

CHAPTER XXVI

The gray-haired valet was sitting drowsily listening to the snoring of the prince, who was in his large study. From the far side of the house through the closed doors came the sound of difficult passages—twenty times repeated—of a sonata by Dussek.

Just then a closed carriage and another with a hood drove up to the porch. Prince Andrew got out of the carriage, helped his little wife to alight, and let her pass into the house before him. Old Tikhon, wearing a wig, put his head out of the door of the antechamber, reported in a whisper that the prince was sleeping, and hastily closed the door. Tikhon knew that neither the son's arrival nor any other unusual event must be allowed to disturb the appointed order of the day. Prince Andrew apparently knew this as well as Tikhon; he looked at his watch as if to ascertain whether his father's habits had changed since he was at home last, and, having assured himself that they had not, he turned to his wife.

“He will get up in twenty minutes. Let us go across to Mary's room,” he said.

The little princess had grown stouter during this time, but her eyes and her short, downy, smiling lip lifted when she began to speak just as merrily and prettily as ever.

“Why, this is a palace!” she said to her husband, looking around with the expression with which people compliment their host at a ball. “Let's come, quick, quick!” And with a glance round, she smiled at Tikhon, at her husband, and at the footman who accompanied them.

“Is that Mary practicing? Let's go quietly and take her by surprise.”

Prince Andrew followed her with a courteous but sad expression.

“You've grown older, Tikhon,” he said in passing to the old man, who kissed his hand.

Before they reached the room from which the sounds of the clavichord came, the pretty, fair-haired Frenchwoman, Mademoiselle Bourienne, rushed out apparently beside herself with delight.

“Ah! what joy for the princess!” exclaimed she: “At last! I must let her know.”

“No, no, please not... You are Mademoiselle Bourienne,” said the little princess, kissing her. “I know you already through my sister-in-law's friendship for you. She was not expecting us?”

They went up to the door of the sitting room from which came the sound of the oft-repeated passage of the sonata. Prince Andrew stopped and made a grimace, as if expecting something unpleasant.

The little princess entered the room. The passage broke off in the middle, a cry was heard, then Princess Mary's heavy tread and the sound of kissing. When Prince Andrew went in the two princesses, who had only met once before for a short time at his wedding, were in each other's arms warmly pressing their lips to whatever place they happened to touch. Mademoiselle Bourienne stood near them pressing her hand to her heart, with a beatific smile and obviously equally ready to cry or to laugh. Prince Andrew shrugged his shoulders and frowned, as lovers of music do when they hear a false note. The two women let go of one another, and then, as if afraid of being too late, seized each other's hands, kissing them and pulling them away, and again began kissing each other on the face, and then to Prince Andrew's surprise both began to cry and kissed again. Mademoiselle Bourienne also began to cry. Prince Andrew evidently felt ill at ease, but to the two women it seemed quite natural that they should cry, and apparently it never entered their heads that it could have been otherwise at this meeting.

"Ah! my dear!... Ah! Mary!..." they suddenly exclaimed, and then laughed. "I dreamed last night..."—"You were not expecting us?..." "Ah! Mary, you have got thinner?..." "And you have grown stouter!..."

"I knew the princess at once," put in Mademoiselle Bourienne.

"And I had no idea!..." exclaimed Princess Mary. "Ah, Andrew, I did not see you."

Prince Andrew and his sister, hand in hand, kissed one another, and he told her she was still the same crybaby as ever. Princess Mary had turned toward her brother, and through her tears the loving, warm, gentle look of her large luminous eyes, very beautiful at that moment, rested on Prince Andrew's face.

The little princess talked incessantly, her short, downy upper lip continually and rapidly touching her rosy nether lip when necessary and drawing up again next moment when her face broke into a smile of glittering teeth and sparkling eyes. She told of an accident they had had on the Spásski Hill which might have been serious for her in her condition, and immediately after that informed them that she had left all her clothes in Petersburg and that heaven knew what she would have to dress in here; and that Andrew had quite changed, and that Kitty Odýntsova had married an old man, and that there was a suitor for Mary, a real one, but that they would talk of that later. Princess Mary was still looking silently at her brother and her beautiful eyes were full of love and sadness. It was plain that she was following a train of thought independent of her sister-in-law's words. In the midst of a description of the last Petersburg fete she addressed her brother:

"So you are really going to the war, Andrew?" she said sighing.

Lise sighed too.

"Yes, and even tomorrow," replied her brother.

“He is leaving me here, God knows why, when he might have had promotion...”

Princess Mary did not listen to the end, but continuing her train of thought turned to her sister-in-law with a tender glance at her figure.

“Is it certain?” she said.

The face of the little princess changed. She sighed and said: “Yes, quite certain. Ah! it is very dreadful...”

Her lip descended. She brought her face close to her sister-in-law’s and unexpectedly again began to cry.

“She needs rest,” said Prince Andrew with a frown. “Don’t you, Lise? Take her to your room and I’ll go to Father. How is he? Just the same?”

“Yes, just the same. Though I don’t know what your opinion will be,” answered the princess joyfully.

“And are the hours the same? And the walks in the avenues? And the lathe?” asked Prince Andrew with a scarcely perceptible smile which showed that, in spite of all his love and respect for his father, he was aware of his weaknesses.

“The hours are the same, and the lathe, and also the mathematics and my geometry lessons,” said Princess Mary gleefully, as if her lessons in geometry were among the greatest delights of her life.

When the twenty minutes had elapsed and the time had come for the old prince to get up, Tikhon came to call the young prince to his father. The old man made a departure from his usual routine in honor of his son’s arrival: he gave orders to admit him to his apartments while he dressed for dinner. The old prince always dressed in old-fashioned style, wearing an antique coat and powdered hair; and when Prince Andrew entered his father’s dressing room (not with the contemptuous look and manner he wore in drawing rooms, but with the animated face with which he talked to Pierre), the old man was sitting on a large leather-covered chair, wrapped in a powdering mantle, entrusting his head to Tikhon.

“Ah! here’s the warrior! Wants to vanquish Buonaparte?” said the old man, shaking his powdered head as much as the tail, which Tikhon was holding fast to plait, would allow.

“You at least must tackle him properly, or else if he goes on like this he’ll soon have us, too, for his subjects! How are you?” And he held out his cheek.

The old man was in a good temper after his nap before dinner. (He used to say that a nap “after dinner was silver—before dinner, golden.”) He cast happy, sidelong glances at his son from under his thick, bushy eyebrows. Prince Andrew went up and kissed his father on

the spot indicated to him. He made no reply on his father's favorite topic—making fun of the military men of the day, and more particularly of Bonaparte.

“Yes, Father, I have come to you and brought my wife who is pregnant,” said Prince Andrew, following every movement of his father's face with an eager and respectful look. “How is your health?”

“Only fools and rakes fall ill, my boy. You know me: I am busy from morning till night and abstemious, so of course I am well.”

“Thank God,” said his son smiling.

“God has nothing to do with it! Well, go on,” he continued, returning to his hobby; “tell me how the Germans have taught you to fight Bonaparte by this new science you call ‘strategy.’”

Prince Andrew smiled.

“Give me time to collect my wits, Father,” said he, with a smile that showed that his father's foibles did not prevent his son from loving and honoring him. “Why, I have not yet had time to settle down!”

“Nonsense, nonsense!” cried the old man, shaking his pigtail to see whether it was firmly plaited, and grasping his by the hand. “The house for your wife is ready. Princess Mary will take her there and show her over, and they'll talk nineteen to the dozen. That's their woman's way! I am glad to have her. Sit down and talk. About Mikhelson's army I understand—Tolstóy's too... a simultaneous expedition.... But what's the southern army to do? Prussia is neutral... I know that. What about Austria?” said he, rising from his chair and pacing up and down the room followed by Tikhon, who ran after him, handing him different articles of clothing. “What of Sweden? How will they cross Pomerania?”

Prince Andrew, seeing that his father insisted, began—at first reluctantly, but gradually with more and more animation, and from habit changing unconsciously from Russian to French as he went on—to explain the plan of operation for the coming campaign. He explained how an army, ninety thousand strong, was to threaten Prussia so as to bring her out of her neutrality and draw her into the war; how part of that army was to join some Swedish forces at Stralsund; how two hundred and twenty thousand Austrians, with a hundred thousand Russians, were to operate in Italy and on the Rhine; how fifty thousand Russians and as many English were to land at Naples, and how a total force of five hundred thousand men was to attack the French from different sides. The old prince did not evince the least interest during this explanation, but as if he were not listening to it continued to dress while walking about, and three times unexpectedly interrupted. Once he stopped it by shouting: “The white one, the white one!”

This meant that Tikhon was not handing him the waistcoat he wanted.

Another time he interrupted, saying:

“And will she soon be confined?” and shaking his head reproachfully said: “That’s bad! Go on, go on.”

The third interruption came when Prince Andrew was finishing his description. The old man began to sing, in the cracked voice of old age: “Malbrook s’en va-t-en guerre. Dieu sait quand reviendra.” *

* “Marlborough is going to the wars; God knows when he’ll return.”

His son only smiled.

“I don’t say it’s a plan I approve of,” said the son; “I am only telling you what it is. Napoleon has also formed his plan by now, not worse than this one.”

“Well, you’ve told me nothing new,” and the old man repeated, meditatively and rapidly:

“Dieu sait quand reviendra. Go to the dining room.”