

CHAPTER IV

Princess Mary as she sat listening to the old men's talk and faultfinding, understood nothing of what she heard; she only wondered whether the guests had all observed her father's hostile attitude toward her. She did not even notice the special attentions and amiabilities shown her during dinner by Borís Drubetskóy, who was visiting them for the third time already.

Princess Mary turned with absent-minded questioning look to Pierre, who hat in hand and with a smile on his face was the last of the guests to approach her after the old prince had gone out and they were left alone in the drawing room.

"May I stay a little longer?" he said, letting his stout body sink into an armchair beside her.

"Oh yes," she answered. "You noticed nothing?" her look asked.

Pierre was in an agreeable after-dinner mood. He looked straight before him and smiled quietly.

"Have you known that young man long, Princess?" he asked.

"Who?"

"Drubetskóy."

"No, not long...."

"Do you like him?"

"Yes, he is an agreeable young man.... Why do you ask me that?" said Princess Mary, still thinking of that morning's conversation with her father.

"Because I have noticed that when a young man comes on leave from Petersburg to Moscow it is usually with the object of marrying an heiress."

"You have observed that?" said Princess Mary.

"Yes," returned Pierre with a smile, "and this young man now manages matters so that where there is a wealthy heiress there he is too. I can read him like a book. At present he is hesitating whom to lay siege to—you or Mademoiselle Julie Karágina. He is very attentive to her."

"He visits them?"

"Yes, very often. And do you know the new way of courting?" said Pierre with an amused smile, evidently in that cheerful mood of good humored raillery for which he so often reproached himself in his diary.

“No,” replied Princess Mary.

“To please Moscow girls nowadays one has to be melancholy. He is very melancholy with Mademoiselle Karágina,” said Pierre.

“Really?” asked Princess Mary, looking into Pierre’s kindly face and still thinking of her own sorrow. “It would be a relief,” thought she, “if I ventured to confide what I am feeling to someone. I should like to tell everything to Pierre. He is kind and generous. It would be a relief. He would give me advice.”

“Would you marry him?”

“Oh, my God, Count, there are moments when I would marry anybody!” she cried suddenly to her own surprise and with tears in her voice.

“Ah, how bitter it is to love someone near to you and to feel that...” she went on in a trembling voice, “that you can do nothing for him but grieve him, and to know that you cannot alter this. Then there is only one thing left—to go away, but where could I go?”

“What is wrong? What is it, Princess?”

But without finishing what she was saying, Princess Mary burst into tears.

“I don’t know what is the matter with me today. Don’t take any notice—forget what I have said!”

Pierre’s gaiety vanished completely. He anxiously questioned the princess, asked her to speak out fully and confide her grief to him; but she only repeated that she begged him to forget what she had said, that she did not remember what she had said, and that she had no trouble except the one he knew of—that Prince Andrew’s marriage threatened to cause a rupture between father and son.

“Have you any news of the Rostóvs?” she asked, to change the subject. “I was told they are coming soon. I am also expecting Andrew any day. I should like them to meet here.”

“And how does he now regard the matter?” asked Pierre, referring to the old prince.

Princess Mary shook her head.

“What is to be done? In a few months the year will be up. The thing is impossible. I only wish I could spare my brother the first moments. I wish they would come sooner. I hope to be friends with her. You have known them a long time,” said Princess Mary. “Tell me honestly the whole truth: what sort of girl is she, and what do you think of her?—The real truth, because you know Andrew is risking so much doing this against his father’s will that I should like to know....”

An undefined instinct told Pierre that these explanations, and

repeated requests to be told the whole truth, expressed ill-will on the princess' part toward her future sister-in-law and a wish that he should disapprove of Andrew's choice; but in reply he said what he felt rather than what he thought.

"I don't know how to answer your question," he said, blushing without knowing why. "I really don't know what sort of girl she is; I can't analyze her at all. She is enchanting, but what makes her so I don't know. That is all one can say about her."

Princess Mary sighed, and the expression on her face said: "Yes, that's what I expected and feared."

"Is she clever?" she asked.

Pierre considered.

"I think not," he said, "and yet—yes. She does not deign to be clever.... Oh no, she is simply enchanting, and that is all."

Princess Mary again shook her head disapprovingly.

"Ah, I so long to like her! Tell her so if you see her before I do."

"I hear they are expected very soon," said Pierre.

Princess Mary told Pierre of her plan to become intimate with her future sister-in-law as soon as the Rostóvs arrived and to try to accustom the old prince to her.