

CHAPTER XIV

When Princess Mary heard from Nicholas that her brother was with the Rostóvs at Yaroslávl she at once prepared to go there, in spite of her aunt's efforts to dissuade her—and not merely to go herself but to take her nephew with her. Whether it were difficult or easy, possible or impossible, she did not ask and did not want to know: it was her duty, not only to herself, to be near her brother who was perhaps dying, but to do everything possible to take his son to him, and so she prepared to set off. That she had not heard from Prince Andrew himself, Princess Mary attributed to his being too weak to write or to his considering the long journey too hard and too dangerous for her and his son.

In a few days Princess Mary was ready to start. Her equipages were the huge family coach in which she had traveled to Vorónezh, a semiopen trap, and a baggage cart. With her traveled Mademoiselle Bourienne, little Nicholas and his tutor, her old nurse, three maids, Tíkhon, and a young footman and courier her aunt had sent to accompany her.

The usual route through Moscow could not be thought of, and the roundabout way Princess Mary was obliged to take through Lípetsk, Ryazán, Vladímír, and Shúya was very long and, as post horses were not everywhere obtainable, very difficult, and near Ryazán where the French were said to have shown themselves was even dangerous.

During this difficult journey Mademoiselle Bourienne, Dessalles, and Princess Mary's servants were astonished at her energy and firmness of spirit. She went to bed later and rose earlier than any of them, and no difficulties daunted her. Thanks to her activity and energy, which infected her fellow travelers, they approached Yaroslávl by the end of the second week.

The last days of her stay in Vorónezh had been the happiest of her life. Her love for Rostóv no longer tormented or agitated her. It filled her whole soul, had become an integral part of herself, and she no longer struggled against it. Latterly she had become convinced that she loved and was beloved, though she never said this definitely to herself in words. She had become convinced of it at her last interview with Nicholas, when he had come to tell her that her brother was with the Rostóvs. Not by a single word had Nicholas alluded to the fact that Prince Andrew's relations with Natásha might, if he recovered, be renewed, but Princess Mary saw by his face that he knew and thought of this.

Yet in spite of that, his relation to her—considerate, delicate, and loving—not only remained unchanged, but it sometimes seemed to Princess Mary that he was even glad that the family connection between them allowed him to express his friendship more freely. She knew that she loved for the first and only time in her life and felt that she was beloved, and was happy in regard to it.

But this happiness on one side of her spiritual nature did not prevent her feeling grief for her brother with full force; on the contrary, that

spiritual tranquility on the one side made it the more possible for her to give full play to her feeling for her brother. That feeling was so strong at the moment of leaving Vorónezh that those who saw her off, as they looked at her careworn, despairing face, felt sure she would fall ill on the journey. But the very difficulties and preoccupations of the journey, which she took so actively in hand, saved her for a while from her grief and gave her strength.

As always happens when traveling, Princess Mary thought only of the journey itself, forgetting its object. But as she approached Yaroslávl the thought of what might await her there—not after many days, but that very evening—again presented itself to her and her agitation increased to its utmost limit.

The courier who had been sent on in advance to find out where the Rostóvs were staying in Yaroslávl, and in what condition Prince Andrew was, when he met the big coach just entering the town gates was appalled by the terrible pallor of the princess' face that looked out at him from the window.

“I have found out everything, your excellency: the Rostóvs are staying at the merchant Brónnikov's house, in the Square not far from here, right above the Vólga,” said the courier.

Princess Mary looked at him with frightened inquiry, not understanding why he did not reply to what she chiefly wanted to know: how was her brother? Mademoiselle Bourienne put that question for her.

“How is the prince?” she asked.

“His excellency is staying in the same house with them.”

“Then he is alive,” thought Princess Mary, and asked in a low voice: “How is he?”

“The servants say he is still the same.”

What “still the same” might mean Princess Mary did not ask, but with an unnoticed glance at little seven-year-old Nicholas, who was sitting in front of her looking with pleasure at the town, she bowed her head and did not raise it again till the heavy coach, rumbling, shaking and swaying, came to a stop. The carriage steps clattered as they were let down.

The carriage door was opened. On the left there was water—a great river—and on the right a porch. There were people at the entrance: servants, and a rosy girl with a large plait of black hair, smiling as it seemed to Princess Mary in an unpleasantly affected way. (This was Sónya.) Princess Mary ran up the steps. “This way, this way!” said the girl, with the same artificial smile, and the princess found herself in the hall facing an elderly woman of Oriental type, who came rapidly to meet her with a look of emotion. This was the countess. She embraced Princess Mary and kissed her.

“Mon enfant!” she muttered, “je vous aime et vous connais depuis longtemps.” *

* “My child! I love you and have known you a long time.”

Despite her excitement, Princess Mary realized that this was the countess and that it was necessary to say something to her. Hardly knowing how she did it, she contrived to utter a few polite phrases in French in the same tone as those that had been addressed to her, and asked: “How is he?”

“The doctor says that he is not in danger,” said the countess, but as she spoke she raised her eyes with a sigh, and her gesture conveyed a contradiction of her words.

“Where is he? Can I see him—can I?” asked the princess.

“One moment, Princess, one moment, my dear! Is this his son?” said the countess, turning to little Nicholas who was coming in with Dessalles. “There will be room for everybody, this is a big house. Oh, what a lovely boy!”

The countess took Princess Mary into the drawing room, where Sónya was talking to Mademoiselle Bourienne. The countess caressed the boy, and the old count came in and welcomed the princess. He had changed very much since Princess Mary had last seen him. Then he had been a brisk, cheerful, self-assured old man; now he seemed a pitiful, bewildered person. While talking to Princess Mary he continually looked round as if asking everyone whether he was doing the right thing. After the destruction of Moscow and of his property, thrown out of his accustomed groove he seemed to have lost the sense of his own significance and to feel that there was no longer a place for him in life.

In spite of her one desire to see her brother as soon as possible, and her vexation that at the moment when all she wanted was to see him they should be trying to entertain her and pretending to admire her nephew, the princess noticed all that was going on around her and felt the necessity of submitting, for a time, to this new order of things which she had entered. She knew it to be necessary, and though it was hard for her she was not vexed with these people.

“This is my niece,” said the count, introducing Sónya—“You don’t know her, Princess?”

Princess Mary turned to Sónya and, trying to stifle the hostile feeling that arose in her toward the girl, she kissed her. But she felt oppressed by the fact that the mood of everyone around her was so far from what was in her own heart.

“Where is he?” she asked again, addressing them all.

“He is downstairs. Natásha is with him,” answered Sónya, flushing. “We have sent to ask. I think you must be tired, Princess.”

Tears of vexation showed themselves in Princess Mary's eyes. She turned away and was about to ask the countess again how to go to him, when light, impetuous, and seemingly buoyant steps were heard at the door. The princess looked round and saw Natásha coming in, almost running—that Natásha whom she had liked so little at their meeting in Moscow long since.

But hardly had the princess looked at Natásha's face before she realized that here was a real comrade in her grief, and consequently a friend. She ran to meet her, embraced her, and began to cry on her shoulder.

As soon as Natásha, sitting at the head of Prince Andrew's bed, heard of Princess Mary's arrival, she softly left his room and hastened to her with those swift steps that had sounded buoyant to Princess Mary.

There was only one expression on her agitated face when she ran into the drawing room—that of love—boundless love for him, for her, and for all that was near to the man she loved; and of pity, suffering for others, and passionate desire to give herself entirely to helping them. It was plain that at that moment there was in Natásha's heart no thought of herself or of her own relations with Prince Andrew.

Princess Mary, with her acute sensibility, understood all this at the first glance at Natásha's face, and wept on her shoulder with sorrowful pleasure.

“Come, come to him, Mary,” said Natásha, leading her into the other room.

Princess Mary raised her head, dried her eyes, and turned to Natásha. She felt that from her she would be able to understand and learn everything.

“How...” she began her question but stopped short.

She felt that it was impossible to ask, or to answer, in words. Natásha's face and eyes would have to tell her all more clearly and profoundly.

Natásha was gazing at her, but seemed afraid and in doubt whether to say all she knew or not; she seemed to feel that before those luminous eyes which penetrated into the very depths of her heart, it was impossible not to tell the whole truth which she saw. And suddenly, Natásha's lips twitched, ugly wrinkles gathered round her mouth, and covering her face with her hands she burst into sobs.

Princess Mary understood.

But she still hoped, and asked, in words she herself did not trust:

“But how is his wound? What is his general condition?”

“You, you... will see,” was all Natásha could say.

They sat a little while downstairs near his room till they had left off crying and were able to go to him with calm faces.

“How has his whole illness gone? Is it long since he grew worse? When did this happen?” Princess Mary inquired.

Natasha told her that at first there had been danger from his feverish condition and the pain he suffered, but at Tróitsa that had passed and the doctor had only been afraid of gangrene. That danger had also passed. When they reached Yaroslávl the wound had begun to fester (Natasha knew all about such things as festering) and the doctor had said that the festering might take a normal course. Then fever set in, but the doctor had said the fever was not very serious.

“But two days ago this suddenly happened,” said Natasha, struggling with her sobs. “I don’t know why, but you will see what he is like.”

“Is he weaker? Thinner?” asked the princess.

“No, it’s not that, but worse. You will see. O, Mary, he is too good, he cannot, cannot live, because...”