

CHAPTER XV

Moscow's last day had come. It was a clear bright autumn day, a Sunday. The church bells everywhere were ringing for service, just as usual on Sundays. Nobody seemed yet to realize what awaited the city.

Only two things indicated the social condition of Moscow—the rabble, that is the poor people, and the price of commodities. An enormous crowd of factory hands, house serfs, and peasants, with whom some officials, seminarists, and gentry were mingled, had gone early that morning to the Three Hills. Having waited there for Rostopchín who did not turn up, they became convinced that Moscow would be surrendered, and then dispersed all about the town to the public houses and cookshops. Prices too that day indicated the state of affairs. The price of weapons, of gold, of carts and horses, kept rising, but the value of paper money and city articles kept falling, so that by midday there were instances of carters removing valuable goods, such as cloth, and receiving in payment a half of what they carted, while peasant horses were fetching five hundred rubles each, and furniture, mirrors, and bronzes were being given away for nothing.

In the Rostóvs' staid old-fashioned house the dissolution of former conditions of life was but little noticeable. As to the serfs the only indication was that three out of their huge retinue disappeared during the night, but nothing was stolen; and as to the value of their possessions, the thirty peasant carts that had come in from their estates and which many people envied proved to be extremely valuable and they were offered enormous sums of money for them. Not only were huge sums offered for the horses and carts, but on the previous evening and early in the morning of the first of September, orderlies and servants sent by wounded officers came to the Rostóvs' and wounded men dragged themselves there from the Rostóvs' and from neighboring houses where they were accommodated, entreating the servants to try to get them a lift out of Moscow. The major-domo to whom these entreaties were addressed, though he was sorry for the wounded, resolutely refused, saying that he dare not even mention the matter to the count. Pity these wounded men as one might, it was evident that if they were given one cart there would be no reason to refuse another, or all the carts and one's own carriages as well. Thirty carts could not save all the wounded and in the general catastrophe one could not disregard oneself and one's own family. So thought the major-domo on his master's behalf.

On waking up that morning Count Ilyá Rostóv left his bedroom softly, so as not to wake the countess who had fallen asleep only toward morning, and came out to the porch in his lilac silk dressing gown. In the yard stood the carts ready corded. The carriages were at the front porch. The major-domo stood at the porch talking to an elderly orderly and to a pale young officer with a bandaged arm. On seeing the count the major-domo made a significant and stern gesture to them both to go away.

"Well, Vasílich, is everything ready?" asked the count, and stroking his bald head he looked good-naturedly at the officer and the orderly and nodded to them. (He liked to see new faces.)

“We can harness at once, your excellency.”

“Well, that’s right. As soon as the countess wakes we’ll be off, God willing! What is it, gentlemen?” he added, turning to the officer. “Are you staying in my house?”

The officer came nearer and suddenly his face flushed crimson.

“Count, be so good as to allow me... for God’s sake, to get into some corner of one of your carts! I have nothing here with me.... I shall be all right on a loaded cart....”

Before the officer had finished speaking the orderly made the same request on behalf of his master.

“Oh, yes, yes, yes!” said the count hastily. “I shall be very pleased, very pleased. Vasílich, you’ll see to it. Just unload one or two carts. Well, what of it... do what’s necessary...” said the count, muttering some indefinite order.

But at the same moment an expression of warm gratitude on the officer’s face had already sealed the order. The count looked around him. In the yard, at the gates, at the window of the wings, wounded officers and their orderlies were to be seen. They were all looking at the count and moving toward the porch.

“Please step into the gallery, your excellency,” said the major-domo. “What are your orders about the pictures?”

The count went into the house with him, repeating his order not to refuse the wounded who asked for a lift.

“Well, never mind, some of the things can be unloaded,” he added in a soft, confidential voice, as though afraid of being overheard.

At nine o’clock the countess woke up, and Matrëna Timoféevna, who had been her lady’s maid before her marriage and now performed a sort of chief gendarme’s duty for her, came to say that Madame Schoss was much offended and the young ladies’ summer dresses could not be left behind. On inquiry, the countess learned that Madame Schoss was offended because her trunk had been taken down from its cart, and all the loads were being uncorded and the luggage taken out of the carts to make room for wounded men whom the count in the simplicity of his heart had ordered that they should take with them. The countess sent for her husband.

“What is this, my dear? I hear that the luggage is being unloaded.”

“You know, love, I wanted to tell you... Countess dear... an officer came to me to ask for a few carts for the wounded. After all, ours are things that can be bought but think what being left behind means to them!... Really now, in our own yard—we asked them in ourselves and there are officers among them.... You know, I think, my dear... let them be taken... where’s the hurry?”

The count spoke timidly, as he always did when talking of money matters. The countess was accustomed to this tone as a precursor of news of something detrimental to the children's interests, such as the building of a new gallery or conservatory, the inauguration of a private theater or an orchestra. She was accustomed always to oppose anything announced in that timid tone and considered it her duty to do so.

She assumed her dolefully submissive manner and said to her husband: "Listen to me, Count, you have managed matters so that we are getting nothing for the house, and now you wish to throw away all our—all the children's property! You said yourself that we have a hundred thousand rubles' worth of things in the house. I don't consent, my dear, I don't! Do as you please! It's the government's business to look after the wounded; they know that. Look at the Lopukhíns opposite, they cleared out everything two days ago. That's what other people do. It's only we who are such fools. If you have no pity on me, have some for the children."

Flourishing his arms in despair the count left the room without replying.

"Papa, what are you doing that for?" asked Natásha, who had followed him into her mother's room.

"Nothing! What business is it of yours?" muttered the count angrily.

"But I heard," said Natásha. "Why does Mamma object?"

"What business is it of yours?" cried the count.

Natásha stepped up to the window and pondered.

"Papa! Here's Berg coming to see us," said she, looking out of the window.