

XIV -- THE PARTING

ON the day after the events described, the carriage and the luggage-cart drew up to the door at noon. Nicola, dressed for the journey, with his breeches tucked into his boots and an old overcoat belted tightly about him with a girdle, got into the cart and arranged cloaks and cushions on the seats. When he thought that they were piled high enough he sat down on them, but finding them still unsatisfactory, jumped up and arranged them once more.

"Nicola Dimitvitch, would you be so good as to take master's dressing-case with you?" said Papa's valet, suddenly standing up in the carriage, "It won't take up much room."

"You should have told me before, Michael Ivanitch," answered Nicola snappishly as he hurled a bundle with all his might to the floor of the cart. "Good gracious! Why, when my head is going round like a whirlpool, there you come along with your dressing-case!" and he lifted his cap to wipe away the drops of perspiration from his sunburnt brow.

The courtyard was full of bareheaded peasants in kaftans or simple shirts, women clad in the national dress and wearing striped handkerchiefs, and barefooted little ones--the latter holding their mothers' hands or crowding round the entrance-steps. All were chattering among themselves as they stared at the carriage. One of the postillions, an old man dressed in a winter cap and cloak, took hold of the pole of

the carriage and tried it carefully, while the other postillion (a young man in a white blouse with pink gussets on the sleeves and a black lamb's-wool cap which he kept cocking first on one side and then on the other as he arranged his flaxen hair) laid his overcoat upon the box, slung the reins over it, and cracked his thonged whip as he looked now at his boots and now at the other drivers where they stood greasing the wheels of the cart--one driver lifting up each wheel in turn and the other driver applying the grease. Tired post-horses of various hues stood lashing away flies with their tails near the gate--some stamping their great hairy legs, blinking their eyes, and dozing, some leaning wearily against their neighbours, and others cropping the leaves and stalks of dark-green fern which grew near the entrance-steps. Some of the dogs were lying panting in the sun, while others were slinking under the vehicles to lick the grease from the wheels. The air was filled with a sort of dusty mist, and the horizon was lilac-grey in colour, though no clouds were to be seen, A strong wind from the south was raising volumes of dust from the roads and fields, shaking the poplars and birch-trees in the garden, and whirling their yellow leaves away. I myself was sitting at a window and waiting impatiently for these various preparations to come to an end.

As we sat together by the drawing-room table, to pass the last few moments en famille, it never occurred to me that a sad moment was impending. On the contrary, the most trivial thoughts were filling my brain. Which driver was going to drive the carriage and which the cart? Which of us would sit with Papa, and which with Karl Ivanitch? Why must

I be kept forever muffled up in a scarf and padded boots?

"Am I so delicate? Am I likely to be frozen?" I thought to myself.

"I wish it would all come to an end, and we could take our seats and start."

"To whom shall I give the list of the children's linen?" asked Natalia Savishna of Mamma as she entered the room with a paper in her hand and her eyes red with weeping.

"Give it to Nicola, and then return to say good-bye to them," replied Mamma. The old woman seemed about to say something more, but suddenly stopped short, covered her face with her handkerchief, and left the room. Something seemed to prick at my heart when I saw that gesture of hers, but impatience to be off soon drowned all other feeling, and I continued to listen indifferently to Papa and Mamma as they talked together. They were discussing subjects which evidently interested neither of them. What must be bought for the house? What would Princess Sophia or Madame Julie say? Would the roads be good?--and so forth.

Foka entered, and in the same tone and with the same air as though he were announcing luncheon said, "The carriages are ready." I saw Mamma tremble and turn pale at the announcement, just as though it were something unexpected.

Next, Foka was ordered to shut all the doors of the room. This amused

me highly. As though we needed to be concealed from some one! When every one else was seated, Foka took the last remaining chair. Scarcely, however, had he done so when the door creaked and every one looked that way. Natalia Savishna entered hastily, and, without raising her eyes, sat down on the same chair as Foka. I can see them before me now-Foka's bald head and wrinkled, set face, and, beside him, a bent, kind figure in a cap from beneath which a few grey hairs were straggling. The pair settled themselves together on the chair, but neither of them looked comfortable.

I continued preoccupied and impatient. In fact, the ten minutes during which we sat there with closed doors seemed to me an hour. At last every one rose, made the sign of the cross, and began to say good-bye. Papa embraced Mamma, and kissed her again and again.

"But enough," he said presently. "We are not parting for ever."

"No, but it is-so-so sad!" replied Mamma, her voice trembling with emotion.

When I heard that faltering voice, and saw those quivering lips and tear-filled eyes, I forgot everything else in the world. I felt so ill and miserable that I would gladly have run away rather than bid her farewell. I felt, too, that when she was embracing Papa she was embracing us all. She clasped Woloda to her several times, and made the sign of the cross over him; after which I approached her, thinking that

it was my turn. Nevertheless she took him again and again to her heart, and blessed him. Finally I caught hold of her, and, clinging to her, wept--wept, thinking of nothing in the world but my grief.

As we passed out to take our seats, other servants pressed round us in the hall to say good-bye. Yet their requests to shake hands with us, their resounding kisses on our shoulders, [The fashion in which inferiors salute their superiors in Russia.] and the odour of their greasy heads only excited in me a feeling akin to impatience with these tiresome people. The same feeling made me bestow nothing more than a very cross kiss upon Natalia's cap when she approached to take leave of me. It is strange that I should still retain a perfect recollection of these servants' faces, and be able to draw them with the most minute accuracy in my mind, while Mamma's face and attitude escape me entirely. It may be that it is because at that moment I had not the heart to look at her closely. I felt that if I did so our mutual grief would burst forth too unrestrainedly.

I was the first to jump into the carriage and to take one of the hinder seats. The high back of the carriage prevented me from actually seeing her, yet I knew by instinct that Mamma was still there.

"Shall I look at her again or not?" I said to myself. "Well, just for the last time," and I peeped out towards the entrance-steps. Exactly at that moment Mamma moved by the same impulse, came to the opposite side of the carriage, and called me by name. Hearing her voice behind me. I

turned round, but so hastily that our heads knocked together. She gave a sad smile, and kissed me convulsively for the last time.

When we had driven away a few paces I determined to look at her once more. The wind was lifting the blue handkerchief from her head as, bent forward and her face buried in her hands, she moved slowly up the steps. Foka was supporting her. Papa said nothing as he sat beside me. I felt breathless with tears--felt a sensation in my throat as though I were going to choke, just as we came out on to the open road I saw a white handkerchief waving from the terrace. I waved mine in return, and the action of so doing calmed me a little. I still went on crying, but the thought that my tears were a proof of my affection helped to soothe and comfort me.

After a little while I began to recover, and to look with interest at objects which we passed and at the hind-quarters of the led horse which was trotting on my side. I watched how it would swish its tail, how it would lift one hoof after the other, how the driver's thong would fall upon its back, and how all its legs would then seem to jump together and the back-band, with the rings on it, to jump too--the whole covered with the horse's foam. Then I would look at the rolling stretches of ripe corn, at the dark ploughed fields where ploughs and peasants and horses with foals were working, at their footprints, and at the box of the carriage to see who was driving us; until, though my face was still wet with tears, my thoughts had strayed far from her with whom I had just parted--parted, perhaps, for ever. Yet ever and again something would

recall her to my memory. I remembered too how, the evening before, I had found a mushroom under the birch-trees, how Lubotshka had quarrelled with Katenka as to whose it should be, and how they had both of them wept when taking leave of us. I felt sorry to be parted from them, and from Natalia Savishna, and from the birch-tree avenue, and from Foka. Yes, even the horrid Mimi I longed for. I longed for everything at home. And poor Mamma!--The tears rushed to my eyes again. Yet even this mood passed away before long.