

## CHAPTER X

Prince Andrew stayed at Brünn with Bilíbin, a Russian acquaintance of his in the diplomatic service.

“Ah, my dear prince! I could not have a more welcome visitor,” said Bilíbin as he came out to meet Prince Andrew. “Franz, put the prince’s things in my bedroom,” said he to the servant who was ushering Bolkónski in. “So you’re a messenger of victory, eh? Splendid! And I am sitting here ill, as you see.”

After washing and dressing, Prince Andrew came into the diplomat’s luxurious study and sat down to the dinner prepared for him. Bilíbin settled down comfortably beside the fire.

After his journey and the campaign during which he had been deprived of all the comforts of cleanliness and all the refinements of life, Prince Andrew felt a pleasant sense of repose among luxurious surroundings such as he had been accustomed to from childhood. Besides it was pleasant, after his reception by the Austrians, to speak if not in Russian (for they were speaking French) at least with a Russian who would, he supposed, share the general Russian antipathy to the Austrians which was then particularly strong.

Bilíbin was a man of thirty-five, a bachelor, and of the same circle as Prince Andrew. They had known each other previously in Petersburg, but had become more intimate when Prince Andrew was in Vienna with Kutúzov. Just as Prince Andrew was a young man who gave promise of rising high in the military profession, so to an even greater extent Bilíbin gave promise of rising in his diplomatic career. He was still a young man but no longer a young diplomat, as he had entered the service at the age of sixteen, had been in Paris and Copenhagen, and now held a rather important post in Vienna. Both the foreign minister and our ambassador in Vienna knew him and valued him. He was not one of those many diplomats who are esteemed because they have certain negative qualities, avoid doing certain things, and speak French. He was one of those, who, liking work, knew how to do it, and despite his indolence would sometimes spend a whole night at his writing table. He worked well whatever the import of his work. It was not the question “What for?” but the question “How?” that interested him. What the diplomatic matter might be he did not care, but it gave him great pleasure to prepare a circular, memorandum, or report, skillfully, pointedly, and elegantly. Bilíbin’s services were valued not only for what he wrote, but also for his skill in dealing and conversing with those in the highest spheres.

Bilíbin liked conversation as he liked work, only when it could be made elegantly witty. In society he always awaited an opportunity to say something striking and took part in a conversation only when that was possible. His conversation was always sprinkled with wittily original, finished phrases of general interest. These sayings were prepared in the inner laboratory of his mind in a portable form as if intentionally, so that insignificant society people might carry them from drawing room to

drawing room. And, in fact, Bilíbin's witticisms were hawked about in the Viennese drawing rooms and often had an influence on matters considered important.

His thin, worn, sallow face was covered with deep wrinkles, which always looked as clean and well washed as the tips of one's fingers after a Russian bath. The movement of these wrinkles formed the principal play of expression on his face. Now his forehead would pucker into deep folds and his eyebrows were lifted, then his eyebrows would descend and deep wrinkles would crease his cheeks. His small, deep-set eyes always twinkled and looked out straight.

"Well, now tell me about your exploits," said he.

Bolkónski, very modestly without once mentioning himself, described the engagement and his reception by the Minister of War.

"They received me and my news as one receives a dog in a game of skittles," said he in conclusion.

Bilíbin smiled and the wrinkles on his face disappeared.

"Cependant, mon cher," he remarked, examining his nails from a distance and puckering the skin above his left eye, "malgré la haute estime que je professe pour the Orthodox Russian army, j'avoue que votre victoire n'est pas des plus victorieuses." \*

\* "But my dear fellow, with all my respect for the Orthodox Russian army, I must say that your victory was not particularly victorious."

He went on talking in this way in French, uttering only those words in Russian on which he wished to put a contemptuous emphasis.

"Come now! You with all your forces fall on the unfortunate Mortier and his one division, and even then Mortier slips through your fingers! Where's the victory?"

"But seriously," said Prince Andrew, "we can at any rate say without boasting that it was a little better than at Ulm..."

"Why didn't you capture one, just one, marshal for us?"

"Because not everything happens as one expects or with the smoothness of a parade. We had expected, as I told you, to get at their rear by seven in the morning but had not reached it by five in the afternoon."

"And why didn't you do it at seven in the morning? You ought to have been there at seven in the morning," returned Bilíbin with a smile.

"You ought to have been there at seven in the morning."

"Why did you not succeed in impressing on Bonaparte by diplomatic methods that he had better leave Genoa alone?" retorted Prince Andrew

in the same tone.

“I know,” interrupted Bilíbin, “you’re thinking it’s very easy to take marshals, sitting on a sofa by the fire! That is true, but still why didn’t you capture him? So don’t be surprised if not only the Minister of War but also his Most August Majesty the Emperor and King Francis is not much delighted by your victory. Even I, a poor secretary of the Russian Embassy, do not feel any need in token of my joy to give my Franz a thaler, or let him go with his Liebchen to the Prater... True, we have no Prater here...”

He looked straight at Prince Andrew and suddenly unwrinkled his forehead.

“It is now my turn to ask you ‘why?’ mon cher,” said Bolkónski. “I confess I do not understand: perhaps there are diplomatic subtleties here beyond my feeble intelligence, but I can’t make it out. Mack loses a whole army, the Archduke Ferdinand and the Archduke Karl give no signs of life and make blunder after blunder. Kutúzov alone at last gains a real victory, destroying the spell of the invincibility of the French, and the Minister of War does not even care to hear the details.”

“That’s just it, my dear fellow. You see it’s hurrah for the Tsar, for Russia, for the Orthodox Greek faith! All that is beautiful, but what do we, I mean the Austrian court, care for your victories? Bring us nice news of a victory by the Archduke Karl or Ferdinand (one archduke’s as good as another, as you know) and even if it is only over a fire brigade of Bonaparte’s, that will be another story and we’ll fire off some cannon! But this sort of thing seems done on purpose to vex us. The Archduke Karl does nothing, the Archduke Ferdinand disgraces himself. You abandon Vienna, give up its defense—as much as to say: ‘Heaven is with us, but heaven help you and your capital!’ The one general whom we all loved, Schmidt, you expose to a bullet, and then you congratulate us on the victory! Admit that more irritating news than yours could not have been conceived. It’s as if it had been done on purpose, on purpose. Besides, suppose you did gain a brilliant victory, if even the Archduke Karl gained a victory, what effect would that have on the general course of events? It’s too late now when Vienna is occupied by the French army!”

“What? Occupied? Vienna occupied?”

“Not only occupied, but Bonaparte is at Schönbrunn, and the count, our dear Count Vrbna, goes to him for orders.”

After the fatigues and impressions of the journey, his reception, and especially after having dined, Bolkónski felt that he could not take in the full significance of the words he heard.

“Count Lichtenfels was here this morning,” Bilíbin continued, “and showed me a letter in which the parade of the French in Vienna was fully described: Prince Murat et tout le tremblement... You see that your victory is not a matter for great rejoicing and that you can’t be

received as a savior.”

“Really I don’t care about that, I don’t care at all,” said Prince Andrew, beginning to understand that his news of the battle before Krems was really of small importance in view of such events as the fall of Austria’s capital. “How is it Vienna was taken? What of the bridge and its celebrated bridgehead and Prince Auersperg? We heard reports that Prince Auersperg was defending Vienna?” he said.

“Prince Auersperg is on this, on our side of the river, and is defending us—doing it very badly, I think, but still he is defending us. But Vienna is on the other side. No, the bridge has not yet been taken and I hope it will not be, for it is mined and orders have been given to blow it up. Otherwise we should long ago have been in the mountains of Bohemia, and you and your army would have spent a bad quarter of an hour between two fires.”

“But still this does not mean that the campaign is over,” said Prince Andrew.

“Well, I think it is. The bigwigs here think so too, but they daren’t say so. It will be as I said at the beginning of the campaign, it won’t be your skirmishing at Dürrenstein, or gunpowder at all, that will decide the matter, but those who devised it,” said Bilfbin quoting one of his own mots, releasing the wrinkles on his forehead, and pausing. “The only question is what will come of the meeting between the Emperor Alexander and the King of Prussia in Berlin? If Prussia joins the Allies, Austria’s hand will be forced and there will be war. If not it is merely a question of settling where the preliminaries of the new Campo Formio are to be drawn up.”

“What an extraordinary genius!” Prince Andrew suddenly exclaimed, clenching his small hand and striking the table with it, “and what luck the man has!”

“Buonaparte?” said Bilfbin inquiringly, puckering up his forehead to indicate that he was about to say something witty. “Buonaparte?” he repeated, accentuating the u: “I think, however, now that he lays down laws for Austria at Schönbrunn, il faut lui faire grâce de l’u! \* I shall certainly adopt an innovation and call him simply Bonaparte!”

\* “We must let him off the u!”

“But joking apart,” said Prince Andrew, “do you really think the campaign is over?”

“This is what I think. Austria has been made a fool of, and she is not used to it. She will retaliate. And she has been fooled in the first place because her provinces have been pillaged—they say the Holy Russian army loots terribly—her army is destroyed, her capital taken, and all this for the beaux yeux \* of His Sardinian Majesty. And therefore—this is between ourselves—I instinctively feel that we

are being deceived, my instinct tells me of negotiations with France and projects for peace, a secret peace concluded separately.”

\* Fine eyes.

“Impossible!” cried Prince Andrew. “That would be too base.”

“If we live we shall see,” replied Bilbin, his face again becoming smooth as a sign that the conversation was at an end.

When Prince Andrew reached the room prepared for him and lay down in a clean shirt on the feather bed with its warmed and fragrant pillows, he felt that the battle of which he had brought tidings was far, far away from him. The alliance with Prussia, Austria’s treachery, Bonaparte’s new triumph, tomorrow’s levee and parade, and the audience with the Emperor Francis occupied his thoughts.

He closed his eyes, and immediately a sound of cannonading, of musketry and the rattling of carriage wheels seemed to fill his ears, and now again drawn out in a thin line the musketeers were descending the hill, the French were firing, and he felt his heart palpitating as he rode forward beside Schmidt with the bullets merrily whistling all around, and he experienced tenfold the joy of living, as he had not done since childhood.

He woke up...

“Yes, that all happened!” he said, and, smiling happily to himself like a child, he fell into a deep, youthful slumber.