

CHAPTER IX

The day after the review, Borís, in his best uniform and with his comrade Berg's best wishes for success, rode to Olmütz to see Bolkónski, wishing to profit by his friendliness and obtain for himself the best post he could—preferably that of adjutant to some important personage, a position in the army which seemed to him most attractive. "It is all very well for Rostóv, whose father sends him ten thousand rubles at a time, to talk about not wishing to cringe to anybody and not be anyone's lackey, but I who have nothing but my brains have to make a career and must not miss opportunities, but must avail myself of them!" he reflected.

He did not find Prince Andrew in Olmütz that day, but the appearance of the town where the headquarters and the diplomatic corps were stationed and the two Emperors were living with their suites, households, and courts only strengthened his desire to belong to that higher world.

He knew no one, and despite his smart Guardsman's uniform, all these exalted personages passing in the streets in their elegant carriages with their plumes, ribbons, and medals, both courtiers and military men, seemed so immeasurably above him, an insignificant officer of the Guards, that they not only did not wish to, but simply could not, be aware of his existence. At the quarters of the commander in chief, Kutúzov, where he inquired for Bolkónski, all the adjutants and even the orderlies looked at him as if they wished to impress on him that a great many officers like him were always coming there and that everybody was heartily sick of them. In spite of this, or rather because of it, next day, November 15, after dinner he again went to Olmütz and, entering the house occupied by Kutúzov, asked for Bolkónski. Prince Andrew was in and Borís was shown into a large hall probably formerly used for dancing, but in which five beds now stood, and furniture of various kinds: a table, chairs, and a clavichord. One adjutant, nearest the door, was sitting at the table in a Persian dressing gown, writing. Another, the red, stout Nesvítski, lay on a bed with his arms under his head, laughing with an officer who had sat down beside him. A third was playing a Viennese waltz on the clavichord, while a fourth, lying on the clavichord, sang the tune. Bolkónski was not there. None of these gentlemen changed his position on seeing Borís. The one who was writing and whom Borís addressed turned round crossly and told him Bolkónski was on duty and that he should go through the door on the left into the reception room if he wished to see him. Borís thanked him and went to the reception room, where he found some ten officers and generals.

When he entered, Prince Andrew, his eyes drooping contemptuously (with that peculiar expression of polite weariness which plainly says, "If it were not my duty I would not talk to you for a moment"), was listening to an old Russian general with decorations, who stood very erect, almost on tiptoe, with a soldier's obsequious expression on his purple face, reporting something.

"Very well, then, be so good as to wait," said Prince Andrew to the general, in Russian, speaking with the French intonation he affected

when he wished to speak contemptuously, and noticing Borís, Prince Andrew, paying no more heed to the general who ran after him imploring him to hear something more, nodded and turned to him with a cheerful smile.

At that moment Borís clearly realized what he had before surmised, that in the army, besides the subordination and discipline prescribed in the military code, which he and the others knew in the regiment, there was another, more important, subordination, which made this tight-laced, purple-faced general wait respectfully while Captain Prince Andrew, for his own pleasure, chose to chat with Lieutenant Drubetskóy. More than ever was Borís resolved to serve in future not according to the written code, but under this unwritten law. He felt now that merely by having been recommended to Prince Andrew he had already risen above the general who at the front had the power to annihilate him, a lieutenant of the Guards. Prince Andrew came up to him and took his hand.

“I am very sorry you did not find me in yesterday. I was fussing about with Germans all day. We went with Weyrother to survey the dispositions. When Germans start being accurate, there’s no end to it!”

Borís smiled, as if he understood what Prince Andrew was alluding to as something generally known. But it was the first time he had heard Weyrother’s name, or even the term “dispositions.”

“Well, my dear fellow, so you still want to be an adjutant? I have been thinking about you.”

“Yes, I was thinking”—for some reason Borís could not help blushing—“of asking the commander in chief. He has had a letter from Prince Kurágin about me. I only wanted to ask because I fear the Guards won’t be in action,” he added as if in apology.

“All right, all right. We’ll talk it over,” replied Prince Andrew. “Only let me report this gentleman’s business, and I shall be at your disposal.”

While Prince Andrew went to report about the purple-faced general, that gentleman—evidently not sharing Borís’ conception of the advantages of the unwritten code of subordination—looked so fixedly at the presumptuous lieutenant who had prevented his finishing what he had to say to the adjutant that Borís felt uncomfortable. He turned away and waited impatiently for Prince Andrew’s return from the commander in chief’s room.

“You see, my dear fellow, I have been thinking about you,” said Prince Andrew when they had gone into the large room where the clavichord was. “It’s no use your going to the commander in chief. He would say a lot of pleasant things, ask you to dinner” (“That would not be bad as regards the unwritten code,” thought Borís), “but nothing more would come of it. There will soon be a battalion of us aides-de-camp and adjutants! But this is what we’ll do: I have a good friend, an adjutant general and an excellent fellow, Prince Dolgorúkov; and though you may not know it, the fact is that now

Kutúzov with his staff and all of us count for nothing. Everything is now centered round the Emperor. So we will go to Dolgorúkov; I have to go there anyhow and I have already spoken to him about you. We shall see whether he cannot attach you to himself or find a place for you somewhere nearer the sun.”

Prince Andrew always became specially keen when he had to guide a young man and help him to worldly success. Under cover of obtaining help of this kind for another, which from pride he would never accept for himself, he kept in touch with the circle which confers success and which attracted him. He very readily took up Borís’ cause and went with him to Dolgorúkov.

It was late in the evening when they entered the palace at Olmütz occupied by the Emperors and their retinues.

That same day a council of war had been held in which all the members of the Hofkriegsrath and both Emperors took part. At that council, contrary to the views of the old generals Kutúzov and Prince Schwartzenberg, it had been decided to advance immediately and give battle to Bonaparte. The council of war was just over when Prince Andrew accompanied by Borís arrived at the palace to find Dolgorúkov. Everyone at headquarters was still under the spell of the day’s council, at which the party of the young had triumphed. The voices of those who counseled delay and advised waiting for something else before advancing had been so completely silenced and their arguments confuted by such conclusive evidence of the advantages of attacking that what had been discussed at the council—the coming battle and the victory that would certainly result from it—no longer seemed to be in the future but in the past. All the advantages were on our side. Our enormous forces, undoubtedly superior to Napoleon’s, were concentrated in one place, the troops inspired by the Emperors’ presence were eager for action. The strategic position where the operations would take place was familiar in all its details to the Austrian General Weyrother: a lucky accident had ordained that the Austrian army should maneuver the previous year on the very fields where the French had now to be fought; the adjacent locality was known and shown in every detail on the maps, and Bonaparte, evidently weakened, was undertaking nothing.

Dolgorúkov, one of the warmest advocates of an attack, had just returned from the council, tired and exhausted but eager and proud of the victory that had been gained. Prince Andrew introduced his protégé, but Prince Dolgorúkov politely and firmly pressing his hand said nothing to Borís and, evidently unable to suppress the thoughts which were uppermost in his mind at that moment, addressed Prince Andrew in French.

“Ah, my dear fellow, what a battle we have gained! God grant that the one that will result from it will be as victorious! However, dear fellow,” he said abruptly and eagerly, “I must confess to having been unjust to the Austrians and especially to Weyrother. What exactitude, what minuteness, what knowledge of the locality, what foresight for every eventuality, every possibility even to the smallest detail! No, my dear fellow, no conditions better than our present ones

could have been devised. This combination of Austrian precision with Russian valor—what more could be wished for?”

“So the attack is definitely resolved on?” asked Bolkónski.

“And do you know, my dear fellow, it seems to me that Bonaparte has decidedly lost bearings, you know that a letter was received from him today for the Emperor.” Dolgorúkov smiled significantly.

“Is that so? And what did he say?” inquired Bolkónski.

“What can he say? Tra-di-ri-di-ra and so on... merely to gain time. I tell you he is in our hands, that’s certain! But what was most amusing,” he continued, with a sudden, good-natured laugh, “was that we could not think how to address the reply! If not as ‘Consul’ and of course not as ‘Emperor,’ it seemed to me it should be to ‘General Bonaparte.’”

“But between not recognizing him as Emperor and calling him General Bonaparte, there is a difference,” remarked Bolkónski.

“That’s just it,” interrupted Dolgorúkov quickly, laughing. “You know Bilíbin—he’s a very clever fellow. He suggested addressing him as ‘Usurper and Enemy of Mankind.’”

Dolgorúkov laughed merrily.

“Only that?” said Bolkónski.

“All the same, it was Bilíbin who found a suitable form for the address. He is a wise and clever fellow.”

“What was it?”

“To the Head of the French Government... Au chef du gouvernement français,” said Dolgorúkov, with grave satisfaction. “Good, wasn’t it?”

“Yes, but he will dislike it extremely,” said Bolkónski.

“Oh yes, very much! My brother knows him, he’s dined with him—the present Emperor—more than once in Paris, and tells me he never met a more cunning or subtle diplomatist—you know, a combination of French adroitness and Italian play-acting! Do you know the tale about him and Count Marków? Count Marków was the only man who knew how to handle him. You know the story of the handkerchief? It is delightful!”

And the talkative Dolgorúkov, turning now to Borís, now to Prince Andrew, told how Bonaparte wishing to test Marków, our ambassador, purposely dropped a handkerchief in front of him and stood looking at Marków, probably expecting Marków to pick it up for him, and how Marków immediately dropped his own beside it and picked it up without touching Bonaparte’s.

“Delightful!” said Bolkónski. “But I have come to you, Prince, as a petitioner on behalf of this young man. You see...” but before Prince Andrew could finish, an aide-de-camp came in to summon Dolgorúkov to the Emperor.

“Oh, what a nuisance,” said Dolgorúkov, getting up hurriedly and pressing the hands of Prince Andrew and Borís. “You know I should be very glad to do all in my power both for you and for this dear young man.” Again he pressed the hand of the latter with an expression of good-natured, sincere, and animated levity. “But you see... another time!”

Borís was excited by the thought of being so close to the higher powers as he felt himself to be at that moment. He was conscious that here he was in contact with the springs that set in motion the enormous movements of the mass of which in his regiment he felt himself a tiny, obedient, and insignificant atom. They followed Prince Dolgorúkov out into the corridor and met—coming out of the door of the Emperor’s room by which Dolgorúkov had entered—a short man in civilian clothes with a clever face and sharply projecting jaw which, without spoiling his face, gave him a peculiar vivacity and shiftiness of expression. This short man nodded to Dolgorúkov as to an intimate friend and stared at Prince Andrew with cool intensity, walking straight toward him and evidently expecting him to bow or to step out of his way. Prince Andrew did neither: a look of animosity appeared on his face and the other turned away and went down the side of the corridor.

“Who was that?” asked Borís.

“He is one of the most remarkable, but to me most unpleasant of men—the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prince Adam Czartorýski.... It is such men as he who decide the fate of nations,” added Bolkónski with a sigh he could not suppress, as they passed out of the palace.

Next day, the army began its campaign, and up to the very battle of Austerlitz, Borís was unable to see either Prince Andrew or Dolgorúkov again and remained for a while with the Ismáýlov regiment.