CHAPTER XVII

Before two o'clock in the afternoon the Rostóvs' four carriages, packed full and with the horses harnessed, stood at the front door. One by one the carts with the wounded had moved out of the yard.

The calèche in which Prince Andrew was being taken attracted Sónya's attention as it passed the front porch. With the help of a maid she was arranging a seat for the countess in the huge high coach that stood at the entrance.

"Whose calèche is that?" she inquired, leaning out of the carriage window.

"Why, didn't you know, Miss?" replied the maid. "The wounded prince: he spent the night in our house and is going with us."

"But who is it? What's his name?"

"It's our intended that was—Prince Bolkónski himself! They say he is dying," replied the maid with a sigh.

Sónya jumped out of the coach and ran to the countess. The countess, tired out and already dressed in shawl and bonnet for her journey, was pacing up and down the drawing room, waiting for the household to assemble for the usual silent prayer with closed doors before starting. Natásha was not in the room.

"Mamma," said Sónya, "Prince Andrew is here, mortally wounded. He is going with us."

The countess opened her eyes in dismay and, seizing Sónya's arm, glanced around.

"Natásha?" she murmured.

At that moment this news had only one significance for both of them. They knew their Natásha, and alarm as to what would happen if she heard this news stifled all sympathy for the man they both liked.

"Natásha does not know yet, but he is going with us," said Sónya.

"You say he is dying?"

Sónya nodded.

The countess put her arms around Sónya and began to cry.

"The ways of God are past finding out!" she thought, feeling that the Almighty Hand, hitherto unseen, was becoming manifest in all that was now taking place.

"Well, Mamma? Everything is ready. What's the matter?" asked Natásha, as

with animated face she ran into the room.

“Nothing,” answered the countess. “If everything is ready let us start.”

And the countess bent over her reticule to hide her agitated face. Sónya embraced Natásha and kissed her.

Natásha looked at her inquiringly.

“What is it? What has happened?”

“Nothing... No...”

“Is it something very bad for me? What is it?” persisted Natásha with her quick intuition.

Sónya sighed and made no reply. The count, Pétya, Madame Schoss, Mávra Kuzmínichna, and Vasílich came into the drawing room and, having closed the doors, they all sat down and remained for some moments silently seated without looking at one another.

The count was the first to rise, and with a loud sigh crossed himself before the icon. All the others did the same. Then the count embraced Mávra Kuzmínichna and Vasílich, who were to remain in Moscow, and while they caught at his hand and kissed his shoulder he patted their backs lightly with some vaguely affectionate and comforting words. The countess went into the oratory and there Sónya found her on her knees before the icons that had been left here and there hanging on the wall. (The most precious ones, with which some family tradition was connected, were being taken with them.)

In the porch and in the yard the men whom Pétya had armed with swords and daggers, with trousers tucked inside their high boots and with belts and girdles tightened, were taking leave of those remaining behind.

As is always the case at a departure, much had been forgotten or put in the wrong place, and for a long time two menservants stood one on each side of the open door and the carriage steps waiting to help the countess in, while maids rushed with cushions and bundles from the house to the carriages, the calèche, the phaeton, and back again.

“They always will forget everything!” said the countess. “Don’t you know I can’t sit like that?”

And Dunyásha, with clenched teeth, without replying but with an aggrieved look on her face, hastily got into the coach to rearrange the seat.

“Oh, those servants!” said the count, swaying his head.

Efím, the old coachman, who was the only one the countess trusted to drive her, sat perched up high on the box and did not so much as glance round at what was going on behind him. From thirty years’ experience he knew it would be some time yet before the order, “Be off, in God’s

name!" would be given him: and he knew that even when it was said he would be stopped once or twice more while they sent back to fetch something that had been forgotten, and even after that he would again be stopped and the countess herself would lean out of the window and beg him for the love of heaven to drive carefully down the hill. He knew all this and therefore waited calmly for what would happen, with more patience than the horses, especially the near one, the chestnut Falcon, who was pawing the ground and champing his bit. At last all were seated, the carriage steps were folded and pulled up, the door was shut, somebody was sent for a traveling case, and the countess leaned out and said what she had to say. Then Efím deliberately doffed his hat and began crossing himself. The postilion and all the other servants did the same. "Off, in God's name!" said Efím, putting on his hat. "Start!" The postilion started the horses, the off pole horse tugged at his collar, the high springs creaked, and the body of the coach swayed. The footman sprang onto the box of the moving coach which jolted as it passed out of the yard onto the uneven roadway; the other vehicles jolted in their turn, and the procession of carriages moved up the street. In the carriages, the calèche, and the phaeton, all crossed themselves as they passed the church opposite the house. Those who were to remain in Moscow walked on either side of the vehicles seeing the travelers off.

Rarely had Natásha experienced so joyful a feeling as now, sitting in the carriage beside the countess and gazing at the slowly receding walls of forsaken, agitated Moscow. Occasionally she leaned out of the carriage window and looked back and then forward at the long train of wounded in front of them. Almost at the head of the line she could see the raised hood of Prince Andrew's calèche. She did not know who was in it, but each time she looked at the procession her eyes sought that calèche. She knew it was right in front.

In Kúdrino, from the Nikítski, Présnya, and Podnovínsk Streets came several other trains of vehicles similar to the Rostóvs', and as they passed along the Sadóvaya Street the carriages and carts formed two rows abreast.

As they were going round the Súkharev water tower Natásha, who was inquisitively and alertly scrutinizing the people driving or walking past, suddenly cried out in joyful surprise:

"Dear me! Mamma, Sónya, look, it's he!"

"Who? Who?"

"Look! Yes, on my word, it's Bezúkhov!" said Natásha, putting her head out of the carriage and staring at a tall, stout man in a coachman's long coat, who from his manner of walking and moving was evidently a gentleman in disguise, and who was passing under the arch of the Súkharev tower accompanied by a small, sallow-faced, beardless old man in a frieze coat.

"Yes, it really is Bezúkhov in a coachman's coat, with a queer-looking old boy. Really," said Natásha, "look, look!"

“No, it’s not he. How can you talk such nonsense?”

“Mamma,” screamed Natásha, “I’ll stake my head it’s he! I assure you! Stop, stop!” she cried to the coachman.

But the coachman could not stop, for from the Meshchánski Street came more carts and carriages, and the Rostóvs were being shouted at to move on and not block the way.

In fact, however, though now much farther off than before, the Rostóvs all saw Pierre—or someone extraordinarily like him—in a coachman’s coat, going down the street with head bent and a serious face beside a small, beardless old man who looked like a footman. That old man noticed a face thrust out of the carriage window gazing at them, and respectfully touching Pierre’s elbow said something to him and pointed to the carriage. Pierre, evidently engrossed in thought, could not at first understand him. At length when he had understood and looked in the direction the old man indicated, he recognized Natásha, and following his first impulse stepped instantly and rapidly toward the coach. But having taken a dozen steps he seemed to remember something and stopped.

Natásha’s face, leaning out of the window, beamed with quizzical kindliness.

“Peter Kirílovich, come here! We have recognized you! This is wonderful!” she cried, holding out her hand to him. “What are you doing? Why are you like this?”

Pierre took her outstretched hand and kissed it awkwardly as he walked along beside her while the coach still moved on.

“What is the matter, Count?” asked the countess in a surprised and commiserating tone.

“What? What? Why? Don’t ask me,” said Pierre, and looked round at Natásha whose radiant, happy expression—of which he was conscious without looking at her—filled him with enchantment.

“Are you remaining in Moscow, then?”

Pierre hesitated.

“In Moscow?” he said in a questioning tone. “Yes, in Moscow. Good-by!”

“Ah, if only I were a man! I’d certainly stay with you. How splendid!” said Natásha. “Mamma, if you’ll let me, I’ll stay!”

Pierre glanced absently at Natásha and was about to say something, but the countess interrupted him.

“You were at the battle, we heard.”

“Yes, I was,” Pierre answered. “There will be another battle tomorrow...” he began, but Natásha interrupted him.

“But what is the matter with you, Count? You are not like yourself....”

“Oh, don’t ask me, don’t ask me! I don’t know myself. Tomorrow... But no! Good-by, good-by!” he muttered. “It’s an awful time!” and dropping behind the carriage he stepped onto the pavement.

Natásha continued to lean out of the window for a long time, beaming at him with her kindly, slightly quizzical, happy smile.