

CHAPTER XIV

Morning came with its cares and bustle. Everyone got up and began to move about and talk, dressmakers came again. Márya Dmítrievna appeared, and they were called to breakfast. Natásha kept looking uneasily at everybody with wide-open eyes, as if wishing to intercept every glance directed toward her, and tried to appear the same as usual.

After breakfast, which was her best time, Márya Dmítrievna sat down in her armchair and called Natásha and the count to her.

“Well, friends, I have now thought the whole matter over and this is my advice,” she began. “Yesterday, as you know, I went to see Prince Bolkónski. Well, I had a talk with him.... He took it into his head to begin shouting, but I am not one to be shouted down. I said what I had to say!”

“Well, and he?” asked the count.

“He? He’s crazy... he did not want to listen. But what’s the use of talking? As it is we have worn the poor girl out,” said Márya Dmítrievna. “My advice to you is finish your business and go back home to Otrádnoe... and wait there.”

“Oh, no!” exclaimed Natásha.

“Yes, go back,” said Márya Dmítrievna, “and wait there. If your betrothed comes here now—there will be no avoiding a quarrel; but alone with the old man he will talk things over and then come on to you.”

Count Rostóv approved of this suggestion, appreciating its reasonableness. If the old man came round it would be all the better to visit him in Moscow or at Bald Hills later on; and if not, the wedding, against his wishes, could only be arranged at Otrádnoe.

“That is perfectly true. And I am sorry I went to see him and took her,” said the old count.

“No, why be sorry? Being here, you had to pay your respects. But if he won’t—that’s his affair,” said Márya Dmítrievna, looking for something in her reticule. “Besides, the trousseau is ready, so there is nothing to wait for; and what is not ready I’ll send after you. Though I don’t like letting you go, it is the best way. So go, with God’s blessing!”

Having found what she was looking for in the reticule she handed it to Natásha. It was a letter from Princess Mary.

“She has written to you. How she torments herself, poor thing! She’s afraid you might think that she does not like you.”

“But she doesn’t like me,” said Natásha.

“Don’t talk nonsense!” cried Márya Dmítrievna.

“I shan’t believe anyone, I know she doesn’t like me,” replied Natásha boldly as she took the letter, and her face expressed a cold and angry resolution that caused Márya Dmítrievna to look at her more intently and to frown.

“Don’t answer like that, my good girl!” she said. “What I say is true! Write an answer!”

Natásha did not reply and went to her own room to read Princess Mary’s letter.

Princess Mary wrote that she was in despair at the misunderstanding that had occurred between them. Whatever her father’s feelings might be, she begged Natásha to believe that she could not help loving her as the one chosen by her brother, for whose happiness she was ready to sacrifice everything.

“Do not think, however,” she wrote, “that my father is ill-disposed toward you. He is an invalid and an old man who must be forgiven; but he is good and magnanimous and will love her who makes his son happy.” Princess Mary went on to ask Natásha to fix a time when she could see her again.

After reading the letter Natásha sat down at the writing table to answer it. “Dear Princess,” she wrote in French quickly and mechanically, and then paused. What more could she write after all that had happened the evening before? “Yes, yes! All that has happened, and now all is changed,” she thought as she sat with the letter she had begun before her. “Must I break off with him? Must I really? That’s awful...” and to escape from these dreadful thoughts she went to Sónya and began sorting patterns with her.

After dinner Natásha went to her room and again took up Princess Mary’s letter. “Can it be that it is all over?” she thought. “Can it be that all this has happened so quickly and has destroyed all that went before?” She recalled her love for Prince Andrew in all its former strength, and at the same time felt that she loved Kurágin. She vividly pictured herself as Prince Andrew’s wife, and the scenes of happiness with him she had so often repeated in her imagination, and at the same time, aglow with excitement, recalled every detail of yesterday’s interview with Anatole.

“Why could that not be as well?” she sometimes asked herself in complete bewilderment. “Only so could I be completely happy; but now I have to choose, and I can’t be happy without either of them. Only,” she thought, “to tell Prince Andrew what has happened or to hide it from him are both equally impossible. But with that one nothing is spoiled. But am I really to abandon forever the joy of Prince Andrew’s love, in which I have lived so long?”

“Please, Miss!” whispered a maid entering the room with a mysterious

air. “A man told me to give you this—” and she handed Natásha a letter.

“Only, for Christ’s sake...” the girl went on, as Natásha, without thinking, mechanically broke the seal and read a love letter from Anatole, of which, without taking in a word, she understood only that it was a letter from him—from the man she loved. Yes, she loved him, or else how could that have happened which had happened? And how could she have a love letter from him in her hand?

With trembling hands Natásha held that passionate love letter which Dólokhov had composed for Anatole, and as she read it she found in it an echo of all that she herself imagined she was feeling.

“Since yesterday evening my fate has been sealed; to be loved by you or to die. There is no other way for me,” the letter began. Then he went on to say that he knew her parents would not give her to him—for this there were secret reasons he could reveal only to her—but that if she loved him she need only say the word yes, and no human power could hinder their bliss. Love would conquer all. He would steal her away and carry her off to the ends of the earth.

“Yes, yes! I love him!” thought Natásha, reading the letter for the twentieth time and finding some peculiarly deep meaning in each word of it.

That evening Márya Dmítrievna was going to the Akhárovs’ and proposed to take the girls with her. Natásha, pleading a headache, remained at home.