CHAPTER XX

A few intimate friends were dining with the Rostóvs that day, as usual on Sundays.

Pierre came early so as to find them alone.

He had grown so stout this year that he would have been abnormal had he not been so tall, so broad of limb, and so strong that he carried his bulk with evident ease.

He went up the stairs, puffing and muttering something. His coachman did not even ask whether he was to wait. He knew that when his master was at the Rostóvs' he stayed till midnight. The Rostóvs' footman rushed eagerly forward to help him off with his cloak and take his hat and stick. Pierre, from club habit, always left both hat and stick in the anteroom.

The first person he saw in the house was Natásha. Even before he saw her, while taking off his cloak, he heard her. She was practicing solfa exercises in the music room. He knew that she had not sung since her illness, and so the sound of her voice surprised and delighted him. He opened the door softly and saw her, in the lilac dress she had worn at church, walking about the room singing. She had her back to him when he opened the door, but when, turning quickly, she saw his broad, surprised face, she blushed and came rapidly up to him.

"I want to try to sing again," she said, adding as if by way of excuse, "it is, at least, something to do."

"That's capital!"

"How glad I am you've come! I am so happy today," she said, with the old animation Pierre had not seen in her for a long time. "You know Nicholas has received a St. George's Cross? I am so proud of him."

"Oh yes, I sent that announcement. But I don't want to interrupt you," he added, and was about to go to the drawing room.

Natásha stopped him.

"Count, is it wrong of me to sing?" she said blushing, and fixing her eyes inquiringly on him.

"No... Why should it be? On the contrary... But why do you ask me?"

"I don't know myself," Natásha answered quickly, "but I should not like to do anything you disapproved of. I believe in you completely. You don't know how important you are to me, how much you've done for me...." She spoke rapidly and did not notice how Pierre flushed at her words. "I saw in that same army order that he, Bolkónski" (she whispered the name hastily), "is in Russia, and in the army again. What do you think?"—she was speaking hurriedly, evidently afraid her strength might fail

her—“Will he ever forgive me? Will he not always have a bitter feeling toward me? What do you think? What do you think?”

“I think...” Pierre replied, “that he has nothing to forgive.... If I were in his place...”

By association of ideas, Pierre was at once carried back to the day when, trying to comfort her, he had said that if he were not himself but the best man in the world and free, he would ask on his knees for her hand; and the same feeling of pity, tenderness, and love took possession of him and the same words rose to his lips. But she did not give him time to say them.

“Yes, you... you...” she said, uttering the word you rapturously—“that’s a different thing. I know no one kinder, more generous, or better than you; nobody could be! Had you not been there then, and now too, I don’t know what would have become of me, because...”

Tears suddenly rose in her eyes, she turned away, lifted her music before her eyes, began singing again, and again began walking up and down the room.

Just then Pétya came running in from the drawing room.

Pétya was now a handsome rosy lad of fifteen with full red lips and resembled Natásha. He was preparing to enter the university, but he and his friend Obolénski had lately, in secret, agreed to join the hussars.

Pétya had come rushing out to talk to his namesake about this affair. He had asked Pierre to find out whether he would be accepted in the hussars.

Pierre walked up and down the drawing room, not listening to what Pétya was saying.

Pétya pulled him by the arm to attract his attention.

“Well, what about my plan? Peter Kirílych, for heaven’s sake! You are my only hope,” said Pétya.

“Oh yes, your plan. To join the hussars? I’ll mention it, I’ll bring it all up today.”

“Well, mon cher, have you got the manifesto?” asked the old count. “The countess has been to Mass at the Razumóvskis’ and heard the new prayer. She says it’s very fine.”

“Yes, I’ve got it,” said Pierre. “The Emperor is to be here tomorrow... there’s to be an Extraordinary Meeting of the nobility, and they are talking of a levy of ten men per thousand. Oh yes, let me congratulate you!”

“Yes, yes, thank God! Well, and what news from the army?”

“We are again retreating. They say we’re already near Smolénsk,” replied Pierre.

“O Lord, O Lord!” exclaimed the count. “Where is the manifesto?”

“The Emperor’s appeal? Oh yes!”

Pierre began feeling in his pockets for the papers, but could not find them. Still slapping his pockets, he kissed the hand of the countess who entered the room and glanced uneasily around, evidently expecting Natásha, who had left off singing but had not yet come into the drawing room.

“On my word, I don’t know what I’ve done with it,” he said.

“There he is, always losing everything!” remarked the countess.

Natásha entered with a softened and agitated expression of face and sat down looking silently at Pierre. As soon as she entered, Pierre’s features, which had been gloomy, suddenly lighted up, and while still searching for the papers he glanced at her several times.

“No, really! I’ll drive home, I must have left them there. I’ll certainly...”

“But you’ll be late for dinner.”

“Oh! And my coachman has gone.”

But Sónya, who had gone to look for the papers in the anteroom, had found them in Pierre’s hat, where he had carefully tucked them under the lining. Pierre was about to begin reading.

“No, after dinner,” said the old count, evidently expecting much enjoyment from that reading.

At dinner, at which champagne was drunk to the health of the new chevalier of St. George, Shinshín told them the town news, of the illness of the old Georgian princess, of Métivier’s disappearance from Moscow, and of how some German fellow had been brought to Rostopchín and accused of being a French “spyer” (so Count Rostopchín had told the story), and how Rostopchín let him go and assured the people that he was “not a spire at all, but only an old German ruin.”

“People are being arrested...” said the count. “I’ve told the countess she should not speak French so much. It’s not the time for it now.”

“And have you heard?” Shinshín asked. “Prince Golítsyn has engaged a master to teach him Russian. It is becoming dangerous to speak French in the streets.”

“And how about you, Count Peter Kirílych? If they call up the militia, you too will have to mount a horse,” remarked the old count, addressing Pierre.

Pierre had been silent and preoccupied all through dinner, seeming not to grasp what was said. He looked at the count.

“Oh yes, the war,” he said. “No! What sort of warrior should I make? And yet everything is so strange, so strange! I can’t make it out. I don’t know, I am very far from having military tastes, but in these times no one can answer for himself.”

After dinner the count settled himself comfortably in an easy chair and with a serious face asked Sónya, who was considered an excellent reader, to read the appeal.

“To Moscow, our ancient Capital!

“The enemy has entered the borders of Russia with immense forces. He comes to despoil our beloved country.”

Sónya read painstakingly in her high-pitched voice. The count listened with closed eyes, heaving abrupt sighs at certain passages.

Natásha sat erect, gazing with a searching look now at her father and now at Pierre.

Pierre felt her eyes on him and tried not to look round. The countess shook her head disapprovingly and angrily at every solemn expression in the manifesto. In all these words she saw only that the danger threatening her son would not soon be over. Shinshín, with a sarcastic smile on his lips, was evidently preparing to make fun of anything that gave him the opportunity: Sónya’s reading, any remark of the count’s, or even the manifesto itself should no better pretext present itself.

After reading about the dangers that threatened Russia, the hopes the Emperor placed on Moscow and especially on its illustrious nobility, Sónya, with a quiver in her voice due chiefly to the attention that was being paid to her, read the last words:

“We ourselves will not delay to appear among our people in that Capital and in other parts of our realm for consultation, and for the direction of all our levies, both those now barring the enemy’s path and those freshly formed to defeat him wherever he may appear. May the ruin he hopes to bring upon us recoil on his own head, and may Europe delivered from bondage glorify the name of Russia!”

“Yes, that’s it!” cried the count, opening his moist eyes and sniffing repeatedly, as if a strong vinaigrette had been held to his nose; and he added, “Let the Emperor but say the word and we’ll sacrifice everything and begrudge nothing.”

Before Shinshín had time to utter the joke he was ready to make on the count’s patriotism, Natásha jumped up from her place and ran to her father.

“What a darling our Papa is!” she cried, kissing him, and she again looked at Pierre with the unconscious coquetry that had returned to her with her better spirits.

“There! Here’s a patriot for you!” said Shinshín.

“Not a patriot at all, but simply...” Natásha replied in an injured tone. “Everything seems funny to you, but this isn’t at all a joke....”

“A joke indeed!” put in the count. “Let him but say the word and we’ll all go.... We’re not Germans!”

“But did you notice, it says, ‘for consultation’?” said Pierre.

“Never mind what it’s for....”

At this moment, Pétya, to whom nobody was paying any attention, came up to his father with a very flushed face and said in his breaking voice that was now deep and now shrill:

“Well, Papa, I tell you definitely, and Mamma too, it’s as you please, but I say definitely that you must let me enter the army, because I can’t... that’s all....”

The countess, in dismay, looked up to heaven, clasped her hands, and turned angrily to her husband.

“That comes of your talking!” said she.

But the count had already recovered from his excitement.

“Come, come!” said he. “Here’s a fine warrior! No! Nonsense! You must study.”

“It’s not nonsense, Papa. Fédya Obolénski is younger than I, and he’s going too. Besides, all the same I can’t study now when...” Pétya stopped short, flushed till he perspired, but still got out the words, “when our Fatherland is in danger.”

“That’ll do, that’ll do—nonsense....”

“But you said yourself that we would sacrifice everything.”

“Pétya! Be quiet, I tell you!” cried the count, with a glance at his wife, who had turned pale and was staring fixedly at her son.

“And I tell you—Peter Kirílych here will also tell you...”

“Nonsense, I tell you. Your mother’s milk has hardly dried on your lips and you want to go into the army! There, there, I tell you,” and the count moved to go out of the room, taking the papers, probably to reread them in his study before having a nap.

“Well, Peter Kirílych, let’s go and have a smoke,” he said.

Pierre was agitated and undecided. Natásha's unwontedly brilliant eyes, continually glancing at him with a more than cordial look, had reduced him to this condition.

"No, I think I'll go home."

"Home? Why, you meant to spend the evening with us.... You don't often come nowadays as it is, and this girl of mine," said the count good-naturedly, pointing to Natásha, "only brightens up when you're here."

"Yes, I had forgotten... I really must go home... business..." said Pierre hurriedly.

"Well, then, au revoir!" said the count, and went out of the room.

"Why are you going? Why are you upset?" asked Natásha, and she looked challengingly into Pierre's eyes.

"Because I love you!" was what he wanted to say, but he did not say it, and only blushed till the tears came, and lowered his eyes.

"Because it is better for me to come less often... because... No, simply I have business...."

"Why? No, tell me!" Natásha began resolutely and suddenly stopped.

They looked at each other with dismayed and embarrassed faces. He tried to smile but could not: his smile expressed suffering, and he silently kissed her hand and went out.

Pierre made up his mind not to go to the Rostóvs' any more.