

not in the least disconcerted by this reception. He had just entered, wearing an embroidered court uniform, knee breeches, and shoes, and had stars on his breast and a serene expression on his flat face. He spoke in that refined French in which our grandfathers not only spoke but thought, and with the gentle, patronizing intonation natural to a man of importance who had grown old in society and at court. He went up to Anna Pavlovna, kissed her hand, presenting to her his bald, scented, and shining head, and complacently seated himself on the sofa.

‘First of all, dear friend, tell me how you are. Set your friend’s mind at rest,’ said he without altering his tone, beneath the politeness and affected sympathy of which indifference and even irony could be discerned.

‘Can one be well while suffering morally? Can one be calm in times like these if one has any feeling?’ said Anna Pavlovna. ‘You are staying the whole evening, I hope?’

‘And the fete at the English ambassador’s? Today is Wednesday. I must put in an appearance there,’ said the prince. ‘My daughter is coming for me to take me there.’

‘I thought today’s fete had been canceled. I confess all these festivities and fireworks are becoming wearisome.’

‘If they had known that you wished it, the entertainment would have been put off,’ said the prince, who, like a wound-up clock, by force of habit said things he did not even wish to be believed.

‘Don’t tease! Well, and what has been decided about Novosiltsev’s dispatch? You know everything.’

‘What can one say about it?’ replied the prince in a cold,