

CHAPTER V

They all separated, but, except Anatole who fell asleep as soon as he got into bed, all kept awake a long time that night.

“Is he really to be my husband, this stranger who is so kind—yes, kind, that is the chief thing,” thought Princess Mary; and fear, which she had seldom experienced, came upon her. She feared to look round, it seemed to her that someone was there standing behind the screen in the dark corner. And this someone was he—the devil—and he was also this man with the white forehead, black eyebrows, and red lips.

She rang for her maid and asked her to sleep in her room.

Mademoiselle Bourienne walked up and down the conservatory for a long time that evening, vainly expecting someone, now smiling at someone, now working herself up to tears with the imaginary words of her pauvre mère rebuking her for her fall.

The little princess grumbled to her maid that her bed was badly made. She could not lie either on her face or on her side. Every position was awkward and uncomfortable, and her burden oppressed her now more than ever because Anatole’s presence had vividly recalled to her the time when she was not like that and when everything was light and gay. She sat in an armchair in her dressing jacket and nightcap and Katie, sleepy and disheveled, beat and turned the heavy feather bed for the third time, muttering to herself.

“I told you it was all lumps and holes!” the little princess repeated. “I should be glad enough to fall asleep, so it’s not my fault!” and her voice quivered like that of a child about to cry.

The old prince did not sleep either. Tikhon, half asleep, heard him pacing angrily about and snorting. The old prince felt as though he had been insulted through his daughter. The insult was the more pointed because it concerned not himself but another, his daughter, whom he loved more than himself. He kept telling himself that he would consider the whole matter and decide what was right and how he should act, but instead of that he only excited himself more and more.

“The first man that turns up—she forgets her father and everything else, runs upstairs and does up her hair and wags her tail and is unlike herself! Glad to throw her father over! And she knew I should notice it. Fr... fr... fr! And don’t I see that that idiot had eyes only for Bourienne—I shall have to get rid of her. And how is it she has not pride enough to see it? If she has no pride for herself she might at least have some for my sake! She must be shown that the blockhead thinks nothing of her and looks only at Bourienne. No, she has no pride... but I’ll let her see....”

The old prince knew that if he told his daughter she was making a mistake and that Anatole meant to flirt with Mademoiselle Bourienne, Princess Mary’s self-esteem would be wounded and his point (not to

be parted from her) would be gained, so pacifying himself with this thought, he called Tíkhon and began to undress.

“What devil brought them here?” thought he, while Tíkhon was putting the nightshirt over his dried-up old body and gray-haired chest. “I never invited them. They came to disturb my life—and there is not much of it left.”

“Devil take ‘em!” he muttered, while his head was still covered by the shirt.

Tíkhon knew his master’s habit of sometimes thinking aloud, and therefore met with unaltered looks the angrily inquisitive expression of the face that emerged from the shirt.

“Gone to bed?” asked the prince.

Tíkhon, like all good valets, instinctively knew the direction of his master’s thoughts. He guessed that the question referred to Prince Vasíli and his son.

“They have gone to bed and put out their lights, your excellency.”

“No good... no good...” said the prince rapidly, and thrusting his feet into his slippers and his arms into the sleeves of his dressing gown, he went to the couch on which he slept.

Though no words had passed between Anatole and Mademoiselle Bourienne, they quite understood one another as to the first part of their romance, up to the appearance of the pauvre mère; they understood that they had much to say to one another in private and so they had been seeking an opportunity since morning to meet one another alone. When Princess Mary went to her father’s room at the usual hour, Mademoiselle Bourienne and Anatole met in the conservatory.

Princess Mary went to the door of the study with special trepidation. It seemed to her that not only did everybody know that her fate would be decided that day, but that they also knew what she thought about it. She read this in Tíkhon’s face and in that of Prince Vasíli’s valet, who made her a low bow when she met him in the corridor carrying hot water.

The old prince was very affectionate and careful in his treatment of his daughter that morning. Princess Mary well knew this painstaking expression of her father’s. His face wore that expression when his dry hands clenched with vexation at her not understanding a sum in arithmetic, when rising from his chair he would walk away from her, repeating in a low voice the same words several times over.

He came to the point at once, treating her ceremoniously.

“I have had a proposition made me concerning you,” he said with an unnatural smile. “I expect you have guessed that Prince Vasíli has not come and brought his pupil with him” (for some reason Prince

Bolkónski referred to Anatole as a “pupil”) “for the sake of my beautiful eyes. Last night a proposition was made me on your account and, as you know my principles, I refer it to you.”

“How am I to understand you, mon père?” said the princess, growing pale and then blushing.

“How understand me!” cried her father angrily. “Prince Vasíli finds you to his taste as a daughter-in-law and makes a proposal to you on his pupil’s behalf. That’s how it’s to be understood! ‘How understand it’!... And I ask you!”

“I do not know what you think, Father,” whispered the princess.

“I? I? What of me? Leave me out of the question. I’m not going to get married. What about you? That’s what I want to know.”

The princess saw that her father regarded the matter with disapproval, but at that moment the thought occurred to her that her fate would be decided now or never. She lowered her eyes so as not to see the gaze under which she felt that she could not think, but would only be able to submit from habit, and she said: “I wish only to do your will, but if I had to express my own desire...” She had no time to finish. The old prince interrupted her.

“That’s admirable!” he shouted. “He will take you with your dowry and take Mademoiselle Bourienne into the bargain. She’ll be the wife, while you...”

The prince stopped. He saw the effect these words had produced on his daughter. She lowered her head and was ready to burst into tears.

“Now then, now then, I’m only joking!” he said. “Remember this, Princess, I hold to the principle that a maiden has a full right to choose. I give you freedom. Only remember that your life’s happiness depends on your decision. Never mind me!”

“But I do not know, Father!”

“There’s no need to talk! He receives his orders and will marry you or anybody; but you are free to choose.... Go to your room, think it over, and come back in an hour and tell me in his presence: yes or no. I know you will pray over it. Well, pray if you like, but you had better think it over. Go! Yes or no, yes or no, yes or no!” he still shouted when the princess, as if lost in a fog, had already staggered out of the study.

Her fate was decided and happily decided. But what her father had said about Mademoiselle Bourienne was dreadful. It was untrue to be sure, but still it was terrible, and she could not help thinking of it. She was going straight on through the conservatory, neither seeing nor hearing anything, when suddenly the well-known whispering of Mademoiselle Bourienne aroused her. She raised her eyes, and two steps away saw Anatole embracing the Frenchwoman and whispering something to her. With

a horrified expression on his handsome face, Anatole looked at Princess Mary, but did not at once take his arm from the waist of Mademoiselle Bourienne who had not yet seen her.

“Who’s that? Why? Wait a moment!” Anatole’s face seemed to say. Princess Mary looked at them in silence. She could not understand it. At last Mademoiselle Bourienne gave a scream and ran away. Anatole bowed to Princess Mary with a gay smile, as if inviting her to join in a laugh at this strange incident, and then shrugging his shoulders went to the door that led to his own apartments.

An hour later, Tíkhon came to call Princess Mary to the old prince; he added that Prince Vasíli was also there. When Tíkhon came to her Princess Mary was sitting on the sofa in her room, holding the weeping Mademoiselle Bourienne in her arms and gently stroking her hair. The princess’ beautiful eyes with all their former calm radiance were looking with tender affection and pity at Mademoiselle Bourienne’s pretty face.

“No, Princess, I have lost your affection forever!” said Mademoiselle Bourienne.

“Why? I love you more than ever,” said Princess Mary, “and I will try to do all I can for your happiness.”

“But you despise me. You who are so pure can never understand being so carried away by passion. Oh, only my poor mother...”

“I quite understand,” answered Princess Mary, with a sad smile. “Calm yourself, my dear. I will go to my father,” she said, and went out.

Prince Vasíli, with one leg thrown high over the other and a snuffbox in his hand, was sitting there with a smile of deep emotion on his face, as if stirred to his heart’s core and himself regretting and laughing at his own sensibility, when Princess Mary entered. He hurriedly took a pinch of snuff.

“Ah, my dear, my dear!” he began, rising and taking her by both hands. Then, sighing, he added: “My son’s fate is in your hands. Decide, my dear, good, gentle Marie, whom I have always loved as a daughter!”

He drew back and a real tear appeared in his eye.

“Fr... fr...” snorted Prince Bolkónski. “The prince is making a proposition to you in his pupil’s—I mean, his son’s—name. Do you wish or not to be Prince Anatole Kurágin’s wife? Reply: yes or no,” he shouted, “and then I shall reserve the right to state my opinion also. Yes, my opinion, and only my opinion,” added Prince Bolkónski, turning to Prince Vasíli and answering his imploring look. “Yes, or no?”

“My desire is never to leave you, Father, never to separate my

life from yours. I don't wish to marry," she answered positively, glancing at Prince Vasíli and at her father with her beautiful eyes.

"Humbug! Nonsense! Humbug, humbug, humbug!" cried Prince Bolkónski, frowning and taking his daughter's hand; he did not kiss her, but only bending his forehead to hers just touched it, and pressed her hand so that she winced and uttered a cry.

Prince Vasíli rose.

"My dear, I must tell you that this is a moment I shall never, never forget. But, my dear, will you not give us a little hope of touching this heart, so kind and generous? Say 'perhaps'... The future is so long. Say 'perhaps.'"

"Prince, what I have said is all there is in my heart. I thank you for the honor, but I shall never be your son's wife."

"Well, so that's finished, my dear fellow! I am very glad to have seen you. Very glad! Go back to your rooms, Princess. Go!" said the old prince. "Very, very glad to have seen you," repeated he, embracing Prince Vasíli.

"My vocation is a different one," thought Princess Mary. "My vocation is to be happy with another kind of happiness, the happiness of love and self-sacrifice. And cost what it may, I will arrange poor Amélie's happiness, she loves him so passionately, and so passionately repents. I will do all I can to arrange the match between them. If he is not rich I will give her the means; I will ask my father and Andrew. I shall be so happy when she is his wife. She is so unfortunate, a stranger, alone, helpless! And, oh God, how passionately she must love him if she could so far forget herself! Perhaps I might have done the same!..." thought Princess Mary.