

CHAPTER XIII

On the seventeenth of August Rostóv and Ilyín, accompanied by Lavrushka who had just returned from captivity and by an hussar orderly, left their quarters at Yankóvo, ten miles from Boguchárovo, and went for a ride—to try a new horse Ilyín had bought and to find out whether there was any hay to be had in the villages.

For the last three days Boguchárovo had lain between the two hostile armies, so that it was as easy for the Russian rearguard to get to it as for the French vanguard; Rostóv, as a careful squadron commander, wished to take such provisions as remained at Boguchárovo before the French could get them.

Rostóv and Ilyín were in the merriest of moods. On the way to Boguchárovo, a princely estate with a dwelling house and farm where they hoped to find many domestic serfs and pretty girls, they questioned Lavrushka about Napoleon and laughed at his stories, and raced one another to try Ilyín's horse.

Rostóv had no idea that the village he was entering was the property of that very Bolkónski who had been engaged to his sister.

Rostóv and Ilyín gave rein to their horses for a last race along the incline before reaching Boguchárovo, and Rostóv, outstripping Ilyín, was the first to gallop into the village street.

“You're first!” cried Ilyín, flushed.

“Yes, always first both on the grassland and here,” answered Rostóv, stroking his heated Donéts horse.

“And I'd have won on my Frenchy, your excellency,” said Lavrushka from behind, alluding to his shabby cart horse, “only I didn't wish to mortify you.”

They rode at a footpace to the barn, where a large crowd of peasants was standing.

Some of the men bared their heads, others stared at the new arrivals without doffing their caps. Two tall old peasants with wrinkled faces and scanty beards emerged from the tavern, smiling, staggering, and singing some incoherent song, and approached the officers.

“Fine fellows!” said Rostóv laughing. “Is there any hay here?”

“And how like one another,” said Ilyín.

“A mo-o-st me-r-r-y co-o-m-pa...!” sang one of the peasants with a blissful smile.

One of the men came out of the crowd and went up to Rostóv.

“Who do you belong to?” he asked.

“The French,” replied Ilyín jestingly, “and here is Napoleon himself”—and he pointed to Lavrúshka.

“Then you are Russians?” the peasant asked again.

“And is there a large force of you here?” said another, a short man, coming up.

“Very large,” answered Rostóv. “But why have you collected here?” he added. “Is it a holiday?”

“The old men have met to talk over the business of the commune,” replied the peasant, moving away.

At that moment, on the road leading from the big house, two women and a man in a white hat were seen coming toward the officers.

“The one in pink is mine, so keep off!” said Ilyín on seeing Dunyásha running resolutely toward him.

“She’ll be ours!” said Lavrúshka to Ilyín, winking.

“What do you want, my pretty?” said Ilyín with a smile.

“The princess ordered me to ask your regiment and your name.”

“This is Count Rostóv, squadron commander, and I am your humble servant.”

“Co-o-om-pa-ny!” roared the tipsy peasant with a beatific smile as he looked at Ilyín talking to the girl. Following Dunyásha, Alpátych advanced to Rostóv, having bared his head while still at a distance.

“May I make bold to trouble your honor?” said he respectfully, but with a shade of contempt for the youthfulness of this officer and with a hand thrust into his bosom. “My mistress, daughter of General in Chief Prince Nicholas Bolkónski who died on the fifteenth of this month, finding herself in difficulties owing to the boorishness of these people”—he pointed to the peasants—“asks you to come up to the house.... Won’t you, please, ride on a little farther,” said Alpátych with a melancholy smile, “as it is not convenient in the presence of...?” He pointed to the two peasants who kept as close to him as horseflies to a horse.

“Ah!... Alpátych... Ah, Yákov Alpátych... Grand! Forgive us for Christ’s sake, eh?” said the peasants, smiling joyfully at him.

Rostóv looked at the tipsy peasants and smiled.

“Or perhaps they amuse your honor?” remarked Alpátych with a staid air, as he pointed at the old men with his free hand.

“No, there’s not much to be amused at here,” said Rostóv, and rode on a

little way. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"I make bold to inform your honor that the rude peasants here don't wish to let the mistress leave the estate, and threaten to unharness her horses, so that though everything has been packed up since morning, her excellency cannot get away."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Rostóv.

"I have the honor to report to you the actual truth," said Alpátych.

Rostóv dismounted, gave his horse to the orderly, and followed Alpátych to the house, questioning him as to the state of affairs. It appeared that the princess' offer of corn to the peasants the previous day, and her talk with Dron and at the meeting, had actually had so bad an effect that Dron had finally given up the keys and joined the peasants and had not appeared when Alpátych sent for him; and that in the morning when the princess gave orders to harness for her journey, the peasants had come in a large crowd to the barn and sent word that they would not let her leave the village: that there was an order not to move, and that they would unharness the horses. Alpátych had gone out to admonish them, but was told (it was chiefly Karp who did the talking, Dron not showing himself in the crowd) that they could not let the princess go, that there was an order to the contrary, but that if she stayed they would serve her as before and obey her in everything.

At the moment when Rostóv and Ilyín were galloping along the road, Princess Mary, despite the dissuasions of Alpátych, her nurse, and the maids, had given orders to harness and intended to start, but when the cavalymen were espied they were taken for Frenchmen, the coachman ran away, and the women in the house began to wail.

"Father! Benefactor! God has sent you!" exclaimed deeply moved voices as Rostóv passed through the anteroom.

Princess Mary was sitting helpless and bewildered in the large sitting room, when Rostóv was shown in. She could not grasp who he was and why he had come, or what was happening to her. When she saw his Russian face, and by his walk and the first words he uttered recognized him as a man of her own class, she glanced at him with her deep radiant look and began speaking in a voice that faltered and trembled with emotion. This meeting immediately struck Rostóv as a romantic event. "A helpless girl overwhelmed with grief, left to the mercy of coarse, rioting peasants! And what a strange fate sent me here! What gentleness and nobility there are in her features and expression!" thought he as he looked at her and listened to her timid story.

When she began to tell him that all this had happened the day after her father's funeral, her voice trembled. She turned away, and then, as if fearing he might take her words as meant to move him to pity, looked at him with an apprehensive glance of inquiry. There were tears in Rostóv's eyes. Princess Mary noticed this and glanced gratefully at him with that radiant look which caused the plainness of her face to be forgotten.

“I cannot express, Princess, how glad I am that I happened to ride here and am able to show my readiness to serve you,” said Rostóv, rising. “Go when you please, and I give you my word of honor that no one shall dare to cause you annoyance if only you will allow me to act as your escort.” And bowing respectfully, as if to a lady of royal blood, he moved toward the door.

Rostóv’s deferential tone seemed to indicate that though he would consider himself happy to be acquainted with her, he did not wish to take advantage of her misfortunes to intrude upon her.

Princess Mary understood this and appreciated his delicacy.

“I am very, very grateful to you,” she said in French, “but I hope it was all a misunderstanding and that no one is to blame for it.” She suddenly began to cry.

“Excuse me!” she said.

Rostóv, knitting his brows, left the room with another low bow.