" said he. "I tell you I am madly, madly, in love with you! Is it my fault that you are enchanting?... It's our turn to begin."

Natásha, animated and excited, looked about her with wide-open frightened eyes and seemed merrier than usual. She understood hardly anything that went on that evening. They danced the écossaise and the Grossvater. Her father asked her to come home, but she begged to remain. Wherever she went and whomever she was speaking to, she felt his eyes upon her. Later on she recalled how she had asked her father to let her go to the dressing room to rearrange her dress, that Héléne had followed her and spoken laughingly of her brother's love, and that she again met Anatole in the little sitting room. Héléne had disappeared leaving them alone, and Anatole had taken her hand and said in a tender voice:

"I cannot come to visit you but is it possible that I shall never see you? I love you madly. Can I never...?" and, blocking her path, he brought his face close to hers.

His large, glittering, masculine eyes were so close to hers that she saw nothing but them.

"Natalie?" he whispered inquiringly while she felt her hands being painfully pressed. "Natalie?"

"I don't understand. I have nothing to say," her eyes replied.

Burning lips were pressed to hers, and at the same instant she felt

herself released, and Hélène's footsteps and the rustle of her dress were heard in the room. Natásha looked round at her, and then, red and trembling, threw a frightened look of inquiry at Anatole and moved toward the door.

"One word, just one, for God's sake!" cried Anatole.

She paused. She so wanted a word from him that would explain to her what had happened and to which she could find no answer.

"Natalie, just a word, only one!" he kept repeating, evidently not knowing what to say and he repeated it till Hélène came up to them.

Hélène returned with Natásha to the drawing room. The Rostóvs went away without staying for supper.

After reaching home Natásha did not sleep all night. She was tormented by the insoluble question whether she loved Anatole or Prince Andrew. She loved Prince Andrew—she remembered distinctly how deeply she loved him. But she also loved Anatole, of that there was no doubt. "Else how could all this have happened?" thought she. "If, after that, I could return his smile when saying good-by, if I was able to let it come to that, it means that I loved him from the first. It means that he is kind, noble, and splendid, and I could not help loving him. What am I to do if I love him and the other one too?" she asked herself, unable to find an answer to these terrible questions.