

CHAPTER VIII

The friends were silent. Neither cared to begin talking. Pierre continually glanced at Prince Andrew; Prince Andrew rubbed his forehead with his small hand.

“Let us go and have supper,” he said with a sigh, going to the door.

They entered the elegant, newly decorated, and luxurious dining room. Everything from the table napkins to the silver, china, and glass bore that imprint of newness found in the households of the newly married. Halfway through supper Prince Andrew leaned his elbows on the table and, with a look of nervous agitation such as Pierre had never before seen on his face, began to talk—as one who has long had something on his mind and suddenly determines to speak out.

“Never, never marry, my dear fellow! That’s my advice: never marry till you can say to yourself that you have done all you are capable of, and until you have ceased to love the woman of your choice and have seen her plainly as she is, or else you will make a cruel and irrevocable mistake. Marry when you are old and good for nothing—or all that is good and noble in you will be lost. It will all be wasted on trifles. Yes! Yes! Yes! Don’t look at me with such surprise. If you marry expecting anything from yourself in the future, you will feel at every step that for you all is ended, all is closed except the drawing room, where you will be ranged side by side with a court lackey and an idiot!... But what’s the good?...” and he waved his arm.

Pierre took off his spectacles, which made his face seem different and the good-natured expression still more apparent, and gazed at his friend in amazement.

“My wife,” continued Prince Andrew, “is an excellent woman, one of those rare women with whom a man’s honor is safe; but, O God, what would I not give now to be unmarried! You are the first and only one to whom I mention this, because I like you.”

As he said this Prince Andrew was less than ever like that Bolkónski who had lolled in Anna Pávlovna’s easy chairs and with half-closed eyes had uttered French phrases between his teeth. Every muscle of his thin face was now quivering with nervous excitement; his eyes, in which the fire of life had seemed extinguished, now flashed with brilliant light. It was evident that the more lifeless he seemed at ordinary times, the more impassioned he became in these moments of almost morbid irritation.

“You don’t understand why I say this,” he continued, “but it is the whole story of life. You talk of Bonaparte and his career,” said he (though Pierre had not mentioned Bonaparte), “but Bonaparte when he worked went step by step toward his goal. He was free, he had nothing but his aim to consider, and he reached it. But tie yourself up with a woman and, like a chained convict, you lose all freedom! And all you have of hope and strength merely weighs you down and torments you with regret. Drawing rooms, gossip, balls, vanity, and triviality—these are the enchanted circle I cannot escape from. I am now going to the war, the greatest war there ever was, and I know nothing and am fit for nothing. I am very amiable and have a caustic wit,” continued Prince Andrew,

“and at Anna Pávlovna’s they listen to me. And that stupid set without whom my wife cannot exist, and those women.... If you only knew what those society women are, and women in general! My father is right. Selfish, vain, stupid, trivial in everything—that’s what women are when you see them in their true colors! When you meet them in society it seems as if there were something in them, but there’s nothing, nothing, nothing! No, don’t marry, my dear fellow; don’t marry!” concluded Prince Andrew.

“It seems funny to me,” said Pierre, “that *you, you* should consider yourself incapable and your life a spoiled life. You have everything before you, everything. And you....”

He did not finish his sentence, but his tone showed how highly he thought of his friend and how much he expected of him in the future.

“How can he talk like that?” thought Pierre. He considered his friend a model of perfection because Prince Andrew possessed in the highest degree just the very qualities Pierre lacked, and which might be best described as strength of will. Pierre was always astonished at Prince Andrew’s calm manner of treating everybody, his extraordinary memory, his extensive reading (he had read everything, knew everything, and had an opinion about everything), but above all at his capacity for work and study. And if Pierre was often struck by Andrew’s lack of capacity for philosophical meditation (to which he himself was particularly addicted), he regarded even this not as a defect but as a sign of strength.

Even in the best, most friendly and simplest relations of life, praise and commendation are essential, just as grease is necessary to wheels that they may run smoothly.

“My part is played out,” said Prince Andrew. “What’s the use of talking about me? Let us talk about you,” he added after a silence, smiling at his reassuring thoughts.

That smile was immediately reflected on Pierre’s face.

“But what is there to say about me?” said Pierre, his face relaxing into a careless, merry smile. “What am I? An illegitimate son!” He suddenly blushed crimson, and it was plain that he had made a great effort to say this. “Without a name and without means... And it really...” But he did not say what “it really” was. “For the present I am free and am all right. Only I haven’t the least idea what I am to do; I wanted to consult you seriously.”

Prince Andrew looked kindly at him, yet his glance—friendly and affectionate as it was—expressed a sense of his own superiority.

“I am fond of you, especially as you are the one live man among our whole set. Yes, you’re all right! Choose what you will; it’s all the same. You’ll be all right anywhere. But look here: give up visiting those Kurágin and leading that sort of life. It suits you so badly—all this debauchery, dissipation, and the rest of it!”

“What would you have, my dear fellow?” answered Pierre, shrugging his shoulders. “Women, my dear fellow; women!”

“I don’t understand it,” replied Prince Andrew. “Women who are *comme il faut*, that’s a different matter; but the Kurágins’ set of women, ‘women and wine’ I don’t understand!”

Pierre was staying at Prince Vasíli Kurágin’s and sharing the dissipated life of his son Anatole, the son whom they were planning to reform by marrying him to Prince Andrew’s sister.

“Do you know?” said Pierre, as if suddenly struck by a happy thought, “seriously, I have long been thinking of it.... Leading such a life I can’t decide or think properly about anything. One’s head aches, and one spends all one’s money. He asked me for tonight, but I won’t go.”

“You give me your word of honor not to go?”

“On my honor!”