

CHAPTER VI

The duel between Pierre and Dólokhov was hushed up and, in spite of the Emperor's severity regarding duels at that time, neither the principals nor their seconds suffered for it. But the story of the duel, confirmed by Pierre's rupture with his wife, was the talk of society. Pierre who had been regarded with patronizing condescension when he was an illegitimate son, and petted and extolled when he was the best match in Russia, had sunk greatly in the esteem of society after his marriage—when the marriageable daughters and their mothers had nothing to hope from him—especially as he did not know how, and did not wish, to court society's favor. Now he alone was blamed for what had happened, he was said to be insanely jealous and subject like his father to fits of bloodthirsty rage. And when after Pierre's departure Héléne returned to Petersburg, she was received by all her acquaintances not only cordially, but even with a shade of deference due to her misfortune. When conversation turned on her husband Héléne assumed a dignified expression, which with characteristic tact she had acquired though she did not understand its significance. This expression suggested that she had resolved to endure her troubles uncomplainingly and that her husband was a cross laid upon her by God. Prince Vasíli expressed his opinion more openly. He shrugged his shoulders when Pierre was mentioned and, pointing to his forehead, remarked:

“A bit touched—I always said so.”

“I said from the first,” declared Anna Pávlovna referring to Pierre, “I said at the time and before anyone else” (she insisted on her priority) “that that senseless young man was spoiled by the depraved ideas of these days. I said so even at the time when everybody was in raptures about him, when he had just returned from abroad, and when, if you remember, he posed as a sort of Marat at one of my soirees. And how has it ended? I was against this marriage even then and foretold all that has happened.”

Anna Pávlovna continued to give on free evenings the same kind of soirees as before—such as she alone had the gift of arranging—at which was to be found “the cream of really good society, the bloom of the intellectual essence of Petersburg,” as she herself put it. Besides this refined selection of society Anna Pávlovna's receptions were also distinguished by the fact that she always presented some new and interesting person to the visitors and that nowhere else was the state of the political thermometer of legitimate Petersburg court society so dearly and distinctly indicated.

Toward the end of 1806, when all the sad details of Napoleon's destruction of the Prussian army at Jena and Auerstädt and the surrender of most of the Prussian fortresses had been received, when our troops had already entered Prussia and our second war with Napoleon was beginning, Anna Pávlovna gave one of her soirees. The “cream of really good society” consisted of the fascinating Héléne, forsaken by her husband, Mortemart, the delightful Prince Hippolyte who had just returned from Vienna, two diplomatists, the old aunt, a young man

referred to in that drawing room as “a man of great merit” (un homme de beaucoup de mérite), a newly appointed maid of honor and her mother, and several other less noteworthy persons.

The novelty Anna Pávlovna was setting before her guests that evening was Borís Drubetskóy, who had just arrived as a special messenger from the Prussian army and was aide-de-camp to a very important personage.

The temperature shown by the political thermometer to the company that evening was this:

“Whatever the European sovereigns and commanders may do to countenance Bonaparte, and to cause me, and us in general, annoyance and mortification, our opinion of Bonaparte cannot alter. We shall not cease to express our sincere views on that subject, and can only say to the King of Prussia and others: ‘So much the worse for you. Tu l’as voulu, George Dandin,’ that’s all we have to say about it!”

When Borís, who was to be served up to the guests, entered the drawing room, almost all the company had assembled, and the conversation, guided by Anna Pávlovna, was about our diplomatic relations with Austria and the hope of an alliance with her.

Borís, grown more manly and looking fresh, rosy and self-possessed, entered the drawing room elegantly dressed in the uniform of an aide-de-camp and was duly conducted to pay his respects to the aunt and then brought back to the general circle.

Anna Pávlovna gave him her shriveled hand to kiss and introduced him to several persons whom he did not know, giving him a whispered description of each.

“Prince Hippolyte Kurágin—charming young fellow; M. Kronq,—chargé d’affaires from Copenhagen—a profound intellect,” and simply, “Mr. Shítov—a man of great merit”—this of the man usually so described.

Thanks to Anna Mikháylovna’s efforts, his own tastes, and the peculiarities of his reserved nature, Borís had managed during his service to place himself very advantageously. He was aide-de-camp to a very important personage, had been sent on a very important mission to Prussia, and had just returned from there as a special messenger. He had become thoroughly conversant with that unwritten code with which he had been so pleased at Olmütz and according to which an ensign might rank incomparably higher than a general, and according to which what was needed for success in the service was not effort or work, or courage, or perseverance, but only the knowledge of how to get on with those who can grant rewards, and he was himself often surprised at the rapidity of his success and at the inability of others to understand these things.

In consequence of this discovery his whole manner of life, all his relations with old friends, all his plans for his future, were completely altered. He was not rich, but would spend his last groat to be better dressed than others, and would rather deprive himself of many pleasures than allow himself to be seen in a shabby equipage or appear

in the streets of Petersburg in an old uniform. He made friends with and sought the acquaintance of only those above him in position and who could therefore be of use to him. He liked Petersburg and despised Moscow. The remembrance of the Rostóvs' house and of his childish love for Natásha was unpleasant to him and he had not once been to see the Rostóvs since the day of his departure for the army. To be in Anna Pávlovna's drawing room he considered an important step up in the service, and he at once understood his role, letting his hostess make use of whatever interest he had to offer. He himself carefully scanned each face, appraising the possibilities of establishing intimacy with each of those present, and the advantages that might accrue. He took the seat indicated to him beside the fair Héléne and listened to the general conversation.

“Vienna considers the bases of the proposed treaty so unattainable that not even a continuity of most brilliant successes would secure them, and she doubts the means we have of gaining them. That is the actual phrase used by the Vienna cabinet,” said the Danish chargé d'affaires.

“The doubt is flattering,” said “the man of profound intellect,” with a subtle smile.

“We must distinguish between the Vienna cabinet and the Emperor of Austria,” said Mortemart. “The Emperor of Austria can never have thought of such a thing, it is only the cabinet that says it.”

“Ah, my dear vicomte,” put in Anna Pávlovna, “L'Urope” (for some reason she called it Urope as if that were a specially refined French pronunciation which she could allow herself when conversing with a Frenchman), “L'Urope ne sera jamais notre alliée sincère.” *

* “Europe will never be our sincere ally.”

After that Anna Pávlovna led up to the courage and firmness of the King of Prussia, in order to draw Borís into the conversation.

Borís listened attentively to each of the speakers, awaiting his turn, but managed meanwhile to look round repeatedly at his neighbor, the beautiful Héléne, whose eyes several times met those of the handsome young aide-de-camp with a smile.

Speaking of the position of Prussia, Anna Pávlovna very naturally asked Borís to tell them about his journey to Glogau and in what state he found the Prussian army. Borís, speaking with deliberation, told them in pure, correct French many interesting details about the armies and the court, carefully abstaining from expressing an opinion of his own about the facts he was recounting. For some time he engrossed the general attention, and Anna Pávlovna felt that the novelty she had served up was received with pleasure by all her visitors. The greatest attention of all to Borís' narrative was shown by Héléne. She asked him several questions about his journey and seemed greatly interested in the state of the Prussian army. As soon as he had finished she turned to

him with her usual smile.

“You absolutely must come and see me,” she said in a tone that implied that, for certain considerations he could not know of, this was absolutely necessary.

“On Tuesday between eight and nine. It will give me great pleasure.”

Borís promised to fulfill her wish and was about to begin a conversation with her, when Anna Pávlovna called him away on the pretext that her aunt wished to hear him.

“You know her husband, of course?” said Anna Pávlovna, closing her eyes and indicating Héléne with a sorrowful gesture. “Ah, she is such an unfortunate and charming woman! Don’t mention him before her—please don’t! It is too painful for her!”