

CHAPTER XX

After Pierre's departure that first evening, when Natásha had said to Princess Mary with a gaily mocking smile: "He looks just, yes, just as if he had come out of a Russian bath—in a short coat and with his hair cropped," something hidden and unknown to herself, but irrepressible, awoke in Natásha's soul.

Everything: her face, walk, look, and voice, was suddenly altered. To her own surprise a power of life and hope of happiness rose to the surface and demanded satisfaction. From that evening she seemed to have forgotten all that had happened to her. She no longer complained of her position, did not say a word about the past, and no longer feared to make happy plans for the future. She spoke little of Pierre, but when Princess Mary mentioned him a long-extinguished light once more kindled in her eyes and her lips curved with a strange smile.

The change that took place in Natásha at first surprised Princess Mary; but when she understood its meaning it grieved her. "Can she have loved my brother so little as to be able to forget him so soon?" she thought when she reflected on the change. But when she was with Natásha she was not vexed with her and did not reproach her. The reawakened power of life that had seized Natásha was so evidently irrepressible and unexpected by her that in her presence Princess Mary felt that she had no right to reproach her even in her heart.

Natásha gave herself up so fully and frankly to this new feeling that she did not try to hide the fact that she was no longer sad, but bright and cheerful.

When Princess Mary returned to her room after her nocturnal talk with Pierre, Natásha met her on the threshold.

"He has spoken? Yes? He has spoken?" she repeated.

And a joyful yet pathetic expression which seemed to beg forgiveness for her joy settled on Natásha's face.

"I wanted to listen at the door, but I knew you would tell me."

Understandable and touching as the look with which Natásha gazed at her seemed to Princess Mary, and sorry as she was to see her agitation, these words pained her for a moment. She remembered her brother and his love.

"But what's to be done? She can't help it," thought the princess.

And with a sad and rather stern look she told Natásha all that Pierre had said. On hearing that he was going to Petersburg Natásha was astounded.

"To Petersburg!" she repeated as if unable to understand.

But noticing the grieved expression on Princess Mary's face she guessed the reason of that sadness and suddenly began to cry.

"Mary," said she, "tell me what I should do! I am afraid of being bad. Whatever you tell me, I will do. Tell me...."

"You love him?"

"Yes," whispered Natásha.

"Then why are you crying? I am happy for your sake," said Princess Mary, who because of those tears quite forgave Natásha's joy.

"It won't be just yet—someday. Think what fun it will be when I am his wife and you marry Nicholas!"

"Natásha, I have asked you not to speak of that. Let us talk about you."

They were silent awhile.

"But why go to Petersburg?" Natásha suddenly asked, and hastily replied to her own question. "But no, no, he must... Yes, Mary, He must...."