

CHAPTER IV

Just then another visitor entered the drawing room: Prince Andrew Bolkónski, the little princess' husband. He was a very handsome young man, of medium height, with firm, clearcut features. Everything about him, from his weary, bored expression to his quiet, measured step, offered a most striking contrast to his quiet, little wife. It was evident that he not only knew everyone in the drawing room, but had found them to be so tiresome that it wearied him to look at or listen to them. And among all these faces that he found so tedious, none seemed to bore him so much as that of his pretty wife. He turned away from her with a grimace that distorted his handsome face, kissed Anna Pávlovna's hand, and screwing up his eyes scanned the whole company.

"You are off to the war, Prince?" said Anna Pávlovna.

"General Kutúzov," said Bolkónski, speaking French and stressing the last syllable of the general's name like a Frenchman, "has been pleased to take me as an aide-de-camp...."

"And Lise, your wife?"

"She will go to the country."

"Are you not ashamed to deprive us of your charming wife?"

"André," said his wife, addressing her husband in the same coquettish manner in which she spoke to other men, "the vicomte has been telling us such a tale about Mademoiselle George and Buonaparte!"

Prince Andrew screwed up his eyes and turned away. Pierre, who from the moment Prince Andrew entered the room had watched him with glad, affectionate eyes, now came up and took his arm. Before he looked round Prince Andrew frowned again, expressing his annoyance with whoever was touching his arm, but when he saw Pierre's beaming face he gave him an unexpectedly kind and pleasant smile.

"There now!... So you, too, are in the great world?" said he to Pierre.

"I knew you would be here," replied Pierre. "I will come to supper with you. May I?" he added in a low voice so as not to disturb the vicomte who was continuing his story.

"No, impossible!" said Prince Andrew, laughing and pressing Pierre's hand to show that there was no need to ask the question. He wished to say something more, but at that moment Prince Vasíli and his daughter got up to go and the two young men rose to let them pass.

"You must excuse me, dear Vicomte," said Prince Vasíli to the Frenchman, holding him down by the sleeve in a friendly way to prevent his rising. "This unfortunate fete at the ambassador's deprives me of a pleasure, and obliges me to interrupt you. I am very sorry to leave

your enchanting party,” said he, turning to Anna Pávlovna.

His daughter, Princess Héléne, passed between the chairs, lightly holding up the folds of her dress, and the smile shone still more radiantly on her beautiful face. Pierre gazed at her with rapturous, almost frightened, eyes as she passed him.

“Very lovely,” said Prince Andrew.

“Very,” said Pierre.

In passing Prince Vasíli seized Pierre’s hand and said to Anna Pávlovna: “Educate this bear for me! He has been staying with me a whole month and this is the first time I have seen him in society. Nothing is so necessary for a young man as the society of clever women.”

Anna Pávlovna smiled and promised to take Pierre in hand. She knew his father to be a connection of Prince Vasíli’s. The elderly lady who had been sitting with the old aunt rose hurriedly and overtook Prince Vasíli in the anteroom. All the affectation of interest she had assumed had left her kindly and tear-worn face and it now expressed only anxiety and fear.

“How about my son Borís, Prince?” said she, hurrying after him into the anteroom. “I can’t remain any longer in Petersburg. Tell me what news I may take back to my poor boy.”

Although Prince Vasíli listened reluctantly and not very politely to the elderly lady, even betraying some impatience, she gave him an ingratiating and appealing smile, and took his hand that he might not go away.

“What would it cost you to say a word to the Emperor, and then he would be transferred to the Guards at once?” said she.

“Believe me, Princess, I am ready to do all I can,” answered Prince Vasíli, “but it is difficult for me to ask the Emperor. I should advise you to appeal to Rumyántsev through Prince Golítsyn. That would be the best way.”

The elderly lady was a Princess Drubetskáya, belonging to one of the best families in Russia, but she was poor, and having long been out of society had lost her former influential connections. She had now come to Petersburg to procure an appointment in the Guards for her only son. It was, in fact, solely to meet Prince Vasíli that she had obtained an invitation to Anna Pávlovna’s reception and had sat listening to the vicomte’s story. Prince Vasíli’s words frightened her, an embittered look clouded her once handsome face, but only for a moment; then she smiled again and clutched Prince Vasíli’s arm more tightly.

“Listen to me, Prince,” said she. “I have never yet asked you for anything and I never will again, nor have I ever reminded you of my

father's friendship for you; but now I entreat you for God's sake to do this for my son—and I shall always regard you as a benefactor," she added hurriedly. "No, don't be angry, but promise! I have asked Golítsyn and he has refused. Be the kindhearted man you always were," she said, trying to smile though tears were in her eyes.

"Papa, we shall be late," said Princess Héléne, turning her beautiful head and looking over her classically molded shoulder as she stood waiting by the door.

Influence in society, however, is a capital which has to be economized if it is to last. Prince Vasíli knew this, and having once realized that if he asked on behalf of all who begged of him, he would soon be unable to ask for himself, he became chary of using his influence. But in Princess Drubetskáya's case he felt, after her second appeal, something like qualms of conscience. She had reminded him of what was quite true; he had been indebted to her father for the first steps in his career. Moreover, he could see by her manners that she was one of those women—mostly mothers—who, having once made up their minds, will not rest until they have gained their end, and are prepared if necessary to go on insisting day after day and hour after hour, and even to make scenes. This last consideration moved him.

"My dear Anna Mikháylovna," said he with his usual familiarity and weariness of tone, "it is almost impossible for me to do what you ask; but to prove my devotion to you and how I respect your father's memory, I will do the impossible—your son shall be transferred to the Guards. Here is my hand on it. Are you satisfied?"

"My dear benefactor! This is what I expected from you—I knew your kindness!" He turned to go.

"Wait—just a word! When he has been transferred to the Guards..." she faltered. "You are on good terms with Michael Ilariónovich Kutúzov ... recommend Borís to him as adjutant! Then I shall be at rest, and then..."

Prince Vasíli smiled.

"No, I won't promise that. You don't know how Kutúzov is pestered since his appointment as Commander in Chief. He told me himself that all the Moscow ladies have conspired to give him all their sons as adjutants."

"No, but do promise! I won't let you go! My dear benefactor..."

"Papa," said his beautiful daughter in the same tone as before, "we shall be late."

"Well, au revoir! Good-by! You hear her?"

"Then tomorrow you will speak to the Emperor?"

"Certainly; but about Kutúzov, I don't promise."

“Do promise, do promise, Vasíli!” cried Anna Mikháylovna as he went, with the smile of a coquettish girl, which at one time probably came naturally to her, but was now very ill-suited to her careworn face.

Apparently she had forgotten her age and by force of habit employed all the old feminine arts. But as soon as the prince had gone her face resumed its former cold, artificial expression. She returned to the group where the vicomte was still talking, and again pretended to listen, while waiting till it would be time to leave. Her task was accomplished.