

CHAPTER VI

Having thanked Anna Pávlovna for her charming soiree, the guests began to take their leave.

Pierre was ungainly. Stout, about the average height, broad, with huge red hands; he did not know, as the saying is, how to enter a drawing room and still less how to leave one; that is, how to say something particularly agreeable before going away. Besides this he was absent-minded. When he rose to go, he took up instead of his own, the general's three-cornered hat, and held it, pulling at the plume, till the general asked him to restore it. All his absent-mindedness and inability to enter a room and converse in it was, however, redeemed by his kindly, simple, and modest expression. Anna Pávlovna turned toward him and, with a Christian mildness that expressed forgiveness of his indiscretion, nodded and said: "I hope to see you again, but I also hope you will change your opinions, my dear Monsieur Pierre."

When she said this, he did not reply and only bowed, but again everybody saw his smile, which said nothing, unless perhaps, "Opinions are opinions, but you see what a capital, good-natured fellow I am." And everyone, including Anna Pávlovna, felt this.

Prince Andrew had gone out into the hall, and, turning his shoulders to the footman who was helping him on with his cloak, listened indifferently to his wife's chatter with Prince Hippolyte who had also come into the hall. Prince Hippolyte stood close to the pretty, pregnant princess, and stared fixedly at her through his eyeglass.

"Go in, Annette, or you will catch cold," said the little princess, taking leave of Anna Pávlovna. "It is settled," she added in a low voice.

Anna Pávlovna had already managed to speak to Lise about the match she contemplated between Anatole and the little princess' sister-in-law.

"I rely on you, my dear," said Anna Pávlovna, also in a low tone. "Write to her and let me know how her father looks at the matter. Au revoir!"—and she left the hall.

Prince Hippolyte approached the little princess and, bending his face close to her, began to whisper something.

Two footmen, the princess' and his own, stood holding a shawl and a cloak, waiting for the conversation to finish. They listened to the French sentences which to them were meaningless, with an air of understanding but not wishing to appear to do so. The princess as usual spoke smilingly and listened with a laugh.

"I am very glad I did not go to the ambassador's," said Prince Hippolyte "—so dull—. It has been a delightful evening, has it not? Delightful!"

“They say the ball will be very good,” replied the princess, drawing up her downy little lip. “All the pretty women in society will be there.”

“Not all, for you will not be there; not all,” said Prince Hippolyte smiling joyfully; and snatching the shawl from the footman, whom he even pushed aside, he began wrapping it round the princess. Either from awkwardness or intentionally (no one could have said which) after the shawl had been adjusted he kept his arm around her for a long time, as though embracing her.

Still smiling, she gracefully moved away, turning and glancing at her husband. Prince Andrew’s eyes were closed, so weary and sleepy did he seem.

“Are you ready?” he asked his wife, looking past her.

Prince Hippolyte hurriedly put on his cloak, which in the latest fashion reached to his very heels, and, stumbling in it, ran out into the porch following the princess, whom a footman was helping into the carriage.

“Princesse, au revoir,” cried he, stumbling with his tongue as well as with his feet.

The princess, picking up her dress, was taking her seat in the dark carriage, her husband was adjusting his saber; Prince Hippolyte, under pretense of helping, was in everyone’s way.

“Allow me, sir,” said Prince Andrew in Russian in a cold, disagreeable tone to Prince Hippolyte who was blocking his path.

“I am expecting you, Pierre,” said the same voice, but gently and affectionately.

The postilion started, the carriage wheels rattled. Prince Hippolyte laughed spasmodically as he stood in the porch waiting for the vicomte whom he had promised to take home.

“Well, mon cher,” said the vicomte, having seated himself beside Hippolyte in the carriage, “your little princess is very nice, very nice indeed, quite French,” and he kissed the tips of his fingers. Hippolyte burst out laughing.

“Do you know, you are a terrible chap for all your innocent airs,” continued the vicomte. “I pity the poor husband, that little officer who gives himself the airs of a monarch.”

Hippolyte spluttered again, and amid his laughter said, “And you were saying that the Russian ladies are not equal to the French? One has to know how to deal with them.”

Pierre reaching the house first went into Prince Andrew’s study like one quite at home, and from habit immediately lay down on the sofa, took from the shelf the first book that came to his hand (it was Caesar’s

Commentaries), and resting on his elbow, began reading it in the middle.

“What have you done to Mlle Schérer? She will be quite ill now,” said Prince Andrew, as he entered the study, rubbing his small white hands.

Pierre turned his whole body, making the sofa creak. He lifted his eager face to Prince Andrew, smiled, and waved his hand.

“That abbé is very interesting but he does not see the thing in the right light.... In my opinion perpetual peace is possible but—I do not know how to express it ... not by a balance of political power....”

It was evident that Prince Andrew was not interested in such abstract conversation.

“One can’t everywhere say all one thinks, mon cher. Well, have you at last decided on anything? Are you going to be a guardsman or a diplomatist?” asked Prince Andrew after a momentary silence.

Pierre sat up on the sofa, with his legs tucked under him.

“Really, I don’t yet know. I don’t like either the one or the other.”

“But you must decide on something! Your father expects it.”

Pierre at the age of ten had been sent abroad with an abbé as tutor, and had remained away till he was twenty. When he returned to Moscow his father dismissed the abbé and said to the young man, “Now go to Petersburg, look round, and choose your profession. I will agree to anything. Here is a letter to Prince Vasíli, and here is money. Write to me all about it, and I will help you in everything.” Pierre had already been choosing a career for three months, and had not decided on anything. It was about this choice that Prince Andrew was speaking. Pierre rubbed his forehead.

“But he must be a Freemason,” said he, referring to the abbé whom he had met that evening.

“That is all nonsense.” Prince Andrew again interrupted him, “let us talk business. Have you been to the Horse Guards?”

“No, I have not; but this is what I have been thinking and wanted to tell you. There is a war now against Napoleon. If it were a war for freedom I could understand it and should be the first to enter the army; but to help England and Austria against the greatest man in the world is not right.”

Prince Andrew only shrugged his shoulders at Pierre’s childish words. He put on the air of one who finds it impossible to reply to such nonsense, but it would in fact have been difficult to give any other answer than the one Prince Andrew gave to this naïve question.

“If no one fought except on his own conviction, there would be no wars,” he said.

“And that would be splendid,” said Pierre.

Prince Andrew smiled ironically.

“Very likely it would be splendid, but it will never come about....”

“Well, why are you going to the war?” asked Pierre.

“What for? I don’t know. I must. Besides that I am going....” He paused. “I am going because the life I am leading here does not suit me!”