



Peace, war and peace

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In the dungeons of abandoned Fort No.5 in Kaliningrad, a burnt manuscript has been discovered. Expert examination has confirmed that it is an unknown first volume of Tolstoy's trilogy – a prequel to War and Peace. The action spans the years 1796–1805: the death of Catherine the Great, the horrors of Paul's reign, the assassination of Paul, and the hopes placed in Alexander I. The reader will see the childhood of Natasha Rostova, the youth of Andrei Bolkonsky, the formative years of Pierre Bezukhov, and the first steps of the beautiful Hélène. For the first time, the world of servants, soldiers, coachmen – those who silently make history – is shown in such full measure. The manuscript has been damaged by fire, so chapters have been partially reconstructed by philologists. Losses are marked with , additions are shown in italics. How the manuscript ended up in the abandoned fort is a mystery shrouded in darkness.. Tolstoy intended to call the trilogy Peace, War and Peace

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Part One

I

In the great reception hall of the Winter Palace - the very one that adjoined the state bedchamber and was filled with marble statues and tall mirrors in gilded frames - Count Fyodor Vasilyevich Rostopchin stood by the window, watching the wet snow fall on the granite slabs of the embankment. This snow was the wettest, most unpleasant kind that only appears in a Petersburg November; it fell and immediately melted, and the count felt that along with this snow, all of his former life - Catherine's life, satisfied, understandable, where everyone knew their place and the very word "tomorrow" meant nothing frightening - was melting away, and something that had never existed before was coming to replace it. And although he, Rostopchin, could not put into words exactly what was coming, he felt with his entire being that this new thing would be the heaviest, most agonizing of anything he had ever experienced.

In the hall, despite the late hour, dignitaries, generals, and foreign ambassadors crowded together; no one slept, no one thought of sleep - they whispered, glancing at the door leading to the inner chambers, and all waited: when would the new emperor arrive from Gatchina, who would be the first to swear loyalty, who would be the first to have his head cut off. But they did not wait in the bedchamber where the body lay - only the closest, those permitted a final farewell, were allowed there - but here, in the reception room, where the candles in the heavy candelabra had long since burned down and their yellow, trembling light fell on the gilded walls, on the tall mirrors dimly reflecting the motionless figures of courtiers, and on faces pale and strained, like those of people who could lose everything in a single night.

"C'est donc fait, mon cher," said Rostopchin without turning, for he recognized the steps of Prince Dolgorukov - the very one who had enjoyed great influence under Catherine and now, like everyone else, did not know if he would remain at court even until morning. "She is dead, and here we are left with this man who spent forty years waiting, and I ask you, prince, frankly, in all honesty: do you believe we will survive this reign? I confess, I do not. He is strange, very strange, and moreover convinced of his own rightness, and that, as we know, is more dangerous than any madness. He thinks that order, discipline, and the parade step will save Russia, but Russia, forgive me, does not need saving from the Prussians, and he does not understand that."

Prince Dolgorukov, an old grandee with gray sideburns and dim eyes, slowly approached the window and also stared at the snow that kept falling and melting, leaving murky streaks on the glass. He was silent for a long time - so long that Rostopchin began to think the old man had fallen asleep standing - but finally the prince spoke, quietly and reluctantly:

"You are too harsh, Count. He is unhappy. And unhappiness, you know, makes people cruel, but in time he may soften."

"We shall see," Rostopchin smiled bitterly - the bitter smile he wore when speaking truths no one wanted to hear. "I do not believe in miracles. And worst of all, he hates everyone close to his mother, everyone without exception. For me, for you, for anyone who wore Catherine's ribbon, there is only either to adapt or to perish. No third option."

He walked away from the window and paced the hall, mechanically glancing at the doors from which adjutants kept emerging with pale faces - pale not from grief but from fear, the very fear that makes people both submissive and cruel simultaneously. At the far end of the hall, by a pillar upholstered in dark green cloth, stood old Count Kirill Vladimirovich Bezukhov, leaning on a cane - he was ill and could barely stand - and beside him, holding onto the tail of his coat, a boy of about eleven shifted from foot to foot: chubby, clumsy, with huge thoughtful eyes that looked at

everything around him with an expression as if he saw not what others saw, but something of his own, understandable only to him. This was Pierre, the count's illegitimate son, whom the old man, it was said, intended to declare his heir. Rostopchin, looking at this boy, thought that children probably did not understand what was happening, and thank God they did not, because if they did, they would surely die of fear or pity.

He remembered that below, at the servants' entrance, wives and children of those admitted to the halls waited in carriages. It was said that Countess Rostova had brought her three children - ten-year-old Nikolai, four-year-old Natasha, and eight-year-old Vera - and now they all sat in the dark, wrapped in greatcoats and shawls, not understanding why they were not allowed into the warm rooms. The eldest, Nikolai, was probably teasing his sisters, while little Natasha was likely asleep, lulled by the steady patter of raindrops on the carriage roof. "And let them be," thought Rostopchin. "They do not need to see what is happening here. They do not need to know how fear makes adults look like trembling hares."

A doctor came out of the bedchamber, wiping his hands, and whispered something to the court marshal. He crossed himself and, without looking at anyone, walked toward the exit with quick, short steps. Rostopchin understood it was over. He approached Prince Dolgorukov and said quietly, almost into his ear, so that no one else could hear:

"She is dead. Now we shall see what Paul does. But I tell you, Prince, this is the beginning of the end, and mark my words: before a year passes, many of us will regret being born."

Dolgorukov said nothing, only sighed and straightened his order ribbon, which had slipped slightly askew. The gesture was so old, so habitual, that Rostopchin suddenly felt pity for the old man - that hopeless pity one feels before a person whose time has already passed, though he himself has not yet realized it.

He went out into the corridor, descended the wide marble staircase where guardsmen with rifles stood on every step, and found himself at the main entrance. Here, in the vestibule, it was cold and smelled of dampness and horses, and doormen in red livery, constantly opening and closing the heavy oak doors, let in and out couriers who brought and took various packages. Rostopchin paused for a moment, looking out into the street. The night was dark and windy; the snow mixed with rain that an hour ago had seemed endless had already stopped, and in the gaps between clouds a black, starry sky appeared here and there. Carriages crowded at the entrance - dozens of them, black with lit lanterns - and in one, the one closest to the porch, a child's face flashed in the window - round, with a turned-up nose - and immediately disappeared as someone drew the curtain.

"The Rostovs," thought Rostopchin. "The boy is ten. He does not yet know what awaits him. And thank God he does not."

He put on his greatcoat, took his tricorne from the doorman, and stepped onto the porch. The wet snow immediately began to melt on his face, mixing with sweat, and it was unpleasant, but he did not wipe his face because he suddenly wanted to feel this cold, sticky moisture as something real, the only real thing left in this world where everything else - ranks, ribbons, positions, hopes - was deceit and dust. The coachman brought the carriage; Rostopchin got in, slammed the door, and said, "To Liteynaya."

The carriage moved, its wheels clattering on the wet cobblestones. The sound was so steady, so familiar, that the count involuntarily closed his eyes and began to think. He thought about what had been and what would be, and how strangely life was arranged: the smartest man could not foresee what would happen to him in a week. Only yesterday he, Rostopchin, was in power; Catherine called him "mon ami" and entrusted him with important affairs; today he was nobody; and if Paul merely frowned, tomorrow he, Rostopchin, would be taken to Shlisselburg, and no one would intercede, no one would remember. And from that fear he had felt for hours, something suddenly lifted, and instead of fear came a calm, almost indifferent curiosity: what would happen next?

He opened his eyes and looked out the window. The sky was low and murky, but here and there stars were breaking through; the wind was scattering the clouds; it seemed that the whole sky, this entire endless cold vault, pressed down on Petersburg, that this oppression would never end, and that the people living under this sky could no longer breathe freely because they had grown accustomed to fear. And Rostopchin thought that human history was not what tsars and ministers did, nor what was written in decrees and treaties, but something else that happened by itself, beyond human will, and people only thought they were leading it, whereas in fact it was leading them, as the wind leads an autumn leaf - and no one knew where or why. Catherine died. Paul became tsar. He, Rostopchin, sat in a carriage driving over wet pavement, and all of it together was something that could neither be stopped nor changed nor even fully understood; one could only watch and marvel, as one watches a swift river in which chips of wood spin and drown.

The carriage stopped at his house on Liteynaya. Rostopchin got out, paid the coachman, and unhurriedly went up to his study. A single candle burned in the study, its yellow circle of light falling on the writing desk piled with papers - reports, dispatches, drafts of decrees that now were probably of no use to anyone. He sat in his armchair, took a pen, dipped it in ink, and sat for a long time not knowing what to write. He wanted to write a request for resignation, but his hand would not rise, because deep down he still hoped that everything would work out, that Paul would come to his senses, that the fear would pass and life would fall back into its rut. He laid down the pen, pushed aside the papers, and looked at the portrait of Catherine that hung above the desk in a gilded frame - young, with an aquiline profile, in a guards uniform - and it seemed to him that she looked at him reproachfully, as if asking: "What is it, Fyodor? Afraid?"

"What can I do, little mother?" he said aloud. "Your time is over. Another is beginning."

Outside the wind howled, and the snow no longer melted because frost had struck. Rostopchin went to the window, drew back the curtain, and saw that the sky had cleared completely, and on that black, endless sky, stars had lit - small, frequent, as cold and indifferent as they had always been, under Catherine, under Peter, under Rurik, and would continue to be long after neither Rostopchin, nor Paul, nor Petersburg itself remained. He stood there a minute, then extinguished the candle, lay down on the sofa without undressing, and closed his eyes. He did not sleep - he listened as somewhere far away, probably in the Winter Palace, the clock struck, and he counted the strokes. Twelve. A new night had begun, a new reign, a new life, and no one - neither wise nor foolish, neither noble nor common - knew what it would bring.

II

Countess Varvara Nikolaevna Golovina sat in the small drawing room of Empress Maria Feodorovna, in that very place by the window from which the snow-covered palace garden was visible - a garden where, in summer under Catherine, people had walked freely and laughed, and now, in December, sentries in Prussian uniforms stood and marched so evenly and resoundingly that it seemed the very earth was beating out the step. On the table before the countess lay unfinished embroidery - an intricate monogram she was embroidering at the empress's request - but the needle had frozen in her fingers, and she had not made a stitch for a quarter of an hour because she was listening. She listened to that strange, unfamiliar noise coming from the next hall: not loud talk, not happy laughter, as Catherine's evenings had been, but half-whispers, fearful, with long pauses when everyone fell silent because somewhere at the end of the corridor steps could be heard - the heavy, quick steps of Emperor Paul, who, it was said, might enter at any moment and say something that made even the most experienced courtiers' legs buckle.

Prince Vasily Kuragin appeared in the doorway. He looked around, as everyone did in those days - a short, quick glance that took in all those present, the doors, the windows, and whether anyone stood behind the curtain - and, approaching Countess Golovina, bent so close to her ear that she felt his warm breath and whispered:

"Well, my dear, what do you say about the new decrees? They ban round hats, frock coats, the waltz. C'est ridicule, n'est-ce pas?"

The countess, without raising her eyes from her sewing but also without making a stitch, answered in the same quiet, nearly inaudible whisper, because she and Prince Vasily both knew that within these walls even the walls could carry an incautious word to those for whom it was not intended:

"This is worse than ridiculous, my dear. It is fear. The sovereign fears everything that reminds him of freedom - the freedom we breathed for thirty-four years. He wants us to walk the Prussian step, speak in whispers, and fear to open our mouths. Il nous rendra fous, mon cher prince, il nous rendra fous, and that will be the most terrible madness, because it will not be ours but his."

Prince Vasily sighed - a deep, meaningful sigh that signified agreement, apprehension, and a readiness to say the opposite at any moment - looked around once more, and walked to the fireplace, where other guests stood, also whispering and glancing at the door.

Countess Golovina set aside her sewing and raised her eyes to the window. The sky was low, leaden, that heavy, motionless color that appears in Petersburg in December, when snow both falls and does not fall, but hangs in the air as fine, prickly dust, and it seems that the whole sky presses on the earth, and no one can throw off that weight. "Quel temps horrible," she thought. And the people were the same: heavy, frightened, not daring to smile. She remembered Catherine's times - how freely French flowed in the drawing rooms, how people were not afraid to say too much, knowing that the empress was intelligent and would forgive foolishness, and would keep cruelty for business, not for amusement. Now any "merci" or "bonjour" was uttered with caution, and the most cautious had switched entirely to Russian, mangling it and suffering, because they were not accustomed to expressing subtle thoughts in a language that until recently had seemed to them the language of footmen and coachmen.

Young Princess Anna Mikhailovna Drubetskaya entered - the very one who, despite her poverty, knew how to enter where others dared not, and how to speak to those whom others feared. By the hand she led her son, Boris, a boy of eleven, dressed in a brand-new little uniform sewn obviously for growth - the sleeves were slightly too long, and the collar stuck up. The boy, rosy-cheeked, with clear eyes not yet knowing fear, looked curiously at the portraits of emperors on the walls, at the golden candelabra, at the tall mirrors reflecting himself, his mother, and all those frightened people in their sumptuous dresses and uniforms.

Countess Golovina beckoned the boy with her finger, and Boris, glancing at his mother who gave a slight nod, stepped forward and stopped, standing at attention as he had been taught in dancing lessons.

"Come here, my child," said the countess. "You, I see, are not afraid of changes? You look at those portraits as if they were your own family."

Boris blushed - with that deep, childish blush that floods cheeks, forehead, and even ears - and answered, looking straight into the countess's eyes:

"I am not afraid, Your Excellency. Because the sovereign is a father, and a father can do nothing wrong."

Countess Golovina involuntarily smiled - that sad, weary smile that appeared on her face whenever she heard something naive and touching. "A father," she thought. "Still a child. He does not know that fathers are sometimes more terrible than enemies." She stroked Boris's head, let him go, and took up her sewing again, but the needle once more froze, for from the next hall came commands - sharp, guttural, in the German manner - and the tramp of many boots drilling the step.

Emperor Paul was conducting a parade drill right in the corridors of the Winter Palace, because, it was said, parade grounds were not enough for him; he wanted his mother's very residence to become a barracks. The countess listened. The steps drew nearer, and her heart beat faster, and like everyone in that room, she froze, afraid to move. But the steps passed by - the door to the little drawing room

did not open - and everyone there exhaled almost simultaneously, and that exhalation in the silence was so audible that each recognized another's fear and was ashamed of their own.

Countess Golovina looked out the window at the low sky that still pressed down on Petersburg, and thought of those who would live after them - of ten-year-old, leggy Nikolai Rostov, who was probably now fighting with his sisters in his father's Moscow house, not knowing that soon he would be sent to military school to learn the Prussian step; of four-year-old Natasha, who must be playing with dolls and not understanding why her mother had grown so sad; of eleven-year-old Pierre Bezukhov, who, it was said, was writing some strange poetry and disobeying his tutors; of ten-year-old Hélène, already promising to be a great beauty; of thirteen-year-old Anatole, who they said had yesterday jumped out of a second-story window on a dare and remained uninjured; of nineteen-year-old Dolokhov, already sent to the guards and feared by everyone like fire.

"They still have to live under this sovereign," thought the countess, looking at Boris Drubetskoy, who had returned to his mother and was now listening to her whisper, his lips pursed. "They have to live and live. God grant that they survive."

She crossed herself - furtively, beneath her sewing, so that no one would see - and made her first stitch, then a second, then a third. The needle moved evenly, and the monogram on the fabric began to take shape. But her thoughts were still out there, beyond the window, where the low December sky hung over the palace, over the city, over all of Russia, and no one knew what it would bring.

An hour later, Countess Golovina left the palace. Outside, the frost was strengthening; snow creaked underfoot; rare stars had already lit up in the darkening sky. Her carriage stood at the entrance, and a footman gave her his hand to help her in. When the carriage moved, she leaned back against the cushions and closed her eyes. She remembered Boris Drubetskoy's face - those clear, childish eyes that did not yet know fear. "Happy boy," she thought. "He does not understand what fear is. But we already understand. And that is the most terrible thing."

The carriage clattered over the icy pavement, and the countess opened the window to take a breath of fresh air. The wind struck her face, cold and sharp, and she screwed up her eyes. When she opened them, a star gleamed above the city in a break in the clouds - bright, solitary - and for a moment the countess thought that this star had seen Catherine, Peter, and all the other tsars, and would see those who came after, and that all of this - the fear, the decrees, the parade drills, the prohibitions - was for the star but a single moment, but for a person, an entire life, full of fear and hope, and no one knew what in it was most important. She closed the window, told the coachman to drive home, and all the way sat silently looking at the flickering lights of the city, which seemed to her like little helpless candles in that black, icy darkness.

III

In the study, which smelled of leather, tobacco, and old books, two candles burned in brass holders, their yellow, flickering light falling on portraits of ancestors, on shelves of papers, and on a tall Venetian mirror in a carved frame, before which stood Prince Nikolai Andreevich Bolkonsky. He was already dressed for the road - in an old-fashioned dark-green woolen coat of the kind still worn under Catherine, and a powdered wig he put on only for the most solemn occasions - and now, his head slightly tilted, he was fastening his orders, one after another. His fingers, dry and sinewy, with long, slightly crooked nails yellowed by age, moved with that habitual, almost mechanical precision that only years of daily ritual can give.

Beside him, eyes downcast, stood nineteen-year-old Andrei - tall, lean, with fine features on which was fixed an expression of restrained, almost stern deference, such as one sees in young men who have already left childhood but not yet achieved full independence and are therefore forced to be silent and listen when their elders speak. His face was pale, his lips tightly pressed, and only his eyes - gray, lively, intelligent - betrayed the inner agitation he tried to hide from his father.

"So then, my son," said the old prince without turning, continuing to fuss with his orders, "I am going to Petersburg. To kiss the hand of the sovereign, who, they say, hates all us old Catherine's

dogs. Very well, he has a right to that, because his mother, may she rest in peace, did not much favor her son. But an old man like me is used to it. *C'est une absurdité, mais que faire?*" And he grunted with annoyance because the order would not fasten.

Andrei was silent. He knew that no answer was required of him, and in general he knew that at moments when his father spoke in this tone - grumbling but not ill-natured - it was better to remain silent and not interrupt, because the old prince loved to talk by himself and only pretended to ask his son's opinion.

"But you," the old man continued, finally managing with the orders and turning to Andrei so that the skirts of his coat flew open, revealing his waistcoat, buttoned to the last button, "you stay here, in Bald Hills. Look after the estate, after Marya. And remember one thing, and remember it well, because your life may depend on it: Paul is mad, but his madness is not the madness of weakness - no, it is the madness of power, and therefore doubly dangerous. Be silent, don't meddle, don't stick out. A wise man under a tyrant either keeps quiet or flees. You cannot flee - you have your estate, debts, a sister - so be silent. And don't even think of arguing, don't think of proving, don't think of showing that you are smarter than he is. He does not forgive that."

Andrei raised his eyes to his father - and in those gray, deep eyes something like bitterness flashed, but it disappeared at once, replaced by the habitual expression of respectful submission.

"Oui, mon père," he answered, his voice steady, without a tremor, though inside everything tightened at the thought that life, real life - with dangers, deeds, great achievements - was passing him by, while he, Andrei Bolkonsky, must sit in this backwater and wait for something real to begin. "I will do everything as you say."

"See that you do," said the old prince, with something between satisfaction and regret in his voice. "And if anything - write. But no more than once a month, because I am a busy man and you are not to burden me with every trifle."

He went to the table, took from it a heavy cane with a silver knob, which he used more for show than for need, and, leaning on it, headed for the door. Prokofy had been standing by the door, his arms crossed over his stomach, watching. He saw how the old prince, passing the mirror, glanced at his reflection and gave a slight smirk - the smirk that meant: "Never mind, we'll yet see which of us lives longer." Then the old prince went out into the vestibule, and Prokofy hurried after him to help his master dress for the road - to put on the heavy bearskin coat he detested for its immoderate weight but wore on account of the frost, and the high boots, and the cap with earflaps that made him look like an old, ruffled bear.

Andrei walked behind, not lagging a step but not overtaking. On the porch, where the frost nipped at his cheeks and breathing became difficult because the air was prickly, dry, and smelled of snow, stood an old carriage - leather-covered, with high springs - into which the old prince always climbed with difficulty, grumbling each time that it was time to buy a new one but a pity to spend the money. The horses, gray dapples, impatiently stamped their feet, and steam poured from their nostrils.

Before getting in, the old prince turned to his son, silently removed his cap, crossed him with a broad, sweeping cross - the kind one makes only before a long journey or before death - and said:

"Well, God be with you. Guard your honor, Andrei. And remember: honor is dearer than life, because a man has only one life, but he carries his honor within him and passes it to his children after death."

Andrei bowed silently. Prokofy gave the master his hand to help him onto the step, and the old prince, grunting and quietly swearing, finally climbed inside, flopped onto the threadbare cushions, and slammed the door.

"And you, Prokofy!" he shouted, sticking his head out the little window that slid open with a squeak. "Keep an eye on him! See that the estate doesn't fall apart, that Marya doesn't weep, that he -" he nodded toward Andrei - "doesn't do any stupid things. You are an old servant, you know the rules."

"At your service, Your Excellency," answered Prokofy, bowing low and holding his cap with one hand to keep it from flying off in the wind, and with the other the skirts of his coat, which were billowing.

"Go!" commanded the old prince, and the coachman, sitting on the box in a sheepskin coat and mittens, tugged the reins. The horses set off slowly, heavily, but still they moved, and the carriage, swaying on its springs, creaked along the packed snow-covered road, growing smaller and smaller until it became a black dot on the white field, and then the dot disappeared around the bend where the forest began.

Andrei stood on the porch and watched. Prokofy stood beside him, not daring to break the silence. The wind lifted snow from the ground, and small snowflakes swirled over the yard; it was so quiet that one could hear dogs barking in the distance and the creak of fresh, newly fallen snow underfoot. Andrei did not move. He stood leaning his hand on the carved pillar of the porch and looked at the oak - that huge, spreading oak that grew right by the house, a few fathoms from the porch, and which, the old folk said, had been planted by the present prince's grandfather, or maybe earlier. This oak was so thick that two people could not embrace it; its branches, black, gnarled, battered by frost and time, reached toward the sky like crooked fingers, and it seemed that this tree was not just a tree but something living, thinking, perhaps even possessing its own will and memory.

"When will real life begin?" thought Andrei, looking at the oak. "Must my whole life pass like this - in waiting, in silence, in languishing, while my elders say 'be silent,' when I cannot take a step without asking permission, when each day is like the one before and all the future seems as gray as this sky?" The sky was low, gray, monotonous, without a break; it seemed to press down on the earth, on this oak, on this house, on him, Andrei, on his entire life, which had not yet begun but was already ending. And he suddenly felt aggrieved - aggrieved to the point of tears, though he would not show them, considering that a man should not cry, so he only clenched his jaw harder and stared at one spot.

Prokofy, after standing a while longer, approached his master and, coughing into his fist, said:

"Your Excellency, it is cold outside. The frost must be twenty degrees. Would you not like to come inside? The stoves are lit, the samovar is ready."

Andrei did not answer. He kept looking at the oak, and Prokofy, who had known this master since childhood and remembered him still small, running about these very rooms in short trousers, suddenly thought that the master was not seeing just a tree, not just an old oak on which he and his brother (deceased, rest his soul) used to hang a swing, but fate itself - that very fate that leads a man through life without asking his consent, and which, like this oak, is old, gnarled, does not move, but stands firm and does not bend before any winds. And Prokofy sighed, because he felt sorry for the master - with that hopeless, silent pity that old servants feel for young masters tormented by something that no advice can remedy. And, sighing, he crossed himself - broadly, as his late mother had taught him - and went into the house, because he had to stoke the stoves and prepare supper, and because standing in the cold watching another's grief was neither the time nor the inclination.

Andrei remained alone. He stood for a long time, until it grew dark, until the first stars lit up in the clearing evening sky, until the snow stopped swirling and settled in an even white cover on the roof, the road, the branches of the oak. And when he finally turned and went into the house, he imagined that the oak knew something that people did not know, and that in its immobility, in its gnarled, upthrust branches, there was something greater than the mere life of a tree - there was memory and patience such as man is not given to have. And this thought made him both lighter and heavier at once, because if a tree is given to know and to endure, then perhaps a man is also given - but not to know, only to endure? He found no answer and, sighing, pushed open the door.

Prokofy, standing by the stove and throwing in wood, heard the door clap, the steps creak, and thought to himself: "Never mind, it will all grind through - flour will come. Everything will grind through." And he went to set the samovar.

IV

Dunyasha, out of breath, ran into the maids' room - a small, stuffy little room with a low ceiling and a single window facing the inner courtyard - and, falling onto a stool, whispered to the other maids who sat sewing: one mending lace, another sorting linen, a third, old Fyoklovna, dozing by the stove with a stocking dropped on her lap. "They are dressing the young lady," said Dunyasha, "for her first formal appearance. The prince ordered the pink dress with the bare shoulders. You know, the one they ordered last year for the big ball and never put on. Now the time has come."

The maids exchanged glances. Old Fyoklovna, without opening her eyes, grumbled: "The girl is eleven. Rather early, isn't it? C'est un peu tôt, elle n'a que onze ans." But Dunyasha only waved her hand and ran back, because she could hear the French governess shouting in the bedroom - the one everyone called Madame Lambert, a thin, bilious woman who tyrannized the household but trembled before the prince like an aspen leaf, and therefore always agreed with his decisions, even the most absurd.

In the bedroom - large, bright, with tall mirrors in carved frames and portraits of some distant relatives on the walls - several people were bustling about. Madame Lambert, holding the pink dress - pale pink, with silver embroidery on the hem and such bare shoulders that the dress seemed about to fall off - pursed her lips disapprovingly but remained silent. Hélène herself, slender, with a figure already noticeably developed beyond her years - the very figure that would later become the talk of every Petersburg drawing room - stood before the mirror in just a petticoat and twirled and twirled, now lifting her head, now lowering it, smiling at herself - not a child's smile, timid and uncertain, but that calm, confident, slightly mocking smile that later would drive half of Petersburg mad and about which it would be said that it contained not a drop of feeling, yet something that made men lose their heads.

"Il faut qu'elle s'y habitue," said Prince Vasily, entering the bedroom and looking at no one. "She must get used to it." He was already dressed for the road, in an embroidered uniform with his orders, because he was taking his daughter to her first grand soirée - at the house of the Ober-Hofmeister Countess Shuvalova, where all high society gathered, and where, he hoped, eleven-year-old Hélène would make an impression. He went to his daughter, looked her over - that quick, appraising look he gave horses before purchase or estates he intended to mortgage - and was pleased. More than pleased. The corners of his lips twitched into something like a smile - the very smile he gave when concluding a profitable deal.

"You will be the most beautiful woman in Russia," he said, taking Hélène by the chin and turning her face to the light. "But remember: beauty without calculation is worth nothing. Remember that. You must not simply be beautiful. You must know how to use your beauty."

Hélène nodded, still smiling, but her eyes were empty - that very emptiness that later so amazed everyone who tried to speak with her of anything other than gowns and balls. She did not understand what "calculation" meant, but she knew that when her father spoke in that tone, it was best to nod and smile, because arguing with him was useless and contradicting him dangerous.

Dunyasha, helping to tighten her corset, pulled at the laces with all her might, and Hélène, wincing, sometimes cried out but endured it. The corset was tight, because the dress had been made a year ago, and in that year Hélène had grown and filled out, and now her thin, still girlishly angular figure was squeezed by the brocade and whalebone, and every breath came with difficulty. But Prince Vasily demanded everything be as it should, and Dunyasha, who feared the master more than fire or flogging, pulled the laces until her own fingers ached.

In the doorway appeared Anatole - fourteen years old, already tall, with rosy cheeks and insolent, cheerfully senseless eyes that seemed to say: "Everything is permitted to me, and I will do as I please." He peered into the bedroom, whistled long and low like a cabman at a horse fair, and loudly, so that the whole room heard, said:

"Elle est belle, ma sœur. Pity one cannot marry one's own sister. Now there would be a wife - the wife of all wives!"

And, without waiting for an answer, immediately boasted that he had stolen a purse from the French tutor - the very one who tormented him with Latin every morning and whom Anatole hated with a fierce, boyish hatred.

"And did you give it back?" asked Madame Lambert, throwing up her hands.

"Why give it back?" Anatole wondered. "I drank it away yesterday with my schoolmates. There were three rubles and forty kopecks. We bought pies with liver and a bottle of rum. C'était délicieux."

Prince Vasily looked at his son with the same appraising glance - but now the glance held not pleasure, as at his daughter, but something else, like weariness and irritation. "He will grow up," thought the prince. "Or he won't. In any case, he will cause a lot of trouble." But aloud he said nothing, only waved his hand, and Anatole, understanding that his father had no time for him, disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared, slamming the door and almost knocking over a footman carrying some papers on a tray.

Dunyasha, fastening the last buttons on Hélène's dress - tiny mother-of-pearl buttons that barely went through the buttonholes - furtively crossed the young lady, because she, Dunyasha, had a rule: every time the young lady put on a new dress or went out for the first time, she crossed her for good luck, that God might protect her from drunken officers, from evil tongues, and from beauty itself, which, as Dunyasha knew from her own small but bitter experience, brings a woman not joy but only grief. "The girl is growing to her own sorrow," thought Dunyasha, tightening the last knot at the waist. "Beauty is not joy, but a burden. Too pretty - that's frightening. C'est dangereux, la beauté." And she crossed herself again, now openly, and Hélène, feeling that breath of fingers on her nape, turned slightly and smiled - the smile that meant nothing, but which Dunyasha remembered for the rest of her life.

Prince Vasily gave a sign, and everyone began to bustle. Madame Lambert threw a warm shawl over Hélène's shoulders - although it was warm enough in the carriage, a shawl was required in case of a draft - and led her to the door. Dunyasha ran after to help her into the carriage and adjust the hem if it caught on the step.

Outside it was freezing - fifteen degrees at least - but the sky stood clear, pure, of that deep, dark blue that comes only in a Petersburg February, when the sun already shines brightly but still gives little warmth, and the air is dry, and each snowflake, if you look closely, shimmers and burns like a small diamond. Hoarfrost on the carriage windows sparkled, shimmering in all colors - pink, blue, green - and Dunyasha, looking at it, involuntarily thought: "Lord, how beautiful. And the young lady is beautiful today. But why does my soul feel so anxious?"

The carriage was brought around - large, with a coat of arms, high springs, and a box on which sat the coachman in a blue livery and a high beaver cap. Prince Vasily helped Hélène climb inside - she stepped carefully, afraid of dirtying her hem in the wet snow lying on the porch and already beginning to melt under people's feet - and sat opposite her. Inside, the carriage was upholstered in dark blue velvet, a small icon lamp hung in the corner, and it smelled of expensive perfume, the very perfume used by the late princess, Hélène and Anatole's mother, who had died five years ago and since then been almost forgotten by everyone but the old servants.

"Well, God be with us," said Prince Vasily, and the carriage moved, softly swaying on its springs.

Dunyasha remained on the porch. She watched the carriage with her eyes until it disappeared around the corner, and kept thinking: "What will become of her? A beauty, that's clear. But will she be happy?" She remembered her own fate - how she, eighteen years old, was married off to a drunken coachman who beat her when drunk and died a year later of delirium tremens, leaving her only debts and bruises. "Beauty," she thought, "is like money: much is good, but much is also frightening. But with the young lady, perhaps everything will be different. She is a prince's daughter. She will be courted, not beaten."

She crossed herself one last time, looking at the clear, frosty sky on which the first evening stars had begun to appear, and went into the house - to finish her sewing, because tomorrow there

would be guests again, and again she would have to serve and clear away, and again all that bustle from which there seemed to be neither exit nor end.

Old Fyoklovna, when Dunyasha returned to the maids' room, asked without raising her head from her stocking:

"Well, have they gone?"

"They've gone," said Dunyasha, and sat down in her place, took her needle, and began to sew - because one always had to sew, and the thoughts crowding in her head had no place in this work, but they crowded nonetheless, and she, sighing, sewed and thought, sewed and thought, and could not drive away the image of Hélène - slim, smiling, with marble shoulders - and Prince Vasily's words: "beauty without calculation is worth nothing." And it seemed to her that there was something terrible in those words, something that an eleven-year-old child should not have heard, but it was said, and the child nodded, and now it would live in her and grow, like a seed cast into the earth.

Meanwhile, the sky outside the window darkened, stars lit one after another, the frost strengthened; someone in the house played the harpsichord - a sad, old melody that Dunyasha had heard many times and now, this evening, listened to with a new, incomprehensible feeling. And it seemed to her that this melody, this sky, this frost, the girl who had driven off into adult life - all of it was one, all connected by some fine, invisible thread called fate, and that no one could escape this fate - neither a prince's daughter nor a simple maid. "Everything is in God's hands," thought Dunyasha and crossed herself again. "Everything is in God's hands."

She laid down her sewing, stood up, straightened the icon lamp before the icon - the one hanging in the corner over an old faded rug - and went to the kitchen to set the samovar, because Prince Vasily would soon return, and he would likely want tea after his visit to the Shuvalovs, and she had to get everything done before the masters began to get angry and shout.

V

In the great dining room of the Rostov house on Povarskaya, where the walls were hung with family portraits in heavy gilded frames and which smelled of wax, polished silver, and something else homely and cozy that exists only in old Moscow houses where three generations of one family live - in this dining room, around a long oak table set for twenty persons, they gathered for supper. Count Ilya Andreyevich Rostov, flushed and cheerful, with that special, festive smile that appeared on his face whenever guests were in the house, sat at the head of the table and kept pouring wine for himself, his neighbors, and especially for the honored guest, Prince Vasily Kuragin, who had stopped in Moscow on his way from Petersburg and, as was his custom, could not pass by the count's hospitable house, where he was always awaited with a hearty supper, good wine, and a cheerful, easy conversation such as could not be found in the prim Petersburg salons.

Petrushka, a young footman who had served the Rostovs for three years and already knew all the masters' habits - when to serve, when to refill, when to stand still, and when to slip out unnoticed - walked around the table with a heavy silver decanter in his hand, pouring red wine into crystal glasses, trying not to clink or spill, because the count did not like stains on the tablecloth, though he himself was always knocking something over. The table was full of people: the count himself; Countess Natalya Petrovna, still young but already plump, with that perpetually worried expression common to mothers of many children; their eldest daughter Vera, an eight-year-old girl with straight fair hair and a stern, unusually serious face, who sat with a straight back and generally tried to behave as, in her understanding, a well-brought-up young lady should; ten-year-old Nikolai, leggy, with tousled curls, who kept fidgeting and had probably already regretted being made to sit at table with the adults; six-year-old Sonya, the count's niece, a quiet, big-eyed girl with a sad, thoughtful face, who stayed close to her mother and glanced timidly at the guest; and finally little Natasha, only four years old - rosy-cheeked, black-eyed, with perpetually disheveled hair and the lively, restless curiosity that never left her for a moment.

Baby Petya, not yet a year old, slept upstairs in the nursery, and his presence was felt only in the countess's frequent anxious listening to sounds from above and her start and gesture to the nanny whenever crying came from there. But for now, all was quiet; everyone sat at the table, and the conversation turned to what now concerned everyone most - the new decrees of Emperor Paul.

Count Rostov, having poured himself another glass and drained it with that cheerful, grunting sound he always made when the wine was good, turned to Prince Vasily:

"I hear, my dear fellow, what decrees our sovereign has signed? He's banning round hats, frock coats, the waltz. The waltz, my dear fellow! They say you can't dance the new way. What is this world coming to? If it weren't so funny, I'd want to weep."

Prince Vasily, sitting next to the count with an air as if he were doing a favor by being there at all, unhurriedly cut a piece of roast veal, put it in his mouth, chewed, and only then answered, glancing at the door - as he glanced everywhere, even in the safest places, because the habit of looking over his shoulder had become second nature after he saw what happened in Petersburg to those who had not been quick enough to look.

"C'est une bêtise, of course," he said, his voice carrying that light, half-contemptuous smirk with which he often accompanied his judgments. "But orders must be obeyed, Count. We no longer live in Catherine's times, when everyone did as they pleased. Now there is order. And we must fit into this order, whether we like it or not."

Count Rostov sighed - heavily, in the Russian manner, with his whole chest - and poured himself more wine. He wanted to say something about Russia not being German, that Prussian ways did not suit her, that real Russian life was breadth, daring, freedom, not drill and fear of speaking a word. But he knew it was dangerous to say such things, so he remained silent, sighing once more, and to smooth over the awkwardness, said loudly and cheerfully:

"Well then, Prince, let us drink to the sovereign's health! Whatever one may say, he is our father, and God willing, everything will be settled."

Prince Vasily raised his glass, clinked, took a sip - and set it down, because he did not like to drink much, considering that wine clouded the mind, and in his position a clouded mind was an unforgivable luxury.

Petrushka, pouring wine, heard all this and wondered. To him, a seventeen-year-old lad who had grown up in the country and come to the city only three years ago, these talks about hats and dances were incomprehensible. What business did the sovereign have with what hat anyone wore? And how could one forbid a dance? A dance came from the soul; you could not forbid it. But the masters spoke of it seriously, almost fearfully, and Petrushka, not understanding the essence, felt only one thing: something in life had changed, and not for the better. He remembered how last year, before the empress's death, the Rostov house had been merrier - guests laughed loudly, spoke freely, no one glanced at doors or lowered their voices when politics came up. But now - whispering, fear, and even Prince Vasily, so important, so seemingly fearless, even he looked around.

Little Natasha, who had spent the whole supper sitting on the floor under the table because her mother would not let her sit at table - "too little, she'll get dirty" - was playing with a rag doll, dressing and undressing it, and could not fasten the tiny button on the doll's dress. She was bored under the table. She heard the voices of adults, the tramp of Petrushka's boots, the clatter of dishes, but could not understand a word of what was said, and so grew more and more angry with the doll that would not button. Finally she grew tired of it. She threw away the doll, crawled out from under the table - covered in dust, hair disheveled, cheeks bright red - and, before her mother or any adult could stop her, ran to Prince Vasily. She stopped before him, hands on hips, and loudly, so that even the footmen froze with their trays, asked:

"Why do you speak not our language?"

Prince Vasily, accustomed to children's questions no more than to the barking of little dogs - that is, paying them no attention - smirked and answered:

"Parce que je suis français, ma petite."

Natasha frowned. She did not understand the words, but the tone displeased her - too affectionate, too adult, as if speaking to a little one. She stamped her foot - not hard, but angrily - and cried:

"Liar! You are Russian! Why do you speak in a foreign tongue? Why pretend?"

She wanted to add something more, but at that moment her mother, Countess Rostova, was already running to her, and Natasha, feeling herself being carried off, only managed to shout after the prince:

"You are deceiving us! I know!"

The countess snatched her up, pressed her to herself, and carried her from the dining room, whispering in her ear: "What are you doing, mad girl? Why do you embarrass your uncle?" Natasha, kicking her legs and feeling no guilt, answered loudly so that all could hear: "He is the one who is embarrassed! He is not telling the truth! He is Russian, but he pretends to be French!"

The door closed behind them. For a second, a silence fell in the dining room - that awkward silence that follows when a child says what everyone is thinking but no one dares to utter. Then Count Rostov laughed - that loud, rolling laugh he always had ready for any occasion - and said:

"Ah, Natalya! That's telling him! C'est une petite philosophe, I declare!"

Prince Vasily also laughed - but his laugh was strained, insincere, and something like annoyance flickered in his eyes. However, he was too experienced a socialite to show his true feelings, and so a second later he was smiling affably and turning to the countess with some empty compliment.

Petrushka, leaving with his tray for the kitchen, remembered it all. And when he stepped into the corridor, he paused for a moment, pressed the tray to his chest, and thought: "The girl speaks truth. Why pretend? Why speak a foreign language if it is not foreign? Russian is the language. French is for the masters, for show. But the prince is Russian. And we are all Russian. So why put on airs? Pourquoi mentir?"

He took the tray to the kitchen, handed over the dirty dishes to the cook, and went into the servants' hall - a small, cramped room where the unmarried footmen slept and which smelled of kvass, vegetable oil, and old, sweat-soaked sheepskins. No other servants were there - all were busy about the house. Petrushka went to the window, drew the curtain, and looked out at the street. Water was dripping from the roofs; the snow that yesterday had lain white was now black, dirty, loose, and here and there the earth showed through - wet, brown, unattractive. The sky was low, damp, overcast, that gray, heavy color that comes before a prolonged rain or before everything finally melts and spring arrives. And in that sky, in those clouds hurrying somewhere northward, there was something that made one's soul both melancholy and light at the same time.

"Spring is coming," thought Petrushka. "The rivers will break up, the fields will emerge from under the snow. And the masters are still at it - hats, dances, French. And a little girl said the truth. Why pretend? One must live truthfully."

He stood a while longer, looking at the melting snow and the low sky, then sighed, crossed himself before the icon in the corner - an old, blackened icon of St. Nicholas the Wonderworker, which had hung there since the house was built - and went back to the dining room, because supper was not yet over, and the masters needed dessert served, and there were not enough footmen, and the count, heaven forbid, would start shouting if the wine were not poured on time.

Passing the nursery door, he heard that inside they were no longer crying but laughing - and Natasha laughing loudest of all, probably because her mother had given her a spoonful of honey to calm her. And Petrushka involuntarily smiled. "Never mind," he thought. "You'll grow up and understand everything yourself. And you'll hear worse."

He pushed the dining room door and took up the decanter again.

VI

Old coachman Yermolai, who had served in the cab trade for twenty-five years and driven generals, merchants, minor officials, and even Count Orlov-Chesmensky himself once - whom he remembered because he had sworn all the way and given a tip of a full ten rubles - sat on the box of his britzka, driving a pair of bays, lazily clicking his whip and looking around. The day was summer, warm, with a light breeze from the fields, smelling of fresh hay and something sweet, probably blooming buckwheat. The road went through a small wood, then a field, then another wood; it was that Russian summer when everything grows and blossoms, and it seems it will always be so, and no one thinks that winter will ever return and cover everything with ice and snow.

In the britzka, on threadbare leather cushions, sat a boy - fat, clumsy, with a round face and eyes too large and too bright for his age. He was twelve, but looked fourteen, and in his thoughtfulness, in the way he looked at the passing fields and forests - as if he were searching for something others did not see - he sometimes seemed an adult, sometimes a child who did not yet understand where he was being taken or why. Pierre Bezukhov - the illegitimate son of old Count Kirill Vladimirovich, whom his father, despite all the gossip, had recognized and was now sending to Paris to study, to gain wisdom, so that when he returned he would no longer disgrace the family name with his clumsiness and strange speeches.

Before his departure, at the porch of the Moscow house on Molchanovka, the old count - ill, with a yellow face and trembling hands, but still alive and still authoritative - embraced his son, crossed him, and said, trying to speak firmly, though his voice broke:

"Mon fils, apprends, deviens un homme. I am old and, surely, will not live to see your return. But you must become such that people speak of you with respect. Not as they do of me - they say I am an old sinner - but as an honest and intelligent man. C'est tout ce que je te demande."

Pierre nodded, not raising his eyes. He did not know how to say goodbye - not because he did not love his father, but because every farewell seemed to him something terrible, final, like death. He climbed into the britzka, caught the skirt of his coat on the step, nearly fell, blushed, finally sat down, and stared at the floor. Yermolai clicked his whip, the horses set off, and the britzka, swaying, drove out of the yard.

The road was long - Yermolai was ordered to take Pierre only as far as Petersburg, and there change horses, another coachman, or perhaps a carriage. But for now they traveled together, and the old coachman from time to time turned to look at the master, who remained silent and gazed into the distance at fields, forests, and passing villages where women in white headscarves worked in the fields and men in bast shoes and ragged shirts trudged along the roadside, hats off when anyone resembling a gentleman passed.

Pierre thought. He thought a great deal about many things - more than a twelve-year-old boy sent abroad to study should. He thought about why people were not equal: some born rich, others poor; some able to read and write, others not; some command, others obey. And it seemed to him unjust, and that something should be done to remedy it, and that he, Pierre, when he grew up, would certainly do something to make all people happy. But how - he did not know. And from this ignorance came melancholy, and he began to look at the clouds racing across the high summer sky and think that the clouds had it good - they floated wherever the wind blew, no one asked them, no one commanded them.

"Why do people kill people?" he suddenly asked aloud, not turning to Yermolai but as if asking the sky itself.

Yermolai heard but did not understand. He thought the master was asking about something of his own, something a coachman was not meant to understand, and so he kept silent.

"Why do some command and others obey?" Pierre continued, his voice holding not childish resentment but an adult, bitter perplexity. "Je veux comprendre le monde. But the world does not want to be understood."

He fell silent, leaned back against the cushions, and closed his eyes. The britzka was warm, smelling of leather, horses, and some grass that must have stuck to the wheels. Pierre did not sleep - he thought, and his thoughts were heavy and unwieldy, like those stones he had once seen on a riverbank - big, gray, mossy, that no one would ever move from their place.

Yermolai, turning, saw that the master was not crying but also not smiling. His face was pale and strained, and his eyes, when he opened them, looked inward at his own thoughts, unknown to the coachman.

"Master," said Yermolai, wanting at least to break the silence that was becoming as heavy as before a storm, "don't be sad. The road is long, and in Paris, they say, it is merry. Theaters, balls, all sorts of establishments for the nobility. Your count will surely not stint you - he'll give you money. You'll go out, see people, show yourself."

Pierre heard, but did not understand at once. Then he turned to Yermolai, and something like surprise flashed in his eyes - that a coachman, a simple peasant, should think of theaters and balls.

"Merry?" he repeated. "Only recently they were executing people in the squares there. Every day. Executing them for thinking differently from those in power. C'est la révolution. That's not a time for balls."

Yermolai did not understand the French words. He did not know French at all, because in their village there were no tutors or boarding schools; they were taught only to pray to God and work in the fields. But he noticed that the master's face had grown even paler, and tears were welling in his eyes - not the bitter, loud tears of a punished child, but quiet, sparse tears that flow down the cheeks by themselves, and the one who weeps does not even notice them until he tastes salt on his lips.

"What is this?" thought Yermolai. "The boy is crying. About what? That people were killed in France? Or that he is being sent alone to a foreign land?" He felt sorry for the master - with that simple, artless pity that an old man feels for a young one going where he himself will never go.

He was silent for a moment, then flicked the horses - not hard, just for order - and said, looking straight ahead:

"Never mind, master. Everywhere there are people, everywhere there is death. In Paris there are people, in Moscow as well. And don't cry. You are young, you have your whole life ahead. Perhaps it's for the best that they're sending you abroad. You'll gain wisdom, and without wisdom you're as helpless as without hands."

Pierre wiped his tears with his sleeve - clumsily, like a child - and again stared at the sky. The sky was high, summer, that pure, deep blue that appears only in June, when the earth has already warmed and the rains have not yet come. Clouds ran across the sky, and Pierre watched them, thinking that clouds knew neither grief nor joy, nor fear nor hope - they simply floated, and it was all the same to them who looked at them and what thoughts came to the head of the one lying in the britzka driving to an unknown destination.

He closed his eyes and tried to imagine Paris - big, noisy, with tall houses and narrow streets where people had lately been executed. But Paris would not come to mind. Instead, Moscow came to mind - familiar, dear, with the smell of pies and the ringing of bells. And his father, the old count, who remained there on the porch, waving his hand until the britzka disappeared around the bend.

"Will I ever return?" thought Pierre. "Will I see him again?"

And there was no answer. Because no one knew the answer - not he, a twelve-year-old boy, not Yermolai, the old coachman, not Count Kirill Vladimirovich himself, who might die before his son reached the border.

Yermolai drove in silence, only occasionally shouting at the horses and clicking his whip. The road went uphill, then down; the britzka creaked, the wheels rattled over stones, the wind whistled in their ears. The coachman thought of his own - of home, of his wife, of his children left in the village, and that in autumn he would have to mow hay, and he had not yet laid in firewood for the winter. And he also thought how strangely life was arranged: here he was, a peasant, driving a master

on a long journey to a foreign land, and the master was crying because people killed people. Yet the master himself, if he wished, could also kill - not with his own hands, but with others', because he had money, and whoever has money has power. And no one would ask him: why did you kill? And why this was so - neither Yermolai, nor Pierre, nor the wisest man could explain.

"Ah, life," thought Yermolai and flicked the horses. "Life is like a road: you drive and you don't know what's around the bend. Maybe a village, maybe a pit, maybe bandits. But you must keep going."

He turned to look at the master. Pierre was asleep, curled up on the threadbare cushions, and his face in sleep was calm, childish, without the thoughtfulness and pain that tormented him by day. Yermolai looked at the sky - high, blue, with swiftly running clouds - crossed himself, and drove the horses faster, because there were still fifteen versts to the night's lodging, and in summer it grows late late, but still it grows late, and he had to make it before it got completely dark and before the master woke and began again to ask questions that had no answers.

The horses broke into a trot; the britzka clattered more quickly; dust rose from under the wheels and for a moment hid the sky, the fields, the forest, and then settled again. Yermolai looked ahead and thought that all of this - dust, road, master's tears - would all pass, only memory would remain, and even that would be erased, as the first rain would erase these wheel tracks on the dusty road. And life would go on, and no one would remember that an old coachman had driven a twelve-year-old boy on a long journey to a foreign land, and that the boy had cried over what could not be mended.

VII

Old cook Karp, who had served in the Bolkonsky kitchen since the time of the late prince, the present prince's father, and remembered days when in Bald Hills they had never heard of Prussian uniforms or parade drills, and everything was done in the old way, by grandfather's custom - stood by the huge stove, built of Dutch brick, stirring sterlet soup in a cast-iron pot - a soup the old prince loved above all other dishes and demanded at table every time he returned from his travels. Karp was fat, red-faced, with gray mustaches and small, quick eyes that seemed to see everything that went on in the kitchen but nothing beyond it. Yet on this day, Karp had to see and hear more than usual, because the kitchen door to the dining room was not fully closed, and through the crack came the voices of the old prince and the young master - Prince Andrei, who had spent the whole summer in Bald Hills, overseeing the estate, and who, as the household said, was very bored and kept looking at the road as if waiting for someone who never came.

The old prince had returned from Petersburg two days earlier - angry, tired, with a face that made even the servants, who had seen all sorts, try to avoid meeting his eye. He beat no one and shouted at no one, but walked about the house, tapping his cane, and spoke in a low voice, repeating one word that Karp could not make out but that he understood was not good. And today, after dinner, the old prince summoned his son to the dining room, and Karp, having put the soup on the fire and ordered his assistant to slice the bread, went himself to listen, because the curiosity he had had since childhood had not dimmed even in old age, though he knew the master would not have liked it.

In the dining room - a large, gloomy chamber with portraits of ancestors on the walls and a long oak table around which on formal days the whole family gathered - the old prince sat in his usual place, in an armchair with a high back. Although no longer in his traveling clothes but in a house coat, he still looked as if he had just come from a parade drill: his face was red, his eyes burned with that special, unkind fire that appeared whenever he spoke of politics. Andrei stood by the window, his hands clasped behind his back, looking not at his father but into the distance, at the garden where the oak was already turning yellow, and at the low autumn sky.

"Paul is mad," said the old prince, not raising his voice but so that every word rang like a taut string. "It is not the madness that doctors treat - no, it is the madness of power, the madness of a man who suddenly realizes that everything is permitted him. C'est un fou dangereux. He wants to clothe the entire army in Prussian uniforms. The entire army, do you hear? Our Suvorov wonder-heroes will walk about in tight jackets and high boots like some Frederickian toy soldiers. And Suvorov - in

disgrace. Suvorov, who made Russia famous throughout Europe - in exile. For what? For daring to have his own opinion and not fearing to say: 'Powder is not a cannon, a curl is not a cannon, a tail is not a saber, and I am no German.'

Andrei kept silent. He knew that when his father began to speak in this tone, it was better not to interrupt, because each word found its way without outside help. But still he could not help himself and, still looking out the window, said, trying to keep his voice calm though everything inside boiled:

"Mais c'est ridicule, mon père. How can one disgrace a man who has won so many battles? That is not just foolishness - that is..." He could not find the word.

"It is suicide," the old prince finished for him. "Russia's suicide. For without an army we are nothing. But he, you see, wants the army to be pretty. To march as in a parade. That all buttons shine. He has forgotten that a bullet is a fool but a bayonet is a fine fellow. He doesn't need soldiers - he needs puppets. And all of Russia, in his plan, is to become a puppet theater, with him as the sole puppeteer."

Karp, standing by the stove and listening, was amazed. He did not understand many words - what "disgrace" was, what a "jacket" was - but he understood the main thing: the master was cursing the tsar. And cursing him as if the tsar were not God's anointed but a common man doing foolish things. And Karp was also amazed that the master - the old prince - spoke words in Russian, but suddenly inserted something incomprehensible: "C'est un fou dangereux." And Andrei, the young master, immediately answered in the same incomprehensible tongue: "Mais c'est ridicule, mon père." And Karp thought they spoke in that incomprehensible language because they were afraid that someone would hear and report them to the tsar. But in the kitchen - no one would report them. Or were they afraid of the walls? But walls, as we know, have ears - Karp knew that for a fact.

"Be silent," the old prince suddenly said, striking the table with a ruler so that the decanter jumped - not loudly, but impressively. "Be silent and listen. La prudence est la mère de la sagesse. Remember that. With the tongue these days one must be more careful than ever. Say an extra word - and you are lost, and you will drag me down with you. And Marya? She is nineteen. Who will take care of her if we are both exiled to Siberia?"

Andrei turned from the window. His face was pale, his lips pressed together, and in his eyes - those same gray, deep eyes that his late mother had loved so much - stood such anguish that Karp, though not a sensitive man, felt sorry for the master.

"I understand, mon père," said Andrei. "I am silent. But for how long can one be silent? When will the time come when one can speak truth to one's face?"

"Never," said the old prince, with such certainty that Karp involuntarily crossed himself. "Truth is not spoken to one's face. Never. It is spoken behind the back, when the person can no longer answer, or written in diaries that are burned before death. The living keep silent. And you keep silent."

He fell silent, wearily leaned back in his chair, and closed his eyes. Karp understood that the conversation was over, put the soup on the table - in a silver tureen, steaming, with dill on top - and was about to leave when he suddenly heard the old prince say, addressing not Andrei but himself:

"Will we live to see better times? Or will we die without having seen them?"

Andrei said nothing. Karp went to the kitchen, sat on a bench, and remained silent for a long time. His assistant asked: "What is it, Uncle Karp?" But Karp only waved his hand. Then he stood up, went to the window overlooking the garden, and began to look at the oak - that huge, spreading oak that had grown by the house since his grandfather's time. A month ago the oak had been green and fresh, its branches stretching toward the sun. But now, in September, the leaves had begun to turn yellow, and red veins appeared here and there, and Karp thought that this oak was like human life: first it reaches for the light, grows, spreads; then old age comes, the leaves turn yellow, the branches bend, and everything moves toward its end. And no one can postpone that end - not the tsar, not the prince, not the richest and most powerful.

"And they keep quarreling," thought Karp. "The tsar at the courtiers, the courtiers at the tsar. But what is it to us peasants? One thing remains: to work, to pray, and to wait for everything somehow to sort itself out. Or not. As God wills."

He looked at the sky - low, autumn, entirely covered with gray clouds - and thought that until spring the sky would remain this way: gloomy, cold, cheerless. And life would be the same: gloomy, cold, and it was unknown when spring would come. Maybe soon, maybe never.

He sighed, crossed himself before the icon in the corner - an old, time-blackened one - and went to finish his kitchen duties, because the prince had ordered sterlet in sauce for supper, and the soup had already cooled, and it had to be reheated, and as Karp knew, if the soup were cold, it was better not to show his face to the old prince. But his thoughts were still there, in the dining room, where the master and his son had spoken of things about which a simple man had better not think, and if he did think, then only to himself, and not repeat to anyone, not even his wife, because the tongue has no bones, and what you say today may turn against you tomorrow.

Karp put the soup on the stove, covered it, and watched it boil and bubble, thinking that life was like this soup: it cooks and cooks, and then it is poured out, and no one remembers what it tasted like. And princes boiled, and tsars boiled, and everyone would boil and be poured out. But the earth would remain, the oak would remain, the sky would remain. And someone else would look at this sky and think their own thoughts - as bitter, as insoluble, as the old prince's today.

Meanwhile, Andrei, left alone in the dining room, went to the window. The oak stood like a yellow spot against the gray background of the sky; the wind stirred its branches; the leaves rustled, and it seemed the tree was whispering something - perhaps a complaint, perhaps a curse, or perhaps just an autumn song about how everything passes. Andrei looked at the oak and thought: "When will real life begin? Must I always keep silent, looking at this oak, waiting for my father to die? And then another tsar will come, and everything will repeat, and again I must be silent and again wait for someone to die?" And he wanted to shout at the top of his lungs for all to hear: "I do not want to be silent! I want to live!" - but he did not shout, because his father was right: now words could cost you your head.

He stood a while longer, then turned and left. His steps clattered on the floor, the door slammed, and the house grew quiet. The silence was so deep that Karp could hear the leaves rustling outside, dogs barking somewhere far away, and the ticking of the clock in the old prince's study. And it occurred to him that this silence was not an ordinary silence but the kind that comes before a storm. And the storm would come. Not today, then tomorrow. Not tomorrow, then the day after. But it would come.

Karp took the soup off the stove, set it on the table, and crossed himself. "Lord," he whispered, "have mercy on us sinners." And he did not know that with these words he was praying not only for himself but for the old prince, for Andrei, and for all Russia, which, like this oak, stood in the middle of a field, buffeted by winds, not knowing when spring would come.

VIII

In the middle of the large drawing room stood a Christmas tree. The tree had been brought from a forest near Moscow the day before, had stood all night in the entryway thawing, and this morning it was brought into the hall, and Agafya with two maids had been for four hours hanging toys on it: glass balls, gold fish, porcelain angels, gingerbread men she had baked herself in the kitchen yesterday, and paper chains the children had glued. It smelled of pine needles, wax, and something sweet and festive; logs crackled in the stoves; frost painted silver patterns on the windows; and everything in the house was as it was every year, and every year everything repeated, but each time seemed new and joyful.

Agafya, adjusting the star that had slipped askew and which she had already tied to the top of the tree three times, sighed and thought: "So Christmas time has come. And it seems only yesterday it was summer, only yesterday we were mowing hay, and now here is frost, and the tree, and the children running and laughing, and no one thinks that someday it will all end. And thank God they

don't think. Laughter is for children, sighing for old people." She was about to tie the star a fourth time when suddenly the drawing-room door burst open and Natasha ran in - five years old, rosy-cheeked, in her father's dressing gown belted with a sash, and a colorful kerchief on her head tied so that it stuck up like a turban in Turkish pictures Agafya had seen in the master's books. The dressing gown trailed on the floor; the kerchief slipped over her eyes; but Natasha was perfectly happy and, stopping in the middle of the room, hands on hips, shouted to the whole drawing room:

"And I am a sultana! Look, everyone! I am the most important sultana in the world! I am going to war! Regardez, je vais à la guerre!" she cried in French, because the governess taught her and Vera French, and Natasha, though she did not understand half of it, loved to insert French words where they were not needed at all - simply because it seemed important and grown-up.

Nikolai, an eleven-year-old boy, leggy, with sideburns already sprouting, which he plucked himself at night sitting before a candle, sat in an armchair, lounging like a nobleman, and looked at his sister mockingly. He was dressed as a page - a costume made for Christmas - and felt terribly grown-up and terribly important, because he was already eleven and soon would be sent to military school to train as a real officer.

"A sultana without a saber," he said with a smirk, not even turning his head. "What kind of sultan is that without a saber? Does a real sultana walk about with bare hands? Any bandit could defeat her."

Natasha frowned. She did not fully understand the word "sultana," but she understood that her brother was laughing at her, and that she could not stand more than anything in the world - to be laughed at, not taken seriously, thought little and ignorant.

"Well, here's a saber!" she cried. "I'll show you right now!"

And without further thought, she took off one of her slippers (the left one), swung, and threw it at her brother. The slipper flew past, hit the wall, knocked a silver angel off the tree, and it, with a tinkle, rolled under the table. Agafya, standing on a stool, nearly fell, grabbed the tree, and three more toys - a glass ball, a gold fish, and a gingerbread man - fell and broke. The ball burst with a thin, plaintive tinkle; the fish broke in half; the gingerbread man, which Agafya had so carefully baked and glazed, fell to the floor and broke into three pieces.

"Oh, good heavens!" cried Agafya, jumping off the stool. "What's going on? A quarter of the work on the floor - all to ruin! Young lady, Natalya Ilyinichna, why throw your slipper? Is that allowed? The count will scold you, you'll see!"

Natasha stood on one foot, holding the slipper she had taken off in her hand, having lost the other somewhere along the way, and her face was that of one surprised by her own actions. At first she wanted to cry - from hurt, from her brother's laughter, from her bare foot on the cold floor - but then she looked at the broken toys, at the shards of the glass ball scattered across the parquet, and suddenly burst out laughing - loudly, ringingly, so that even Agafya smiled through her scolding.

"Oh, how fun!" cried Natasha. "Look, look, the fish is in two pieces! Now its tail is separate and its head separate. And the gingerbread boy is scattered! Let's eat him! He's broken anyway, he'll be no use on the tree."

She ran to the gingerbread man, grabbed a piece, and stuffed it in her mouth. But the gingerbread was old and stale, and Natasha, chewing, made a face and spat it into her hand.

"Tasteless," she said. "Why hang such things on the tree, Agafya? You should have baked soft ones."

Agafya only waved her hand and began to pick up the pieces.

At that moment, Count Ilya Andreyevich appeared in the doorway - flushed, with shining eyes, in an unbuttoned coat, because he had just returned from a walk and had not yet changed. He saw the broken toys, Natasha on one foot, Nikolai trying to assume an innocent air but failing, and guessed that something had happened. But instead of getting angry, he suddenly smiled that broad, kind smile that made him look like a big, good-natured bear, and said, spreading his hands:

"Quelle joie, mes enfants! Now this is Christmas time! This is fun! In my day, we did worse. Once at Christmas time I threw a candlestick at a sugarloaf - and the sugar flew everywhere like snow! And my grandmother, Princess Sofya Dmitrievna, was angry, but then she laughed herself."

Agafya did not understand the count's French words, because she had not been taught French, and the only French word she knew was "merci," which she pronounced as "mersey" and used only when one of the masters gave her something on a holiday. But she understood from the count's face that he was not angry, and so she smiled - that relieved, elderly smile that comes when an expected punishment suddenly passes by.

"Don't be angry, Your Excellency," she said. "I'll tidy it up now. And children - they are always children. They'll grow up and be wiser."

Count Rostov only waved his hand and went to change, saying as he left: "And by supper I want the tree like new, Agafya! And straighten that star on top - it's slipped sideways again."

Agafya sighed, took the stool, tied the star for the fourth time - now, she hoped, for good - and was about to start hanging new toys to replace the broken ones when she heard a rustle behind her. She turned and saw that Natasha, having forgotten her quarrel with her brother and the broken fish, had climbed onto the table, from the table onto the windowsill, and from the windowsill was reaching for the tree, trying to reach the very star Agafya had just tied.

"Young lady!" cried Agafya. "You'll fall!"

But Natasha no longer heard. She grabbed a branch; the branch cracked; the tree tilted; and Natasha, losing her balance, fell - straight into an imaginary snowdrift, which, however, did not exist, because only parquet lay on the floor - hard and cold, and it would hurt to fall on it. But by a miracle she did not fall on the parquet but into a pile of soft cushions that Agafya had piled in the corner that evening to put on the sofas. The cushions softened the fall, and Natasha, emerging from them covered in feathers and lace, laughed again - so loudly and infectiously that Nikolai, who had almost taken offense at her over the slipper, could not help himself and laughed too.

"Look," he said, pointing at her, "now you're not a sultana, you're a broody hen! All covered in feathers!"

"Am not!" cried Natasha, climbing out of the cushions. "I am a star!" And she snatched a paper star from a branch - the one Agafya had hung last - and fixed it to her turban. "See? Now I am the most important star on the tree!"

Nikolai laughed even louder. Agafya stood, watching this commotion, and did not know whether to cry or laugh with them. A branch of the tree had broken; toys lay on the floor; the star - the main one, the glass one - was scratched, because Natasha, grabbing the tree, had knocked it off, and now it lay on the carpet, one of its sharp points broken off and rolled under the sofa. But Agafya was somehow not angry. She suddenly thought that all of this - the tree, the toys, the stars, the children's laughter, the quarrels and reconciliations - all of this was life, and that without it life would be empty and boring, and that the children would grow up, and have their own children, who would also break toys and quarrel and make up and hang on the tree, because it could not be otherwise. That was how the world was arranged. That was how it had been.

She went to Natasha, picked her up (the girl was light as a feather), removed the remains of the paper star from her head, kissed her forehead, and said:

"Ah, little mischief-maker. What are you doing? The countess will scold. Better go to the nursery and change. Guests will come this evening; you must be pretty."

"I am pretty anyway," said Natasha, but obediently climbed out of the cushions, picked up her lost slipper, and, limping, ran to the nursery, leaving a trail of feathers and pine needles.

Agafya watched her go, crossed herself - broadly, in the old fashion - and began to tidy up. She swept up the shards, gathered the fallen toys, straightened the broken branch, hung new balls in place of the broken ones. Evening was falling; outside, the frosty air was turning blue; the first stars had lit in the gray, pre-evening sky - small, frequent, prickly, like the shards she was now sweeping into

the dustpan. Agafya paused for a moment, looked out the window at those stars - the very stars that had shone for her grandmother, for her mother, and would shine when neither she, nor the count, nor little Natasha, who had just been playing the star, remained in the world - and sighed. "Everything passes," she thought. "The tree stood, the toys broke, the children grew, the old aged. But the stars are still the same. And the sky, it seems, does not care who lives below and what toys they break."

She finished tidying, wiped her hands on her apron, and went to the window. The sky was starry, frosty, as it should be in December, when God lights the stars early and extinguishes them late, and people, looking at them, think of eternity, but eternity remains eternal, and people remain people: quarreling, making up, breaking dishes, while old housekeepers gather the pieces and sigh. Agafya smiled at her own thoughts, crossed herself once more, and went to the kitchen to set the samovar for tea, because guests would soon arrive, and guests are not received without tea; the samovar must boil, the pies must be hot, and everything must be as it should, because order is order, and without it one cannot manage.

And as she was leaving the drawing room, she heard from above, from the nursery, the sound of laughter - Natasha, probably, making peace with Nikolai, and the two of them inventing something together, their voices so merry, so carefree, that Agafya involuntarily smiled, shook her head, and went her way, softly humming an old Christmas song her mother had sung - the words long forgotten, but the melody remained, and lived in her, and warmed her soul, as fire in the stove warms a winter evening.

X

The day was August, hot, stuffy, with that heavy, leaden silence that comes before a thunderstorm. In the count's house it was quiet - the master had not left his study for three days and received no one; the servants walked on tiptoe, afraid to disturb. Only in the morning had the post arrived from abroad, and the count, having received a letter, sat over it for a long time, then called his steward and said: "Pierre writes. Alive, healthy. Asks permission to return. But I think - let him study another year. France, they say, is calming down. The Terror is over, the Jacobins have been dispersed. Now consuls rule, and it seems quieter."

The steward, an old German, bowed and left. And rumors went through the house that the young master Pierre, now thirteen, was writing terrible letters from Paris, and that France, they said, was no longer what it had been, and that a new ruler there, some Bonaparte, had pacified everyone and was now gathering an army, and it was unknown against whom. Semyon, cleaning harness, listened with half an ear and thought his own thoughts. He thought about how the count was old and ill, and the heir was a boy abroad, and it was unknown whether he, Semyon, would have to drive with this boy or would remain with the old master until his death. He was not afraid of death - he had seen old masters die, and he knew that after death one still had to live and serve the new master. But he did not like the thought that the new master would be that fat, clumsy boy who once, before his departure, had run around the yard and kept asking the servants why the sky was blue and why people could not fly.

"He's strange," said Semyon aloud, addressing no one. "And his eyes are not like everyone else's. He looks and seems to see something we don't see."

"And what," asked the cook, fat Marfa, who had just milked the cow, "will he come back, they say? He'll need watching over. He might do foolish things."

"He won't," answered Semyon. "He's quiet. Only very thoughtful. And thoughtful people rarely do foolish things. They suffer more inwardly."

The servants' hall laughed. Semyon took offense - not at the laughter, but at not being understood. He was about to say something more, but at that moment the count's valet, Grigory, came out of the house and said the count wanted the carriage harnessed - to go to town, to Prince Kuragin's. Semyon stood up, put on his sheepskin coat, and went to the stable to harness.

The count drove alone; Semyon, sitting on the box, heard the old master sigh heavily as he settled onto the cushions and say to himself in French: "Que faire, mon Dieu? Il est encore si jeune."

Semyon did not understand whom the count meant, but guessed Pierre. He was afraid, probably, that the boy would be lost in a foreign land. Or afraid that he himself would not live to see his return. So they drove in silence, only the wheels clattering on the cobblestones, while over Moscow a thunderstorm gathered, stuffy and low, pressing on the chest.

At Prince Vasily's house, the count stayed only a short while - came out pale, angry, slammed the carriage door, and ordered them to drive back. Semyon turned and saw from a second-story window Princess Hélène looking out - slender, with marble shoulders - smiling. But her smile was somehow empty, unreal, and Semyon felt uneasy. He started the horses, and the carriage rolled back.

That same evening, in Count Bezukhov's house, they learned news that spread all over Moscow: Emperor Paul had signed a decree forbidding young people from going abroad to study without special permission. Now Pierre, like many Russian nobles, could not return because he had been sent before the decree, but also could not stay - because the decree demanded everyone's return. The count sat in his study, rereading his son's letter, thinking. And Semyon, standing by the stable, looked at the sky. The thunderstorm had passed by, only rustled and gone, but the air became cleaner, and the first stars lit in the black, high sky.

"What will be, will be," thought Semyon. "And the count will probably obtain permission. He has influence, money. And Pierre will come - and we'll go on living. There's room for everyone."

He crossed himself, entered the stable, patted the horses, gave them oats, and lay down to sleep in the hayloft, listening to the harmonica playing beyond the wall in the servants' hall and someone singing an old, long song about a brave young man riding into an open field where no one awaits him. And it seemed to Semyon that this song was about everyone - about him, about the old count, about little Pierre studying in France, not knowing if he would ever return home. And over Moscow the sky was high and starry, and the wind blew from the north, and somewhere in the distance, beyond the city, began those very fields over which couriers galloped with the emperor's decrees.

XI

Count Kirill Vladimirovich, dressed in a spacious dressing gown, sat in his favorite Voltaire armchair by the window, rereading a letter that had come that morning from Paris. The letter was from Pierre - the thirteen-year-old boy the count had sent to France two years ago to study and who now, apparently, did not intend to return, because, as he wrote, his studies were absorbing and Paris the most beautiful city in the world. The count read, smiled, sometimes frowned and twitched his eyebrows - those thick, gray eyebrows that made his face resemble that of an old, life-wise lion.

"What does he write?" asked Grigory, handing him a cup.

"He writes," answered the count without raising his eyes, "that Bonaparte, that Corsican, they say, will soon chase everyone away and make himself consul. Already everyone speaks of him as the master of France. *C'est un homme extraordinaire*, he writes. The boy, but he's at it - judging politics."

Grigory said nothing, for he understood nothing of politics and had seen Bonaparte only in pictures - small, angry, with a hand tucked into his coat. But he noticed that the count was not angry with Pierre, but rather proud that his son was interested in such things.

"And then, Your Excellency," Grigory asked cautiously, "will he return soon? Or will he stay on in France?"

"He'll stay," said the count, putting aside the letter. "Let him study. Things are unsettled now at home. The sovereign, they say, is preparing new decrees, and who knows what will happen with Europe. Better he stay in France than be here, under the hand of an emperor who can exile you for an extra word. *Ici, c'est dangereux*."

Grigory sighed, straightened the napkin, and walked to the window. The sky was autumn, low, gray, with small, quickly moving clouds that seemed to Grigory like couriers shuttling between Moscow and Petersburg with tsarist decrees. A fine, frequent rain tapped on the glass - the kind that comes in September, when summer is over but winter has not yet begun, and everything around seems wet, sticky, unpleasant. And the people were the same - wet, sticky, unpleasant. Yesterday,

for example, Prince Vasily Kuragin had come - ostensibly to visit the ailing count (though the count was not ill, merely tired and not coming to dinner) - but actually, as Grigory understood, to find out whether a new will had been written, and whether the estate had been left to the wrong person. Prince Vasily sat in an armchair, drank tea, spoke of trifles, but his eyes darted and he kept glancing at the writing desk where papers lay in a leather portfolio.

"A fox," Grigory thought then. "He came to sniff what lay where." And now, remembering it, he thought: "He'll come again. He'll come, certainly. As long as the count lives, he won't rest."

The count finished his chocolate, set aside his cup, and said:

"Grigory, write an answer. Say: live, study, don't be bored. And I will send him as much money as he asks. Let him not want."

Grigory went to the desk, took a pen, dipped it in ink, and began to write at dictation. The count dictated slowly, deliberately, sometimes pausing, his voice tired but firm.

"Mon cher fils, I received your letter and was glad that you are healthy and cheerful. As for Bonaparte - do not judge what you do not know. Time will show whether he is a genius or a brigand. Study, listen to your professors, do not be lazy. And do not hurry to return. In Russia things are no better than in France, perhaps worse..."

He paused, rubbed his forehead, and added:

"Don't write 'worse.' Delete it. Write: 'Be careful, take care of yourself. Your loving father.'"

Grigory wrote, folded the sheet, sealed it with wax, and pressed it with a stamp bearing the count's coat of arms. The count took the letter, held it to the candle for the wax to harden, and said:

"Send it with a courier tomorrow. Have it fly."

Then he leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and after a silence, said as if to himself:

"If I die, he will be alone. Prince Vasily will eat him alive. And Princess Drubetskaya too. I must do something. I must write a will... but when? There's never time."

Grigory stood and looked at the count. He felt pity for the old man - that quiet, silent pity that servants feel for old, lonely masters who have no one but their servants. The count had relatives - Prince Vasily, Princess Drubetskaya, some cousins and nephews - but they all wanted one thing: his money. And his son, the only one who loved him not for his money, was far away in France, and it was unknown when he would return.

"Your Excellency," said Grigory, hesitating, "perhaps write to Pierre to come? After all, one's own flesh and blood."

The count opened his eyes, looked at Grigory with a long, heavy look, and answered:

"No. Let him study. I shall live yet. I am tenacious."

He smirked - that crooked, joyless smirk people give when they know their tenacity is running out but do not want to show it. Grigory bowed and went out into the corridor.

In the corridor it was dark; it smelled of old wood and wax. Grigory passed the room where Pierre had once lived - a small room with a window onto the yard - and stopped. The room was empty; furniture stood covered with sheets; on the wall hung a portrait of the late Countess Bezukhova, young, beautiful, with that special, sad smile that appears on women who know they will die young. Grigory crossed himself, remembered how little Pierre had run about this room, asking: "Grigory, why is the sky so high? Why don't the stars fall?" And how Grigory had not known what to answer, and answered: "God made it so, master." And Pierre had not believed, said God had nothing to do with it, that everything had an explanation, one only had to seek. And Grigory had thought then: "A strange boy. Big, clever eyes. Maybe he will indeed find the answer."

Now Pierre was thirteen, lived in Paris, studied in a boarding school, wrote his father letters about Bonaparte and about how the world was arranged. And Grigory, looking at his mother's portrait, thought: "If only he would grow up soon and return. Or the old count will die any day, and the boy will be left alone, surrounded by wolves. Prince Vasily is already sharpening his teeth. And Princess

Drubetskaya is not far behind. She came again yesterday - brought flowers, but she kept looking at the portfolio. Foxes, I declare."

He went downstairs to the kitchen, ordered dinner to be served, and remained standing by the window, looking out at the autumn street. The rain had stopped, but the sky remained low and gray; rare passersby walked with collars turned up, hiding their faces. Someone among the servants said that in Petersburg there were more arrests, that the sovereign was displeased, that everyone was afraid - nobles, merchants, common people. Grigory listened and thought: "Fear everywhere. Everywhere dread. And the boy in France is probably better off. There at least you know what to fear. But here - unknown. Maybe tomorrow a decree, the day after exile. And no one knows for what."

He sat on a bench, took up an old, well-read book - a book of saints' lives, which he liked to read in his spare time - but did not read, because his thoughts were elsewhere. He thought about how life goes on, and no one knows where it leads. The count is rich and noble, but lies in his chair, afraid that after his death his son will be cheated. Prince Vasily is clever and cunning, but also afraid - afraid he will not get what he hoped for. And he, Grigory, a little man, a servant, is also afraid, because if the count dies, the new master may turn him out in his old age, and he will wander the world. Everyone is afraid. Only the sky - high, indifferent - fears nothing and looks on everyone alike: on the count, on the prince, on the servant.

He crossed himself, rose, and went to set the table, because the count should have dinner, and dinner must not grow cold, and order must be kept - as in life and as in death, because order is order, and without it one cannot manage.

Outside dusk was falling; candles were lit in the house; shadows danced on the walls, and it seemed that in this dance of shadows there was something that could not be understood with the mind, only felt - felt that everything was going as it must, and no one could stop this movement, not the tsar, not a minister, not the richest man in Russia.

XII

The day was December, frosty, sunny, with that special, festive sparkle that comes before Christmas, when snow creaks underfoot, hoarfrost shimmers on the branches, and it seems the whole world has frozen in anticipation of something joyful and bright. At the Rostovs' house guests had come today - not many, about ten people - and all sat in the drawing room, drinking tea with jam and listening to little Natasha sing French romances before them, which her governess had taught her.

Efim did not see this, but heard - through the double windows came a faint, pure voice, so thin and tender that even the old coachman, who understood not a word of French, felt a pang in his heart. The voice sang of something sad, something Efim could not put into words but understood with his whole being, because in that voice was that genuine, unaffected purity that exists only in children - and that passes as they grow up. In the drawing room, as the footmen later told, Countess Rostova wiped tears with a handkerchief; the count himself, red as a lobster, sat with a glass in his hand and, sobbing, repeated: "Ah, what a girl! Ah, Lord!"; and one guest, an elderly princess, very important and perfumed, bending to the countess's ear, said: "Elle a du talent, ma chère. She has real talent; take care of her."

The count, hearing this, laughed through his tears and shouted something loud and cheerful, making everyone laugh; and Natasha, finishing her song, made a curtsy - clumsy, funny, because she still did not know how to bow properly - and ran to her mother, buried her face in her knees, and asked: "Mama, did I sing well? Mama, truly well?" The countess stroked her hair and said: "Well, my joy, very well."

But Natasha could not stay still. She was six years old, and after long sitting in the stuffy drawing room, after singing and applause, she wanted to go outside - into the frost, into the snow, where she could run, shout, roll in a snowdrift, and not think about how to bow and speak French. She slipped out of the room unnoticed, ran down the stairs, threw a little fur coat over her shoulders - not buttoned, carelessly - and ran out onto the porch.

Efim, seeing the young lady run out, was surprised.

"Young lady!" he said. "It's cold! Why no hat? You'll catch cold, the count will scold you."

"I'm not afraid!" cried Natasha, jumping in the frost. "Efim, oh Efim, will you take me to Moscow tomorrow? We're going to our aunt, I heard. Will you take me?"

"I'll take you, young lady," answered Efim, smiling into his mustache. "Wherever you order, there I'll take you. Even to the end of the world."

Natasha laughed, ran to the porch railing, wrapped her arms around it, and began to look at the sky. The sky was low, winter, that grayish-blue color that comes in December, when the day is short and the frost strong, and stars are already beginning to light in the east, though the sun has not yet set. Natasha looked at this sky, at the clouds, at the rare, twinkling stars, and sighed - not because she was sad, no, she was merry, but in that sigh there was something that made Efim suddenly think: "The girl is growing. Still small, but already sighing like a grown-up. She must have her own sorrow, even if she doesn't say what." He remembered his own daughter, who died in infancy, and for a moment felt pain, but the pain passed at once, because life is life, and there is no time to grieve the past when you have work to do.

"Efim," Natasha suddenly said without turning, "do stars fall? Kolya told me they fall. But I don't believe it. Stars are God's little eyes, they don't fall."

"Your brother, Nikolai Ilyich, was surely joking," answered Efim. "Stars don't fall. They stand in the sky like candles in church. And what falls are shooting stars; in the folk they call them falling stars. But those aren't stars, just flyers."

"How do you know?" asked Natasha, turning her rosy, frost-covered face to him.

"Because I'm old," said Efim. "I know everything."

Natasha laughed, pushed off from the railing, ran across the porch, grabbing the posts, then stopped, looked at the sky once more, and said:

"And when I grow up, I will sing. Right on a stage. So that everyone weeps. And you, Efim, will weep too."

"I will, young lady," said Efim. "Where can I go?"

At that moment the door opened, and Nikolai came onto the porch - twelve years old, already tall, with freckles and that mischievous, boyish expression that later, when he became an officer, would turn into dash, but for now only promised future bravado. He was without a hat, in a jacket thrown over his shoulders, and seeing Natasha, he shouted:

"So there you are! I've been looking for you! Mama told you to come inside - you'll catch cold, silly. And Efim, what are you staring at? Take her inside!"

"You're the silly one!" Natasha shouted back, stuck out her tongue at her brother, and ran up the stairs, but halfway she stopped, turned, stuck out her tongue again, and disappeared behind the door.

Nikolai smirked, shook his head, and, already leaving, said to Efim:

"Don't listen to her. She's little and foolish. And tomorrow we're going to Moscow. Harness the horses early."

"At your service," said Efim, adjusted his cap, and remained alone.

He sat on the box, gazing at the darkening sky where the first stars had already lit - large, bright, such as you don't see in summer - and thought. He thought about how strangely life was arranged. Children grew: today they were little, running about, playing pranks; tomorrow - look - they were adults, each with their own path. Natasha - she would probably become a singer, as she said. Or not a singer, but something else, but anyway she would be happy or unhappy - as God willed. And he, Efim, would go on sitting on the box and driving them as long as his legs carried him. And that was good. Because order must be. Without order, one cannot manage.

In the house, music began to play - someone sat at the harpsichord, and they sang in chorus, voices - adult, child, high and low - all blending into one, into that which is called a "family celebration," and Efim, listening, suddenly felt good. Cold, but good. Because he was part of this

house, this life, this celebration. And though he did not sit at the table, but sat on the box, he was still here, still one of them. And that little girl who had just looked at the sky and sighed like an adult - she too was part of his life. And he would remember her like this - little, rosy, with disheveled hair - and when she grew up, he would remember and perhaps weep.

Natasha, meanwhile, returned to the drawing room, ran to her father, climbed onto his lap, and, pressing close to his warm belly, whispered:

"Papa, when I grow up, I will sing on stage. Will you come and listen?"

"I will," said the count, stroking her head. "And I'll sit in the front row. And I'll weep."

"And Efim will come too," said Natasha. "I told him. He said he would."

"And Efim will come," smiled the count. "We'll all come."

And Natasha, comforted, closed her eyes and fell asleep right in her father's arms, because the day had been long, and she was tired - the singing, the running in the frost, the tears - all mixed in her child's head into one big, sweet, Christmas dream, in which she was a princess, and sang, and everyone wept, and it was warm, and bright, and good.

Efim, hearing the music die down and the voices fall silent, understood that the guests were leaving. He climbed down from the box, adjusted the harness, went to the horses, patted their muzzles, gave each a piece of bread he had saved earlier. The horses snorted, shook their manes; steam poured from their nostrils; their eyes gleamed in the dark, and Efim thought that those eyes were like stars in the sky: they too shone, they too lived their own special life, which people did not understand.

He sat back down, lit his pipe - old, smoke-blackened, which he had smoked since the late count's father's time - and waited to be called. And he thought about how life was like a road: you go and go, but where you'll arrive - unknown. Today - this morning he did not know that in the evening he would listen to a little young lady's singing and look at the stars. And he still did not know what tomorrow would bring. But whatever would come - would come. And one must be ready. For anything.

And the stars in the sky lit up, more and more; the frost strengthened; snow creaked under someone's steps; candles burned in the Rostov house; and life continued - that same incomprehensible life that cannot be stopped or turned back, only traveled along, as along this snow-covered road, peering into the darkness and hoping that ahead - there is light.

Part Two

I

Old doorman Zakhar Ivanov, who had served at the Maltese Chapel of Mikhailovsky Castle since the day it was consecrated, and in his time had seen generals, bishops, and the emperor himself, who, it was said, now slept in this castle surrounded by sentries and cannons - stood by the heavy oak doors upholstered in black leather and opened them whenever another carriage arrived. The day was January, frosty, windy, with that Petersburg wind that roamed the Neva and howled in the chimneys of Mikhailovsky Castle so plaintively and woefully that even the old doorman, used to everything, sometimes started and crossed himself. There were no people in the street - only occasional carriages passed, sentries walked the parade ground marking time, flocks of jackdaws circled over the low, leaden sky, and it seemed that this sky pressed down on the castle, on the city, on all of Russia, and this weight could not be thrown off by any force.

Today something important was to happen in the chapel - Zakhar knew this by the special bustle that occurs in a palace when the sovereign is preparing for a celebration. In the morning came chamberlains, then knights of the Maltese cross in white cloaks with eight-pointed stars, then Prince Vasily Kuragin himself, who, it was said, was the chief organizer. Zakhar opened doors, bowed, let them in, and when no one was there, he furtively opened the door and looked into the chapel. The chapel was small but richly decorated: on the walls hung Maltese banners; candles burned on the

altar; it smelled of incense and wax. In the middle of the chapel, on a dais, stood a lectern, before which Emperor Paul was to kneel to accept the title of Grand Master of the Order of Malta.

Zakhar did not understand this enterprise - what knights, what order, why a Russian tsar, an Orthodox sovereign, should put on Catholic crosses and call himself a master? But he was a bonded man and dared not reason. However, a young subdeacon standing beside him, with lively eyes named Fedot, whispered in his ear:

"What is all this for, Uncle Zakhar? Knights, pah. Catholicism, crosses. Our sovereign is Orthodox, and yet he climbs to be a master. This is not good."

Zakhar only sighed, crossed himself furtively, and answered:

"Be quiet, Fedot. It is not our business. What the sovereign commands, that you do. Reasoning will only land you in trouble."

But he thought to himself: "Indeed - knights. It's laughable. Yet the sovereign is serious. And everyone around him is serious. And Prince Vasily bows, and the nobles stand at attention. And the sky above us is leaden, heavy. All this bodes no good. C'est le début de la fin."

Inside the chapel, all who were supposed to attend had gathered. Emperor Paul, pale, with burning, mad eyes, in a white Maltese cloak embroidered with golden lilies, and a crown on his head - the same crown that was too large and constantly slipped askew - stood before the lectern accepting the regalia. Prince Vasily Kuragin, in a white cloak over his uniform, with a particularly solemn face, presented on a velvet cushion the Maltese cross - eight-pointed, silver, with a white eagle - and, bending to the sovereign's ear, said:

"L'Empereur a pris la croix, c'est un grand honneur pour la Russie."

Paul took the cross, with trembling hands pressed it to his lips, then to his heart, and froze. In the chapel it became so quiet that one could hear the crackle of candles and the wind howling outside. Everyone waited - what would he say, what would he do? But the emperor was silent, only his eyes burned ever brighter, with that unkind, unearthly fire that made even the bravest lower their eyes.

In the crowd of dignitaries, by a column, stood two men: Count Rostopchin, the same one who had been powerful under Catherine, and now, though still at court, was said to be in disgrace - and Bilibin, a young diplomat, clever, mocking, with perpetually narrowed eyes. Rostopchin, looking at the emperor, at his white cloak and burning eyes, shook his head and said to Bilibin, trying to ensure no one else heard:

"What is this? What is he doing? Knights, crosses - and all in earnest?"

Bilibin smirked - that thin, caustic smirk he wore when speaking of the foolishness of the powerful - and answered:

"C'est une folie, mais une folie dangereuse."

Rostopchin wanted to answer, but at that moment Paul turned, and his gaze fell on them - and both, the count and the diplomat, lowered their eyes and put on such faces as if they had said nothing, only prayed and rejoiced in the great event.

In another corner of the chapel, by the wall where the Maltese banner hung, stood Pierre Bezukhov - the same one now called count, though he was only fifteen, and who, having returned from abroad only a month ago, had already managed to amaze Petersburg society with his strange speeches and even stranger behavior. Pierre was fat, clumsy, in a black coat too short for him, and looked at the ceremony with eyes that held not reverence but rather bewilderment mixed with curiosity. He did not understand why all this was needed - crosses, cloaks, Maltese eagles. It all seemed to him a strange, incomprehensible theater, where the emperor played the lead role and everyone else was an extra. And he, Pierre, was also an extra, though no one had asked him.

He sighed - so heavily, so deeply, that the dignitary standing beside him looked at him with bewilderment - then took a notebook from his pocket and wrote something in pencil. What exactly, Zakhar could not make out, but thought: "An intelligent master, evidently. He writes things down so as not to forget. Or maybe his thoughts, which he will tell no one." Pierre finished writing, put away

the notebook, and again began to look at the emperor, who still stood before the lectern, motionless, seeming to have forgotten everyone and seeing something no one else could see.

At last the ceremony ended. The emperor gave a sign, and everyone began to disperse - not noisily, not merrily, as after a celebration, but quietly, fearfully, looking around. Paul left the chapel with quick, nervous steps, looking at no one, and Zakhar, opening the door for him, noticed that the sovereign's face was pale and earthy, his eyes burning with the same unhealthy, mad fire. "Lord, save and have mercy," thought Zakhar and crossed himself.

When everyone had left, Zakhar closed the heavy oak doors, bolted them, and went out onto the porch. The courtyard was empty; only sentries walked the parade ground, and the wind drove fine, prickly blowing snow across the snow. The sky over Petersburg was low, leaden, with rare flocks of jackdaws circling the castle as if sensing something evil. Zakhar stood, looked at the spire of the Peter and Paul Fortress, where the evening lights had just been lit, and thought: "This bodes no good. Knights, masters - all of this is not ours, foreign. And the sovereign is not himself. And people are afraid. And the sky is so heavy. Here it is, the beginning of the end." He crossed himself once more, turned, and went to his little room to stoke the stove and set the samovar, because he could not bear standing in the cold, and his old bones ached.

Walking down the corridor, he thought about what he had seen. He thought about Pierre - the young count who looked at the ceremony as if he saw something funny, though nothing had been funny. He thought about Prince Vasily, who spoke beautiful words but with emptiness in his eyes. He thought about Rostopchin and Bilibin, who whispered and smirked, though furtively, looking around. And he thought about the sovereign - about his pale face and burning eyes, and about how all this could not end well, because the madness of power is the most terrible illness, and there is no cure for it.

He entered his little room, closed the door, lit a candle, and sat for a long time by the stove, gazing at the fire. The fire crackled, the logs burned, and in their living, bright light there was something soothing, something that said: "Never mind, it will all grind through - flour will come. And this too will pass. And this too will end." But Zakhar knew that not everything passes and not everything ends. Sometimes it remains - in memory, in the soul, in those very stars in the sky that see everything and remember everything.

He crossed himself before the icon of the Savior hanging in the corner and whispered:

"Lord, have mercy on us sinners. Lord, save and preserve."

And fell asleep, sitting on a stool, to the steady, soothing tick of the old clock's pendulum, which marked time - that same incomprehensible time that leads a man through life, turning neither left nor right and asking no permission.

II

Valet Filipp, who had served Prince Andrei Bolkonsky for three years and knew all his habits - when to serve coffee, when to wake him for matins, when not to enter without knocking, and when not to appear at all - stood in the middle of the small entrance hall of the prince's Petersburg apartment on Galernaya Street, brushing his uniform. The uniform was new, made according to the latest Prussian pattern - the very kind all officers now wore, though many, as Filipp knew from servants' talk, secretly hated it for its discomfort and because in it you could not take a deep breath. Prince Andrei was going to a ball at Count Sheremetev's, one of those nobles who, despite disgraces and new decrees, still kept open house and received the cream of Petersburg society.

Filipp diligently brushed the sleeves, shaking off invisible dust, and, glancing at his master, who stood before the mirror tying his cravat, noticed that the prince's face today was not as usual - not gloomy and concentrated, but somehow at a loss, almost boyish. Prince Andrei was twenty-two, but he had always seemed older - both because of his seriousness and because of that special, restrained weariness that had lain on his face since he returned from the army. Today, however, in his gray, deep eyes flitted something new - impatience, expectation, almost excitement, which Filipp had never observed in him.

"Your Excellency," said Filipp, setting aside the brush and wiping his hands on a cloth, "allow me to note, your cravat has slipped to the side. Put it on as I taught you: first the knot, then the ends down... Like this."

Prince Andrei, who was standing before the mirror agonizingly trying to tie his cravat so that it looked both handsome and careless yet strict, waved his hand in annoyance and said:

"Oui, oui. In a minute. Leave me alone, Filipp."

Filipp stepped back but continued to observe. His master was not himself today. He kept adjusting his hair, pulling down his coat, going to the window and looking at the spring street, where icicles dripped from roofs and the last snow melted, puddles visible, and the sky beyond the window was no longer winter-leaden but March, gray-blue, with swift, ragged clouds. And Filipp, who knew his master inside out, grew curious: what had happened? Why all this fuss? Could he be in love? Or did he sense something momentous? Or was it simply spring - a time when young people want to go to balls, dance, and talk to ladies?

At last Prince Andrei mastered his cravat, straightened his coat, took his greatcoat from the rack, and said:

"Well, I'm off. Wait up. I'll probably be late."

"At your service," answered Filipp, opened the door, and remained alone in the entrance hall.

He sat on a stool, folded his hands on his knees, and waited. He knew how to wait - in three years of service with the prince, he had grown used to long evenings when his master was out visiting, and he, Filipp, sat in the entrance hall listening to the clock tick, carriages pass outside, and the footman from the next apartment snore in the next room. But today waiting was not boring - there was something to think about. Filipp remembered how recently in the servants' hall they had said that Prince Andrei, apparently, was looking for a bride. Who had said it - he did not remember, but the words stuck in his soul. "Can he really be thinking of marrying?" thought Filipp. "Twenty-two - just the right age. And he has a difficult, silent character; marriage, they say, changes a man. Maybe he will become cheerier. Or maybe not. As God wills."

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