CHAPTER XVI

Anatole had lately moved to Dólokhov's. The plan for Natalie Rostóva's abduction had been arranged and the preparations made by Dólokhov a few days before, and on the day that Sónya, after listening at Natásha's door, resolved to safeguard her, it was to have been put into execution. Natásha had promised to come out to Kurágin at the back porch at ten that evening. Kurágin was to put her into a troyka he would have ready and to drive her forty miles to the village of Kámenka, where an unfrocked priest was in readiness to perform a marriage ceremony over them. At Kámenka a relay of horses was to wait which would take them to the Warsaw highroad, and from there they would hasten abroad with post horses.

Anatole had a passport, an order for post horses, ten thousand rubles he had taken from his sister and another ten thousand borrowed with Dólokhov's help.

Two witnesses for the mock marriage—Khvóstikov, a retired petty official whom Dólokhov made use of in his gambling transactions, and Makárin, a retired hussar, a kindly, weak fellow who had an unbounded affection for Kurágin—were sitting at tea in Dólokhov's front room.

In his large study, the walls of which were hung to the ceiling with Persian rugs, bearskins, and weapons, sat Dólokhov in a traveling cloak and high boots, at an open desk on which lay an abacus and some bundles of paper money. Anatole, with uniform unbuttoned, walked to and fro from the room where the witnesses were sitting, through the study to the room behind, where his French valet and others were packing the last of his things. Dólokhov was counting the money and noting something down.

"Well," he said, "Khvóstikov must have two thousand."

"Give it to him, then," said Anatole.

"Makárka" (their name for Makárin) "will go through fire and water for you for nothing. So here are our accounts all settled," said Dólokhov, showing him the memorandum. "Is that right?"

"Yes, of course," returned Anatole, evidently not listening to Dólokhov and looking straight before him with a smile that did not leave his face.

Dólokhov banged down the lid of his desk and turned to Anatole with an ironic smile:

"Do you know? You'd really better drop it all. There's still time!"

"Fool," retorted Anatole. "Don't talk nonsense! If you only knew... it's the devil knows what!"

“No, really, give it up!” said Dólokhov. “I am speaking seriously. It’s no joke, this plot you’ve hatched.”

“What, teasing again? Go to the devil! Eh?” said Anatole, making a grimace. “Really it’s no time for your stupid jokes,” and he left the room.

Dólokhov smiled contemptuously and condescendingly when Anatole had gone out.

“You wait a bit,” he called after him. “I’m not joking, I’m talking sense. Come here, come here!”

Anatole returned and looked at Dólokhov, trying to give him his attention and evidently submitting to him involuntarily.

“Now listen to me. I’m telling you this for the last time. Why should I joke about it? Did I hinder you? Who arranged everything for you? Who found the priest and got the passport? Who raised the money? I did it all.”

“Well, thank you for it. Do you think I am not grateful?” And Anatole sighed and embraced Dólokhov.

“I helped you, but all the same I must tell you the truth; it is a dangerous business, and if you think about it—a stupid business. Well, you’ll carry her off—all right! Will they let it stop at that? It will come out that you’re already married. Why, they’ll have you in the criminal court....”

“Oh, nonsense, nonsense!” Anatole ejaculated and again made a grimace. “Didn’t I explain to you? What?” And Anatole, with the partiality dull-witted people have for any conclusion they have reached by their own reasoning, repeated the argument he had already put to Dólokhov a hundred times. “Didn’t I explain to you that I have come to this conclusion: if this marriage is invalid,” he went on, crooking one finger, “then I have nothing to answer for; but if it is valid, no matter! Abroad no one will know anything about it. Isn’t that so? And don’t talk to me, don’t, don’t.”

“Seriously, you’d better drop it! You’ll only get yourself into a mess!”

“Go to the devil!” cried Anatole and, clutching his hair, left the room, but returned at once and dropped into an armchair in front of Dólokhov with his feet turned under him. “It’s the very devil! What? Feel how it beats!” He took Dólokhov’s hand and put it on his heart. “What a foot, my dear fellow! What a glance! A goddess!” he added in French. “What?”

Dólokhov with a cold smile and a gleam in his handsome insolent eyes looked at him—evidently wishing to get some more amusement out of him.

“Well and when the money’s gone, what then?”

“What then? Eh?” repeated Anatole, sincerely perplexed by a thought of the future. “What then?... Then, I don’t know.... But why talk nonsense!” He glanced at his watch. “It’s time!”

Anatole went into the back room.

“Now then! Nearly ready? You’re dawdling!” he shouted to the servants.

Dólokhov put away the money, called a footman whom he ordered to bring something for them to eat and drink before the journey, and went into the room where Khvóstikov and Makárin were sitting.

Anatole lay on the sofa in the study leaning on his elbow and smiling pensively, while his handsome lips muttered tenderly to himself.

“Come and eat something. Have a drink!” Dólokhov shouted to him from the other room.

“I don’t want to,” answered Anatole continuing to smile.

“Come! Balagá is here.”

Anatole rose and went into the dining room. Balagá was a famous troyka driver who had known Dólokhov and Anatole some six years and had given them good service with his troykas. More than once when Anatole’s regiment was stationed at Tver he had taken him from Tver in the evening, brought him to Moscow by daybreak, and driven him back again the next night. More than once he had enabled Dólokhov to escape when pursued. More than once he had driven them through the town with gypsies and “ladykins” as he called the cocottes. More than once in their service he had run over pedestrians and upset vehicles in the streets of Moscow and had always been protected from the consequences by “my gentlemen” as he called them. He had ruined more than one horse in their service. More than once they had beaten him, and more than once they had made him drunk on champagne and Madeira, which he loved; and he knew more than one thing about each of them which would long ago have sent an ordinary man to Siberia. They often called Balagá into their orgies and made him drink and dance at the gypsies’, and more than one thousand rubles of their money had passed through his hands. In their service he risked his skin and his life twenty times a year, and in their service had lost more horses than the money he had from them would buy. But he liked them; liked that mad driving at twelve miles an hour, liked upsetting a driver or running down a pedestrian, and flying at full gallop through the Moscow streets. He liked to hear those wild, tipsy shouts behind him: “Get on! Get on!” when it was impossible to go any faster. He liked giving a painful lash on the neck to some peasant who, more dead than alive, was already hurrying out of his way. “Real gentlemen!” he considered them.

Anatole and Dólokhov liked Balagá too for his masterly driving and because he liked the things they liked. With others Balagá bargained, charging twenty-five rubles for a two hours’ drive, and rarely

drove himself, generally letting his young men do so. But with “his gentlemen” he always drove himself and never demanded anything for his work. Only a couple of times a year—when he knew from their valets that they had money in hand—he would turn up of a morning quite sober and with a deep bow would ask them to help him. The gentlemen always made him sit down.

“Do help me out, Theodore Iványch, sir,” or “your excellency,” he would say. “I am quite out of horses. Let me have what you can to go to the fair.”

And Anatole and Dólokhov, when they had money, would give him a thousand or a couple of thousand rubles.

Balagá was a fair-haired, short, and snub-nosed peasant of about twenty-seven; red-faced, with a particularly red thick neck, glittering little eyes, and a small beard. He wore a fine, dark-blue, silk-lined cloth coat over a sheepskin.

On entering the room now he crossed himself, turning toward the front corner of the room, and went up to Dólokhov, holding out a small, black hand.

“Theodore Iványch!” he said, bowing.

“How d’you do, friend? Well, here he is!”

“Good day, your excellency!” he said, again holding out his hand to Anatole who had just come in.

“I say, Balagá,” said Anatole, putting his hands on the man’s shoulders, “do you care for me or not? Eh? Now, do me a service.... What horses have you come with? Eh?”

“As your messenger ordered, your special beasts,” replied Balagá.

“Well, listen, Balagá! Drive all three to death but get me there in three hours. Eh?”

“When they are dead, what shall I drive?” said Balagá with a wink.

“Mind, I’ll smash your face in! Don’t make jokes!” cried Anatole, suddenly rolling his eyes.

“Why joke?” said the driver, laughing. “As if I’d grudge my gentlemen anything! As fast as ever the horses can gallop, so fast we’ll go!”

“Ah!” said Anatole. “Well, sit down.”

“Yes, sit down!” said Dólokhov.

“I’ll stand, Theodore Iványch.”

“Sit down; nonsense! Have a drink!” said Anatole, and filled a large glass of Madeira for him.

The driver’s eyes sparkled at the sight of the wine. After refusing it for manners’ sake, he drank it and wiped his mouth with a red silk handkerchief he took out of his cap.

“And when are we to start, your excellency?”

“Well...” Anatole looked at his watch. “We’ll start at once. Mind, Balagá! You’ll get there in time? Eh?”

“That depends on our luck in starting, else why shouldn’t we be there in time?” replied Balagá. “Didn’t we get you to Tver in seven hours? I think you remember that, your excellency?”

“Do you know, one Christmas I drove from Tver,” said Anatole, smilingly at the recollection and turning to Makárin who gazed rapturously at him with wide-open eyes. “Will you believe it, Makárka, it took one’s breath away, the rate we flew. We came across a train of loaded sleighs and drove right over two of them. Eh?”

“Those were horses!” Balagá continued the tale. “That time I’d harnessed two young side horses with the bay in the shafts,” he went on, turning to Dólokhov. “Will you believe it, Theodore Iványch, those animals flew forty miles? I couldn’t hold them in, my hands grew numb in the sharp frost so that I threw down the reins—‘Catch hold yourself, your excellency!’ says I, and I just tumbled on the bottom of the sleigh and sprawled there. It wasn’t a case of urging them on, there was no holding them in till we reached the place. The devils took us there in three hours! Only the near one died of it.”