

CHAPTER V

Borís had not succeeded in making a wealthy match in Petersburg, so with the same object in view he came to Moscow. There he wavered between the two richest heiresses, Julie and Princess Mary. Though Princess Mary despite her plainness seemed to him more attractive than Julie, he, without knowing why, felt awkward about paying court to her. When they had last met on the old prince's name day, she had answered at random all his attempts to talk sentimentally, evidently not listening to what he was saying.

Julie on the contrary accepted his attentions readily, though in a manner peculiar to herself.

She was twenty-seven. After the death of her brothers she had become very wealthy. She was by now decidedly plain, but thought herself not merely as good-looking as before but even far more attractive. She was confirmed in this delusion by the fact that she had become a very wealthy heiress and also by the fact that the older she grew the less dangerous she became to men, and the more freely they could associate with her and avail themselves of her suppers, soirees, and the animated company that assembled at her house, without incurring any obligation. A man who would have been afraid ten years before of going every day to the house when there was a girl of seventeen there, for fear of compromising her and committing himself, would now go boldly every day and treat her not as a marriageable girl but as a sexless acquaintance.

That winter the Karágins' house was the most agreeable and hospitable in Moscow. In addition to the formal evening and dinner parties, a large company, chiefly of men, gathered there every day, supping at midnight and staying till three in the morning. Julie never missed a ball, a promenade, or a play. Her dresses were always of the latest fashion. But in spite of that she seemed to be disillusioned about everything and told everyone that she did not believe either in friendship or in love, or any of the joys of life, and expected peace only "yonder." She adopted the tone of one who has suffered a great disappointment, like a girl who has either lost the man she loved or been cruelly deceived by him. Though nothing of the kind had happened to her she was regarded in that light, and had even herself come to believe that she had suffered much in life. This melancholy, which did not prevent her amusing herself, did not hinder the young people who came to her house from passing the time pleasantly. Every visitor who came to the house paid his tribute to the melancholy mood of the hostess, and then amused himself with society gossip, dancing, intellectual games, and bouts rimés, which were in vogue at the Karágins'. Only a few of these young men, among them Borís, entered more deeply into Julie's melancholy, and with these she had prolonged conversations in private on the vanity of all worldly things, and to them she showed her albums filled with mournful sketches, maxims, and verses.

To Borís, Julie was particularly gracious: she regretted his early disillusionment with life, offered him such consolation of friendship as she who had herself suffered so much could render, and showed him

her album. Borís sketched two trees in the album and wrote: “Rustic trees, your dark branches shed gloom and melancholy upon me.”

On another page he drew a tomb, and wrote:

La mort est secourable et la mort est tranquille.
Ah! contre les douleurs il n’y a pas d’autre asile. *

* Death gives relief and death is peaceful.
Ah! from suffering there is no other refuge.

Julie said this was charming

“There is something so enchanting in the smile of melancholy,” she said to Borís, repeating word for word a passage she had copied from a book. “It is a ray of light in the darkness, a shade between sadness and despair, showing the possibility of consolation.”

In reply Borís wrote these lines:

Aliment de poison d’une âme trop sensible,
Toi, sans qui le bonheur me serait impossible,
Tendre mélancholie, ah, viens me consoler,
Viens calmer les tourments de ma sombre retraite,
Et mêle une douceur secrète
A ces pleurs que je sens couler. *

*Poisonous nourishment of a too sensitive soul,
Thou, without whom happiness would for me be impossible,
Tender melancholy, ah, come to console me,
Come to calm the torments of my gloomy retreat,
And mingle a secret sweetness
With these tears that I feel to be flowing.

For Borís, Julie played most doleful nocturnes on her harp. Borís read Poor Liza aloud to her, and more than once interrupted the reading because of the emotions that choked him. Meeting at large gatherings Julie and Borís looked on one another as the only souls who understood one another in a world of indifferent people.

Anna Mikháylovna, who often visited the Karágins, while playing cards with the mother made careful inquiries as to Julie’s dowry (she was to have two estates in Pénza and the Nizhegórod forests). Anna Mikháylovna regarded the refined sadness that united her son to the wealthy Julie with emotion, and resignation to the Divine will.

“You are always charming and melancholy, my dear Julie,” she said to the daughter. “Borís says his soul finds repose at your house. He has suffered so many disappointments and is so sensitive,” said she to the mother. “Ah, my dear, I can’t tell you how fond I have grown of Julie latterly,” she said to her son. “But who could help loving her? She is an angelic being! Ah, Borís, Borís!”—she paused. “And how I pity her mother,” she went on; “today she showed me her accounts and letters from Pénza (they have enormous estates there), and

she, poor thing, has no one to help her, and they do cheat her so!”

Borís smiled almost imperceptibly while listening to his mother. He laughed blandly at her naïve diplomacy but listened to what she had to say, and sometimes questioned her carefully about the Pénza and Nizhegórod estates.

Julie had long been expecting a proposal from her melancholy adorer and was ready to accept it; but some secret feeling of repulsion for her, for her passionate desire to get married, for her artificiality, and a feeling of horror at renouncing the possibility of real love still restrained Borís. His leave was expiring. He spent every day and whole days at the Karágins’, and every day on thinking the matter over told himself that he would propose tomorrow. But in Julie’s presence, looking at her red face and chin (nearly always powdered), her moist eyes, and her expression of continual readiness to pass at once from melancholy to an unnatural rapture of married bliss, Borís could not utter the decisive words, though in imagination he had long regarded himself as the possessor of those Pénza and Nizhegórod estates and had apportioned the use of the income from them. Julie saw Borís’ indecision, and sometimes the thought occurred to her that she was repulsive to him, but her feminine self-deception immediately supplied her with consolation, and she told herself that he was only shy from love. Her melancholy, however, began to turn to irritability, and not long before Borís’ departure she formed a definite plan of action. Just as Borís’ leave of absence was expiring, Anatole Kurágin made his appearance in Moscow, and of course in the Karágins’ drawing room, and Julie, suddenly abandoning her melancholy, became cheerful and very attentive to Kurágin.

“My dear,” said Anna Mikháylovna to her son, “I know from a reliable source that Prince Vasíli has sent his son to Moscow to get him married to Julie. I am so fond of Julie that I should be sorry for her. What do you think of it, my dear?”

The idea of being made a fool of and of having thrown away that whole month of arduous melancholy service to Julie, and of seeing all the revenue from the Pénza estates which he had already mentally apportioned and put to proper use fall into the hands of another, and especially into the hands of that idiot Anatole, pained Borís. He drove to the Karágins’ with the firm intention of proposing. Julie met him in a gay, careless manner, spoke casually of how she had enjoyed yesterday’s ball, and asked when he was leaving. Though Borís had come intentionally to speak of his love and therefore meant to be tender, he began speaking irritably of feminine inconstancy, of how easily women can turn from sadness to joy, and how their moods depend solely on who happens to be paying court to them. Julie was offended and replied that it was true that a woman needs variety, and the same thing over and over again would weary anyone.

“Then I should advise you...” Borís began, wishing to sting her; but at that instant the galling thought occurred to him that he might have to leave Moscow without having accomplished his aim, and have vainly wasted his efforts—which was a thing he never allowed to

happen.

He checked himself in the middle of the sentence, lowered his eyes to avoid seeing her unpleasantly irritated and irresolute face, and said:

“I did not come here at all to quarrel with you. On the contrary...”

He glanced at her to make sure that he might go on. Her irritability had suddenly quite vanished, and her anxious, imploring eyes were fixed on him with greedy expectation. “I can always arrange so as not to see her often,” thought Borís. “The affair has been begun and must be finished!” He blushed hotly, raised his eyes to hers, and said:

“You know my feelings for you!”

There was no need to say more: Julie’s face shone with triumph and self-satisfaction; but she forced Borís to say all that is said on such occasions—that he loved her and had never loved any other woman more than her. She knew that for the Pénza estates and Nizhegórod forests she could demand this, and she received what she demanded.

The affianced couple, no longer alluding to trees that shed gloom and melancholy upon them, planned the arrangements of a splendid house in Petersburg, paid calls, and prepared everything for a brilliant wedding.