

## CHAPTER VII

The dreadful news of the battle of Borodinó, of our losses in killed and wounded, and the still more terrible news of the loss of Moscow reached Vorónezh in the middle of September. Princess Mary, having learned of her brother's wound only from the Gazette and having no definite news of him, prepared (so Nicholas heard, he had not seen her again himself) to set off in search of Prince Andrew.

When he received the news of the battle of Borodinó and the abandonment of Moscow, Rostóv was not seized with despair, anger, the desire for vengeance, or any feeling of that kind, but everything in Vorónezh suddenly seemed to him dull and tiresome, and he experienced an indefinite feeling of shame and awkwardness. The conversations he heard seemed to him insincere; he did not know how to judge all these affairs and felt that only in the regiment would everything again become clear to him. He made haste to finish buying the horses, and often became unreasonably angry with his servant and squadron quartermaster.

A few days before his departure a special thanksgiving, at which Nicholas was present, was held in the cathedral for the Russian victory. He stood a little behind the governor and held himself with military decorum through the service, meditating on a great variety of subjects. When the service was over the governor's wife beckoned him to her.

"Have you seen the princess?" she asked, indicating with a movement of her head a lady standing on the opposite side, beyond the choir.

Nicholas immediately recognized Princess Mary not so much by the profile he saw under her bonnet as by the feeling of solicitude, timidity, and pity that immediately overcame him. Princess Mary, evidently engrossed by her thoughts, was crossing herself for the last time before leaving the church.

Nicholas looked at her face with surprise. It was the same face he had seen before, there was the same general expression of refined, inner, spiritual labor, but now it was quite differently lit up. There was a pathetic expression of sorrow, prayer, and hope in it. As had occurred before when she was present, Nicholas went up to her without waiting to be prompted by the governor's wife and not asking himself whether or not it was right and proper to address her here in church, and told her he had heard of her trouble and sympathized with his whole soul. As soon as she heard his voice a vivid glow kindled in her face, lighting up both her sorrow and her joy.

"There is one thing I wanted to tell you, Princess," said Rostóv. "It is that if your brother, Prince Andrew Nikoláevich, were not living, it would have been at once announced in the Gazette, as he is a colonel."

The princess looked at him, not grasping what he was saying, but cheered by the expression of regretful sympathy on his face.

"And I have known so many cases of a splinter wound" (the Gazette said

it was a shell) “either proving fatal at once or being very slight,” continued Nicholas. “We must hope for the best, and I am sure...”

Princess Mary interrupted him.

“Oh, that would be so dread...” she began and, prevented by agitation from finishing, she bent her head with a movement as graceful as everything she did in his presence and, looking up at him gratefully, went out, following her aunt.

That evening Nicholas did not go out, but stayed at home to settle some accounts with the horse dealers. When he had finished that business it was already too late to go anywhere but still too early to go to bed, and for a long time he paced up and down the room, reflecting on his life, a thing he rarely did.

Princess Mary had made an agreeable impression on him when he had met her in Smolénsk province. His having encountered her in such exceptional circumstances, and his mother having at one time mentioned her to him as a good match, had drawn his particular attention to her. When he met her again in Vorónezh the impression she made on him was not merely pleasing but powerful. Nicholas had been struck by the peculiar moral beauty he observed in her at this time. He was, however, preparing to go away and it had not entered his head to regret that he was thus depriving himself of chances of meeting her. But that day’s encounter in church had, he felt, sunk deeper than was desirable for his peace of mind. That pale, sad, refined face, that radiant look, those gentle graceful gestures, and especially the deep and tender sorrow expressed in all her features agitated him and evoked his sympathy. In men Rostóv could not bear to see the expression of a higher spiritual life (that was why he did not like Prince Andrew) and he referred to it contemptuously as philosophy and dreaminess, but in Princess Mary that very sorrow which revealed the depth of a whole spiritual world foreign to him was an irresistible attraction.

“She must be a wonderful woman. A real angel!” he said to himself. “Why am I not free? Why was I in such a hurry with Sónya?” And he involuntarily compared the two: the lack of spirituality in the one and the abundance of it in the other—a spirituality he himself lacked and therefore valued most highly. He tried to picture what would happen were he free. How he would propose to her and how she would become his wife. But no, he could not imagine that. He felt awed, and no clear picture presented itself to his mind. He had long ago pictured to himself a future with Sónya, and that was all clear and simple just because it had all been thought out and he knew all there was in Sónya, but it was impossible to picture a future with Princess Mary, because he did not understand her but simply loved her.

Reveries about Sónya had had something merry and playful in them, but to dream of Princess Mary was always difficult and a little frightening.

“How she prayed!” he thought. “It was plain that her whole soul was in her prayer. Yes, that was the prayer that moves mountains, and I am sure her prayer will be answered. Why don’t I pray for what I want?” he

suddenly thought. "What do I want? To be free, released from Sónya... She was right," he thought, remembering what the governor's wife had said: "Nothing but misfortune can come of marrying Sónya. Muddles, grief for Mamma... business difficulties... muddles, terrible muddles! Besides, I don't love her—not as I should. O, God! release me from this dreadful, inextricable position!" he suddenly began to pray. "Yes, prayer can move mountains, but one must have faith and not pray as Natásha and I used to as children, that the snow might turn into sugar—and then run out into the yard to see whether it had done so. No, but I am not praying for trifles now," he thought as he put his pipe down in a corner, and folding his hands placed himself before the icon. Softened by memories of Princess Mary he began to pray as he had not done for a long time. Tears were in his eyes and in his throat when the door opened and Lavrúshka came in with some papers.

"Blockhead! Why do you come in without being called?" cried Nicholas, quickly changing his attitude.

"From the governor," said Lavrúshka in a sleepy voice. "A courier has arrived and there's a letter for you."

"Well, all right, thanks. You can go!"

Nicholas took the two letters, one of which was from his mother and the other from Sónya. He recognized them by the handwriting and opened Sónya's first. He had read only a few lines when he turned pale and his eyes opened wide with fear and joy.

"No, it's not possible!" he cried aloud.

Unable to sit still he paced up and down the room holding the letter and reading it. He glanced through it, then read it again, and then again, and standing still in the middle of the room he raised his shoulders, stretching out his hands, with his mouth wide open and his eyes fixed. What he had just been praying for with confidence that God would hear him had come to pass; but Nicholas was as much astonished as if it were something extraordinary and unexpected, and as if the very fact that it had happened so quickly proved that it had not come from God to whom he had prayed, but by some ordinary coincidence.

This unexpected and, as it seemed to Nicholas, quite voluntary letter from Sónya freed him from the knot that fettered him and from which there had seemed no escape. She wrote that the last unfortunate events—the loss of almost the whole of the Rostóvs' Moscow property—and the countess' repeatedly expressed wish that Nicholas should marry Princess Bolkónskaya, together with his silence and coldness of late, had all combined to make her decide to release him from his promise and set him completely free.

It would be too painful to me to think that I might be a cause of sorrow or discord in the family that has been so good to me (she wrote), and my love has no aim but the happiness of those I love; so, Nicholas, I beg you to consider yourself free, and to be assured that, in spite of everything, no one can love you more than does

Your Sónya

Both letters were written from Tróitsa. The other, from the countess, described their last days in Moscow, their departure, the fire, and the destruction of all their property. In this letter the countess also mentioned that Prince Andrew was among the wounded traveling with them; his state was very critical, but the doctor said there was now more hope. Sónya and Natásha were nursing him.

Next day Nicholas took his mother's letter and went to see Princess Mary. Neither he nor she said a word about what "Natásha nursing him" might mean, but thanks to this letter Nicholas suddenly became almost as intimate with the princess as if they were relations.

The following day he saw Princess Mary off on her journey to Yaroslávl, and a few days later left to rejoin his regiment.