

## CHAPTER II

The day after his son had left, Prince Nicholas sent for Princess Mary to come to his study.

“Well? Are you satisfied now?” said he. “You’ve made me quarrel with my son! Satisfied, are you? That’s all you wanted! Satisfied?... It hurts me, it hurts. I’m old and weak and this is what you wanted. Well then, gloat over it! Gloat over it!”

After that Princess Mary did not see her father for a whole week. He was ill and did not leave his study.

Princess Mary noticed to her surprise that during this illness the old prince not only excluded her from his room, but did not admit Mademoiselle Bourienne either. Tikhon alone attended him.

At the end of the week the prince reappeared and resumed his former way of life, devoting himself with special activity to building operations and the arrangement of the gardens and completely breaking off his relations with Mademoiselle Bourienne. His looks and cold tone to his daughter seemed to say: “There, you see? You plotted against me, you lied to Prince Andrew about my relations with that Frenchwoman and made me quarrel with him, but you see I need neither her nor you!”

Princess Mary spent half of every day with little Nicholas, watching his lessons, teaching him Russian and music herself, and talking to Dessalles; the rest of the day she spent over her books, with her old nurse, or with “God’s folk” who sometimes came by the back door to see her.

Of the war Princess Mary thought as women do think about wars. She feared for her brother who was in it, was horrified by and amazed at the strange cruelty that impels men to kill one another, but she did not understand the significance of this war, which seemed to her like all previous wars. She did not realize the significance of this war, though Dessalles with whom she constantly conversed was passionately interested in its progress and tried to explain his own conception of it to her, and though the “God’s folk” who came to see her reported, in their own way, the rumors current among the people of an invasion by Antichrist, and though Julie (now Princess Drubetskáya), who had resumed correspondence with her, wrote patriotic letters from Moscow.

“I write you in Russian, my good friend,” wrote Julie in her Frenchified Russian, “because I have a detestation for all the French, and the same for their language which I cannot support to hear spoken.... We in Moscow are elated by enthusiasm for our adored Emperor.

“My poor husband is enduring pains and hunger in Jewish taverns, but the news which I have inspires me yet more.

“You heard probably of the heroic exploit of Raévski, embracing his two sons and saying: ‘I will perish with them but we will not be shaken!’

And truly though the enemy was twice stronger than we, we were unshakable. We pass the time as we can, but in war as in war! The princesses Aline and Sophie sit whole days with me, and we, unhappy widows of live men, make beautiful conversations over our charpie, only you, my friend, are missing..." and so on.

The chief reason Princess Mary did not realize the full significance of this war was that the old prince never spoke of it, did not recognize it, and laughed at Dessalles when he mentioned it at dinner.

The prince's tone was so calm and confident that Princess Mary unhesitatingly believed him.

All that July the old prince was exceedingly active and even animated. He planned another garden and began a new building for the domestic serfs. The only thing that made Princess Mary anxious about him was that he slept very little and, instead of sleeping in his study as usual, changed his sleeping place every day. One day he would order his camp bed to be set up in the glass gallery, another day he remained on the couch or on the lounge chair in the drawing room and dozed there without undressing, while—instead of Mademoiselle Bourienne—a serf boy read to him. Then again he would spend a night in the dining room.

On August 1, a second letter was received from Prince Andrew. In his first letter which came soon after he had left home, Prince Andrew had dutifully asked his father's forgiveness for what he had allowed himself to say and begged to be restored to his favor. To this letter the old prince had replied affectionately, and from that time had kept the Frenchwoman at a distance. Prince Andrew's second letter, written near Vitebsk after the French had occupied that town, gave a brief account of the whole campaign, enclosed for them a plan he had drawn and forecasts as to the further progress of the war. In this letter Prince Andrew pointed out to his father the danger of staying at Bald Hills, so near the theater of war and on the army's direct line of march, and advised him to move to Moscow.

At dinner that day, on Dessalles' mentioning that the French were said to have already entered Vitebsk, the old prince remembered his son's letter.

"There was a letter from Prince Andrew today," he said to Princess Mary—"Haven't you read it?"

"No, Father," she replied in a frightened voice.

She could not have read the letter as she did not even know it had arrived.

"He writes about this war," said the prince, with the ironic smile that had become habitual to him in speaking of the present war.

"That must be very interesting," said Dessalles. "Prince Andrew is in a position to know..."

"Oh, very interesting!" said Mademoiselle Bourienne.

“Go and get it for me,” said the old prince to Mademoiselle Bourienne.  
“You know—under the paperweight on the little table.”

Mademoiselle Bourienne jumped up eagerly.

“No, don’t!” he exclaimed with a frown. “You go, Michael Ivánovich.”

Michael Ivánovich rose and went to the study. But as soon as he had left the room the old prince, looking uneasily round, threw down his napkin and went himself.

“They can’t do anything... always make some muddle,” he muttered.

While he was away Princess Mary, Dessalles, Mademoiselle Bourienne, and even little Nicholas exchanged looks in silence. The old prince returned with quick steps, accompanied by Michael Ivánovich, bringing the letter and a plan. These he put down beside him—not letting anyone read them at dinner.

On moving to the drawing room he handed the letter to Princess Mary and, spreading out before him the plan of the new building and fixing his eyes upon it, told her to read the letter aloud. When she had done so Princess Mary looked inquiringly at her father. He was examining the plan, evidently engrossed in his own ideas.

“What do you think of it, Prince?” Dessalles ventured to ask.

“I? I?...” said the prince as if unpleasantly awakened, and not taking his eyes from the plan of the building.

“Very possibly the theater of war will move so near to us that...”

“Ha ha ha! The theater of war!” said the prince. “I have said and still say that the theater of war is Poland and the enemy will never get beyond the Niemen.”

Dessalles looked in amazement at the prince, who was talking of the Niemen when the enemy was already at the Dnieper, but Princess Mary, forgetting the geographical position of the Niemen, thought that what her father was saying was correct.

“When the snow melts they’ll sink in the Polish swamps. Only they could fail to see it,” the prince continued, evidently thinking of the campaign of 1807 which seemed to him so recent. “Bennigsen should have advanced into Prussia sooner, then things would have taken a different turn...”

“But, Prince,” Dessalles began timidly, “the letter mentions Vítebsk....”

“Ah, the letter? Yes...” replied the prince peevishly. “Yes... yes...” His face suddenly took on a morose expression. He paused. “Yes, he writes that the French were beaten at... at... what river is it?”

Dessalles dropped his eyes.

“The prince says nothing about that,” he remarked gently.

“Doesn’t he? But I didn’t invent it myself.”

No one spoke for a long time.

“Yes... yes... Well, Michael Ivánovich,” he suddenly went on, raising his head and pointing to the plan of the building, “tell me how you mean to alter it....”

Michael Ivánovich went up to the plan, and the prince after speaking to him about the building looked angrily at Princess Mary and Dessalles and went to his own room.

Princess Mary saw Dessalles’ embarrassed and astonished look fixed on her father, noticed his silence, and was struck by the fact that her father had forgotten his son’s letter on the drawing room table; but she was not only afraid to speak of it and ask Dessalles the reason of his confusion and silence, but was afraid even to think about it.

In the evening Michael Ivánovich, sent by the prince, came to Princess Mary for Prince Andrew’s letter which had been forgotten in the drawing room. She gave it to him and, unpleasant as it was to her to do so, ventured to ask him what her father was doing.

“Always busy,” replied Michael Ivánovich with a respectfully ironic smile which caused Princess Mary to turn pale. “He’s worrying very much about the new building. He has been reading a little, but now”—Michael Ivánovich went on, lowering his voice—“now he’s at his desk, busy with his will, I expect.” (One of the prince’s favorite occupations of late had been the preparation of some papers he meant to leave at his death and which he called his “will.”)

“And Alpátych is being sent to Smolénsk?” asked Princess Mary.

“Oh, yes, he has been waiting to start for some time.”