

CHAPTER XXXI

The valet, returning to the cottage, informed the count that Moscow was burning. The count donned his dressing gown and went out to look. Sónya and Madame Schoss, who had not yet undressed, went out with him. Only Natásha and the countess remained in the room. Pétya was no longer with the family, he had gone on with his regiment which was making for Tróitsa.

The countess, on hearing that Moscow was on fire, began to cry. Natásha, pale, with a fixed look, was sitting on the bench under the icons just where she had sat down on arriving and paid no attention to her father's words. She was listening to the ceaseless moaning of the adjutant, three houses off.

"Oh, how terrible," said Sónya returning from the yard chilled and frightened. "I believe the whole of Moscow will burn, there's an awful glow! Natásha, do look! You can see it from the window," she said to her cousin, evidently wishing to distract her mind.

But Natásha looked at her as if not understanding what was said to her and again fixed her eyes on the corner of the stove. She had been in this condition of stupor since the morning, when Sónya, to the surprise and annoyance of the countess, had for some unaccountable reason found it necessary to tell Natásha of Prince Andrew's wound and of his being with their party. The countess had seldom been so angry with anyone as she was with Sónya. Sónya had cried and begged to be forgiven and now, as if trying to atone for her fault, paid unceasing attention to her cousin.

"Look, Natásha, how dreadfully it is burning!" said she.

"What's burning?" asked Natásha. "Oh, yes, Moscow."

And as if in order not to offend Sónya and to get rid of her, she turned her face to the window, looked out in such a way that it was evident that she could not see anything, and again settled down in her former attitude.

"But you didn't see it!"

"Yes, really I did," Natásha replied in a voice that pleaded to be left in peace.

Both the countess and Sónya understood that, naturally, neither Moscow nor the burning of Moscow nor anything else could seem of importance to Natásha.

The count returned and lay down behind the partition. The countess went up to her daughter and touched her head with the back of her hand as she was wont to do when Natásha was ill, then touched her forehead with her lips as if to feel whether she was feverish, and finally kissed her.

“You are cold. You are trembling all over. You’d better lie down,” said the countess.

“Lie down? All right, I will. I’ll lie down at once,” said Natásha.

When Natásha had been told that morning that Prince Andrew was seriously wounded and was traveling with their party, she had at first asked many questions: Where was he going? How was he wounded? Was it serious? And could she see him? But after she had been told that she could not see him, that he was seriously wounded but that his life was not in danger, she ceased to ask questions or to speak at all, evidently disbelieving what they told her, and convinced that say what she might she would still be told the same. All the way she had sat motionless in a corner of the coach with wide open eyes, and the expression in them which the countess knew so well and feared so much, and now she sat in the same way on the bench where she had seated herself on arriving. She was planning something and either deciding or had already decided something in her mind. The countess knew this, but what it might be she did not know, and this alarmed and tormented her.

“Natásha, undress, darling; lie down on my bed.”

A bed had been made on a bedstead for the countess only. Madame Schoss and the two girls were to sleep on some hay on the floor.

“No, Mamma, I will lie down here on the floor,” Natásha replied irritably and she went to the window and opened it. Through the open window the moans of the adjutant could be heard more distinctly. She put her head out into the damp night air, and the countess saw her slim neck shaking with sobs and throbbing against the window frame. Natásha knew it was not Prince Andrew who was moaning. She knew Prince Andrew was in the same yard as themselves and in a part of the hut across the passage; but this dreadful incessant moaning made her sob. The countess exchanged a look with Sónya.

“Lie down, darling; lie down, my pet,” said the countess, softly touching Natásha’s shoulders. “Come, lie down.”

“Oh, yes... I’ll lie down at once,” said Natásha, and began hurriedly undressing, tugging at the tapes of her petticoat.

When she had thrown off her dress and put on a dressing jacket, she sat down with her foot under her on the bed that had been made up on the floor, jerked her thin and rather short plait of hair to the front, and began replaiting it. Her long, thin, practiced fingers rapidly unplaited, replaited, and tied up her plait. Her head moved from side to side from habit, but her eyes, feverishly wide, looked fixedly before her. When her toilet for the night was finished she sank gently onto the sheet spread over the hay on the side nearest the door.

“Natásha, you’d better lie in the middle,” said Sónya.

“I’ll stay here,” muttered Natásha. “Do lie down,” she added crossly, and buried her face in the pillow.

The countess, Madame Schoss, and Sónya undressed hastily and lay down. The small lamp in front of the icons was the only light left in the room. But in the yard there was a light from the fire at Little Mytíshchi a mile and a half away, and through the night came the noise of people shouting at a tavern Mamónov's Cossacks had set up across the street, and the adjutant's unceasing moans could still be heard.

For a long time Natásha listened attentively to the sounds that reached her from inside and outside the room and did not move. First she heard her mother praying and sighing and the creaking of her bed under her, then Madame Schoss' familiar whistling snore and Sónya's gentle breathing. Then the countess called to Natásha. Natásha did not answer.

"I think she's asleep, Mamma," said Sónya softly.

After a short silence the countess spoke again but this time no one replied.

Soon after that Natásha heard her mother's even breathing. Natásha did not move, though her little bare foot, thrust out from under the quilt, was growing cold on the bare floor.

As if to celebrate a victory over everybody, a cricket chirped in a crack in the wall. A cock crowed far off and another replied near by. The shouting in the tavern had died down; only the moaning of the adjutant was heard. Natásha sat up.

"Sónya, are you asleep? Mamma?" she whispered.

No one replied. Natásha rose slowly and carefully, crossed herself, and stepped cautiously on the cold and dirty floor with her slim, supple, bare feet. The boards of the floor creaked. Stepping cautiously from one foot to the other she ran like a kitten the few steps to the door and grasped the cold door handle.

It seemed to her that something heavy was beating rhythmically against all the walls of the room: it was her own heart, sinking with alarm and terror and overflowing with love.

She opened the door and stepped across the threshold and onto the cold, damp earthen floor of the passage. The cold she felt refreshed her. With her bare feet she touched a sleeping man, stepped over him, and opened the door into the part of the hut where Prince Andrew lay. It was dark in there. In the farthest corner, on a bench beside a bed on which something was lying, stood a tallow candle with a long, thick, and smoldering wick.

From the moment she had been told that morning of Prince Andrew's wound and his presence there, Natásha had resolved to see him. She did not know why she had to, she knew the meeting would be painful, but felt the more convinced that it was necessary.

All day she had lived only in hope of seeing him that night. But now

that the moment had come she was filled with dread of what she might see. How was he maimed? What was left of him? Was he like that incessant moaning of the adjutant's? Yes, he was altogether like that. In her imagination he was that terrible moaning personified. When she saw an indistinct shape in the corner, and mistook his knees raised under the quilt for his shoulders, she imagined a horrible body there, and stood still in terror. But an irresistible impulse drew her forward. She cautiously took one step and then another, and found herself in the middle of a small room containing baggage. Another man—Timókhin—was lying in a corner on the benches beneath the icons, and two others—the doctor and a valet—lay on the floor.

The valet sat up and whispered something. Timókhin, kept awake by the pain in his wounded leg, gazed with wide-open eyes at this strange apparition of a girl in a white chemise, dressing jacket, and nightcap. The valet's sleepy, frightened exclamation, "What do you want? What's the matter?" made Natásha approach more swiftly to what was lying in the corner. Horribly unlike a man as that body looked, she must see him. She passed the valet, the snuff fell from the candle wick, and she saw Prince Andrew clearly with his arms outside the quilt, and such as she had always seen him.

He was the same as ever, but the feverish color of his face, his glittering eyes rapturously turned toward her, and especially his neck, delicate as a child's, revealed by the turn-down collar of his shirt, gave him a peculiarly innocent, childlike look, such as she had never seen on him before. She went up to him and with a swift, flexible, youthful movement dropped on her knees.

He smiled and held out his hand to her.