

CHAPTER IV

When Princess Mary came down, Prince Vasíli and his son were already in the drawing room, talking to the little princess and Mademoiselle Bourienne. When she entered with her heavy step, treading on her heels, the gentlemen and Mademoiselle Bourienne rose and the little princess, indicating her to the gentlemen, said: “Voilà Marie!” Princess Mary saw them all and saw them in detail. She saw Prince Vasíli’s face, serious for an instant at the sight of her, but immediately smiling again, and the little princess curiously noting the impression “Marie” produced on the visitors. And she saw Mademoiselle Bourienne, with her ribbon and pretty face, and her unusually animated look which was fixed on him, but him she could not see, she only saw something large, brilliant, and handsome moving toward her as she entered the room. Prince Vasíli approached first, and she kissed the bold forehead that bent over her hand and answered his question by saying that, on the contrary, she remembered him quite well. Then Anatole came up to her. She still could not see him. She only felt a soft hand taking hers firmly, and she touched with her lips a white forehead, over which was beautiful light-brown hair smelling of pomade. When she looked up at him she was struck by his beauty. Anatole stood with his right thumb under a button of his uniform, his chest expanded and his back drawn in, slightly swinging one foot, and, with his head a little bent, looked with beaming face at the princess without speaking and evidently not thinking about her at all. Anatole was not quick-witted, nor ready or eloquent in conversation, but he had the faculty, so invaluable in society, of composure and imperturbable self-possession. If a man lacking in self-confidence remains dumb on a first introduction and betrays a consciousness of the impropriety of such silence and an anxiety to find something to say, the effect is bad. But Anatole was dumb, swung his foot, and smilingly examined the princess’ hair. It was evident that he could be silent in this way for a very long time. “If anyone finds this silence inconvenient, let him talk, but I don’t want to,” he seemed to say. Besides this, in his behavior to women Anatole had a manner which particularly inspires in them curiosity, awe, and even love—a supercilious consciousness of his own superiority. It was as if he said to them: “I know you, I know you, but why should I bother about you? You’d be only too glad, of course.” Perhaps he did not really think this when he met women—even probably he did not, for in general he thought very little—but his looks and manner gave that impression. The princess felt this, and as if wishing to show him that she did not even dare expect to interest him, she turned to his father. The conversation was general and animated, thanks to Princess Lise’s voice and little downy lip that lifted over her white teeth. She met Prince Vasíli with that playful manner often employed by lively chatty people, and consisting in the assumption that between the person they so address and themselves there are some semi-private, long-established jokes and amusing reminiscences, though no such reminiscences really exist—just as none existed in this case. Prince Vasíli readily adopted her tone and the little princess also drew Anatole, whom she hardly knew, into these amusing recollections of things that had never occurred. Mademoiselle Bourienne also shared them and even Princess Mary felt herself pleasantly made to share in these

merry reminiscences.

“Here at least we shall have the benefit of your company all to ourselves, dear prince,” said the little princess (of course, in French) to Prince Vasíli. “It’s not as at Annette’s * receptions where you always ran away; you remember *cette chère Annette!*”

* Anna Pávlovna.

“Ah, but you won’t talk politics to me like Annette!”

“And our little tea table?”

“Oh, yes!”

“Why is it you were never at Annette’s?” the little princess asked Anatole. “Ah, I know, I know,” she said with a sly glance, “your brother Hippolyte told me about your goings on. Oh!” and she shook her finger at him, “I have even heard of your doings in Paris!”

“And didn’t Hippolyte tell you?” asked Prince Vasíli, turning to his son and seizing the little princess’ arm as if she would have run away and he had just managed to catch her, “didn’t he tell you how he himself was pining for the dear princess, and how she showed him the door? Oh, she is a pearl among women, Princess,” he added, turning to Princess Mary.

When Paris was mentioned, Mademoiselle Bourienne for her part seized the opportunity of joining in the general current of recollections.

She took the liberty of inquiring whether it was long since Anatole had left Paris and how he had liked that city. Anatole answered the Frenchwoman very readily and, looking at her with a smile, talked to her about her native land. When he saw the pretty little Bourienne, Anatole came to the conclusion that he would not find Bald Hills dull either. “Not at all bad!” he thought, examining her, “not at all bad, that little companion! I hope she will bring her along with her when we’re married, *la petite est gentille.*” *

* The little one is charming.

The old prince dressed leisurely in his study, frowning and considering what he was to do. The coming of these visitors annoyed him. “What are Prince Vasíli and that son of his to me? Prince Vasíli is a shallow braggart and his son, no doubt, is a fine specimen,” he grumbled to himself. What angered him was that the coming of these visitors revived in his mind an unsettled question he always tried to stifle, one about which he always deceived himself. The question was whether he could ever bring himself to part from his daughter and give her to a husband. The prince never directly asked himself that question, knowing beforehand that he would have to answer it justly, and justice clashed not only with his feelings but with the very possibility of life. Life without Princess Mary, little as he seemed to value her, was unthinkable to him. “And why should she marry?” he thought. “To be unhappy for

certain. There's Lise, married to Andrew—a better husband one would think could hardly be found nowadays—but is she contented with her lot? And who would marry Marie for love? Plain and awkward! They'll take her for her connections and wealth. Are there no women living unmarried, and even the happier for it?" So thought Prince Bolkónski while dressing, and yet the question he was always putting off demanded an immediate answer. Prince Vasíli had brought his son with the evident intention of proposing, and today or tomorrow he would probably ask for an answer. His birth and position in society were not bad. "Well, I've nothing against it," the prince said to himself, "but he must be worthy of her. And that is what we shall see."

"That is what we shall see! That is what we shall see!" he added aloud.

He entered the drawing room with his usual alert step, glancing rapidly round the company. He noticed the change in the little princess' dress, Mademoiselle Bourienne's ribbon, Princess Mary's unbecoming coiffure, Mademoiselle Bourienne's and Anatole's smiles, and the loneliness of his daughter amid the general conversation. "Got herself up like a fool!" he thought, looking irritably at her. "She is shameless, and he ignores her!"

He went straight up to Prince Vasíli.

"Well! How d'ye do? How d'ye do? Glad to see you!"

"Friendship laughs at distance," began Prince Vasíli in his usual rapid, self-confident, familiar tone. "Here is my second son; please love and befriend him."

Prince Bolkónski surveyed Anatole.

"Fine young fellow! Fine young fellow!" he said. "Well, come and kiss me," and he offered his cheek.

Anatole kissed the old man, and looked at him with curiosity and perfect composure, waiting for a display of the eccentricities his father had told him to expect.

Prince Bolkónski sat down in his usual place in the corner of the sofa and, drawing up an armchair for Prince Vasíli, pointed to it and began questioning him about political affairs and news. He seemed to listen attentively to what Prince Vasíli said, but kept glancing at Princess Mary.

"And so they are writing from Potsdam already?" he said, repeating Prince Vasíli's last words. Then rising, he suddenly went up to his daughter.

"Is it for visitors you've got yourself up like that, eh?" said he. "Fine, very fine! You have done up your hair in this new way for the visitors, and before the visitors I tell you that in future you are never to dare to change your way of dress without my consent."

“It was my fault, mon père,” interceded the little princess, with a blush.

“You must do as you please,” said Prince Bolkónski, bowing to his daughter-in-law, “but she need not make a fool of herself, she’s plain enough as it is.”

And he sat down again, paying no more attention to his daughter, who was reduced to tears.

“On the contrary, that coiffure suits the princess very well,” said Prince Vasíli.

“Now you, young prince, what’s your name?” said Prince Bolkónski, turning to Anatole, “come here, let us talk and get acquainted.”

“Now the fun begins,” thought Anatole, sitting down with a smile beside the old prince.

“Well, my dear boy, I hear you’ve been educated abroad, not taught to read and write by the deacon, like your father and me. Now tell me, my dear boy, are you serving in the Horse Guards?” asked the old man, scrutinizing Anatole closely and intently.

“No, I have been transferred to the line,” said Anatole, hardly able to restrain his laughter.

“Ah! That’s a good thing. So, my dear boy, you wish to serve the Tsar and the country? It is wartime. Such a fine fellow must serve. Well, are you off to the front?”

“No, Prince, our regiment has gone to the front, but I am attached... what is it I am attached to, Papa?” said Anatole, turning to his father with a laugh.

“A splendid soldier, splendid! ‘What am I attached to!’ Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Prince Bolkónski, and Anatole laughed still louder. Suddenly Prince Bolkónski frowned.

“You may go,” he said to Anatole.

Anatole returned smiling to the ladies.

“And so you’ve had him educated abroad, Prince Vasíli, haven’t you?” said the old prince to Prince Vasíli.

“I have done my best for him, and I can assure you the education there is much better than ours.”

“Yes, everything is different nowadays, everything is changed. The lad’s a fine fellow, a fine fellow! Well, come with me now.” He took Prince Vasíli’s arm and led him to his study. As soon as they were alone together, Prince Vasíli announced his hopes and wishes to the old

prince.

“Well, do you think I shall prevent her, that I can’t part from her?” said the old prince angrily. “What an idea! I’m ready for it tomorrow! Only let me tell you, I want to know my son-in-law better. You know my principles—everything aboveboard! I will ask her tomorrow in your presence; if she is willing, then he can stay on. He can stay and I’ll see.” The old prince snorted. “Let her marry, it’s all the same to me!” he screamed in the same piercing tone as when parting from his son.

“I will tell you frankly,” said Prince Vasíli in the tone of a crafty man convinced of the futility of being cunning with so keen-sighted a companion. “You know, you see right through people. Anatole is no genius, but he is an honest, goodhearted lad; an excellent son or kinsman.”

“All right, all right, we’ll see!”

As always happens when women lead lonely lives for any length of time without male society, on Anatole’s appearance all the three women of Prince Bolkónski’s household felt that their life had not been real till then. Their powers of reasoning, feeling, and observing immediately increased tenfold, and their life, which seemed to have been passed in darkness, was suddenly lit up by a new brightness, full of significance.

Princess Mary grew quite unconscious of her face and coiffure. The handsome open face of the man who might perhaps be her husband absorbed all her attention. He seemed to her kind, brave, determined, manly, and magnanimous. She felt convinced of that. Thousands of dreams of a future family life continually rose in her imagination. She drove them away and tried to conceal them.

“But am I not too cold with him?” thought the princess. “I try to be reserved because in the depth of my soul I feel too near to him already, but then he cannot know what I think of him and may imagine that I do not like him.”

And Princess Mary tried, but could not manage, to be cordial to her new guest. “Poor girl, she’s devilish ugly!” thought Anatole.

Mademoiselle Bourienne, also roused to great excitement by Anatole’s arrival, thought in another way. Of course, she, a handsome young woman without any definite position, without relations or even a country, did not intend to devote her life to serving Prince Bolkónski, to reading aloud to him and being friends with Princess Mary. Mademoiselle Bourienne had long been waiting for a Russian prince who, able to appreciate at a glance her superiority to the plain, badly dressed, ungainly Russian princesses, would fall in love with her and carry her off; and here at last was a Russian prince. Mademoiselle Bourienne knew a story, heard from her aunt but finished in her own way, which she liked to repeat to herself. It was the story of a girl who had been seduced, and to whom her poor mother (*sa pauvre mère*) appeared, and reproached her for yielding to a man without being married. Mademoiselle

Bourienne was often touched to tears as in imagination she told this story to him, her seducer. And now he, a real Russian prince, had appeared. He would carry her away and then sa pauvre mère would appear and he would marry her. So her future shaped itself in Mademoiselle Bourienne's head at the very time she was talking to Anatole about Paris. It was not calculation that guided her (she did not even for a moment consider what she should do), but all this had long been familiar to her, and now that Anatole had appeared it just grouped itself around him and she wished and tried to please him as much as possible.

The little princess, like an old war horse that hears the trumpet, unconsciously and quite forgetting her condition, prepared for the familiar gallop of coquetry, without any ulterior motive or any struggle, but with naïve and lighthearted gaiety.

Although in female society Anatole usually assumed the role of a man tired of being run after by women, his vanity was flattered by the spectacle of his power over these three women. Besides that, he was beginning to feel for the pretty and provocative Mademoiselle Bourienne that passionate animal feeling which was apt to master him with great suddenness and prompt him to the coarsest and most reckless actions.

After tea, the company went into the sitting room and Princess Mary was asked to play on the clavichord. Anatole, laughing and in high spirits, came and leaned on his elbows, facing her and beside Mademoiselle Bourienne. Princess Mary felt his look with a painfully joyous emotion. Her favorite sonata bore her into a most intimately poetic world and the look she felt upon her made that world still more poetic. But Anatole's expression, though his eyes were fixed on her, referred not to her but to the movements of Mademoiselle Bourienne's little foot, which he was then touching with his own under the clavichord. Mademoiselle Bourienne was also looking at Princess Mary, and in her lovely eyes there was a look of fearful joy and hope that was also new to the princess.

"How she loves me!" thought Princess Mary. "How happy I am now, and how happy I may be with such a friend and such a husband! Husband? Can it be possible?" she thought, not daring to look at his face, but still feeling his eyes gazing at her.

In the evening, after supper, when all were about to retire, Anatole kissed Princess Mary's hand. She did not know how she found the courage, but she looked straight into his handsome face as it came near to her shortsighted eyes. Turning from Princess Mary he went up and kissed Mademoiselle Bourienne's hand. (This was not etiquette, but then he did everything so simply and with such assurance!) Mademoiselle Bourienne flushed, and gave the princess a frightened look.

"What delicacy!" thought the princess. "Is it possible that Amélie" (Mademoiselle Bourienne) "thinks I could be jealous of her, and not value her pure affection and devotion to me?" She went up to her and kissed her warmly. Anatole went up to kiss the little princess' hand.

“No! No! No! When your father writes to tell me that you are behaving well I will give you my hand to kiss. Not till then!” she said. And smilingly raising a finger at him, she left the room.