

## CHAPTER VII

Two months had elapsed since the news of the battle of Austerlitz and the loss of Prince Andrew had reached Bald Hills, and in spite of the letters sent through the embassy and all the searches made, his body had not been found nor was he on the list of prisoners. What was worst of all for his relations was the fact that there was still a possibility of his having been picked up on the battlefield by the people of the place and that he might now be lying, recovering or dying, alone among strangers and unable to send news of himself. The gazettes from which the old prince first heard of the defeat at Austerlitz stated, as usual very briefly and vaguely, that after brilliant engagements the Russians had had to retreat and had made their withdrawal in perfect order. The old prince understood from this official report that our army had been defeated. A week after the gazette report of the battle of Austerlitz came a letter from Kutúzov informing the prince of the fate that had befallen his son.

“Your son,” wrote Kutúzov, “fell before my eyes, a standard in his hand and at the head of a regiment—he fell as a hero, worthy of his father and his fatherland. To the great regret of myself and of the whole army it is still uncertain whether he is alive or not. I comfort myself and you with the hope that your son is alive, for otherwise he would have been mentioned among the officers found on the field of battle, a list of whom has been sent me under flag of truce.”

After receiving this news late in the evening, when he was alone in his study, the old prince went for his walk as usual next morning, but he was silent with his steward, the gardener, and the architect, and though he looked very grim he said nothing to anyone.

When Princess Mary went to him at the usual hour he was working at his lathe and, as usual, did not look round at her.

“Ah, Princess Mary!” he said suddenly in an unnatural voice, throwing down his chisel. (The wheel continued to revolve by its own impetus, and Princess Mary long remembered the dying creak of that wheel, which merged in her memory with what followed.)

She approached him, saw his face, and something gave way within her. Her eyes grew dim. By the expression of her father’s face, not sad, not crushed, but angry and working unnaturally, she saw that hanging over her and about to crush her was some terrible misfortune, the worst in life, one she had not yet experienced, irreparable and incomprehensible—the death of one she loved.

“Father! Andrew!”—said the ungraceful, awkward princess with such an indescribable charm of sorrow and self-forgetfulness that her father could not bear her look but turned away with a sob.

“Bad news! He’s not among the prisoners nor among the killed! Kutúzov writes...” and he screamed as piercingly as if he wished to drive the princess away by that scream... “Killed!”

The princess did not fall down or faint. She was already pale, but on hearing these words her face changed and something brightened in her beautiful, radiant eyes. It was as if joy—a supreme joy apart from the joys and sorrows of this world—overflowed the great grief within her. She forgot all fear of her father, went up to him, took his hand, and drawing him down put her arm round his thin, scraggy neck.

“Father,” she said, “do not turn away from me, let us weep together.”

“Scoundrels! Blackguards!” shrieked the old man, turning his face away from her. “Destroying the army, destroying the men! And why? Go, go and tell Lise.”

The princess sank helplessly into an armchair beside her father and wept. She saw her brother now as he had been at the moment when he took leave of her and of Lise, his look tender yet proud. She saw him tender and amused as he was when he put on the little icon. “Did he believe? Had he repented of his unbelief? Was he now there? There in the realms of eternal peace and blessedness?” she thought.

“Father, tell me how it happened,” she asked through her tears.

“Go! Go! Killed in battle, where the best of Russian men and Russia’s glory were led to destruction. Go, Princess Mary. Go and tell Lise. I will follow.”

When Princess Mary returned from her father, the little princess sat working and looked up with that curious expression of inner, happy calm peculiar to pregnant women. It was evident that her eyes did not see Princess Mary but were looking within... into herself... at something joyful and mysterious taking place within her.

“Mary,” she said, moving away from the embroidery frame and lying back, “give me your hand.” She took her sister-in-law’s hand and held it below her waist.

Her eyes were smiling expectantly, her downy lip rose and remained lifted in childlike happiness.

Princess Mary knelt down before her and hid her face in the folds of her sister-in-law’s dress.

“There, there! Do you feel it? I feel so strange. And do you know, Mary, I am going to love him very much,” said Lise, looking with bright and happy eyes at her sister-in-law.

Princess Mary could not lift her head, she was weeping.

“What is the matter, Mary?”

“Nothing... only I feel sad... sad about Andrew,” she said, wiping away her tears on her sister-in-law’s knee.

Several times in the course of the morning Princess Mary began trying to prepare her sister-in-law, and every time began to cry. Unobservant as was the little princess, these tears, the cause of which she did not understand, agitated her. She said nothing but looked about uneasily as if in search of something. Before dinner the old prince, of whom she was always afraid, came into her room with a peculiarly restless and malign expression and went out again without saying a word. She looked at Princess Mary, then sat thinking for a while with that expression of attention to something within her that is only seen in pregnant women, and suddenly began to cry.

“Has anything come from Andrew?” she asked.

“No, you know it’s too soon for news. But my father is anxious and I feel afraid.”

“So there’s nothing?”

“Nothing,” answered Princess Mary, looking firmly with her radiant eyes at her sister-in-law.

She had determined not to tell her and persuaded her father to hide the terrible news from her till after her confinement, which was expected within a few days. Princess Mary and the old prince each bore and hid their grief in their own way. The old prince would not cherish any hope: he made up his mind that Prince Andrew had been killed, and though he sent an official to Austria to seek for traces of his son, he ordered a monument from Moscow which he intended to erect in his own garden to his memory, and he told everybody that his son had been killed. He tried not to change his former way of life, but his strength failed him. He walked less, ate less, slept less, and became weaker every day. Princess Mary hoped. She prayed for her brother as living and was always awaiting news of his return.