

## CHAPTER XII

The Rostóvs remained in Moscow till the first of September, that is, till the eve of the enemy's entry into the city.

After Pétya had joined Obolénski's regiment of Cossacks and left for Bélaya Tsérkov where that regiment was forming, the countess was seized with terror. The thought that both her sons were at the war, had both gone from under her wing, that today or tomorrow either or both of them might be killed like the three sons of one of her acquaintances, struck her that summer for the first time with cruel clearness. She tried to get Nicholas back and wished to go herself to join Pétya, or to get him an appointment somewhere in Petersburg, but neither of these proved possible. Pétya could not return unless his regiment did so or unless he was transferred to another regiment on active service. Nicholas was somewhere with the army and had not sent a word since his last letter, in which he had given a detailed account of his meeting with Princess Mary. The countess did not sleep at night, or when she did fall asleep dreamed that she saw her sons lying dead. After many consultations and conversations, the count at last devised means to tranquillize her. He got Pétya transferred from Obolénski's regiment to Bezúkhov's, which was in training near Moscow. Though Pétya would remain in the service, this transfer would give the countess the consolation of seeing at least one of her sons under her wing, and she hoped to arrange matters for her Pétya so as not to let him go again, but always get him appointed to places where he could not possibly take part in a battle. As long as Nicholas alone was in danger the countess imagined that she loved her first-born more than all her other children and even reproached herself for it; but when her youngest: the scapegrace who had been bad at lessons, was always breaking things in the house and making himself a nuisance to everybody, that snub-nosed Pétya with his merry black eyes and fresh rosy cheeks where soft down was just beginning to show—when he was thrown amid those big, dreadful, cruel men who were fighting somewhere about something and apparently finding pleasure in it—then his mother thought she loved him more, much more, than all her other children. The nearer the time came for Pétya to return, the more uneasy grew the countess. She began to think she would never live to see such happiness. The presence of Sónya, of her beloved Natásha, or even of her husband irritated her. "What do I want with them? I want no one but Pétya," she thought.

At the end of August the Rostóvs received another letter from Nicholas. He wrote from the province of Vorónezh where he had been sent to procure remounts, but that letter did not set the countess at ease. Knowing that one son was out of danger she became the more anxious about Pétya.

Though by the twentieth of August nearly all the Rostóvs' acquaintances had left Moscow, and though everybody tried to persuade the countess to get away as quickly as possible, she would not hear of leaving before her treasure, her adored Pétya, returned. On the twenty-eighth of August he arrived. The passionate tenderness with which his mother received him did not please the sixteen-year-old officer. Though she concealed from him her intention of keeping him under her wing, Pétya guessed her

designs, and instinctively fearing that he might give way to emotion when with her—might “become womanish” as he termed it to himself—he treated her coldly, avoided her, and during his stay in Moscow attached himself exclusively to Natásha for whom he had always had a particularly brotherly tenderness, almost lover-like.

Owing to the count’s customary carelessness nothing was ready for their departure by the twenty-eighth of August and the carts that were to come from their Ryazán and Moscow estates to remove their household belongings did not arrive till the thirtieth.

From the twenty-eighth till the thirty-first all Moscow was in a bustle and commotion. Every day thousands of men wounded at Borodinó were brought in by the Dorogomílov gate and taken to various parts of Moscow, and thousands of carts conveyed the inhabitants and their possessions out by the other gates. In spite of Rostopchín’s broadsheets, or because of them or independently of them, the strangest and most contradictory rumors were current in the town. Some said that no one was to be allowed to leave the city, others on the contrary said that all the icons had been taken out of the churches and everybody was to be ordered to leave. Some said there had been another battle after Borodinó at which the French had been routed, while others on the contrary reported that the Russian army had been destroyed. Some talked about the Moscow militia which, preceded by the clergy, would go to the Three Hills; others whispered that Augustin had been forbidden to leave, that traitors had been seized, that the peasants were rioting and robbing people on their way from Moscow, and so on. But all this was only talk; in reality (though the Council of Filí, at which it was decided to abandon Moscow, had not yet been held) both those who went away and those who remained behind felt, though they did not show it, that Moscow would certainly be abandoned, and that they ought to get away as quickly as possible and save their belongings. It was felt that everything would suddenly break up and change, but up to the first of September nothing had done so. As a criminal who is being led to execution knows that he must die immediately, but yet looks about him and straightens the cap that is awry on his head, so Moscow involuntarily continued its wonted life, though it knew that the time of its destruction was near when the conditions of life to which its people were accustomed to submit would be completely upset.

During the three days preceding the occupation of Moscow the whole Rostóv family was absorbed in various activities. The head of the family, Count Ilyá Rostóv, continually drove about the city collecting the current rumors from all sides and gave superficial and hasty orders at home about the preparations for their departure.

The countess watched the things being packed, was dissatisfied with everything, was constantly in pursuit of Pétya who was always running away from her, and was jealous of Natásha with whom he spent all his time. Sónya alone directed the practical side of matters by getting things packed. But of late Sónya had been particularly sad and silent. Nicholas’ letter in which he mentioned Princess Mary had elicited, in her presence, joyous comments from the countess, who saw an intervention of Providence in this meeting of the princess and Nicholas.

“I was never pleased at Bolkónski’s engagement to Natásha,” said the countess, “but I always wanted Nicholas to marry the princess, and had a presentiment that it would happen. What a good thing it would be!”

Sónya felt that this was true: that the only possibility of retrieving the Rostóvs’ affairs was by Nicholas marrying a rich woman, and that the princess was a good match. It was very bitter for her. But despite her grief, or perhaps just because of it, she took on herself all the difficult work of directing the storing and packing of their things and was busy for whole days. The count and countess turned to her when they had any orders to give. Pétya and Natásha on the contrary, far from helping their parents, were generally a nuisance and a hindrance to everyone. Almost all day long the house resounded with their running feet, their cries, and their spontaneous laughter. They laughed and were gay not because there was any reason to laugh, but because gaiety and mirth were in their hearts and so everything that happened was a cause for gaiety and laughter to them. Pétya was in high spirits because having left home a boy he had returned (as everybody told him) a fine young man, because he was at home, because he had left Bélaya Tsérkov where there was no hope of soon taking part in a battle and had come to Moscow where there was to be fighting in a few days, and chiefly because Natásha, whose lead he always followed, was in high spirits. Natásha was gay because she had been sad too long and now nothing reminded her of the cause of her sadness, and because she was feeling well. She was also happy because she had someone to adore her: the adoration of others was a lubricant the wheels of her machine needed to make them run freely—and Pétya adored her. Above all, they were gay because there was a war near Moscow, there would be fighting at the town gates, arms were being given out, everybody was escaping—going away somewhere, and in general something extraordinary was happening, and that is always exciting, especially to the young.