

CHAPTER XIII

On Saturday, the thirty-first of August, everything in the Rostóvs' house seemed topsy-turvy. All the doors were open, all the furniture was being carried out or moved about, and the mirrors and pictures had been taken down. There were trunks in the rooms, and hay, wrapping paper, and ropes were scattered about. The peasants and house serfs carrying out the things were treading heavily on the parquet floors. The yard was crowded with peasant carts, some loaded high and already corded up, others still empty.

The voices and footsteps of the many servants and of the peasants who had come with the carts resounded as they shouted to one another in the yard and in the house. The count had been out since morning. The countess had a headache brought on by all the noise and turmoil and was lying down in the new sitting room with a vinegar compress on her head. Pétya was not at home, he had gone to visit a friend with whom he meant to obtain a transfer from the militia to the active army. Sónya was in the ballroom looking after the packing of the glass and china. Natásha was sitting on the floor of her dismantled room with dresses, ribbons, and scarves strewn all about her, gazing fixedly at the floor and holding in her hands the old ball dress (already out of fashion) which she had worn at her first Petersburg ball.

Natásha was ashamed of doing nothing when everyone else was so busy, and several times that morning had tried to set to work, but her heart was not in it, and she could not and did not know how to do anything except with all her heart and all her might. For a while she had stood beside Sónya while the china was being packed and tried to help, but soon gave it up and went to her room to pack her own things. At first she found it amusing to give away dresses and ribbons to the maids, but when that was done and what was left had still to be packed, she found it dull.

“Dunyásha, you pack! You will, won't you, dear?” And when Dunyásha willingly promised to do it all for her, Natásha sat down on the floor, took her old ball dress, and fell into a reverie quite unrelated to what ought to have occupied her thoughts now. She was roused from her reverie by the talk of the maids in the next room (which was theirs) and by the sound of their hurried footsteps going to the back porch. Natásha got up and looked out of the window. An enormously long row of carts full of wounded men had stopped in the street.

The housekeeper, the old nurse, the cooks, coachmen, maids, footmen, postilions, and scullions stood at the gate, staring at the wounded.

Natásha, throwing a clean pocket handkerchief over her hair and holding an end of it in each hand, went out into the street.

The former housekeeper, old Mávra Kuzmínichna, had stepped out of the crowd by the gate, gone up to a cart with a hood constructed of bast mats, and was speaking to a pale young officer who lay inside. Natásha moved a few steps forward and stopped shyly, still holding her handkerchief, and listened to what the housekeeper was saying.

“Then you have nobody in Moscow?” she was saying. “You would be more comfortable somewhere in a house... in ours, for instance... the family are leaving.”

“I don’t know if it would be allowed,” replied the officer in a weak voice. “Here is our commanding officer... ask him,” and he pointed to a stout major who was walking back along the street past the row of carts.

Natasha glanced with frightened eyes at the face of the wounded officer and at once went to meet the major.

“May the wounded men stay in our house?” she asked.

The major raised his hand to his cap with a smile.

“Which one do you want, Ma’am’selle?” said he, screwing up his eyes and smiling.

Natasha quietly repeated her question, and her face and whole manner were so serious, though she was still holding the ends of her handkerchief, that the major ceased smiling and after some reflection—as if considering in how far the thing was possible—replied in the affirmative.

“Oh yes, why not? They may,” he said.

With a slight inclination of her head, Natasha stepped back quickly to Mavra Kuzmínichna, who stood talking compassionately to the officer.

“They may. He says they may!” whispered Natasha.

The cart in which the officer lay was turned into the Rostóvs’ yard, and dozens of carts with wounded men began at the invitation of the townsfolk to turn into the yards and to draw up at the entrances of the houses in Povarskáya Street. Natasha was evidently pleased to be dealing with new people outside the ordinary routine of her life. She and Mavra Kuzmínichna tried to get as many of the wounded as possible into their yard.

“Your Papa must be told, though,” said Mavra Kuzmínichna.

“Never mind, never mind, what does it matter? For one day we can move into the drawing room. They can have all our half of the house.”

“There now, young lady, you do take things into your head! Even if we put them into the wing, the men’s room, or the nurse’s room, we must ask permission.”

“Well, I’ll ask.”

Natasha ran into the house and went on tiptoe through the half-open door into the sitting room, where there was a smell of vinegar and Hoffman’s drops.

“Are you asleep, Mamma?”

“Oh, what sleep—?” said the countess, waking up just as she was dropping into a doze.

“Mamma darling!” said Natáša, kneeling by her mother and bringing her face close to her mother’s, “I am sorry, forgive me, I’ll never do it again; I woke you up! Mávra Kuzmínichna has sent me: they have brought some wounded here—officers. Will you let them come? They have nowhere to go. I knew you’d let them come!” she said quickly all in one breath.

“What officers? Whom have they brought? I don’t understand anything about it,” said the countess.

Natáša laughed, and the countess too smiled slightly.

“I knew you’d give permission... so I’ll tell them,” and, having kissed her mother, Natáša got up and went to the door.

In the hall she met her father, who had returned with bad news.

“We’ve stayed too long!” said the count with involuntary vexation. “The Club is closed and the police are leaving.”

“Papa, is it all right—I’ve invited some of the wounded into the house?” said Natáša.

“Of course it is,” he answered absently. “That’s not the point. I beg you not to indulge in trifles now, but to help to pack, and tomorrow we must go, go, go!...”

And the count gave a similar order to the major-domo and the servants.

At dinner Pétya having returned home told them the news he had heard. He said the people had been getting arms in the Krémlin, and that though Rostopchín’s broadsheet had said that he would sound a call two or three days in advance, the order had certainly already been given for everyone to go armed to the Three Hills tomorrow, and that there would be a big battle there.

The countess looked with timid horror at her son’s eager, excited face as he said this. She realized that if she said a word about his not going to the battle (she knew he enjoyed the thought of the impending engagement) he would say something about men, honor, and the fatherland—something senseless, masculine, and obstinate which there would be no contradicting, and her plans would be spoiled; and so, hoping to arrange to leave before then and take Pétya with her as their protector and defender, she did not answer him, but after dinner called the count aside and implored him with tears to take her away quickly, that very night if possible. With a woman’s involuntary loving cunning she, who till then had not shown any alarm, said that she would die of fright if they did not leave that very night. Without any pretense she was now afraid of everything.