

CHAPTER XVIII

Márya Dmítrievna, having found Sónya weeping in the corridor, made her confess everything, and intercepting the note to Natásha she read it and went into Natásha's room with it in her hand.

"You shameless good-for-nothing!" said she. "I won't hear a word."

Pushing back Natásha who looked at her with astonished but tearless eyes, she locked her in; and having given orders to the yard porter to admit the persons who would be coming that evening, but not to let them out again, and having told the footman to bring them up to her, she seated herself in the drawing room to await the abductors.

When Gabriel came to inform her that the men who had come had run away again, she rose frowning, and clasping her hands behind her paced through the rooms a long time considering what she should do. Toward midnight she went to Natásha's room fingering the key in her pocket. Sónya was sitting sobbing in the corridor. "Márya Dmítrievna, for God's sake let me in to her!" she pleaded, but Márya Dmítrievna unlocked the door and went in without giving her an answer.... "Disgusting, abominable... In my house... horrid girl, hussy! I'm only sorry for her father!" thought she, trying to restrain her wrath. "Hard as it may be, I'll tell them all to hold their tongues and will hide it from the count." She entered the room with resolute steps. Natásha lying on the sofa, her head hidden in her hands, and she did not stir. She was in just the same position in which Márya Dmítrievna had left her.

"A nice girl! Very nice!" said Márya Dmítrievna. "Arranging meetings with lovers in my house! It's no use pretending: you listen when I speak to you!" And Márya Dmítrievna touched her arm. "Listen when I speak! You've disgraced yourself like the lowest of hussies. I'd treat you differently, but I'm sorry for your father, so I will conceal it."

Natásha did not change her position, but her whole body heaved with noiseless, convulsive sobs which choked her. Márya Dmítrievna glanced round at Sónya and seated herself on the sofa beside Natásha.

"It's lucky for him that he escaped me; but I'll find him!" she said in her rough voice. "Do you hear what I am saying or not?" she added.

She put her large hand under Natásha's face and turned it toward her. Both Márya Dmítrievna and Sónya were amazed when they saw how Natásha looked. Her eyes were dry and glistening, her lips compressed, her cheeks sunken.

"Let me be!... What is it to me?... I shall die!" she muttered, wrenching herself from Márya Dmítrievna's hands with a vicious effort and sinking down again into her former position.

"Natalie!" said Márya Dmítrievna. "I wish for your good. Lie still, stay like that then, I won't touch you. But listen. I won't tell you how guilty you are. You know that yourself. But when your father comes back

tomorrow what am I to tell him? Eh?"

Again Natásha's body shook with sobs.

"Suppose he finds out, and your brother, and your betrothed?"

"I have no betrothed: I have refused him!" cried Natásha.

"That's all the same," continued Márya Dmítrievna. "If they hear of this, will they let it pass? He, your father, I know him... if he challenges him to a duel will that be all right? Eh?"

"Oh, let me be! Why have you interfered at all? Why? Why? Who asked you to?" shouted Natásha, raising herself on the sofa and looking malignantly at Márya Dmítrievna.

"But what did you want?" cried Márya Dmítrievna, growing angry again. "Were you kept under lock and key? Who hindered his coming to the house? Why carry you off as if you were some gypsy singing girl?... Well, if he had carried you off... do you think they wouldn't have found him? Your father, or brother, or your betrothed? And he's a scoundrel, a wretch—that's a fact!"

"He is better than any of you!" exclaimed Natásha getting up. "If you hadn't interfered... Oh, my God! What is it all? What is it? Sónya, why?... Go away!"

And she burst into sobs with the despairing vehemence with which people bewail disasters they feel they have themselves occasioned. Márya Dmítrievna was to speak again but Natásha cried out:

"Go away! Go away! You all hate and despise me!" and she threw herself back on the sofa.

Márya Dmítrievna went on admonishing her for some time, enjoining on her that it must all be kept from her father and assuring her that nobody would know anything about it if only Natásha herself would undertake to forget it all and not let anyone see that something had happened. Natásha did not reply, nor did she sob any longer, but she grew cold and had a shivering fit. Márya Dmítrievna put a pillow under her head, covered her with two quilts, and herself brought her some lime-flower water, but Natásha did not respond to her.

"Well, let her sleep," said Márya Dmítrievna as she went out of the room supposing Natásha to be asleep.

But Natásha was not asleep; with pale face and fixed wide-open eyes she looked straight before her. All that night she did not sleep or weep and did not speak to Sónya who got up and went to her several times.

Next day Count Rostóv returned from his estate near Moscow in time for lunch as he had promised. He was in very good spirits; the affair with the purchaser was going on satisfactorily, and there was nothing to keep him any longer in Moscow, away from the countess whom he missed. Márya

Dmítrievna met him and told him that Natásha had been very unwell the day before and that they had sent for the doctor, but that she was better now. Natásha had not left her room that morning. With compressed and parched lips and dry fixed eyes, she sat at the window, uneasily watching the people who drove past and hurriedly glancing round at anyone who entered the room. She was evidently expecting news of him and that he would come or would write to her.

When the count came to see her she turned anxiously round at the sound of a man's footstep, and then her face resumed its cold and malevolent expression. She did not even get up to greet him. "What is the matter with you, my angel? Are you ill?" asked the count.

After a moment's silence Natásha answered: "Yes, ill."

In reply to the count's anxious inquiries as to why she was so dejected and whether anything had happened to her betrothed, she assured him that nothing had happened and asked him not to worry. Márya Dmítrievna confirmed Natásha's assurances that nothing had happened. From the pretense of illness, from his daughter's distress, and by the embarrassed faces of Sónya and Márya Dmítrievna, the count saw clearly that something had gone wrong during his absence, but it was so terrible for him to think that anything disgraceful had happened to his beloved daughter, and he so prized his own cheerful tranquillity, that he avoided inquiries and tried to assure himself that nothing particularly had happened; and he was only dissatisfied that her indisposition delayed their return to the country.