

War and Peace



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF LEO TOLSTOY

The fourth of five children born into a well-known aristocratic family, Tolstoy was orphaned at age nine and raised by relatives. After studying briefly at Kazan University, Tolstoy followed his older brother into the army and served as an artillery officer in the Crimean War. (Tolstoy's father, Count Nikolai Ilyich Tolstoy, was a veteran of the War of 1812.) Though recognized for courage, Tolstoy found warfare horrifying and increasingly favored nonviolent political ideas. Back at his home of Yasnaya Polyana, he founded schools for recently emancipated serf children. Soon after, in 1862, he married Sophia Andreevna Behrs, with whom he had 13 children (eight of them living to adulthood). Sophia faithfully edited and copied her husband's massive manuscripts. Their later years together were unhappy, though, as Tolstoy became more absorbed in radical ideas. Tolstoy wrote *War and Peace* on the brink of a moral and spiritual crisis that led him to focus on Christ's ethical teachings (especially the Sermon on the Mount) and to embrace pacifism. Both the characters of Pierre Bezukhov and Prince Andrei Bolkonsky drew on his personality in various ways. Tolstoy died of pneumonia at a train station when he was 82. He was nominated several times for both the Nobel Prize in Literature and the Nobel Peace Prize, though he never won.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Tolstoy poured extensive research into the novel, including approximately 160 historical figures among its characters. Obviously, the novel's main focus is the Napoleonic Wars, which were fought between Napoleon (and his allies) and several different coalitions of European countries. In 1805, the Third Coalition of Britain, Russia, Austria, and Prussia fought Napoleon over French aggressions in Italy and parts of Central and Northern Europe. By the time Napoleon defeated the Russian and Austrian forces at the battle of Austerlitz that December, much of Europe was under Napoleon's rule. In 1806–1807, a slightly modified Fourth Coalition faced Napoleon in Prussia and Poland; by the summer of 1807, Emperor Alexander of Russia accepted peace with Napoleon with the treaties of Tilsit. The Patriotic War of 1812, or the French invasion of Russia, was fought over control of Poland and Russian trade with Great Britain. Despite a questionable victory at the battle of Borodino in August and the seizing of Moscow, French forces were forced to retreat within a few months because of Russian scorched earth tactics, guerilla warfare, and the brutal Russian winter.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Tolstoy cited Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) as a major influence, as well as the fiction of Laurence Sterne. Literary critics have seen Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (published in the 1760s) as a precursor to the form and structure of *War and Peace*. *Dead Souls* by Nikolai Gogol (1842) and *The House of the Dead* by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1860) are mentioned in the novel's Appendix as precursors in the sense that, in Tolstoy's opinion, they don't fit the conventional genre of the novel. He considered *Anna Karenina* (1877) to be his first "true" novel, seeing *War and Peace* as more of a prose epic. The main plot of Tolstoy's short story "God Sees the Truth, But Waits" appears in Platon Karataev's story in Volume IV of *War and Peace*. Other acclaimed works by Tolstoy include the novella *The Death of Ilyan Ilyich* and the short story "How Much Land Does a Man Need?"

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** War and Peace
- **When Written:** 1863
- **Where Written:** Yasnaya Polyana, Russia
- **When Published:** 1865–1867 (serialized), 1869 (book)
- **Literary Period:** Golden Age of Russian Literature
- **Genre:** Realistic fiction, epic historical novel
- **Setting:** Russia, Austria, and Poland in 1805–1820
- **Climax:** The Battle of Borodino in 1812 and Prince Andrei's subsequent death, also Pierre's befriending of Platon Karataev
- **Antagonist:** France and Napoleon, as well as the lack of meaning in life, loss of ideals, and death
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

EXTRA CREDIT

Tolstoyan Legacy. Tolstoy's writings *My Confession*, *The Kingdom of God Is Within You*, and *A Letter to a Hindu* professed ideals of pacifism and nonviolent resistance that influenced the thought of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. In fact, Tolstoy and Gandhi corresponded for about a year (1909–1910), and Gandhi named a South African ashram "Tolstoy Farm."

Natasha & Pierre. Dave Malloy wrote a musical adaptation of *War and Peace* (specifically, Volume II, Part Five) called *Natasha, Pierre & The Great Comet of 1812*. The musical premiered in 2012 and had its Broadway debut in 2016, garnering numerous Tony nominations. Notable performances have

included *Hamilton's* Phillipa Soo playing Natasha Rostov and Josh Groban playing Pierre.



PLOT SUMMARY

In July, 1805, Anna Pavlovna Scherer throws a Petersburg soirée where several members of the nobility—including the Kuragin family, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, and awkward newcomer Pierre Bezukhov—debate Russia's looming war with Napoleonic France. Prince Andrei has enlisted in the army because he's unhappy with married life. Pierre, meanwhile, can't decide what to do with his life. When Pierre's wealthy father, Count Bezukhov, is on his deathbed, Prince Vassily Kuragin plots to wrest the Count's fortune from Pierre. Though Pierre gets the inheritance, he's listless in the struggle and indifferent to his sudden change in social status. Meanwhile, in Moscow, young Nikolai Rostov prepares to join the army as a hussar cadet.

Before heading off to war, Prince Andrei visits his father Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky's estate of Bald Hills, leaving his pregnant wife Princess Liza there and saying goodbye to his beloved sister, Princess Marya. Princess Marya urges Andrei to show sympathy to his lonely wife and to have faith in God, but Andrei warns Marya that their harsh father mistreats her.

In October, Prince Andrei is with General Kutuzov's army in Austria, while Nikolai Rostov is stationed with a hussar regiment; both men see battle for the first time. The first major engagement occurs at Schöngraben where, facing chaos in the field and superiors' indifference, both Andrei and Nikolai become somewhat disillusioned about the thrill and honor of warfare. At the battle of Austerlitz, despite General Kutuzov's warnings, the Russians make an ill-advised attack and instead are routed by Napoleon. Prince Andrei briefly rallies the scattered Russians, then he gets wounded and realizes the insignificance of Napoleon and the war as he lies contemplating the infinite [sky](#).

Back in Russia, Prince Vassily manipulates newly wealthy Pierre into marrying his beautiful but debauched daughter Hélène Kuragin. In the winter of 1805–1806, during a pause in the war, Pierre duels with a coldhearted soldier named Dolokhov over Dolokhov's rumored affair with Hélène. Though Pierre unexpectedly wins the duel, he separates from Hélène in anger. Meanwhile, at Bald Hills, Princess Liza dies in childbirth just as Prince Andrei—believed to have died at Austerlitz—unexpectedly arrives home. Nikolai returns to his regiment in 1806 after incurring massive gambling debts to Dolokhov, who hoped to marry Sonya Rostov and resents her love for her cousin Nikolai.

After his falling out with Hélène, Pierre leaves Moscow. On the way, he meets an old man named Bazdeev, who convinces Pierre to believe in God and seek self-improvement through

Masonic mystical practices. After initiation, Pierre tries to live out his new beliefs by liberating his peasants, but he totally lacks the practical wisdom to follow through. In contrast to Pierre's idealism, his close friend Prince Andrei emerges from the war and his wife's death thoroughly disillusioned and determined to live only for himself.

Meanwhile, Napoleon has invaded Prussia, and the Russian army is fighting the French in Poland. In 1807, after witnessing horrible conditions in a field hospital, Nikolai Rostov sees Napoleon and Emperor Alexander signing peace treaties at Tilsit and feels disillusioned by the stark contrast between soldiers' sufferings and imperial pomp.

In 1809, Prince Andrei visits the Rostovs' country estate, Otradnoe, where he meets Nikolai's enchanting sister Natasha for the first time, finding renewed hope in life. He moves to Petersburg and takes a government position, revising Russia's civil code. The Rostovs also move to Petersburg, and after dancing with Natasha at a ball, Prince Andrei proposes. Prince Nikolai, disapproving, sends his son abroad for a year. Andrei promises Natasha that if her feelings change while he's gone, he'll release her from the engagement. Meanwhile, despite disillusionment with Freemasonry, Pierre rededicates himself to his own marriage.

In 1810, Nikolai Rostov reluctantly leaves his regiment and returns to Otradnoe to help settle his father's messy finances. At Christmas, Nikolai and his cousin Sonya's romance rekindles, but Countess Rostov angrily objects because Sonya is poor. That winter Count Rostov and the girls visit Moscow. During a night at the opera, Natasha falls for Anatole Kuragin and agrees to elope with him (unaware that he's secretly married to someone else). After their plan is foiled at the last minute, Natasha, sick with despair over her betrayal of Prince Andrei, confides in Pierre, who admits that he loves her.

In June, 1812, Napoleon's army invades Russia. Prince Andrei rejoins the army and hopes at first to find a pretext for a duel with Anatole, but he soon falls comfortably into the day-to-day rhythms of military life. He refuses the opportunity to serve at headquarters because he believes the best, bravest men are found in the ranks. In the battle of Ostrovna, Nikolai Rostov takes a French captive and gets promoted for his courage, yet he feels conflicted about his supposed "heroism."

Through the summer, Moscow is filled with anxious rumors about French invasion. In a passion, young Petya Rostov enlists in the army, and Pierre, living idly in Moscow, longs to contribute more than his wealth to the war effort. When the French burn Smolensk, Prince Andrei's feelings about the war turn fiercely personal. At Bald Hills, Prince Nikolai is slow to respond to the threat of invasion, though the French are just 40 miles away. After deciding to personally lead the village militia, he suffers a stroke and later dies on the Bolkonskys' Bogucharovo estate. Later, when mutinous peasants interfere with Princess Marya's evacuation, Nikolai Rostov, whose

hussars happen to be nearby, comes to her rescue. Nikolai and Marya feel a mutual attraction. Meanwhile, Pierre abruptly leaves Moscow for the front lines at Borodino.

The night before the battle of Borodino, Pierre and Prince Andrei talk for the last time. The next day, Pierre observes the brutal fighting from the Raevsky redoubt. On a different part of the battlefield, Andrei is severely injured by an exploding shell. When he returns to consciousness in the field hospital, Andrei sees Anatole Kuragin being treated for a leg amputation and feels nothing but compassion for his enemy. The outcome of the battle is murky. Both armies are devastated, and Kutuzov insists Russia has won, but the French have enough momentum to push onward to Moscow, forcing a Russian retreat. Still, the French are demoralized for the first time, while the Russians take heart.

Moscow is in disarray, as wounded veterans are brought in and citizens flee the city on overladen carts. When the Rostovs evacuate, many soldiers catch rides in their caravan. Unbeknownst to Natasha, one of them is Andrei Bolkonsky. By the time Napoleon arrives on the outskirts of the city, eager to possess and civilize Moscow, almost nobody is left.

Meanwhile, Pierre, back from Borodino, remains behind, convinced it's his calling to kill Napoleon. However, as Moscow burns, he gets arrested for defending a woman from French looters. Two days' distance away, Natasha has found out that Prince Andrei is among their party. In the middle of the night, she sneaks to his bedside, and they share a tearful reunion.

During Borodino, Nikolai Rostov is in Voronezh, getting horses for his division. While there, someone tries to match him with Princess Marya, who's staying with an aunt nearby. Though the two feel a natural understanding, Nikolai is torn because of his past vow to Sonya. Around the same time, Sonya writes to Nikolai, self-sacrificially releasing him from their promise.

While in French custody, Pierre narrowly avoids execution. Just as he's feeling totally broken by this experience, he meets a fellow prisoner, a gentle peasant named Platon Karataev, whose wisdom and joy restore Pierre's will to live.

When Princess Marya learns Prince Andrei's whereabouts, she hurries to join the Rostovs; Natasha has been caring for Andrei night and day. Marya finds her brother strangely detached, his mind already fixed on the afterlife. Andrei no longer fears death, and having forgiven Natasha, he spends his last days contemplating eternal love.

Following the battle of Tarutino, the French army begins to panic and retreat. Meanwhile, Pierre finds peace and contentment in prison and on the march. Platon is shot for straggling the day before Denisov's partisan fighters free the prisoners. During the same battle that frees Pierre, Petya Rostov acts recklessly and gets fatally shot. In caring for her grieving mother, Natasha, who's been despondent since Andrei's death, finds renewed life.

Pierre returns to Moscow in January, 1813, and when he confides his experiences in the newly mature Natasha, she responds with sensitivity and compassion. Their love becomes mutual, and they marry (Hélène having died the previous year). After Count Rostov dies, Nikolai moves back to Moscow to work off his father's extensive debts. In 1814, he and Princess Marya get married, and by 1820, he's become a successful farmer devoted to peasant reforms. That year, Pierre, Natasha, and their four children visit Bald Hills. Both families are happy. Pierre debates politics with Nikolai, who resists his ideas about government reform, and inspires nephew Nikolenka Bolkonsky, now 15, to follow him in hopes of pleasing his late father Andrei.

Tolstoy concludes by reflecting that although human beings feel that they act freely, history cannot study this freedom; its task is to examine laws that, like the earth's movement, cannot be felt. In the novel, Tolstoy has sought to focus on this law of predetermination, as well as the psychological law by which unfree people convince themselves they are free. In reality, freedom is the unknowable "remainder of what we know about the laws of human life."



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Prince Andrei Bolkonsky – Prince Andrei is the son of Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky and brother of Princess Marya Bolkonsky. At the beginning of the novel, he is married to Lise, "the little princess," but he's discontent with married life and disgusted with Petersburg society. He enlists in the war as an adjutant to General Kutuzov. Prince Andrei comes across as aloof and arrogant to most people, though he quickly gains Kutuzov's trust because of his competence. Early on, Andrei has a mocking attitude toward Princess Lise and doesn't sympathize with her fears of childbirth and loneliness. He isn't very concerned about life's deeper meaning and lacks his sister Marya's devout faith. Before the battle of Austerlitz, he longs for glory in battle, but after being wounded and contemplating the beauty of the **sky**, he realizes such glory can't be the goal of life, and that even men like Napoleon aren't very significant. After the battle, it's rumored that he died, but he arrives home just before the little princess dies giving birth to their son, Nikolushka. Disillusioned, Andrei briefly lapses into nihilism and solitude, but after being inspired by both his good friend Pierre and Natasha Rostov to change his life, he begins working on Speransky's government reforms in Petersburg. He soon grows disenchanted with this work, however, and after further meetings with Natasha, he proposes to her, touched by her joyful simplicity. However, his disapproving father sends him abroad for a year, and Andrei tells Natasha they can break the engagement if her feelings fade. After Natasha's thwarted elopement with Anatole Kuragin, Prince Andrei returns to the

army. At the battle of Borodino, he is severely injured by a shell explosion. As he recovers, his fear of death leaves him, and when he sees Anatole suffering from a terrible injury, he forgives Anatole for luring Natasha away from him. Along with other wounded soldiers, he ends up in the Rostovs' care, faithfully tended by Natasha, whom he also forgives. He spends his last days contemplating eternal love, realizing this is the point of life.

Pierre Bezukhov – Pierre is an illegitimate son of Petersburg's wealthy, dying Count Bezukhov. He was educated in Paris and, when he returns to Petersburg as a young man, he's socially awkward and unfamiliar with Russian aristocratic expectations. For example, he idolizes the French leader Napoleon and openly champions Bonaparte when in Russian high society. However, he also has an appealingly warm, sincere demeanor that wins people over despite his missteps. Pierre continually struggles to figure out what to do with his life, and in the beginning, he lacks a sound ethical framework, struggling to keep his word or make sensible decisions. After gaining his father's inheritance, Pierre is manipulated by Prince Vassily into marrying Hélène Kuragin, although he doesn't respect her. After hearing rumors of Dolokhov's affair with his wife, Pierre challenges Dolokhov to a duel and unexpectedly wins, but he separates from Hélène. Easily moved by others' strong convictions, Pierre joins the Freemasons upon meeting Bazdeev, a prominent Mason who seems to know the answer to all of Pierre's problems. Pierre is idealistic—wanting to liberate all the peasants on his land, for example—but has no notion of the financial implications such an action will have on his struggling estates. Because of his kindness, Pierre tends to become a confidant to women like Princess Marya and Natasha. This is especially difficult as Pierre develops romantic feelings for Natasha, which he struggles to keep in check. In 1812, he pays to outfit a regiment but is desperate to do more for the war effort against France's invasion of Russia. He observes the battle of Borodino up close, then decides to stay in Moscow after its evacuation, convinced it's his job to assassinate Napoleon. However, he gets arrested by the French for beating up some looting soldiers. After months of imprisonment, during which he befriends and learns from Platon Karataev, Pierre possesses a new capacity to find joy and contentment in everyday life. Returning to Moscow, he tells Natasha his story and falls in love with her anew. They marry in 1813, and by 1820, they have four children, and Pierre is working in secret to build a government reform movement in Petersburg. He has finally found happiness and a settled sense of life's meaning.

Natasha Rostov – Natasha, daughter of the Count and Countess Rostov, is an irrepressibly lively young girl who charms people even when her impulsive behavior breaches noble social norms. Natasha throws herself wholeheartedly into the things and people she cares about, whether it's singing,

a religiously pious phase, a romance, or a rescue effort for wounded soldiers. She is 13 when the novel begins, and it's no secret that she is her parents' favorite. As a young teen, she has a crush on Boris Drubetskoy, though Countess Rostov discourages the courtship. When she's a little older, having officially come out in society and enchanted many with her precocious grace, she also turns down a marriage proposal from Denisov. After a brief renewal of her flirtation with Boris, Natasha is courted by Prince Andrei after her first grand ball, and they quickly get engaged, as Andrei finds Natasha's joyful embrace of life intoxicating. However, while in Moscow preparing for her wedding, she develops a sudden, confusing passion for Anatole Kuragin and calls off the engagement. After her planned elopement with Anatole fails, she falls ill from heartbreak for a time. She meets Prince Andrei again after his injury at Borodino and tenderly nurses him night and day. After Andrei's death, Natasha feels her life is over, but caring for the Countess after Petya's death revives her. Despite getting off on the wrong foot during her engagement, she and Princess Marya become dear friends in their shared grief for Andrei. Softened and matured by grief, Natasha listens to Pierre's stories (he's long been her confidant) with a new sensitivity and understanding, and she quickly reciprocates his love. They marry in 1813 and, by 1820, they have three daughters and a son together. As a wife and mother, she defies social expectations by dedicating herself exclusively, even obsessively, to her family and no longer caring what others think of her.

Nikolai Rostov – Nikolai is the eldest Rostov son. Throughout the novel, he's often simply referred to as "Rostov." He and his younger sister Natasha are close friends. Nikolai serves in the war of 1805 with the Pavlogradsky hussars, under a squadron commander named Denisov, whom he befriends and admires. Nikolai has a deep, almost exaggerated sense of honor and loyalty, as the incident involving the thief Telyanin and their commander Bogdanych illustrates. His sense of honor sometimes expresses itself in a quick temper. At Schöngraben, his first major battle, Nikolai sustains a minor wound, panics, and runs from the attacking French, though he gets a promotion afterward and lets others believe he fought bravely. When Nikolai returns home on leave in the winter of 1805–1806, he ignores his boyhood crush on his second cousin Sonya. The following year, he befriends Dolokhov, who cheats him out of 43,000 roubles just before Nikolai rejoins his regiment. Nikolai feels happier in the regiment than living in the morally ambiguous outside world, but when he visits a field hospital and contrasts the soldiers' suffering with pompous imperial ceremonies, his firm principles are somewhat shaken. A few years later, Nikolai returns to his family's country estate, where he becomes an avid huntsman and rekindles his romance with Sonya. In 1812, back in the army, he's promoted to captain and decorated for heroism after leading an attack and taking a Frenchman captive, but he feels troubled about this supposed "heroism." Later, while stationed near

Bogucharovo, Nikolai helps Princess Marya with some troublesome peasants and begins to fall in love with her. After the war, Nikolai moves back to Moscow to repay his late father's debts, and though he briefly rebuffs Marya, they finally marry in 1814. Nikolai becomes a passionate and successful farmer beloved by his peasants. At the end of the novel, in 1820, he and Marya have three children with another on the way.

Princess Marya Bolkonsky – Princess Marya lives with her father Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky on his Bald Hills estate. She is also very close to her brother Prince Andrei, often worrying about his moral and spiritual state. Marya is a gentle, sincere, and somewhat naïve young woman. Though outwardly plain, she has luminous eyes that light up when she's listening thoughtfully to others. She spends her days sacrificially catering to her father's needs, seeing him as unflinchingly kind and declining to judge him for his harsh moods. Princess Marya is a devout Orthodox Christian who enjoys sheltering poor, wandering pilgrims and briefly dreams of becoming one herself. She tends to deny her own needs (though she has a deep longing for romantic love, which she views as sinful) in order to bear her loved ones' burdens. Although she's trusting to a fault and tends to overlook others' flaws, she also has a deep sense of pride and she refuses to be taken advantage of once she understands the reality of a situation. For example, she refuses an attempted match with Anatole Kuragin. She is friends with Julie Karagin, with whom she often exchanges letters, though it becomes clear that Julie doesn't respect her. Over the years, her father treats her with increasing cruelty, but they reconcile when he's on his deathbed. Around this time Princess Marya begins to hope for a different life, and after Nikolai Rostov helps her manage some rebellious peasants, she suspects she could love him. With Natasha Rostov, she shares the duties of nursing Prince Andrei when he's dying of war wounds. Despite a rocky start, she and Natasha become best friends and live together in Moscow. In 1814, she and Nikolai finally renew their romance, get married, and move to Bald Hills. By 1820, they have three children with a fourth on the way. Princess Marya is deeply happy with family life, although she recognizes that she's no longer able to pursue spiritual longing to the same degree.

Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky – Prince Nikolai, father of Prince Andrei and Princess Marya, lives on a rural estate called Bald Hills. He spends his time tutoring Princess Marya and improving his property. Though he loves his daughter and cares about her wellbeing, he sometimes speaks to her cruelly, and everyone shrinks from the Prince's bad moods and harsh demands. He masks his genuine affection for his children with grumpiness. He mocks modern European military strategy, but in 1806, he's briefly revived by new duties as an army commander. As he later declines into senility, he makes Marya's life increasingly difficult and balks at Prince Andrei's

engagement with Natasha. In his final days, he tries to rally Bald Hills against the French, suffers a stroke, and reconciles with Marya in his dying moments.

Count Rostov – Count Rostov, husband of Countess Rostov and father of Vera, Nikolai, Natasha, and Petya, is a cheerful, generous man who lovingly indulges his family and enjoys the good things in life. He is notoriously bad at managing his money, which leads the Rostovs' to have perpetually shaky finances and to hold a correspondingly lower position in society. The Count loves to lavishly entertain even though he can't afford it. He also adopts his poor young cousin Sonya. He can't bear to face any unpleasantness in his life, like shame over his debts or Natasha's broken engagement to Prince Andrei. After the sorrows of 1812, especially Petya's death, the Count dies, tearfully asking the Countess's forgiveness for his failings.

Countess Rostov – Countess Rostov, wife of Count Rostov and mother of Vera, Nikolai, Natasha, and Petya, is painfully aware of her family's tenuous financial and social situation and has a sharp eye for her children's best interests, especially when it comes to potential spouses. For example, she interferes in Natasha's courtships and quashes Nikolai's hopes of marrying his poor cousin Sonya, knowing advantageous marriages are her children's best hope in life. She is, however, particularly indulgent of Natasha's outspoken, impulsive teen behavior. She is emotional and sometimes falls ill under stress. When Petya gets killed in the War of 1812, she is maddened by grief and prematurely ages.

Sonya Rostov – Sonya, 15 at the start of the novel, is Count Rostov's cousin. The Rostovs have taken her in because she's orphaned and without means. She has strong romantic feelings for her second cousin Nikolai. However, because of her loyal sense of indebtedness to the Rostovs, she refrains from pushing Nikolai to marry her since it would be a financially poor match for him. In 1806, she rejects a marriage proposal from Dolokhov. Sonya is a humble young woman who's usually in the shadow of her best friend, Natasha. When Nikolai lives at Otradnoe during the winter of 1810, Sonya and Nikolai rekindle their romance. In response to Countess Rostov's mounting hostility, however, she eventually writes to Nikolai to release him from his promise to marry her, sacrificing herself for the family's wellbeing.

Petya Rostov – Petya is the youngest of the Rostov children, idealistic and emotional. In 1812, he's desperate to join the army and swoons in a crowd at the Kremlin while waiting for a glimpse of Emperor Alexander. Later that year, he winds up with Denisov's partisan detachment. He is generous and tender-hearted, wanting to help a timid French captive. Desperate for heroism, he has a tendency to behave wildly in battle and is forbidden to participate in the partisan fighting. After accompanying Dolokhov on a successful scouting mission, he joins the partisan attack, ignores Denisov's warnings, and gets fatally shot. His death devastates his

parents.

Hélène Kuragin Bezukhov – Princess Hélène is Prince Vassily's famously beautiful daughter. Unseemly rumors swirl around her, as she's said to have many sexual affairs, even with her brother, Anatole. Though Pierre finds her vacuous and morally repugnant, he's manipulated by Prince Vassily into marrying her in the winter of 1805. There are ongoing rumors of Hélène's affairs; Pierre duels with Dolokhov over one such rumor, and he and Hélène separate for a few years. By 1809, Hélène heads a pro-French social circle in Petersburg, and officials and other aristocrats vie for her approval, though she is really quite shallow. She and Pierre reconcile around this time. However, in 1812, she converts to Catholicism and asks Pierre for a divorce so she can marry somebody else. Shortly after the battle of Borodino, she does suddenly, either from heart trouble or, it's rumored, suicide.

General Kutuzov – Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov was a historical figure whom Tolstoy adapts for the novel. During the war of 1805, he is the commander in chief of the Russians fighting in Austria. He is noted (and vilified by some) for resisting the younger generals' insistence on offensive war against Napoleon. Resigned to the younger generation's victory and to the inevitability of fate, he tends to fall asleep at key moments. Despite Emperor Alexander's personal dislike of Kutuzov, he is appointed commander in chief of the Russian army in the summer of 1812, replacing Barclay de Tolly. Though he is much criticized after the War of 1812 for abandoning Moscow and not destroying the retreating French army, he is unfailingly faithful to his goal of simply defeating the French and driving them out of Russia, dying not long after he achieves this. He has a deep, unflinching faith in the Russian people, and he doesn't care about the broader picture of Europe's fate.

Napoleon Bonaparte – Napoleon is the Emperor of France and Russian Emperor Alexander I's antagonist in the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon is characterized as short and stout with a springy walk, and he is exaggeratedly self-confident, regarding his own will as the most important thing in the world. He has an explosive temper. He tugs people's ears as a sign of his personal favor toward them. Prince Andrei Bolkonsky believes Napoleon is an exemplary general, but after getting wounded at Austerlitz and seeing Bonaparte beneath the infinite sky, he realizes Napoleon is just a man, and an insignificant one at that. Pierre also idealizes Napoleon at the beginning of the novel, but by 1812 his feelings have changed so much that he dreams of assassinating the emperor. Napoleon seems invincible until he invades Russia in 1812 and wins a hollow victory at Borodino; after taking Moscow, his French army is so depleted that they're soon forced into a desperate retreat.

Emperor Alexander I – At the beginning of the novel, Russia's Emperor is viewed by his people as an idealized savior of Russia and Europe. He is a handsome, mild-mannered young man with

a gentle voice and is often moved to tears by others' suffering. His mere presence enchants and inspires his men. Nikolai Rostov especially idolizes him, though when Nikolai sees Alexander and Napoleon at Tilsit, he struggles not to criticize the Emperor for a war that increasingly seems like a senseless bloodbath. When Alexander first came to the throne, he was known for a liberalizing agenda, but after 1812, he develops a reputation for being more reactionary.

Princess Lise (Liza) Bolkonsky ("the little princess") – Lise or Liza Bolkonsky is Prince Andrei's first wife, a young beauty who charms everyone. She is sensitive and quick to tears, and Prince Andrei can be impatient and downright scornful with her. She's fearful of living in the country with Prince Andrei's family while he's away at war. She's especially intimidated by her father-in-law Prince Nikolai, though she gets along well with her sister-in-law Princess Marya. Liza dies in March, 1806, while giving birth to Nikolushka. Prince Andrei arrives home just in time to watch her die, when he is seemingly ready to devote himself to his marriage and family. Long after Princess Lise dies, he's tormented by the memory of her innocent suffering.

Nikolai Andreich (Nikolushka or Nikolenka) Rostov – Nikolushka is Prince Andrei's son. His mother, Princess Lise, died giving birth to him. When Nikolushka is seven, his father dies. At 15, he especially admires his uncle Pierre and wants to be like him. Nikolenka is a lonely, somewhat delicate, idealistic young man who longs to make a difference in the world.

Prince Vassily Kuragin – Prince Vassily is a frequent guest at Anna Pavlovna Scherer's Petersburg soirées. He is a shameless social climber, always looking to exploit relationships for his and his children's gain. Though his plans aren't usually premeditated, he feels entitled to wealth and success. He's related to Count Bezukhov through his wife and tries to gain the Count's inheritance that way, but when he fails, he manipulates Pierre Bezukhov into marrying his daughter Hélène instead. His other children include Anatole (whom he tries to match with Princess Marya Bolkonsky) and Ippolit. In 1812, he flits between pro-French and pro-Russian salons.

Anatole Kuragin – Anatole is one of Prince Vassily's sons, known as an amoral good-for-nothing. He looks at life as entertainment, nothing more, and he doesn't worry about the consequences of his actions for himself or others. When Anna Pavlovna Scherer and Prince Vassily set him up with Princess Marya Bolkonsky, he flirts shamelessly with Marya's companion Mlle Bourienne, derailing the intended engagement. Years later, after accumulating massive debt and getting kicked out of his home by Prince Vassily, Anatole ensnares Natasha Rostov, who falls passionately in love with him (or at least thinks she does). Though most don't know it, Anatole is already married to a Polish woman he met while stationed with the army. He plans to abduct and elope with Natasha, but the plan is foiled at the last minute, and Pierre angrily kicks Anatole out of Moscow. Though Natasha's former

francé Prince Andrei Bolkonsky detests and resents Anatole, he forgives and pities him when Anatole gets injured, perhaps fatally, at the battle of Borodino.

Dolokhov – An unscrupulous army officer who’s friends with Anatole Kuragin. He’s a notorious gambler, cold-hearted, and remains clear-headed no matter how much he drinks. After getting demoted for antics involving a bear in Petersburg, he redeems himself by getting wounded and taking a prisoner at Schöngraben. While staying with Pierre Bezukhov, Dolokhov is rumored to have had an affair with Hélène, whereupon Pierre challenges him to a duel. After recovering from his dueling wound, Dolokhov befriends Nikolai Rostov and proposes to Sonya Rostov. To get back at Nikolai for Sonya’s refusal, Dolokhov goads Nikolai into a card game in which Nikolai racks up massive debt. After a stint as a Persian prince’s official, Dolokhov returns to war, asking and getting Pierre’s forgiveness on the eve of the battle of Borodino. He shows up again fighting alongside Denisov during partisan warfare in the fall of 1812.

Boris Drubetsky – Boris is Anna Mikhailovna Drubetsky’s son. He serves in the Semyonovsky guards. He and Natasha have a mutual crush before he goes off to war, though he discourages Natasha from kissing him in secret and promises to propose to her after she turns 16. Boris is also Count Bezukhov’s godson, though he doesn’t get the inheritance his mother hopes for. Unlike his friend Nikolai, Boris is a career-minded young man who unabashedly positions himself for social connections and advancement every chance he gets. He and Natasha reunite when she’s 16 and still like one another, but Countess Rostov dissuades him from pursuing Natasha further. Not long after, he starts courting the wealthier Julie Karagin instead, and they get married.

Julie Karagin Drubetsky – Julie Karagin is a wealthy young woman of Moscow. Young Nikolai Rostov flirts with her, provoking Sonya’s jealousy. Julie is friends with Princess Marya Bolkonsky and often exchanges letters with her. As Julie grows older and inherits wealth, however, she becomes more preoccupied with men and soirées, and it also becomes clear that her friendship with Marya isn’t genuine. She ends up marrying Boris Drubetsky, who shares her obsession with social status.

Princess Anna Mikhailovna Drubetsky – Anna Mikhailovna, a close friend of the Rostovs as well as a member of Petersburg society, is obsessed with securing a good social position for her son Boris. At the beginning of the War of 1805, she successfully begs Prince Vassily to get Boris a position in the Semyonovksy guards. Anna Mikhailovna loves to put herself at the center of any situation.

Captain Denisov – Denisov is Nikolai Rostov’s squadron commander in the Pavlogradsky hussars. Nikolai looks up to Denisov, and they become friends. After multiple visits to the Rostov home, Denisov proposes to Natasha in the winter of

1806 but is turned down. In the War of 1812, Denisov leads small detachments against the French in partisan warfare. Pierre Bezukhov is one of the Russians taken prisoner by the French whom Denisov recaptures.

Prince Bagration – Bagration (a real historical figure) is a Russian general in 1805–6 and a commander during Napoleon’s invasion in 1812. In 1805, Kutuzov sends Bagration’s vanguard to delay the French, successfully misleading the French into thinking Bagration’s detachment is the whole army. Prince Andrei spends time with Bagration’s detachment at the battle of Schöngraben and admires his hands-off, encouraging style of leadership. Moscow society honors him as a hero for his level-headedness at Austerlitz, contrasting him with Kutuzov. He is fatally injured at the battle of Borodino.

Anna Pavlovna Scherer – Anna Pavlovna is a middle-aged Petersburg society lady, a maid of honor to the Emperor’s mother. She hosts cultured soirées where important people mingle and discuss politics. Prince Vassily Kuragin is a frequent guest. She has an animated personality, and fulfilling society’s expectations is important to her. She also loves to use her influence to marry people off. In 1812, her salon is pro-Russian, refusing to even speak French.

Platon Karataev – Platon is a fellow prisoner whom Pierre meets while in French custody. He is a gentle, wise peasant who reassures Pierre and seems to be “the embodiment of everything Russian.” He is full of homespun sayings and stories. On the march, he travels with a bowlegged dog named Gray and, after weakening from a fever, gets shot as a straggler. Pierre sees Platon as the embodiment of someone who loves life despite suffering guiltlessly.

Osip (Iosif) Alexeevich Bazdeev – Bazdeev is a prominent Mason whom Pierre meets at a crisis point in his life. He is an elderly, squat, wrinkled man with glittering eyes. He has a kindly yet penetrating demeanor that quickly wins Pierre’s trust. Bazdeev mentors Pierre in Freemasonry over the years, often warning him not to skip over self-purification in his eagerness to improve others’ lives.

Marya Dmitrievna Akhrosimov – Marya Dmitrievna is a formidable, opinionated widow and Natasha’s godmother. The Rostovs stay with her in Moscow during the winter of 1810–1811. She purchases Natasha’s wedding trousseau and gives her advice about her pending marriage to Prince Andrei. She also shields Count Rostov from the full story of Natasha’s broken engagement after she tries to elope with Anatole.

Captain Ramballe – Ramballe is a gregarious French officer who chooses Bazdeev’s house for his quarters upon invading Moscow. When Pierre saves him from being shot by the madman Makar Alexeevich, Ramballe decides Pierre is an honorary Frenchman and spends the night drinking wine and telling stories with him. Ramballe is next seen at the end of the

war, staggering weakly out of the woods and cared for by Russian soldiers.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Vera Rostov – Vera is the eldest Rostov child. She tends to be a scolding, sour older sister and doesn't mind when she alienates the younger siblings. She marries Berg. Her biggest passion in life is to throw parties that are just like everybody else's.

Ippolit Kuragin – Prince Vassily's foolish son.

Mlle. Bourienne – Mademoiselle Amélie Bourienne is Princess Marya's companion at Bald Hills. She is a cheerful, outgoing young woman, but she has no qualms about flirting with Marya's suitors and isn't a particularly faithful friend.

Count Kirill Vladimirovich Bezukhov – Count Bezukhov, Pierre's father, is a Russian courtier dating back to Catherine the Great's time. He has many illegitimate children, but Pierre is his favorite, and it is Pierre who gets the Count's inheritance. He is known to have a temper, which Pierre also has inherited.

Count Willarski – A young Polish count who sponsors Pierre's membership in the Masons.

Smolyaninov – A Mason who guides Pierre through his Masonic initiation.

General Bennigsen – An ambitious Russian general who is obsessed with promotion.

Pelageyushka – One of Princess Marya's "people of God," a wandering pilgrim who tells Prince Andrei and Pierre about a miracle-working icon.

Speransky – Speransky was a powerful adviser to Emperor Alexander who undertook various liberal reforms. In 1809, he appoints Prince Andrei to revise the civil law code. The intellectual Speransky has a magnetic personality and Andrei idealizes him at first, but just as quickly finds him distastefully artificial.

Count Arakcheev – Arakcheev is a grumpy minister of war who, in 1809, appoints Prince Andrei to the commission on military regulations.

Mme Marya Ignatievna Peronsky – A friend of Countess Rostov and a lady-in-waiting of the previous emperor's court. She secures a grand ball invitation for the Rostovs in Petersburg despite the family's modest social position.

Mitenka – Count Rostov's unscrupulous steward who takes advantage of him.

Danilo – Nikolai's kennelman at Otradnoe.

Ilagin – A neighbor of the Rostovs' Otradnoe estate. He and the Rostovs have a somewhat contentious relationship.

Anisya Fyodorovna – Housekeeper of the Rostovs' country uncle.

Mrs. Pelageya Danilovna Melyukov – Widowed neighbor of

the Rostovs' Otradnoe estate. At Christmas, 1810, the Rostov children dress in mummers' costumes to entertain the Melyukov children. Sonya and Nikolai kiss at her house that night.

Balashov – Adjutant general whom Emperor Alexander sends to Napoleon after the French invasion in 1812 with a letter objecting to Napoleon's aggression.

Marshal Davout – A cruel, gloomy commander under Napoleon who refuses Balashov access to the emperor. He also surprisingly spares the prisoner Pierre from execution.

Pfuel – A military theoretician at Russian army headquarters who's dedicated to the science of war.

Ermolov – Russian general who favors fighting on the offensive.

Shishkov – Russian secretary of state who, in 1812, convinces Emperor Alexander to leave army headquarters and return to Moscow to inspire the people for war.

Barclay de Tolly – Russian general of German origins. In 1812, Kutuzov replaces him as commander in chief of the army.

Ilyin – Teenage officer who looks up to his captain Nikolai Rostov.

Mrs. Agrafena Ivanovna Belov – Rostov family friend who encourages Natasha to attend church and prepare to receive Communion while Natasha is depressed in Moscow. In old age, she lives with the Rostovs at Bald Hills.

Count Rastopchin – Rastopchin is Moscow's military governor, best remembered for his anti-French propaganda posters. Distraught over the abandonment of Moscow, Rastopchin chooses Vereshchagin as a scapegoat and turns him over to an angry mob.

Ferapontov – Smolensk innkeeper and friend of Alpatych who flees the city when it falls to the French.

Wolzogen – Arakcheev's adviser who favors German military strategy and whom Prince Bagration blames for the abandonment of Smolensk. Wolzogen doesn't respect General Kutuzov's leadership and believes that Russia loses the battle at Borodino.

Dron – A sturdy old peasant and village headman at Bogucharovo. He feels torn between the Bolkonskys and the villagers and eventually sides with the latter in resisting evacuation from Bogucharovo.

Clausewitz – Russian general and military theoretician of Prussian origins.

Berthier – French general who suggests that Napoleon send his old guard into battle at Borodino.

Malasha – A six-year-old peasant girl; she watches as the Russian generals hold a war council in her family's cottage, and Kutuzov gives her a lump of sugar.

Mavra Kuzminishna – The Rostovs' Moscow housekeeper.

Gerasim – Iosif Alexeevich’s old servant.

Makar Alexeevich – Iosif Alexeevich’s half-mad, alcoholic brother who nearly shoots Captain Ramballe.

Vereshchagin – A political prisoner whom Count Rastopchin uses as a scapegoat; he is murdered by a wrathful mob before the burning of Moscow.

Anna Ignatyevna Malvintsev – The wealthy, widowed aunt of Princess Marya Bolkonsky.

Catiche – Catiche is one of Count Bezukhov’s nieces. Prince Vassily plots with her to try to thwart Pierre’s inheritance from his father.

Viscount of Mortemart – A French émigré in Petersburg who’s the centerpiece of one of Anna Pavlovna Scherer’s soirées. He supposedly knew the duc d’Enghien, whose controversial execution contributed to the War of 1805.

Abbé Morio – A guest of Anna Pavlovna Scherer, the abbé Morio fascinates Pierre with his proposal for political peace in Europe.

Novosiltsov – A special emissary whom Emperor Alexander I sends to Berlin in 1805 in an effort to negotiate a peace between France and the Third Coalition. He was unsuccessful.

Mikhail Ivanovich – Prince Nikolai’s architect at Bald Hills.

Timokhin – Company captain over Dolokhov; he leads his men in a brave pursuit of the French at Schöngraben.

Zherkov – A hussar in Kutuzov’s suite.

Lieutenant Telyanin – Telyanin serves in Nikolai Rostov’s and Denisov’s hussar regiment. Nikolai dislikes him. Telyanin steals Denisov’s money with the excuse that his elderly parents need it. Despite Nikolai’s indignation, the regimental commander, Bogdanych, refuses to discipline Telyanin for the theft lest the entire regiment be dishonored.

Lavrushka – Captain Denisov’s orderly. In 1812, he’s taken prisoner and personally interrogated by Napoleon.

Bogdanych – Nikolai’s regimental commander in the Pavlogradsky hussars.

Nesvitsky – Prince Andrei’s roommate and fellow adjutant in 1805. He serves as Pierre’s second in the duel with Dolokhov.

Bilibin – A skilled Russian diplomat and friend of Prince Andrei’s, beloved in society for his cultured wit.

Mack – Austrian general whose army was encircled by the French at Ulm; Mack surrendered without a fight.

Emperor Franz – Emperor of Austria. When Prince Andrei brings him news of a minor Russian victory, he responds indifferently.

Weyrother – Chief of staff of the Austrian army.

General Murat – French general who incurs Napoleon’s wrath when, before the battle of Schöngraben in 1805, he mistakenly

believes that Bagration’s small detachment is the entire Russian army. He is captured by the Russians at Borodino. Years later, Napoleon names him king of Naples.

Tushin – Tushin is a battery officer who leads a heroic attack on Schöngraben. Though Prince Andrei admires Tushin’s courageous leadership, superior officers merely criticize Tushin for leaving some of his guns behind, disillusioning Andrei.

Alpatych – Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky’s steward at Bald Hills.

Berg – Berg is a commander in the Izmailovsky regiment and a friend of Boris Drubetskoy’s. He marries Vera Rostov.

Prince Dolgorukov – Dolgorukov is an adjutant to General Kutuzov who advocates for offensive warfare.

Prince Adam Czartoryski – Minister of foreign affairs under Emperor Alexander.

Marya Bogdanovna – Midwife who attends Princess Lise during childbirth.

Praskovya Savishna – Princess Marya’s childhood nanny.

logel – Moscow dancing-master.

Dessales – Nikolushka Rostov’s tutor.

Count Orlov-Denisov – Commander of a Cossack regiment who was praised for his actions at 1812’s Battle of Tarutino.

Dokhturov – A quiet, unassuming general who’s present at most of the war’s battles, though history doesn’t say much about him.

Denis Davydov – A Russian general who normalized the practice of partisan warfare, or organizing small attachments to attack the French army as it retreated.

Tikhon Shcherbaty – Tikhon is a peasant scout who serves in Denisov’s partisan detachment.

Captain von Toll A captain in the Russian army who consoles Emperor Alexander after the Russian loss at Austerlitz. He rises to become a colonel by 1812.

Dunyasha A servant of the Rostov family.

Beausset The prefect of Napoleon’s palace.



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don’t have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



SOCIETY AND WEALTH

Among the novel’s aristocratic characters, human relationships—like marriages and friendships—are often tools for gaining and maintaining a desirable

social position. In other words, social standing and wealth are ends in themselves, and the rest of life serves those ends, causing people to sacrifice their own desires, and ultimately their happiness, for the sake of money and status. In particular, aristocratic characters—like Pierre Bezukhov and Sonya Rostov—postpone happiness or miss it altogether because they're stuck in a society that views them in terms of their financial value. Only those who live outside this system altogether—like idealized peasant Platon Karataev—are truly happy, because they have no wealth to offer, so society doesn't see them as valuable. Tolstoy criticizes the Russian aristocracy's obsession with social position and wealth, arguing that it stifles individual happiness and leads people to use others as means to an end. Only those who manage to circumvent or ignore this system enjoy real freedom.

Among the higher aristocracy, people frantically try to manipulate and outmaneuver one another to achieve a better social position. Pierre's value to society fluctuates with his change in fortunes. "Pierre, on unexpectedly becoming a rich man and Count Bezukhov" has to "receive a host of persons who formerly did not even care to know of his existence, but who now would be hurt and chagrined if he did not wish to see them." Before he inherited his father's wealth, Pierre was a socially awkward nobody, but now he's sought after and expected to cater to society's whims. Though he doesn't care about this new inherited wealth, the money puts Pierre in a position to be manipulated by social climbers like Prince Vassily Kuragin and Anna Mikhailovna Drubetskoy, who use him to advance their own interests. Because he capitulates to this, Pierre is immediately miserable in the sham marriage Prince Vassily maneuvers him into with Vassily's debauched daughter, Hélène Kuragin.

But poorer nobles do not necessarily fare better—in fact, many of them are especially constrained because they lack the means either to manipulate others or resist being used. The Rostov family is the primary example. Though Count Rostov is a nobleman, his debts limit his children's choices: "The count walked about in his affairs as in an enormous net, trying not to believe that he was entangled [...] [Countess Rostov] felt that [a wealthy bride] was their last hope and that if Nikolai refused the match she had found for him, they would have to say good-bye forever to the possibility of mending their affairs." Nikolai isn't rich enough to marry just anyone he wants, yet he's not poor enough to disregard aristocratic expectations entirely. And if anyone's in a worse position, it's Nikolai's second cousin Sonya; the two enjoy a short-lived romance, but their affection can only be expressed at a costume party—that is, in a fantasy—because, as a charity-dependent orphan, Sonya is an unthinkable match. Nikolai and Sonya's relationship makes more sense in outlandish costumes than in the context of society, which shows how impossibly constrained their choices are.

By contrast, the novel depicts peasants as unconstrained by expectations of society and wealth. Platon Karataev, who possesses nothing and is impervious to social expectations, is one of the novel's only truly free and happy characters. Even as a prisoner, he leads a contented life: "He sang songs not as singers do who know they are being listened to, but as birds do, apparently because it was necessary for him to utter those sounds, as it is necessary to stretch one's arms or legs; [...] for Pierre he remained forever [...] the unfathomable, round, and eternal embodiment of the spirit of simplicity and truth." Platon is likened to a bird who lives happily by instinct, not to perform or conform to anyone else's standards. Pierre sees Platon as the epitome of freedom because of this, a man unfettered by society in spite of, even because of, the fact that he isn't seen as "valuable."

In the end, despite lifelong jockeying for position, families who (like the Kuragins) are most obsessed with society fade from the story. More tellingly, despite the constraints they've faced, both Rostovs and Pierre marry well out of love, not primarily for money, and are happier pursuing family life, farming, and social ideals on a local scale. In other words, people who identify themselves less with wealth and position end up uniting and building a solid foundation for their own happiness's sake.



EUROPEAN CULTURE VS. THE RUSSIAN SOUL

Throughout the novel, Tolstoy contrasts aristocratic Russia (which is European-influenced, contrived, and often pretentious) and traditional Russia (which is more instinctual, more honest, and more authentic overall). Aristocrats aspire to "European" traits, like an obsession with French culture and the adoption of complicated German war strategies. However, these don't work well in the long run—or at least they can't suppress authentically "Russian" instincts in the novel's characters, such as religious piety and love of life. With such examples, Tolstoy isn't saying that European values are totally corrupt or meaningless. He suggests instead that Russia and its people thrive when they're true to their own culture and values, instead of importing foreign ideas that tend to undermine what Russian people know best.

Within aristocratic society, there's an internal contradiction—can aristocrats remain authentically Russian while embracing "European" things? Tolstoy suggests they can't. Aristocratic Russians love all things French. The novel literally opens with French conversation, as Anna Pavlovna Scherer welcomes people to one of her famous soirées, which typically showcase French émigrés. At the same time, the conversation suggests that Russia alone, led by "angelic" Emperor Alexander, can be Europe's "savior" against the "monstrous" Corsican/French Napoleon. To maintain a place in aristocratic society, a good Russian must act culturally "French" even while

denouncing French “monstrosity.”

There’s a similar dynamic in warfare. German strategic approaches dominate Russian warfare. In Volume 1, Prince Nikolai (who is identified with the older, more Russian generation) teases his son Andrei by mocking the German influence on the modern Russian military. And he’s right—German strategy doesn’t work well for Russia; at Austerlitz, the more “Russian” General Kutuzov is presciently resigned to the failure of the younger generals’ elaborate offensive strategy. By Borodino, even Prince Andrei is critical of “German [...] reasoning, which isn’t worth a tinker’s damn” compared to native Russian passion and courage.

While the Russian aristocracy has an inauthentic and counterproductive fixation on Europe, families and characters who are more distant from aristocratic society are portrayed as more authentically “Russian.” For example, Princess Marya, the most devout Russian Orthodox character, is associated not with aristocratic society, but with the “people of God” (impoverished Russian pilgrims) whose naïve piety would be mocked at any society soirée. Surprisingly, Natasha Rostov—despite being an aristocrat—is another character who seems characteristically Russian, as she’s associated with a Russian free-spiritedness and zest for life. Despite not having been taught to dance like a peasant (indeed, she was raised by a French émigré), Natasha charms her rustic relatives: “[H]ow [...] had this little countess [...] sucked this spirit from the Russian air she breathed[?] [...] Yet that spirit and these ways were those very inimitable, unstudied Russian ones[.]”

Most notably, Platon Karataev is symbolic of the authentically joyful, spiritually wise Russian peasantry: for Pierre, Platon “remained forever [...] the embodiment of everything Russian,” and he helps Pierre rebuild the world “in his soul with a new beauty, on some new and unshakeable foundations.” Pierre, who is French-educated and tormented by aristocratic society’s expectations of him, only realizes who he is after he learns from this paragon of “Russianness.” In other words, Pierre himself is an embodiment of how a Russian soul won’t thrive on European foundations alone.

Again, Tolstoy doesn’t simplistically reject “European” people, culture, or values. Rather, he suggests that Napoleonic-era Russia stunted its own welfare by failing to embrace distinctly Russian beliefs, values, and love of life.



LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND FAMILY

War and Peace is filled with romances that have varying degrees of success. In many of these relationships, under pressure from society or their own youthful inexperience, people substitute all sorts of things—reputation, passion, or abstract ideals—for genuine love. One of the most obvious examples is Pierre and Hélène’s sham marriage, which is beautiful only in the eyes of society. In

a very different scenario, when the debauched Anatole Kuragin flirts with Natasha, she is swept away in the false belief that he’s a good person. Even in a relationship with genuine potential, like Natasha’s engagement to Prince Andrei, Natasha is more of a symbol of happiness for Andrei than a person in her own right, and their romance fades. Generally, it’s only after characters have survived great suffering—like failed engagements, deathly illness, or imprisonment—that their pretenses are stripped away enough for them to experience genuine love. Tolstoy suggests that mature, lasting love thrives because it sees others on a realistic basis, as flawed, unique people.

The novel gives several examples of immature love that don’t reach its potential. Pierre and Hélène’s marriage is a disastrous sham because they marry for social standing rather than love. Though Pierre knows Hélène is stupid and immoral, he consents to the marriage because “not for me alone, but for all of them, *this* inevitably had to come about. They all expect *this* so much [...] that I simply cannot disappoint them.” But “*this*”—and the desire to conform to social expectations—prove a weak foundation for a lasting love, so their marriage is filled with infidelity, animosity, and ultimately failure. Similarly, Natasha and Prince Andrei’s marriage never happens because Natasha indulges in an immature passion with Anatole Kuragin. After meeting Anatole, she tells herself, “If [...] I could respond to his smile with a smile [...] it means that I loved him from the first moment. [...] What am I to do, if I love him and love the other?” Natasha’s inability to distinguish between fleeting passion and real affection ends up costing her the real thing. And even in Andrei and Natasha’s case, Natasha was more of an ideal for Andrei than an actual person. When Andrei begins courting Natasha, he reflects that she contains “the presence of a special world [...] filled with joys of a sort as yet unknown to him.” After years of unhappiness, Andrei idealizes Natasha as an opportunity for a fresh start in life instead of seeing her as a person in her own right.

In contrast, mature love consists of people’s ability to see one another as they really are and accept them on that basis, whether through selfless mutual care or actual marriage. When Prince Andrei is dying, he and Natasha experience true love even though they’ll never marry. Even Princess Marya can see in Natasha’s expression “boundless love for him [...] an expression of pity, of suffering for others [...] It was clear that [...] there was not a single thought of herself” in Natasha. In devoting herself to Andrei’s care, Natasha isn’t concerned about the nature of her feelings or of any possible future with him, but only in self-giving for his sake. And this suffering actually prepares Natasha for a truly loving marriage. When Pierre returns from his time as a prisoner of war, she listens to him with great sensitivity and compassion. Before she survived her own grief, Natasha wasn’t open-hearted enough to see Pierre so clearly. Natasha and Pierre’s unspoken understanding

finally provides a sound basis for a mature, mutually accepting love.

Fittingly, the last narrative section of *War and Peace* focuses on two happy marriages: Bezukhov (Pierre and Natasha) and Rostov (Nikolai and Marya). Though neither family is without its challenges and flaws, both couples appear to enjoy a stable, sincere bond unhampered by social expectation or unrealistic ideals.



WAR AND PEACE

Much of the novel focuses on major events of the Napoleonic Wars, especially during the years 1805-1807 and the French invasion of Russia in 1812. Tolstoy examines the details of war from many different angles—from councils of generals pre-battle to young hussar cadets under fire for the first time. Though Tolstoy discusses the broader scale of the wars and their international impact for decades to come, he also examines the behavior of individual soldiers to reveal what he believes about war as a human phenomenon. On a human scale, war ultimately comes down to fellow human beings killing each other, which makes no sense regardless of war's theoretical objectives. Because war is irrational, people behave irrationally in battle, and in the aftermath, they often find their sense of morality has been eroded by the experience. By focusing on war's distortions of human beings, Tolstoy suggests that, regardless of purported justifications, war is fundamentally a senseless event that diminishes people's humanity.

War causes people to act irrationally and inhumanely. The day before the battle of Schöngraben, for instance, enemy soldiers joke around with each other, despite the fact they'll be killing each other the next day. Tolstoy implies that this is senseless behavior—either these men are enemies or they're not. Furthermore, Nikolai Rostov behaves irrationally under fire. When an enemy soldier charges him, he grabs his pistol—but instead of shooting the man, he throws the gun at him and runs away. Despite his training and ideals, Nikolai behaves senselessly under fire, and Tolstoy suggests that he does so because the moment is senseless—war brings that out of people.

While many soldiers enter war full of ideals, they're inevitably disillusioned by fighting and their morality is often compromised. For instance, even though he's an honest, idealistic person, Nikolai lies about his courage at Schöngraben in order to conform to a conventional narrative of wartime courage. Describing the battle to friends, he "imperceptibly, involuntarily, and inevitably [...] went over into untruth," feeling that had he told the more complicated truth to his civilian friends—who don't understand war—they'd make him feel ashamed. This shows how war—and its incomprehensible senselessness—is eroding his honesty and morality. Then, Nikolai is further disillusioned at the battle of Ostrovna. After

being rewarded for capturing a Frenchman, Nikolai reflects that this man was terribly afraid and hadn't really done anything wrong, which makes Nikolai doubt his own heroism in capturing him. Once his enemy becomes humanized in his eyes, he wonders if "heroism" is an empty notion after all, showing how war distorts people's values, propping up immoral notions of heroism and dehumanizing others.

Ordinary people's morals can be compromised by war, too. After the invasion of Moscow, for instance, Count Rastopchin stirs up a Russian mob to execute a supposed traitor: "The barrier of human feeling, strained to the utmost in holding back the crowd, instantly broke. The crime had begun, it was necessary to go through with it," so the mob ruthlessly beats Vereshchagin to death as a scapegoat. Given a suitable provocation, "human feeling" gives way to irrational, animalistic passion in times of war.

Tolstoy often restates the view that the Napoleonic Wars were ultimately just a mass of fellow Christians murdering each other for no reason. At the end of the book, he goes further in saying that there's no explaining the war except as an example of the "zoological law" that males tend to fight and kill each other. No matter what ideals people name, Tolstoy holds that war is ugly, unjustifiable, and degrades everyone it touches.



HAPPINESS AND THE MEANING OF LIFE

In *War and Peace*, most major characters wrestle with how to live fulfilled, happy lives in a world that seems to be overwhelmed with suffering. For example, Pierre seeks meaning and stability in Freemasonry, a spiritual brotherhood that promises to cure him of his youthful debauchery, but he's soon disillusioned by its members' hypocrisy. Princess Marya, who's otherwise an exemplar of genuine religious faith, finds that her virtue makes her vulnerable to a self-sabotaging pride. Both Pierre and Marya learn that to live a meaningful life, it's necessary to accept the realities of ordinary life in the world, not try to escape them. A partial exception is Prince Andrei, who transcends worldly ventures (like war, career, and love) to such a degree that he glimpses the ultimate object of life—eternal love—and is therefore able to die peacefully. For most people, though, Tolstoy suggests that happiness is found not in indulgence, escapism, or relentless self-denial, but in the ability to see the beauty and goodness present in everyday existence.

Pierre's storyline shows how escapism fails to provide a meaningful life. Disillusioned by a failed marriage and a life of physical indulgence, Pierre meets a Mason named Bazdeev and believes Masonry will cure him of the depravity of his past—he thinks "with a rapture of renewal" about the "blissful, irreproachable, and virtuous future" that awaits him due to Masonry. But within a few years, Pierre discovers that his escapist attempt to find meaning in an esoteric society has failed: the majority of Masons only care about the rites, not any

kind of meaning or virtue. In addition, many “did not believe in anything [...] and joined the Masons only to be close to the rich young brothers.” This is a blow to Pierre’s idealism, since he’d joined the brotherhood as a way of avoiding the pressures of aristocratic society. But most Masons simply replicate aristocratic structures *within* the brotherhood. It isn’t until Pierre meets a poor peasant named Platon Karataev while suffering together in French captivity that Pierre learns that neither indulgence nor escape will bring happiness. From Platon’s simple integrity, Pierre learns to find joy regardless of his external circumstances. After being freed, Pierre learns “to see the great, the eternal, and the infinite in everything [...] And the closer he looked [at it], the calmer and happier he became.” Peace and happiness are found not in some distant, disembodied state, but in seeing mundane existence as a divine gift.

While Pierre’s arc shows how escapism fails to bring happiness, Princess Marya’s story shows that self-denial is no better. Marya’s primary struggle is reconciling her religious faith with her desire for earthly love. Though Marya wants love and a family, she sees such desires as sinful, since loving a man would distract her from serving God wholeheartedly. Because of this, she denies her own desires, making her miserable and alone. Out of slavish family loyalty, Marya also denies her self-worth. As her father Prince Nikolai declines into senility, he becomes abusive, but Marya either reproaches herself for judging his behavior or notices that a “feeling resembling the pride of sacrifice gathered in [her] soul.” In other words, Marya becomes self-conscious about how much she’s putting up with, and it leads to self-righteousness instead of the humility she wants to have. This shows how excessive self-denial can backfire—it makes her neither happy nor virtuous. But by the end of the book, Marya is married to Nikolai Rostov and she finds peace in conventional family life. In marriage, she learns to integrate her spiritual beliefs with care for her family—namely by loving her family in the way that “Christ loved mankind.” Through this, she learns that she can serve God *while* loving those around her and even enjoying family life.

While Pierre and Princess Marya’s spiritual journeys involve learning to live happily on earth, Prince Andrei finds happiness that frees him to leave everyday life behind. After getting injured at the battle of Austerlitz, Prince Andrei lies on the battlefield staring at the **sky**, oblivious to the carnage around him. The sky changes him—he thinks “Yes! everything is empty, everything is a deception, except this infinite sky.” Having sought glory in war, Andrei now realizes that there is “infinite” beauty he’s never noticed before, and that war is “empty” by comparison. After surviving this moment, Andrei struggles to find a satisfying role in earthly life. He tries government service and quickly grows disillusioned, and while he initially believes that marrying Natasha will fix him, it becomes clear that he hasn’t really seen her for who she is—he only saw what she

might do for him. It’s not until Andrei glimpses eternal love and turns away from desiring anything in the material world altogether that his tension is resolved. Gravely wounded at Borodino, he sees his enemy Anatole suffering and “a rapturous pity and love for this man filled his happy heart,” making him realize that universal love is what he’s been missing. The more he contemplates this, the less it’s necessary for him to persist in the world, and he dies.

Tolstoy suggests that meaning and happiness aren’t found through a universal, prescribed path, but through one’s ability to come to terms with the mystery of the world as it is. Generally speaking, though, beauty and goodness aren’t “out there”—they’re not objects of endless striving—but instead they can be embraced here and now, by recognizing what’s been right in front of a person all along.



THEORY OF HISTORY

In reaction to the rising prevalence of scientific theories in his day, Tolstoy opposed the notion that reality could be explained *solely* in terms of theories and systems. In his view, such systems push the possibility of divine will and the complexity of human events to the margins of history, thereby trying to reduce life to the easily explainable. In other words, people apply sweeping theories to life, or attribute historical movements to larger-than-life personalities, instead of recognizing that life is the product of countless interacting possibilities. For example, the novel contrasts the pronouncements of generals—normally seen to be the most consequential actors in war—with the unrecognized heroism and sufferings of everyday soldiers, whom Tolstoy implies were actually much more significant to the war’s outcome than the famous generals. Tolstoy also critiques the historians of his day for trying to explain the War of 1812 in terms of Napoleon’s genius or failure alone, instead of realizing that every battle’s outcome is the product of countless individual choices. Ultimately, Tolstoy contends that when people stop believing that God runs the world, they substitute other simplistic theories that inevitably flatten life’s true complexity.

To critique simplistic theories of how the world works, Tolstoy shows Russian generals trying to use German theories of war to make battle plans—but these theories don’t recognize more complex and variable human aspects of war, which leads them to fail. Reflecting on the council of war he observes at army headquarters, Prince Andrei articulates this critique, remarking that the size of an army is less important than the morale of its members, and these German-style plans cannot account for something human and unpredictable like morale, which doesn’t operate according to any kind of recognizable law. General Kutuzov makes this critique of simplistic theories even clearer when he falls asleep at a meeting of officers who are tediously reciting the war plan—a plan Kutuzov finds irrelevant. His sole contribution to the meeting is to say that “there’s nothing more

important before a battle [...] than a good night's sleep." Kutuzov disdains his inferiors' over-reliance on theory because he knows from experience that something as basic as a well-rested soldier has a more concrete impact in battle than the best-laid plans.

Tolstoy also questions history's obsession with superhuman "great men," like Emperor Alexander or Napoleon, suggesting that the choices of ordinary people are more consequential than the actions of a few famous men. For one thing, Tolstoy depicts so-called great men as not being so great. Nikolai Rostov has always idolized Emperor Alexander, but after visiting a disease-ridden field hospital, he is disillusioned by the pomp surrounding the Emperor. Nikolai can't reconcile ordinary men's horrible suffering with the "self-satisfied" complacency of the rulers for whom they're fighting. Furthermore, "greatness" actually allows amoral figures like Napoleon to get away with anything they want. To defend heroes, historians resort to so-called greatness "as if greatness excludes the possibility of the measure of good and bad. For the great man there is no bad." If good and bad don't apply, then the whole notion of great men governing history is suspect.

Finally, Tolstoy suggests that ordinary people matter *more* than great men, but this is seldom recognized. At Schöngraben, for example, Prince Andrei witnesses a low-ranking artillery officer act heroically, only to see the man berated by his superiors for minor "failures." While Andrei tries to stand up for the man, Prince Bagration doesn't believe him—this is one example of how the "great" come to disdain the lesser people who actually make their victories possible.

According to Tolstoy, history is always more complicated than it looks on the surface, both because of unpredictable variables and because of the vast numbers of unrecognized people whose actions combine to shape events. Because historians can't capture all those people and variables, they inevitably simplify. Part of *War and Peace's* achievement is its intricacy—the novel explores inexhaustible human complexity in a way that gives history its due, but it looks beyond the obvious and "great."

the sky's deep blue and feels at peace, comforted that there's something greater than death. Similarly, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky gazes at the sky after being wounded in the battle of Austerlitz, instantly changing his sense of what's meaningful—next to eternity, even Napoleon looks utterly insignificant. During his forced march as a prisoner in 1812, Pierre, too, draws comfort from the sky's vastness, seeing it as a reflection of the human soul that can never be bound.



CLOCK

Tolstoy likens the events of war to the precisely tuned workings of a mechanical clock. For example, in the days preceding the battle of Austerlitz, battle preparations tick down as inevitably as the motions of a clock, as if they've been set in motion long before. This image symbolizes Tolstoy's belief that history unfolds according to the law of predetermination. Because events are the result of countless circumstances coming together over time, historians can't isolate singular causes and must resort to predetermination, or the law of necessity, to explain events.



OAK TREE

The oak tree symbolizes the indispensable role of hope in human flourishing. One day in 1809, Prince Andrei sees a gnarled oak tree in the woods, which seems to resist the coming of spring. At that time, the tree symbolizes the stagnation in Andrei's own life; he feels there's nothing to live for. Later, after meeting Natasha Rostov and seeing her joyful openness to life, Andrei feels renewed hope for his future. When he spots the same oak tree again, it's bursting with fresh leaves, almost unrecognizably transformed.



COMET

The comet of 1812 symbolizes the growth of Pierre's soul in unselfish love, though it takes Pierre a while to understand this. Pierre sees the comet for the first time after consoling Natasha (who's distraught over her broken engagement) and acknowledging his love for her. Though he's not free to marry her, Pierre feels something new being awakened in his soul. He comes to believe that, somehow, the comet signifies that he'll be liberated from his idle, worthless Moscow life by the war of 1812—that his fate is mysteriously bound up with both Natasha's and Napoleon's. While his prediction isn't completely wrong, his involvement with Napoleon is as a suffering war prisoner—not a triumphant assassin, as he'd hoped. After his ordeal, his soul has matured to a point that he can love Natasha freely.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



SKY

The sky symbolizes the eternal, unfathomable aspect of human life, though this means something different to each character. In general, glimpses of the sky assure people that life and meaning endure beyond their immediate sufferings. When Nikolai Rostov experiences enemy fire for the first time, he suddenly finds himself enchanted by



QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Vintage edition of *War and Peace* published in 2008.

Volume 1, Part 1: Chapters 5–6 Quotes

“There’s war now against Napoleon. If it were a war for freedom, I could understand it, I’d be the first to go into military service; but to help England and Austria against the greatest man in the world . . . is not right.”

Prince Andrei merely shrugged his shoulders at Pierre’s childish talk. He made it look as though he could not reply to such stupidity; but in fact it was hard to reply to this naive question in any other way than Prince Andrei had done.

“If everyone made war only according to his own convictions, there would be no war,” he said. [...]

“Well, what makes you go to war?” asked Pierre.

“What makes me? I don’t know. I have to. Besides, I’m going . . .” He paused. “I’m going because this life I lead here, this life— is not for me!”

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, Pierre Bezukhov (speaker), Napoleon Bonaparte

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Early in the novel, Pierre Bezukhov and his best friend, Prince Andrei, discuss war. At this point, Russia’s war with Napoleon is little more than rumor. Though Andrei has already enlisted, Pierre, who reveres Napoleon, finds the whole idea of war offensive. He argues that war for principle’s sake is one thing, but that this fight isn’t Russia’s business, and, anyway, Napoleon is a great man.

Prince Andrei is annoyed by his friend’s idealism and suggests that most people don’t fight on principle. For his part, war is an escape from an unhappy marriage and a lack of prospects at home. As such, war offers some outlet for achievement and happiness.

Tolstoy, though, suggests that both friend’s perspectives are naïve. In his view, war is inherently meaningless, so it’s pointless to seek meaning in it—whether principle or self-realization. Tolstoy will also challenge Pierre’s exalted view of Napoleon, and more generally the notion of “great men” as the hinge-points of history, as, over the course of the story, both Pierre and Andrei change their beliefs not just about war, but about what constitutes a meaningful life.

Volume 1, Part 2: Chapters 4–8 Quotes

Rostov, preoccupied by his relations with Bogdanych, stopped on the bridge, not knowing what to do with himself. There was no one to cut down (as he had always pictured battle to himself), nor could he help set fire to the bridge, because, unlike the other soldiers, he had not brought a plait of straw with him. He was standing and looking about, when suddenly there was a rattling on the bridge, as if someone had spilled nuts, and one of the hussars, the one nearest him, fell on the railing with a groan. [...]

Nikolai Rostov turned away, and, as if searching for something, began looking at the distance, at the waters of the Danube, at the sky, at the sun! How good the sky seemed, how blue, calm, and deep!

Related Characters: Bogdanych, Nikolai Rostov

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Nikolai Rostov’s first experience of battle during the War of 1805, as Russian troops encounter French troops in Enns, Austria. The experience is nothing like Nikolai had imagined. Instead of being focused on the task at hand, Nikolai is distracted by a conflict with his regimental commander, Bogdanych. When the hussars are supposed to burn a bridge, Nikolai can’t help because he forgot the simple task of bringing some straw; and, though he’d always imagined himself attacking the enemy, there are no enemies at hand. Tolstoy portrays the young cadet’s first experience of war in a deeply human way: his thoughts wander to irrelevancies, he’s forgetful, and the moment doesn’t live up to past daydreams of glory.

When another hussar is wounded by canister shot (the comparison to “spilled nuts” suggests Nikolai isn’t yet used to the deadly sound), Nikolai snaps out of his idleness—yet instead of springing into action, he suddenly feels closely connected to nature, particularly noticing the sky’s peaceful depths. Tolstoy sometimes uses the sky as a symbol of stable, unchanging reality which starkly contrasts with what he portrays as the meaningless chaos of war.

Volume 1, Part 2: Chapters 13–20 Quotes

☛ And the flushed alien physiognomy of this man who, with lowered bayonet, holding his breath, was running lightly towards him, frightened Rostov. He seized his pistol and, instead of firing it, threw it at the Frenchman, and ran for the bushes as fast as he could. [...] One undivided feeling of fear for his young, happy life possessed his entire being. Quickly leaping over the hedges, with that swiftness with which he had run playing tag, he flew across the field, turning his pale, kind young face back from time to time, and a chill of terror ran down his spine. [...] “Something must be wrong,” he thought, “it’s impossible that they should want to kill me.”

Related Characters: Nikolai Rostov (speaker)

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

At the battle of Schöngraben, in November 1805, Nikolai Rostov endures his most intense battle experience yet. Throughout the novel, Tolstoy depicts war as inherently meaningless. Accordingly, this passage is marked by irrationality. The French soldier who charges toward Rostov is “alien,” and Nikolai’s response is not to fight back, as he’s been trained, but instead to fling his weapon at the man. Instead of rational thought, all-consuming fear governs his actions, and when he runs away, it’s like a nightmarish game of tag, a reminder of Rostov’s youthfulness. The idea that someone wants to kill him seems “impossible” nonsense. All these details suggest that, in the heat of battle, people don’t behave according to the principles of courage and patriotism that have been instilled in them; rather they behave as the situation demands, that is, irrationally, even inhumanly.

Later in the novel, Nikolai exaggerates his courage at Schöngraben, but regardless of what happened, it’s a coming of age moment for the young hussar—he faces the enemy for the first time and survives, even if the way he survives doesn’t match his dreams of glory.

Volume 1, Part 3: Chapters 1–5 Quotes

☛ “All this had to be so and could not be otherwise,” thought Pierre, “therefore there’s no point in asking whether it’s good or bad. It’s good because it’s definite, and there’s no more of the old tormenting doubt.” [...]

“Something special is said on these occasions,” he thought, but he simply could not remember precisely what was said on these occasions. [...]

“It’s too late now, it’s all over; and anyway I love her,” thought Pierre.

“*Je vous aime!*” he said, having remembered what needed to be said on these occasions; but the words sounded so meager that he felt ashamed of himself.

A month and a half later he was married and settled down, as they say, the happy possessor of a beautiful wife and millions of roubles, in the big, newly done-over house of the counts Bezukhov in Petersburg.

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov (speaker), Hélène Kuragin Bezukhov

Page Number: 214

Explanation and Analysis

Pierre’s “old tormenting doubt” refers to his constant questions about the meaning of life; as a young man, he’s constantly unsure what to do with himself. Therefore he tends to get swept along unresistingly in others’ plans for him, finding relief in that surrender, even when he’s obviously being manipulated. Such is the case here, as Prince Vassily pushes Pierre and Vassily’s daughter Hélène together in hopes of securing a rich husband for her.

Pierre knows that Hélène has an immoral reputation and doesn’t particularly like her, yet on the strength of his sexual attraction and pressure from others, he passively submits to the match, telling himself it must be fate. Still, on the night of the engagement, he’s clueless about what to say, finally managing an awkward “I love you.” Though the passage has a comical edge, it’s also tragic, as Hélène proves to be a disastrous false start in Pierre’s long journey of discovering how to live a good life.

Thinking of marriage, Princess Marya dreamed of family happiness and children, but her chiefest, strongest, and most secret dream was of earthly love. [...] “My God,” she said, “how can I suppress these devil’s thoughts in my heart? How can I renounce evil imaginings forever, so as peacefully to do Thy will?” And she had barely asked this question, when God answered her in her own heart: “[...] The future of people and your own fate must be unknown to you; but live so as to be ready for anything. If God should see fit to test you in the duties of marriage, be ready to fulfill His will.” With this reassuring thought (but still with a hope that her forbidden earthly dream would be fulfilled), Princess Marya sighed, crossed herself, and went downstairs without thinking about her dress, or her hairstyle, or how she would walk in, or what she would say. What could all that mean in comparison with the predestination of God, without whose will not one hair falls from man’s head.

Related Characters: Princess Marya Bolkonsky (speaker), Anatole Kuragin

Page Number: 221

Explanation and Analysis

Before her brief, ill-fated matchup with Anatole Kuragin, Princess Marya prays for guidance concerning a possible marriage. Though Princess Marya is the most religious character in the novel, she’s not otherworldly, separate from the world. In contrast, like other characters such as Prince Andrei and Pierre, Marya struggles to live out her convictions amid the conflicting influences of the real world.

In particular, she struggles with the fact that she yearns for romantic love, but believes this desire is evil because it threatens to draw her affections away from God. In prayer, Marya is comforted by the belief that God controls inscrutable fate, and she must simply submit to it. This fits in with Tolstoy’s broader argument that the movement of history, or “necessity,” is the primary determinant of human events, whether in war or marriage. For Marya, details like dress and hairstyle are tiny and insignificant compared to God’s will controlling everything.

The last two sentence of the quote are probably allusions to the Biblical Gospels, especially to Christ’s promise in the Book of Luke that “not a hair of your head will perish” under persecution unless God decrees it.)

Volume 1, Part 3: Chapters 6–9 Quotes

Rostov was a truthful young man, not for anything would he have deliberately told an untruth. He began telling the story with the intention of telling it exactly as it had been, but imperceptibly, involuntarily, and inevitably for himself, he went over into untruth. If he had told the truth to these listeners, who, like himself, had already heard accounts of attacks numerous times and had formed for themselves a definite notion of what an attack was, and were expecting exactly the same sort of account—they either would not have believed him or, worse still, would have thought it was Rostov’s own fault that what usually happens in stories of cavalry attacks had not happened with him. He could not simply tell them that they all set out at a trot, he fell off his horse, dislocated his arm, and ran to the woods as fast as he could to escape a Frenchman. [...] They were expecting an account of how he got all fired up, forgetting himself [...] how his saber tasted flesh, how he fell exhausted, and so on. And he told them all that.

Related Characters: Berg, Boris Drubetsky, Nikolai Rostov

Page Number: 242

Explanation and Analysis

In winter 1805, before the battle of Austerlitz, Nikolai Rostov talks with his friends Boris and Berg about their experiences of military life. At the battle of Schöngraben, Nikolai had fled the attacking French in a moment of confused panic. But when he recounts the event to Boris and Berg (who serve in a guard regiment that hasn’t yet seen direct battle), he finds himself not just exaggerating what happened, but telling them an altogether different story—a much more valorous, adventurous version of his actions that match with what he thinks they want to hear.

This shift is all the more striking because Nikolai normally values honesty and honor. Nikolai’s out-of-character behavior suggests that in war, even ethical people’s moral compass gets skewed. Soldiers feel pressured to conform to certain standards of behavior in battle (flying into a rage, killing enemies), and when they fail to live up to those, they feel the need to fabricate an acceptable account. At this point in the novel, Nikolai lives with a sense of dissonance—war is different from what he expected, and not only that, but he also isn’t quite the person he thought he was, either. As Tolstoy sees it, war’s irrationality distorts everyone it touches.

Volume 1, Part 3: Chapters 10–13 Quotes

●● As in a clock the result of the complex movement of numberless wheels and pulleys is merely the slow and measured movement of the hands pointing to the time, so also the result of all the complex human movements of these hundred and sixty thousand Russians and French—all the passions, desires, regrets, humiliations, sufferings, bursts of pride, fear, rapture—was merely the loss of the battle of Austerlitz, the so-called battle of the three emperors, that is, a slow movement of the world-historical hand on the clockface of human history.

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 258

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes the hours leading up to the battle of Austerlitz on December 2, 1805, in what's now the Czech Republic. The battle is considered to be one of the most important in the Napoleonic Wars and, in fact, one of Napoleon's greatest victories ever. It has been called the "battle of the three emperors" because Napoleon fought against emperors Alexander I of Russia and Franz I of Austria.

Tolstoy uses the symbol of a clock to suggest two main things about the outcome of the battle as well as history more generally. First, like a clock, a historical event such as the battle of Austerlitz has "numberless" minute parts which work together to bring about a certain result. Tolstoy identifies these parts as things like human "passions, desires, [and] regrets," as opposed to things like battle plans. In this way, Tolstoy suggests that in war, inner motivations are more important than things like weapons and battlefield positions. Second, these countless components work together in a mechanical way—"a slow movement [...] on the clockface of human history." This imagery anticipates Tolstoy's argument (developed later in the novel) that an overarching, unexplainable divine force determines historical outcomes, overseeing and coordinating the infinite small factors that combine to produce an event.

●● That night Rostov was on the picket line with his platoon forward of Bagration's detachment. [...] His eyes kept closing, and in his imagination the sovereign appeared, then Denisov, then Moscow memories [...] "Why not? It might well be," thought Rostov, "that the sovereign, meeting me, gives me some assignment, saying as to any officer: 'Go and find out what's there.' There are many stories about how he got to know some officer quite by chance and attached him to himself. What if he attached me to himself? Oh, how I'd protect him, how I'd tell him the whole truth, how I'd expose the deceivers!"

Related Characters: Nikolai Rostov (speaker), Captain Denisov, Prince Bagration, Emperor Alexander I

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis


The night before the battle of Austerlitz, Nikolai Rostov sleepily rides along the picket line, drifting between dreams and conscious thought. He dreams recurrently of Emperor Alexander, whom Nikolai idolizes. Nikolai not only hopes to randomly encounter the Russian sovereign, but he also imagines that he will faithfully perform whatever special mission the sovereign happens to entrust to him. (There's a humorous note here, since Nikolai has only faced one major battle so far and didn't display all that much courage on that occasion.)

At this point in Nikolai's early life as a soldier, he's motivated by adoration of the emperor. There's little sense that he cares about the war's broader objectives, whatever those might be, or even about distinguishing himself among his fellow soldiers—he just wants to personally serve Alexander and gain the sovereign's trust in doing so. This represents Nikolai's youthful illusions about war. Little by little as the novel progresses, the emperor's godlike status in Nikolai's mind will be eroded, and as he's exposed to more of the horrors of warfare, he will begin to question his motivations and the meaning of the war more broadly.

Volume 1, Part 3: Chapters 14–19 Quotes

☞ There was nothing over him now except the sky—the lofty sky, not clear, but still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds slowly creeping across it. “How quiet, calm, and solemn, not at all like when I was running,” thought Prince Andrei, “not like when we were running, shouting, and fighting; not at all like when the Frenchman and the artilleryman, with angry and frightened faces, were pulling at the swab— it’s quite different the way the clouds creep across this lofty, infinite sky. How is it I haven’t seen this lofty sky before? And how happy I am that I’ve finally come to know it. Yes! everything is empty, everything is a deception, except this infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing except that. But there is not even that, there is nothing except silence, tranquillity. And thank God!...”

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker)

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 281

Explanation and Analysis

In the battle of Austerlitz, Prince Andrei finally has the heroic moment he’s dreamed of—seizing the standards (the battle flags) in order to rally the panicked, scattering Russian soldiers. Almost immediately, he gets struck down with an injury and finds himself staring at the vast sky above him. In a daze, he considers the overwhelming contrast between the fear and chaos of battle and the measureless, untouched purity of the “infinite sky.” The sky’s silence and peace seem to swallow up the battle still raging around him, to the extent that everything else seems an irrelevant “deception.”

Up to now, Prince Andrei has sought happiness in warfare, but now, for the first time, he finds that happiness in contemplating eternal reality instead of temporary, earthbound glory. This is the first of several spiritual awakenings Andrei experiences in the novel as he struggles to comprehend life’s meaning. Though he’ll try to replicate this feeling in a public career and in marriage, he’ll eventually be pushed back toward the contemplation of spiritual realities, suggesting that Tolstoy sees the spiritual realm as the ultimate source of truth.

☞ “But that can’t be him, alone in the middle of this empty field,” thought Rostov. Just then Alexander turned his head, and Rostov saw the beloved features so vividly imprinted on his memory. The sovereign was pale, his cheeks were hollow, his eyes sunken; but there was all the more loveliness and mildness in his features. [...]

But as a young man in love trembles and thrills, not daring to utter what he dreams of by night, and looks about fearfully, seeking help or the possibility of delay and flight, when the desired moment comes and he stands alone with her, so now Rostov, having attained what he desired more than anything in the world, did not know how to approach the sovereign and presented thousands of considerations to himself for why it was unsuitable, improper, and impossible.

Related Characters: Nikolai Rostov (speaker), Emperor Alexander I

Page Number: 287


Explanation and Analysis

As the battle of Austerlitz winds down, Nikolai unexpectedly sees his beloved Emperor Alexander in an outlying field. He’d dreamed of exactly this moment—Tolstoy likens it to a young man getting a moment alone with his dream girl for the first time—but it doesn’t live up to his hopes. Far from a triumphant moment, the battle has been lost, and the Emperor stands there looking defeated and bereft.

Watching from a distance, Nikolai talks himself out of approaching the grieving sovereign—ironically undermining his dream the night before, when he imagined coming to Alexander’s aid and gaining his approval. Even though there’s nothing stopping him from seizing this rare opportunity, Nikolai cannot think of what to say, perhaps because in this moment of failure Alexander is humanized in Nikolai’s eyes for the first time. Nikolai instinctively knows how to rally behind a hero, but he doesn’t know how to behave toward an idol who has been revealed to be as helplessly human as himself. It’s a major step toward Nikolai’s disenchantment with the sovereign and with idealized visions of war in general.

☛☛ “Voilà une belle mort,” said Napoleon, looking at Bolkonsky. Prince Andrei understood that it had been said about him, and that it was Napoleon speaking. [...] But he heard these words as if he was hearing the buzzing of a fly. He not only was not interested, he did not even notice, and at once forgot them. [...] He knew that it was Napoleon— his hero— but at that moment, Napoleon seemed to him such a small, insignificant man compared with what was now happening between his soul and this lofty, infinite sky with clouds racing across it. To him it was all completely the same at that moment who was standing over him or what he said about him; he was only glad that people had stopped over him and only wished that those people would help him and bring him back to life, which seemed so beautiful to him, because he now understood it so differently.

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker), Napoleon Bonaparte

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 291

Explanation and Analysis

Even though he fights for Russia, Prince Andrei has looked up to Napoleon as an exemplary general. After being injured on the battlefield at Austerlitz, he gets the chance to meet his hero when Napoleon visits the Russian wounded. Looking down at Andrei, Napoleon says admiringly, “There’s a fine death.”

Unknown to Napoleon, however, Andrei’s perspective has completely changed since the battle. The war’s larger-than-life personalities and objectives no longer mean anything to him. He now cherishes life not as an arena in which to gain personal glory, but as an opportunity to encounter eternal, spiritual beauties. Thus an encounter that would have thrilled him an hour ago is no longer worth his attention. In that regard, Napoleon’s words can be interpreted not just as Napoleon himself means them, but also as symbolically marking that Andrei has “died” to the kind of life that once seemed valuable to him. So it’s ironic that the glory-seeking Napoleon admires Andrei’s “death,” since it signals Andrei’s recognition of Napoleon’s own unimportance in the greater scheme of things.

Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 1–4 Quotes

☛☛ “For centuries, starting with our forefather Adam and down to our days, we have been working towards that knowledge and are infinitely far from reaching our goal; but we see our incomprehension only as our weakness and His grandeur . . .”

With a swelling heart, with glittering eyes, Pierre gazed into the Mason’s face, listened to him, did not interrupt him, did not ask anything, and believed with his whole soul what this stranger was telling him. Whether he believed those reasonable arguments in the Mason’s speech, or believed, as children do, the intonations, convictions, and heartfelt emotion in the Mason’s speech [...] in any case he wanted to believe with his whole soul, and did believe, and experienced a joyful feeling of peace, renewal, and return to life.

Related Characters: Osip (Iosif) Alexeevich Bazdeev (speaker), Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 351

Explanation and Analysis

Pierre has just left behind his failed marriage and the trappings of his position as Count Bezukhov and feels that he is flailing for stable meaning in his life. While waiting in the posting-station for horses, he meets a prominent Mason who’s familiar with his situation. The Mason diagnoses the source of Pierre’s unhappiness as his lack of belief in God. The brotherhood of Freemasons believe in a form of deism which doesn’t align with mainstream monotheistic religions. The Mason explains that God is infinitely beyond human comprehension, and that Masons throughout history have worked together to study the architecture of the universe in order to develop their understanding of the divine and improve themselves.

At this low point in his life, Pierre is ripe for such talk. Feeling stifled by the constraints of aristocratic society, he is thrilled with the expansiveness of Bazdeev’s vision—stretching back to the beginning of humanity and forward into eternity. He responds emotionally to the Mason’s tone of conviction, not rationally to the content of his arguments. This emotional appeal is enough to give Pierre a sense of “[returning] to life” from empty meaninglessness. Though in reality, this shift is just the next step on his search for life’s meaning, not the conclusion.

Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 10–14 Quotes

●● Pierre did not know that the village where he was offered bread and salt and where a chapel to Peter and Paul was being built was a market village with a fair on St. Peter's Day, that the chapel had been begun long ago by the wealthy peasants, who were the ones that welcomed him, and that nine-tenths of the peasants in that village were completely destitute. [...]

"How easy it is, how little effort it takes, to do so much good," thought Pierre, "and how little we care about it!"

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov (speaker)

Page Number: 380

Explanation and Analysis

An important part of Pierre's new life as a Mason involves trying to purify his soul through good deeds. Accordingly, he undertakes the task of reforming the lives of peasants on his southern estates by lightening their workloads, providing medical and educational resources, and more. At least, he believes that's what he's doing. His savvy head steward knows that Pierre's intended reforms would ruin Pierre financially, so he orchestrates scenes of improvement to satisfy Pierre, like convincing him that a new chapel is being built by well-off peasants in his honor. Pierre is none the wiser, taking joy in what he thinks is the result of his own benevolence.

There are layers of irony here. For one thing, even if the reforms really took place, they weren't really Pierre's doing—his steward is the one who would actually have carried them out, using Pierre's money. But more to the point, the reforms didn't happen, yet Pierre gets the same emotional satisfaction as if they had ("how easy it is, how little effort it takes"). Tolstoy uses Pierre as an example of how easily even well-meaning people can be deceived about their own goodness, and raises the question of whether real improvement has occurred in someone if they merely *think* it has.

●● "To live only so as not to do evil, so as not to repent, is too little. I used to live that way, I lived for myself, and I ruined my life. And only now, when I live, or at least try to live" (Pierre corrected himself out of modesty) "for others, only now have I understood all the happiness of life. No, I won't agree with you, and you don't really think what you're saying." Prince Andrei silently gazed at Pierre with a mocking smile.

[...]

"Maybe you're right for yourself," he went on after a brief pause, "[...] But I experienced the opposite. I used to live for glory. (What is glory? The same as love for others, the desire to do something for them, the desire for their praise.) So I lived for others and ruined my life— and not almost, but completely. And I've been at peace since I began living for myself alone."

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, Pierre Bezukhov (speaker)

Page Number: 384

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange between close friends Pierre and Prince Andrei comes at a transitional moment in both men's lives. For Andrei, it's a low point—after getting injured at Austerlitz, and vowing to devote himself to family life, he returned home just in time to watch his wife Princess Lise die in childbirth. Since then, Andrei has decided to stop living for the idea of serving others and start looking out for himself alone.

Pierre, in contrast, is at a high point in his life—or at least he thinks so. Pierre has joined the Freemasons and devoted himself to improving conditions for the serfs on his estates. Even though (unbeknownst to him) these reforming efforts haven't accomplished much, Pierre believes that helping others is the path to happiness in life. Disillusioned, Andrei dissents from the idea that helping others ultimately serves them well (his own efforts have only led to grief) or even that there's a consistent right and wrong in life.

Despite their opposing attitudes, neither man has arrived at true happiness. Pierre hasn't yet faced up to his own flaws or the reality of death; Andrei hasn't yet opened himself to the possibility of happiness and love. This conversation actually reveals the start of their respective journeys toward rejecting counterfeit happiness (Pierre) and becoming willing to embrace real happiness (Andrei).

Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 15–18 Quotes

☛ Here in the regiment everything was clear and simple. The whole world was divided into two unequal parts: one was our Pavlogradsky regiment, the other— all the rest. And with this rest he had nothing to do. In the regiment, everything was known: who was a lieutenant, who a captain, who was a good and who a bad man, and— above all— who was a comrade. [...] Having entered once more into these definite conditions of regimental life, Rostov experienced a joy and peace similar to what a weary man feels when he lies down to rest. This regimental life was the more pleasurable for Rostov during this campaign in that, after losing to Dolokhov (an act for which, despite all his family's reassurances, he could not forgive himself), he had resolved to serve not as before, but, in order to smooth over his guilt, to serve well and be a perfectly excellent comrade and officer, that is, a fine human being— which seemed so difficult in the world, but so possible in the regiment.

Related Characters: Dolokhov, Nikolai Rostov

Page Number: 395

Explanation and Analysis

When Nikolai returns to the regiment in 1806, life becomes much simpler for him. This has nothing particularly to do with the war itself and much to do with the familial atmosphere the regiment provides. Nikolai's experience can be compared to both Prince Andrei's and Pierre's around the same time. Pierre has joined the Masons in order to find a structure within which he believes he can become a better person; Prince Andrei meanwhile struggles to find the same in public service and remarriage.

Especially after his brutal gambling loss to Dolokhov, Nikolai finds the built-in structure of the regiment an ideal environment for self-improvement. In the regiment, it's clear what's expected of a person, who's an enemy, and who's a friend—deceivers like Dolokhov aren't such a threat there. Nikolai is no longer seeking glory in the war so much as he wants to figure out how to be a good man. And it's ordinary men and their modest motivations that Tolstoy sees as making the biggest difference, ultimately, in war.

Volume 2, Part 2: Chapters 19–21 Quotes

☛ Rostov stood at the corner for a long time, looking at the feasting men from a distance. Painful work was going on in his mind, which he could not bring to an end. Terrible doubts arose in his soul. Now he remembered [...] the whole hospital with those torn-off arms and legs, that filth and disease. He imagined so vividly now that hospital stench of dead flesh that he looked around to see where the stench could be coming from. Then he remembered that self-satisfied Bonaparte with his white little hand, who was now an emperor, whom the emperor Alexander liked and respected. Why, then, those torn-off arms and legs, those dead people? [...] He caught himself in such strange thoughts that it made him frightened.

Related Characters: Emperor Alexander I, Napoleon Bonaparte, Nikolai Rostov

Page Number: 416

Explanation and Analysis



Nikolai Rostov is visiting Tilsit at the time that the peace treaties are drawn up between Napoleon and Emperor Alexander. He has just come from visiting Denisov in a field hospital, where sick and injured soldiers languish in terrible conditions. The sights there made a deep impression on him. Now, Nikolai sees celebratory feasting among the dignitaries in Tilsit. He can't fathom the suffering and decadence he's witnessed existing within such a short space of time. He asks himself: if Emperor Alexander is now making peace with Napoleon, then why did all those soldiers suffer so horribly? These questions stir "terrible doubts" in Rostov.

While Nikolai had begun to see Alexander in a more human light at the battle of Austerlitz, he now questions the humanity of the war altogether. But Tolstoy is always attentive to the inner contradictions that people overlook in order to live with themselves—even though Nikolai is frightened by these "strange thoughts," they don't convince him to leave army life which, for all Nikolai's disillusionment, is the only context in which he's felt free to become a better man.

Volume 2, Part 3: Chapters 1–6 Quotes

☛☛ The old oak, quite transformed, spreading out a canopy of juicy, dark greenery, basked, barely swaying, in the rays of the evening sun. Of the gnarled fingers, the scars, the old grief and mistrust— nothing could be seen. Juicy green leaves without branches broke through the stiff, hundred-year-old bark, and it was impossible to believe that this old fellow had produced them. “Yes, it’s the same oak,” thought Prince Andrei, and suddenly a causeless springtime feeling of joy and renewal came over him. All the best moments of his life suddenly recalled themselves to him at the same time. Austerlitz with the lofty sky, and the dead, reproachful face of his wife, and Pierre on the ferry, and a girl excited by the beauty of the night, and that night itself, and the moon— all of it suddenly recalled itself to him.

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker), Princess Lise (Liza) Bolkonsky (“the little princess”), Natasha Rostov, Pierre Bezukhov

Related Symbols:  

Page Number: 423

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes a moment of spiritual significance in Prince Andrei’s life as he travels home from a visit to the Rostovs. On his journey to their home, he had passed an aged, gnarled oak tree that looked as if it didn’t have much life left in it. Now, on the way home, he looks for the oak again, but it looks so different he doesn’t recognize it at first—instead it’s “juicy” and thriving with life, its years seemingly disappeared.

Obviously, the oak symbolizes Andrei’s feeling of renewed life after meeting Natasha at the Rostovs’ summer estate. But the “springtime [...] joy” doesn’t just come from the promise of romance. In addition to Natasha’s beauty, Andrei is reminded of several key moments in his life, from his glimpse of eternity while wounded on the fields of Austerlitz, to his young wife’s death, to a lively ethical discussion with Pierre which reoriented him toward spiritual realities. All these things, even those touched by grief, now point him away from the despairing, premature retirement he’s been living in and toward the possibility of a fruitful life. The seeds of that life have always been there, it seems, and Natasha’s beauty has coaxed them out of dormancy.

Volume 2, Part 3: Chapters 18–22 Quotes

☛☛ On returning home, Prince Andrei began to recall his Petersburg life of those last four months as if it was something new. [...] He recalled his work on legislation, the concern with which he had translated the articles of the Roman and French codes into Russian, and he felt ashamed of himself. Then he vividly pictured Bogucharovo, his occupations in the country, his trip to Ryazan, recalled the muzhiks, the headman Dron, and applying to them the personal rights he had classified by paragraphs, he felt astonished that he could have been occupied with such idle work for so long.

Related Characters: Dron, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky

Page Number: 466

Explanation and Analysis

During this phase of his life, Prince Andrei has been working in Petersburg on writing a section of Russia’s civil law code pertaining to “Personal Rights.” In this work he believed he’d found renewed purpose, a meaningful outlet for his abilities. However, as his relationship with Natasha deepens—and after he becomes disillusioned with his boss Speransky’s fakeness—he begins to doubt the significance of his efforts.

In particular, when Andrei contrasts the idleness of his legislative work with the vividness of rural Russian life, the former seems meaningless. That’s especially so because he can picture specific peasants, like village leader Dron, whereas the “personal rights” he’d so carefully translated were just coldly abstract paragraphs. Next to the places and people he knows personally, abstractions appear foolish. Prince Andrei’s reaction represents the push and pull that earthly and spiritual matters hold in his life. Increasingly, he finds that the division of so-called active and idle occupations isn’t as important as the distinction between temporary, earthly things like politics and eternal things, like the souls of human beings.

Volume 2, Part 3: Chapters 23–26 Quotes

☛☛ “Forgive me,” said Prince Andrei, “but you’re so young, and I’ve already experienced so much of this life. I fear for you. You don’t know yourself.”

Natasha listened with concentrated attention, trying to understand the meaning of his words, and not understanding.

“Hard as this year that postpones my happiness will be for me,” Prince Andrei went on, “during this time you will test yourself. I ask you to make me happy in a year; but you’re free: our engagement will remain a secret, and if you become convinced that you don’t love me, or that you love ...” Prince Andrei said with an unnatural smile.

“Why are you saying this?” Natasha interrupted him. “You know I’ve loved you from the very day you first came to Otradnoe,” she said, firmly convinced that she was speaking the truth.

Related Characters: Natasha Rostov, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker)

Page Number: 479

Explanation and Analysis

After Prince Andrei and Natasha get engaged, Prince Andrei explains that he must travel abroad for a year. Though Prince Andrei chafes under this obligation (placed on him by his disapproving father), he also senses that his relationship with Natasha needs testing. They haven’t known each other for very long, and Natasha is more than a decade younger, less experienced, and more passionate than Andrei, a widower, is.

Tolstoy skillfully captures Natasha’s disbelieving resistance to Andrei’s caution. She tries to understand, but his explanation is beyond her teenaged comprehension—she’s convinced that she’s in love with him, and that’s all that matters. The truth is that Natasha wasn’t too aware of Prince Andrei the previous summer at Otradnoe, but in light of her current passion, and without intending to be dishonest, she reinterprets her memories. In this moment, Tolstoy hints that Natasha doesn’t even know herself yet, or how to distinguish passion from real love—prerequisites, in Tolstoy’s view, to truly loving another person. Given Natasha’s immaturity, the exchange anticipates that Andrei’s absence will be disastrous for them.

Volume 2, Part 4: Chapters 7–13 Quotes

☛☛ Where, how, and when had this little countess, brought up by an émigré Frenchwoman, sucked this spirit in from the Russian air she breathed, where had she gotten these ways[?] Yet that spirit and these ways were those very inimitable, unstudied Russian ones which the uncle expected of her. [...]

She did it exactly right, and so precisely, so perfectly precisely, that Anisya Fyodorovna, who at once handed Natasha the kerchief she needed for it, wept through her laughter, looking at this slender, graceful countess, brought up in silk and velvet, so foreign to her, who was able to understand everything that was in Anisya and in Anisya’s father, and in her aunt, and in her mother, and in every Russian.

Related Characters: Anisya Fyodorovna, Natasha Rostov

Page Number: 512

Explanation and Analysis

In some ways the winter of 1810 is a time of refuge for the Rostovs—they live on their country estate and enjoy traditionally Russian activities like hunting, folk music, and Christmas festivities. Here Natasha, while visiting an uncle who’s of the lower nobility or higher peasantry, exemplifies Russian womanhood with a traditional dance. When she spontaneously dances to her relative’s balalaika music, onlookers are amazed that a girl raised in aristocratic society—which was much more French than Russian—would instinctively know how to dance like this.

Tolstoy implies here that Natasha wasn’t taught traditional Russian culture, but that she naturally “sucked this spirit in from the Russian air she breathed,” understanding the ways of the peasant housekeeper Aniya Fyodorovna more naturally than the self-conscious fashions of Moscow and Petersburg. Natasha’s dance epitomizes Tolstoy’s view that there’s a “Russian soul” that all Russian people share, and Natasha herself is the epitome of authentic, graceful, joyful Russian womanhood.

Volume 2, Part 5: Chapters 5–10 Quotes

☛☛ The curtain rose again. Anatole left the box calm and cheerful. Natasha returned to her father's box, now totally subjected to the world she was in. Everything that was happening before her now seemed perfectly natural to her; but instead all her former thoughts about her fiancé, about Princess Marya, about country life, never once entered her head, as if it was all long ago, long past.

In the fourth act there was a devil, who sang, waving his arm, until the boards were pulled out from under him, and he sank down below. That was all Natasha saw of the fourth act: something excited and tormented her, and the cause of it was Kuragin, whom she involuntarily followed with her eyes.

Related Characters: Princess Marya Bolkonsky, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, Anatole Kuragin, Natasha Rostov

Page Number: 566

Explanation and Analysis

In Moscow, during Prince Andrei's travels abroad, Natasha goes to the opera. At first, the experience is totally disorienting. She instinctively resists the artificiality of the performance onstage. As the evening goes on, however—especially after she meets Anatole Kuragin—she becomes more and more “subjected” to what she sees both onstage and around her in the audience. As she forgets about the Bolkonskys and her home environment in the country, Natasha becomes increasingly distanced from what's natural to her and accommodates herself to the more affected, morally ambiguous world of Moscow society. The descent of the onstage devil is obviously connected with Kuragin, who later tempts Natasha into an illicit romance.

This scene also contrasts with Natasha's traditional Russian dance in the country. At her uncle's house, she was natural and carefree. In Moscow, she's tempted into affectation and deception.

Volume 3, Part 1: Chapters 1–7 Quotes

☛☛ Understandably, these and a countless, endless number of other causes, the number of which depends on countless different points of view, presented themselves to contemporaries; but for us, the descendants, who contemplate the enormity of the event in all its scope and delve into its simple and terrible meaning, these causes seem insufficient. For us it is not understandable that millions of Christians killed and tortured each other because Napoleon was a lover of power, Alexander was firm, English policy cunning, and the duke of Oldenburg offended.

Related Characters: Emperor Alexander I, Napoleon Bonaparte

Page Number: 604

Explanation and Analysis

Here Tolstoy compares the way the Napoleonic Wars looked to contemporaries and the way they appeared to later historians. He observes that there were many different contributors to the outbreak of war—for example, Napoleon was power-hungry, treaties were made and broken, territories changed hands. Indeed, anyone who participated in the wars or were affected by them could offer additional reasons, depending on their points of view.

However, Tolstoy suggests that none of these causes can ever explain what happened, at least not to the satisfaction of modern people looking back on the events. That's because the war ultimately came down to Christian people murdering one another—something that *cannot* make sense, no matter the explanation. People who were closer to the events might analyze them in terms of various causes, but people generations removed can look at them in their entire scope and discover that, for all the multiplicity of causes, it all comes down to a “simple and terrible meaning” of senseless killing. Tolstoy suggests that this is the irreducible truth of all war.

Volume 3, Part 1: Chapters 8–11 Quotes

☛☛ It is only because military men are clothed in splendor and power, and masses of scoundrels flatter power, endowing it with qualities of genius it does not have, that they are called geniuses. On the contrary, the best generals I knew were stupid or absentminded people. [...] A good commander not only does not need genius or any special qualities, but, on the contrary, he needs the absence of the best and highest human qualities—love, poetry, tenderness, a searching philosophical doubt. [...] The merit of success in military affairs does not depend on them, but on the man in the ranks who shouts ‘We're lost!’ or shouts ‘Hurrah!’ And it is only in the ranks that one can serve with the assurance of being useful!

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker)

Page Number: 644

Explanation and Analysis

When General Kutuzov offers Prince Andrei the coveted opportunity to take a position on his staff, Andrei declines. This quote sums up the reasoning that led to that fateful decision. Andrei has observed generals for many years at

this point, and he's concluded that so-called military "genius" is overrated. He recognizes that most of those "geniuses" are simply powerful people being flattered by fawning masses.

What's more, Andrei has realized, a good general doesn't need genius. That's because military success, in his view, depends so much more on the morale of rank-and-file soldiers. For that reason, a good general isn't one with lots of original ideas or philosophical insights, but one who's "stupid or absentminded"—who focuses on maintaining the men's spirit and staying out of their way so they can do their jobs. Because of these observations, Prince Andrei turns down the opportunity to join Kutuzov's staff and returns instead to the ranks, where he'll be less honored, but where he knows his abilities might actually be put to use.

Volume 3, Part 1: Chapters 12–15 Quotes

☛ Rostov kept thinking about that brilliant feat of his, which, to his surprise, had gained him the St. George Cross and even given him the reputation of a brave man— and there was something in it that he was unable to understand. "So they're even more afraid than we are!" he thought. "So that's all there is to so-called heroism? And did I really do it for the fatherland? And what harm had he done, with his dimple and his light blue eyes? But how frightened he was! He thought I'd kill him. Why should I kill him? My hand faltered. And they gave me the St. George Cross. I understand nothing, nothing!"

Related Characters: Nikolai Rostov (speaker)

Page Number: 654

Explanation and Analysis

In 1812, at the battle of Ostrovno, Nikolai Rostov leads his hussars in a spur-of-the-moment attack on some French dragoons and takes his first prisoner. It's considered an honorable feat, and he should feel triumphant, yet his feelings are conflicted. He can't stop thinking about his captive's frightened face when he surrendered and his timid smile before being led away with the other prisoners. Nikolai finds the whole experience dissatisfying.

Now that Nikolai can picture the face of a specific enemy, he realizes there's nothing monstrous about the French in general. And if that's so, then what can his so-called "heroism" mean? Nothing in the frightened Frenchman's demeanor, or even in his own feelings of patriotism, seems to justify Rostov's actions or the praise those actions have earned.

Nikolai's despair that he "[understands] nothing" hearkens

back to his disillusionment when he watched the emperors celebrate at Tilsit. It also echoes his experience of being chased by a French soldier at Schöngraben, when he couldn't fathom why anyone would want to kill him. Nikolai's dissonant emotions support Tolstoy's argument that when reduced to its basic mechanism—human beings killing each other—war just doesn't make sense.

Volume 3, Part 1: Chapters 16–18 Quotes

☛ [A] new feeling of humility would come over Natasha before the great, the unknowable, when at this unaccustomed hour of morning, looking at the blackened face of the Mother of God lit by candles and the light of morning coming from the window, she listened to the words of the service, which she tried to follow and understand. When she understood them, her personal feeling, with its nuances, joined with her prayer; when she did not, the sweeter it was for her to think that the wish to understand everything was pride, that it was impossible to understand everything, that she only had to believe and give herself to God, who in those moments— she felt— was guiding her soul. [...] Natasha experienced a new feeling of the possibility of correcting her vices and the possibility of a new, pure life and happiness.

Related Characters: Natasha Rostov

Page Number: 659

Explanation and Analysis

After Natasha's ill-fated romance with Anatole Kuragin and her broken engagement with Prince Andrei, she falls ill from heartbreak. A family friend encourages her to prepare for Holy Communion, and the daily services help to pull her out of her depression. The services are largely mysterious to her—besides the fact that they're in Church Slavonic instead of Russian, they take her out of her usual routine and distract her from her inner turmoil by drawing her to something greater and ultimately "unknowable." Natasha finds that it isn't necessary to understand everything that's going on, but that instead she can simply find meaning by humbly surrendering herself to God.

The liturgy gives Natasha the feeling that by starting life over, she can find happiness. This parallels Pierre's experience of being initiated into the Masons, which he likewise doesn't understand. And like Pierre's induction, Natasha's newfound Orthodox piety is really just the beginning of a longer journey. In both cases, Tolstoy suggests that happiness consists less in understanding life perfectly than in accepting the unknowable.

Volume 3, Part 1: Chapters 19–23 Quotes

☛☛ “Angel! Father! Hurrah! Dearest! . . .” cried the people and Petya, and again peasant women and a few men of the weaker sort, including Petya, wept with happiness. A rather large piece of the biscuit that the sovereign was holding broke off, fell onto the railing of the balcony, and from there to the ground. A cabby in a jerkin, who was standing closest of all, rushed to this piece of biscuit and snatched it up. Some people in the crowd rushed to the cabby. Noticing that, the sovereign asked for a plate of biscuits to be brought and began tossing biscuits from the balcony. Petya’s eyes became bloodshot, the danger of being crushed aroused him still more, he rushed for the biscuits. He did not know why, but it was necessary to take a biscuit from the tsar’s hands, and necessary not to give it up. He rushed and tripped up a little old woman who was trying to catch a biscuit. [...] Petya knocked her arm aside with his knee, snatched a biscuit, and, as if afraid to be late, again shouted “Hurrah!” in a voice now grown hoarse.

Related Characters: Petya Rostov (speaker), Emperor Alexander I

Page Number: 675

Explanation and Analysis

Petya, the youngest of the Rostovs, doesn’t feature prominently in the novel until Volume 3, when he’s old enough to go to war—something he longs to do. When Emperor Alexander returns to Moscow to inspire the people for the coming war, Petya hurries to the Kremlin to see his hero in person. Like others of the “weaker sort,” Petya cries and scrambles for one of the biscuits the sovereign tosses to the adoring crowds, not caring if he knocks down little old ladies in the process.

While this episode doesn’t seem to be drawn from an actual historical event, such hero-worship is a good illustration of the kind of irrational behavior that Tolstoy critiques throughout the novel. Petya doesn’t even know why he’s acting this way, but the frenzy of the crowd and the proximity of the “godlike” emperor sucks him in. And in this frenzy he does ignoble things, such as knock over old ladies while trying to get one of the Emperor’s biscuits. While this is a relatively harmless or even humorous scene, Tolstoy uses it to prepare the reader for darker scenes of war-inspired hysteria later in the novel.

Volume 3, Part 2: Chapters 13–14 Quotes

☛☛ “Well, what if I really have fallen in love with him?” thought Princess Marya.

Ashamed as she was to admit to herself that she had fallen in love first with a man who, perhaps, would never love her, she comforted herself with the thought that no one would ever know of it, and that she would not be to blame if, to the end of her life, without speaking of it to anyone, she should love the one she loved for the first and last time.

Sometimes she remembered his glances, his sympathy, his words, and happiness did not seem impossible to her. And it was then that Dunyasha noticed her, smiling, looking out the window of the carriage.

“And it had to be that he came to Bogucharovo, and at that very moment!” thought Princess Marya. [...] And in all of that Princess Marya saw the will of Providence.

Related Characters: Princess Marya Bolkonsky (speaker), Dunyasha, Nikolai Rostov

Page Number: 737

Explanation and Analysis

When Princess Marya is forced to deal with some rebellious peasants during the French invasion, Nikolai Rostov happens to be stationed nearby and comes to her rescue. Though their meeting is brief, both walk away from the encounter wondering if they’ve fallen in love. Marya is particularly struck by Nikolai’s respectful kindness and sympathy, and Nikolai notices the earnest glow of Marya’s eyes, which people often miss.

Through this development, Tolstoy suggests that passionate romance isn’t necessary to sustain love—sometimes, people glimpse one another’s true nature in just a few moments, and that’s enough. Though Marya had never quite believed she’d know romantic love, she’s suddenly struck by it on an otherwise catastrophic day (her father is dead, the French army threatens Bogucharovo). In these unlikely circumstances, Marya sees the working of Providence, which aligns with Tolstoy’s belief in an inscrutable power at work throughout history, even in common human events like these.

Notably, her old nanny, Dunyasha, *does* notice Marya’s happiness—a hint that her love is genuine, recognized by those who know her best.

Volume 3, Part 2: Chapters 24–25 Quotes

☛☛ “Take no prisoners,” Prince Andrei went on. “That alone would change the whole war and make it less cruel. As it is, we’ve been playing at war— that’s the nasty thing, we act magnanimously and all that. It’s like the magnanimity and sentimentality of the lady who swoons when she sees a calf slaughtered [...] We’re told about the rules of war, about chivalry, about parleying, sparing the unfortunate, and so on. It’s all nonsense. I saw chivalry and parleying in 1805: they cheated us, we cheated them. They loot other people’s houses, spread false banknotes, and worst of all— kill my children and my father, and then talk about the rules of war and magnanimity towards the enemy. [...]

If there was none of this magnanimity in war, we’d go to it only when it was worth going to certain death, as now.”

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker), Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 775

Explanation and Analysis

At the beginning of the novel, Prince Andrei told Pierre if that people only fought wars out of personal conviction, there wouldn’t be war. Years later, Andrei has reached an unexpected strength of conviction about war, which he shares with Pierre in a passionate monologue the night before the battle of Borodino. Andrei argues that up until now, people have fought the war half-heartedly, even “playing at war,” with a pretense of chivalry and compassion. Ironically, he argues, such warfare is crueler than the alternative of fighting with conviction.

Andrei makes the case that in the War of 1805, the pretense of chivalrous warfare just led to mutual betrayal, higher stakes, and greater suffering for both soldiers and civilians, as a peaceful resolution was pushed further into the future. Pretending to fight “magnanimously” also gives people permission to enter war too glibly. If people were honest about the horror of war, they would be much more hesitant to fight. Prince Andrei’s clear-sighted declaration—on the eve of his own final battle—shows how his character has developed. Initially enlisting as a way to escape his issues at home, Andrei has come to understand the irrational brutality of war.

Volume 3, Part 2: Chapters 36–39 Quotes

☛☛ In the unfortunate, sobbing, exhausted man whose leg had just been removed, he recognized Anatole Kuragin. [...] Anatole was sobbing deeply. “Yes, it’s he; yes, this man is closely and painfully connected with me by something,” thought Prince Andrei, not yet understanding clearly what he saw before him. [...] And suddenly a new and unexpected memory from the world of childhood, purity, and love came to Prince Andrei. He remembered Natasha as he had seen her for the first time at the ball in 1810, with her slender neck and arms, with her frightened, happy face ready for rapture, and in his soul love and tenderness for her awakened, stronger and more alive than ever. He now remembered the connection between him and this man, who was looking at him dully through the tears that filled his swollen eyes. Prince Andrei remembered everything, and a rapturous pity and love for this man filled his happy heart.

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker), Natasha Rostov, Anatole Kuragin

Page Number: 814

Explanation and Analysis

After Prince Andrei’s injury at Borodino, he unexpectedly sees his enemy, Anatole Kuragin, in the field hospital, weeping after getting his leg amputated. At first, Andrei doesn’t remember his connection to Anatole. Though he gradually remembers that Anatole lured Natasha away from him, he comes to that realization by way of a much different memory: he has an innocent recollection of his first sight of Natasha in her youthful, joyful embrace of life.

Instead of hate, Andrei is filled with love and compassion by this memory. It takes him beyond his own grudge, even his own romantic feelings for Natasha, to a pure, childlike love in response to hers—a love he wants to share even with the man who wronged him so badly. Andrei goes on to recognize that this kind of love—one that can even embrace enemies—is what he’s been seeking his whole life through various worldly endeavors; but it can only be realized beyond worldly limits.

Volume 3, Part 3: Chapters 18–22 Quotes

☛ “Here it is, the reward for all those of little faith,” he thought, looking at his retinue and at the troops approaching and forming up. “One word from me, one movement of my hand, and this ancient capital *des Czars* is destroyed. [...] [H]ere she is lying at my feet, her golden cupolas and crosses playing and glittering in the sunlight. But I will spare her. On the ancient monuments of barbarism and despotism, I will write great words of justice and mercy . . . Alexander will take precisely that most painfully of all— I know him.” (It seemed to Napoleon that the main significance of what was happening lay in his personal struggle with Alexander.) “From the heights of the Kremlin—yes, yes, that’s the Kremlin—I will give them the laws of justice, I will show them the meaning of true civilization; I will make the generations of *boyars* remember the name of their conqueror with love.”

Related Characters: Napoleon Bonaparte (speaker), Emperor Alexander I

Page Number: 872

Explanation and Analysis

On September 2nd, 1812, Napoleon prepares to take possession of Moscow. Here he overlooks the city from Poklonnaya Hill, and delivers a monologue imagining how he’ll rule the city and how the people will receive him (joyously, of course).

Tolstoy uses this monologue to criticize Napoleon’s arrogance and even to inject a note of humor into his characterization. With short-sighted confidence, Napoleon presumes he could destroy Moscow if he chose—though naturally, out of his great magnanimity, he won’t. He arrogantly imagines ridding Moscow of its “barbarism” and “despotism”—betraying a Western European view of Russia as “backwards” and ripe for a “civilizing” influence (a view not infrequently shared by Russian aristocrats, though, ironically, Russians mocked Napoleon’s “Corsican” “barbarity” as well). With similar self-importance, Napoleon reduces the whole war to a personal conflict between himself and Alexander. Meanwhile, his use of the term *boyars* (an outdated term for the Russian aristocracy) humorously reveals that he doesn’t know very much about the place he presumes to civilize.

Volume 3, Part 3: Chapters 23–26 Quotes

☛ But after the exclamation of surprise that escaped Vereshchagin, he uttered a pitiful cry of pain, and that cry was the end of him. The barrier of human feeling, strained to the utmost in holding back the crowd, instantly broke. The crime had begun, it was necessary to go through with it. The pitiful moan of reproach was stifled by the menacing and wrathful roar of the crowd. [...] The dragoon who had struck Vereshchagin was about to repeat his blow. Vereshchagin, with a cry of terror, shielding himself with his hands, rushed towards the people. The tall fellow, whom he ran into, seized Vereshchagin’s thin neck with his hands and, uttering a wild cry, fell with him under the feet of the pushing, tearing people.

Related Characters: Count Rastopchin, Vereshchagin

Page Number: 890

Explanation and Analysis

After Moscow is abandoned by the Russian army, Governor-General Count Rastopchin feels angry, guilty, and at a loss—all his efforts to defend the city have been in vain. Looking for a scapegoat, he brings Vereshchagin, a political prisoner accused of French sympathies, before a mob and goads them into killing him. The crowd is hesitant at first, but after the first blow is struck, the whole mob descends on the unfortunate man. Vereshchagin’s “pitiful moan” is quickly swallowed up by the people’s “roar,” as though blocking out a sound that might humanize their supposed enemy.

Eager to deflect blame from himself for letting Moscow be overrun, Rastopchin reads the crowd accurately—they want to unleash their rage on someone, and since they can’t take on the French, an anonymous prisoner will have to do (it’s not clear that anyone knows what he’s done—and Vereshchagin wasn’t sentenced to death, so Rastopchin’s action is truly repugnant). This passage illustrates Tolstoy’s point that war leads people to act in senseless, inhumane ways—not just soldiers, but ordinary people, too.

Volume 4, Part 1: Chapters 4–8 Quotes

☛☛ At that time when Russia was half conquered and the inhabitants of Moscow were fleeing to the distant provinces, and one popular militia after another was rising to the defense of the fatherland, we, who were not living at that time, involuntarily imagine that all Russian people, great and small, were taken up only with sacrificing themselves, saving the fatherland, or weeping over its loss. The stories and descriptions of that time all speak without exception of self-sacrifice, love of the fatherland, despair, grief, and the heroism of the Russians. In reality, it was not like that. It seems so to us only because all we see in the past is the general historical interest of the time, and we do not see all those personal, human interests that the people of that time had.

Page Number: 944

Explanation and Analysis

In this quote Tolstoy considers the way people view history long after the fact. “We” (that is, people of his day, half a century later) figure that in the midst of great events like the French invasion in 1812, Russian people, no matter their station in life, thought about nothing else besides loss, survival, and patriotism. After all, that’s the way histories of the time are written.

However, Tolstoy attests that this perspective is too simple. Historians necessarily write in general terms about vast, sweeping movements. They don’t attend to the innumerable “personal, human interests” of the time, because no historian could write exhaustively enough to do them justice. So when looking back on the war, it’s important to remember that in the midst of things like heroism and self-sacrifice, everyday human life was still going on.

In that sense, this quote actually comments on Tolstoy’s own approach to writing—though there’s obviously no attempt to be exhaustive, Tolstoy *does* pointedly focus on all kinds of people and their “personal, human interests” during, and in spite of, the epic events of war.

Volume 4, Part 1: Chapters 9–13 Quotes

☛☛ From the moment when Pierre saw this horrible murder performed by people who did not want to do it, it was as if the spring that upheld everything and made it seem alive had been pulled from his soul, and it had all collapsed into a heap of meaningless trash. Though he did not account for it to himself, his faith in the world’s good order, in humanity’s and his own soul, and in God, was destroyed. Pierre had experienced this state before, but never with such force as now. [...] But now he felt that it was not his guilt that caused the world to collapse in front of his eyes and leave only meaningless ruins. He felt that to return to faith in life was not in his power.

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 969

Explanation and Analysis

Pierre is distraught after watching French soldiers execute five Russian prisoners of war. The soldiers were summarily shot on flimsy charges, and the soldiers who carried out the executions only did so because they were following orders. Though Pierre was unexpectedly spared, his gratitude is outweighed by horror as his faith in everything good falls apart. He’s had a similar experience before; years ago, while waiting at the posting-station after leaving his wife, Pierre felt as if his world had collapsed and he didn’t know where to look for meaning.

The difference was that, back then, he knew he was responsible for the disasters in his life. In this case, it’s not his fault, and Pierre now fears that there’s no goodness in the world whatsoever. Though this leaves him feeling hopeless, the fact that a “return to faith” is beyond his power is ultimately a hopeful turning point. His despair will lead to a kind of rebirth which allows Pierre to find joy regardless of the ugliest circumstances. If he hadn’t hit bottom in this way, he might never have learned to let go of the idealism that has repeatedly failed him.

☛ Karataev had no attachments, friendships, or love, as Pierre understood them; but he loved and lived lovingly with everything that life brought his way, especially other people— not any specific people, but those who were there before his eyes. He loved his mutt, his comrades, the French, he loved Pierre, who was his neighbor; but Pierre sensed that, despite all his gentle tenderness towards him [...] Karataev would not have been upset for a moment to be parted from him. And Pierre was beginning to experience the same feeling towards Karataev. [...]

But for Pierre he remained forever as he had seen him the first night, the unfathomable, round, and eternal embodiment of the spirit of simplicity and truth.

Related Characters: Platon Karataev, Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 974

Explanation and Analysis

When Pierre is despairing in prison, he meets a fellow prisoner, a peasant named Platon Karataev. Besides being the archetypical Russian peasant, Platon becomes instrumental in Pierre's spiritual reawakening.

It's not Platon's sayings or stories that influence Pierre so much as Platon's way of being in the world. Platon has a simple, whole-hearted way of accepting whatever happens to him in life and loving whomever he meets. Pierre, in contrast, has always been tormented by questions about the meaning of life and his role in the world; because of this, joy and simplicity have always eluded him.

Platon teaches Pierre that joy is possible by learning to embrace daily life, no matter what uncertainty or suffering he encounters. Platon contrasts markedly with Pierre's first mentor, Bazdeev, who taught him that happiness is attainable through the esoteric practices and science of Freemasonry. For Platon, happiness comes not through study or self-denial, but love.

Volume 4, Part 1: Chapters 14–16 Quotes

☛ In those hours of suffering solitude and half delirium that he spent after being wounded, the more he pondered the new principle of eternal love revealed to him, the more, though without feeling it himself, he renounced earthly life. To love everything, everybody, always to sacrifice oneself for love, meant to love no one, meant not to live this earthly life. And the more imbued he was with this principle of love, the more he renounced life and the more completely he destroyed that dreadful barrier which, without love, stands between life and death. When, in that first time, he remembered that he had to die, he said to himself: "Well, so much the better."

Related Characters: Prince Andrei Bolkonsky (speaker)

Page Number: 982

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Prince Andrei's loss of the fear of death after being wounded at Borodino. Upon seeing Anatole Kuragin in the hospital, he was filled with love for his former enemy, and the more he dwells on this love—which comes from God—the more he distances himself from life. The more universally Andrei loves, the less purpose he finds in remaining alive. In other words, if this "principle of eternal love" is indeed life's purpose, then Andrei has exhausted his reason to live, and death loses its terror. In fact, death can even be welcomed ("so much the better").

Andrei's present peace will be shaken when Natasha nurses him and he is forcefully reminded of his particular love for her. Later he also dreams of a last struggle against death, in which he learns that death, like waking up from a dream, is simply an "awakening from life." However, the "dreadful barrier" between life and death is broken down for good when he contemplates eternal love for the first time.

Volume 4, Part 2: Chapters 8–14 Quotes

☛ The satisfaction of his needs— for good food, cleanliness, freedom— now that he was deprived of them all, seemed perfect happiness to Pierre, and the choice of an occupation, that is, of a life, now, when that choice was so limited, seemed to him such an easy matter that he forgot that a superfluity of life's comforts destroys all the happiness of the satisfaction of one's needs, and that a greater freedom to choose one's occupation, the freedom which in this life was granted him by education, wealth, social position— precisely that freedom made the choice of an occupation insolubly difficult and destroyed the very need and possibility of an occupation.

All Pierre's dreams were now turned to the time when he would be free. And yet afterwards and for the whole of his life Pierre thought and spoke with rapture of that month of captivity, of those irrevocable, strong, and joyful sensations, and above all of that full peace of mind, that perfect inner freedom, which he experienced only in that time.

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 1013

Explanation and Analysis

While Pierre is imprisoned by the French, the things that have burdened him—like his marriage, and his desperation

to find an important role in the war—no longer seem important to him. Happiness seems to consist in those basic needs he is denied, and in the freedom to determine his own life. Ironically, Pierre forgets that these precise things are what made life so difficult for him before—falling into vice when tempted by excess, and being paralyzed by the very freedom to choose his own occupation. In reality, Pierre is far happier without these things. Captivity and limited comforts actually give Pierre freedom and peace of mind for the first time. This is because, like Platon Karataev, he is forced to find joy in what's right in front of him. A typical society life makes such peace and joy impossible.

Pierre's paradoxical happiness illustrates Tolstoy's point that life's meaning is not found in indulgence or denial, but in accepting the simplicity of the everyday. Other characters come to this realization in different ways; for Pierre, it comes when his privileges are stripped away, revealed to have been burdens all along.

Volume 4, Part 3: Chapters 16–19 Quotes

☛ ...[W]hen it is no longer possible to stretch the so-elastic threads of historical discourse any further, when an action clearly contradicts all that mankind calls good and even just, historians resort to the saving notion of greatness. It is as if greatness excludes the possibility of the measure of good and bad. For the great man there is no bad. There is no horror that can be laid to the blame of someone who is great.

[...] *Grand*, to their minds, is the property of some sort of special animals known as heroes. And Napoleon, in his warm fur coat, clearing off for home from his perishing men [...] feels *que c'est grand*, and his soul is at peace.

Related Characters: Napoleon Bonaparte

Page Number: 1070

Explanation and Analysis

Reflecting on the final retreat of the French from Russia, Tolstoy criticizes the idea of “greatness” (*grand* being “great” in French). He suggests that the idea of “greatness” is used by historians to excuse things that would be condemned, in other circumstances, as wickedness and injustice. In other words, if somebody qualifies as “great,” then anything they do is justifiable on those grounds. A “great” man, then, can truly get away with anything.

Tolstoy goes on to suggest that so-called great individuals make up a category called “heroes,” which are really people who are exempt from the moral judgments to which lesser individuals are subject. All this leads up to Tolstoy's more

direct critique of Napoleon who, while his army suffered and starved to death, was able to return to France in comfort, with a clear conscience—after all, he, too, believed that he was “great.” Tolstoy develops his criticism of historian's “great man” theory in more detail in the novel's Epilogue.

Volume 4, Part 4: Chapters 1–3 Quotes

☛ Morally bowed down and shutting their eyes to the menacing cloud of death that hung over them, they did not dare to look life in the face. They carefully protected their open wounds from any offensive, painful touch. Everything— a carriage driving quickly down the street, a reminder of dinner, a maid's question about what dress to prepare; still worse, a word of insincere, weak sympathy— everything painfully irritated the wound, seemed offensive, and violated the necessary quiet in which they both tried to listen to the dread, stern choir not yet silenced in their imagination, and prevented them from peering into those mysterious, infinite distances which for a moment had opened before them.

Related Characters: Natasha Rostov, Princess Marya Bolkonsky, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky

Page Number: 1075

Explanation and Analysis

This quote describes Princess Marya's and Natasha's emotions after the death of Prince Andrei. One of the most profound descriptions of grief in the novel, it captures how the women shrink from the reality of death while unable to face life, either. Yet life keeps intruding—in things as ordinary as the sound of carriages or innocuous questions. All these things are “offensive” in that they try to pull the bereaved away from the overwhelming reality of death they haven't yet understood. Andrei's death gave them both a glimpse of “infinite distances” and echoes like a “dread, stern choir” in their minds, yet because life keeps moving, they can't tarry to look and listen.

Ironically, it's only the necessity of dealing with further grief—caring for her mother after Petya's death—that relieves Natasha of this burden, suggesting that grief isn't a problem that can be neatly solved, no matter how long a person dwells on it. The women's shared grief also ends up being life-giving in certain ways. Not only does it serve as the basis for their friendship, it opens both of them—especially Natasha—to a more mature kind of love in the future.

☛ The wound in the mother's soul could not heal. Petya's death tore away half of her life. A month after the news of Petya's death, which had found her a fresh and cheerful fifty-year-old woman, she came out of her room an old woman—half-dead and taking no part in life. But the same wound that half killed the countess, this new wound called Natasha to life. [...]

[A] wound in the soul, like a physical wound, can be healed only by the force of life pushing up from inside. This was the way Natasha's wound healed. She thought her life was over. But suddenly her love for her mother showed her that the essence of life—love—was still alive in her. Love awoke, and life awoke.

Related Characters: Natasha Rostov, Petya Rostov, Countess Rostov

Page Number: 1080

Explanation and Analysis

Petya Rostov's death is a turning point in his family's lives. For Countess Rostov, his death is the thing she's feared most, and she never recovers. Afterward, she can no longer take part in life the way she used to. But at the same time, Petya's death indirectly becomes a source of new life for Natasha, who's still grieving Andrei's death at this time.

Tolstoy explains this impact of Petya's death on Natasha in terms of a wound healed "by the force of life pushing up from inside." For Natasha, that "force of life" is caring for her grieving mother. Countess Rostov's sorrow demands fresh reserves of love, and as she pours out this love, Natasha discovers that there's still life in her after all. This freshly awakened life heals Natasha's grief. In a way, it also mirrors Prince Andrei's experience of "awakening from life" as he dies; only Natasha awakens from her obsession with death, ready to live again.

Volume 4, Part 4: Chapters 4–9 Quotes

☛ For Russian historians—strange and terrible to say—Napoleon, that most insignificant instrument of history, who never and nowhere, even in exile, displayed any human dignity—Napoleon is the object of admiration and enthusiasm; he is *grand*. While Kutuzov, a man who, from the beginning to the end of his activity in 1812, from Borodino to Vilno, while always being true to himself in all his acts and words, shows an example uncommon in history of self-denial and awareness in the present of the future significance of the event—Kutuzov seems to them something indefinite and pathetic, and when they speak of Kutuzov and the year twelve, it is as if they are always slightly embarrassed.

Related Characters: General Kutuzov, Napoleon Bonaparte

Page Number: 1085

Explanation and Analysis

Tolstoy contrasts historians' attitudes to the two most significant historical figures in the book, Napoleon and Kutuzov. Even Russian historians, he says, accept the narrative that Napoleon was a "great" man and therefore essentially incapable of doing anything wrong. On the other hand, Kutuzov, in Tolstoy's view, showed integrity throughout his career, even though his views were seldom respected (younger, less experienced generals usually got their way).

Kutuzov also had tremendous foresight throughout the war, making decisions based on his view of what was best for Russia in the long run, even if it led to choices which others vilified—like refusing to wipe out the retreating French. Because Kutuzov made choices that peers and historians often didn't understand, he is remembered as weak, whereas Napoleon—who tended to make decisions based on his ego instead—is admired. Tolstoy suggests that a view of history that's based on "great men" will fundamentally misread history because it pays more attention to flashy, superficial personalities than to the more mundane realities of leadership.

Volume 4, Part 4: Chapters 12–14 Quotes

☛ Formerly he had been unable to see the great, the unfathomable and infinite, in anything. [...] He had armed himself with a mental spyglass and gazed into the distance, where the petty and humdrum, disappearing in the distant mist, had seemed to him great and infinite, only because it was not clearly visible. Thus he had looked at European life, politics, Masonry, philosophy, philanthropy. But even then, in moments he regarded as his own weakness, his mind had penetrated this distance, and there, too, he had seen the petty, the humdrum, the meaningless. Now he had learned to see the great, the eternal, and the infinite in everything, and therefore, in order to see it, to enjoy contemplating it, he had naturally abandoned the spyglass he had been looking through until then over people's heads [...] And the closer he looked, the calmer and happier he became.

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 1104

Explanation and Analysis

This quote summarizes the change in Pierre over the course of the book. More than any other character, Pierre has been tormented by the question of meaning. For most of his life, he looked to distant things for meaning. This is why he dabbled in Freemasonry, for example, and searched desperately for a way to contribute to the war effort. Inevitably, though, when he got too “close” to these things, he was disillusioned, finding them ultimately to be “petty” and “humdrum.”

After surviving the war, however, Pierre realizes that he’s been looking at things backwards. The “infinite” isn’t out there in the distance; it’s all around and within him, suggesting that there’s infinite meaning to be found wherever he looks. This revolution in Pierre’s perspective causes his old angst about meaning to fade away. Instead of constantly feeling he’s missing something, he can contemplate the things and people around him and even find joy in them.

Volume 4, Part 4: Chapters 15–20 Quotes

●● Pierre told of his adventures as he had never told them to anyone, as he had never yet recalled them to himself. It was as if he now saw a new significance in everything he had lived through. [...] Natasha, not knowing it herself, was all attention: she did not miss a word of Pierre’s, not a waver in his voice, not a glance, not the twitch of a facial muscle, not a gesture. She caught the not-yet-spoken word in flight and brought it straight into her open heart, guessing the secret meaning of all Pierre’s inner work.

Related Characters: Natasha Rostov, Pierre Bezukhov

Page Number: 1117

Explanation and Analysis

When Pierre returns to Moscow after his ordeal in captivity, he unexpectedly meets Natasha at Princess Marya’s. For the first time, he tells his friends the whole story. Though both women listen sympathetically, Natasha’s attention reveals how much she has changed since they saw one another the previous summer. Her sensitivity heightened by her own suffering, she hears Pierre’s every word, interprets his movements, and understands much that he doesn’t say aloud. In short, she sees the whole change that has occurred in Pierre because of the transformation that has taken place in her.

This conversation is the first step toward Natasha and Pierre’s eventual marriage. It’s completely different from Pierre’s former marriage and Natasha’s previous

relationships. Rather than being based on ideals, social expectations, or a fleeting passion, it’s grounded in their mutual ability to see and love one another as they really are—something Tolstoy suggests is what a mature, lasting love is all about.

Epilogue, Part 1: Chapters 1–4 Quotes

●● [Historians’ reproaches consist in the fact] that a historical figure such as Alexander I, a figure who stood on the highest possible step of human power [...] a figure who felt upon himself at every moment of his life the responsibility for all that was happening in Europe; and not an invented figure, but a living one, and, like every man, with his personal habits, passions, strivings for goodness, beauty, truth—that this figure, fifty years ago, was not so much not virtuous (the historians do not reproach him for that), but did not have those views of the good of mankind now possessed by a professor who from his youth has been taken up with learning, that is, reading books, attending lectures, and copying things from these books and lectures into a notebook.

Related Characters: Emperor Alexander I

Page Number: 1130

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel’s epilogue, Tolstoy offers extended general reflections on history. He begins by considering historians’ overall assessments of Napoleon and Emperor Alexander 50 years later. Though Napoleon is widely hailed as a great figure, Tolstoy explains, Alexander is more often reproached, even by Russians.

Tolstoy’s defense of Alexander isn’t so much that Alexander was only human and bore tremendous responsibility, though those things were true. The bigger point is that, because of his place in history, Alexander did not share modern historians’ views of what constitutes “the good of mankind.” Tolstoy sarcastically points out that those assessing Alexander this way have spent their whole lives “reading books, attending lectures, and copying things [...] into a notebook”—to say the least, such people are arrogant to assume that their notion of goodness is superior to that of a ruler of Alexander’s stature.

But Tolstoy’s overall argument is that historians typically judge figures by anachronistic standards—standards which are constantly being supplanted by new ones. This argument builds into a broader examination of “greatness” and his own comparison of Alexander and Napoleon (with the former coming out ahead).

Epilogue, Part 1: Chapters 8–16 Quotes

☛☛ She, as they put it, let herself go. Natasha took no trouble either about her manners, or about the delicacy of her speech, or about showing herself to her husband in the most advantageous poses, or about her toilette, or about not hampering her husband with her demands. She did everything contrary to these rules. [...]

The subject that absorbed Natasha fully was her family— that is, her husband, who had to be kept in such a way as to belong entirely to her, to the household; and her children, whom she had to carry, give birth to, nurse, and bring up.

Related Characters: Pierre Bezukhov, Natasha Rostov

Page Number: 1155

Explanation and Analysis

After Natasha marries Pierre, her life changes even more than it did in 1812–1813. Natasha throws herself wholly into marriage and motherhood, unwilling to share Pierre with anyone else or to spare herself the work of personally raising her children.

Superficially, this could sound like Natasha has faded into a dull, domestic life, no longer an interesting character. However, there's more to her than that. If anything, Natasha transfers her youthful fire into a fiercely single-minded style of motherhood, one that *doesn't* conform to society's expectations of her. A woman of Natasha's class would be expected to maintain her beauty in order to ensure her husband was still charmed by her, and to keep circulating in society. But Natasha is so confident in Pierre's love for her and so engrossed in family life that she doesn't have time for any of that. In this respect, she subverts the "rules" of society as much as she did as an unruly young girl, and Tolstoy suggests that she'll all the happier for it.

☛☛ Sometimes the thought occurred to her that this difference was caused by age; but she felt that she was guilty before him, and in her heart she promised herself to mend her ways and do the impossible— that is, in this life to love her husband, and her children, and Nikolenka, and all who were close to her as Christ loved mankind. Countess Marya's soul always strove towards the infinite, eternal, and perfect, and therefore could never be at peace. The stern expression of concealed, lofty suffering of a soul burdened by a body came to her face. Nikolai looked at her [...] and, standing in front of the icon, he began to recite the evening prayers.

Related Characters: Nikolai Rostov (speaker), Nikolai Andreich (Nikolushka or Nikolenka) Rostov, Princess Marya Bolkonsky

Page Number: 1174

Explanation and Analysis

This is the last appearance in the novel for the other central married couple, Marya and Nikolai. Marya has just been reflecting that she doesn't love her nephew Nikolenka as much as she should, especially now that she has several children of her own. In her repentant thoughts, she resolves to "do the impossible"—to love *everyone* in her family in a Christlike way.

Because Marya never stops seeking greater holiness and purity, she's never completely at ease in the world. Marya has always been deeply, even self-sacrificially devout, but Tolstoy suggests that she's developed in some subtle ways—instead of suppressing her longing for earthly love and even dreaming of leaving worldly concerns behind to become a pilgrim, Marya now channels her spirituality into her strivings on behalf of her family. In other words, she's learned that service to God and her family don't have to conflict. And like Natasha, Marya has an elevating effect on her husband—in her case, inspiring him to seek spiritual truth as well.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 1–4

In July 1805, Anna Pavlovna Scherer throws a party. In French, she greets her first guest, Prince Vassily, begging him to tell her that Russia is now at war with “that Antichrist,” “Buonaparte.” Unruffled, Prince Vassily replies in refined French, showing he’s grown up in society.

Anna Pavlovna and Prince Vassily chat about society events and about the emissary Novosiltsov. The prince tells Anna Pavlovna that Napoleon has “burned his boats” and that Russia is in the process of doing the same. Prince Vassily has a lazy way of speaking, while 40-year-old Anna Pavlovna’s is more animated. Known as an enthusiast, Anna Pavlovna always tries to live up to society’s expectations of her.

Anna Pavlovna says that Russia must be Europe’s “savior.” No other country, especially not England, understands the motivations of their virtuous Emperor. As they have tea, Prince Vassily asks Anna Pavlovna, with pretend nonchalance, about a political appointment in Vienna which he’s been wanting for his son. Anna Pavlovna explains that the dowager empress wants Baron Funke in the role. Anna Pavlovna finds the prince’s question indelicate but also feels sorry for him, so she changes the subject to the prince’s beautiful daughter, who has recently entered society.

They discuss Prince Vassily’s other children, especially his two problematic sons, foolish Ippolit and troublesome Anatole. Anna Pavlovna suggests marrying off Anatole, perhaps to their mutual relation Princess Marya Bolkonsky. The Princess is rich and unhappy, and her brother Prince Andrei will be here tonight. Anna Pavlovna decides she will speak to the Princess’s sister-in-law, Lise (known as “the little princess”), tonight to try to arrange things.

The novel begins with a soirée (or party) at which several of the novel’s aristocratic characters are introduced. Anna Pavlovna Scherer is a maid of honor to the Emperor’s mother, so her parties are popular among the socially ambitious. Politics are a prime topic of conversation there. A few months earlier, in April, 1805, Russia had joined the Third Coalition, an alliance with Britain and Austria against French aggressions. Napoleon Bonaparte was born on the formerly Italian island of Corsica. Anna Pavlovna mockingly refers to Napoleon by the Corsican form of his name, implying that he’s not even properly French. (Over the past century, French had become the language of the Russian aristocracy, part of efforts to “westernize” Russian culture.) By writing the novel’s opening exchange (criticizing France!) in French, Tolstoy mocks the aristocratic obsession with that culture.



Emperor Alexander I sent special emissary Novosiltsov to Berlin to attempt to negotiate peace between France and the members of the Third Coalition. He was not successful (the parties have “burned [their] boats,” or have no options left), and because of this, Prince Vassily predicts that war is coming



Anna Pavlovna has an idealized view of Emperor Alexander and Russia’s role in Europe. Because of her connections to the court, Anna Pavlovna is an advantageous person for social climbers like Prince Vassily to know. Roles in government offices were typically filled by means of such social connections. Prince Vassily shamelessly exploits such relationships, and there’s a sense that while doing this is expected, it’s tactless to be obvious about it.



Anna Pavlovna schemes with Prince Vassily to secure advantageous social positions for one of his sons. In the Russian aristocracy, marriage was an important way of gaining such positions, regardless of the feelings of the people involved.



More members of the Petersburg nobility arrive for the party, including Princess Lise Bolkonsky and Prince Vassily's son Ippolit. Princess Bolkonsky, beautiful and aglow with her pregnancy, charms everyone, especially the men. There's also Pierre, the illegitimate son of Count Bezukhov (a dying courtier from Catherine the Great's time). Pierre is a fat, fashionable young man who's just returned from his education abroad. As Anna Pavlovna makes the rounds of her guests, she worries about Pierre, who is socially inexperienced and has never attended a Petersburg soirée before.

The soirée breaks up into three circles, a mostly masculine one, a youthful one, and Anna Pavlovna with the Viscount of Mortemart, a popular French émigré whom Anna Pavlovna intends to be the center of the party. They discuss the murder of the duc d'Enghien. Anna Pavlovna summons the other guests to hear the Viscount's perspective. The beautiful Princess Hélène, Prince Vassily's daughter, draws everyone's admiration as she sits before the Viscount. Princess Bolkonsky and Prince Ippolit join the Viscount's audience, too. Prince Ippolit resembles his sister Princess Hélène, except that he looks foolish and weak.

Now that everyone is settled, the Viscount of Mortemart tells the popular anecdote of the duc d'Enghien going secretly to Paris, where he shared a mistress with Bonaparte. When Bonaparte fainted in the duke's presence, the duke refused to take advantage of the moment, and Bonaparte later had the duke killed for his "magnanimity." Anna Pavlovna intervenes in Pierre and the abbé Morio's animated political discussion—the abbé is presenting his pet project, a scheme for European peace—by drawing them both into the circle, too. Just then Princess Lise's husband, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, enters the room. He looks bored.

Anna Pavlovna asks Prince Andrei Bolkonsky about his war enlistment. Bolkonsky explains that General Kutuzov wanted him as an adjutant, and that Lise will stay with his family in the country while he serves. Pierre talks with Bolkonsky, and they admire Princess Hélène as she and her father Prince Vassily excuse themselves to leave. Before he goes, Prince Vassily asks Anna Pavlovna to "educate this bear," Pierre, who's a visiting relative and who needs, like all young men, the company of intelligent women.

In addition to the Kuragins (Prince Vassily's family), the Bolkonsky and Bezukhov families will play major roles in the novel. Pierre Bezukhov, with his foreign education, stands out from the rest and is ill at ease in Petersburg high society, despite his father's longstanding connection to the Russian court



Louis-Antoine, duc d'Enghien, was falsely accused of participating in an assassination plot against Bonaparte and was summarily tried and executed in 1804. The execution was condemned across Europe, and the event helped spur Emperor Alexander to war against Napoleon. The Viscount of Mortemart supposedly knew the duke, so his perspective gives the party a provocative centerpiece.



There's no historical evidence that the duc d'Enghien and Napoleon had the same mistress or that she played a role in the duke's later execution. This anecdote is probably just an example of society gossip at the time. Abbé Morio is based on an actual Italian priest, Scipione Piattoli, who influenced Emperor Alexander's court with his scheme for a union of nations against Napoleon. In contrast to Prince Vassily, Prince Andrei doesn't have much patience with society's pretensions.



Mikhail Illarionovich Kutuzov, a highly decorated Russian military officer, is one of the many real historical figures whom Tolstoy fictionalizes in his novel. He will figure prominently in Tolstoy's account of the wars of 1805 and 1812. An adjutant is an officer who assists a superior, typically a general, in administrative matters.



Before Prince Vassily can leave, an older lady, Princess Drubetskoy, grabs his arm in the hall and pleads for his help with her son Boris. She is desperate to get Boris a position with the guards, and she has no other society connections. Prince Vassily uses his influence sparingly, but he owes his own entrance into the service to Princess Drubetskoy's father, so he promises to do as she asks. However, he can't promise her that he'll recommend Boris as General Kutuzov's adjutant—all the mothers in Russia are pushing for that.

Back in the drawing room, the conversation has shifted to Bonaparte. The viscount argues that, if Bonaparte remains on the French throne for another year, French society will fall apart. He maintains that since the duke's murder, the French have ceased to see Bonaparte as a hero. But then, to Anna Pavlovna's horror, Pierre bursts into the conversation praising Bonaparte for executing the duc d'Enghien. He sees Bonaparte as the deliverer of the French from the Bourbons; Bonaparte, he claims, champions liberty and equality.

The moment is awkward, and Prince Andrei gets up to leave. However, Prince Ippolit jumps up and gestures for everyone to stay. He starts telling a humorous anecdote in a French accent. The others appreciate his tact. Then the group breaks up into smaller conversations again.

VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 5–6

The guests begin to leave. Pierre leaves as awkwardly as he arrived, yet his warm, sincere smile inclines everyone to forgive his missteps. As Princess Lise leaves, she quietly plans with Anna Pavlovna to match her sister-in-law Marya with Anatole, Prince Vassily's son. Prince Ippolit gets in everyone's way as he says goodbye to the Princess. Later, in his own carriage with the Viscount, they talk about the little princess, whom the Viscount admires. Ippolit says that Russian ladies can be as good as French ladies—one just has to know how to handle them.

At home, Prince Andrei and his friend Pierre discuss the latter's future. While in Petersburg, Pierre is supposed to be choosing a career, but he can't make up his mind. He also disagrees with Prince Andrei about going to war—he says it's wrong to wage war against the world's greatest man, Napoleon. Prince Andrei argues that if people only went to war over their own convictions, there wouldn't be any war. As for himself, he's going to war because the life he leads in Petersburg is dissatisfying.

The Drubetskoys are another aristocratic family who—alongside the Bolkonskys, Bezukhovs, and Kuragins—will feature prominently in the story. Like Prince Vassily himself, Princess Drubetskoy is obsessed with her children's social position and leverages her social connections to get Boris an ideal role.

Pierre's outburst is awkward because of its poor timing and lack of restraint, but also because it contradicts society's opinion about Bonaparte at the moment. It establishes Pierre's naïve idealism and highlights his outsider status; he sounds more like a Frenchman than a Russian and doesn't know (or seem to care) to conduct himself appropriately in Petersburg society.



Pierre's social awkwardness almost ruins Anna Pavlovna's party; as an enlistee in the Russian army, Prince Andrei, despite being Pierre's friend, is particularly offended by praise of Napoleon.



Though Pierre is only at the beginning of his struggle to figure out where he fits in society, his kind and genuine nature stands out more than his bumbling. Anna Pavlovna's plan to marry off Anatole Kuragin moves forward, although it's hinted that the Kuragin men don't have good ethics where women are concerned.



Pierre is a privileged young man who can essentially choose his path in life, yet ironically, he feels paralyzed by the options available. He and Andrei represent different attitudes about war. Pierre idealizes Napoleon, but Andrei doesn't think ideals matter much in war. In fact, he's going to war because he's disillusioned with Petersburg society and marriage, not because he believes in a cause.



Princess Lise comes in, and Pierre changes the subject to the Princess's impending departure for the countryside. When the Princess says she's afraid to live alone with Andrei's family while pregnant, Andrei cuts her short. Even though Pierre is still there, Lise starts crying and says that Andrei has changed; he no longer pities her. Andrei dismisses her from the room with a warning tone.

Prince Andrei and Pierre have supper. Eventually, Andrei passionately blurts out a warning to his friend: never get married; it will ruin everything that's best about him. When a man binds himself to a woman, he loses his freedom and must take part in the insipid world of society women. Pierre, who idealizes Andrei, is shocked. Andrei urges Pierre to stop leading a dissolute life with Prince Vassily's sons, and Pierre agrees.

Late that night, Pierre heads home by hired carriage, but at the last moment, he changes his mind and goes to Anatole Kuragin's for gambling and drinking. He figures that he'd given his word both to Anatole (that he'd show up) and to Andrei (that he wouldn't), and that such contradictory "words of honor" must be meaningless in the end. When he gets to Kuragin's, he finds a group of young men playing with a bear on a chain and making a bet.

While making Pierre drink glass after glass of wine, Anatole explains that Dolokhov, an army officer, is making a bet with Stevens, an English sailor, that Dolokhov can drink a bottle of rum while sitting in a third-floor window. Dolokhov, a notorious gambler who rarely loses, is respected by the others for his clear-headedness. Everyone watches in suspense as Dolokhov sits in the window and downs the bottle without holding onto anything; he wins the bet. Dolokhov also offers 100 imperials to anyone who can copy his feat. Pierre, now drunk, tries to climb into the window, but Anatole talks him out of it. Then Pierre waltzes around the room with the pet bear.

VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 7–11

Prince Vassily does as he'd promised and speaks on behalf of Princess Drubetskoy's son, Boris, securing him a spot in the Semyonovskys guards. In August, Princess Drubetskoy returns to Moscow to visit her relatives, the Rostovs. On the 10th, the two Natalyas in the Rostov family, mother and daughter, are celebrating their name day. Guests have been coming and going all day. Princess Drubetskoy sits with Countess Rostov in the drawing room. Meanwhile, Count Rostov, cheerful and self-satisfied, drifts between the drawing room and the hall, where a grand dinner is being set up.

Just after Prince Andrei confides that he's going to war to escape his home life, there's evidence that Princess Lise's and Andrei's marriage is troubled. Andrei appears not to have much patience or respect for his young wife.



After the uncomfortable scene between Andrei and Lise, Andrei confides in Pierre that, from his perspective, marriage represents a loss of freedom and the ruination of what's best about a person, shocking his idealistic friend. However, despite his general cynicism, Andrei sees good in Pierre and urges him not to let it go to waste by keeping unsavory company.



Pierre immediately goes back on his promise to avoid the Kuragins; his vacillation, and his attempt to rationalize it to himself, suggest his lack of direction in life overall. In fact, he even lacks a strong moral framework for decision-making.



Dolokhov's cold steadiness contrasts with Pierre's lack of control, which just exaggerates his usual social awkwardness—he doesn't fit smoothly into high Petersburg society, but he doesn't fit into this dissipated crowd, either. He gets himself in trouble by going along with the whims of whoever surrounds him. This passage also establishes Dolokhov's indifference to others' wellbeing, which will come up in another gambling scene later.



A name day, celebrated much like a birthday, honors the patron saint after whom a person is named. While Petersburg was regarded as having a more aristocratic, European society, Moscow was considered to be more Russian and provincial. The setting suits the Rostovs, whose social position is shakier due to the Count's poor financial decisions. Despite his circumstances, the Count loves to lavishly entertain.



In the drawing room, conversation focuses on the current gossip: Count Bezukhov's illness, and his son Pierre's improper behavior at Anna Pavlovna Scherer's soirée. And now Pierre has been banished to Moscow for his behavior at Anatole's. With Dolokhov and Kuragin, he got in trouble for driving around with a bear in the carriage. The young men tied the bear to the policeman who stopped them, then threw the pair into the river. Amid their laughter, the group blames Pierre's foreign upbringing for this behavior. Princess Drubetskoy adds the gossip that when Count Bezukhov dies, his fortune will go either to Pierre or to Prince Vassily, who's related to the Count through his wife; the Count himself has no legitimate children.

Suddenly 13-year-old Natasha runs in, carrying something in her skirt. She is neither a child nor yet a young lady, a lively girl with curly black hair and dark eyes. Even the prim guests can't resist Natasha's infectious laughter. Princess Drubetskoy's son Boris, a lifelong friend of the Count's eldest son Nikolai, comes in, too. At home among the company, Boris teases Natasha about her doll and then courteously offers to get his mother a carriage.

Count Rostov's 15-year-old cousin Sonya and Nikolai remain in the room. The count tells a guest that, out of friendship with Boris, Nikolai has decided to leave the university and join the army, too—though the count is sure that nothing will come of the rumors of war. Nikolai blushes and claims it's not because of friendship; he feels a calling to join the military. Sonya keeps watching Nikolai flirtatiously. The count, for his part, obviously feels grief about his son's imminent departure. He says that Bonaparte is turning all the young men's heads.

When Nikolai flirts with the guest Julie Karagin, Sonya storms out of the room, and Nikolai hurries after her. Countess Rostov says that children at this dangerous age cause their parents much anxiety. She is being less strict with young Natasha than she was with her elder daughter, Vera, so that Natasha will continue to confide in her. Vera agrees, making everyone feel awkward. The guests finally leave, promising to return for dinner.

Again, Pierre doesn't fit in anywhere he goes. His misbehavior gets him kicked out of Petersburg, and his unruly conduct is attributed to the fact that he wasn't raised in Russia. Despite his inability to fit in, Pierre's position could change dramatically at any moment if he inherits his dying father's fortune, making him a respectable count and an attractive marriage prospect overnight. In Russia's aristocracy, money is more important than reputation or individual merit.



The Rostov family, with the Bolkonskys, Bezukhovs, Drubetskoy, and Kuragins, rounds out the novel's aristocratic families. More than the other families, the Rostovs are represented as thoroughly Russian, with their warm, affectionate family life and generous spirit. They also show fewer "European" affectations than more "Westernized" noble families. This is especially true of irrepressible Natasha and loyal, honorable Nikolai.



Count Rostov, an affectionate father, struggles to accept Nikolai's decision to join the army, attributing it to both youthful friendship and a naïve attitude about Napoleon, whom the Count himself doesn't take seriously. At this early stage, war doesn't seem like a foregone conclusion, certainly not one with major long-term consequences for Russia. Sonya, an orphaned cousin whom the Rostovs support, has a crush on Nikolai.



Sonya is offended by Nikolai's flirtation with another girl, showing that she takes her feelings for Nikolai seriously, probably more seriously than he does. Countess Rostov makes her favoritism for Natasha obvious and indulges her younger daughter. She justifies this favoritism on the grounds that children of marriageable age place special burdens on their parents.



Natasha runs to the conservatory and hides among the plants, waiting impatiently for Boris to find her. Soon after, Sonya comes in crying, followed closely by Nikolai. While Natasha watches, Nikolai takes Sonya's hand and kisses her. After they leave the room, Natasha finds Boris and leads him to her hiding place in the conservatory. When Boris hesitates to kiss her, Natasha jumps onto one of the tubs of plants and kisses Boris. Boris tells Natasha he doesn't want to do secretive things like this. He assures her that in four years' time, when she's sixteen, he will ask for her hand in marriage. Later, Vera scolds Natasha for running after Boris in front of company. Natasha says Vera has no heart. Vera has this unpleasant effect on everyone, but it doesn't bother her.

Natasha has a passionate, playful nature and boldly takes the initiative to kiss Boris, whom she hopes to marry. However, her passions don't last as long as her cousin Sonya's, and at this point, she doesn't have a realistic sense of marriage as a lasting commitment; she just goes after what she wants in the moment. Sonya's devotion to Nikolai will be an enduring feature in the story. Vera is much more concerned about social proprieties than her younger sister.



Back in the drawing room, the women talk. The countess wonders how Anna Mikhailovna got Boris a place in the guards, while Nikolai will be a mere junker. Anna Mikhailovna proudly tells her how she solicited Prince Vassily, forgetting how humiliating it was. But she starts crying as she tells the countess that a lawsuit consumes all her money, and she doesn't know how she'll afford to equip Boris for the army. Her only hope is that Count Bezukhov will leave Boris, who's his godson, an inheritance. She decides she'll approach him before dinner. Hearing of her plans, Count Rostov encourages her to invite Pierre to dinner, too.

A "junker" is a young cadet. Nikolai's position as a lowly cadet, while Boris will serve in the more prestigious Semyonovskiy guards (one of Russia's oldest regiments), highlights the social difference between the two families—the more provincial Rostovs don't have the connections to secure such an appointment for Nikolai. Besides that, Anna Mikhailovna is a much more aggressive social climber than her friends.



VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 12–13

As they drive to Count Kirill Vladimirovich Bezukhov's, Princess Anna Mikhailovna tells Boris to be respectful toward his godfather. When they arrive, the porter tells them the Count is too ill to receive anyone, but Anna Mikhailovna gets him to summon Prince Vassily, who's currently staying there. Though the Prince indicates that Count Bezukhov is on his deathbed, Anna Mikhailovna, undeterred, insists on seeing him. Meanwhile, she sends Boris to invite Pierre to dinner at the Rostovs'.

Though Anna Mikhailovna has just bemoaned her humiliation at having to ask Prince Vassily for help on Boris's behalf, she shows no hesitation to use that connection once again—this time to force her way into the dying Count's presence. She's always working multiple angles of an issue: she makes sure Boris is currying Pierre's favor, too.



Pierre returned several days ago, after being banished to Moscow for his part in the antics with the bear. (He still hasn't chosen a career.) His cousins, the three young Bezukhov princesses, are cold toward him. When Boris comes in, he finds Pierre pacing his room, pretending he's Napoleon in the act of conquering London. Pierre doesn't recognize Boris at first and mistakes him for a Rostov son.

Pierre remains at loose ends, unsure what to do with his life and seemingly unwanted by everyone, in both Moscow and Petersburg. He still idolizes Napoleon and occupies himself with fantasies about Napoleon's rumored invasion of Britain (something that never materialized).



Pierre engages Boris in conversation about Napoleon's Villeneuve expedition, but Boris isn't familiar with the news. He tells Pierre that people in Moscow only care about gossip—which currently revolves around Count Bezukhov and his fortune, though Boris assures Pierre that he and his mother, though poor, will never ask the Count for anything. Pierre agrees to come for dinner at the Rostovs'. Boris rejoins Anna Mikhailovna, who is in a flutter about the Count's condition and wants to spend the night to care for him.

In 1805, Napoleon planned to land troops in England, but the English blocked Admiral Villeneuve in the Mediterranean, halting the invasion. Despite the fact that Boris, unlike Pierre, is actually enlisted in the army, he doesn't know much about the war. This suggests that for him, like his mother, the war is more about social advancement than military glory. Tolstoy suggests that such was the case for many noble families.



VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 14–17

At the Rostovs', the Countess weeps about her friend Anna Mikhailovna's plight. Finally she asks the Count for money, and he gives her 700 roubles, fondly calling her a spendthrift. When Anna Mikhailovna comes back from Count Bezukhov's, the Countess gives her the stack of money for Boris's uniform, and the friends both weep.

Even though the Rostovs don't have much money, they give generously to friends who are in need (or at least claim to be). This openhanded attitude partly explains the Rostovs' financial woes and inability to keep up with the rest of the nobility.



Later, the Countess sits with her daughters and guests in the drawing room. One guest, Marya Dmitrievna Akhrosimov, a rudely frank society lady whom everyone respects and fears, scolds the late arriving Pierre about his escapade with the bear. In his study, the Count smokes pipes and listens to his guests argue about the wisdom of going to war with Napoleon. Later, at the dinner table, Nikolai defends the war with awkward warmth, earning praise from Julie Karagin (which makes Sonya blush). Natasha, dared by her little brother Petya, speaks out of turn, demanding to know what they're having for dessert. When the countess and Marya Dmitrievna laugh at the girl's boldness, everyone else does, too.

In mid-August, 1805, Kutuzov had led the Russian army from Petersburg to join the Austrian army, and on September 1, Emperor Alexander I issued a manifesto about the war. These events are already known, or rumored as imminent, among the nobility in late August and are subject to rigorous debate. For his part, Nikolai supports the war out of simple, earnest patriotism. Meanwhile, Natasha is clearly everyone's favorite, indulged even when she fails to observe social proprieties.



After dinner, the adults divide into groups to play cards, and the young people gather around the clavichord and harp. Natasha is asked to sing, but she runs to find Sonya first and discovers her friend weeping in a corridor. Natasha cries in sympathy. Sonya explains that she's upset that Nikolai's going into the army, and they can't hope to marry, because they're cousins and will therefore need permission from a bishop. Natasha realizes that Vera had been tormenting Sonya earlier, telling her that the Countess would never consent to the marriage and that Nikolai will marry Julie instead. Natasha comforts and reassures her friend, and they run back to the drawing room to sing with the others.

Cousins could marry in the Orthodox Church only with the metropolitan's (regional bishop's) permission. Though Sonya worries about this obstacle, the Countess's opposition is due to Sonya's poverty—the Rostovs need Nikolai to marry a wealthier girl, like Julie Karagin, if they hope to improve their financial status. In the aristocracy, a couple without financial resources didn't have the luxury of marrying for love. Though Natasha can be childishly self-indulgent, she also shows warm-hearted sympathy with others.



Later, during the dancing, Natasha claims Pierre as her dance partner, and the countess marvels at the poised, grown-up way Natasha chats with the young man. Count Rostov dances with Marya Dmitrievna, and his exuberance delights the onlookers, who burst into applause when the performance is over.

Pierre is several years older than Natasha and they don't have much in common, but Natasha already has a self-confidence beyond her years when it comes to men. The Count's dancing exemplifies the Rostovs' un-stuffy, characteristically "Russian" joy in life.



VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 18–21

As the Rostov party stretches into the night, Count Bezukhov suffers his sixth stroke. A group of people, including Prince Vassily, begin congregating at Bezukhov's house, anticipating his death. While everyone waits, Prince Vassily goes to his cousin Catiche's room. He says that Catiche, her sisters, and his wife are the Count's only heirs. But last winter the Count wrote a will bequeathing all his property to Pierre instead. What if, he wonders, the Count has legally adopted Pierre, making him no longer illegitimate? In fact, this has happened, though the letter hasn't yet been sent to the sovereign. If and when it is, Pierre will become the new Count Bezukhov and will get everything, leaving the others penniless.

Prince Vassily and Catiche must speak to Count Bezukhov about it before he dies. Catiche blames Princess Anna Mikhailovna—last winter, she got herself into the Count's good graces. Catiche says the will can be found in the inlaid portfolio kept under the Count's pillow. Meanwhile, Pierre and Anna Mikhailovna arrive at Count Bezukhov's; the Count has sent for Pierre. Their carriage stops at the back entrance. When the two pass Catiche's room, where she's talking with Prince Vassily, Catiche slams her door. Anna Mikhailovna reassures Pierre that she will watch out for his interests. Pierre isn't entirely sure what his "interests" are.

Anna Mikhailovna, bold and self-assured, and Pierre enter Count Bezukhov's anteroom, where the doctor and some clergymen are sitting. Anna Mikhailovna disappears into the Count's room, while Pierre sits down, uncomfortable with the others' sudden, quiet deference and respect—he's never been treated this way before. He decides he'd better surrender to everyone else's guidance so that he doesn't do anything foolish. Prince Vassily comes in and tells Pierre that the Count has suffered another stroke. Everyone rushes into the Count's bedroom.

Count Bezukhov lies in bed in the shadow of candle-lit icons while the clergy administer extreme unction. Besides Prince Vassily, Anna Mikhailovna, and the household staff, the princesses (his cousins) are also there. At one point, during a pause in the service, Prince Vassily and Catiche briefly disappear through a door behind the Count's bed. Pierre takes no notice, believing that everything is happening as it must. His father doesn't respond when, at Anna Mikhailovna's urging, Pierre kisses his hand. When Pierre gets up to help shift the Count onto his side, he notices his father's limp arm hanging grotesquely and begins to cry.

In contrast to the carefree party at the Rostovs', events at the Bezukhovs'—and the implications for Pierre's fate—grow more dire. Intrigue surrounds the matter of Count Bezukhov's will. In short, Pierre stands to become the Count's heir, and Prince Vassily, in league with Count Bezukhov's nieces, hopes to thwart that development so they can claim the inheritance instead.



Though Count Bezukhov intends that Pierre be his heir, Pierre is still treated like an illegitimate son whose presence must be concealed. Anna Mikhailovna (who's taken Pierre under her wing because she hopes that Pierre will dispense favors to her son Boris) orchestrates everything. Pierre appears naïve and hapless in such matters, at the mercy of others' scheming.



So far, Pierre has been treated like a socially awkward misfit; others' sudden, tacit recognition of him as the Count's son and heir is jarring. He doesn't trust himself to handle this new, socially ascendant role. Indeed, he lacks Anna Mikhailovna's confidence in navigating the aristocratic world into which he's suddenly been thrust.



Extreme unction is an Orthodox Christian service of prayers, anointing, and sometimes Communion for those near death. Pierre is oblivious to the intrigues occurring right before his eyes—he's swept along with the flow of events and doesn't ask questions about them. The sight of his father's dangling arm forces him to acknowledge the reality of death. In fact, he has a much more heartfelt reaction than anyone else to the Count's death—while they're consumed with the financial fallout.



After tea, Pierre finds Anna Mikhailovna blocking Catiche from reentering the bedroom to talk to Count Bezukhov about the will. The two women tussle over an inlaid portfolio. But just then the younger princess runs out of the bedroom, saying that the Count is now dying. Prince Vassily follows soon after, crying as he tells Pierre that “everything ends in death.” The next day, Anna Mikhailovna tells Pierre that, though the will hasn’t been opened yet, he might soon possess a large fortune. She adds that if she hadn’t been there, who knows what would have happened? The Count had promised not to forget Boris in his will; she hopes Pierre will fulfill his father’s wish.

The drama intensifies as Anna Mikhailovna and Catiche wrestle over the portfolio that allegedly contains Count Bezukhov’s will. Though Pierre is most directly impacted by its contents, he passively watches. After his father’s death, he doesn’t grasp the implications of his imminent change in fortune or take death’s finality to heart as Prince Vassily seems to. Anna Mikhailovna, meanwhile, is purely self-interested on her son’s behalf.



VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTER 22

At Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky’s estate, Bald Hills, the young Prince Andrei and his wife, the little princess, are expected to arrive any day. Meanwhile, life on the estate carries on peacefully. Prince Nikolai spends his time tutoring his daughter, Princess Marya, and ceaselessly improving the estate. Though the Prince isn’t cruel, everyone holds him in fearful respect as they try to live up to his exacting demands.

Having introduced aristocratic families based in Petersburg and Moscow, the story turns to the rural Bolkonskys. Though they’re an aristocratic family, too, Tolstoy portrays them as comparatively detached from big city society circles. Stern, industrious Prince Nikolai contrasts with the much more indulgent, more spendthrift, and less diligent Count Rostov.



On the morning of Prince Andrei’s arrival, Marya timidly enters her father’s study for their daily meeting. Prince Nikolai greets his daughter sternly yet tenderly. He marks a geometry assignment in a notebook and also gives her a letter “from Héloïse,” which is what he calls her friend Julie Karagin. As always, Princess Marya is too nervous to grasp the geometry lesson and gives the wrong answer. As usual, her father shouts and flings the notebook away in barely restrained anger. But before she goes, he pats her cheek and explains that he doesn’t want her to be like the “stupid” women here. He also gives her a religious book that Julie sent, called *Key to the Mystery*.

*Prince Nikolai loves Marya, putting personal effort into her education, yet he’s also controlling and has a fearful temper. “Héloïse” is a sarcastic reference to Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s popular 1761 epistolary novel *Julie ou la Nouvelle Héloïse*. Princess Marya’s and Julie’s letters are based on a collection of letters by two young ladies named Volkov and Lanskoj, which Tolstoy had read. *A Key to the Mysteries of Nature* was an occult work by Karl von Eckartshausen, popular in 18th-century Europe.*



Princess Marya returns to her bedroom and opens the letter from Julie Karagin, her closest childhood friend. Julie opens the letter with warm, heaping praise for Marya, whom she hasn’t seen for three months and misses so much. Marya looks in the mirror at her sad, unattractive face and figures Julie is flattering her, but it’s not true; she’s just never noticed the luminous look that fills her eyes while she’s listening carefully to another person.

Julie (who flirted with Nikolai Rostov in previous chapters) doesn’t seem to have much in common with Princess Marya; where Marya represents a restrained, isolated country life, Julie occupies Moscow society and serves as Marya’s connection to that foreign world. In keeping with her more “Russian” characterization, Princess Marya possesses an inner beauty that isn’t always evident at first glance.



Marya returns to the letter. Julie writes that in Moscow, people talk of nothing but war; her own brothers have enlisted. She prays that the “Corsican monster” will be defeated by the “angel” of Russia. She also writes of her love for Nikolai Rostov, praising his nobility and poetic spirit. Julie also mentions the gossip surrounding Count Bezukhov’s death and Pierre’s controversial inheritance. In consequence, women’s attitudes toward Pierre have changed overnight. In the meantime, Princess Anna Mikhailovna is scheming to marry off Marya to Prince Vassily’s son Anatole. She closes by encouraging Marya to read the enclosed mystical book.

Marya replies at once. She assures Julie that she doesn’t disapprove of Julie’s feelings for Nikolai Rostov; it’s only that, never having experienced such feelings herself, Marya assumes that Christian love—the love for both neighbor and enemy—is sweeter still than romantic love. She speaks warmly of Pierre, whose warm heart she’s always admired, and pities him the burden of wealth he’ll now carry. She thanks Julie for the book, but admits that she thinks mystical writings only spur religious doubt and confusion. Finally, Marya adds that talk of war has even reached the countryside, and she doesn’t understand why Russia must take part in a “wretched” war.

Cheerful Mlle Bourienne, Marya’s companion, enters the room, warning Marya that Prince Nikolai has had an argument and is therefore in a grumpy mood. Marya says she doesn’t like to judge her father for his moods. Then she looks at her watch and is frightened to see she’s late: it’s the time of day when she must play the clavichord while her father rests, as she does every day between noon and two.

VOLUME 1, PART 1: CHAPTERS 23–25

In the afternoon Prince Andrei and his wife arrive at Bald Hills. Since Prince Nikolai is still napping, they surprise Princess Marya while she’s practicing the clavichord. When Marya greets Andrei, her warm eyes light up. Sadly, she asks Andrei if he’s really going to war, and he acknowledges that he is—tomorrow.

The “Corsican monster” is, of course, Napoleon, while Emperor Alexander is idealized as Russia’s “angel.” Julie is much more connected to war news than Marya is, but her view of the war is filtered through society lenses—her crush on Nikolai, the gossip about Pierre’s newfound status, and marriage prospects for Marya are even more important to her. Overall, Julie comes across as relatively flighty and superficial.



Princess Marya’s character comes through in her response to Julie. She considers herself to be uninterested in romantic love or wealth, and she favors traditional Russian religious piety to popular mystical fads. The realities of war seem distant and unconnected to Marya’s life, a perception that will be challenged as the story develops.



Princess Marya’s life is governed by her father’s moods and demands, to which she dutifully caters. Her understanding of life’s meaning comes from her devotion to others, even at her own expense.



Nikolai and Marya have always been close friends. For Marya, the war isn’t about abstract ideals or national glory, but the very personal absence of the brother she loves.



In a special exception, Prince Nikolai allows Prince Andrei to visit his quarters before dinner. Cheerful after his nap, he greets his son with, “So you want to defeat Bonaparte?” Always critical of the modern military, he criticizes “this new science” called “strategy” that the Russians have learned from the Germans. Resistant at first, Andrei gives in and begins answering his father’s questions about the war with growing eagerness. He explains how an army of 500,000 will attack France from different sides, including an army of 90,000 which will threaten Prussia in order to draw it out of neutrality. His father doesn’t appear to listen, however, interjecting unrelated questions. Then Prince Nikolai sends Andrei to the dining room while singing a French war song off-key.

At dinner, Prince Nikolai joins Prince Andrei, the little princess, Princess Marya, Mlle Bourienne, and the Prince’s architect Mikhail Ivanovich, whom he’s invited mainly to agree with his views on Bonaparte. Prince Nikolai is convinced that Bonaparte has gained power only because there’s no strong Russian opposition, and that there’s no real war happening, just a puppet show. Prince Andrei delightedly eggs his father on by continuing to argue that Bonaparte is in fact a great general. After dinner, the little princess takes Princess Marya aside and admits that Prince Nikolai frightens her. Princess Marya replies that her father is “so kind.”

After dinner, Prince Andrei prepares for his departure the following day. He ponders his future. Princess Marya rushes in to speak with him before he goes. She tells “Andryusha” he has changed, smiling as she uses his childhood nickname. When she speaks warmly of Andrei’s wife, she notices the mocking expression that comes over his face. She encourages Andrei to sympathize with Lise, who’s not used to being isolated in the country. Andrei doesn’t reply to this, but he suggests instead that Prince Nikolai is too hard on Marya. Shocked, she protests that she’s perfectly content with him.

Princess Marya begs Prince Andrei to fulfill a request for her. She takes out an icon of Christ, says a prayer of blessing, and, after Andrei crosses himself a bit mockingly, gives it to him. He promises to wear it for her. After that, she hesitantly admits that the little princess wept after dinner, unhappy with her life. Prince Andrei says that he’s never reproached Lise for anything, but that neither of them is really happy. Princess Marya tells him that if he prayed, God would grant him the love he’s unable to feel for his wife.

For Prince Nikolai, too, the war against Napoleon remains mostly an abstract idea, the subject of a spirited theoretical discussion with his son. Tolstoy also portrays a generational difference between father and son: Prince Nikolai sees military strategy as newfangled and suspect, while Andrei is exhilarated by the alliance’s lofty objectives. This suggests a difference between Nikolai’s old-fashioned Russian view of warfare and the European-inspired strategy Andrei favors.



For both Prince Nikolai and Prince Andrei, the war is so far mainly a subject for enjoyable dinner-table debate, not a matter of life and death. This time, much of their disagreement centers around Napoleon’s reputation—is he a worthy opponent or just an opportunist who will be subdued easily? Meanwhile, Andrei’s departure for war means that the little princess will be left alone in an unfamiliar place. Princess Marya is so used to accommodating her father that she’s blind to his faults.



The warm moment between brother and sister reveals how they view their respective weaknesses. Marya perceives that Andrei isn’t very sympathetic toward his wife and in fact doesn’t respect her much. Andrei clearly sees that Prince Nikolai doesn’t treat Marya well. Unlike Nikolai, Marya is oblivious to her situation.



Princess Marya is the novel’s most conventionally religious character. Prince Andrei, at this point, makes no pretense of being a devout Russian Orthodox believer or of being much concerned about life’s ultimate meaning. Princess Marya nevertheless remains convinced that prayer would solve Andrei’s marital difficulties.



Prince Andrei's coach stands outside in the autumn evening; the household gathers in the hall to bid him goodbye. Prince Nikolai continues scribbling a letter in his office when Prince Andrei comes to say farewell. Embarrassed, Andrei asks a favor—that Nikolai send to Moscow for a midwife, since Lise is fearful about giving birth. His father agrees and also gives Prince Andrei a letter to his friend, Kutuzov, urging his son's quick promotion.

Prince Nikolai's military background, particularly his personal friendship with General Kutuzov, allows him to advocate for the acceleration of his son's career, showing how much social standing could shape one's personal experience of war.



In a shrill voice, Prince Nikolai tells Prince Andrei that though he'll grieve if his son dies, he'll be most ashamed if he hears that Andrei did not behave like Nikolai Bolkonsky's son. Prince Andrei asks that, if he dies and his wife bears a son, his father make sure to raise the boy himself. Then Prince Nikolai shoos his son away in an angry tone. When Prince Andrei says goodbye to his wife, Lise faints. After her brother goes, Princess Marya, supporting her sister-in-law, makes signs of the cross in the direction of the door. Prince Nikolai pokes his head out of his study, says, "Gone? Well, that's good!" and slams the door.

Prince Andrei's goodbye brings some of the Bolkonsky family's faults to the forefront. Prince Nikolai clearly does have genuine feelings for his son, yet he masks his emotion with anger because he doesn't want to appear weakly sentimental. The strain of Andrei's departure overwhelms the little princess, but Andrei goes anyway, leaving Marya to (literally) bear the weight of everyone around her, as usual.



VOLUME 1, PART 2: CHAPTERS 1–3

It's October, 1805. Russian troops are stationed near the fortress of Braunau, Austria, creating a burden for local villagers. Commander in chief Kutuzov has his headquarters here. On the 11th, an infantry regiment halts outside of town, awaiting Kutuzov's review. The battalion commanders aren't sure whether Kutuzov wants to see the regiment in parade uniform or not, so they decide it's better to be safe than sorry—meaning that the soldiers, exhausted from a 20-mile march, must stay up all night mending and cleaning their uniforms.

Now that the story's prominent families have been introduced, Part 2 of Volume 1 shifts to the battlefield for the first time. In particular, the story focuses not primarily on high-ranking officers, but on the experiences of ordinary infantry soldiers—those who bore the biggest burden of marching, fighting, and in this case, fulfilling their superiors' sometimes unpredictable demands.



The next morning, 2,000 soldiers wait in sparkling good order. Belatedly, an adjutant arrives from headquarters to report that the commander in chief wants to see the soldiers in marching conditions, *not* parade uniform. Kutuzov has been ordered to march the regiment to a position he considers to be ill-advised, so he'd hoped the men would look convincingly bedraggled, thus changing the general's mind. The men hurriedly change into their dirty marching uniforms.

Tolstoy humorously captures some of wartime's unpredictable realities, including the fact that even a commander in chief like Kutuzov sometimes feels constrained by superiors' demands—and that, as the most powerful figure, he depends on the much larger number beneath him to achieve his goals (a point Tolstoy argues regarding history in general).



Commander in chief Kutuzov and an Austrian general arrive in an elegant Viennese coach. Kutuzov walks among the troops, pointing out their pitiful boots to the Austrian. A suite of about 20 men follows Kutuzov, with Prince Andrei Bolkonsky walking nearest. At one point, Prince Andrei steps forward to remind Kutuzov about the demoted officer Dolokhov. Hearing his name, Dolokhov steps forward, saying he wants a chance to wipe out his guilt and prove his devotion. Kutuzov doesn't respond. Then the regiment breaks up into companies to seek lodging and rest.

As the third company walks toward its quarters, the regimental commander questions the company captain, Timokhin, about Dolokhov's behavior. Timokhin explains that Dolokhov occasionally becomes "a beast," but the regimental commander pities the well-connected young man and lets Dolokhov know that when he serves in his first action, he'll be rewarded with epaulettes. The rest of the soldiers chatter spiritedly, exchanging rumors about Bonaparte, and the company soon breaks into marching songs.

Back from the review, Kutuzov and the Austrian general study a map. There are rumors that the Austrian army lost their recent battle, and Kutuzov doubts that the Austrians really need Russian help at this point. Kutuzov turns to Prince Andrei and orders him to prepare a report on all that's known about the Austrian army's actions. Though many find Andrei pompous, Kutuzov has quickly taken notice of him, thinking him promising and admirable.

Before Prince Andrei can leave headquarters, a bandaged Austrian general hurriedly enters in search of Kutuzov. The flustered newcomer says in a trembling voice, "You are looking at the unfortunate [General] Mack." A tremor crossing his face, Kutuzov allows Mack into his office and shuts the door. The rumor of Austrian defeat, including the surrender of the entire Austrian army at Ulm, is true.

Prince Andrei understands the military implications of this development better than most, and he feels excited as he considers the Russian army's difficult position and the role he might play. At the same time, he both fears Bonaparte and doesn't want to see his hero defeated. On his way to write to his father, Andrei runs into his friend Zherkov, a hussar from Kutuzov's suite. Some Austrian officers squeeze past them in the corridor, and Zherkov jokingly congratulates them on the disgraced Mack's arrival. Prince Andrei, enraged, reprimands Zherkov. He explains to his startled roommate Nesvitsky that only "schoolboys" behave like that when an ally's army has been slaughtered.

Kutuzov's luxury contrasts with the soldiers' rough conditions. Nonetheless, Kutuzov uses his inferiors' bedraggled state to try to gain an advantageous position for his army. Prince Andrei, last seen at Bald Hills, closely assists Kutuzov (a sign of his own social standing). Dolokhov, last seen goofing around with Pierre and the Kuragins in Petersburg, has been demoted for his antics there and hopes to redeem himself.



Dolokhov's social connections spare him from consequences for his misbehaviors, and he's even promised new decorations (implying he'll be promoted) after his first battle. With the other soldiers in good spirits, the overall mood is hopeful—no one has yet gotten a real taste of battle, and war mostly offers opportunities for personal advancement and adventure so far.



Kutuzov has a conservative temperament in battle, something that will characterize his decisions throughout the wars—he hesitates to spend Russian lives unless he's convinced it will benefit Russia. Prince Andrei is already making his mark with Kutuzov, meaning he could have a promising career on military staff instead of fighting.



Baron Karl Freiherr Mack von Liebereich was an Austrian general who, along with his 30,000 men, surrendered to Napoleon at Ulm, Prussia, without a fight. It was the beginning of the Austrian army's downfall and that of the entire Third Coalition against Napoleon. The disastrous loss at Ulm means that the Russians will soon have to face the French for themselves.



Prince Andrei's reactions to the news are conflicted. It's an opportunity for personal glory, and, on the other hand, he still idealizes Bonaparte as a general and doesn't want to be disillusioned about him. In other words, his attitude about war is still mostly theoretical. A hussar, like Zherkov, is a cavalryman—one who fights on horseback. Zherkov makes light of the Austrian loss, which offends Prince Andrei's high ideals about war.



VOLUME 1, PART 2: CHAPTERS 4–8

The Pavlogradsky hussars are stationed two miles from Braunau, in the village of Salzeneck. Nikolai Rostov serves as a junker in this regiment. He lives with his squadron commander, Captain Denisov. Nikolai rides up to his quarters, fondly takes leave of his horse, and exchanges cheerful greetings with the German landlord. When Denisov gets home, he rants gloomily about his bad luck at cards last night, then sets Rostov to counting the coins left in Denisov's purse. Lieutenant Telyanin, from the same regiment, comes to the door. Nikolai stows Denisov's purse under a pillow and reluctantly chats with Telyanin, whom he dislikes. Telyanin teaches Rostov how to shoe his horse, then leaves.

When Rostov returns to the cottage, Denisov is eating a meal and writing a love letter. The sergeant major shows up for his winnings from last night's gambling, and Rostov offers to cover the debt, but Denisov refuses. Yet when Denisov looks under his pillow for the purse full of coins, it's not there. Denisov starts menacing his orderly, Lavrushka, for taking the purse, but Rostov realizes who must have taken it, buckles on his saber, and prepares to go out.

Rostov finds Telyanin at a tavern, where he demands to examine Telyanin's purse and quietly accuses him of stealing Denisov's money. Telyanin begins to sob about his elderly parents, and Rostov returns the purse. Later, back at Denisov's quarters, another captain tells Nikolai that it looks bad for a mere junker to try to get a superior (Telyanin) in trouble. He's now put the regimental commander, Bogdanych, in a tough spot—if Bogdanych prosecutes Telyanin, he'll bring dishonor on the entire regiment. Tears in his eyes, Rostov gives a stumbling retraction. But just then Zherkov comes in with the news of Mack's defeat; they're to march out tomorrow.

Kutuzov's regiment falls back toward Vienna, destroying bridges as they go. By October 23rd, a warm, rainy day, Russian troops have reached the Austrian town of Enns, near where the River Enns meets the Danube. In the distance, they can see enemy troops. While the artillerymen scurry into position to fire on the enemy position, Nesvitsky rides down to urge the hussars forward; they must cross the bridge and then burn it. The sound of an exploding shell, as well as a sudden burst of sunshine, lifts everyone's spirits.

From Kutuzov's suite, the action shifts to the relatively lowly Nikolai Rostov, who ranks at the bottom of the hussars. So far, Nikolai's life as a junker isn't very eventful. Rather than gaining glory in combat, this life mostly involves supporting his superior Denisov's dissipated habits like gambling—a first hint that war isn't much like people imagine. Nevertheless, Nikolai seems to adapt smoothly to the routines of regimental life.



Rostov's eagerness to cover Denisov's debts, and then intervene in the apparent theft, shows his impulsive, even foolhardy sense of honor and personal loyalty.



Nikolai's incident with Telyanin shows his naïve, youthful impetuosity and idealistic sense of principle. Nikolai believes that Telyanin's apparent theft of Denisov's money is a matter of honor. However, he doesn't yet understand that in the army, the honor of one person matters less than the honor of the whole—in other words, if Telyanin gets in trouble, the entire regiment will be shamed. Before this lesson can fully sink in, though, the war gets real—it's time to leave petty matters behind and march to battle for the first time.



When the Russian army reaches Enns, there's a heightened sense of urgency—they're within firing range of the enemy for the first time. Still, spirits remain high as soldiers anticipate getting into battle; even the sound of weaponry hasn't yet gained ominous associations.



As enemy cannonballs fly overhead, the infantry soldiers and hussars exchange jibes, the hussars' horses splashing mud on the foot soldiers. Then they see French troops and artillery appear on the road opposite, a mere 600 yards away. Rostov sits on his slightly lame horse, Little Rook, beaming like a schoolboy at his comrades. Then the commander orders the two squadrons of Pavlogradsky hussars to cross back over the bridge. Rostov finds himself riding near the regimental commander, Bogdanych—the first time they've seen each other since the affair of Telyanin—and feels guilty. He speculates about Bogdanych's motives.

Soon Nesvitsky returns, wondering why the bridge hasn't been burned already. The colonel argues, insisting it wasn't part of his original orders, but he finally agrees in an injured tone. Rostov feels that his first test has come. As the hussars make the sign of the cross and start running, Rostov suddenly feels afraid and hurries to get ahead of the others. But he falls in the mud near the bridge. Bogdanych, not recognizing Rostov, yells at him to stay back.

Beyond the range of fire, officers watch, wondering if the hussars will succeed in setting fire to the bridge before the French get there. Soon the French draw close enough to throw canisters at the hussars, a few of whom fall. The hussars set fire to the bridge and race back to their horse-handlers, but some are struck down by canister-shot. Rostov realizes this isn't how he'd imagined battle—there aren't any French to strike down—and he's failed to bring any straw with which to set the bridge alight. So he stands there uselessly, gazing around at the blue sky and the glistening Danube; he feels at peace. He runs with the others, yet his thoughts are elsewhere. By the time he's back on Little Rook, he realizes nobody has noticed his cowardice on the bridge. He's just like any other junker under fire for the first time.

VOLUME 1, PART 2: CHAPTERS 9–12

The Russians are demoralized and exhausted. Under Kutuzov, they retreat down the Danube, pursued by the French, uncertain about their allies, and short of supplies. Guided by modern strategy, the Russians had planned for an offensive war, but now Kutuzov's best hope is to unite with the rest of the Russian army without facing a humiliating surrender, as Mack did at Ulm.

On the brink of the novel's first battle scene, Tolstoy focuses on the good-natured joking of ordinary soldiers, a reminder of his view that such men were ultimately the most consequential figures in war, not generals and commanders. Rostov is excited about his first encounter with the enemy. When he sees Bogdanych—with whom he'd gotten into trouble for accusing Telyanin—he's even distracted from battle entirely. Meanwhile, orders are confused, and it's unclear why the hussars are told to cross back over the bridge they've been ordered to destroy.



The disagreement between the colonel and Nesvitsky illustrates one of Tolstoy's key arguments about history, especially war—that miscommunications and mistakes can have a bigger impact on battles than simple orders do. Meanwhile, finally put to the test, Nikolai's first, instinctual reaction isn't courage but fear.



Because the hussars were slow and hesitant on the bridge, some are killed before they can finish carrying out the order to destroy the bridge. Rostov had pictured battle differently—presumably fighting French soldiers face-to-face. When he's actually under fire from the French, he finds himself completely unprepared for the task at hand. Unexpectedly, he experiences an intense awareness of nature, especially the sky, around him—a sensation that other characters will experience when in mortal danger. Though Nikolai feels his running and fear on the bridge are shameful, the reality is that most cadets react no differently in this situation, and everyone is so absorbed in his own feelings that he doesn't notice what others are doing.



After being rebuffed by the French at Enns, the Russians undertake a discouraging retreat. While they had planned to fight offensively, modern strategy fails them in this instance, suggesting that "European" approaches aren't foolproof. Now, they hurry to reinforce their strength before there's a chance of encirclement by the enemy.



Finally, on October 30th, Kutuzov's men gain a victory: they crush Mortier's division of the French army on the Danube's left bank, near Krems. It's the Russians' first triumph over the French after two weeks of retreat. Despite the sorry condition of the army and the crowds of untended sick and wounded, the Russians celebrate, and optimistic rumors fly. During the battle, Prince Andrei's horse was shot out from under him, and a bullet grazed his arm. As a reward, the commander in chief sends him to the Austrian court, now located in Brünn, with the news of the victory. Prince Andrei's carriage glides along the dark, snowy roads, and he's filled with memories of the day's battle and a hint of long-desired happiness.

At the Austrian headquarters, Prince Andrei's joy is slightly dashed when he's taken in through a side entrance and led not to the emperor, but to the minister of war. When the minister finally looks up from his desk, he acknowledges Andrei with a fake smile. After reading Andrei's dispatch, he tells Andrei that the emperor will probably want to see him tomorrow. As he leaves, Andrei feels deflated, the victory a distant memory.

Prince Andrei stays with a friend, a promising Russian diplomat and bachelor named Bilibin. Over dinner, Prince Andrei relaxes into the cultured surroundings. Bilibin is known in Vienna for his elegant, witty turns of phrase. Tonight Bilibin speaks in French, except when he wants to contemptuously emphasize a Russian phrase. He, too, is unimpressed by the Russian victory, since the Russians failed to capture Mortier. Prince Andrei is baffled by this tepid reaction, especially after Mack's defeat and Austrian inactivity. Bilibin argues that the allies abandoned Vienna and allowed a beloved general, Schmidt, to be killed in battle, then showed up expecting congratulations. Meanwhile, he adds, Bonaparte is living in Schönbrunn.

Prince Andrei begins to realize the insignificance of the Russian victory in the greater scheme of things. Bilibin concludes that unless Prussia joins the alliance, it's just a matter of time until the French win the war. What's more, he thinks a secret, separate peace is already being negotiated between Austria and France. Prince Andrei goes to bed, and though troubled by the conversation, he dreams happily of the victory at Krems.

The Russians finally have a small victory over a French division, raising their spirits. Prince Andrei also sees his first real fighting, and at this point, he feels that war is starting to live up to his ideals, bringing him happiness for the first time in the novel.



Fresh from victory, Prince Andrei expects to be enthusiastically received by the Austrian emperor himself, but officials aren't as excited about the small victory as he is. This reflects Tolstoy's argument, developed throughout the novel, that while so-called great men might plan wars, it's ordinary soldiers who fight them, and their perspectives are correspondingly different. The "great men" don't always see what their inferiors do, and vice versa.



There's an irony in Russian aristocrats' attitude—though the French are their enemy, only French language is respectable in cultured circles, with Russian being somewhat derided. Regarding the battle, Bilibin's reaction suggests, again, that officials who are at a distance from the action have a very different perception of the war than those who actually fought it. Schönbrunn was the beloved Hapsburg palace in Vienna, so it would be especially galling for Austrians and their allies to see Napoleon setting up his residence there.



It's historically accurate that, before the French took Vienna, Austrian Emperor Franz I sent Napoleon two different offers to negotiate a peace, both of which were rejected. In other words, Bilibin's cynical instinct is correct, and even Prince Andrei begins to realize that his view of the war might be too idealistic—allies betray one another.



The next day, Prince Andrei's audience with Emperor Franz is awkward. The Emperor asks Andrei simple questions and shows no interest in the answers. Immediately after this meeting, though, Prince Andrei is ambushed by courtiers congratulating him and extending various honors, including the Order of Maria Theresa. When he gets back to Bilibin's house, Prince Andrei is surprised to find a servant hurriedly packing a carriage. Bilibin, flustered, tells Prince Andrei that the French have crossed the bridge of Tabor. The bridge was mined, but it didn't blow up.

Prince Andrei is saddened by the news, yet happy to think that this might be his opportunity for glory. He prepares to leave at once. Bilibin tries to persuade Andrei to save himself and flee along with him, but finding Andrei undeterred, Bilibin calls him a hero.

Prince Andrei's report to the Austrian emperor is basically perfunctory. The Order of Maria Theresa is the Austrian Empire's highest military honor; the prestige of the honor contrasts with the nonchalance of Andrei's reception, suggesting that such honors were a superficial gesture that didn't necessarily mean a great deal. In any case, Andrei's pleasant intermission in society ends abruptly—the French are pursuing them again. French generals tricked an Austrian prince into believing that France and Austria had established a truce, thereby gaining access to the bridge.

Prince Andrei continues to hold onto his hope of battlefield glory by refusing to flee the pursuing French when he has the chance. Despite his experiences among the indifferent Austrians and Bilibin's cynicism, Andrei's idealism remains intact for now.



VOLUME 1, PART 2: CHAPTERS 13–20

That night, Prince Andrei goes in search of the Russian army, getting caught in the disorderly mass of men and wagons choking the roads. Suddenly a distressed woman cries out to Andrei for help, seeing he's an adjutant. An officer, maddened by the confusion, is beating the woman's husband, a doctor, for trying to get ahead of the crowds. Andrei angrily intervenes; afterward, he hurries off, embarrassed, before the woman can thank him. Reaching the village which houses the commander in chief, he tries to clear his mind.

In the village, Prince Andrei runs into Nesvitsky and another officer, who know no more than he does. In a nearby house, he finds Kutuzov, Prince Bagration, and an Austrian general named Weyrother. Even here, things are confused, but Andrei manages to learn that, far from surrendering, the army has been ordered to prepare for battle. He watches Kutuzov and Bagration share an emotional farewell, then Kutuzov orders Andrei into his own carriage.

Kutuzov sends Bagration's vanguard over the hills to try to forestall the French on the road from Vienna and give Kutuzov's men enough time to catch up. It seems impossible. But when French general Murat meets Bagration's detachment, he mistakenly believes it's the whole Russian army. Therefore Murat suggests a three-day truce until the rest of the French army catches up with him, claiming that peace negotiations are underway and there is no point in useless bloodshed. When Kutuzov receives this news, he accepts the truce, giving his men enough time to reach Znaim and giving Bagration's men a chance to rest.

Tolstoy pays attention to war's impact on the masses and not just officers and soldiers. With the French army approaching, ordinary people clog the few available roads, adding to the overall chaos and confusion. Though Andrei cares about behaving honorably and helping civilians, he finds it shameful to be publicly recognized for doing so.



At this point in the war, Kutuzov's troops are in danger of being surrounded by Napoleon's army, like General Mack was, and losing contact with the rest of the Russian army. Now Kutuzov's goal is to reunite with the rest of the army at Znaim before the French get there; unfortunately, the French have better roads and are moving faster.



The Russians have a stroke of luck, misleading the French by pretending Bagration's vanguard is the whole army. Even though the French resort to trickery again, falsely claiming a truce as they did earlier with the Austrians, the ruse gives Kutuzov time to meet his objective of getting the whole army in one place. Kutuzov's method is to take his time and avoid unnecessary battle, continuing to show his preference for careful, calculated defense rather than strategically sophisticated offense.



Fifteen miles away in Schönbrunn, Bonaparte receives word of the supposed truce and Kutuzov's suggested conditions of surrender. He realizes Kutuzov is deceiving him and writes a furious letter expressing his displeasure at Murat and ordering him to destroy the Russian army while he has the chance. Meanwhile, not trusting his generals to follow through, Napoleon himself prepares to move into battle, while Bagration's men complacently rest.

Prince Andrei persuades Kutuzov to let him join Bagration's detachment. He surveys the condition of Bagration's bedraggled troops, deciding to stay with a group near the front line. From here, Russian and French soldiers study one another, laughing and talking curiously. Andrei sees Dolokhov taunting the French. Then another officer lets out a stream of nonsense words, pretending it's real Russian, and the Russians' uproarious laughter causes the French to burst out laughing, too. Yet the two armies' cannons remain pointed at one another.

Having ridden along the line of the troops, Prince Andrei goes up the battery. From here he can see the distant village of Schöngraben and most of the French troops. From this position, the French could easily encircle the Russians. Retreat would be difficult, because there's a steep ravine just behind the Russians. Prince Andrei takes out a notebook and jots some ideas to tell Prince Bagration, picturing various battle contingencies. At the back of his mind, he listens to soldiers in the nearby lean-to speculating about life after death. Just then a cannonball whistles through the air and crashes nearby.

The battle begins in earnest. Prince Andrei rides in search of Prince Bagration. General Murat has just received Napoleon's letter, and he moves his troops around both Russian flanks in hopes of crushing them before Napoleon arrives. Bagration calmly listens to Prince Andrei's report of what he's seen and then rides toward the front, Andrei trailing him along with Bagration's personal adjutant Zherkov and a state councilor who's come to observe. As Zherkov and the councilor are joking around, a cannonball kills a Cossack right behind the councilor.

The Russian battery starts firing on the village of Schöngraben as musketfire breaks out in the valley below. The French begin to press into both the right and left Russian flanks. As Prince Andrei listens to Bagration's orders, he's surprised that no orders are actually given—Bagration acts as if everything that happens, whether by chance or by an inferior officer's decision, is just what he'd intended all along. As a result, Prince Bagration has a calming and encouraging effect on all those who speak with him.

Like Kutuzov, Napoleon is a savvy general, and he quickly realizes his army is missing its chance. Tension builds as Napoleon moves into the story as a character for the first time.



The encounter between the two sides at the front line is an example of Tolstoy's contention that war is inherently nonsense. The two sides don't understand each other's languages for the most part, yet they're able to joke around—to recognize each other's shared humanity, in other words. Yet they're still about to kill each other. Tolstoy suggests that such behavior is senseless and inhuman.



Prince Andrei, still committed to his idealistic view of war, automatically searches for ways to support the Russian effort and promote a better outcome. He only vaguely listens to the nearby soldiers' speculations—in other words, matters of life and death still seem abstract and unimportant. The cannon fire changes that in an instant, symbolically destroying Andrei's complacency by bringing the prospect of death front and center.



It's now evident that Napoleon's supposed truce has been called off. General Murat acts quickly in hopes of redeeming himself in Napoleon's eyes. Again, as Prince Andrei rides with Bagration and his staff, the officials' lightheartedness belies their surroundings—they don't seem to realize that they're under deadly fire until there's a near miss.



Prince Andrei's observations about Prince Bagration's leadership fit with Tolstoy's views of history—that the decisions of commanders and generals aren't the biggest deciding factors in war. While Bagration's command is important, it's not because of the specific orders Bagration gives; it has more to do with the way he inspires those beneath him, encouraging them in their own initiatives.



Prince Bagration moves down into the valley and begins to encounter wounded soldiers. The air is thick with gunpowder, and soldiers are bunched together amid general confusion. The nearby regiment hastily lines up to meet an approaching French infantry column. They maintain ranks even as a cannonball crashes among them. Bagration dismounts and joins the soldiers, and Prince Andrei, too, feels a kind of euphoria. As the French begin to shoot, Bagration yells, “Hurrah!” and the soldiers echo him.

After this, the Russian right flank is able to retreat, but the left flank is in disarray. Bagration sends Zherkov to order the left flank to retreat, but Zherkov becomes frightened and fails to carry out the order. The infantry general and the hussar colonel exchange heated words and begin riding together toward the front. But their standoff is disrupted when the French attack Russian soldiers in the woods, and the Russians are forced to cut a path for retreat. Rostov is part of the cavalry squadron that’s facing the French. Though Rostov felt lighthearted during the initial advance, something suddenly strikes the squadron, and he finds himself alone in the field with a numb arm.

As Rostov gets off his horse, he sees French soldiers rushing toward him and stands frozen, wondering why anyone would want to kill him. When the nearest Frenchman draws close with bayonet extended, Rostov throws his pistol at the man and runs in the opposite direction. He dives into some bushes, where he finds Russian riflemen.

The Russian infantry regiments run out of the woods in disarray, crying out that they’re surrounded and cut off. But when the French suddenly retreat, Timokhin’s company (including Dolokhov) pursue them with terrifying ferocity. Dolokhov sustains a bayonet wound and captures an officer, both of which he happily displays to the regimental commander, asking him to remember. Meanwhile, Tushin’s battery succeeds in setting fire to Schöngraben. As French guns return fire, Tushin feels happily delirious, as if he’s entered a fantasy world—he’s like a giant flinging cannonballs at the enemy. Then Prince Andrei gets through with the order to retreat. After Andrei helps Tushin remove the guns, Tushin bids Andrei a tearful goodbye.

As he continues to follow Prince Bagration through the battlefield, Prince Andrei gets closer to the chaos of direct fighting. Bagration’s willingness to join his soldiers on their ground, even if it’s a superficial gesture, succeeds in rousing them. Even though Andrei is moved, too, Tolstoy isn’t necessarily praising the soldiers’ bravado; he subtly critiques the way idealizing a hero can move people to give up their lives.



Zherkov’s cowardice is a good example of Tolstoy’s emphasis on the consequential actions of the rank and file, regardless of commanders’ orders. Because the left flank doesn’t get the order to retreat, they face the French attack head-on while in a vulnerable position. Nikolai Rostov reappears in the story at this moment, among the embattled hussar cadets.



Rostov’s behavior—tossing his weapon at the approaching enemy—is less about cowardice than about war’s maddening effect on people. Tolstoy suggests that when faced with the senseless madness of war, people will behave irrationally regardless of their training.



Just when it looks as if the Russians face devastation, there’s a reversal in the Russians’ favor. Dolokhov achieves his goal of redeeming himself for his bad behavior and regaining his reputation. Then Tushin saves the day by destroying the French position with artillery fire. Tushin’s delirium is another example of Tolstoy’s view of the madness of war. At the same time, the determined, emotional Tushin is also an example of what Tolstoy sees as a characteristically “Russian” soul.



VOLUME 1, PART 2: CHAPTER 21

As the day darkens into evening, Tushin's men retreat; Zherkov is roundly scolded for having failed to reach them with the initial order. Many wounded catch rides on the retreating guns, among them Rostov, pale and pitiful, clutching his arm. They eventually make it to the village of Guntersdorf, soldiers beating off a final French attack before things fall quiet. Gradually, the groans of the wounded fill the silence. Rostov sits next to Tushin, numbly watching their campfire. In a nearby cottage, Prince Bagration eats dinner with Prince Andrei and other officers. The regimental commander tells Bagration that he led a bayonet attack, though it isn't true—it's what he'd meant to do, and it seems to him that perhaps he really did.

Tushin is summoned into the officers' cottage. He enters timidly, tripping over a French standard. Bagration asks Tushin why two of his guns were abandoned. Disgraced, Tushin stumbles over his words—he hadn't thought of it until this moment. Prince Andrei speaks up in Tushin's defense, saying that when he joined Tushin, he found most of his company killed and no covering troops; actually, he believes most of the day's success owes to Tushin and his men. Tushin follows Prince Andrei out and thanks him, but Andrei says nothing in reply. None of today's events have measured up to Andrei's hopes.

Meanwhile, Rostov still sits by the fire, tormented by pain in his arm. He falls asleep and dreams of his family, of Denisov, Telyanin, and Bogdanych, and the dreams merge with the pain. When he wakes up, it's snowing, and he thinks wistfully of the Russian winter, wondering why he ever came here. The next day, Bagration's detachment joins Kutuzov's army.

Historically, the engagement at Schöngrabern, or Hollabrunn, is considered to be a French victory. However, it achieved Kutuzov's goal of delaying the French long enough to allow him to join up with the rest of the Russian army, so it's also regarded as something of a Russian moral victory. Though Tolstoy portrays Tushin's actions on the battery as being decisive in resisting the French, Tushin sits at a campfire while the superior officers eat in comfort, again highlighting the contrast between those who give orders and those who actually fight. He also suggests that people's perceptions (like the boastful commander's) are distorted in the aftermath of battle.



In Tolstoy's eyes, Tushin is a heroic and honorable figure for maintaining his attack on the French under fire, yet the army staff not only fails to acknowledge this, but also criticizes him for leaving some guns behind. This further disillusiones Prince Andrei, who witnessed the situation firsthand and tries to speak up in Tushin's defense. While Andrei had believed that war was an honorable pursuit, he doesn't see evidence of that in his superiors' narrow-minded attitudes.



War hasn't turned out as Nikolai Rostov expected, either. In his pain, he can't separate dream from reality—hinting at Tolstoy's view that war isn't a rational occurrence—and he longs for his homeland of Russia. Despite Rostov's disillusionment, Kutuzov's goal—uniting the armies—has been achieved.



VOLUME 1, PART 3: CHAPTERS 1-5

Prince Vassily isn't someone who thinks through his plans in advance, and he certainly doesn't intend to harm others with them. He's just a man with a habit of worldly success, who instinctively forms schemes as situations demand—befriending the wealthy and influential, for example. Lately he's had Pierre appointed to a government position and moved him into Vassily's Petersburg house. Without consciously thinking about it, Vassily does whatever's necessary to ensure that Pierre marries his daughter Hélène. This will allow him to borrow a needed forty thousand from Pierre later.

The setting shifts from the war back to the home front, where Prince Vassily plots his future. He's a scheming, manipulative man who values wealth and social position more than anything else and feels entitled to these. The newly wealthy Pierre is the current object of Vassily's schemes.



As the new Count Bezukhov, Pierre's life suddenly becomes much busier, taken up with duties he doesn't understand and doesn't care about much. People speak so flatteringly to Pierre that he begins to believe their remarks about his kindness and intelligence. Even the older princess, who'd been cruel to him before, humbly asks for his favor.

In the aftermath of Count Bezukhov's death, Prince Vassily spends all his time guiding the hapless Pierre. Pierre's harried new life is much the same, except that most of his old friends have gone off to war. So he spends most of his time with Prince Vassily, the Prince's wife, the Prince's daughter H  l  ne, and Anna Pavlovna Scherer, who—like everyone else—now seems to find him “*charmant*” instead of tactless and awkward. Early in the winter of 1805–1806, Pierre receives an invitation to another soir  e at Anna Pavlovna's. She mentions that H  l  ne will be there, and Pierre gathers that people have begun to associate him and H  l  ne in their minds.

At the party, Anna Pavlovna pointedly pairs off the young couple to keep her elderly aunt company. Though uninterested in the conversation, Pierre notices for the first time how beautiful H  l  ne is and suddenly feels that she *must* become his wife. Later, at home, he thinks of H  l  ne and remembers that he thinks she is stupid, and that he's heard unseemly rumors about her—they surely wouldn't make a good match. Yet that doesn't change his matrimonial dreams one bit.

In November, Prince Vassily has to go on a business trip, including a visit to Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky, in hopes of marrying his son Anatole to the wealthy prince's daughter Marya. But he's concerned that Pierre, who still hasn't proposed to H  l  ne, is wasting valuable time. Pierre, for his part, is convinced that marriage to H  l  ne would be a terrible mistake, yet he can't bring himself to leave Prince Vassily's house. He doesn't want to disappoint everyone's newfound expectations for him, and he keeps vacillating between admiration and disgust for H  l  ne.

On H  l  ne's name-day, a small group of friends and relatives—all of them expecting an imminent marriage proposal—gather at Prince Vassily's. The company laughs and talks happily, all the while eyeing the bashfully smiling couple at the other end of the table. Happy to be the center of attention, Pierre is nevertheless puzzled by this turn of events and unsure how the proposal will come about. As the guests take their leave, Pierre and H  l  ne sit alone in the drawing room, and Pierre tries to gather his wits to say something about love for the first time. He keeps turning to harmless, irrelevant subjects instead. Prince Vassily and his wife take turns checking on the couple in the other room.

In wealth-obsessed Petersburg, Pierre's new status transforms him from a laughable misfit to a desirable catch. Pierre naively buys into people's newfound opinion of him, making him even more vulnerable to manipulation.



Unlike others his age, Pierre doesn't seek meaning in war service. Instead, he looks to others to fill his life with meaning, getting swept along in their schemes—particularly Prince Vassily's and Anna Pavlovna's desire to marry him off to Vassily's daughter, now that his wealth makes his social awkwardness forgivable. Pierre is oblivious to the scheme until it's well underway.



Pierre feels a strong sexual attraction to H  l  ne which remains unabated even after he recalls that he doesn't think she's a good person or a suitable wife for him. He doesn't reason about his future or make any real attempt to direct it for himself; he lets superficial emotions and others' manipulations set his course.



Pierre knows what's right in this situation, yet he completely lacks the courage of his convictions—he won't do anything to change his trajectory for fear of losing his newly respectable reputation. At this point, Pierre is a morally weak and immature character, and he assumes his social position is the most important thing—accepting the default view of his society.



Pierre is laughably clueless about how to navigate this situation, though it's also disturbingly clear that Prince Vassily has engineered everything and that, deep down, Pierre doesn't really want to propose to H  l  ne. But he's let himself be swept so far down this path that he can no longer summon the will to resist.



At last Prince Vassily, frustrated, walks right up to Pierre and Hélène and congratulates them on their engagement, calling his wife to do the same. When they're left alone again, Pierre feels that this was destined to happen and is relieved that it's finally behind them. Hélène kisses Pierre on the lips, and he finally thinks of something to say: "I love you." A month and a half later, the wealthy young couple is married and settled in the newly redecorated Bezukhov mansion in Petersburg.

In December, Prince Vassily takes his son Anatole on a visit to Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky. Prince Nikolai has always held a low opinion of Prince Vassily, and it doesn't improve when the little princess hints about Prince Vassily's unstated purpose in visiting. So on the day of the guests' arrival, he's in a bad mood. On Prince Nikolai's morning walk, his steward Alpatych mentions Vassily's impending visit, and Prince Nikolai angrily swings his walking-stick at the steward and orders that the newly cleared avenue be covered with snow again. At dinner, the little princess senses Prince Nikolai's bad mood and refuses to join the table, citing her fears for the baby. When Mlle Bourienne makes cheerful conversation about Prince Vassily's visit with his son, the Prince huffs that he doesn't understand why the son is being brought here. Princess Marya blushes.

Prince Vassily, Anatole, and their party arrive in the evening. Anatole looks at all of life as entertainment that somebody has arranged for his benefit, and the possibility of marrying an ugly, rich princess is no exception. Princess Marya waits nervously in her room until the little princess and Mlle Bourienne come in to check her appearance. Her friends subject Princess Marya to several dress changes and an unflattering hairdo, not realizing that nothing will make Marya's face suitably attractive. But finally, on the edge of tears, Princess Marya begs the girls to let her alone. She sits there sadly, trying to imagine herself as a wife and mother, but she can't picture this happening to someone as plain as she is.

When Princess Marya is summoned to tea, she first pauses in front of her icon of Christ to pray. She prays to be rid of her desire for earthly love, considering it sinful, and she perceives that God answers in her heart, telling her not to wonder about her fate, but to be ready to fulfill whatever God's will may be, perhaps including marriage. Then she goes downstairs in peace.

Finally Prince Vassily gives up and forces Pierre's hand by pretending he's heard they're already engaged. Pierre acquiesces to this as fate, allowing Vassily to get the rich son-in-law he desires. It's an example of how, rather like war, cutthroat Petersburg society overrides people's rational faculties, especially when they lack the moral strength to resist.



Pierre's experience at Prince Vassily's mercy makes it look as if Princess Marya—who's also an innocent, wealthy character who's naïve about society—might suffer a similar fate. Prince Nikolai appears to sense this, too—hence his grumpiness and overt inhospitality to the guests.



Anatole is an amoral character, indifferent to his actions' impact on others; in that way, he is a decadent version of his father, seeing other people as means to an end. Princess Marya couldn't be more different—she's a thoroughly "Russian" soul, which for Tolstoy means that she loves passionately and without restraint, even at cost to herself. Marya desires a meaningful family life, but she believes that her lack of conventional beauty keeps such a life out of her reach. Her friends' well-intended help feels like a mockery of her situation.



For Princess Marya, religious faith is the core of life. That's why she feels guilty about her desire for romantic love, deeming this a distraction from spiritual concerns, and she prays to align her will with God's. Though she's conflicted about her various desires, Marya has the most developed and consistent sense of life's meaning so far of any character.



When Princess Marya comes into the room, she's struck by Anatole's beauty and comfortable self-assurance. Thanks to the talkative little princess and Mlle Bourienne, there's lively conversation. Indeed, when the conversation turns to Paris, Anatole becomes interested in Mlle Bourienne and hopes she'll be part of the household after he marries Princess Marya. Meanwhile, as Prince Nikolai dresses for dinner, he continues to resent Prince Vassily's arrival. It renews his inner debate as to whether he can ever give Princess Marya away in marriage. He can't imagine life without her.

At first Prince Nikolai pretends to listen to Prince Vassily's conversation, but then he abruptly gets up and confronts Princess Marya, scolding her in front of the guests for changing her hairstyle without his permission. He ignores Princess Marya's tears and questions Anatole about his military service, then just as abruptly sends him to rejoin the ladies. He takes Prince Vassily into his study, and Prince Vassily openly explains his hopes for the young people. Prince Nikolai shrilly declares that it's all the same to him if Princess Marya marries.

With the arrival of Anatole, all the young women of the house feel that their lives have new meaning. Princess Marya is drawn to Anatole, imagining him to be kind, brave, and good. She tries and fails to show him warmth; all he can think is that she's an ugly girl. At the same time, Mlle Bourienne's long-cherished fantasy of being swept away by a Russian prince begins to revolve around Anatole. The little princess, despite her pregnancy, instinctively begins to flirt. Anatole enjoys all this immensely. As Princess Marya plays the piano after dinner, she is excited to notice Anatole gazing at her.

That night, nobody but Anatole sleeps easily. Even Prince Nikolai paces and grunts resentfully. He sees that Anatole cares nothing for his daughter and only has eyes for Mlle Bourienne, whom he resolves to throw out. Then he'll no longer have to worry about parting with Marya. Meanwhile, Mlle Bourienne and Anatole have come to a wordless understanding, and they look for each other the next morning. They meet in the winter garden while Princess Marya is with her father.

Like Pierre, Princess Marya is naïve about others—in this case, seeming to take Anatole's good looks as a reflection of a depth that he truly lacks. Anatole's moral vacuousness is quickly made apparent by his thoughts on keeping Mlle Bourienne around for his own amusement (as well as his assumption that Marya will agree to marry him). Though Prince Nikolai is harsh with his daughter, his inner conflict shows that it's actually a dysfunctional expression of his deep love and attachment.



Unlike Petersburg-bred Prince Vassily, characteristically Russian Prince Nikolai displays no social pretensions—he doesn't even pretend to take an interest in the polite conversation. He again shows his concern for his daughter in a dysfunctional way by demeaning her in front of everyone else. In private, his shrill tone betrays the fact that he doesn't want Marya to marry at all, though he's terrible at showing it.



The mere appearance of Anatole gives the women an illusory impression that they've found new meaning— they nurture fantasies (all detached from reality in various ways). Anatole is more than happy to have these illusions projected onto him (a trait that will create greater heartache later on).



Anatole has no moral conscience; he's so self-indulgent that he doesn't even care about jeopardizing his own best interests by flirting with Mlle Bourienne on the eve of his engagement. Unlike his daughter, Prince Nikolai is shrewd enough to see this. It also provides an excuse to keep Marya under his control.

That morning Prince Nikolai is unusually gentle with his daughter. He explains that Prince Vassily seeks Marya's hand in marriage for Anatole. He sends her to her room to consider this offer. However, he also jokes that Anatole will take her and her dowry while also claiming Mlle Bourienne as a wife. Though she's happy with the proposal, the comment strikes Marya as an ominous hint. When she's walking through the garden a little later, she sees Anatole embracing Mlle Bourienne. When Anatole sees her, he just smiles and shrugs, though Mlle Bourienne runs off.

An hour later, when Princess Marya is summoned to her meeting with Prince Nikolai and Prince Vassily, she's embracing Mlle Bourienne, who is weeping. She assures Mlle Bourienne that she doesn't hate her and that she'll do anything for her happiness. When Marya enters her father's study, she finds him snorting and shouting and Prince Vassily weeping sentimentally. She looks straight at them both and says she doesn't wish to marry, because she never wants to separate from her father. Prince Nikolai, while squeezing Marya's hand and pressing his forehead to hers, shouts that this is "rot." When she returns to her room, Princess Marya reflects that her calling in life is love and self-sacrifice—a different kind of happiness.

VOLUME 1, PART 3: CHAPTERS 6–9

The Rostovs get their first letter from Nikolai in midwinter. Anna Mikhailovna, who's still living with them, finds the Count laughing and crying over the news that Nikolai was wounded and then promoted. Anna Mikhailovna offers to spend the day preparing the Countess for the news. Natasha persuades Anna Mikhailovna to tell her the news first, swears not to tell, then immediately runs and tells Sonya. The cousins cry together. To Natasha's astonishment, Sonya confides that she's in love with Nikolai. Natasha says she can't relate to such feelings.

When Anna Mikhailovna goes into the countess's room after dinner, Count Rostov listens at the keyhole, unable to hear much. Finally, Anna Mikhailovna opens the door with a triumphant look and informs him, "It's done!" The count finds his wife alternately kissing Nikolai's portrait and the letter. The whole family crowds into the room to hear the letter read aloud. When Sonya hears Nikolai's affectionate greetings for her, she runs to the ballroom and twirls with delight.

When Princess Marya sees her father's ominous hint confirmed, she recognizes Anatole's true nature—he's totally shameless as well as morally depraved. Again Anatole represents the worst of "society" impulses gone to seed—he views others as playthings—while Marya represents a "Russian" innocence and integrity; though her emotions make her vulnerable, she also has a self-respecting pride.



Even when she's been betrayed by her so-called companion, Princess Marya's first instinct is to comfort her friend instead of resorting to self-pity. She also boldly asserts her wishes to her father and Prince Vassily. Both these things reveal a lot about Marya's character. She might be naïve, but she—in stark contrast to Anatole—has a firm moral compass that drives her actions, one revolving around the happiness of her loved ones. (Though she may not be conscious of it, pride is a factor, too: she won't be taken advantage of.) Characteristically, Prince Nikolai reacts to Marya's decision by yelling to mask his relief and affection.

The Rostovs' heartfelt, expressive emotion—Tolstoy's idea of "Russian" character—contrasts with the artificiality of Petersburg society families like the Kuragins and Drubetksoys. Though many, like Natasha, have taken Sonya's feelings for Nikolai as a childhood crush—more playful than serious, like Natasha's flirtations with Boris and other young men—Sonya reveals that her emotions run deeper.



Anna Mikhailovna relishes putting herself at the center of any drama, even though she's not a member of the Rostov family. Countess Rostov exemplifies the devoted Russian soldier's mother, and Sonya takes Nikolai's greeting as evidence that he reciprocates her feelings.



The countess keeps the letter in her exclusive possession from then on, astonished to think that her little son has become a man capable of doing brave deeds on foreign battlefields. Over the coming week, the family members each write letters to Nikolushka and gather these, along with 6,000 roubles to outfit him for his promotion, to be mailed to Nikolai by way of Boris, who's under the patronage of the grand duke Konstantin Pavlovich (the Emperor's younger brother).

On November 12th, Nikolai gets a note from Boris, telling him about the note and money from his family. At the time, Kutuzov's army is camped near Olmütz. The Pavlogradsky guards are camped about 10 miles away and will join them the next morning, when the Russian and Austrian emperors will review the whole army. The hussars have been celebrating their victory with feasts and visits to a tavern, so Nikolai really needs the money to pay off his debts. He rides to Boris's regiment, proud of how shabbily battle-seasoned he looks. Nikolai finds Boris with his friend Berg, who's been recently promoted to company commander. They are playing checkers and are neatly dressed. Each day, the Izmailovsky regiment has made short marches accompanied by music, while their packs are transported by wagon.

Nikolai and Boris admire the changes in one another and swap stories about their experiences—Nikolai's life as a hussar at the front and Boris's in a regiment honored with frequent dinners and balls. When Nikolai reads the letter from home, he feels ashamed for frightening his family. He also tosses aside a letter of recommendation to Prince Bagration, secured for him by Anna Mikhailovna. Boris picks up the letter and tells him he needs it; it's valuable. But Nikolai says he doesn't want to be anybody's adjutant, as it's a "lackey's" job. Boris, on the other hand, aspires to such a role.

Over wine, Berg and Boris animatedly tell Rostov about the joys of serving in the Grand Duke's regiment. Then Boris asks about Rostov's wound, a story Nikolai happily tells. Though Nikolai is a truthful person, he gives an exaggerated account without quite intending or realizing it. He senses that his story needs to conform to their expectations of what a cavalry attack would be like, so he can't just say that he fell off his horse, dislocated his arm, and then ran away into the woods (which is what really happened).

In his family's eyes, Nikolai is the ideal Russian hero—an instance of dramatic irony, since Nikolai acted rather unheroically at Schöngraben. Unlike wealthier families, they have to scrape together money and avail themselves of social connections in order to support Nikolai's military career. Both things—the contrast between ideal and reality and the importance of social standing—suggest that war doesn't fulfill some glorious ideal.



The story transitions back to the war front, presenting a contrast between Nikolai and Boris and Berg. While Nikolai is proud of how battle-hardened he looks as part of the Pavlogradsky guards, Boris and Berg, in the Izmailovsky regiment, clearly haven't taken part in actual fighting. While they've enjoyed leisure and public recognition, the hussars have literally been doing the dirty work. The contrast illustrates what patronage can do (Anna Mikhailovna's appeal to Prince Vassily to get Boris this position). Still, Nikolai is a down-to-earth young man who prefers a simple soldier's life.



Nikolai and Boris have opposite values. Nikolai doesn't want things the easy way—gaining an adjutant job through connections, and thereby avoiding more direct fighting. Boris is unabashedly careerist and doesn't understand how his friend can literally throw away such an opportunity, which doesn't come along every day.



So far in the story, Nikolai has given every indication of being an honorable person, but he feels the pressure to live up to other people's ideals of battlefield heroism. His out-of-character exaggeration suggests that war weakens people's moral compass, even when it's otherwise strong.



In the middle of the story, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky walks in. Prince Andrei can't stand boastful front-line hussars; Rostov, in turn, scorns adjutants. Yet the latter blushes and falls silent as Boris talks to Bolkonsky. When Bolkonsky asks Rostov if he fought at Schöngraben, Rostov answers defensively, yet he can't help admiring Bolkonsky's arrogant sense of calm. As he leaves, he wishes he could challenge the adjutant with his pistol, and yet, at the same time, he wishes they could be friends.

The next day, the Russian and Austrian emperors both review the 80,000-man allied army. Cavalry, artillery, and infantry stretch across an enormous field in three impeccable lines. Standing with the front ranks of Kutuzov's army, Rostov feels proud as Emperor Alexander rides up to them. Everyone roars "Hurrah!" with a feeling that they'd do anything for their sovereign. Emperor Alexander is young and handsome with a surprisingly gentle voice. Rostov finds him enchanting and wishes he could die for the man. After the review, everyone talks about the Emperor and feels inspired.

The next day, Boris visits Bolkonsky in Olmütz, seeking an appointment to an adjutant position. He feels he's in a more difficult position than Rostov, whose family can support him—he has to build his own career without such help. An unknown officer of the guard amidst the aristocracy, Boris feels invisible. But when Bolkonsky steps aside from important generals in order to speak to him, Boris realizes something: there are multiple systems in the army. There's the official system of rank and discipline, and another, more basic system that, because of a letter of recommendation, allows a nobody like him to be recognized over a general. Boris resolves to build his career on the latter system.

After Prince Andrei deals with a report from a purple-faced general (who stares resentfully at Boris all the while), he takes Boris to the other room and says they'll go together to speak to an adjutant named Prince Dolgorukov, who may be able to establish Boris "closer to the sun." Prince Andrei loves being in a position to confer success on others. That evening, he takes Boris to the palace in Olmütz, where the emperors are staying. In a war council earlier that day, the younger generals decided that the allies should go on the offensive against Bonaparte (though Kutuzov disagrees). The younger generals are so euphoric (encouraged in part by the emperors' presence) that it's as if victory has already been won.

War can entrench artificial distance between people, even when they're on the same side. By this time, Prince Andrei has grown more cynical about war, and he senses that Rostov is exaggerating, as young soldiers do. Rostov, for his part, finds Andrei's arrogance repellent, yet he also feels a grudging respect for the adjutant and wants his approval.



Alexander Pavlovich Romanov became Emperor in 1801, just a few years before the story begins, after his father, Paul I, was assassinated. Rostov idolizes the Emperor and relishes the unity he feels during the review. Emperor Alexander seems to embody everything that's worth dying for, even though Nikolai doesn't seem to be clear on exactly what that is. While Tolstoy downplays the role of such "great men" in world events, he also shows—and implicitly criticizes—their ability to stir fanatical devotion because of what they symbolize.



In some ways, Boris has more advantages than Nikolai does. He has connections that allowed him to gain a relatively safe and comfortable position. But unlike Nikolai, Boris sees rank as more important than glory in battle, and if he hopes to advance further, he has to distinguish himself—hence seeking out Bolkonsky. When Andrei acknowledges him, Boris realizes that "who you know" is often more important than outward rank. It's basically the logic of high society applied to the military, an insight that shapes Boris's life form now on.



Boris's boldness in approaching Prince Andrei immediately pays off. He not only gets access to important generals; he gets to see consequential decisions being made up close. Characteristically, Kutuzov considers offensive warfare too risky, while the less experienced generals, buoyed by the events at Schöngraben, override him with their optimism. Even as he traces the generational differences among army staff, the novel questions whether generals' decisions are as significant as they seem in the long run.



Prince Andrei introduces Boris to Prince Dolgorukov, who's part of the group that argued for the offensive. Dolgorukov excitedly tells Prince Andrei about the allies' advantages, especially their "combination of Austrian clarity with Russian courage." Furthermore, he believes that Bonaparte is at a loss—his letter today sounded as if he was simply stalling for time. By this time, he's summoned to the emperor and doesn't have time to hear Prince Andrei's request on Boris's behalf.

Prince Dolgorukov is an example of a Russian officer who's enamored of more "European" tactics (like fighting offensively instead of defensively). He sees a compound of Austrian and Russian traits as giving the allies an advantage. The novel will question this assumption as the war drags on—that is, do European tactics really suit Russia?



On the way out, they cross paths with minister of foreign affairs Prince Adam Czartoryski, a young man whom Prince Andrei dislikes. Upon such men, Prince Andrei acknowledges to Boris, the fates of nations rest. Boris ends up staying with the Izmailovsky regiment for the time being, since there's no more time to see Bolkonsky or Dolgorukov before the next battle.

Prince Andrei advises Boris that diplomatic officials like Czartoryski make the really fateful decisions in war. It's not clear that Andrei, with his newly cynical outlook, sees this as a good thing. Boris's promotion can't go forward for the time being, but more importantly, he's established a pattern of befriending the "right" people and putting his name out there.



VOLUME 1, PART 3: CHAPTERS 10–13

On the sixteenth of November, Denisov's squadron in Bagration's detachment (Nikolai Rostov's squadron) moves into action. It turns out that the squadron is kept in reserve, however, and even after victory at Wischau, Rostov feels deflated. Suddenly, however, the Emperor passes by, and Rostov's melancholy mood instantly transforms. When the Emperor's eyes meet Rostov's for two seconds, Rostov feels as though Alexander must have read his soul in those brief moments. Later, after the regiment advances into Wischau, Rostov sees the Emperor again, tearful at the sight of a gravely wounded soldier. He tells Czartoryski, "What a terrible thing war is!"

Rostov persists in his youthful idealization of Emperor Alexander. For him, the Emperor is no earthly human being, but a godlike presence, Nikolai's motivation for fighting and indeed for living. Ironically, Alexander seems to have a greater appreciation for the costs of war than Rostov himself does. While Alexander sees human suffering, Rostov's gaze remains fixed on his hero.



The next few days, leading up to the battle of Austerlitz, are a bustle of activity. The events of the day before the battle are like the minutely tuned motions of a mechanical **clock**. Prince Andrei senses that Kutuzov is upset about what he's been told at headquarters, so he asks Dolgorukov, who's been charged with negotiations with Napoleon, what's going on. Dolgorukov tells Andrei that Kutuzov wants to drag his feet, but that this is a foolish move while Napoleon is weak. Young men's instincts are more trustworthy in such situations, he says, and he begins showing Prince Andrei the battle plan on a map. Prince Andrei starts showing Dolgorukov a better plan he has in mind, but Dolgorukov is not interested. On the way home, Kutuzov tells Prince Andrei that he believes the allies will lose.

The mechanical image of the clock symbolizes Tolstoy's view that necessity, or fate, is a bigger factor in the outcomes of battles than human decisions are, the bustle of human effort notwithstanding. Dolgorukov's optimism contrasts with the elderly Kutuzov's pessimism. In fact, Dolgorukov seems more concerned about the vindication of his own opinion than the possibility of Andrei's alternative. Youthful aggressive strategy contrasts with the more typically "Russian" restraint, with the implication that the Russian approach is wiser.



That evening, there's a council of war, and all the column leaders are invited. Weyrother, chief of staff of the Austrian army, eagerly shows his battle plan while Kutuzov sits by sulkily. Prince Andrei enters the room about seven o'clock to tell Kutuzov that Prince Bagration isn't coming, then he remains in the council. Kutuzov abruptly falls asleep.

Undaunted, Weyrother begins reading aloud the complex battle plan. It takes more than an hour. The generals listen with varying degrees of absorption. When he's done, others immediately begin making objections—like the fact that if Napoleon goes on the offensive, this whole plan will become useless. Weyrother remains confident, however, that Napoleon is weak and that if he meant to attack, he would have done so already. Andrei starts to voice an objection himself, whereupon Kutuzov suddenly wakes up, tells them all that the plan is set, and that it's more important now to get a good night's sleep. Prince Andrei leaves.

Prince Andrei feels disturbed. He doesn't know who's right, but it seems to him that many lives are being risked because some people have access to the sovereign while others don't. He begins pondering the possibility of his own imminent death. He also imagines himself stating his opinions to Kutuzov and Weyrother and single-handedly leading a division to victory, then going on to replace Kutuzov as commander in chief. He admits to himself that he desires glory and others' approval more than anything else—even more than he loves his family.

That night Rostov is with his hussar platoon on the picket line. He rides back and forth along the line, fighting to stay awake. Dreamily, he imagines encountering the emperor, gaining his trust, and distinguishing himself in Alexander's presence. After drooping into sleep once more, Rostov is jolted awake by the sound of repeated cries from the enemy's direction. He also sees fires flaring up along the French line. Now fully alert, he makes out what the enemy voices are crying: "Vive l'empereur!"

Rostov joins the generals and their adjutants, who have ridden up to see what's going on. Prince Dolgorukov tells Prince Bagration that it's surely just a ruse. Bagration is skeptical. He asks Rostov what he's observed, and Rostov offers to lead his men over to see whether the French pickets are still there or if they've retreated. Bagration gives the order, and Rostov, thrilled, leads a few of his hussars toward the position. After confirming that the pickets are still there, Rostov, exhilarated, gets Bagration's permission to stay with his squadron as an orderly during the battle.

Kutuzov is so resigned to the failure of the younger generals' decision that he literally spends the council unconscious. There's a sense that the younger generals, influenced by their European allies, will inevitably get their way, and that Russia's fate will follow suit.



Weyrother's plan exemplifies European-style strategy, in Tolstoy's view—it's long, complicated, and contains glaring holes that could readily undermine the plan, yet its authors are so committed to their brainstorm that they downplay objections. The nonchalance of some generals, plus Kutuzov's resignation, suggests both that the plan will probably fail and that, ultimately, generals' role is less important than their rank implies.



A perceptive observer, Andrei sees that human lives hinge on the Emperor's favor, regardless of the merits of a given plan (Alexander dislikes Kutuzov and naturally favors the younger generals' decision). Despite his growing realism about war, he also sees personal success in terms of glory on the battlefield. It's the only part of his life where he sees potential for self-distinction and hence for meaning in life.



Though Andrei is older and more cynical than Rostov, both he and Nikolai have naïve, youthful dreams of glory on the eve of Austerlitz. But where Andrei's involves personal glory, Nikolai longs most of all for the Emperor's approval. French adulation of Napoleon wakes him up, as if to remind him that most young soldiers revere their rulers, and there's nothing special about his dreams.



Prince Dolgorukov guesses correctly that the French are lighting fires and making noise in order to lure the allies into an attack, but Rostov has no way of knowing that yet. As far as Rostov is concerned, getting to stay with Bagration's squadron during the battle is the perfect opportunity to make his dream come true.



The Russians saw a commotion among the French troops because Napoleon was riding through the ranks while his orders were being read. Napoleon himself will direct the battalions, and if the honor of the French infantry is at stake, Napoleon will enter the line of fire himself. He urges his men to remain determined to defeat “these mercenaries of England.”

Tolstoy gives a glimpse of the French perspective as well, here including Napoleon himself for the first time. Just like the Russians, the French revere their sovereign and see him as the embodiment of their cause more than any abstract ideal.



VOLUME 1, PART 3: CHAPTERS 14–19

It’s five o’clock in the morning on the day of battle, dark and cold. The Russian left flank is beginning to stir. Their job will be to attack the French right flank in hopes of driving them back to the Bohemian Mountains. Soldiers hurriedly eat, pack up, cross themselves, and struggle into formation in the smoky, foggy darkness. The columns march a long way, uncertain where they’re going or where the enemy might be.

The morning of November 20th, 1805, dawns. The foggy atmosphere symbolizes war’s lack of clarity: even as they follow orders, their minds fixed on concrete ideals, people generally have little clue what’s happening at any given moment.



After an hour’s march, a general sense of confusion and disorder runs through the ranks, which the Russians are quick to blame on the “sausage makers” (the Germans). As the demoralized troops move downhill, they unexpectedly run into the enemy, and shooting begins. Those above still can’t see what’s happening due to the fog, and orders are slow to come. Meanwhile, Napoleon sits on his gray horse on the heights, at the village of Schlapanitz. The French troops are positioned much closer than the Russians had believed. From his vantage point, Napoleon can see that the Russians think the French are far ahead. He also sees where the center of the Russian army is located, near Pratz, and decides to attack there just as the sun breaks through the fog. The French begin moving toward the Pratz heights from which the Russians have just descended.

The French have successfully tricked the Russians into thinking they’re far away, but they’re actually close at hand, monitoring Russian movements, while the Russians blunder through the fog in the valley. Now the Russians can easily be trapped on the heights.



At eight o’clock, Kutuzov rides to Pratz, intending to lead the regiment himself. Prince Andrei is with him, feeling that today is going to be a momentous day for him. He gazes down into the sea of fog and imagines how he might distinguish himself. Kutuzov is in a bad mood, snapping at his inferiors. Seeing Prince Andrei, his expression softens, and he orders his adjutant to check on the third division and tell them to send out riflemen. Believing that the French are six miles ahead, the regimental commander is surprised by Andrei’s message.

Prince Andrei has a premonition of the day’s importance and continues to believe its significance will consist in his personal glory. Meanwhile, showing his superior instincts, Kutuzov senses that the French aren’t as far away as Russian conventional wisdom believes.



The emperors and their suite approach. Kutuzov, who’d just been yawning, jerks to attention. The Emperor wonders why Kutuzov hasn’t yet moved his men; after all, they’re not on parade, so it’s not as if they have to wait for all the regiments to assemble. Kutuzov responds that he hasn’t moved *because* they’re not on parade. The two engage in a silent standoff for a minute until Kutuzov finally breaks it and orders the columns to advance.

Kutuzov is hesitant to order his troops to advance, apparently sensing the gravity of the moment despite his drowsiness. But he also knows that resisting the Emperor’s will is a losing proposition, no matter what his instincts tell him about the French position and the wisdom of attack. European strategy overpowers Russian instinct once again.



Kutuzov and his adjutants ride down the hill behind the carabineers. As the fog clears below, the French become visible—not a mile and a half away, as they'd believed, but just down the hill in front of them. Prince Andrei rides toward Kutuzov to speak to him, but suddenly a burst of gunfire fills the air with smoke, and everyone begins to run. Kutuzov, whose cheek is bleeding, yells to Andrei to stop the fleeing men, but the Prince gets swept backwards in the crowd. Kutuzov's suite is rapidly cut down to four men, and the French target Kutuzov. Nearly weeping with shame and anger, Prince Andrei jumps off his horse, grabs the standard, and runs, shouting "Hurrah!" and trusting that the battalion will follow him. Little by little, soldiers follow him, though men constantly fall around him.

Suddenly, as Prince Andrei runs toward the embattled Russian artillerymen above, he's struck on the head. He collapses onto his back and stares at the **sky**, with clouds drifting across it. He observes the sky's vastness and thinks that the sky is all that's real, then he thinks that there's nothing except for silence and tranquility.

Meanwhile, on the army's right flank, Prince Bagration is reluctant to get started. To delay things, he tells Dolgorukov to send a messenger to Kutuzov to ask what they should do. With six miles' distance between the army's flanks, Bagration figures that a message won't make it back to them until evening. Bagration picks Rostov, who's watching him eagerly, as messenger. Rostov feels joyful—all his wishes are coming true, as he might even cross paths with the Emperor during this mission.

Hearing musketfire and cannons booming above, Rostov pauses to see what's going on, but he can't make out the chaotic movements on the hills beneath Pratz. Suddenly Rostov narrowly avoids getting swept up in a mass of Russian cavalrymen preparing to attack the French. As smoke engulfs the field, he pushes onward. He sees Boris, who's exhilarated after coming under fire for the first time—the guards unexpectedly found themselves on the front lines. Rostov keeps riding, trying to give a wide berth to the hottest action, when he hears musketfire from an unexpected direction. For the first time, he feels afraid.

The French ruse works. The French are nearby and beginning to attack at close range, catching the Russians off guard. When Kutuzov's suite is attacked, Prince Andrei gets the chance for glory he'd been dreaming of, quickly assuming leadership and rallying the scattering soldiers.



Just as Prince Andrei distinguishes himself in the way he's dreamed of, however, he's suddenly cut down, and his perspective abruptly changes. He suddenly feels small and insignificant against the sky, and his self-important dreams dissolve on the spot. The meaning of life isn't what he thought: glory in war passes as unexpectedly as it comes.



On the right flank, Bagration doesn't know what's happening on the Pratz heights and still believes there's no imminent possibility of fighting with the French. Tapped as messenger, Rostov is about to get his chance at glory, too.



As Rostov comes under fire, he begins to realize that the situation isn't what Bagration had believed. It's hard to tell what's happening because of the engulfing confusion of battle which, as Tolstoy likes to point out, makes no inherent sense. Though orders are important, the moment-by-moment decisions in battle are made by confused, frightened soldiers like Rostov.



Rostov decides to keep going. The closer he gets to Pratz, the more confused and apprehensive he feels as soldiers in various uniforms run in all directions, and he can't spot any superior officers, much less Kutuzov or the sovereign. Even when he sees French troops standing on the Pratz heights, where Kutuzov is supposed to be, he can't believe that the Russians are being defeated. When Rostov finally gets an orderly to stop and speak to him, the man claims that the wounded emperor was driven away by carriage an hour ago. Another directs Rostov to a nearby village where the superiors are assembled, but Rostov slows his horse to a walk, no longer sure of his mission.

When he reaches the village of Hostieradek, Rostov still can't find either the emperor or Kutuzov, but the Russians—calmer here—all agree that the battle has been lost. Riding a couple miles beyond the troops, Rostov gives up on finding anyone, when suddenly he spots two horsemen, one with a white-plumed hat, who seems oddly familiar. Suddenly Rostov realizes it's the sovereign, unwounded. Like a baffled lover, Rostov is unsure how to approach the emperor—he's dreamed of this moment so many times—and finally turns away, afraid to disturb him. He sees Captain Toll comforting the distraught emperor and longs to speak to him, but by the time he reaches the spot, no one is there. Despondent, he follows a wagon train to the nearby village.

By five o'clock that afternoon, the battle has been lost. Near the village of Augesd, cannonfire continues to fall in the midst of a dense, desperate crowd of fleeing soldiers. Dolokhov, wounded, leads what's left of the regiment across a dam. He tests the frozen pond next to the dam and begins running across the cracking ice, calling for others to follow. After a commander is crushed by a cannonball, more and more desperate men flee by jumping onto the ice, which soon gives way altogether. A crush of soldiers drowns as cannonballs crash down all around them.

Back on the hill below Pratz, Prince Andrei Bolkonsky lies bleeding and moaning. In the evening, when he revives from a faint, his first thought is of the **sky**. He opens his eyes and sees it's still there—“the blue of infinity.” Gazing at it, he doesn't realize that Napoleon has stopped beside him. “There's a fine death,” Napoleon says of Bolkonsky. Andrei realizes it's his hero Napoleon speaking, yet this no longer matters to him. In fact, Napoleon seems utterly insignificant compared to the sky above them.

The disarray near Pratz illustrates Tolstoy's argument that in the thick of battle, a sovereign or commander's orders are only so consequential—it's every individual for himself. Rostov can't reconcile what he's seeing with his ardent belief in the sovereign's supremacy. His certainty about the war, and his place in it, is already unraveling.



Just as Prince Andrei's values get shaken up by his experiences on the battlefield, so do Rostov's. While Andrei began to question the all-importance of personal glory in his life, Rostov finds his beloved Emperor demystified, disarmingly human. Like Andrei, he has the chance he's been waiting for—to show his devotion to Alexander—but he can't think of what to say, and the moment slips away from him. His hero isn't the godlike figure he's imagined, and war is mass chaos.



The dramatic scene on the shattering ice sums up the day's chaotic destruction—senseless death piles on top of senseless death. Tolstoy implies that this is what war is, fundamentally—a meaningless waste of life.



As Nikolai Rostov comes to terms with his very human hero, Andrei encounters his as well. Yet, when he has the chance to impress the admired emperor, Andrei is mostly oblivious to the moment. The sky symbolizes eternity, something Andrei never cared about before. Yet now it's earthly matters that pale in comparison to heavenly ones.



Andrei passes out and, the next time he's aware of anything, he's resting in the hospital. Napoleon rides past and speaks kindly to the wounded Russians. But when he recognizes Andrei and asks how he feels, Andrei is unable to say anything. Napoleon orders that the gentlemen officers be tended by his own physician, then gallops off.

As if to drive home Andrei's change of heart, he has a nearly identical encounter with Napoleon a short time later. Once again, Napoleon seems petty and insignificant to him beside the mysteries of life and death. Despite a once in a lifetime chance, Andrei doesn't care to address the emperor.



Someone puts Marya's little icon back around Prince Andrei's neck. Looking at it, Andrei wishes everything could be as simple for him as it is for Marya. He thinks that if he could pray to God for mercy, he'd be at peace. But it seems to him that God is too incomprehensibly remote to be addressed. Soon he drifts into delirium, dreaming of a happy family life at Bald Hills, mixed with images of Napoleon and the peaceful sky. By morning, Napoleon's doctor believes there's no longer any hope for Prince Andrei, and he's committed to the care of the locals.

For the first time, Prince Andrei feels open to the idea of God and the importance of the spiritual world. But at this moment—one that will be paralleled much later—Andrei feels that eternity is untouchably distant. His sense of the meaning of life remains muddled and unresolved, and the volume ends on a suspenseful note.



VOLUME 2, PART 1: CHAPTERS 1–6

Early in 1806, Nikolai Rostov comes home on leave, bringing Denisov with him. As the carriage gets closer to the house, Rostov—now sporting a new mustache—feels increasingly eager. When he creeps into the silent house, intending to surprise everyone, his family members suddenly pounce on him from all directions, weeping, kissing him, and all talking at once. Sonya, now turned 16, beams at him. The Countess weeps on Nikolai's new Hungarian jacket. Denisov comes in unnoticed, until Natasha shrieks and hugs him, embarrassing everyone. Rostov spends the evening happily basking in his family's love, and yet nothing matches the joy of his first moments in the house.

A few months have passed since Nikolai's experiences at the battle of Austerlitz, and he returns home triumphant, looking like a sophisticated man of the world with his mustache and foreign clothes. He clearly wants to make an impression on everyone, yet the family's characteristically sincere, overwhelming affection comes through most of all. Some things haven't changed: Sonya still cares for him, and Natasha hasn't outgrown her impulsive exuberance.



The next morning, Nikolai and Denisov oversleep, and Nikolai's little brother Petya bursts into their bedroom, leaving Natasha and Sonya laughing at the brief, forbidden glimpse of the men. Nikolai comes out in his dressing gown and sits with Natasha for another comfortable, familial chat. Eventually Natasha tells Nikolai that Sonya doesn't want him to feel bound by his former promises to her; if he did, it would look as though he felt forced to marry her. Nikolai thinks Sonya is lovely, but he agrees that it's better for him to be free. Natasha claims she doesn't want to marry anyone and is going to become a ballet dancer instead. She questions him about Denisov.

The warm, intimate family environment contrasts with the battlefield violence and existential dread that marked the end of Volume 1. In her self-sacrificing nature, Sonya has offered Nikolai a way out of their informal engagement, which Nikolai—ostensibly, at least—appreciates. For her part, Natasha is still young enough that love and marriage aren't at the forefront of her mind.



Joining the household in the drawing room, Nikolai can tell that everyone is watching him to see how he behaves toward Sonya. He greets her formally as “Miss Sonya,” yet they exchange a tender look which assures both of them of their mutual love. Vera comments aloud on their formality, making everyone blush. Meanwhile, Denisov enters the drawing room in a new uniform and fresh hairstyle and perfume.

Nikolai’s family welcomes him home as a hero and Moscow as a whole treats him as a desirable suitor. For his part, Nikolai feels he’s matured beyond childish activities, including secret kisses with Sonya. He’s now a hussar lieutenant with adult acquaintances, including a lady he visits in the evenings. He feels he’s enjoying his freedom too much to have time for love.

In March, Count Rostov arranges a dinner at the English Club in honor of Prince Bagration. In the flurry of last-minute preparations, the Count orders Nikolai to Count Bezukhov’s to get fresh fruit and from there to find Ilyushka the Gypsy. Just then Anna Mikhailovna comes in with her usual long-suffering expression and offers to go to Bezukhov’s instead, since he has a letter from Boris. In pitying tones, she gossips about the countess Hélène’s rumored affair with Dolokhov, whom Pierre had invited to his Petersburg estate.

On March 3rd, Prince Bagration’s dinner at the English club takes place with 300 guests. When news had first come back about the defeat at Austerlitz, Moscow society didn’t know what to believe. There was a general feeling that it was better to keep silent about bad news. Eventually, opinions began to circulate regarding Austrian treachery, poor provisioning, Kutuzov’s failings, and the youthful emperor’s inexperience.

But the Russian troops are universally regarded as heroic, especially Prince Bagration, who kept his column in order during the battle and twice beat back the French. He serves as a convenient figurehead for the Russian troops in general, as well as a foil for Kutuzov. Heroic stories circulate about other soldiers and officers. Nobody talks about Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, though—only that he died regrettably early, leaving a pregnant wife behind.

Nikolai’s conflicted feelings about Sonya are evident—he still loves her, yet he feels the need to outwardly deny any special attachment, setting aside the appearance of anything childish and unsuitable for his new social position.



Nikolai’s experiences abroad have caused him to think differently about his relationship with Sonya. He assigns it to a period of his life that’s closed. As a war veteran honored by his society, he now seeks out “adult” relationships which, ironically, are more casual and open-ended.



The English Club was a social club for high nobility, modeled on similar clubs in England. Ilyushka the Gypsy, or Ilya Sokolov, conducted an acclaimed Gypsy choir which Moscow’s elite favored. The elaborate dinner is an example of the generous entertainments Count Rostov loves to give but can’t really afford (undermining his family’s long-term standing in the process).



Generally, historians accept that the reasons given—with the exception of poor provisioning (inadequate supplies)—are incorrect. But the flurry of opinions in the aftermath of Austerlitz demonstrates high society’s unwillingness to recognize a Russian defeat.



Even though the Russians lost the battle of Austerlitz, they still celebrate Prince Bagration’s heroism as an indirect rebuke of Kutuzov, their scapegoat for the loss because of his retreat. For the first time, Prince Andrei’s supposed death is acknowledged.



At the dinner, Pierre walks absentmindedly through the rooms, used to being treated obsequiously because of his wealth. Thanks to his wife's influence, he's more fashionably dressed these days, yet his air is gloomy. He alternates between the young guests, with whom he more naturally belongs, and the older ones who share his wealth and status. Nikolai talks with Dolokhov, whom he's recently befriended. When Prince Bagration is announced, he comes in wearing a new uniform decorated with medals, yet looking as if he'd much rather be on the battlefield. Someone presents him a set of verses on a silver platter and reads them aloud. The verses refer to Bagration as "Ripheus" and "the Russian Alcides." Before the verses' author can finish reading, dinner is served.

Before dinner, Count Rostov makes sure to introduce Nikolai to Bagration, who recognizes him from the war. The meal itself is a great success, and soon it's time for the champagne toasts. When the Count toasts the Emperor, Nikolai almost weeps. After drinking, he throws his empty glass on the floor, and many others follow suit. Toast after toast is given, concluding with one for the host, Count Rostov, whereupon the Count bursts into tears.

Though Pierre eats and drinks as much as ever, he seems distracted and depressed. It's about the rumors of Dolokhov's affair with his wife; he'd even received an anonymous letter that morning warning him about it. He doesn't believe it, but sitting across from Dolokhov at the banquet unnerves him. After the campaign, Dolokhov came to live with Pierre and Hélène, borrowed money from Pierre, and often praised Pierre's wife's beauty. Now Pierre watches Dolokhov talking merrily and thinks of his fierce reputation as a duelist.

Pierre is so lost in thought that he fails to toast the Emperor. Then, Dolokhov provokes Pierre by raising a toast to pretty women. At this, Pierre lunges across the table and challenges Dolokhov to a duel. Nesvitsky agrees to be Pierre's second, and Rostov agrees to be Dolokhov's. Pierre goes home, feeling devastatingly certain that Hélène cheated on him.

*Despite his newly established position in society, Pierre still feels like a misfit, not fully fitting in anywhere. The verses given are by the 18th-century Russian poet Nikolev. Tolstoy discovered these in a book called *Diary of a Student* by Zhikharev; among other references, they draw on Virgil's Aeneid (Ripheus was Aeneas's companion), and Greek mythology (Alcides was Hercules's surname). In other words, Bagration was being boldly mythologized. The banquet honoring Bagration was a real historical event.*



Count Rostov isn't throwing a banquet out of simple patriotism—it's also an opportunity to make important social connections for his son. Still, his patriotism is heartfelt—Nikolai and his father both respond with their characteristically Russian emotion, as smashing an empty glass is a Russian custom to punctuate a sincere toast.



Dolokhov, whose past behaviors (especially the infamous bear incident) have established his lack of regard for others' feelings, has been grossly abusing his "friend" Pierre's hospitality, and Pierre has apparently let himself be used this way. Being out in society and keenly aware of what others are thinking about him, Pierre now questions Dolokhov.



Pierre's challenge is a very bold move—Dolokhov is a steady, cold-hearted duelist, while Pierre has no such experience and isn't renowned for his bravery. Because Dolokhov has brazenly insulted Pierre's honor, failing to challenge Dolokhov would make Pierre's sense of being a social misfit even more acute. Though outlawed, dueling was quite popular among aristocrats looking to settle matters of honor in 19th century Russia. A "second" was a close friend who represented the combatant and tried to resolve the matter peacefully.



Early the next morning, Pierre, Nesvitsky, Dolokhov, Denisov, and Rostov meet at the Sokolniki woods. Pierre hasn't slept. He feels painfully conscious of his wife's guilt, yet he feels that if he were in Dolokhov's position, he would probably have acted the same way. Before the duel, Nesvitsky urges Pierre to call it off. Pierre refuses and fiddles with the pistol, figuring out how to fire it (he's never held one before). Nesvitsky and Denisov measure out 40 paces in the snow. Everyone stands there silently.

Now that the duel is underway, it seems like events are moving forward apart from any human will. Denisov counts to three, and the adversaries start marching toward each other. When Pierre fires in Dolokhov's direction, the loud gunshot startles Pierre. There's no return shot. As the smoke clears, he sees Dolokhov walking towards him. Dolokhov collapses on the snow and wipes a bloody hand on the ground. With an agonizing effort, he pulls himself together and aims at Pierre, who's standing there defenseless, but he misses and falls down with the effort. Pierre walks away, incoherently muttering. Nesvitsky takes Pierre home.

As Rostov and Denisov take the wounded Dolokhov back to Moscow, Dolokhov begs Rostov to go to his house and prepare his mother for the news. Rostov is surprised to find out that Dolokhov is a loyal, affectionate son and brother to his elderly mother and hunchbacked sister.

At home, Pierre paces the old Count Bezukhov's study, unable to rest. He keeps picturing his wife's face and Dolokhov's beside it, alternately wearing a mocking or suffering expression. He tries to understand how this happened. He realizes it's his fault for marrying H el ene in the first place—he'd always felt, ever since the night of their engagement, that it was wrong because he didn't love her. And ever since their marriage, Pierre felt he couldn't understand her, attributing it to the fact that she is "depraved." She once mocked Pierre and told him that if she ever had children, she wouldn't have *his*.

Pierre alternates between blaming H el ene for her depravity and blaming himself for lying and saying he loved her. He knows his honor has been disgraced, but it's merely a social convention that doesn't really matter to him. Unable to face H el ene again, he tells his valet to pack for a return to the Petersburg estate tomorrow. He will leave his wife a letter explaining that he can no longer live with her.

Pierre's deeply conscientious soul is shown by the fact that, as much as he feels justified in challenging Dolokhov, he doesn't see himself as being above Dolokhov's behavior (as indeed he's joined in Dolokhov's antics in the past). The tension before the duel is profound, increased by the fact that Pierre literally doesn't know what he's doing; yet he feels duty-bound to follow through.



Tolstoy alludes to his broader argument about the role of necessity, determinism, or fate, in driving human events. There's a surreal feeling of inevitability about the scene—and Pierre's unlikely defeat of the far more experienced Dolokhov is all the more surprising. Despite the feeling of being carried along by fate, Pierre takes responsibility for his own reputation in a way he hasn't before.



Despite his depraved reputation, Dolokhov isn't all he seems, either—he is capable of love and loyalty to his own family, like any good Russian son.



Though Pierre has always felt uneasy about his marriage, the duel opens his eyes to the sheer dysfunction in their relationship. H el ene openly rejects him; it's suggested that the couple doesn't have a sexual relationship (and that H el ene carries on countless affairs, reportedly even with her brother Anatole). Pierre's emotions are complex, though—he sees he's to blame for his inability to refuse an attractive bride and the social standing he gained by her.

For Pierre, aristocratic notions of "honor" aren't what matters most. The whole situation comes down to H el ene's infidelity and his own foolishness in consenting to the marriage. The duel with Dolokhov merely prompts him to acknowledge his marriage is a sham.



However, first thing the next morning, Hélène herself confronts Pierre, looking elegant and wrathful. She tells Pierre that he did this because he believes whatever he's told, and that she'll now become the laughingstock of Moscow. Feeling a tightness in his chest, Pierre says they must part, and when Hélène says he must grant her a fortune first, Pierre suddenly jumps up from his sofa, seizes a marble slab, and swings it at his wife, shouting, "I'll kill you!" She springs out of the way, and instead he smashes the slab on the floor. A week later, Pierre gives Hélène power of attorney for his estates in Great Russia, and he moves back to Petersburg alone.

Gentle Pierre is capable of frightening outbursts of temper (taking after his hot-blooded father). Now that Hélène's behavior is out in the open, Pierre is enraged at being pressed further. By giving Hélène control of his estates, Pierre essentially surrenders his position as Count Bezukhov, suggesting that he rejects the hollow satisfactions of social standing. His short-lived attempt to find meaning in this lifestyle has failed.



VOLUME 2, PART 1: CHAPTERS 7–9

Two months have passed since everyone at Bald Hills learned of Prince Andrei's disappearance at Austerlitz. They've sent letters through the Russian embassy trying to locate him—he could still be a prisoner, or recovering in the care of locals and unable to communicate with them. A week after the initial news, they receive a letter from Kutuzov. He reports having seen Andrei fall on the battlefield with the standard in hand, but he doesn't know whether the adjutant is alive or dead.

When Prince Andrei last appeared, he was injured on an Austrian battlefield, gazing at the sky and pondering eternity. As far as everyone is concerned, he died there—but given the difficulty of communications, and the chaos after the battle, nobody can know for certain.



When Prince Nikolai receives Kutuzov's news, he doesn't tell anyone at first. When Princess Marya reports for her lessons the next morning, her father greets her with unnatural brightness, yet his expression gives away the truth. Prince Nikolai shrilly tells his daughter that Andrei has been killed. Marya weeps as she embraces her father, wondering if Andrei repented of his unbelief in God before he died. She goes to tell Liza the news, but the little princess is so happy about her baby's approaching birth that Marya decides the news must be kept from her for now. In the meantime, Prince Nikolai grows weaker, but Marya clings to hope and keeps praying for her brother's return.

Prince Nikolai and Marya mourn Andrei's apparent death. To both of them, war primarily meant the risk of Andrei's death instead of abstract ideals, and that fear has now come true. But Marya's deepest grief is spiritual—she fears her brother died in atheism. Even in her grief, she puts others' feelings before her own. She also maintains a shred of hope, something her father lacks the capacity to do.



On the morning of March 19th, Princess Marya notices that the little princess looks very pale. She goes to fetch Marya Bogdanovna, the midwife who's been staying at Bald Hills (a doctor from Moscow is expected at any moment). She retreats to her room to pray, but she remains agitated. Later, Marya's old nanny, Praskovya Savishna, comes in with Prince Andrei's old wedding candles, lights them before an icon, and prays. The whole house feels tense and watchful, but nobody talks about Liza's labor. That night no one sleeps.

Special candles are held by a Russian Orthodox bride and groom, and these were kept after the wedding. When Savishna brings in the candles to pray, she is portrayed as a good Russian peasant, traditionally religious and fervent in prayer. Marya shares this old-fashioned Russian piety.



It's a wintry March night. Suddenly a gust of wind blows the window open, bringing cold and snow into the room. As Savishna closes the window, the nanny sees the German doctor coming down the avenue, and Marya rushes to meet him. As she comes downstairs, though, she thinks she hears a familiar voice. Marya tells herself it can't possibly be Prince Andrei's—yet he suddenly appears around the corner, pale, thin, with a softened expression. "You didn't get my letter?" he asks Marya. He embraces his sister, who's unable to speak, then hurries off to his wife's rooms, followed by the doctor, who arrived at the same time.

When Prince Andrei enters the little princess's room, she doesn't seem to grasp the significance of his arrival. She's just gotten through a contraction and lies there, exhausted, looking a little reproachfully at everyone. Princess Marya and Andrei step out of the room as the contractions continue, listening helplessly to Liza's groans. There's one last, terrible cry, followed by the sound of a baby crying. Prince Andrei begins to weep uncontrollably, too. When Andrei returns to his wife's room, he finds her dead, her face wearing the same sweet expression as moments before.

When Prince Andrei goes to his father's study, Prince Nikolai already knows about his return and his daughter-in-law's death. He clings to his son's neck and weeps. Three days later, the little princess's funeral is held. Liza's still face seems to say, "What have you done to me?" It makes Andrei feel that something has broken in his soul. Five days later, the new baby, Nikolai Andreich, is baptized. Prince Nikolai, acting as godfather, is so afraid of dropping the baby that he shakes as he circles the font. After the baptism, the baby's nanny gives Prince Andrei the good news that when the piece of wax with the baby's hair was dropped into the font, it floated instead of sank.

VOLUME 2, PART 1: CHAPTERS 10–16

Nikolai Rostov is promoted to the position of adjutant to the governor general of Moscow. While the rest of the Rostovs spend the summer in the country, Nikolai becomes good friends with Dolokhov, who's recovering from his dueling wound. Dolokhov's doting mother, Marya Ivanovna, tells Nikolai that her son is too "pure-hearted" for this wicked world, and that it was unjust of Pierre to challenge him to a duel—doesn't everybody have love affairs these days? Dolokhov seems to have softened, too. He tells Rostov that what's keeping him alive is the hope of someday meeting a woman with integrity, who will purify him in turn.

In a surreal passage, as Marya expects one person and is shocked to face the other, Prince Andrei unexpectedly returns as if from the dead, resolving the uncertainty surrounding his disappearance. Yet there's no time for this to sink in, as he gets there at a critical point in his wife's labor.



Prince Andrei's own brush with death seems to have softened his attitude toward the wife he'd scorned before. In the novel, death often functions as a transforming moment in a character's view of the meaning of life. Yet just as Andrei appears ready to embrace married life, Liza is taken away from him by her own death.



Liza is portrayed as an innocent, transparent character even in death, lacking the strength to make sense of suffering and therefore unable to survive it. Though Andrei does have such strength, he is "broken" by his wife's death, forced again to wrestle with the meaning of life. At a Russian Orthodox baptism, godparents would stand in for the baby's parents. It was also traditional to drop a piece of wax with the baby's hair attached into the water. If it floated, that was taken to mean that the baby would live. Baby Nikolai's survival means that, sorrow notwithstanding, the Bolkonsky family will carry on.



While home from war, Nikolai grows closer to fellow veteran Dolokhov. It's a surprising friendship, given Dolokhov's reckless and cruel tendencies, but Nikolai is naïve; he is won over by the kinder, gentler Dolokhov who's been chastened by his dueling loss and claims to want to improve himself.



In the fall, the Rostovs return to Moscow. Denisov visits again, too. The winter of 1806 is one of the happiest in Nikolai's life. Because of so many young, eligible girls—Vera, Sonya, and Natasha—there's a romantic atmosphere in their home. When Nikolai brings Dolokhov home for a visit, Natasha takes a passionate dislike to him, finding him wicked and calculating. But Nikolai is convinced that Dolokhov is a great soul. Dolokhov develops a crush on Sonya and begins spending a lot of time there. Meanwhile, people begin talking about war with Napoleon again. Nikolai decides to return to his regiment after the holidays, along with Denisov.

On the third day of Christmas, the Rostovs have a farewell dinner for Nikolai; Denisov and Dolokhov are there. When Nikolai gets home that evening, he notices an unsettled atmosphere around Sonya and Dolokhov and realizes something must have happened between them. After dinner, he takes Natasha aside to find out. Natasha triumphantly tells him that Dolokhov proposed to Sonya. Though Nikolai has paid Sonya little attention over the past year, he feels crushed by this news. He's relieved to learn that Sonya flatly refused Dolokhov. He tells Sonya that he doesn't feel such friendship toward anyone else, but he can't promise he'll be able to marry her. Sonya insists that she loves him like a brother and doesn't want to marry him.

That night, Logel, the dancing-master, throws a ball, which is an extremely popular event with teenage girls. It's Natasha's first time wearing a long gown, and she enraptures everyone she meets. Eventually Natasha dances with Denisov, who's a gifted dancer himself, and they make a graceful pair.

Dolokhov stops coming to the Rostovs' house. A few days later, Nikolai receives a note inviting him to a farewell party at a hotel. When Nikolai arrives at the party, Dolokhov looks at him coldly and invites him to gamble. Nikolai recognizes one of Dolokhov's crueler moods, but he joins in. Even as Nikolai starts losing large sums of money, Dolokhov dares him to keep going. Count Rostov is low on funds and told Nikolai he can't give him a further allowance until May. Nikolai had promised to live within these means, but to his horror, his debts mount to 43,000 roubles. Nikolai keeps wondering how this sudden, dramatic reversal of fortune has happened in such a short time, thinking longingly of the comforts of home.

Life at the Rostovs' is different than it was before the war. The family's social circle has expanded beyond their old Moscow friends, and the young women are old enough for romance. On the cusp of another war campaign, this combination makes way for new drama in the household—especially the fact that Nikolai unreservedly welcomes Dolokhov.



Because Sonya is a poor orphan who's completely dependent on her Rostov cousins' kindness, a good marriage is the only possibility of a different life for her. Marrying Dolokhov would be a much better match than she had hoped for. But her devotion to Nikolai traps her as much as her poverty does. While Nikolai still has feelings for Sonya, he's also constrained by the family's financial situation, and he tries to convey this gently. Sonya claims she's fine with that.



At Logel's ball, Natasha's beauty is on display at a public event for the first time, and her maturity is clear for everyone to see.



Dolokhov is obviously still upset about Sonya's refusal and wants some kind of revenge for Sonya's feelings for Nikolai. Knowing this, Nikolai still gets sucked into a game with the expert gambler. It's hard to guess why he lets this happen, but if he is still naïve about Dolokhov's true nature, his innocence is shattered over the course of the evening. Nikolai knows his family can't afford such a huge debt, but he continues to rack up debt as if events are beyond his control. As he realizes what he's done, Nikolai feels like comfortable family life is lost to him forever.



Nikolai wonders what Dolokhov's motivations can be. After losing again, Nikolai takes Dolokhov aside and asks if he'll accept a promissory note. Dolokhov mentions Sonya, saying he knows she's in love with Nikolai. Nikolai feels totally under Dolokhov's power and insists that he'll get his money tomorrow.

Dolokhov makes it clear that he's trying to get even with Nikolai, and Nikolai's pretensions about the supposed friendship are decisively shattered. Dolokhov basically has no moral code; Tolstoy suggests that naïve notions of honor, like those Nikolai holds, will be manipulated by people like Dolokhov.



Nikolai comes home in dread. He finds the young people of the household gathered around the piano; Denisov is playing and singing an original song to Natasha, who looks scared and happy. Though briefly distracted by his sister's beautiful singing, Nikolai forces himself to confess his losses to the Count. Ashamed, he breezily remarks that this kind of loss happens to everybody. He expects his father to scold him, but instead, the Count just looks away uncomfortably and agrees that such things happen to everybody. Nikolai bursts into tears and begs his father's forgiveness.

When Nikolai gets home, he sees a heart-wrenching scene of family happiness and feels cut off from it because of his actions. When telling his father what happened, Nikolai affects the appearance of a smooth young man of society, but he's unable to maintain the pretension, which shows his true character. He also feels shamed by his father's financial troubles, knowing he's just made things worse.



Meanwhile, Natasha runs to the countess and announces that Denisov has proposed to her. The countess can't think of Natasha as a grownup, and she starts to refuse Denisov on Natasha's behalf, but Natasha runs to him first and haltingly turns him down. Denisov leaves town in disgrace the next day. Nikolai stays in Moscow for two more weeks until his father is able to raise the 43,000 to cover his son's gambling debt.

Hopeful scenes of family happiness and budding romance have given way to a scattered, financially strained household and the fizzling of marital hopes. As Nikolai prepares to return to war, even the illusion of peace at home is broken.



VOLUME 2, PART 2: CHAPTERS 1–4

After arguing with his wife, Pierre goes to Petersburg. As he waits at the posting station, lost in thought, he feels that the screw that holds his life together “turned in the same groove without catching hold[.]” He wonders about the nature of good and bad, love and hate. It seems that only death will resolve his questions, yet he fears dying.

Up to now, Pierre has had no steady sense of direction or moral center to his life; the duel and the collapse of his marriage have made this obvious. He has all-consuming questions about the meaning of life, yet he sees no viable path to resolving them.



Another traveler, waiting for horses, is brought into Pierre's waiting room. The man is squat, wrinkled, and elderly with heavy brows over glittering eyes. The newcomer sits down and looks at Pierre with a penetrating expression. When the man closes his eyes and folds his hands, Pierre notices a large signet ring on one of his fingers; the ring is shaped like a skull. He keeps watching the man as he drinks tea and reads a book, feeling irresistibly drawn to him. At last, the other man speaks. He recognizes Pierre and has heard of his recent “misfortune.” He assures Pierre that he's not just being nosy—he wants to help. When he smiles, the older man looks warm and fatherly.

There's a symbolic significance to the fact that Pierre is on a journey when he encounters the mysterious man—he's not just on a literal journey to a new life, but also a spiritual journey to a new understanding of life's meaning. It's also not accidental that the man gives Pierre a paternal feeling—there's been a gap in Pierre's life after Count Bezukhov's death, something that's left him feeling more directionless even though, ironically, it's given him more options financially.



When Pierre asks, the man acknowledges that he belongs to the brotherhood of Freemasons. Pierre feels torn—he instinctively trusts the kindly man, yet he’s mocked Masons in the past. He tells the stranger that their ways of thinking are totally opposite. The man replies that, in fact, Pierre’s conventional way of thinking is a grievous error. For himself, he cannot claim to know the truth—it’s only over countless generations that truth is attained, “stone by stone,” building “a worthy dwelling place” for God. Pierre is amazed by the confidence of his words.

Reluctantly, Pierre admits that he doesn’t believe in God. The Mason smiles like a wealthy man about to bestow a gift on a poor man. He says that Pierre doesn’t know God, and that’s why he is unhappy. He assures Pierre that God exists—in fact, he’s here, in both of them. If that weren’t true, how could they even be sitting here speaking of God? While it’s true that God is hard to understand, that just goes to show God’s greatness.

Pierre is transfixed by the stranger’s words. He’s not sure if he believes the content of the Mason’s speech or simply believes in the strength of the man’s conviction compared to his own total lack of conviction—but he *wants* to believe and feels that he does. The old man goes on to say that a person can’t understand God through reason, but through life. To do this, a man must purify himself, guided by the divine light of conscience, in order to attain a higher science. Seeming to know everything about Pierre’s past, the man points out that, far from purifying himself and helping others, Pierre has lived a life of idle depravity. Pierre agrees and asks the man for help. Before continuing on his journey, the man writes down a note for a man in Petersburg, Count Willarski. He encourages Pierre to spend time in solitude and self-reflection.

After the man goes, Pierre looks at the postmaster’s register and learns that his name was Osip Alexeevich Bazdeev, a well-known Mason and Martinist. Pierre paces the station, thinking over his past debauched life and joyfully anticipating a reformed, virtuous life in the future. It seems to him that, now that he recognizes the goodness of virtue, it will be easy to change his life. He imagines that Masonry is simply a brotherhood united to support one another on such a path.

Tolstoy found a collection of Masonic texts in a Moscow museum, which he used as a basis for the descriptions of Masonic beliefs and ceremonies found in this section. The fraternal organization of Freemasonry dates to the Middle Ages. Freemasonry is hierarchical and heavily symbolic, its rituals drawing from the craft of stonemasonry. Its primary symbol is the Temple of Solomon in ancient Jerusalem. Freemasonry appeared in Russia in the 1700s, so it would have been established for multiple generations by this time.



Freemasonry’s spiritual beliefs are broadly deistic and, as the old man suggests, don’t align with a single religious system. The Mason refers to “God” as a benevolent Supreme Being who makes and dwells within creation, incapable of being grasped by any single human being.



Pierre is easily swayed by others’ feelings, and the Mason’s appeal is no exception. He’s never held spiritual beliefs, so the man’s certainty about spiritual realities is as attractive as the specifics of what he’s saying. The man also suggests that spiritual truth is gained by improving oneself morally—a message that appeals to Pierre in his demoralized state. Freemasonry seems to offer Pierre a ready-made path to free himself from his aimless, self-indulgent existence.



Tolstoy based Bazdeev’s character on a Moscow Mason named Pozdeev, who died in 1811. “Martinists” were followers of the teachings of a French spiritual writer named Martines de Pasqually, whose ideas were closely related to those of Freemasonry.



When Pierre arrives in Petersburg, he spends his time reading Thomas à Kempis. The book shows him the idea of becoming perfect and spreading brotherly love among people, as Osip Alexeevich had said. The week after his arrival, the young Polish Count Willarski comes to visit him. He enters the room with the same solemn look Pierre had seen when Dolokhov's second approached him before the duel. He looks strikingly different from the cheerful society man Pierre had vaguely known before.

Count Willarski asks Pierre if he wishes to join the Freemasons under his sponsorship. He also asks Pierre if he's renounced his former convictions and now believes in God. Reflectively, Pierre says that he does believe in God. Then they get into Willarski's carriage and drive to the Freemasons' lodge. Willarski explains that Pierre will be tested, and all he has to do is tell the truth. Willarski blindfolds Pierre, kisses him, and leads him forward by the hand. He wishes Pierre courage and tells him to take off the blindfold when he hears knocking at the door.

Pierre waits for about five minutes, going through a series of emotions: fear, curiosity, and most of all, joy about the new life that's beginning. When he hears the knock at the door, he removes the blindfold and finds himself in a room that's almost completely dark. He sees a lamp burning inside a human skull, an open Bible, and a coffin filled with bones. Then a short man wearing a long apron enters the room. Pierre recognizes the rhetor (the man who prepares seekers to join the Masons)—an acquaintance named Smolyaninov.

When prompted to state his purpose, Pierre feels unable to speak at first, but finally he says that he wants renewal and hopes that the Masons can guide him. He speaks haltingly because he's not used to discussing abstract subjects in Russian. Then the rhetor explains the ancient mysteries handed down by Freemasonry, which require personal purification. Masonry's other goal is that members become moral exemplars for humanity as a whole. Pierre feels especially drawn to the latter goal, hoping to help others who are as morally depraved as he used to be.

*Thomas à Kempis was a German-Dutch monk whose book *The Imitation of Christ* was one of the late medieval period's most popular religious writings. Count Willarski gives Pierre a sense that he's facing life and death choices, as in the duel with Dolokhov. Like the duel, Freemasonry lets Pierre step outside the constraints of aristocratic society and encounter deeper realities.*



Freemasonry involves an elaborate, secretive initiation ritual in which an initiate learns the signs and allegories of the brotherhood. This initiation gives Pierre an opportunity to find a place in life and a direction, as both society and marriage have failed to give him.



Pierre feels hopeful that Freemasonry is what he's been looking for. In a way, this secret society parallels public society, giving Pierre another context for fitting in with the men he crosses paths with socially. In that respect, it doesn't matter what the strange, morbid symbols signify or what Pierre believes; more than anything else, the system offers Pierre a kind of rebirth.



Pierre's struggle to speak abstract Russian is another example of his constant struggle to fit into his society (though it isn't uncommon among aristocrats raised speaking French). Notably, as soon as he hears Freemasonry's goals, he skips over the moral improvement part, wanting to jump right to helping other people. This shows Pierre's generous heart, as well as his idealistic impatience to arrive at life's meaning.



Half an hour later, the rhetor returns and tells Pierre the seven virtues which Masons are expected to cultivate. These correspond to the seven steps of Solomon's temple: discretion, obedience, morality, love of humanity, courage, generosity, and love of death. The latter virtue means that the individual should meditate on death until he no longer fears it. Pierre thinks over the virtues and especially feels drawn to obedience—after all his struggling to understand life, the idea of submitting to someone else seems freeing. When the rhetor returns this time, Pierre tells him that he's ready for everything.

The rhetor explains that Masonic induction communicates its teachings not just verbally, but through symbolic hieroglyphs. He asks Pierre to hand over his valuables as a sign of generosity. Then he tells Pierre to undress as a sign of obedience. Once that's done, he asks Pierre to tell him his main predilection—the one that's given him the most difficulty on the path of virtue. After much thought, Pierre says his main vice is “women.” After this, the rhetor blindfolds him once more and tells him that, from now on, he must seek blessedness not from the outside world, but within.

After being led through a maze of hallways, Pierre hears allegories about the dangerous labors of life's journey and about the architect of the world. After multiple blindfoldings, Pierre's eyes are uncovered to reveal a dozen men seated around a table; he recognizes some of them from Petersburg society. He's given several symbolic objects, like an apron (for blamelessness), a trowel (the work of purification), and several pairs of gloves (one of which must be given to the woman Pierre honors most).

Pierre is finally allowed to sit down at the table, and the grand master reads the rules. Pierre is so overwhelmed he cannot understand them, but he remembers the last one—that Masons may only make distinctions between virtue and vice. Otherwise, they must never violate the equality between members. They must be quick to help, encourage, and forgive one another. Then the grand master embraces Pierre, and Pierre's eyes fill with tears of joy. On the way home from the meeting, he feels as if he has returned from a faraway journey and completely changed his way of life.

Pierre's attraction to the virtue of obedience is telling. Surrendering to others seems to relieve Pierre of the responsibility of figuring out how to live his life. Pierre disregards the emphasis on love of death, but in time, it's this fearlessness of mortality that will end up playing a bigger role in Pierre's development.



The induction ceremony symbolically strips away the things Pierre can hide behind—money and clothes (that is, his social standing)—before requiring him to admit his deepest moral struggle. When Pierre cites “women” as his biggest problem, he's thinking mainly of H el ene—how he let himself marry her because of social pressure and sexual attraction, even while knowing that he didn't respect her character and that they weren't compatible.



The esoteric Masonic symbolism seems to make relatively little impression on Pierre, but at the conclusion, he's welcomed into an elite company—a crowd in which he feels ill at ease in everyday life. In these surroundings, he can feel not just tolerated, but recognized as worthy. That's something Pierre has always struggled to achieve in the outside world.



Pierre's grasp of Masonic teachings is uneven. What sticks with him more than arbitrary rules is the ethic of equality, something that promises a sense of brotherhood and invests his life with new meaning. So far, Pierre's practice of Freemasonry has been limited to personal study and symbolic rituals; yet, idealistic as ever, he imagines his life has already been transformed.



VOLUME 2, PART 2: CHAPTERS 5–9

The next day, Pierre sits at home, reading and daydreaming about the new life he's about to begin. Just then Prince Vassily comes in and tells Pierre that Hélène is completely innocent. He blames Pierre for his newly awkward position in society and wants to help the couple reconcile. Remembering his Masonic vow to be "gentle and affable," Pierre struggles not to respond sharply to his father-in-law. Yet, suddenly, he jumps up and opens the door, firmly telling Prince Vassily to go—he was not invited. A week later, he leaves large sums of alms for his Mason brothers and leaves for his southern estates with letters of recommendation for the Masons in Kiev and Odessa.

Though Pierre and Dolokhov suffer no legal consequences for the duel, rumors spread. Now that Pierre is no longer a wealthy young suitor, society no longer coddles him, and he is solely blamed for what's happened to his marriage; everyone says he takes after his father, subject to rages. When Hélène returns to Petersburg, she assumes the role of a suffering martyr among her society friends. Anna Pavlovna Scherer, for her part, claims that she always knew Pierre was "crazy," never supported this marriage, and predicted it would fail.

Anna Pavlovna is still throwing her soirées. She invites the cream of Petersburg, and the parties always reveal the political mood of society. In late 1806, a new war with Napoleon begins. Around this time, Anna Pavlovna throws a soirée with Hélène, Mortemart, Prince Ippolit, some diplomats, and others not yet well-known. One of these is Boris Drubetsky, who's currently serving as an adjutant to someone important and has just come from an errand to the Prussian army. Boris is the special guest whom Anna Pavlovna hopes to "serve up" to her guests, and she guides the discussion around diplomatic relations with Austria.

By now, Boris has matured and has put himself in a respectable position in his military service. He enjoys the system of subordination he learned to recognize at Olmütz—in which courage or perseverance aren't primary, but rather skill in dealing with those who are in a position to reward their service. He doesn't understand why more people do not strive for the same. He spends all his money on dressing well and only associates with those who can be of some benefit to him. When he's invited to Anna Pavlovna's, he believes he's moving up in the world. After the party, Hélène Bezukhov frequently invites Boris to her house.

Pierre's new life is abruptly shaken out of the realm of daydreams. His old problems continue to haunt him. Still only concerned about his own social position, Prince Vassily tries to smooth over his daughter's faults in the marriage. In his response to this still fresh wound, Pierre finds it harder than expected to live up to his new ethics. Living morally in a troubled world isn't a matter of simple resolve; it's a continual struggle.



Dueling is illegal, so Pierre could have suffered worse consequences; his social status probably helps. Nevertheless, now that he's no longer an eligible bachelor, society freely criticizes him, no matter how much (like Anna Pavlovna) they claimed to admire him before. It all goes to show the shallowness and fragility of reputation in aristocratic Russia.



By late 1806, one Prussian fortress after another has surrendered to Napoleon, and the Russian army has moved into Poland to meet the French. Accordingly, Anna Pavlovna chooses a different centerpiece for her latest party, focusing on warfront diplomacy instead of French gossip. It's a reciprocal arrangement—such attention could establish young Boris in society for life, while also shoring up Anna Pavlovna's social status.



Boris shows that he takes after his mother, Anna Mikhailovna Drubetsky. Unlike his friend Rostov, he doesn't see military service as honorable in its own right, but as a system of social advancement to be mastered. In this system, people aren't valuable in themselves but as resources for one's own progress. Though she's been presenting herself as a victim, Hélène doesn't hesitate to pursue questionable relationships with young men like Boris.



Meanwhile, the war is drawing closer to the Russian borders. Recruits are gathered from the villages, and conflicting rumors fly. Since 1805, the Bolkonskys' lives have changed a lot. In 1806, Prince Nikolai is made one of Russia's eight militia commanders in chief. Though the prince is old, the new responsibility revives him. He spends his time traveling around the three provinces assigned to him, fulfilling his duties with obsessive exactness. Princess Marya spends most of her time mothering little Prince Nikolai, Prince Andrei's son, as best she can.

Prince Nikolai has given Andrei an estate called Bogucharovo, 30 miles away, and Andrei begins spending most of his time there. After the Battle of Austerlitz, Andrei takes a post raising militia for his father so that he can avoid active service. While his father is exhilarated by the war, Prince Andrei no longer sees any good in it.

At the end of February, 1807, Prince Andrei stays at Bald Hills while his father is traveling on duty. Baby Nikolushka is sick. When letters arrive for Prince Andrei, the maid finds him in the nursery, sitting in a child's chair and unsteadily pouring drops of medicine into a glass while arguing with Princess Marya in a whisper. Neither Prince nor Princess has slept for two days as they've tried various remedies on the baby's persistent fever. Prince Andrei's opinion prevails, and they wake the baby to administer medicine. The baby cries and wheezes.

Prince Andrei retreats to the next room to read the letter that's come from his father. Prince Nikolai joyfully reports a victory over Napoleon at Preussisch-Eylau. He orders Prince Andrei to hasten to Korchevo to make sure the army there is fully provisioned. Prince Andrei refuses to do this until the baby is well. What's more, he feels his father is mocking him with the news of a Russian victory while Andrei himself is out of the action. He decides to read his other letter, from Bilibin, for distraction.

The war is no longer a distant, abstract matter for the family at Bald Hills. Despite his skepticism of modern warfare, Prince Nikolai thrives in public service, and Princess Marya, characteristically, pours herself into caring for someone else's needs in his absence.



Prince Andrei's experience at Austerlitz was a turning point for him. At the beginning of the novel, he hoped war would provide a meaningful alternative to marriage. Since his near-death spiritual awakening, he no longer finds meaning in the war, and his marriage is no more.



The scene in the Bald Hills nursery is a big change for Andrei; he's never taken such an interest in domestic matters before. His sleepless efforts and firm opinions on childrearing contrast sharply with his life as Kutuzov's adjutant, suggesting that he's now looking for meaning in personal relationships instead of abstract ideals.



The battle of Preussisch-Eylau was fought on February 8, 1807. Both the Russian and French sides claimed victory. Though once prompt in military duties, Andrei won't even respond to his father's request while his baby is sick, showing how much his priorities have shifted. At the same time, he still feels self-conscious about the fact that he's not fulfilling his expected role.



Bilibin is now a diplomat attached to the army headquarters, and his letter, though written in French, has a “Russian fearlessness” and self-deprecating tone. The letter is dated before the battle of Preussisch-Eylau, and Bilibin pours out his heart to Prince Andrei. He writes of how Bonaparte has “[beaten] the stuffing” out of their Prussian allies. As a result, the Russians are now at war on their very frontiers. He also mentions the selection of an older commander in chief, Kamensky, the lack of food, and General Bennigsen’s ambition. Instead of focusing on the enemy, Bennigsen spends his energy trying to thwart a rival for promotion, Buxhöwden. Meanwhile, the hungry soldiers starts roaming the countryside and looting the people, causing widespread famine.

Finishing the letter, Prince Andrei crumples it and tosses it aside in anger. He’s disgusted that army life can still sound interesting and attractive. He goes back to the nursery and, at first afraid that the baby is dead, soon rejoices to see that the fever has broken. He and Princess Marya join hands and watch the calmly sleeping baby in relief and wonder. At last, Prince Andrei tears himself away from the baby’s bedside, reflecting that his son is all that’s left to him now.

The “Russian” tone of Bilibin’s letter suggests that the cultured use of French doesn’t drown out a deeper, more passionate Russian sensibility. Bilibin maintains a cynical outlook on the war, conveying that it isn’t going well, in part because generals are caught up in irrelevant dramas, leading suffering inferiors to fend for themselves. This supports Tolstoy’s argument that the morale of the rank-and-file is often more consequential in war than the commands of their superiors.



Despite his retreat from active service, Prince Andrei still cares about the war and, on some level, wishes he were there. For the time being, he continues to occupy himself—genuinely, it seems—in family concerns, refusing to seek meaning in the disillusioning outer world.



VOLUME 2, PART 2: CHAPTERS 10–14

After becoming a Mason, Pierre sets out for his estate in Kiev with big plans for the peasants there. He informs his stewards that he intends to liberate the peasants immediately. Hospitals, almshouses, and schools must be established. The head steward points out that Pierre’s estate is in rough shape financially. Perennially in debt, Pierre doesn’t have a mind for business. His goal of serf liberation and the head steward’s goal of debt repayment are in conflict.

Townsppeople begin to seek out acquaintance with Pierre, their new rich neighbor. At the same time, Pierre’s weakness for women persists. Instead of starting a new life, he finds himself drawn into the same lifestyle of soirées and balls, just in a different setting. He knows he’s falling short of the Masonic requirement of living a moral life; he reassures himself that he excels at other virtues, like reforming humanity.

Exploring characters’ lives on the home front, the focus turns to Pierre’s efforts to integrate his new beliefs into his daily life. Serfs were considered to be attached to the land they worked and could be “sold” with the land; they had few rights and were often subject to mistreatment. Pierre’s goal of freeing and providing for his serfs is ahead of his time; emancipation wasn’t decreed in Russia until 1861.



Pierre learns that simply removing himself from a tempting environment and announcing philanthropic intentions doesn’t make him moral. A moral life seems to demand more than sincerity. For the time being, though, Pierre remains convinced that he can skip over self-improvement in his well-meant efforts to improve others.



In the spring of 1807, Pierre decides to return to Petersburg. On the way, he plans to stop at his various estates to see how his reforms are progressing. The head steward, who understands Pierre well, orders feasts to be held at each stop. The journey cheers Pierre—his peasants seem grateful for his benefactions. What Pierre doesn't know is that these are fictions. In one village, for example, wealthy peasants claim they're building a chapel in his honor, but the construction began long ago, and most of the peasants are still impoverished. Pierre happily writes to the Mason grand master about how easy it is to accomplish good.

Rejuvenated from the country, Pierre decides to visit Prince Andrei Bolkonsky, whom he hasn't seen for two years. He finds him at Bogucharovo, a flat, rather ugly estate. The manor is situated behind a pond in the middle of a wood. Pierre finds Andrei living not in the manor's big stone house, but in a small, tidy cottage smelling freshly of pine. He's shocked by his friend's aged appearance; Andrei's expression is dull and remote and doesn't match his warm words of greeting. As the friends haltingly get into conversation, Pierre longs to show he's improved himself and express his new Masonic beliefs, but expressing joy in front of Andrei feels wrong somehow.

Eventually, their conversation drifts to Pierre's marriage. When Pierre says it would've been wrong to kill Dolokhov in the duel, Prince Andrei says it wouldn't necessarily have been wrong—people have always been mistaken in their judgment about right and wrong. Finally becoming animated, he argues that the only two "evils" he acknowledges are remorse and illness; the only good in life is avoiding these things. Pierre vehemently disagrees. He used to think like Andrei does, living only for himself, but now he believes that life's happiness consists in living for others.

Prince Andrei says that Pierre will get along well with Princess Marya. He also says that his experience has been the opposite of Pierre's—he once lived for glory and others' betterment, but this completely ruined his own life. He's only found peace since he began to live for himself instead. Andrei then argues that Pierre's reforming efforts actually deprive his peasants of "animal happiness"—in other words, the only *real* happiness. Physical labor is as necessary for them, he contends, as mental labor is for himself and Pierre.

Tellingly, the parade of "progress" on Pierre's estates amounts to little more than a sham. Thoroughgoing reforms take money and effort, not just well-meaning resolutions, but Pierre is naïve and thinks his ideals are enough to make things happen. He believes he's done good, but not only did his steward accomplish what little was done; the evidence of "progress" is fake. Pierre remains detached from reality in this respect.



Like Pierre, Prince Andrei is trying to figure out how to put his altered beliefs into practice. Unlike Pierre's serf communities, Andrei's estate has little pretense. Andrei distances himself from wealth and can't muster enthusiasm for much of anything. While Pierre feels happier than Andrei, Andrei's detachment seems to be a more truthful reflection of reality than Pierre's.



Pierre and Andrei form a pointed contrast. While Pierre aspires to follow a strict ethical code, Prince Andrei's disillusionment has gone so far that he embraces a kind of nihilism—rejecting most distinctions between right and wrong and striving for little more than avoiding discomfort. This mindset is repugnant to Pierre, who's fresh from his efforts on the serfs' behalf (as superficial as they were).



Prince Andrei rejects the whole basis of Pierre's moral transformation. Pursuing higher ideals has only disappointed him and brought grief. He even contests the idea that making peasants' lives easier actually does them any good, offering a class-based argument that serfs aren't suited for anything but labor.



Pierre finds this view appalling, but Andrei maintains that he didn't choose to be alive, so the best he can do is live the best he can without bothering anybody. The local people wanted to elect him their marshal, but he believes he lacks the "good-natured and bustling banality" necessary for the post. And the only reason he serves in the military is to temper his father's more extreme ideas. Pierre tells Andrei he will never agree with his views.

That evening, Prince Andrei and Pierre drive to Bald Hills. Pierre is downcast—he keeps wanting to enlighten Prince Andrei with Masonic ideas, yet he's afraid that Andrei will discredit them. Finally, he can't help himself, and he explains Masonry, describing it as Christianity without any religious ritual or nationalistic trappings. He assures Andrei that if he joins the brotherhood, he, too, will once more feel connected to others. To his relief, Andrei does not laugh.

As they cross a river by ferry, however, Prince Andrei asks how it can be true that the Masons alone know the nature of truth—aren't they just people, too? Pierre explains that truth is discovered by seeing oneself as a step in the interconnected structure of the universe. Andrei says this is Herder's teaching, and it doesn't persuade him. Life and death are the only things he finds convincing—specifically, he believes in a future life because there *must* be a reason for suffering and dying.

Even after they've reached the opposite shore and the servants have taken the carriage off, the two men continue to stand on the ferry, talking. Pierre argues that if there's a future life, then there is also truth and virtue, and a person finds happiness by striving for these, looking toward eternity. In response, Prince Andrei only says, "If only it were so!" But when he looks into the **sky**, he remembers the sight of the "eternal sky" at Austerlitz, and something stirs in his soul. From that time forward, Prince Andrei becomes aware of a new, inner life.

As Pierre and Prince Andrei arrive at Bald Hills, Prince Andrei points out four people, including a bent old woman and a man with long hair, fleeing from the carriage. He says they're Princess Marya's "people of God," whom, in defiance of Prince Nikolai, Marya welcomes. After settling into their rooms, Prince Andrei and Pierre go to Marya's room, where she's sitting with a young man in a monk's robe and an elderly woman with a childlike face. Princess Marya blushes at their arrival and helplessly rebukes Prince Andrei when he makes joking remarks in French about the "people of God." Pierre peers at the guests curiously.

Andrei's own brush with death, followed by his wife's death, seems to have sapped his will to engage with life. He believes his cynicism makes him useless to others; in fact, service to others, in his view, seems to demand a kind of ignorance of reality. (Ironically, this description fits Pierre.)



Pierre thinks of life's meaning mostly in terms of ideas. Interestingly, this contrasts with the way Masonry was presented to Pierre at first—that is, as a way of life first and foremost. Pierre still hasn't learned how to put his ideas into practice, but ideas are all he has to offer his struggling friend.



Prince Andrei refers to German philosopher Johann Gottfried von Herder, whose writings on immortality were of interest to Tolstoy. Andrei isn't impressed with these philosophical ideas; thinking of his wife Lise's death, he believes there must be some future accounting for people's sufferings on earth. He isn't interested in the abstract principles that energize Pierre.



Andrei's and Pierre's conversation on the ferry suggests that they're both on a spiritual journey, although it appears as if their circumstances are standing still. Though Andrei continues to resist the idea of striving for truth, Pierre prompts him to remember his moment of contemplating eternity, and this sets him on a different trajectory.



In Russian Orthodox spirituality, people sometimes embarked on extended or even lifelong pilgrimages, wandering from one holy site to the next and living off charity as they traveled. Princess Marya finds spiritual benefit in offering hospitality to the pilgrims, though she's also self-conscious about the fact that her bother doesn't take them seriously—even Marya feels pulled between spiritual and earthly matters at times.



Prince Andrei asks the wanderers about their travels, and the old woman, Pelageyushka, starts talking about a miracle-working icon she saw in Kolyazin—holy oil dripped down the cheek of the Mother of God. Pierre protests that such phenomena are tricks played on the people. When Prince Andrei continues to joke, the horrified old woman gets up to leave, but Pierre asks forgiveness so meekly that she relents. Marya is grateful, and for the rest of the visit, both she and Prince Nikolai get along well with Pierre. However, Marya worries that inactive rural life is bad for her brother.

Religious icons, especially those with miracles attributed to them, play a significant role in Russian Orthodox spirituality. Though Pierre makes a characteristically tactless outburst about the supposedly faked miracles, he still takes the old pilgrim seriously, whereas Andrei seems uncomfortable with the whole topic and tries to distance himself from it.



VOLUME 2, PART 2: CHAPTERS 15–18

When Rostov returns to his regiment from leave, he realizes that his bond with them is very strong. As he takes up his usual duties, he feels free from the chaos and mistakes of the outside world. Life in the regiment makes things clear and straightforward. He's determined to become a good person, in a way that doesn't feel attainable in the outside world. He's also determined to pay back his debt to his parents.

Like Pierre and Prince Andrei, Nikolai seeks to better himself after facing personal difficulties. Like Pierre in the Masons and Andrei on his rural estate, Rostov hopes that the regiment, a world unto itself, will provide a shelter from the pain and confusion of the outside world.



The Russian army is preparing for a new campaign. Currently, the Pavlogradsky regiment is camped near Bartenstein, an abandoned German village. The roads are impassable with mud, so the men are forced to scavenge through the villages for meager potatoes. Nearly half the regiment are lost to famine or disease. Otherwise, regimental life continues much as normal. Nobody talks much about the war.

Life in the regiment doesn't revolve around the ups and downs of the war itself. The rank-and-file soldiers are just focused on daily survival, not on the campaign. This is somewhat ironic because, in Tolstoy's view, such men's actions determine much of the war's outcome.



Rostov's and Denisov's friendship is stronger than ever. Denisov looks out for Rostov and tries to keep him from dangerous duty as much as possible. During one mission, Rostov finds an elderly Pole, his daughter, and baby granddaughter, and he brings them home to shelter in his quarters. When an officer makes vile comments about Rostov's relationship with the daughter, the two men almost come to a duel. When Denisov reprimands Rostov for this later, he's moved by Rostov's goodness; there are tears in his eyes.

In his efforts to become a better person, Rostov extends hospitality to those who are worse off than himself. He also continues to uphold his strong sense of personal honor, retaliating against insults. Nikolai's ethics are admirable to those who know him well.



One morning in April, Rostov returns from duty to find Denisov shouting at a sergeant major. He disappears for the day and returns with some wagons in tow. An infantry officer argues with Denisov, saying he's seized his own army's transport of provisions. Denisov snarls that he's the one who'll answer for the seizure, so the officer should leave him alone. As the officer trots off, Denisov laughs and tells Rostov that he forcefully appropriated the entire infantry transport; it was unescorted. The next day, the commander sends Denisov to the regimental staff to explain himself, and he comes home distraught. Denisov explains that he got into a fight with Telyanin, accusing him of withholding provisions from his men.

In contrast to Rostov, Denisov doesn't behave honorably. Though the men are hungry, stealing provisions is a serious offense, and the accusation against Telyanin (with whom Denisov and Rostov previously clashed over a theft in Austria) could likewise have grave consequences for Denisov.



The next day, however, the regimental adjutant arrives, looking serious. He warns Denisov that a court-martial has been assigned to his case, and that the best-case scenario is demotion. The offended side is arguing that Denisov showed up drunk at the quartermaster's, called him a thief, and started beating people up. Denisov laughs at this, calling it nonsense. Rostov knows him well, however, and can see that his friend is deeply worried. On the first of May, he's ordered to turn over the squadron command to the next in seniority. The day before he's supposed to appear at the division headquarters, however, he receives a slight wound in the leg during a skirmish with the French. He uses this excuse to go to the hospital instead.

In June, during a truce, Rostov gets permission to visit Denisov in the hospital. When he arrives, the doctor tells him that the hospital is a typhus hotspot; patients and doctors succumb one after another. In the soldiers' ward, Rostov is horrified by the stench and the sight of a suffering Cossack on the floor, his eyes rolled back and begging for a drink. A gray-bearded amputee begs Rostov to have a dead comrade removed from the ward. The doctor's assistant hustles Rostov out of the room.

In the officers' ward, Rostov sees Tushin, the artilleryist he'd met at the battle of Schöngraben. It turns out that Tushin, who's had an arm amputated, is Denisov's roommate. As Tushin leads Rostov into another room, Rostov is shocked by the sound of laughter. Denisov greets Rostov warmly, but Rostov notices a dark undertone beneath his merry words. Denisov only seems interested in talking about his court martial case, and he eagerly reads Rostov the draft of his reply to the commission. Tushin urges Denisov to just sign the petition admitting his guilt and send it to the staff with Rostov; it's the best outcome he could hope for. That evening, to Rostov's surprise, Denisov signs the petition begging for the Sovereign's mercy and gives it to Rostov with a grimace.

VOLUME 2, PART 2: CHAPTERS 19–21

After reporting to the regiment, Rostov rides to Tilsit with Denisov's letter for the sovereign. On June 13th, Napoleon and Emperor Alexander are meeting at Tilsit. Boris Drubetskoy is also stationed there. Boris witnesses the two emperors greeting one another on a raft in the middle of the river Niemen and then disappearing inside a pavilion. Boris observes the proceedings closely, including the precise length of the emperors' meeting, and writes down all the details. Boris believes that his presence at this important meeting assures his position in the "higher world."

Though it's not clear exactly what happened in this incident, Denisov appears to have lost his temper at superior officers. Unlike Rostov, who tries to right the wrongs he's committed, Denisov avoids facing up to the consequences of his actions.



Rostov's visit to the field hospital is a disillusioning moment for him, as he sees lower-ranked soldiers suffering in squalid, neglected conditions. So far, regimental life has sheltered him from such realities of war.



Conditions are different in the officers' ward; officers are better cared for and able to live in some comfort, suggesting that class distinctions make a difference in the quality of medical care. Denisov is obsessed with his pending trial, wanting to hang onto a sense of principle (insofar as he has a defensible argument, which isn't really clear). In any case, he finally gives up, as if realizing that in the greater scheme of things, principle doesn't have much of a place in war.



On July 7th and 9th, 1807, Napoleon and Alexander signed treaties in Tilsit (then in East Prussia) dividing territories between France and Russia, securing Russia's alliance with France, and effectively giving Napoleon control over most of Central Europe. Boris continues looking for any chance to put himself close to power, so he can store up benefits for himself.



During the stay in Tilsit, Boris rooms with a Polish adjutant named Zhilinsky who loves French culture. Boris and Zhilinsky host frequent gatherings for French officers. One of these dinners includes Napoleon's adjutant and page; that same night, Rostov arrives and visits Boris's apartment in civilian clothes. Rostov is startled by the friendly atmosphere—he's used to thinking of French soldiers as enemies and of Napoleon as a criminal. Nikolai asks for Boris's help on Denisov's behalf, refusing to stay for the French party.

Rostov's timing is poor. The two emperors are signing a preliminary peace agreement and then attending a celebratory banquet. Rostov decides that if he can't trust Boris, he'll take matters into his own hands. He lingers outside Emperor Alexander's quarters and, surprised at his own resolve, walks straight inside. He believes Alexander can be trusted to side with justice. An officer scolds Rostov for his presumption, but just as he's about to slink from the house in shame, he runs into a sympathetic former commander who accepts Denisov's letter.

As Rostov leaves, he hears the emperor approaching, and he can't resist crowding close along with some townsfolk. Seeing Alexander, Rostov's love for the sovereign is rekindled; he feels the emperor's gaze lights up everything it touches. He watches the two sovereigns shake hands and bestow honors on soldiers in the town square; he can't help noticing that Napoleon's smile looks fake and that he's a poor horseman.

During the ensuing banquet, Boris notices the stormy expression on Rostov's face. Rostov agrees to visit with Boris, but he stands there pensively silent, thinking about the suffering amputees in the hospital, Denisov's trouble, and the two emperors. He goes to a bustling inn and, while downing two whole bottles of wine, listens to Russian soldiers criticizing the peace treaty. Suddenly, Rostov has an outburst. Soldiers have no right to criticize the sovereign, he insists; it's their job to do their duty and die—not to think. If they keep questioning everything, he continues while banging the table, what will remain sacred? He calls for another bottle.

Boris and Rostov have very different attitudes about the war. With his straightforward patriotism, Rostov finds it jarring, even unconscionable, to socialize with the French, while socially conscious Boris, who mainly cares about his long-term standing in society, seeks out such connections without regard for higher principles.



Rostov's errand isn't working out. He came to Tilsit on a matter of individual justice, but all he finds is diplomatic pomp and social ambitions. His boldness in trying to approach Alexander shows that Nikolai's rugged devotion to principle remains intact—it's considered offensive for him to enter the imperial quarters in civilian clothes, so his behavior isn't without risk. Even though he doesn't speak to Alexander, his daring is rewarded.



Despite Rostov's disillusionment, the Emperor still has a nearly supernatural appeal for him, suggesting that patriotism has a deep, almost mystical pull on the average Russian's heart. Tolstoy portrays one of his lowest-ranked characters—a hussar—encountering the very highest (even judging Napoleon's horsemanship!), a reminder of how the actions of the highest shape the lives of the lowest in history, and vice versa.



At Tilsit, Rostov's recent experiences build to an emotional climax. He's gone from a disease-ridden hospital to an imperial banquet, witnessing the gamut of the war. He struggles to reconcile the agonies and injustices of war on a personal level with the beauty and ceremony of alleged peace on a symbolic level. In the end, he'd rather be around fellow soldiers than banqueting officers, and even then, he can't make sense of what's real. His outburst suggests that he's suppressing his own criticisms of Alexander, sensing that everything will unravel if he dwells on them.



VOLUME 2, PART 3: CHAPTERS 1–6

Two years later, in 1808, Emperor Alexander meets with Napoleon at Erfurt, and the event is the talk of Petersburg society. In 1809, when France declares war on Austria, Russia comes to France's aid against their former ally. There's even talk of intermarriage between the two imperial houses. However, ordinary life goes on much as before, with little regard for politics.

Prince Andrei still lives in the country. Without saying anything about it, Andrei has quietly carried out Pierre's intended reforms—he has all the practicality and follow-through that Pierre lacks. One of Andrei's estates is the first example of serfs being freed in Russia. He also brings in a trained midwife, as well as a priest to teach the peasants' children. Prince Andrei divides his time between Bald Hills and Bogucharovo, reads widely, and finds that he's better acquainted with current events than his Petersburg visitors. After carefully watching Russia's failed military campaigns, Prince Andrei also draws up a proposal for military reform.

One spring day in 1809, Prince Andrei visits his son's estates at Ryazan. Along the way, his coach passes a massive, gnarled **oak tree** towering above the younger birches; it seems to scorn spring's arrival. Prince Andrei keeps turning to look at the oak; it gives him melancholy thoughts about his own life. He feels he must simply live out his life without indulging either hopes or fears.

Count Rostov is the province's marshal of nobility, and in May, Prince Andrei must visit him in connection with his son's properties. As Andrei drives up to Otradnoe, the Rostovs' country estate, he sees girls running beside the path and notes a slender, dark-eyed girl with a kerchief on her head; she laughs and darts away. The sight of the girl pains Prince Andrei; he wonders what makes her so happy.

Later, as Prince Andrei sits through Count Rostov's dull entertainments, he keeps glancing at Natasha. Unable to sleep that night, he opens his window and gazes at the full moon in the bright **sky**. He hears conversation in the rooms above his, then a girl leans out the window above and calls tearfully for Sonya to admire the moonlight. He listens to Natasha for a long time until, overcome by a tangle of confusing, youthful emotions, he finally falls asleep.

The object of the sovereigns' meeting was to confirm the treaty made at Tilsit, including the new French and Russian alliance. The new alliance—the Russians are now fighting against Austria—shows how dramatically war can reshape societies within just a few years. And yet, among ordinary people, there isn't much change at all.



After his experience at Austerlitz, Andrei remains uninterested in fighting, turning his attentions instead to concrete things he can achieve at home. In the early 1800s, it was rare for landowners to emancipate their serfs, so like Pierre, Andrei shows he's forward-thinking. And even though Andrei avoids both battle and Petersburg society, he isn't totally detached from society; he lives the cultured life of a Russian gentleman.



The oak tree symbolizes Prince Andrei's life. It's detached from others and looks down on them; it also looks old and weathered beyond its years. Its appearance prompts Andrei to think that he can strive for nothing beyond bare existence; life promises nothing more.



The laughing girl (Natasha) reminds Prince Andrei of much that he lacks: youth, innocence, happiness—and a young woman he loves. More than anything else, though, Andrei feels the lack of meaning in his life; he's too emotionally detached from his existence to be really happy.



Earlier, at the battle of Austerlitz, the sky symbolized eternal life to Andrei. Here, the symbolism is less clear, but the sky is associated with a youthful openness to life. When he and Natasha admire the sky's beauty at the same time, it suggests they have some yearnings in common.



The next day, Prince Andrei departs for home. Once again, he pauses in the birch woods, looking for the old **oak tree**. He doesn't spot it immediately; in the past weeks, its leaves have burst forth, hiding its gnarled shape and aged scars. When he finally recognizes the tree, a feeling of joy breaks over him. He decides that his life must not be over at age 31. He no longer wishes to live for himself alone; he wants his life to be joined to everyone's, like Pierre's, and the laughing girl's.

After his trip, Prince Andrei decides that he must go to Petersburg. It feels imperative that he begin to take an active role in life again. He wonders why he ever believed otherwise. Even Lise's's portrait no longer seems to look at him reproachfully but cheerfully. He arrives in Petersburg in August 1809.

At this time, Speransky's reforms are at their height. Emperor Alexander, who's staying nearby while recovering from a leg injury, meets often with Speransky, beginning to realize the "vague liberal dreams" he'd brought to the throne with him. When Prince Andrei appears at court in Petersburg, he feels that the sovereign dislikes him and assumes it's because he's been absent from court for several years. Nonetheless, Andrei gives a field marshal, his father's old friend, his proposed military reforms, and soon after, he's invited to meet with the new minister of war, Count Arakcheev.

When Prince Andrei gets his chance to meet with Count Arakcheev, the minister grumbles about the proliferation of new military proposals, yet he also appoints Andrei to the commission on military regulations, without salary. Prince Andrei smiles before the Count dismisses him from the office.

While in Petersburg, Prince Andrei renews the acquaintances of people who can benefit him. Speransky's civil reforms remind him of being on the battlefield. He soon becomes more interested in this than in his military reforms. His reputation as a liberal landowner precedes him, and the story of Lise's death (and his own rumored death before that) gains sympathy for him. Everyone agrees that Andrei has matured for the better.

After meeting Natasha at Otradnoe, Prince Andrei sees his life differently. The aged, gnarled tree has given forth improbable signs of new life, no longer appearing aloof and weary. This transformation tells Andrei that he, too, must seek meaning in relationship with others, and will find renewed life that way.



After seeing the symbol of the revived tree, Andrei decides that the key to his new life is engaging in public service. He'll no longer remain isolated in the country, captive to sorrowful memories of his late wife and keeping all his thoughts inside.



Powerful court adviser Mikhail Speransky issued several liberalizing decrees, abolishing lifelong court rank for the nobility and requiring examinations for administrative ranks, for example. In other words, Petersburg seems to be open to fresh, new ideas instead of relying on hereditary connections. At the same time, it's notable that it's Andrei's family connections that gain him a hearing.



The historical Count Arakcheev served as minister of war and councilor under Emperor Alexander I. When Arakcheev grants Andrei a government position, Andrei feels he's meeting his goal of being useful to the world.



Though Andrei once scorned Petersburg's social world, he knows how to play its game when necessary by currying favor with influential people. Civil reforms also begin to displace the idealistic role filled by war when he was younger. People used to see him as pompous, but his sufferings have made him more approachable.



The day after he visits Count Arakcheev, Prince Andrei meets Speransky at a soirée. Andrei feels this is a life-changing moment. He tries to resist the man's magnetism and not agree with him in everything as they debate inherited court privileges. When Speransky invites Prince Andrei to meet with him the following week, he believes he's found his longed-for exemplar of "the fully reasonable and virtuous man." At the same time, he feels that the quiet way of life he's cultivated in the country is being consumed by Petersburg life. It seems that life is taken up with appointments and talking, not doing.

Prince Andrei's admiration for the bright and aloof Speransky reminds him of what he once felt for Bonaparte. Besides his work on military regulations, Andrei also becomes head, at Speransky's direction, of a section of the legislative commission, though Andrei lacks a legal education. His first task is to revise the first part of the civil code. Using the *Code Napoléon* and the *Justiniani* to guide him, he must write a section titled "Personal Rights."

Prince Andrei continues to avail himself of social connections, something he scorned not too long ago. He even begins to idealize the reformer Speransky, believing he lives a truly moral life that benefits others. Even as he admires Speransky, though, Andrei wonders if this life of meetings and discussion is really the kind of new life Natasha inspired him to seek.



Andrei is aware that his admiration for the glittering Speransky could fade, as did his idealization of Napoleon. Because Prince Andrei has freed his serfs, he's gained a reputation as a reformer. The Code Napoléon was the French code of civil law; the Codex Justiniani was a significant Byzantine law code, issued under the sixth-century Emperor Justinian, which had long formed the basis of European law. Being entrusted with reforming the law code represents a big step up in the world for Andrei.



VOLUME 2, PART 3: CHAPTERS 7–10

The timeline shifts to two years earlier, in 1808, when Pierre accidentally becomes head of the Petersburg Masons. He organizes events, recruits members, and donates lots of alms to a poorhouse. Meanwhile, he continues dining and drinking liberally and partaking of "bachelor" amusements, though he believes it's wrong.

The longer he participates in Masonry, though, the more Pierre feels that its ground is giving way beneath him. He knows most of his brother Masons in everyday life, and he can't help viewing them as the social strivers he's always known. Their failures to live up to their moral vows sow doubts in Pierre's mind. Increasingly, he realizes that although some Masons are devoted to its spiritual path, the majority just observe the external rituals and value the social connections the brotherhood provides. Frustrated, he travels abroad to be initiated into the highest Masonic mysteries

Not too long before Prince Andrei shifts to a more active life, Pierre, too, struggles with how best to incorporate his private beliefs into public life. As before, he discovers that just because his ideals have theoretically changed, that doesn't mean it's easy to put them into practice.



In his peers, Pierre sees the same contradiction between professed beliefs and outward life that he's struggling with personally. In that way, Masonry is just a mirror of regular aristocratic society. Though he's disillusioned, he addresses the dissonance by looking deeper for meaning instead of trying a different path.



Pierre returns from his travels in the summer of 1809. The lodge convenes a special session to hear what he's learned. In his speech, Pierre argues that it's not enough for Masons to observe lodge rituals; it's time for them to become active for the good of society. To do this, they must dedicate themselves to virtue. This means forming "a universal, sovereign form of government" that rules over all other governments without disrupting civil bonds. Pierre's speech gets conflicting responses. While some support him, the majority accuse him of supporting Illuminism. When the grand master tells him that his ideas will not be accepted, he abruptly goes home.

After his speech, Pierre becomes depressed. He languishes at home until he receives a letter from his wife, saying she misses him and wants to devote herself to him anew. Around this time, a brother Mason he dislikes tells Pierre he's being unjust to his wife in contradiction of Masonic vows. His mother-in-law (Prince Vassily's wife) also wants to see him. Pierre realizes they're all conspiring against him, and he feels so hopeless about his life that he doesn't resist.

In November, Pierre goes to visit Iosif Alexeevich, who's been ill. After Pierre gives his account of the rift at the lodge and his studies abroad, Iosif Alexeevich condemns Pierre's ideas for societal improvement. Individual self-purification, he reminds Pierre, is the primary Masonic goal, without which it's illegitimate for a Mason to pursue either mystical or societal goals. Pierre must cultivate the chief virtue of the love of death, and this is only possible by meeting adversity. Bazdeev gives Pierre a journal in which to chronicle his self-improvement.

A few days later, Pierre reunites with his wife H el ene. He decides to forgive her for virtue's sake, though he tells her that he has nothing for which to forgive her. He only asks her to forgive him for any offenses and to forget their past. From now on, their marriage will have a spiritual goal. Pierre feels renewed and happy.

H el ene is part of a Petersburg social circle which supports the Napoleonic alliance. Present at the emperors' Erfurt meeting, H el ene made many French connections and even attracted Napoleon's attention at the theater. Pierre is surprised to discover that society men like Bilibin strive for H el ene's approval, that people read books before her soir ees in order to impress her, and that officials confide diplomatic secrets in her. In her salon, everyone seems to find deep meaning in her most banal sayings.

Pierre basically argues that it's time for Masons to put their mystical beliefs to active use, even if that means experimenting with controversial political ideas. Illuminism refers to the Illuminati sect, which was founded in Bavaria, Germany, in 1776. The Illuminati had many ideas in common with the Masons, but they also had political goals that aligned with republicanism. Such ideas wouldn't be broadly welcomed in imperial Russia, and they prove to be a step beyond his brothers' tolerance.



Pierre feels that the various avenues he's pursued are all coming to nothing. The Masons no longer want him, and his unwanted marriage looms up in his life again. As he tends to do, Pierre reacts to external pressure by lapsing into a passive attitude once again.



Pierre's old Masonic mentor explains that Pierre's ideas are off track because he's getting ahead of himself—he can't work for sweeping social improvements if he hasn't yet mastered the spiritual basics. Pierre's advanced studies and social proposals, in other words, are ways of avoiding necessary self-purification.



Pierre again lets himself be swept along by others' opinions, though he justifies this to himself on the grounds that he can start his marriage over on a spiritual basis—ignoring his and H el ene's incompatibility, which hasn't changed.



In keeping with Petersburg's more European atmosphere, the fashionable social set leans French in its culture and sympathies. Like the rest of the Kuragin family, however, H el ene is only interested in climbing socially. With his sincere and transparent personality, Pierre is baffled that other people take H el ene seriously.



Pierre serves H el ene’s interests well. Because he’s eccentric and spiritually occupied, he’s genuinely indifferent to what happens in his wife’s salon and serves as a useful contrast to her. Boris Drubetskoy is one of H el ene’s most frequent guests. H el ene treats him like a child, and Boris acts meekly deferential toward Pierre. Though disturbed by all this, Pierre tries not to think about it. He tells himself that a “bluestocking” doesn’t get tangled up in passionate affairs.

Though Pierre says he wants to reestablish their marriage with more spiritual grounding, he immediately starts ignoring their old problems instead of confronting them. The term “bluestocking” was developed in the 18th century to refer to a literary woman. Even though Pierre knows better, he goes along with the pretense that his wife is above her old behaviors, like carrying on affairs right in front of him.



Meanwhile, Pierre develops spiritually. Thanks to the journaling, he observes that he hates Boris deep down, even as he serves as rhetor for Boris’s reception into the Masons. He believes Boris is only joining the Masons in order to gain power and connections. He also has sexual dreams which remind him that he’s neglecting his wife. He prays for God’s help in overcoming his “depravity” and developing virtue.

Though Pierre begins to pay closer attention to his spiritual purification instead of trying to change the world around him, it’s tough going—he recognizes layers of wrongdoing in himself, including resentment of those who don’t value spiritual things.



VOLUME 2, PART 3: CHAPTERS 11–17

During the Rostovs’ two years in the country, their financial situation doesn’t improve. Though Nikolai keeps his promise not to drain his parents’ finances further, the family’s debts mount, and they eventually move to Petersburg so that Count Rostov can earn income from a government post. Soon after their move, Berg and Vera get engaged. In Moscow, the Rostovs had been members of high society. In Petersburg, however, the Rostovs seem like provincials to everyone else.

The Rostovs’ reduced social standing highlights the difference between Moscow and Petersburg. The Rostovs fit into the more traditional, Russian environment of Moscow; in sophisticated Petersburg, however, they’re beneath the notice of high society.



Boris, Pierre, and Berg all become regulars at the Rostovs’ suppers. Since surviving a couple of minor war injuries, Berg has become a captain of the guards and taken a profitable posting in Petersburg. Soon, he and Vera are engaged. Though Berg is the son of an obscure nobleman, it’s well known that the Rostovs’ affairs are in disarray, and also that Vera, now 24, has received no other proposals. Still, the Rostovs feel a bit ashamed of the couple’s engagement. Also, Count Rostov is painfully aware that he has no dowry to give his daughter. A few days before the wedding, Count Rostov has to give Berg a promissory note.

Vera and Berg’s engagement is a good example of the Rostovs’ awkward social status and the way this narrows a young person’s options, especially a young woman’s. For the daughter of a Count, Berg isn’t a particularly great catch, but since Count Rostov can’t contribute much for a young couple to live on, Vera cannot be too picky.



Natasha is now 16. Since she first kissed Boris four years ago, she hasn’t seen him once. She jokes about her childish promises with Boris, yet deep down, she’s tormented over them—were they sincere or not? Finally, when the Rostovs move to Petersburg, Boris visits them. Boris remembers Natasha with sincere affection, yet he considers himself a member of high society now, with excellent marriage prospects.

Count Rostov’s status is also an obstacle for Natasha’s hopes of marriage. From Boris’s point of view, the Rostovs’ circumstances give him an excuse to ignore his promise to propose when Natasha was younger. Natasha can’t serve Boris’s efforts to establish himself in high society, so old feelings don’t matter.



Boris still thinks of Natasha as a mischievous little girl, so when he sees how she's matured, he's pleasantly surprised. For her part, Natasha admires Boris's newly refined manners and connections. Boris keeps resolving to have a talk with her, explaining that they have no future together, yet he can't bring himself to do it. He visits more often and stops spending time at the Bezukhovs'.

Boris believes Natasha's lack of fortune would wreck his career prospects, yet he lacks the courage of his convictions and continues leading her on with hopes of a possible marriage.



One evening, Natasha bursts into Countess Rostov's room, interrupting her mother's bedtime prayers. Unable to scold her daughter—they both treasure these nighttime chats—Countess Rostov agrees to talk about Boris. She can see that Natasha has “turned [Boris's] head,” but she also knows that Natasha doesn't love him. This won't do—it might harm Natasha's chances with other suitors, and besides, it torments Boris for nothing. In fact, the next day, she has a talk with Boris to discourage him from visiting so often. Natasha thinks that nobody understands how she feels deep inside.

Though Countess Rostov indulges Natasha, she also understands where the family stands in society and what that means for her children's future. She still sees Natasha's friendship with Boris as a childish infatuation that has no marriage potential, so she takes the matter into her own hands. Natasha must also consider her reputation in order to keep her options open.



On New Year's Eve, an old dignitary throws a ball. The diplomatic corps and the Emperor are to attend. Despite their fears of being excluded, the Rostovs are invited, too, because the Countess is friends with a lady-in-waiting of the old court. It's Natasha's first grand ball, and all day long, she's been feverishly perfecting her mother's, Sonya's, and her own outfits.

Because of a family tie to the previous Emperor's court, the Rostovs make the cut to attend the grand ball (showing how they're right on the cusp of acceptable Petersburg society). This event will be a prime opportunity for Natasha to be seen in society as an eligible young woman, so the stakes are high.



Arriving at the ball, Natasha is bursting with barely suppressed excitement and delighted to overhear guests discussing her. Mme Peronsky points out the distinguished guests, including Countess Hélène Bezukhov, various foreign ambassadors, and Andrei Bolkonsky. Natasha remembers him from his visit to Otradnoe and is pleased to see him, but Mme Peronsky sniffs that he's become insufferably prideful since befriending Speransky.

The grand ball gives the provincial Rostovs a chance to rub shoulders with the likes of the Bezukhovs and Bolkonskys, both families that have moved up in the world while the Rostovs have remained stagnant.



The orchestra strikes up a specially composed polonaise, and Emperor Alexander walks in with the host and hostess. Ladies, suddenly heedless of their dresses, press forward for a closer look. But Natasha doesn't care about the sovereign. As couples pair off for the first dance, she stands breathless, terrified that nobody will ask her. As acquaintances walk by without acknowledging her, she's about to cry.

Though most guests relish the opportunity to get close to the Emperor, Natasha knows that this evening means something of greater consequence for her: whether she'll be acknowledged as somebody worth noticing at a Petersburg ball. For several tense minutes, it looks like she'll be passed by.



After the polonaise, a waltz begins. The Rostovs are asked to step aside to make room. Eventually, Pierre walks up to Prince Andrei, who's chatting with someone about politics, and asks him to dance with Miss Rostov. When Prince Andrei turns to look at Natasha, his face lights up; he remembers her as the lively young girl from Otradnoe. Natasha beams in turn, her expression saying, "I've been waiting a long time for you." The couple begins to dance, cheerfully and gracefully. Though Hélène is more attractive, Natasha has a fresher, more vulnerable look on the dance floor and Andrei quickly finds her intoxicating.

After that, several young men ask Natasha to dance. Before supper, Prince Andrei dances with her again and tells her about the night at Otradnoe when he overheard her talking upstairs. He finds Natasha an enchanting departure from everyday society—her joy, shyness, and awkward French. Natasha says that she's never enjoyed herself more in her life. Pierre, however, is having a gloomy evening, and Natasha, seeing his troubled expression, wishes she could give him some of her happiness.

VOLUME 2, PART 3: CHAPTERS 18–22

The next day, Prince Andrei struggles to settle down to his work, so he's relieved when Bitsky, a fellow commissioner and society gossip, drops by. Bitsky rapturously recounts the Emperor's speech at the State Council that morning—he'd made a strong stand for principled reform instead of arbitrary government power. Though Prince Andrei had looked forward to the Council's opening, it no longer seems important to him. In fact, even legislative reforms and dining with Speransky no longer excite him.

Nevertheless, Prince Andrei shows up for a small dinner at Speransky's that evening. Listening to Speransky's high-pitched laughter during the hors d'oeuvres, Prince Andrei feels disillusioned. Speransky seems to have been demystified in this setting, and the result is no longer attractive to Andrei. Speransky seems fake to him, and the guests seem to be currying his favor. They even lapse into ordinary conversation the moment he leaves the room. After this, Prince Andrei excuses himself. He compares the past few months in Petersburg with his former life at Bogucharovo; the latter now seems far more engaging and meaningful.

At first pushed to one side, beneath the notice of most of Petersburg, the Rostovs soon take center stage as one of the prominent guests acknowledges Natasha. Andrei's visit to Otradnoe was a turning point for him—Natasha's youthful joy renewed his own zest for living—and their dance seems to fulfill that promise. In this Petersburg setting, Natasha's beauty is also conveyed as more authentic, even exotic, compared to Hélène's tiredly conventional look.



Though Prince Andrei's attentions grant Natasha the social standing she'd coveted just a few minutes earlier, Andrei is drawn to her because she stands out from typical Petersburg society with its contrived, cultured ways. Pierre, once again, doesn't easily fit anywhere, and even in her happiness, Natasha feels generously drawn to him.



Prince Andrei thought he'd found new meaning in public service and social reform, but even with big changes stirring in Russian politics, these developments no longer hold his interest. His evening with Natasha has caused him to reevaluate his priorities yet again.



Next to Natasha's freshness and free spirit, life in society seems intolerably stale, fake, and pointless to Prince Andrei; it's like waking up to reality once again. If his brush with death at the battle of Austerlitz changed his view of war, meeting Natasha has changed his mind about the value of public service. Neither one offers a path to a meaningful life.



The next day Prince Andrei visits the Rostovs. He'd once judged the Rostovs harshly, but he's now touched by their simplicity and sincerity. Natasha seems to represent a world filled with unknown joys. After supper, she plays the clavichord and sings for him. In the middle of her song, Prince Andrei's eyes fill with tears. Such a thing has never happened to him before. He feels suddenly aware of the chasm between the infinite and the earthly. Unable to sleep that night, he makes plans for the future, deciding that Pierre was right: a person must believe in the possibility of happiness and enjoy it while one can.

One morning Colonel Berg visits Pierre and invites him to a soirée he's throwing with Vera; Hélène had turned him down. When Pierre arrives at the party, he finds Berg explaining to Vera that he's worked his way up to the position of regimental commander by choosing his acquaintances well. Both Berg and Vera look down on one another and the opposite sex in general, but they share a passion for prominent guests. They interrupt one another as they try to entertain Pierre with competing conversations. As more guests arrive, including Boris and the Rostovs, the couple feels satisfied that their soirée is exactly like everyone else's.

As one of the more honored guests, Pierre sits at a card game with Count Rostov. Natasha sits there, too, and Pierre notices that she seems uncharacteristically quiet and withdrawn. But when Prince Andrei walks in and approaches her, she suddenly glows. Pierre notices that Prince Andrei seems lighter and younger, too, and as he observes the two throughout the evening, he feels glad but also bitter. Later, Pierre overhears Vera making wry comments about Natasha's youthful flightiness and past romances; Andrei looks troubled by this.

Prince Andrei spends the next day at the Rostovs'. Natasha is pale with nervous anticipation; Prince Andrei is surprisingly shy. Sonya won't leave her friend's side. Natasha later confides in the Countess that she'd first fallen in love with Andrei at Otradnoe and that their meeting again in Petersburg was fate. At the same time, Prince Andrei confides in Pierre that he loves Natasha and plans to propose.

Prince Andrei's reactions to Natasha raise some interesting questions—like whether he truly sees Natasha as an individual, or whether her innocence and beauty get conflated in Andrei's mind with his near-death experience and his yearning for happiness. In other words, she seems to represent happiness, but it's not clear if she can truly make him happy.



In a somewhat comical interlude, it appears that Berg and Vera are well suited for each other. They both have a high opinion of themselves and want to be highly regarded in society as well (though people of Hélène's social status apparently scorn them). Their biggest desire in life is to conform to exactly what society expects of them.



Natasha is still fresh from the curtailed courtship with Boris; talking with Andrei lifts her out of that gloom. It's not clear if Vera is specifically trying to undermine the budding romance or if she's just offering gossip suitable for a soirée, but either way, she gives Prince Andrei second thoughts. Pierre, stuck in a loveless marriage, looks on wistfully—Pierre has a pattern of looking at others' happiness from the outside.



Anticipation mounts in the Rostov household. Things have moved quickly—though Natasha barely knows Andrei, she projects her feelings for him into the past. (Tolstoy sometimes points out realistic moments like this where characters reinterpret their memories in light of new developments.) Having come to Petersburg to seek meaning in public service, Andrei now has a very different view of his personal happiness.



Countess Bezukhov is having a party that night. Pierre wanders through the party with a sad, distracted look. Ever since the Emperor's ball, he's been inclined to hypochondria. Recently granted the rank of gentleman of the chamber, he's begun to feel pessimistic about worldly pursuits again. He tries to ward off his doubts by throwing himself into Masonic studies again. That's when Prince Andrei comes in to talk about Natasha. He's never known this kind of happiness before, he assures Pierre. Pierre encourages his friend, feeling the gloominess of his own life by comparison.

Though Pierre doesn't acknowledge any feelings for Natasha herself, Andrei's new romance reminds Pierre of the unresolved emptiness in his own life which nothing seems to adequately fill. His friend's life is taking a new turn while his remains stagnant.



VOLUME 2, PART 3: CHAPTERS 23–26

The next day, Prince Andrei travels to Bald Hills to ask his father's permission to marry. Prince Nikolai receives the news calmly, but inside, he can't understand it—why anyone would seek to dramatically change their life. He argues with Andrei: the marriage isn't a particularly brilliant match; Andrei is no longer youthful, while Natasha is very young, and finally, there's his son to think of. He orders Andrei to go abroad for a year, and if the passion persists, then he can marry. Knowing his father hopes he'll change his mind, Prince Andrei returns to Petersburg to propose.

Prince Nikolai dislikes change and isn't much more receptive to Andrei's possible marriage than he was to Princess Marya's. As the head of the family, he has the final say over both his children's futures. Prince Nikolai hopes time will wear down his son, but there's a difference in how the two generations view happiness: the Bolkonsky reputation is his guiding principle, while happiness is Andrei's.



Meanwhile, Natasha doesn't know that Prince Andrei has left Petersburg, and she spends three weeks sulking. After that, she decides to resume her old routine. As she practices her singing exercises and admires her reflection in the mirror, Natasha feels hopeful again, telling herself she's content with life as it is. When she hears Prince Andrei being admitted to the house, she panics. Andrei speaks to Countess Rostov in private, and the Countess warmly consents to the proposal, but she finds him "alien and frightening."

Natasha is a passionate young woman, but the flipside of her quick emotions is that she is generally resilient. Just when she's accepted that her romance with Andrei won't continue, he comes back. His "alien" appearance suggests that, though Andrei doesn't relish high society like some do, he belongs to that world in a way that the more provincial Rostovs don't. Even though Natasha is young, the match is so good that the Countess can't say no this time.



As Natasha nervously enters the drawing room, she thinks, "Can it be that this stranger has now become everything for me?" Prince Andrei approaches her shyly, saying that he's loved her since he first set eyes on her and asking if she loves him, too. Natasha says yes, bursts into tears, and after only a moment's hesitation, kisses him. Prince Andrei gazes at the weeping girl and doesn't feel the former passion, but he feels pity and a binding sense of duty.

Though Natasha and Andrei have feelings for one another, most aristocratic marriages are, in some sense, between "strangers." Both of them realize this to some degree, especially Andrei, who realizes that his initial feeling of joy isn't sustainable indefinitely—Natasha isn't just a vague promise of possible happiness, but is now a real, concrete obligation.



Natasha tries to grasp the idea that she's now grown up. Prince Andrei explains the necessity of a year's absence. If this year of testing shows Natasha that she *doesn't* love him, he says, then he will set her free. Natasha bursts into tears, not understanding, but insists she can wait. From then on, Prince Andrei visits the Rostovs' as Natasha's fiancé, though their betrothal isn't public. The Rostovs grow more accustomed to Andrei, finding him less foreign and strange.

Engagement makes heavy demands of Natasha from the beginning: she doesn't get to enjoy the proximity of her future husband or the public accolades associated with engagement. Though Andrei becomes more a part of the family, the romance remains irregular and the couple's future remains uncertain.



Natasha grows to understand Prince Andrei's feelings and loosens up around him; her merry moods make him laugh wholeheartedly. However, his impending trip abroad hangs over them. The night before his departure, Pierre joins the Rostovs for dinner. Prince Andrei explains that Pierre knows about the engagement and urges Natasha to go to him for any advice, since Pierre has "a heart of gold." Natasha says goodbye to Andrei with an anguished "Don't leave!" which he long remembers. However, after two weeks of depression, Natasha goes about her normal life, looking a little older.

Back at Bald Hills, Prince Nikolai's health declines. The burden of this falls on Princess Marya. Princess Marya's soft spots are her nephew Nikolushka and her religious faith, and the irritable Prince attacks these at every opportunity. However, none of this hurts Princess Marya; she doesn't take any of it personally or hold it against him. Marya simply wants to live a life of love and self-denial, as Christ did. Other people's mistreatment doesn't bother her.

When Prince Andrei comes to Bald Hills, he doesn't tell Princess Marya about his engagement. After he goes abroad, she writes a letter to her friend Julie Karagin, who's currently mourning the death of her brother in Turkey. (She'd always dreamed that Andrei would marry Julie.) She consoles Julie that only religion can deliver people from life's incomprehensible trials. She learned this from Lise's death; five years later, she believes that her sister-in-law's death was somehow an expression of God's love. Because God's will is an expression of his love, everything that befalls people is ultimately good, even if they can't understand it.

Marya continues writing that her brother Andrei has finally "revived morally." For this reason, she discounts the rumor that he's engaged to the "little Rostov girl." She simply isn't in the category of women who could please Andrei, and anyway, she believes he mourns Lise too deeply to think of remarrying. Over the summer, however, Princess Marya receives an unexpected letter from Switzerland—Prince Andrei announces his engagement. He didn't confide in Marya sooner because he didn't want to add to family tensions. He encloses a letter asking Prince Nikolai to shorten the postponement of marriage by a few months, and he asks Marya to give the letter to their father at a well-chosen moment. Bitterly, Prince Nikolai replies that Andrei must remarry after his father's death.

Andrei's and Natasha's relationship gets stronger, though their farewell has ominous overtones. Pierre, always watching other people's happiness from the outside, gets saddled with the role of being Natasha's confidant in Andrei's absence.



Princess Marya continues to find happiness in denying herself for others' sake. She suppresses her own needs, wants, and feelings in order to care for those around her. For the time being, Tolstoy upholds this as exemplary.



Princess Marya's faith in God could be said to line up with Tolstoy's belief that fate conquers the freedom of the human will. In this view, human beings are limited in their understanding and influence over human events; their perspective is merely partial. They cope with suffering and unknowing by acknowledging that some higher force—in Marya's belief, God—controls outcomes. For Marya, God's will is always loving, even if his actions are inscrutable to human understanding.



Always worried about her brother's spiritual condition, Princess Marya can see that his outlook on life has changed. However, people constantly try to reduce love to categories that make sense, and that prevents Marya from seeing how Andrei could be happy with Natasha. Even though Andrei tries to protect his sister from their father's moods, Marya ends up in the middle again.



Princess Marya's life continues much as before. However, the people of God have become her deepest joy. It's obvious to her that most people suffer and strive for fleeting, earthly forms of happiness, instead of focusing their efforts on eternity. Only the poor, wandering pilgrims choose a different way of life.

Princess Marya has deeper insight into the nature of happiness than most characters do, seeing that there's only so much contentment that worldly things can give. In fact, she thinks it's better to forgo earthbound pleasures entirely.



Princess Marya especially loves a 50-year-old pilgrim named Fedosyushka, who has wandered barefoot and in chains for decades. One night, Fedosyushka's stories inspire Marya to become a wanderer herself. Her confessor approves of this idea, so she begins quietly making preparations. But each time she gathers her resolve to leave, she feels renewed love for her father and her little nephew Coco, and she weeps over her sinful affections.

Princess Marya encounters an obstacle to her dream of becoming a wandering pilgrim—her affection for her family is too strong. Though Marya sees this love as sinful, Tolstoy hints that, as admirable as Marya is otherwise, her love has become too detached from human relationships.



VOLUME 2, PART 4: CHAPTERS 1–6

The main attraction of military service is its "obligatory and irreproachable idleness." Nikolai Rostov discovers this for himself after 1807, when he takes over from Denisov as squadron commander of the Pavlogradsky regiment. His fellow hussars love him for his good nature, and he loves the predictability of military life. However, in 1810, his mother persuades him to come home because their affairs are a mess, and his father's steward Mitenka takes advantage of him. Nikolai feels obligated to do so. He gets approval for a leave and, after the brigade throws a big party for him, he journeys to Otradnoe.

Nikolai doesn't love the army because he loves fighting; rather, regimental life provides a built-in structure that gives daily life a meaningful order, even if the lifestyle is sometimes "idle." But "real" life outside the regiment keeps impinging on his army career. Like Pierre's struggle to adhere to Masonic principles in a messy world, Nikolai must also learn how to live well in the unpredictable outside world.



By the time he reaches Otradnoe, Nikolai is eager to see his family. He finds his parents much the same, but fretful about their affairs; Sonya, now 20, still exudes love for Nikolai. He chats with Natasha about her engagement and, seeing her unflappable calm, feels skeptical that the marriage will take place. Countess Rostov secretly agrees with Nikolai, believing that there's nothing legitimately keeping Prince Andrei abroad and away from Natasha.

Back at home, some things, like Sonya, have stayed predictably the same; others have changed. Yet, given her calm, Nikolai finds it hard to believe that his passionate sister really cares for Prince Andrei.



A few days after his arrival, Nikolai loses his temper while dealing with Mitenka. Disgusted with worldly business, he takes up hunting instead. One misty September day, Nikolai and his kennelman Danilo decide to hunt for a family of wolves in the Otradnoe woods. Just before they set out, Natasha and Petya, who's now 13, burst into Nikolai's study, hoping to come along. Despite Nikolai's protests, Natasha orders Danilo to saddle horses for them. The hunting party, with 130 dogs, sets out across the muddy fields.

At home, Nikolai finds it difficult to adjust to the expectations of civilian society. Hunting, though it's an idle gentleman's pursuit on one hand, becomes a way for him to channel his desire for a meaningful life in peacetime, in the absence of another occupation.



Before they reach the woods, Nikolai's party comes across a distant relative and neighbor who's hunting, too. They decide to combine their packs. Count Rostov also joins the hunt, though he's most interested in chatting with his valet. Meanwhile, Nikolai stands in his appointed position, praying that the wolf will cross his path. Just as he's resigned himself to his usual bad luck, he sees an old wolf trotting across the field towards him. The dogs corner the wolf in a ditch, and when Nikolai sees his favorite old dog, Karai, gripping the wolf by the throat, he feels it's the happiest moment of his life.

After Nikolai helps Danilo truss up the animal, the hunt continues. Nikolai sees an unfamiliar group chasing foxes in a nearby field. A fight breaks out between Ivan, one of Nikolai's hunters, and Ilagin, a neighboring hunter with whom the Rostovs have a pending lawsuit. Ivan, sporting a black eye, breathlessly explains to Nikolai that one of the Rostovs' dogs took down the fox, but that Ilagin, who had allowed his men to hunt on land traditionally hunted by the Rostovs, has claimed the fox as *his* quarry. Nikolai has never met Ilagin, but, "as usual, knowing no middle way" in his feelings, he regards the man as an enemy and rides toward him expecting to settle the matter with violence. But, struck by Ilagin's profuse apology, Nikolai accepts an invitation to hunt the other man's property.

Suddenly, a swift hare takes off, pursued by baying hounds and borzois. Ilagin, Nikolai, Natasha, and Nikolai's uncle follow. Ilagin's prized dog Yerza nearly catches the hare, then loses its footing and somersaults. Nikolai's beloved dog Milka overtakes Yerza, to Nikolai's delight, but she, too, comes up short. Then the uncle's dog, Rugai, overtakes both dogs and chases down the hare. The uncle claims the rabbit, chattering with awkward excitement. As they all ride onward, Nikolai and Ilagin gradually regain their "sham indifference."

VOLUME 2, PART 4: CHAPTERS 7–13

The hunt has taken Nikolai so far from home that he agrees to stop by his uncle's house in a nearby village. Natasha and Petya join them. When the uncle's servants see a lady on horseback, they unabashedly surround her and make awed comments about her sidesaddle riding, "like a Tartar woman." Nikolai's uncle leads the guests into his small, shabby house. Natasha and Nikolai sit on a sofa, along with the muddy dog, and laugh merrily for no particular reason. Their uncle's housekeeper, a plump, graceful woman of 40 named Anisya Fyodorovna, brings in generously laden trays of food.

Though his family feels differently, hunting is more than a sport for Nikolai. It's an example of finding happiness in everyday life—not in some intangible, abstract meaning. His complete joy when his dog catches the wolf exemplifies this. Though the whole hunting scene can be likened to battle, the bigger point isn't that hunting symbolizes something bigger, but that happiness comes in everyday, unchosen moments.



The peaceful hunt almost deteriorates into a violent encounter, as Nikolai's justice-loving nature is offended by the trespassing of traditional hunting rights (a serious matter for rural Russian estates). Nikolai is portrayed as a conventional Russian country gentleman—finding outlets for both joy and anger in the context of ordinary life and relationships.



The tense showdown between Nikolai's and Ilagin's hunting dogs—a proxy for "war"—ends up settling the conflict between the two men. Though both pretend not to be invested in the chase, they both want to win, and each knows that the other does, too. The result, with Nikolai's relative winning, is effectively a truce, allowing the men to resume living side by side in peace.



From the very Russian pastime of hunting, the setting moves to a village, giving a sense of authentic, non-aristocratic Russian life. The Tartars are a large ethnic minority native to the Russian steppes; to the frank gaze of the servants, Natasha is as wondrously foreign as they are. The modest yet inviting atmosphere is just as cheerfully strange for the Rostovs.



Natasha thinks she's never eaten more delightful food, and she listens happily as Nikolai and the uncle talk about hunting and dogs. Nikolai has always heard good things about this relative, a trustworthy eccentric who refuses government service, preferring his fields and garden. Down the hall, the uncle's coachman, Mitya, begins skillfully playing the balalaika. Natasha goes into the hall to hear better. Mitya plays the popular song "Barinya" over and over, but his listeners don't tire of it.

Natasha asks the uncle if he can play, and Anisya happily brings a dusty guitar. The uncle begins to play a familiar song, his face taking on a merry expression. When the song ends, Natasha hugs him and begs for more. When he begins the song for the third time, Natasha stands in front of him and begins to dance with instinctive Russian movements. Everyone wonders how a girl brought up by an émigré Frenchwoman could know how to dance like this, but her natural grace makes even Anisya weep with recognition.

When the uncle praises Natasha's dancing, he remarks that all she needs is a fine young husband. Nikolai says that a husband has already been chosen. Natasha wonders about her brother's choice of words—does he imply that Andrei wouldn't understand the kind of joy they're sharing here? She dismisses the thought from her mind and turns back to the singing, even trying out her uncle's guitar. When the siblings climb into the Rostovs' droshky to go home, the uncle bids Natasha goodbye with special tenderness. During the ride, Natasha tells her brother that she'll never feel as happy and peaceful as she does right now.

Count Rostov resigns from his post as marshal of the nobility due to the expenses involved. His own finances haven't improved. Life at Otradnoe is a little quieter, yet their way of life remains mostly unchanged, because it's all the Rostovs know. Nikolai maintains a huge stable of horses, the family has lavish name-day celebrations, and Count Rostov loses generous amounts at card tables. Count Rostov is aware that he's financially trapped, yet he lacks the will to disentangle himself. Countess Rostov believes the family's only hope is for Nikolai to marry a rich bride. She decides this bride should be Julie Karagin, who's now a wealthy heiress because of her brother's death.

Natasha and Nikolai relish the comforts of a "traditional" Russian home. The food, company, and atmosphere are warm, sincere, earnest, and delightful—contrasting with the pretense of society drawing rooms and balls. Tolstoy makes the scene as traditional as possible, including balalaika music (a traditional Russian stringed instrument).



Natasha was raised in Moscow to participate in aristocratic society, yet she instinctively knows how to dance with the abandon and grace of a Russian village girl. In this way Tolstoy portrays her as an archetypal Russian woman—given the opportunity, she can shed the outward trappings of "society," revealing a simple, heartfelt zest for life.



Nikolai's tone implies—in Natasha's mind, at least—that he thinks Andrei is a poor match for her. Since the scene at the uncle's house reveals Natasha's authentic self, Natasha's thoughts suggest that she harbors misgivings about Andrei herself. She seems to doubt that Andrei would understand her dance, and that any future happiness with him couldn't surpass the easy, natural joy of this day.



The Rostovs' life continues much as before, with a generous enjoyment of life that inevitably surpasses the family's limited resources. Despite their inability to live within their means, Tolstoy suggests that the Rostovs' way of life—at least the generosity behind it—is more authentically Russian than the lives of their wealthier society counterparts, for whom position is more important than happiness. Still, Countess Rostov knows that their lifestyle limits their children's possibilities.



Countess Rostov encourages Nikolai to visit the Karagins in Moscow. Nikolai balks at the idea of marrying for money instead of love. For her part, Countess Rostov dislikes the idea of Nikolai having to sacrifice for her. Yet when she sees Nikolai's growing devotion to Sonya, she feels angry. She feels even angrier because Sonya is so kind, selfless, and devoted to her benefactors. Around this time, Natasha receives another letter from Prince Andrei; a setback with his war wound prevents him from traveling home. Natasha still loves him, but she feels she is wasting away in his absence. The Rostov home has a gloomy atmosphere.

One day, over Christmas, at a dull and dreary time of day, Natasha is practically in tears over Andrei's absence and the fear that nothing in her life will change. The countess persuades Natasha to sing for them, but as she listens, she feels that there is "too much of something" in Natasha which will keep her from being happy.

Soon Petya runs in announcing that the mummers have come. Costumed servants fill the reception room with songs, dances, and games. The young people dress up in their own costumes and decide to pay a visit to a neighbor, Mrs. Melyukov. Sonya, in a Circassian outfit with a painted mustache and eyebrows, looks especially striking, and her timid persona grows bolder while she's in costume. They crowd into several troikas, the sleighs' runners squeaking over the snow. Racing one another and laughing in the frosty night, they all have a magical feeling.

Pelageya Danilovna Melyukov, a bespectacled widow, has been trying to keep her daughters entertained when the mummers arrive. Everyone is delighted with the costumes, dancing, and games. The Rostovs stay for supper, and Pelageya Danilovna tells the young people a method of fortune-telling: if a girl hears banging in a barn, it's a bad sign, but if she hears the sound of pouring grain, it's a good sign. Boldly, Sonya says she would try this.

Something about the costumes and merriment has made Sonya glow more than usual, and Nikolai notices. When Sonya puts on her coat to walk to the barn, Nikolai runs outside, thinking he's been a fool and now determined to intercept her. He waits by the barn, and she notices him when she's just a few steps away, running to him at once. He's costumed in a woman's dress. Nikolai embraces Sonya, and they kiss in the moonlight, murmuring each other's names.

Though he'd do anything to help his family, idealistic Nikolai dislikes society's standards for a "good" marriage. Countess Rostov is likewise torn: she wants her son to be happy, is committed to what she thinks is best for him, and also resents having to break the heart of someone as innocent as Sonya. Meanwhile, Natasha's life stands still, her happiness postponed to some indefinite future.



The countess suspects that Natasha's exuberant love of life will end up being an obstacle—that she won't be able to bear life's heartaches. Because Natasha is associated with the "Russian" soul, this suggests that this "too much of something" is characteristic of Russian people generally.



On festive occasions like the Christmas season, disguised figures called mummers would travel from house to house offering entertainment. Circassians were a Northern Caucasian people who were forced to migrate to the Middle East during a long war with Russia in the 1800s. In the story, Sonya's costume isn't seen as anything offensive. It's just part of the feeling of stepping into a different world and being festively out of character.



The costumed atmosphere, as well as being in somebody else's home, gives Sonya an unusual boldness. It's a very different environment from a party in Moscow or Petersburg, complete with folk customs instead of political gossip.



Because the atmosphere has taken the young people away from their everyday problems, the usual obstacles—like Sonya's status as a poor, dependent cousin—seem to have vanished. Their costumed embrace highlights this even more and suggests that it won't last—they're not entirely themselves, and even if the affection is real, it can only be expressed within a fantasy.



As they head home, Natasha picks up on something between Nikolai and Sonya and insists that they share a sleigh. Nikolai drives home more slowly, gazing at Sonya and remembering their kiss. At one point, he gives the reins to the coachman and jumps onto the runners of Natasha's sleigh to tell her what happened. She heartily approves. He jumps back into his own sleigh and sits with the smiling, mustached Circassian who will become his wife.

At home, Dunyasha has set up mirrors in Natasha's room. Natasha and Sonya peer into the mirrors for signs of their future. After a few minutes, Sonya moves away, covering her eyes. She didn't see anything, but pressed by Natasha, she haltingly claims to have seen Andrei with a cheerful face. As she talks about it, Sonya begins to think she *did* see Andrei in the mirror. Feeling frightened that she'll never see Andrei again, Natasha goes to bed and lies awake for a long time.

After Christmas, Nikolai tells his mother that he loves Sonya and intends to marry her. Though Countess Rostov has been expecting this, she tells Nikolai that she and the Count cannot bless this marriage. The Count tries to dissuade Nikolai, too, but he's aware that the situation is his fault—if his affairs were in order, he couldn't possibly object to Sonya as Nikolai's bride.

A few days later, Countess Rostov speaks to Sonya with unexpected cruelty. She accuses Sonya of luring Nikolai and being ungrateful. Sonya feels ashamed and doesn't know what to do—she loves the Rostovs and feels indebted to them, but she knows Nikolai's happiness depends on her love for him. Nikolai speaks to his mother again, warning that he'll elope with Sonya. The Countess replies that if he does so, she won't acknowledge "this intriguer" as her daughter-in-law. Nikolai is furious, but Natasha, who's been eavesdropping, interrupts the argument before Nikolai can say anything he'll regret. She negotiates a truce whereby Nikolai agrees not to marry in secret, and the Countess agrees not to give Sonya a hard time.

In January, Nikolai returns to his regiment, planning to put his affairs in order so that he can resign from the service and marry Sonya. Meanwhile, the Countess falls ill from the emotional strain. The Count needs to sell his Moscow estate in order to rectify his finances, but the Countess's ill health prevents this. Sonya feels distraught about it all. Natasha, meanwhile, feels more tormented than ever by Andrei's absence. From his letters, it seems he's living an exciting life abroad while she languishes in the country. She sends him dull, dutiful letters in return. Finally, at the end of January, the Count takes Natasha and Sonya to Moscow with him, leaving the Countess at Otradnoe to recover.

Traveling home in the mummers' costumes, free from everyday constraints, the young people continue to dwell in a fantasy for the time being. Nikolai even imagines he has the freedom to marry Sonya, which he knows to be untrue in everyday life.



In a scene which will have significance much later, the Rostov girls try to tell their fortunes. They don't really see anything in the mirrors; Sonya just tells Natasha what she wants to hear. With this, Tolstoy isn't undermining his argument about fate, but rather suggesting that human desires are mysteriously entangled with what's foreordained.



The reactions of the Count and Countess highlight the constraining role of social expectations. A relatively impoverished noble family like the Rostovs is in an especially difficult position because Nikolai needs to marry "well," yet few well-off families would be interested in a connection with the Rostovs.



The burden of the Rostovs' position falls perhaps most cruelly on Sonya. She can't help the situation—she's in love with Nikolai, but she's completely dependent on the family's charity and for that reason has nothing to offer them from a social perspective. Countess Rostov projects her anxiety and guilt about the situation onto Sonya, and the mess creates tension between mother and son.



The Rostovs' winter began with happiness and hope—Nikolai's hunting trip, Natasha's dance at her uncle's, the costume party at Christmas—but it ends on a subdued, doubtful note. Illness, separation, and uncertainty loom over the family—especially the question of whether either of the children's marriages will come to pass, given the pressures of society and distance.



VOLUME 2, PART 5: CHAPTERS 1–4

After Prince Andrei and Natasha get engaged, Pierre feels like he can't go on with life as it is. His mentor Iosif Alexeevich has died, and though Pierre remains convinced of the truths of Masonry, he now finds it pointless. He starts drinking and partying with bachelors again, and when H el ene reprimands him, he moves to Moscow in order to avoid these vices.

Arriving in Moscow, Pierre feels he's come home again. He fits in here, embraced as a good-natured, generous eccentric. He supports every cause (though he's broke), he's the life of every party, and he charms ladies without flirting. Seven years ago, when he first came home to Russia, he would never have believed that life would turn out like this. He'd wanted to become a Napoleon-like figure, to perfect himself, and to liberate the peasants. Now he's exactly the type of retired Moscow gentleman he once loved to denounce.

When he stops to think about it, Pierre senses that everybody else is aware of life's fundamental hypocrisy, yet they refuse to acknowledge it. He suffers from a characteristically Russian belief in the existence of goodness and truth while simultaneously seeing evil and feeling powerless before it. So he passes his days in "chatter, reading, and wine." After a couple bottles of wine, life's questions no longer feel so terrifying.

That winter Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky comes to Moscow with Princess Marya. Emperor Alexander has fallen out of favor, and Prince Nikolai becomes a central figure in Moscow's government opposition. He has aged significantly and lately shows signs of senility. Though outsiders still hold the Prince in awe, Princess Marya suffers under his rule. City life holds no joys for her, she attends no parties, and she has no suitors or friends. Even Mlle Bourienne has become disagreeable to her, and despite their long correspondence, Julie Karagin seems a stranger to her. (Julie is now a wealthy, eligible woman who spends most of her time on society pleasures.)

At this point, it's unclear whether Pierre has feelings for Natasha or simply despairs over the inescapable unhappiness of his marriage. Either way, when he feels aimless, Pierre falls into bad habits, suggesting it's difficult to live a good life in the absence of a clear belief in life's meaning.



When he was younger, Pierre wanted his life to mean something. Yet, years later, he's living in idleness. He's kind and generous, but he doesn't know how to direct these virtues in a productive way. He seems to believe that unless he achieves greatness (being like Napoleon), he can't be useful to society. Tolstoy hints that Pierre is missing the point and that cultivating personal virtue is valuable for its own sake.



The tragedy of Pierre's situation is that he is actually more sensitive to life's mysteries, especially its pain, than almost anyone else, yet he suppresses his questions through meaningless activities, no longer sure where to look for the answers. Outwardly, he now fits smoothly into society, but he's not content there.



Outside the familiar environment of Bald Hills, Princess Marya, too, struggles to fit in. Society life isn't meaningful for her, she's outgrown her few friendships, and home isn't a refuge for her, as Prince Nikolai's cruelty intensifies with his age.



Prince Nikolai is always in a bad mood, and whenever Princess Marya tries to fulfill her promise to Andrei to prepare her father for Andrei's marriage to Natasha, it goes poorly. Worse, as she tutors six-year-old Nikolushka, she sees her father's angry traits in herself—she becomes impatient and punishes her nephew for the least failing. But the worst thing is her father's cruelty. Because she knows that her father loves her, it makes his deliberate insults even worse. He also flirts with Mlle Bourienne in Marya's presence to provoke her. All these sufferings cause "the pride of sacrifice" to develop in Marya. Yet, at the same time, when she sees her father's frailty, she reproaches herself for judging him.

On the Prince's name-day, he only wishes to receive a few specified guests. The list doesn't include Métivier, a fashionable French doctor he's lately befriended. But the doctor pushes past Princess Marya to visit the Prince, leading the Prince to an outburst of rage. He calls Métivier a French spy. After Métivier leaves, Prince Nikolai storms at Princess Marya. He says he can't have a moment's peace with her and that she must move out— "if only some fool would marry her!"

The nearly silent meal includes some political talk, with Prince Nikolai offering an occasional grunt in response. As the evening goes on, however, Prince Nikolai grows more animated on the subject of Bonaparte. He says there's no need to meddle in European politics, but simply to maintain armed borders against Napoleon. Count Rastopchin agrees, adding that nobody dares oppose the French these days— "the French are [Russia's] gods, and our kingdom of heaven is Paris." Prince Nikolai approves of his friend's words.

Princess Marya doesn't pay much attention to the conversation. After the other guests have gone, Pierre sits and talks with Marya. He warns her that Boris has come to Moscow with the express goal of marrying a rich wife, and he's torn between pursuing her or Julie Karagin. Marya doesn't really care about that, but she longs to confide her unhappiness in Pierre because he's so kind to her. They talk about her father's ultimatum to Prince Andrei, and Marya asks Pierre what Natasha Rostov is like. Pierre can only say she's "enchanted." Marya plans to get to know Natasha in hopes of reconciling her father to this future daughter-in-law.

Tolstoy shows the complexity of Marya's personality. She's unfailingly loyal to her family, yet realistically, she treats her young nephew much as she was treated as a child, though she's ashamed of it. Always self-sacrificing, Marya begins to take pride in her own ability to forebear under oppression. And through all this, she genuinely loves her father. Like Pierre, she hasn't completely figured out the meaning of her life, and there's a sense that refusing her own happiness is backfiring, suppressing her growth.



Prince Nikolai irrationally projects all his anger onto his daughter and claims to want to be rid of her, despite his earlier reluctance to marry her off. His paranoid behavior reflects his opposition to the Emperor's pro-French policies.



An outsider to court politics, Prince Nikolai resists pro-French enthusiasm. Count Rastopchin, a statesman who later becomes a fervent anti-French propagandist, voices similar frustration with the Russian court's favoring of all things French.



Princess Marya is both oblivious and indifferent to aristocratic society's obsessions with romance and war. Her father's tyranny, and finding a way to make peace in her family, are her main preoccupations in life.



VOLUME 2, PART 5: CHAPTERS 5–10

Pierre is correct. Boris Drubetsky did indeed come to Moscow in search of a rich bride; he'd failed to find one in Petersburg, and now he struggles to choose between Princess Marya and Julie Karagin. Feeling rebuffed by Marya, he focuses his attentions on Julie who, at 27, is plain and rather melancholy. Most of the young men don't understand Julie's temperament, but Boris writes sad poems in Julie's album and reads her affecting passages from a novel. At Julie's gatherings, they look at each other as if nobody else understands them.

Anna Mikhailovna attends the Karagins' parties and gathers information about Julie's properties, which she passes to Boris. Every day, Boris tells himself he'll propose to Julie, but even though he pictures himself as the owner of her estates, he can't give up on the idea of true love. Meanwhile, Julie becomes impatient and begins to act uncharacteristically cheerful towards a new guest, Anatole Kuragin. His mother warns Boris that Prince Vassily has sent Anatole to Moscow to marry Julie, so Boris hurries to Julie's to propose.

At the Karagins', Boris starts arguing with Julie about women's inconstancy, but seeing her irritation, he rapidly shifts to declaring his love for her. She beams and forces him keep talking, making all the conventional romantic statements; Boris is getting her estates, after all. The newly engaged couple starts preparing for their wedding and a home in Petersburg.

At the end of January, Count Rostov arrives in Petersburg with Natasha and Sonya. They must sell the Moscow estate and prepare for Natasha's wedding; Prince Andrei is expected back in town any day. They stay with Marya Dmitrievna Akhrosimov, an industrious, opinionated widow. After buying Natasha's wedding trousseau, Marya Dmitrievna takes her goddaughter aside and tells her she must win over her crotchety future father-in-law, since he's still against Andrei's marriage. To that end, she's arranged a meeting between Natasha and Princess Marya. Natasha resents this.

The next day, Count Rostov and Natasha go to see Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky. The Count is nervous, but Natasha feels confident that the Bolkonskys will love her—everybody else does, after all. When they arrive at the Bolkonskys, there's a commotion, and the Prince refuses to receive them. When Princess Marya comes out, her face is blotchy from nervousness, and she struggles to appear casual and friendly. She dislikes Natasha from the start, thinking her flighty and vain. Deep down, though, she's been prejudiced against Natasha all along, envying her youth and Andrei's love for her. She's also afraid that her agitated father will make a scene.

Boris looks at all situations in terms of their potential for his personal advancement, and courtship is no exception; he is more than willing to take on a persona in order to win a desirable woman's affection.



Even though Boris cares most about social advancement, just as Anna Mikhailovna raised him to do, he desires an authentic, loving marriage deep down. But with schemers like his mother and Prince Vassily constantly working behind the scenes, it's necessary for an ambitious young man to move quickly.



Humorously, Boris changes his mood as rapidly as he accuses Julie of doing. Julie, too, obviously accepts that their marriage is a financial transaction more than anything else. They are a conventional "society" couple, seemingly made for each other.



According to Marya Dmitrievna, it's part of Natasha's role to win over Andrei's father, but Natasha takes a more idealistic view of the marriage. She hasn't grasped the unavoidable realities of the situation, like the fact that she'll have responsibilities to the other Bolkonskys and will be expected to care about more than her own happiness.



Natasha has always been indulged as a favorite, and she's not used to not getting her own way or working hard to win anyone over. Princess Marya, in her own way, is used to coming first in her family—at least, she's proud of her role in mediating for her father and being Andrei's confidant. Each sees the other as an interloper.



After a few uncomfortable minutes, to Marya's horror, Prince Nikolai walks in wearing a dressing gown and nightcap. He awkwardly repeats, "As God is my witness, I didn't know [you were here]," then leaves. Mlle Bourienne tries to smooth over the awkwardness, while Natasha and the Princess look at each other uneasily. Before she leaves with her father, Natasha is further offended by Marya's fumbled attempt to speak kindly to her; she says that now isn't the time. Back at Marya Dmitrievna's, however, she sobs in her room, longing for Andrei, while Sonya tries to comfort her.

That night Marya Dmitrievna takes the Rostovs to the opera. Studying her lovely appearance in the mirror, Natasha comforts herself with thoughts of Prince Andrei. When the Rostovs enter their opera box, the crowd stares at them curiously, knowing Natasha is engaged to one of Russia's most eligible men. Natasha spots Boris and Julie in their own box, evidently talking about her, with Anna Mikhailovna sitting radiantly behind them, "given over to the will of God." Suddenly, Natasha feels humiliated over the morning's events once more.

Natasha also spots Dolokhov, surrounded by Moscow's most popular young men. Recently, he's served as a minister to some Persian prince, and Moscow's ladies are now obsessed with him. Countess Bezukhov sits down in the next box, and Natasha admires her beauty. Then the overture ends, the conductor taps his baton, and everyone turns their attention to the stage.

After spending a long time in the country, Natasha is astonished by the spectacle of the opera. But the longer she watches, the more ridiculously fake it all seems. She looks around at the audience, expecting others to share her mockery, but everyone is rapt. Then she begins to feel a bit drunk in the bright, warm, heady atmosphere. When Anatole Kuragin comes in late and speaks to his sister Hélène while looking at Natasha, she notices how handsome he is.

During an intermission, Natasha notices Anatole Kuragin eyeing her and smiling affectionately in the next box. Even after the second act begins, Natasha notices Anatole watching her, and it doesn't occur to her that there's anything wrong with that. During the next intermission, Natasha is flattered that Countess Bezukhov asks to be introduced to her. Even though she can tell that Hélène is flattering her, she does it with such a natural air. She invites Natasha to come and sit in her box for the next act, so that they can get better acquainted. Natasha is thrilled. By the time the third act is over, she's cheering as loudly as everyone else.

In his growing senility, Prince Nikolai makes things as awkward as possible, topped only by Natasha's total bungling of an opportunity to smooth things over with Marya. With her passionate forthrightness, Natasha isn't prepared for delicate scenes like this. Tolstoy suggests, in fact, that like many Russians, she's too irrepressibly spontaneous to navigate such situations with the necessary subtlety.



Natasha, who normally relishes others' attentions, feels painfully exposed at the opera; being known as Andrei's fiancée (though it's technically not public knowledge) is different from being a desirable single girl. Society is the place for people like Anna Mikhailovna, who know how to manipulate others to their liking (no matter how she smugly convinces herself it's all God's will).



When Dolokhov was last seen in the story, he had just manipulated Natasha's brother Nikolai out of thousands, but she doesn't know this. Likewise, she doesn't know much more about Pierre's wife except that she's an exemplary lady of society. In other words, Natasha is dangerously innocent. The beginning of the opera performance suggests that a drama is about to unfold in the audience as well as onstage.



Relatively sheltered from society, Natasha sees through the absurdity of the spectacle before her at first. But the atmosphere begins to have an effect on her, suggesting that the trappings of society can manipulate those who are innocent of its ways.



In keeping with her innocence, Natasha doesn't pick up on any danger signs from Anatole, or from Anatole's equally dangerous sister Helene. And now that she's grown accustomed to the performance style of the opera, it's also implied that she's become more susceptible to the manipulations of those offstage, too.



During the next intermission, Anatole enters Hélène's box. Hélène introduces him to Natasha. Natasha is struck by his simple good nature, which contrasts with his somewhat notorious reputation in society. She enjoys his frank admiration, yet she also fears the sudden intimacy she feels between them—she's never felt that with any man before. She's uneasy, yet the warmth of his smile wins her over. By the time she returns to the Rostovs' box, Natasha feels that Prince Andrei, Princess Marya, and her country life are far away.

In the opera's fourth act, a devil sings. All this time, Natasha can't help watching Anatole, and she feels excited and tormented by him. After the opera, he helps Natasha into her carriage, and the press of his hand thrills her. After the Rostovs get home, Natasha suddenly feels horrified and confused by her interactions with Anatole. At the opera, it had made sense, but now, it seems incomprehensible. She convinces herself that she didn't provoke Anatole's attentions and that her love for Prince Andrei remains intact, yet at the same time, she fears the purity of that love has been lost.

VOLUME 2, PART 5: CHAPTERS 11–13

Anatole Kuragin is living in Moscow because, back in Petersburg, Prince Vassily kicked him out. He's spent over 20,000 a year in cash and accumulated the same in debts. Prince Vassily agrees to pay off these debts, but in return, Anatole must go to Moscow—Prince Vassily has gotten him a job as the commander in chief's adjutant—and try to find a good match. Anatole agrees and stays with Pierre, who grows to like him.

Though nobody but his close friends know it, Anatole is already married. Two years ago, a Polish landowner had forced Anatole to marry his daughter while Anatole was stationed nearby with his regiment. Naturally unreflective, Anatole doesn't believe he's ever done anything wrong in his life, and he feels entitled to a high position in society. He never thinks about the consequences of his actions for other people, and because of this, he enjoys a clear conscience.

Anatole likes Dolokhov, while Dolokhov, who habitually manipulates others, befriends and uses Anatole for his connections. After the opera, Anatole analyzes Natasha's beauty to Dolokhov and decides he's going to toy with her for a while. Dolokhov warns him it's not a good idea, because he's gotten in trouble over a young girl before. Anatole just laughs and says it's not as if such a thing could happen twice.

Natasha finds it easy to trust Anatole, who's a master manipulator. The Rostovs' sincerity contrasts starkly with the Kuragins' amorality. Natasha's experience with the Kuragins makes her feel initiated into a different part of society, even alienated from the comparatively innocent environment that's natural to her.



The devil's song suggests a loss of innocence. Outside the suggestive atmosphere of the opera, where drama mixed confusedly with reality, Natasha feels that something irrevocable has happened that she can't quite understand. In reality, nothing has happened, but doubts have been planted in Natasha's mind, already unsettled by the Bolkonskys' dislike.



Anatole is still up to his dissipated ways. He has a gift for winning over people more innocent than he is, like Pierre.



Anatole's situation is even worse than Natasha suspects. He is dangerous especially because, unlike Pierre or Andrei, he has no conscience and believes that society owes him. Tolstoy argues that aristocratic society encourages manipulation of others; Anatole takes this behavior to an extreme.



Dolokhov's attitude suggests that there's no end to the depths of manipulation that can occur in society; unlike Anatole, Dolokhov has a sense of right and wrong and simply doesn't care.



The day after the opera, Natasha waits uneasily for Prince Andrei. She feels apprehensive and doesn't know why. Her thoughts of Andrei are mixed up with thoughts of Princess Marya, old Prince Nikolai, the opera, and her guilty, flustered feelings about Anatole Kuragin.

After church on Sunday, Marya Dmitrievna announces resolutely that she's going to visit Prince Nikolai and have a talk with him regarding Natasha. While she's gone, Countess Bezukhov stops in to invite the Rostovs to a soiree that night. Natasha feels special with such an important lady praising her. Before H el ene leaves, she tells Natasha that her brother Anatole is quite in love with her and that she's sure Natasha's fianc e doesn't want her to be secluded and bored. Knowing H el ene is married to a moral fellow like Pierre, Natasha figures everything must be all right. When Marya Dmitrievna gets home, she discourages the outing, but she's so weary from her encounter with Prince Nikolai that she doesn't fight it.

That night Count Rostov takes Natasha and Sonya to the Bezukhovs' and is unhappy to find a frivolous crowd there. He keeps a close eye on Natasha and, when everyone sits down for the actress's performance, grabs the chair next to her before Anatole can get it. Mlle George emerges in costume and recites French verses about a woman's illicit love for her son. Natasha doesn't understand the performance, but again feels she's in an "insane world" where it's impossible to know what's good or bad. After the recitation, Anatole comes over and praises Natasha's beauty, but the Count ushers her away.

Anatole dances with Natasha and tells her he loves her. She's astonished and struggles to speak, then finally tells him that he mustn't say such things because she's engaged. He says he doesn't care about that. Later, Natasha finds herself alone with Anatole in a sitting room. He blocks her from leaving the room and squeezes her hands painfully, and she can find nothing to say. Just before H el ene returns to the room, he presses his lips to Natasha's. That night, she's unable to sleep, wondering which man she loves. She concludes that she loves both, and that if she loves Anatole, it must mean that he's kind and good.

Natasha is confused and disoriented by what's happened with the Bolkonskys and at the opera. Inexperienced, she doesn't know how to distinguish between what she feels for the two men.



Natasha's innocence is clearly on display here. Trusting Pierre's goodness, she doesn't know how he could be married to someone immoral, and Helene offers Natasha a questionable pretext for welcoming Anatole's attentions. It's a good example of the layered hypocrisies and manipulations in aristocratic society.



Mlle George is reciting lines from the play Ph edre, by Jean Racine, her most famous role. Tolstoy bases this character on the historical actress Marguerite-Josephine Weymer, who performed in Moscow around this time. The performance gives Natasha a sense of moral disorientation that compounds what happened at the opera. The influences of society offer manifold corruptions, and Natasha is too innocent to resist their pull.



Natasha is disturbingly manipulated by the Kuragins; they appear to be working together to ensnare her. She's so innocent that she assumes that such attentions cannot be ill-intended and that any object of her love must be worthy of it.



VOLUME 2, PART 5: CHAPTERS 14–17

The next morning, Natasha tries hard to act normal. After breakfast, Marya Dmitrievna calls Natasha and Count Rostov over. She tells them what happened at the Bolkonskys' yesterday—she and Prince Nikolai got into a shouting match. She recommends that the Rostovs return to Otradnoe and wait until Prince Andrei returns and sets things straight. She hands Natasha a letter from Princess Marya. Reluctantly, Natasha reads Marya's kind letter, which asks her not to think ill of Prince Nikolai. Natasha tries to recall her former devotion to Prince Andrei, yet now, just a day later, it's overshadowed by her new passion for Anatole.

That evening, a maid hands Natasha another letter, looking secretive. It's from Anatole. When she reads the passionate letter, Natasha believes her own feelings are echoed in it. Anatole promises that if Natasha only says "yes," love will triumph, and he'll carry her off. Natasha reads the letter over and over and avoids company, claiming she has a headache.

When Sonya gets home that evening, she finds Natasha asleep in her room with the letter lying nearby. She reads it. She bursts into tears and wakes her friend. Natasha immediately tells Sonya that she loves Anatole. When Sonya asks how she can reject Prince Andrei, Natasha impatiently tells her not to say stupid things. Though it's only been a few days, she feels as if she's loved Anatole forever; Sonya doesn't understand such love.

Horrified, Sonya threatens to tell on Natasha; she feels ashamed for her friend. If Anatole isn't comfortable seeing Natasha openly, she insists, there must be reasons for that. Natasha refuses to hear this, sends Sonya out, and writes back to Princess Marya. She writes that Prince Andrei had given her full freedom, and that she now knows she can't be his wife. It all seems very clear to her.

On one of their final days in Moscow, Natasha tries to talk to Sonya about Anatole, but they end up arguing about how Natasha will "ruin" herself. Sonya watches Natasha closely for the next few days. She notices that Natasha signals to someone outside the window, and that she's behaving distractedly. It dawns on her that Natasha must be planning to elope with Anatole. Count Rostov is away dealing with the Moscow estate, and Sonya doesn't know what to do. But she's determined to prove her loyalty to the Rostovs, who've done so much for her.

Natasha is confused and torn between her affection for Andrei, her awkward reception by the Bolkonskys, and her new feelings for Anatole. It all goes to show her innocence and inexperience in a status-driven, often amoral society.



Natasha is too young to distinguish between love and passion. Anatole doesn't promise Natasha anything real or concrete, just targets her innocence by vaguely extolling "love."



When Sonya quite sensibly confronts her, Natasha cruelly claims her cousin is being the immature one—a heartless jibe at Sonya's love for Nikolai. Her obsession with Anatole leads her to scorn one of the truest friends she has.



Again, Sonya is the one showing wise discernment in this situation. But, befitting her immature passion, Natasha has been convinced by her fit of her emotion that what she's doing is right. Her manipulated feelings lead her to an irrevocable step.



Perhaps because of her vulnerable status as a subject of family charity, Sonya is more aware of the consequences of indiscretion than her spoiled cousin. Showing considerable courage, she's willing to harm her relationship with her best friend in order to spare her and her beloved family those consequences.



Anatole has been staying with Dolokhov, and together they've made a plan to abduct Natasha. Natasha is supposed to sneak out of the house late in the evening. Anatole will conceal her in a troika and drive them to Kamenka, a village 40 miles away, where a defrocked priest will be waiting to marry them. After that they'll flee abroad. He's got documents and money prepared, and two witnesses are waiting.

Anatole's intended actions could get them both in tremendous trouble—he's proposing to enter a bigamous marriage, something neither the law nor the church would recognize. It would also effectively ruin Natasha's reputation—again showing that, indulged throughout her life as well as sheltered, she's not used to looking out for her best interests.



Anatole paces Dolokhov's house, smiling. Dolokhov urges him to drop the plan—his marriage will be discovered, and Anatole will end up in criminal court. Anatole refuses to consider the future. After his troika driver arrives, Anatole speeds off to Marya Dmitrievna's. But when he runs to the back porch to find Natasha, he's met instead by a huge footman, who says that he must take Anatole to the mistress of the house. He's been betrayed. Anatole dodges the footman and runs.

In a dramatic finale to this subplot, Anatole's elopement with Natasha is foiled at the last moment. For the time being, however, Anatole still evades being held accountable for his reckless actions.



VOLUME 2, PART 5: CHAPTERS 18–22

The elopement plan was foiled when, earlier that evening, Marya Dmitrievna found Sonya crying in the hallway and got the truth out of her. She immediately locked Natasha into her room. Now, the abductors having run away, Marya Dmitrievna paces thoughtfully for a while and finally, about midnight, goes to Natasha. She demands that Natasha listen and tells her that she's disgraced herself, but that for Count Rostov's sake, she'll conceal what's happened. When she lifts Natasha's face toward her, both she and Sonya are surprised by the absence of tears. Natasha wrenches herself away and angrily demands to be left alone.

Natasha's actions would be devastating for her future as well as for her family's already precarious status. Marya Dmitrievna's willingness to conceal the matter shows her shrewdness as well as her merciful attitude toward Natasha.



That night Natasha lapses into a shivering fever, ignoring everyone's efforts to comfort her. The next day Count Rostov returns, cheerful due to the successful conclusion of his estate business. When he finds Natasha ill and sees Sonya's and Marya Dmitrievna's embarrassed faces, he knows something must have happened between Natasha and her fiancé. But he can't bear to think of anything shameful happening to Natasha, so he asks no further questions.

Count Rostov continues to show the indulgent attitude that has helped bring about Natasha's situation in the first place, refusing to be involved in what's happened. It's the same well-meaning negligence that has contributed to the family's poor social status.



Pierre has been avoiding Natasha, to whom he's attracted, but when Marya Dmitrievna sends him a note, he comes at once. On the way, he passes Anatole, who looks calm and untroubled. Pierre envies him. Marya Dmitrievna swears Pierre to secrecy and tells him Natasha's whole story. Pierre is flabbergasted. He's known Natasha since she was a child, and he's always thought her sweet and innocent. He tells Marya Dmitrievna that Anatole is already married.

Pierre's behavior contrasts strongly with Anatole's. He has real feelings for Natasha, but unlike Anatole, who isn't remotely conscientious, he shows scrupulous integrity.



Marya Dmitrievna is afraid that, if Count Rostov or Prince Andrei learn what's happened, they'll challenge Anatole to a duel. She asks Pierre to order his brother-in-law to leave Moscow, and he agrees. He also talks with Count Rostov, who's troubled and flustered over Natasha's refusal of Prince Andrei. He'd never been thrilled about the match, but he can't believe Natasha took this sudden step without telling anyone.

Sonya intercepts Pierre on his way out. She says that Marya Dmitrievna has told Natasha about Anatole's marriage, but she's refusing to believe it without Pierre's confirmation. On his honor, Pierre tells Natasha that Anatole is married. Unable to speak, she waves them all away. Then Pierre goes in search of Anatole. Finding him in H el ene's drawing room, he furiously pulls Anatole into his study and threatens him with a paperweight when he refuses to speak. Then he demands Anatole's letters from Natasha, orders him to leave Moscow, and warns him to keep the whole thing quiet.

Pierre asks Anatole if he can understand that there's more to life than his own pleasure—other people's lives are at stake. It's one thing to toy with a woman like H el ene, but to deceive a girl like Natasha is entirely different. Anatole trembles and demands that Pierre retract these words. Pierre asks his forgiveness, but when he sees a familiar feeble smile on Anatole's face, he storms from the room, saying, "Oh, mean, heartless breed!" Anatole leaves town the next day.

Meanwhile, Natasha is very sick. The night she learned that Anatole was married, she swallowed a little bit of arsenic, then grew frightened and confessed what she'd done. She's been given an antidote, but she can't leave Moscow until she regains strength. Meanwhile, rumors spread around town about the attempted abduction, and Pierre does his best to quash these.

Pierre gets a note from Prince Andrei, who's just arrived in Moscow. As soon as Andrei arrived, Prince Nikolai gave him Natasha's note to Princess Marya stating her refusal of Andrei. (Mlle Bourienne had stolen it from Marya.) He's also heard the rumors about Natasha's abduction, happily embellished by his father. When Pierre arrives at the Bolkonskys', he expects to find Andrei dejected, but Princess Marya tells him her brother took things well. She, too, seems relieved.

The situation could have far worse fallout for the Rostovs and Bolkonskys, since Anatole's actions are considered to be an affront to Natasha's honor and therefore to her family and fianc e as well.



Pierre has the greatest integrity of nearly any character. He's already established himself as someone in Natasha's life who can be trusted to tell her the truth. His anger at Anatole also suggests that he takes an insult to her honor very personally and takes it upon himself to protect her reputation and happiness.



The difference between Pierre and Anatole is clear: unlike Pierre, Anatole is indifferent to matters of honor and the impact of his actions on those more vulnerable than himself. Pierre is becoming more discerning in his dealings with such men—once he might have been fooled by Anatole's feigned anger, but no longer.



Distraught and fearful of the repercussions for her own and her family's reputation, Natasha makes a suicide attempt, though even now, it seems her desire to live is not entirely crushed. Pierre continues looking out for her.



The abduction attempt happened just before Prince Andrei arrived back in town—highlighting just how impulsively Natasha has behaved, throwing aside potential happiness on a whim. The rest of the Bolkonskys are glad to put the engagement behind them, as they never saw it as a good match to begin with.



In the study, Pierre finds Prince Andrei in an animated political argument with his father and another prince about Speransky, who's been accused of treason. He chats superficially with Pierre about his travels abroad, then resumes the argument. Pierre senses that he's trying to stifle his pain. After the other guest leaves, Andrei takes Pierre to his room and asks him to confirm what's happened with Natasha. He gives Pierre Natasha's letters and portrait. When Pierre says that Natasha had been deathly ill, he coldly wishes her well. He tells Pierre he can't forgive Natasha or be noble enough to marry her anyway. Over dinner with Prince Nikolai and Princess Marya, Pierre sees that the Bolkonskys hold the Rostovs in great contempt.

That evening, Pierre gives Marya Dmitrievna the letters from Prince Andrei. Natasha has gotten dressed and asks to see Pierre. He finds Natasha pale and flustered. She tells Pierre that Andrei had charged her to turn to Pierre in any difficulty. She now begs Pierre to ask Andrei to forgive her, though she knows there's no hope for marriage. Pierre pities Natasha. He promises to do this, but he asks whether Natasha truly loved Anatole. Natasha starts to cry and says she doesn't know. Pierre cries, too. He kisses her hand and encourages her that her whole life is still ahead of her. In fact, if he were a free man, he'd propose to her at this moment. Overcome with gratitude, Natasha flees the room.

Pierre leaves Marya Dmitrievna's, thinking about Natasha's grateful look. He feels great tenderness toward her. Compared to that feeling, everything in the world seems base. Only the starry **sky** seems exalted. As Pierre is driven home, he looks up and sees the long, white **comet** of 1812 streaking across the sky at that very moment. The comet looks as if it's paused in its course to play among the stars. To Pierre, it symbolizes the new blossoming in his soul.

VOLUME 3, PART 1: CHAPTERS 1–7

Starting at the end of 1811, western European forces begin to concentrate on Russia's borders. On June 12th, 1812, war begins— "an event [...] contrary to human reason[.]" With "naïve assurance," later historians name several causes—the offense against the duke of Oldenburg, the failure of the Continental System, Napoleon's power hunger, and more. Therefore, from historians' perspective, a subtle difference—more skillful diplomacy, perhaps—could have prevented war.

Because of his own feelings for Natasha, Pierre finds it hard to believe that Prince Andrei doesn't appear more heartbroken. It seems that Natasha's actions have just confirmed what the Bolkonskys already thought about the Rostov family—that they're beneath the Bolkonskys in both class and character.



Pierre's tenderheartedness toward Natasha contrasts with Prince Andrei's coldness. He feels deeply for her, even though she's behaved so foolishly, and he confesses his feelings for her. Natasha doesn't seem to understand why she's behaved as she did. She doesn't yet understand the difference between passion and mature love. On the other hand, Pierre understands that real love accepts a person as they are, which is why he can love Natasha despite her glaring flaws.



Even knowing that he can't marry Natasha, Pierre finds great joy and spiritual renewal simply in loving her. As Nikolai and Andrei have done at moments of exaltation, Pierre looks skyward and sees a symbol of what he's feeling—the great comet of 1811–1812. It doesn't just signify romantic love, but the growth of Pierre's soul because of unselfish love.



Throughout the novel, Tolstoy offers more general reflections on war and develops his theory of history. The Continental System was a blockade imposed by Napoleon between England and the European continent. Until 1810, Russia participated in Napoleon's blockade. In 1812, Napoleon declared war to force Russia back into the blockade, claiming Russia had betrayed the treaties made at Tilsit years earlier. Other factors included France's annexation of the duchy of Oldenburg; the duke was a relative of the Russian imperial family. Tolstoy suggests that while historians confidently name clear-cut causes of war, they're "naïve" in doing so. Tolstoy also reiterates his belief that war is essentially irrational.



That's also how it seemed to the people of the time, and even to Napoleon himself. Depending on who you asked—Prince Oldenburg, the English Parliament, merchants, or diplomats—everyone would have blamed a different historical circumstance. To us, however, it's impossible to explain how any one of these circumstances necessitated the killing of Christians by other Christians. In reality, "billions of causes" coincided to bring about war, and no single cause would have sufficed.

Each human being's life is two-sided—a personal life and an "elemental" life in which a person merely fulfills what's prescribed for them. While a person consciously lives for himself, that person also serves as an instrument in the unfolding of history. The higher a person's social standing, the more interconnected with other people's lives, the more obvious is the "inevitability" of his actions. Even kings are the "slaves of history" whose lives are just instruments. History's so-called "great men" give their names to events, but these events are actually the product of the whole course of history.

On May 29th, 1812, Napoleon leaves Dresden and progresses through Poland, met by enthusiastic crowds at every stop. When he reaches the Russian border, to everyone's surprise, he orders his troops to cross the Niemen. On June 12th, the army enters Russia, calling "Long live the Emperor!" as they go. The following day, Napoleon himself crosses the river to rapturous cries from his men. At the river Vilia, a group of zealous Polish cavalrymen, to show their devotion, attempt to swim across without finding a safe place to ford. At least 40 drown, while Napoleon obliviously paces on the bank.

For the past month, Emperor Alexander has been at Vilno. His troops aren't prepared, and there's no plan, though several have been proposed. Each of the three Russian armies has a separate commander in chief, and there's no supreme commander. Meanwhile, the Emperor attends many balls and parties. The adjutant generals throw a huge dinner and ball at Count Bennigsen's country estate, including boat rides and fireworks. Emperor Alexander dances with Countess Bezukhov as Napoleon's army crosses into Russia. Boris Drubetskoy, now rich, is also there.

With the limited perspective of a given time and situation, most people favor one specific cause or another. Tolstoy questions, however, how we can look back at the overall catastrophe of war and justify the bloodbath perpetrated by people who had more commonalities than differences. And in any case, it's impossible to isolate just a few salient causes for an event as massive as war.



Tolstoy argues that, beyond what an individual is aware of, they also play a role in history's broader unfolding. The life of a prominent person like a king is connected to countless other lives. So while that person's actions look "inevitable," they're actually connected to countless other causes. Their power, in other words, isn't as encompassing as it appears to us. Even though events are attributed to famous figures, countless factors help determine those events.



The French invasion of Russia takes place on June 12th, and with this event, Napoleon begins to enter the story more consistently as a prominent character. Given Tolstoy's previous discussion of history, though, it can be expected that Napoleon won't be deified as a larger-than-life hero who singlehandedly changed history. For example, while his men obviously loved him, Napoleon's disregard for their demonstration of devotion suggests that he didn't deserve their loyalty.



As the French invasion takes place, the Russians are caught off guard not many miles away. Leadership is divided and more preoccupied with lavish entertainments than preparations for war. Even prominent society figures like Hélène and social climbers like Boris (newly married to heiress Julie Karagin) are among the celebrants.



While dancing with H el ene, Boris watches Emperor Alexander closely. He notices that Balashov, an adjutant general, receives some obviously important news. When Balashov and the Emperor step outside, Boris feels tormented, wondering how to get the news before anybody else does. He manages to overhear a snippet of conversation—that the enemy has entered Russia without a declaration of war, and that Alexander will not make peace while a single enemy remains on his soil. This makes Boris the first person to learn about the French invasion, allowing him to rise in the opinions of other important people. The next day, Emperor Alexander sends a letter to Napoleon disputing that there’s any pretext for French aggression, and that the burden is on Napoleon to withdraw and avoid war.

Emperor Alexander sends Balashov to Napoleon with his letter. He instructs Balashov to personally convey his declaration that he will not make peace as long as a single armed enemy remains in Russia. Balashov is rudely received at the French outpost and waits for a long time. Finally, just after sunrise, a yawning French colonel leads Balashov to Murat, who is now the king of Naples. Murat doesn’t understand why he’s the Neapolitan king or exactly what he’s doing in the war, but he accepts the role happily nonetheless. He walks and chats with Balashov about the war, explaining that France’s dignity is offended by the Russian demand to withdraw their troops from Prussia. Murat doesn’t accept that Napoleon is the war’s instigator.

Balashov assumes he’ll see Napoleon next, but instead, he’s taken to Marshal Davout in the next village. Davout is a cruel, determinedly gloomy man. He refuses to let Balashov deliver his message directly and takes pleasure from the resulting dismay on Balashov’s face. Balashov is forced to spend the night and speak to nobody except for Davout’s adjutant. Four days later, Balashov enters Vilno, which is now occupied by the French. He will meet with Napoleon in the same house where Emperor Alexander’s party was held four days ago.

At last, Napoleon—short and stout, majestically uniformed, with a springy step—enters the reception room where Balashov waits. Glancing briefly into Balashov’s eyes, Napoleon speaks to him quickly and confidently. He seems to think that his own will is all that matters in the world. He asserts that he has been forced into a war he never wanted and explains why he’s unhappy with the Russian government. Balashov gives his prepared speech, stating that Alexander doesn’t want war and is not cooperating with England, despite what the French think.

Constantly alert for opportunities for self-advancement, Boris puts himself in the path of important people, scrutinizes their behavior, and calculates how to use information to his own advantage. The catastrophic news of renewed war doesn’t even seem to matter greatly to him; ever ambitious, he mostly cares about how this inside scoop can elevate him above others who aren’t yet in the know.



Balashov was a historical figure who served as an adjutant general and state councilor under Emperor Alexander I; he did relay the Emperor’s reply to Napoleon in person in 1812. Murat was a longtime general and also brother-in-law of Napoleon who was rewarded with the title king of Naples (a French client state under Napoleon) in 1808. Unsurprisingly, Murat rejects the Russian perspective on the invasion.



After seeing Murat, Balashov is deliberately kept waiting for days before he’s allowed to speak to anyone else. During that time, the French continue to press into Russian territory. The site of the leisurely celebration of just a few days earlier is rapidly transformed into occupied territory.



Napoleon is immediately characterized as an arrogant, self-satisfied figure who is used to getting his own way, and believes he’s justified in asserting his own will at all times, notwithstanding the views of those around him.



Balashov remembers what the Emperor had ordered—he's to tell Napoleon that Alexander will not make peace while a single armed enemy remains on his soil. Yet, somehow, he can't bring himself to say those words. Instead he says that Alexander will make peace if the French withdraw to the other side of the Niemen. Napoleon seems to be agitated by this. He points out that, a few months ago, Alexander demanded withdrawal from Prussia, yet now he's willing to start peace negotiations if Napoleon merely crosses the Niemen. He is offended by this idea and paces, his left leg trembling, listing Alexander's weaknesses and his own strengths.

Napoleon continues to insult Alexander, the Russian army, and Russia's allies. Balashov keeps trying to speak in his sovereign's defense, but Napoleon repeatedly interrupts him. Balashov knows Napoleon is talking nonsense, yet he cowers before Napoleon's compulsive torrent of words. Napoleon yells at Balashov that he will destroy Prussia and push back Russia. He dismisses Balashov from his presence without acknowledging his protests.

To Balashov's surprise, he's invited to dine at Napoleon's table later that day, and Napoleon greets him cheerfully, apparently unembarrassed by his outburst earlier. He questions Balashov closely about Moscow, seeming oblivious to Balashov's subtle attempts to insult France. By the time dinner is over, Napoleon seems to assume that Balashov is his friend. As they have coffee in Emperor Alexander's former study, Napoleon grows heated again, declaring how he'll overthrow all of Alexander's German relatives. He tugs Balashov's ear, which is considered to be a sign of great favor in the French court. Then he sends Balashov back to Alexander with a letter of his own. War begins soon after.

VOLUME 3, PART 1: CHAPTERS 8–11

After Prince Andrei meets with Pierre in Moscow, he travels to Petersburg to meet with Prince Anatole Kuragin. Having been tipped off by his brother-in-law Pierre, Kuragin flees Petersburg, taking an army post in Moldavia. While in Petersburg, Prince Andrei meets his old general, Kutuzov, who's been appointed commander in chief in Moldavia. Prince Andrei secures an army appointment in Turkey and leaves Russia with the intention of following Kutuzov to Moldavia.

Tolstoy takes some liberty with Balashov's conversation with Napoleon. It's not clear why Balashov hesitates to give the Emperor's full ultimatum. In any case, Napoleon acts insulted by the fact that he's invested so much in the advance across the Niemen, only to be met with, in his view, a weakened Russian response. In turn, Napoleon openly insults the Emperor and plays up his own greatness. Tolstoy brings out small humanizing details, like the way Napoleon's leg trembled when he was worked up.



Even though Napoleon isn't making sense, that doesn't make him less intimidating to Balashov. Tolstoy portrays Napoleon as bombastic, with an out-of-control temper, hinting that Napoleon's reputation owes more to these characteristics than to the substance of his words.



Napoleon is further portrayed as lacking in self-awareness—or at least, he thinks everything he does is right and therefore isn't embarrassed by inconsistencies that seem obvious to everyone else. His moods are mercurial, and once he knows what he wants, he's impossible to reason with. Balashov's drawn-out errand is a pointless failure.



After Natasha's transgression, Prince Andrei acted as though he wasn't bothered. However, this clearly isn't the case, as he chooses his military postings with the object of pursuing Anatole across Europe.



Prince Andrei hopes to meet with Anatole in order to find a pretext for a duel. However, their paths don't cross in Turkey. But Prince Andrei comes to find life in Turkey easier. He's no longer burdened with thoughts of eternity, like those he first had on the field at Austerlitz. He's only concerned about the practical details of the present moment. Yet his anger at Anatole's insult continues to burn beneath the surface.

When he's transferred to the Western Army, Prince Andrei stops at Bald Hills on the way. After so much upheaval and travel, he's struck by the sameness of Bald Hills. The place and inhabitants haven't changed, except that little Nikolushka has grown. He laughs just like the little princess used to laugh. Prince Andrei doesn't realize, though, that Bald Hills has actually divided into two camps, with Prince Nikolai and Mlle Bourienne on one side, and Princess Marya, Nikolushka, and Nikolushka's tutor and caregivers on the other. When Prince Nikolai complains about Princess Marya for disliking Mlle Bourienne, trying to get Andrei on his side, Andrei argues with his father for the first time. Prince Nikolai angrily orders him away.

Before leaving Bald Hills, Prince Andrei tries to summon up his former tenderness for Nikolushka, but he can't find it. He's likewise disturbed to find that he feels no remorse for arguing with Prince Nikolai for the first time in his life. He wants to flee the painful memories of this place. He complains of those "nonentities" who cause so much unhappiness. Princess Marya knows he's referring to Anatole. Marya tries to comfort him, saying that all grief is ultimately sent by God, not the people who are merely its instruments. Therefore Andrei must forgive. Andrei angrily retorts that forgiveness is a female virtue. As Prince Andrei leaves Bald Hills, he feels that life is just a series of meaningless, unconnected phenomena.

Prince Andrei arrives at army headquarters on the Drissa, where he's assigned to Barclay de Tolly, at the end of June. At this point, nobody suspects that there could be an invasion of the Russian provinces; everyone assumes that the war will stop short in western Poland. Prince Andrei spends a few days taking stock of the military situation. Many people, such as Arakcheev and Count Bennigsen, are with Emperor Alexander at headquarters; they have no official military function, yet they exert much influence. It's often unclear whether such people's advice originates with them or from the Emperor himself, and thus whether it's necessary to follow it.

Coming to grips with life's meaning isn't a linear process. After Andrei's breakthrough, he was just as suddenly disillusioned by his wife's death. Now he's disillusioned anew by Natasha's betrayal and distracts himself from his anger by immersing himself once again in military life.



To Prince Andrei, peacetime life appears to stand still. In reality, though, life away from the warfront is riven by its own factions and conflicts that can be just as difficult to navigate. Prince Andrei can see that Mlle Bourienne is a cause of the family rift, but his argument is unheeded.



Life feels meaningless to Prince Andrei. He finds no joy in fatherhood or family life. Princess Marya sees suffering as part of a bigger picture that's inscrutable, but must be trusted as coming from God's hand. Prince Andrei refuses to hear this, believing there is no bigger picture; the succession of failures and losses in his life have led him to believe otherwise. As Prince Andrei heads back to the army, he seems to be at a loss. Since he'd already been disillusioned with war at Austerlitz, his return suggests he doesn't know what else to do with himself.



The Drissa camp was located on the Dvina River in what's now Belarus. The camp was designed as a base for resisting Napoleon's invasion, but it proved impractical for this purpose. Barclay de Tolly was a commander in chief of the Russian army at the beginning of the 1812 campaign. Other leaders with no definite status loiter at headquarters, too, creating confusion.



During his time at headquarters, Prince Andrei observes several tendencies and parties. The first party, made up predominantly of German princes, surrounds the military theoretician Pfuel, who believes firmly in the science of war. The second party is the opposite—it calls for the abandonment of former plans and a bold advance into Poland. These include Russians like Bagration and the up-and-coming Ermolov.

Other groups include one which is passionately devoted to the person of the Emperor, much as Rostov used to be; they want Alexander himself to take command of the army. Another, by far the largest, doesn't care about war or peace: they only want what's most beneficial to themselves, whether it be money, honors, or rank. All these factions stir up confusion wherever they go, drowning out sincere exchanges of views.

About the time that Prince Andrei joins headquarters, another group of seasoned statesmen also emerges. These people believe that the sovereign's presence with the army is harmful and destabilizing, that the Emperor should rule and not command, and that an independent commander in chief is needed. The leading representative of this group is secretary of state Shishkov. Along with Arakcheev and Balashov, Shishkov writes a letter to the Emperor suggesting that the Emperor can serve Russia best by departing for the capital and inspiring the people for war. Alexander accepts this reasoning and leaves the army.

Before this happens, Barclay tells Prince Andrei that the Emperor wishes to see him. Andrei finds an informal council of war gathered at headquarters—people whose opinions the sovereign wants but who don't occupy official posts. Prince Andrei spots Pfuel there and thinks that he looks like a stereotypical German theoretician. Pfuel is in a bad mood because the Emperor is inspecting and criticizing the Drissa camp he designed without consulting him. Like all Germans, Pfuel believes that science is absolute truth and that anything less is barbarism.

Emperor Alexander arrives and greets Bolkonsky, inviting him into the room where the informal war council is gathered. Animated and sarcastic, Pfuel insists that his plan has foreseen every contingency. As opinions fly in French, German, and Russian, Prince Andrei silently listens.

Prince Andrei's observations about factions at headquarters highlight Tolstoy's argument about European versus Russian approaches to warfare. Germans like Pfuel favor strategy, while Russian generals resist plans that don't fit their instincts.



The range of views includes those who, like Nikolai Rostov, idealize the Emperor and those who, like Boris Drubetskoy, couldn't care less—they just want to use the situation to their advantage. With these divergent factions, Tolstoy alludes to his argument that many competing factors shape history, not unified voices.



There are so many factions in war that the generals and statesmen can't even agree on how they can best be led—whether the Emperor is better as a military commander or as a symbolic figurehead. In other words, the warfront is chaotic, reflecting Tolstoy's view of war's overall character.



At army headquarters, the chaotic atmosphere of war persists. Pfuel is characterized in a stereotypical way in order to contrast him with less codified, more instinctive Russian approaches to war. Pfuel believes that strict adherence to strategy is the key to victory in war.



As he did just before Austerlitz, Prince Andrei gets an inside look behind the scenes of the war. What he witnesses just confirms his sense that war is chaos.



There's also a big difference from 1805. Now, every voice contains a hint of panic about Napoleon's military genius. For his part, Prince Andrei finds it increasingly obvious that there can be no such thing as military science—there are too many variables, and nobody can predict the future. He thinks the only reason military men are called “geniuses” is because they're powerful and surrounded by flatterers.

Andrei thinks the best generals are, like Bagration, absent-minded. In fact, the highest human qualities are a disadvantage for a commander. A good commander must simply be convinced that what he's doing is important, because that's what makes him brave. And this is found in the ranks, not among the powerful. The next day, therefore, Prince Andrei asks the sovereign's permission to serve with the army instead of with headquarters—a decision which forever locks him out of court favor.

Prince Andrei's growing convictions reflect Tolstoy's own views about war and history—namely, that war is too unpredictable and unwieldy a phenomenon to be reduced to a science, and that so-called military genius is a matter of reputation more than reality.



Prince Andrei recalls Prince Bagration's ability to simply instill confidence in his men instead of focusing on his own orders. Unfortunately, most generals aren't like that. As Prince Andrei realizes this, he sees that the rank-and-file soldiers are much more important than their superiors, because it's their conviction and spirit that win battles. Based on this belief, Prince Andrei makes the fateful decision to leave behind the prospect of a high-ranking military career.



VOLUME 3, PART 1: CHAPTERS 12–15

Rostov receives a letter from his parents, explaining that Natasha has broken with Prince Andrei and fallen ill, and asking him to come home. Rostov tells them he'll do his best. Separately, he writes to Sonya and tells her that duty calls him to war. However, if he survives the war and she still loves him, he will return to her without delay. His time at Otradnoe over the winter had made him long for a gentleman's life, but he is nevertheless content with regimental life. He's promoted to captain and given his old squadron.

Stationed in Poland, the Pavlogradsky regiment retreats from Vilno. It's a happy time: nobody in the army questions where they're going or why. On July 13th, they're to participate in serious action for the first time. The night before, there's a heavy thunderstorm. Rostov camps in a haphazard tent in a rye field with his 16-year-old officer Ilyin, who looks up to Rostov as Rostov once idolized Denisov. He listens to another officer recounting some battle heroics elsewhere in the war. Nowadays, Rostov knows that everybody lies about such things.

Tolstoy contrasts Prince Andrei's experience of war with Rostov's. Unlike Prince Andrei, Rostov is content with his home life and its future possibilities, yet everyday regimental life is just as fulfilling for him, if not more so. He finds happiness in the daily routine instead of troubling himself about war's meaning.



While Prince Andrei is troubled by the contradictory chaos at headquarters, Nikolai, serving among the ranks, couldn't care less about such things. To him, camping in the open, anticipating battle, and exaggerated stories (he's becoming disillusioned on that point) are second nature by now, and the life suits him.



Ilyin goes in search of better shelter, and he soon returns excitedly telling Rostov about a nearby abandoned tavern; Marya Genrikhovna, the young German wife of the regimental doctor, is there. Rostov hurries along with Ilyin through the mud. Everyone changes into dry clothes and then gathers around a makeshift table where Marya Genrikhovna is making tea. While the regimental doctor sleeps, the other men flirt gallantly with Marya Genrikhovna. When the doctor wakes up, he's displeased by the scene and takes his wife to bed in their carriage outside. The other men settle down to sleep in the tavern, occasionally spying on the carriage and breaking into laughter.

In the middle of the night, the squadron receives orders to march to the village of Ostrovna. As he rides through the damp, chilly dawn with Ilyin, Rostov thinks about the pleasant evening in the tavern and about his fine horse; he doesn't think about the coming battle. Over the years, he's learned to control himself in the face of danger.

The hussars receive orders to occupy the left flank position behind the uhlans on the front line. The crackling noise of gunfire cheers Rostov. When the uhlans are ordered to attack, Rostov's squadron takes their place. A few minutes later, the uhlans come back up the hill, pursued by the French dragoons. Rostov watches them all like a hunter and considers what would happen if the hussars attacked now. Barely taking the time to consult with another captain, Rostov suddenly moves his horse ahead, and the squadron wordlessly falls in behind him. Instinctively, he feels this is his only chance.

As the hussar squadron moves downhill, their trot shifts into a gallop. Rostov feels as if he's chasing a wolf in the hunt. Seeing the hussars, the dragoons begin to fall apart. Rostov picks a gray horse as his target and runs it down; his horse bumps into the dragoon's horse, and Rostov hits the French officer with his saber. The wincing officer tumbles awkwardly from his horse, and Rostov's joy suddenly dissipates—the young man doesn't look like an enemy. "I surrender!" the Frenchman cries. As Rostov and the other hussars ride back with their captives, Rostov feels troubled.

For Rostov and his friends in the regiment, army life is best captured by almost cozily domestic scenes like this one—finding unexpectedly good shelter on a rainy night, enjoying a woman's company, and sharing laughs with his comrades. Tolstoy contrasts scenes like this with scenes at headquarters to show that war is much more than the plans envisioned by generals; it's also the lives of the ordinary soldiers on whom the burden of battle falls most heavily—and battle is, in some ways, a small part of their lives.



By this time, Rostov has been a soldier for several years. He's no longer the inexperienced cadet who froze with fear in his early encounters with the enemy. He puts the war in the context of other good things in his life, like fellowship and horsemanship.



This battle scene shows how far Nikolai has come since his early days as a hussar. Watching the French and the uhlans (Prussian cavalrymen), Rostov draws on his love of hunting to make sense of what's happening on the battlefield (a hint that a Russian hunter's instincts are just as effective in battle as a high-ranking strategist's). And now, instead of shrinking in fear, Rostov's instincts propel him to take daring chances.



By all military measures, Rostov's attack is very successful. His hunter's instincts lead him accurately; he even claims his own enemy captive. Yet when he encounters his captive face to face, Rostov's idea of an abstract "enemy" is shattered. The young Frenchman doesn't look like someone Rostov would want to hurt or kill.



Rostov's general praises his daring and says he's going to request the St. George Cross for him. Though he should be delighted, Rostov feels nauseated and remorseful. He goes to look for his captive, and the dimpled young Frenchman gives him a weak smile. Over the coming days, Rostov can't stop thinking about his "brave" action. He realizes that the French are just as afraid as the Russians. He feels confused about his motives. Is heroism nothing more than this? Regardless, Rostov now has a reputation for courage and is promoted to leading a battalion.

Unlike his experience at the battle of Schöngraben, Nikolai actually does achieve a brave deed at Ostrovna. But his reaction isn't at all what he'd expected. Now that he's come face to face with the "enemy," Rostov sees firsthand how similar they are. It makes him wonder if heroism and his promotion really mean anything—if war really means anything, or is ultimately meaningless.



VOLUME 3, PART 1: CHAPTERS 16–18

When the Countess hears that Natasha is ill, she and the rest of the household travel to Moscow, where the entire family soon moves into their own house. Natasha has gotten so sick that everyone forgets about her attempted elopement. She doesn't sleep or eat and grows weak and thin, making doctors fear for her life. Though their prescribed remedies don't do much good, Natasha's heartbreak and body both heal over time.

As war escalates, Natasha is fighting for her life at home, recovering from the heartbreak of her betrayal by Anatole and, above all, her broken engagement with Prince Andrei.



Though Natasha's demeanor is calmer, she is no more cheerful. She avoids society, and she no longer sings. She's often choked with tears of regret over the innocent life she's thrown away. She often thinks of the carefree winter at Otradnoe and knows such hope and joy will never be hers again. Sometimes Petya can make her laugh, and when Pierre comes to visit, she is grateful for his tenderness. She thinks Pierre is kind to everyone, and she doesn't attribute anything special to his attitude towards her.

Natasha's experience has changed her. Her youthful carefree attitude is gone; her prediction the previous winter—that life would never be so joyful again—has come true. She is going through her own kind of disillusionment.



An Otradnoe neighbor, Agrafena Ivanovna Belov, comes to Moscow to venerate some saints. She suggests that Natasha prepare for communion, and Natasha agrees. Normally, the Rostovs prepare for communion by listening to a few services at home, but Natasha joins Agrafena Ivanovna at every church service for a whole week.

Devout Orthodox Christians would be expected to prepare themselves for Holy Communion by attending services and confessing their sins beforehand. Though the Rostovs aren't exceptionally devout, Natasha's heartbreak inclines her to consider life's meaning more seriously.



Mrs. Belov picks up Natasha at three o'clock each morning, and they walk to a neighboring parish that's known for having a stricter priest. Natasha stands before the Mother of God icon, feeling a new humility and trying to follow the service. Even when she can't understand what she's hearing, she feels that God is guiding her. She focuses especially on prayers of repentance and walks home in the early mornings believing that she can start life over. After a whole week of preparatory services, Natasha goes to communion in a white dress and returns home feeling calm and renewed.

The Russian Orthodox liturgy would be celebrated in Church Slavonic, a language developed in the ninth century and only partially understood by most Russian speakers. Even though she's not familiar with the language, Natasha finds deeper spiritual meanings in the structure of the daily liturgy. Communion offers her a kind of rebirth after her experiences that winter.



By early July, unsettling rumors of war reach Moscow. Many of these are exaggerated, suggesting that Russia needs a miracle to escape Napoleon's wrath. In mid-July, on a hot Sunday morning, the Rostovs attend the liturgy at the Razumovskys' house chapel, as they always do. Natasha overhears young men whispering about her, Bolkonsky, and Kuragin. She used to take pride in her beauty at such moments, but now the attention pains her.

Tension rises in Moscow. As rumors of war grow more alarming, Natasha also hears rumors about herself that, rather than flattering her pride, now serve to humble her. She no longer enjoys attracting attention for its own sake.



In the service, Natasha catches herself judging another worshiper and feels despair at her wickedness. She feels tears starting and focuses on the service, longing to know how to live a good life. During the prayers, Natasha prays earnestly for both Prince Andrei and Anatole. Later in the service, the priest unexpectedly kneels to lead the congregation in a lengthy prayer for Russia's salvation from foreign invasion. Natasha doesn't fully understand the prayer to prevail over enemies, especially since she'd prayed to forgive her enemies just moments earlier. But she joins in the prayer with all her heart.

Like Pierre, Natasha finds it's difficult to carry out one's resolve to live a good life, especially in a troubled world. With the patriotic prayer for Russia's victory in war, Tolstoy suggests that there's a fundamental contradiction when people who profess Christianity go to war against one another and justify their killing on religious grounds.



VOLUME 3, PART 1: CHAPTERS 19–23

Ever since Pierre left the Rostovs' house and saw the **comet** in the sky, his old tormenting questions seem to have left him. His despair about earthly vanity has been replaced by the image of Natasha's face. Pierre is still drawn into his wasteful, idle social life, and as Natasha's health improves, and he hears rumors of war, he begins to feel anxious again. He fears some impending catastrophe.

In Natasha, Pierre senses an answer to his ongoing questions about life's meaning, but that doesn't fix everything. His old vices continue to attract him, and he's unsettled.



A fellow Mason shows Pierre a verse in the Book of Revelation, explaining that it's a prophecy of Napoleon. He derives this prophecy by assigning numerical values to the French letters of this verse. When one writes "*l'empereur Napoléon*" in the numerical alphabet and adds up the values of the letters, the result is 666, showing that Napoleon is the prophesied beast. The same code, applied to an earlier verse, suggests that Napoleon will reach the height of his power in 1812.

Pierre tends to be swept up in questionable beliefs when he's feeling vulnerable in his life. Pierre is so desperate for settled meaning that he's persuaded it can be found in strained apocalyptic interpretations of the Bible.



By experimenting with this alphanumeric code and variant spellings of his name, Pierre figures out that "*L'russe Besuhof*" adds up to 666, suggesting to him that, in some mysterious way, he's bound up in the events surrounding Napoleon. He feels that all these events—his love for Natasha, the **comet**, the war—will somehow connect in such a way that he'll be liberated from his worthless Moscow life.

*Pierre goes to great lengths to wrest meaning from his Bible code, finding a way that "*Bezukhov the Russian*" allegedly connects with Napoleon. He's so hungry for concrete direction in his life that he basically orchestrates what he wants to see, even if it's the most unlikely possibility.*



Pierre has promised to visit the Rostovs with war news. When he stops at Count Rastopchin's to pick up the relevant documents, an army courier gives him a letter from Nikolai to pass along. Pierre feels excited by all the war news and wishes he could join the military himself. However, the Masons are bound by oath to peace. More than that, however, his numerological study convinces him that, somehow, he's predestined to interfere in Napoleon's invasion. He just has to wait for events to unfold.

When Pierre arrives at the Rostovs' that evening, he finds Natasha practicing her scales, the first time she's sung since her illness. She seems happier than before, but she stops Pierre and asks him if it's wrong for her to sing—she trusts him implicitly and doesn't want to do anything he wouldn't approve of. Pierre blushes, so moved that he almost declares his love to her again, but then 15-year-old Petya runs into the room. He secretly wants to join the hussars and hopes Pierre can help him.

The rest of the family comes in and wants to see the manifesto Pierre has brought—a war appeal from the Emperor. The manifesto tells of the threat to Russia, the sovereign's faith in the people of Moscow, and his commitment to stand among them. Afterward, Count Rostov is teary-eyed. Blushing, Petya goes up to his father and says he wants to join the military. Countess Rostov is horrified, and the Count says it's nonsense—Petya must go to university instead. Suddenly Natasha's stare is too much for Pierre, and he makes an excuse to leave, deciding he must no longer visit the Rostovs.

After Pierre's visit, Petya goes to his room and cries. The next day, he dresses carefully. The Emperor is due in town, and Petya plans to make a speech to one of Alexander's gentlemen-in-waiting conveying his readiness to defend the fatherland. But when he reaches the Kremlin, he has to elbow through the crowd just like everybody else who's gathered to see the sovereign's arrival. Suddenly the crowd surges forward, cheering, and Petya is nearly crushed in the stampede; he briefly loses consciousness. A clergyman leads Petya away from the crowd, somebody unbuttons his coat, and he sits down to rest on a monument.

As Petya's pain subsides, he relishes his favored vantage point. While the emperor attends a prayer service in the cathedral, hawkers sell snacks, and the crowd lapses into ordinary conversation. When the emperor's entourage emerges from the cathedral, Petya tearfully shouts "Hurrah!," not knowing which figure is the emperor but hardly caring—he just knows he must enlist in the military, whatever it takes.

Though Pierre's Masonic convictions are supposed to preclude him from fighting, he longs to be involved in this major national event, and his study of Revelation has given him a reason to believe he will be. He's right that he'll be destined to be involved in some way, though the nature of that involvement isn't at all what he thinks.



Pierre continues to have feelings for Natasha, who looks up to him as a trustworthy man. Natasha continues to emerge from her grief and, in contrast to her childhood impulsiveness, is concerned about acting appropriately, showing that she's learned something from the fiasco with Anatole.



At army headquarters, Emperor Alexander had to be persuaded to issue this manifesto; now, from the perspective of the ordinary public, the manifesto has its intended effect of moving people and inspiring them to enlist. For his part, Pierre is so unsettled by Natasha's presence that he feels he must distance himself from a possibility of happiness that can never be his.



Petya, the youngest Rostov, is the most impressionable in his attitude about war. He's grown up hearing about the drama of war, his brother has served, and now he's just heard an emotive appeal from the Emperor. The crush of people at the Kremlin matches Petya's mood. The masses are irrational, nearly killing those in their path. Tolstoy suggests this is what war, being irrational, stirs up in otherwise rational people.



The Emperor's presence creates a holiday atmosphere that sweeps people, including Petya, into its irrational energy. Thus choosing to enlist isn't really a rational choice, either. Petya responds to the emotion of the moment and the crowds.



During the Emperor's supper in the palace, the people remain gathered beneath his balcony. When he steps out to greet them, many people, including Petya, begin to cry. When the sovereign accidentally drops a piece of the biscuit he's holding, it falls to the ground, and a cabby pounces on it. The crowd, in turn, rushes the cabby. Then the Emperor calls for a plate of biscuits and begins throwing these at the crowd. Heedless of the mob, Petya pushes forward to grab a biscuit, knocking a little old lady aside. When he gets home, he repeats his firm intention to join the army. Though he doesn't say yes, Count Rostov starts searching for a way that Petya can be sent to a less dangerous area of the warfront.

A few days later, carriages crowd outside the Slobodsky palace. The palace's halls are filled with nobles and merchants, milling around and talking. Pierre is there, excited about the mix of classes and the fact that the sovereign said he was coming to Moscow "for consultations" with the people—it all makes him think of the French revolution. Various people make speeches in support of various roles for the nobility in the war, one man arguing that nobles should enlist to fight.

Pierre interrupts an elderly senator in overly correct Russian with French sprinkled in. He argues that the sovereign wants counsel, not just cannon fodder. Most people walk away, but several people jump in to argue with Pierre. One impassioned fellow declares that Russians must spill their last drop of blood in the tsar's defense. Pierre wants to defend himself by saying that he's happy to support the emperor, but that it's important to understand the state of affairs first. However, he's drowned out and pushed to the margins, as people want a clear rallying cry and a clear villain.

Then Count Rastopchin comes in and says that the Emperor will arrive soon. He supposes there won't be much to discuss, and that it's the nobility's job to raise a militia. There's a quiet murmur of agreement. The secretary is ordered to write down what the Muscovite nobility will contribute to the war effort.

Pierre now feels ashamed of the "constitutional tendency" he's just shown, and to make up for it, he pledges a thousand men and their maintenance to the war effort. Count Rostov goes home and tearfully tells his wife about the affecting scene; he also signs Petya up for service, his misgivings vanished. After the sovereign leaves Moscow, the noblemen return to their normal routines, giving their stewards orders to deal with the militia.

The biscuit-throwing episode isn't historically attested. In the Appendix, Tolstoy claims he can provide references for everything his historical characters do, but when challenged on this specific point, he was unable to give evidence that it happened. In any case, these events further support Tolstoy's argument that people in mobs act irrationally, and that warfare especially stirs up such reactions in people.



The Slobodsky palace was the seat of the Assembly of the Nobility. Upon the Emperor's return to Moscow, the nobility are summoned to consult with the Emperor about the coming war. Unsurprisingly, Pierre has idealistic hopes for this consultation, hoping it means that a wide spectrum of perspectives will be offered.



To this day, Pierre is rather ill at ease in aristocratic Russian crowds, his Russian not quite matching his passion for speaking. Not naturally a fighter, Pierre tries to present a balanced perspective, but that isn't what people want to hear—they want a call to action against the French. Pierre's experience here echoes the mob weeping over Emperor Alexander a few days earlier—there's no appetite for moderation or careful thought.



Ironically, as soon as the nobility are told by one of the Emperor's ministers what's going to happen, they drop the passionate outcry of moments earlier and quietly acquiesce, raising the question of how sincere they really were.



Pierre, afraid of looking more like a citizen of a republic than a subject of a tsar, submits to the surrounding mood and makes a very generous donation. For all their vocal enthusiasm, the other nobles leave the whole matter in the hands of those who actually run their estates. Count Rostov is especially moved by the patriotism and fatefully allows his son to go to war.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 1–5

Napoleon goes to war with Russia because he can't help himself—can't help being overwhelmed by honors, moved by fine weather, and bursting out in anger at diplomats. Emperor Alexander refuses to negotiate because he feels personally offended. Everyone involved in the war does the same—acting on the basis of their personal qualities and habits, though they all imagine they're choosing to act in given ways. "Providence" moves them all.

Today, it's obvious what caused the French army's downfall in 1812—the French army's lack of preparation for a Russian winter, and the hatred their actions stirred in the Russian people. At the time, however, nobody foresaw this—the Russians seemed obviously weaker than the French.

In retrospect, both sides did the very things that would ultimately destroy them. Today, French historians like to say that Napoleon understood he was overextending his army. Russian historians, meanwhile, claim that the Russians knowingly lured the French into the depths of Russia. But both sides only say these things because the events of 1812 justify them. The facts contradict such claims. The Russians tried their best to halt the French advance, and Napoleon fearlessly extended his line.

By August, Napoleon reaches Smolensk and plans to advance toward Moscow, though this will doom him. Luring Napoleon never occurs to the Russian commanders. Everything plays out by chance. The enemy is drawn to Smolensk when the Russian armies involuntarily retreat in a certain direction. Personal rivalries between generals affect the direction and timing of the retreat. Lack of unified leadership, helped by the indecision swirling around the Emperor while he lingers with the army, leads to avoidance of battle.

The day after Prince Andrei leaves, Prince Nikolai blames Princess Marya for his son's departure. He stays in his study for a week and even refuses to see Mlle Bourienne. Princess Marya divides her time between tutoring Nikolushka and staying in her room, sometimes visiting with God's people. She thinks about the war "as women [do]"—worrying about Andrei and failing to understand the bigger picture.

Tolstoy suggests that a divine power, or "providence," guides people's actions, whether through people's individual personalities or through factors as minor as weather that influence people's decisions. All the while, people suppose they're acting on the basis of pure free will. Tolstoy develops this argument in the epilogue and appendix.



Historical events always look different in retrospect than they did at the time. When Tolstoy wrote, people could look back and identify significant factors that weren't obvious to participants in the events.



Even when modern historians have more information, that doesn't mean they use evidence accurately. They still make claims justifying the actions of their preferred side. However, it's still possible to look at the facts to determine what really happened—in this case, that both the French and Russians acted against their best interests in 1812.



Tolstoy gives some examples of his claims about how history works. For instance, though it may have looked like the Russians tried to draw the French deep into Russian territory, factors like personal rivalries and even indecisiveness combine to produce results that ultimately doom the French.



From sweeping remarks on history, Tolstoy moves back to the specific. The Bolkonsky family remains divided. Princess Marya's "womanly" worries are very specific, too. This isn't necessarily a criticism on Tolstoy's part—he, too, holds that "small" individuals and events contribute to large historical moments.



Julie Karagin, now Princess Drubetskoy, has resumed writing to Princess Marya—patriotic letters in Russian, as she claims she can no longer abide French. Prince Nikolai refuses to acknowledge the war, so Marya assumes it isn't very important. Meanwhile, Prince Andrei sends his father a humble letter asking his forgiveness. Prince Nikolai responds warmly and distances himself from Mlle Bourienne at that time. In his second letter, Andrei encloses a map and explains that the Bolkonskys should move to Moscow for safety—Bald Hills lies directly in the troops' line of movement.

Even after this letter is read to the household, Prince Nikolai refuses to believe that Bald Hills is in danger. In fact, he believes the French are still in Poland and have never crossed the Niemen. He resumes talking with his architect about plans for a new servants' building.

Bald Hills sits 40 miles east of Smolensk and two miles from the Moscow road. One night, Nikolushka's tutor Dessales tells Princess Marya to write to the head of the province to find out what's going on, since Prince Nikolai refuses to act. When Alpatych the steward sets off for Smolensk, sent by the Prince to do some ordinary shopping, he takes the letter with him. On his way, he passes baggage trains and troops and even hears shooting, but he doesn't think anything of it. When he reaches his friend Ferapontov's inn, where he always stays in Smolensk, the men agree that the ongoing exodus from Smolensk is foolish.

Early the next morning, however, the people of Smolensk hear both musket fire and cannon fire. Alpatych conducts his business around town and then goes to the governor's house with the letter. When the governor hurriedly receives Alpatych, he hands him a paper and urges that the Bolkonskys go to Moscow. As Alpatych returns to the inn, he can hear the gunfire. He reads the paper, which is Barclay de Tolly's order saying that his army and Prince Bagration's army will soon unite before Smolensk, and that the inhabitants needn't worry.

Back at Ferapontov's inn, Alpatych hastily packs up his purchases. By the time he goes outside, the inn's windows shake from cannon fire, and shells fall on the city. Napoleon's army is bombarding Smolensk. Everybody stands on the street, curiously watching the flying shells overhead. Ferapontov's cook is standing at the corner, marveling. As she heads back toward the inn, something explodes in the middle of the street, and a crowd quickly gathers around the wailing cook, whose hip has been smashed by a shell splinter.

Now that the French have invaded Russia, aristocratic attitudes about the French shift abruptly, pointing out the shallowness of these attitudes all along. Even as family relationships are tentatively patched up, the war begins to intrude on the Bolkonskys' lives in a more than strictly personal way—unlike in the fighting that took place in 1805–1807, the French are now near at hand.



Whether it's because of his growing senility or simple refusal to believe that Russia could be invaded, Prince Nikolai remains in steadfast denial about the war's growing encroachment on their lives.



The Prince isn't alone in his denial. The idea of the French being a couple of days' march from the estate is unprecedented and hard for everyone to absorb, Prince and servant alike. But now Alpatych heads straight into the fighting—in mid-August, 1812, the battle of Smolensk was the first major battle on Russian soil. While many flee in advance, others remain skeptical of what's happening.



As battle bears down on the city, Russian generals try to assure the people that Smolensk will be defended, but evidently few people believe this—even the governor's recommendation belies these orders. Ordinary people's instincts often reflect reality more than official orders do.



Those who fled turn out to have had the right instincts. Tolstoy highlights the experiences of ordinary civilians, not just soldiers; besides fear, they're filled with curiosity at this unprecedented event in their city. And civilians can suffer as cruelly and randomly as combatants do.



While Alpatych and the innkeeper's household gather in the cellar, Ferapontov goes to the cathedral, where the miracle-working icon of Smolensk is being carried in procession. Towards evening, the town grows quiet. The air is filled with smoke. Alpatych goes outside, and a fleeing officer warns him that the town has surrendered—everyone should leave. Alpatych and his coachman nervously prepare their horses as wailing people take stock of their burning city. When Ferapontov comes back, he tells Alpatych that Russia is finished. His family also boards a cart to flee.

The wagons progress slowly out of the city, as the streets are blocked by confused groups of soldiers and smoldering fires. As Alpatych stands with a crowd watching a blazing barn, he suddenly hears Prince Andrei's voice. Alpatych bursts into tears, asking his master's son if Russia is lost. Prince Andrei doesn't answer. He quickly scrawls a note to Princess Marya, telling the family to vacate Bald Hills at once. As he gives Alpatych hurried instructions, the barn's ceiling collapses. Prince Andrei rides off.

The Russian army continues to retreat from Smolensk with the French in pursuit. On August 10th, Prince Andrei's regiment passes right by the avenue to Bald Hills. The land lies under a severe drought, with crops and swamps drying up. Troops suffer in the relentless heat and choking dust. The burning of Smolensk is a turning point for Prince Andrei; his anger at the enemy masks his personal grief.

Though Prince Andrei has received word that his family fled Bald Hills for Moscow, he feels compelled to visit the estate when his regiment passes by. As he rides through the property, he sees that the garden is overgrown and livestock wanders through it. Alpatych is still there, too. When Prince Andrei sees two peasant girls taking plums from one of the conservatory trees, he feels strangely comforted by the persistence of ordinary human interests, and he hopes the best for the girls.

When he reaches the road again, he finds soldiers swimming naked in a small, muddy pond, whooping with delight. Their merriment is somehow sad. Timokhin encourages Andrei to swim, too, but he decides to have a shower in a nearby shed instead. "Cannon fodder" he thinks with a shudder as he looks at all the naked bodies.

The burning of Smolensk has apocalyptic overtones. The icon procession highlights traditional Russian religious piety in response to a catastrophe—appealing to God for a miracle. As they take in the devastated city, people conclude that their way of life has come to an end.



Alpatych's unexpected encounter with Prince Andrei highlights the role of chance in war. The collapse of the barn symbolizes what's happening to Russia more broadly—at least as things appear in this moment, as people's whole world seems to be falling down around them.



Seeing his home fields devastated, Prince Andrei's personal feelings about the war undergo a shift. Rejoining the army had been a way of fleeing the seeming meaninglessness in his life; now that the French invasion has literally struck close to home, he regains a sense of purpose.



Prince Nikolai's lovingly tended estate is now abandoned and in disarray, showing how war senselessly overturns normal life. Yet, in one of Tolstoy's subtle, human details, the presence of the foraging peasant girls suggests that elements of normal life persist despite this.



Prince Andrei senses that the soldiers' delight is a fleeting moment in the midst of hopeless circumstances. In a moment that Andrei will flash back to later, the men's bodies signify the grinding reality of war, which consumes human lives indiscriminately.



On August 7th, Prince Bagration writes a letter to Arakcheev, knowing it will also be read by the Emperor. He reports that the minister shamefully abandoned Smolensk while Bagration's troops held out against the French for more than 35 hours. It would have cost nothing to stay, Bagration argues, since the French were short of water and would have retreated soon anyway. He goes on to say that making peace at this point is unthinkable. He tells Arakcheev to call out the militia. It's too bad that the sovereign entrusts his army to the minister's adviser, Adjutant Wolzogen, who's rumored to be more loyal to Napoleon than to Russia. He laments Russia's "cowardly" retreat.

From the ordinary men or "cannon fodder," the focus once again shifts back to the decisions of high-ranking officers and government officials. Though later historians will argue that the Russian army intentionally lured the French into the country's vast interior, Tolstoy points out that generals like Bagration criticized the Russian retreat at the time. Events which later proved to favor the Russians were, at the time, influenced more by questionable decisions than by considered strategy.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 6–12

The outward life of Petersburg salons never changes. The people in Anna Pavlovna's salon watch Napoleon nervously, believing that European sovereigns indulge him in order to cause anxiety in the court circle. In contrast, Hélène's salon admires Napoleon and hopes for peace with France. In Anna Pavlovna's circle, members refrain from attending the French theater and spread hopeful rumors about the Russian army. Hélène's circle refutes rumors of French cruelty and views the war as mostly an empty exhibition, which its instigators can end when they choose. Bilibin is among this circle.

Petersburg aristocrats are divided in their attitudes about the war. Anna Pavlovna's circle is pro-Russian and decries once-prized elements of French culture; Hélène's circle is pro-French and takes the war less seriously. One's social position signals one's political alignment and vice versa.



Prince Vassily is a mediating figure between the two circles, alternating between his friend Anna Pavlovna's and his daughter Hélène's salons. As a result, sometimes he gets confused and says things in one circle that he should have said in the other. One day at Anna Pavlovna's, Prince Vassily denounces Barclay de Tolly and gets into an argument about who should replace him as commander in chief. When somebody suggests Kutuzov, Vassily objects, saying Kutuzov is old and blind. Nevertheless, a couple of weeks later, Kutuzov is appointed to the position with power over all Russia's armies. Even though the Emperor doesn't like Kutuzov, the existence of multiple commanders in chief is regarded as a problem which Kutuzov's leadership is meant to fix.

Unsurprisingly, Prince Vassily drifts between circles according to what's advantageous for him at the moment. After the French invasion, Russian leadership remains in flux. Commander-in-chief Barclay de Tolly kept retreating before the French instead of fighting, and after the French victory at Smolensk, Kutuzov replaced him, though his avoidance of direct battle will also prove controversial.



After hearing this news, Prince Vassily shows up at Anna Pavlovna's salon. When he praises the appointment, a distinguished gentleman reminds Vassily of his former position that Kutuzov is blind, but Vassily brushes this off with a delicate cough. In fact, he can't praise Kutuzov too highly, citing his good character.

The distinguished gentleman in this chapter is probably the philosopher Joseph de Maistre, who served as an ambassador in Russia at this time; Tolstoy consulted de Maistre's correspondence for details of Petersburg soirées. Either way, the man sees through Prince Vassily's shallow posturing.



The next battle takes place at Borodino, a mere 75 miles from Moscow. On the march, Napoleon's chief of staff interrogates a Russian prisoner and tells Napoleon what he's learned—that Platov's corps is on its way to join the main army, and Kutuzov is now commander in chief. It turns out that this prisoner is Lavrushka, Denisov's serf. Napoleon wants to speak to him personally, so the drunken Cossack soon rides up, unintimidated by Napoleon (though he pretends not to recognize him). Lavrushka was taken prisoner while stealing chickens from a village.

Napoleon questions Lavrushka about the Russian army's status and morale. When the interpreter translates Lavrushka's words for Napoleon, he says that if there's battle within three days, the French will win, but if battle comes later, then God only knows what will happen. Napoleon reveals his identity, and Lavrushka pretends to be shocked. A later French historian recounts this meeting by saying that Lavrushka fell silent with naïve amazement before being sent away. In reality, Lavrushka gallops in search of his master Nikolai Rostov, exaggerating the whole story in his mind.

Though Prince Andrei thinks Princess Marya is safe, that's not true. After Alpatych returns from Smolensk, Prince Nikolai springs into action. He calls up the village militia, deciding to stay and defend Bald Hills. He orders that Princess Marya and Nikolushka be taken to Bogucharovo and from there to Moscow. However, Princess Marya is worried about her father and refuses to leave, disobeying him for the first time. Though Prince Nikolai storms at her, Marya knows he's secretly relieved that she's staying.

The morning after Nikolushka leaves for Bogucharovo, Prince Nikolai puts on his decorated uniform and goes out to review the village militia. But soon after, a frightened crowd runs back to the house, dragging her suddenly withered and timid-looking father. He cannot speak. A doctor says the Prince has suffered a stroke. The Prince is transported to Bogucharovo the next day, where he spends the next three weeks paralyzed and unconscious, muttering something that nobody can understand. His agitation worsens whenever Princess Marya is near.

Princess Marya, watching over her father day and night, is disturbed to find that, deep down, she hopes he will die soon. She's even more troubled when thoughts of a new life—of earthly love and even a family of her own—cross her mind once again. She thinks these are temptations from the devil, yet she finds it impossible to pray.

The French are getting closer and closer to Moscow. In a humorous juxtaposition, Napoleon's questioning of Lavrushka brings together a minor, lower-class Russian character with the French emperor. As Tolstoy likes to point out, sometimes a thieving serf plays a consequential role in war as an emperor.



Lavrushka believes that if the French strike relatively soon, they'll be at an advantage, but the longer they wait, the more that advantage will be ceded to the Russians fighting on home soil. The French historian's account of the meeting is a humorous acknowledgment of the fact that each side will try to interpret things in the most flattering light.



The focus shifts back to Bald Hills after the battle of Smolensk. Finally believing the urgency of what's happening, Prince Nikolai nevertheless stands his ground, refusing to let his beloved estate fall to the French.



His attempt to defend Bald Hills, and likely the overall shock of the invasion, proves too much for Prince Nikolai. The family is forced to leave Bald Hills after all.



Again Tolstoy shows the complexity of Marya's character. For all her self-sacrificing loyalty, she knows that her father's death will be a liberation for her, and her longings for a more normal life clash with her religious convictions.



French looters have struck within 10 miles of Bogucharovo. Princess Marya prepares the household to move again. The morning of departure, the doctor says Prince Nikolai is a little better and trying to communicate. Marya goes to her father, who looks pitifully shriveled. He presses her hand and struggles to speak; Marya looks away, pained by the strain in his face. After many guesses, she figures out that he's saying, "My soul aches." He repeats, "Thank you...forgive me!" to Marya as his tears fall.

After this exchange, Prince Nikolai becomes more agitated, talking about his son, the Emperor, and the war. Then he has another stroke. Princess Marya flees outside, overwhelmed with love for her father. She no longer thinks about her future; she can't imagine life without him. The marshal of the district nobility comes to Bogucharovo to persuade Princess Marya to leave as quickly as possible for everyone's safety, but his pleas don't sink in. The next time Marya is called to her father's room, sunshine is spilling through the window, and women are bustling around. She sees the stern, immobile look on Prince Nikolai's face and, filled with horror, collapses into the doctor's arms.

The peasants at Bogucharovo are called "steppe folk." They are hardworking but wilder than the peasants of Bald Hills. News of Napoleon's war is all mixed up in their minds with rumors of the Antichrist and the end of the world. Lately there's been unrest among the peasants, with much talk of forming a caravan and migrating somewhere warmer. Alpatych has been staying at Bogucharovo, and he's learned that the peasants plan to stay put. He also sees French leaflets informing villagers that they won't be harmed by the invaders, and that they'll be paid for anything that's taken from them.

The headman of Bogucharovo is a sturdy old muzhik named Dron, who's trusted and respected by the Bolkonskys and peasants alike. On the day of Prince Nikolai's funeral, Alpatych orders Dron to prepare horses for the carriages and carts that will soon be leaving Bogucharovo. Feeling caught between the peasants and his masters, Dron hedges, then begs to be released from his role as headman. Alpatych refuses to listen and, not telling Princess Marya what's going on, goes to speak to the local authorities.

Princess Marya and her father share a touching reconciliation. On one hand, it's a tragic moment—Prince Nikolai has been unable to show affection to his daughter until his deathbed. On the other hand, he is able to profess his gratitude and love and ask forgiveness for his oppressive behavior. Death often reveals characters' truest selves and lets people see one another as they really are.



Unburdened after reconciling with his daughter, the Prince lapses into incoherence again and ultimately dies. Despite her genuine desire for a different life, Princess Marya begins to grieve the loss of her father in earnest, and grief drowns out all thoughts of the future, both immediate and longer term. The sunshine and bustle—the persistence of life in the presence of death—contrast with Marya's abject distress.



Tolstoy highlights the variety of peasant experience. Though they're also serfs, the peasants at the Bolkonskys' country estate are used to greater independence. For them, the French invasion has an apocalyptic resonance. Napoleon's armies often distributed counterfeit rubles to the peasantry, so unlike the nobility, the peasants are also convinced that there's a financial benefit for them in accepting French rule.



Muzhik is a Russian word for "peasant." There's hierarchy among peasants, with a mediating figure like Dron experiencing conflicted loyalties. Dron knows the peasants don't want to leave Bogucharovo and that their stubbornness could be an obstacle for the Bolkonskys' escape.



Meanwhile, Mlle Bourienne checks on her grieving friend, and Princess Marya, unable to resent or judge her anymore, extends a hand to her. When Mlle Bourienne shows her a French leaflet, explaining they must flee the estate, Marya becomes anxious. More than anything, she feels insulted on her father's and Prince Andrei's behalf. Glad to be distracted from her grief, Marya talks with Dron and orders that the estate's grain be distributed to the suffering muzhiks in her brother's name.

An hour later, the muzhiks are still refusing to leave. Princess Marya goes outside to negotiate with them, drawing strength from the sense that she's representing her father and brother. She promises the crowd of muzhiks all the grain they need and begs them to move to the Bolkonsky estate outside Moscow. They simply stare back at her with unreadable expressions. Gradually they begin to grumble, refusing to leave Bogucharovo and preferring to be despoiled by the invading French. Princess Marya sadly retreats to the house. She sits up late that night, remembering her father's last words—“dear heart”—and grieving that nobody will ever know all that was in him. Eventually she runs to her former nanny for comfort.

Though she has a strong sense of pride, Princess Marya doesn't hold a grudge, and she readily forgives Mlle Bourienne's divisive role in the household. The prospect of French invasion of the family estates affronts her, and she tries to confront the balking peasants, but the complexity of the situation doesn't quite sink in—charity doesn't persuade them.



Princess Marya shows she's well capable of rising to the occasion under pressure, especially when she feels family honor is at stake. However, she doesn't count on these peasants' independent streak and doesn't get far in persuading them. Grief finally overwhelms her strength, and she finds childlike solace in her old nanny.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 13–14

On August 17th, Rostov, Ilyin, and Lavrushka go to Bogucharovo in search of hay. The estate is right between the Russian rear guard and the French vanguard. The young men are in good moods. They don't know anything about Bogucharovo, but they hope to find some pretty girls there. Lavrushka tells them stories about Napoleon, and they race each other on their horses, joking around. Nikolai has no idea that Bogucharovo belongs to his sister's ex-fiancé. They approach a barn surrounded by muzhiks. They also see two women and a man walking towards the group from the manor house.

Alpatych approach Rostov. Alpatych leads Rostov a little distance from the drunken, singing muzhiks so they can talk privately. He explains that the muzhiks are threatening to unharness the horses so that the mistress cannot leave. Princess Marya's attempt to reason with the muzhiks backfired, and even Dron has gone over to their side. When Princess Marya saw the hussars approaching just now, she feared they were Frenchmen.

The surprising appearance of Rostov and his friends on the Bolkonsky estate shows how close to ordinary Russian life the war has gotten. The young men's carefree moods—they have nothing on their minds but provisions and girls—contrast with the drama that's ongoing at Bogucharovo.



The mutinous peasants are now sabotaging Princess Marya's retreat. Princess Marya's situation is dire, as she could easily find herself vulnerable to enemy pillaging or worse.



When Rostov sees Princess Marya's bright eyes and listens to her trembling account of events, he finds something romantic in the moment. When she mentions her father's death, tears fill Rostov's eyes. He bows to her and promises to settle her problems. Princess Marya is touched by his respectful attitude but quickly leaves the room, overcome with tears.

Though he doesn't yet realize there's a personal connection between their families, Nikolai's natural gallantry and honor rise to the surface when he hears Marya's plight.



When Rostov rejoins Ilyin and Lavrushka, he's in a much different mood. He walks toward the village with clenched fists, muttering about brigands. Alpatych runs after him, saying it's best not to stir up the peasants with no military backup available. Rostov ignores him. In the meantime, the muzhiks have begun arguing among themselves. When one of them steps forward to challenge Rostov, Rostov immediately punches him and orders him bound. He has Dron's hands tied, too, and orders the rest back to their homes. They hurriedly obey, and two hours later, the carts are being loaded for departure from Bogucharovo.

Nikolai quickly succeeds in subduing the angry peasants, showing that when he has an objective—especially when motivated by his sense of honor—he isn't to be trifled with. Marya's retreat from Bogucharovo is soon underway.



Rostov keeps his distance from Princess Marya and rides with her as far as the inn of Yankovo. Only then does he kiss her hand. He blushes at her thanks and insists he's done nothing, but Marya is radiant with gratitude, believing he's saved her from both the rebel muzhiks and the French. Not only that, he's kind and sympathetic. Strangely, after Nikolai leaves, Princess Marya wonders if she loves him. When Rostov rejoins his squadron, they tease him about his future bride. Rostov responds angrily, precisely because he's wondering the same thing. He likes Marya—and her wealth would solve his family's problems. Yet he made Sonya a promise.

Though Nikolai and Marya's meeting was brief, they saw each other at their best in those moments—Marya's bright-eyed earnestness and Nikolai's eagerness to be of service in a matter of honor. This accounts for their immediate mutual fondness—Tolstoy associates real love with the clarity of seeing people as they really are. However, the novel has also established that love and marriage are two different things, and Nikolai is committed elsewhere.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 15–18

After Kutuzov takes command of the armies, he orders Prince Andrei to headquarters. While Prince Andrei waits for Kutuzov to return from a review of the troops, a hussar lieutenant with bristling mustaches rides up and introduces himself as Denisov. He's heard of Bolkonsky's misfortunes and greets him sympathetically. Andrei heard of Denisov from Natasha's stories—he was her first suitor. What with Smolensk and his father's death, Andrei hasn't thought about Natasha for a long time. Denisov, for his part, thinks briefly of his silly proposal to 15-year-old Natasha. His purpose now, however, is to present a campaign plan to Kutuzov. He thinks the Russians ought to break through the French communications, using the French's overextended line to their advantage.

Prince Andrei's visit to headquarters brings another unlikely meeting, this time with Nikolai Rostov's old captain and friend Denisov. They have Natasha in common, though for different reasons, neither of them thinks much about their failed romances anymore. Denisov thinks the Russians should take advantage of the strained French position—the French are far from home and extended deep into enemy territory, a situation that makes them vulnerable.



Kutuzov, heavier than before and breathing hard, rides into the yard, attended by a crowd of fawning generals and officers. He tiredly greets Prince Andrei and, when Andrei mentions he's just learned of his father's death, Kutuzov embraces him tenderly, his eyes filling with tears. Denisov boldly approaches at this moment, unaware of the adjutants' annoyance, and explains he has a plan for the good of Russia. The plan, to cut the enemy's line of operations between Smolensk and Vyazma, is a sensible one. When Kutuzov learns that the commissary general is Denisov's uncle, he cheerfully invites Denisov to stay at headquarters and to talk more tomorrow.

Prince Andrei is invited to stay while Kutuzov signs some papers. In the meantime, Kutuzov listens patiently to the general who's speaking to him, yet it's evident that he doesn't care about even the most intelligent reports, as if, in his old age and experience, he knows that intelligence won't ultimately decide matters. Later, while talking in the commander in chief's quarters, Kutuzov invites Prince Andrei remain with his staff. Prince Andrei thanks him for the honor, but he explains that he's grown used to regimental life and is attached to his men there. Kutuzov understands that the regiments need good men, too, and he remembers seeing Andrei carrying the standard on the day he was injured at Austerlitz. Andrei is flattered.

Before Andrei goes, Kutuzov talks with him about criticisms he sustained for his actions in the Turkish war, concluding that everything comes at the right time to the one who knows how to wait. He reflects that to win a campaign, it's not necessary to attack; one just needs patience and time. He believes the same will hold true with the French, though the younger advisers don't want to hear that. Kutuzov says goodbye to Prince Andrei, reminding him to regard him as a father.

When Prince Andrei returns to his regiment, he feels calmer. He believes that Kutuzov understands that there's something more powerful than his own will—“the inevitable course of events.” He also trusts Kutuzov because he's Russian, as his deep emotion indicates.

Life in Moscow flows much as before; it's easy to forget that Russia is in danger. The patriotic fervor of recent days has faded. In the face of the coming danger, people are torn between self-preservation and the desire to not think of anything unpleasant. While the former is usually considered in solitude, the latter is expressed in company: Moscow is filled with merrymaking that year. People enjoy discussing Rastopchin's propaganda posters, which insult the French. Some find them humorous, while others think they're stupid.

Prince Andrei's father and Kutuzov were personal friends, so it's easy for him to get access to the general. A family connection proves vital to Denisov's ability to gain a hearing, too. These encounters suggest that even ethical and independent-minded generals naturally gravitate to such connections—it's how aristocratic society works.



Much as he fell asleep before the battle of Austerlitz, disregarding detailed war plans, here Kutuzov is similarly disengaged from others' reports, showing that he relies more heavily on instincts than on supposed intelligence. His invitation therefore suggests that he genuinely thinks highly of Prince Andrei, seeing more in him than bare intelligence. However, Andrei has had enough of the abstractions of higher office and fatefully declines.



Kutuzov has been criticized in the past for his slowness to act in battle. However, this doesn't deter him from what he senses is right: most often, victory is a matter of waiting out the enemy. Young, impatient generals prefer to rush to the offensive, but Kutuzov refuses to abandon the instincts he's developed through long experience.



Prince Andrei (reflecting Tolstoy's own views here) trusts Kutuzov's humility before fate and his passionate “Russian” instincts—the makings of a good Russian general.



Back in Moscow, the atmosphere is tense with anticipation, yet curiously tinged with denial at the same time. It's simply human nature to avoid unpleasant subjects—like impending invasion—until it's absolutely necessary. So people have parties instead of panicking. Rastopchin, Moscow's military governor, produced his infamous posters in an attempt to stir up patriotic feeling again.



In Julie Drubetskoy's circles, people have taken to speaking Russian only; if someone utters French by mistake, they have to make a donation to the war effort. Julie is leaving Moscow shortly, and Pierre comes to her farewell soirée, where people have just been joking about the militia he is outfitting. Pierre laughs at this idea himself, saying he's too big to ride a horse.

In certain society circles, people continue their rather frivolous boycott of the French language. Meanwhile, Pierre is following through on his rather audacious pledge to finance a militia for the war effort—a serious effort, but society people make light of that, too.



The conversation turns to the Rostovs' struggles. Natasha is better, and the Count wants to return to the country, but the Countess insists on waiting for Petya, who's joined the Cossacks but is soon to be transferred to Pierre's regiment. Julie teases Pierre about Natasha, calling him her "knight," and Pierre gets annoyed. Julie changes the subject to Marya Bolkonsky, who's soon arriving in Moscow after the death of her father. She tells the story of Nikolai Rostov rescuing Marya from the Bogucharovo peasants and hints that Marya might be in love with Nikolai.

Despite years of friendship with Princess Marya, Julie Karagin has shown her true colors the more she's entered into society life. Not only does she gossip about her old friend, but she appears to betray a trust as well. Such gossip is valuable currency in aristocratic circles, and Julie evidently cares more about her own status than about true friendship.



When he gets home, Pierre looks at some of Rastopchin's posters. One of the posters insists that the enemy will never enter Moscow. This convinces him that the French actually will reach Moscow. Pierre wonders, for the hundredth time, if he should enter military service. He shuffles a deck of cards for a sign that he should enter the service. Even after the cards turn up the sign he'd been hoping for, he remains irresolute.

Deep down, Pierre seems to have an accurate sense of truth versus propaganda. Yet when it comes to his own actions, he continues to waffle rather than commit, relying on dubious signs to guide his decisions. Though he's already contributed quite a bit to the war effort, donating his wealth doesn't feel like enough.



By this time, most of Pierre's acquaintances have left Moscow. He has other troubles—in order to fund a regiment, he'll have to sell one of his estates. To distract himself, he goes to a nearby village to see a hot-air balloon. On his way back into the city, he sees two Frenchmen being publicly flogged, one of them a cook accused of spying. Pierre hurries back to his coach. Suddenly, he feels utterly resolved to leave Moscow and join the army.

It's not totally clear why witnessing the flogging of the two Frenchmen has such a decisive effect on Pierre. Public opinion has turned harshly against French residents, and perhaps Pierre, aware of his past struggles to fit in as Russian, feels the need to prove himself. Or maybe the brutality of the scene simply shocks him out of his indecision.



The next day Pierre sets out for Mozhaik, which is filled with troops of every kind. He feels both restless and joyful, longing to sacrifice something. The everyday comforts of life, he realizes, are nothing compared to...something else. Pierre isn't sure what he wants to sacrifice for—yet the *idea* of sacrifice delights him.

Pierre's feelings as he goes to the warfront hearken back to his emotions during his Masonic initiation. Once again, he feels he's on the cusp of a life-changing breakthrough. At the same time, he still doesn't understand what his sacrificial longing should be directed toward.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 19–23

The battle of Borodino takes place on the 26th of August. Fighting this battle makes no sense for either side. In fact, both sides are brought closer to realizing their biggest fears: the destruction of Moscow (for the Russians) and the destruction of an entire army (for the French). Only later do historians offer ingenious explanations for why the generals, swept up involuntarily in world events, agreed to do battle.

Though historians later claim that Kutuzov sought the best possible battle position at Borodino, the truth is that he might have picked a better position from a map at random. In fact, the Russians had barely started fortifying this position on the day of battle. In reality, when the French unexpectedly attacked the Russians at the Shevardino redoubt on August 24th, the Russians were forced to pull back the army's left wing and fortify that wing wherever it happened to end up. The Russian commanders were slow to recognize the weakness of the left wing and had to transfer troops from right to left during the course of battle. This is how the Russians wound up fighting the French on scarcely fortified ground they didn't choose while twice as weak as their opponents.

On the morning of August 25th, Pierre drives out of Mozhaisk. He watches a train of carts being driven up the hill into the town; they're filled with wounded, jostling men. A singing cavalry regiment blocks the road, halting both Pierre and some of the wounded. Pierre chats with a soldier until he's free to move on.

After three miles, he finally sees a doctor he knows, who advises him to speak directly to Kutuzov if he hopes to join the battle. The doctor is harried because he anticipates 20,000 wounded in the coming battle, and the army isn't prepared. Pierre tries to grasp this idea. How can so many men—now healthy and even cheerful—be facing imminent death? He keeps going until he reaches a crowd of muzhik militiamen digging on a hill. The sight of the peasants impresses Pierre, reminding him of something the soldier had said earlier—that “they want the whole people to throw their weight into it.”

Pierre climbs the hill in the late morning sun, overlooking the village of Borodino and the winding road that leads to Valuevo, where Napoleon is currently based. A forest sits on the horizon, a monastery bell tower visible in its midst. Pierre had expected to see a battlefield with clearly distinguishable troop positions, but instead he sees a varied, confusing landscape in which he can't tell Russian troops apart from the enemy.

The battle of Borodino was the pivotal battle of the entire French invasion, and the deadliest of the campaign. But Tolstoy's biggest point is that the battle was senseless, going against the best interests of both sides and later justified on shaky grounds.



Tolstoy studied army positions closely, not just for historical accuracy, but to convey some of the multiplicity of factors that affect battle outcomes, wars, and fates of nations. One of historians' later justifications is that Kutuzov chose advantageous ground for fighting the battle, but Tolstoy argues that, actually, circumstances forced this position on Kutuzov. Kutuzov was more concerned about defending the right wing, nearer the road to Moscow, so the left wing, dislodged by the earlier attack on Shevardino, was left vulnerable.



Fitting his character, Pierre shows up for the battle filled with patriotic fervor and no clear objective. In sharp contrast to the idle, courteous world of the city, he arrives directly in the midst of the unpredictable, chaotic battlefield.



Pierre explicitly poses the question Tolstoy asks more subtly throughout the novel: how can seemingly sane, happy human beings throw away their lives in combat? What's more, there's a feeling that all of Russia is pouring its strength into the effort, as Pierre reflects when he sees the men digging. The unspoken question is whether all this will prove to have been worth it.



Pierre is surprised by the chaotic setting. He'd pictured enemies situated in clear opposition to one another, yet he sees something quite different—an indistinguishable mass of people. This suggests that human distinctions between friend and enemy are arbitrary, and more broadly, that war has no discernible meaning.



Pierre talks with a nearby officer, who points out the enemy troops. The officer isn't sure of the village's name— "Burdino or something." He points out the various fortifications and the army's right flank, but he struggles to clearly explain the position of the left flank; it's been shifted back, but he thinks it unlikely that battle will occur there.

As Pierre goes back down the hill, he sees a church procession coming from the direction of Borodino. The procession carries the icon of the Smolenskaya Mother of God. Soldiers run from all directions to bow before the icon. The crowd stops to hold a prayer service. Pierre watches the solemn, devout faces with interest. Kutuzov, Bennigsen, and their suite join the service. When it's over, Kutuzov heavily bows and kisses the icon, with the lower ranks jostling behind.

In the middle of the crush of people, Boris Drubetskoy approaches Pierre. When Pierre explains his desire to take part in the battle, Boris invites Pierre to follow Count Bennigsen, to whom Boris is attached. Boris senses that, no matter the battle's outcome, Bennigsen will emerge looking better than Kutuzov and rising to prominence as a result.

Kutuzov notices the crowd surrounding Pierre and wants to see him. On his way, Pierre spots Dolokhov and learns that his old enemy has been demoted to the ranks. As Pierre and Boris approach Kutuzov, Boris makes a pointed remark about the heroic militiamen and their readiness for death, hoping to be overheard by Kutuzov. After greeting the commander in chief, Pierre crosses paths with Dolokhov, who offers his hand and asks Pierre's forgiveness for their former misunderstanding. The men embrace. Then Boris invites Pierre to join Count Bennigsen's suite in riding along the line.

Bennigsen rides across a bridge into the village of Borodino, then turns left and climbs a high barrow onto what will become known as the Raevsky redoubt. Pierre doesn't pay much attention to it, not knowing that this will be the battlefield's most important spot for him. Then they ride through rye fields until they reach a fortification, from which they can view the Shevardino redoubt. Yesterday the redoubt belonged to the Russians, but now it's occupied by the French. Pierre sees horsemen on the redoubt and tries to guess which of them might be Napoleon.

The officer's garbling of "Borodino" is ironic, because this relatively obscure spot was to become one of the most famous places in Russian history. His opinion about the left flank position is another instance of dramatic irony, since that position turned out to be so decisive after all.



The icon of the Virgin Mary, made in 1648, is a copy of an eighth-century Byzantine icon which was believed to be miracle-working. The icon was kept in one of Moscow's holiest sites, the Iverskaya Chapel, until the Soviet era. The procession on the eve of battle demonstrates the importance of Orthodox piety in Russian national identity.



As usual, Boris is focused on how the war might impact people's reputations and standing, not who wins or loses and what that might mean for Russia as a whole.



Before accompanying Bennigsen's suite, Pierre has a notable encounter with a former enemy. Though Dolokhov has been a wicked and remorseless character in the past, now he shows every sign of sincerity, suggesting that war doesn't inevitably change people for the worse.



The Raevsky redoubt was a huge earthwork topped with cannons; it defended the center of the Russian position, and over the course of the battle, it changed hands multiple times. Now, in the calm before battle, it appears inconspicuous to Pierre.



Pierre listens carefully to Bennisen's explanation of the troops' position, but he finds it difficult to understand. The group rides through some woods and finds an unoccupied hill. Bennisen commands that troops be positioned atop the hill instead of gathering at its base. Pierre agrees with the general's opinion about defending this hill, yet because he *can* understand it, he wonders how such an obvious mistake could have been made. Neither Pierre nor Bennisen knows that the troops had been put there in order to ambush the advancing French. Bennisen moves the troops without consulting Kutuzov.

Pierre isn't a soldier and doesn't have a natural eye for a battlefield, so when a problem seems obvious to him, he assumes there must be crucial details he's missing. In this case, he's right: there's a reason the Russian soldiers are clustered at the foot of the empty hill, but Bennisen, assuming his read of the situation is correct, repositions the troops to his liking. It's an example of miscommunications and assumptions having an impact on battle outcomes, even more than clear orders do.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 24–25

That evening of August 25th, Prince Andrei lies in a shed on the outskirts of a village. He feels nervous and excited, much as he did before the battle of Austerlitz seven years earlier. He is also tormented with the fear, almost the certainty, of imminent death. His whole life, especially his greatest griefs (his love for Natasha, his father's death, and the invasion of Russia), now seem simple and even foolish in the stark light of death. He pictures the forest, the clouds, and the smoking campfires outlasting him and feels chilled with fear.

Prince Andrei has had a long journey to this point—loss, disillusionment, absence of purpose, not to mention near misses with death himself. Even after all this, the prospect of dying in battle puts everything else in perspective, and ordinary objects feel threatening, reminding him that life will go on after him—perhaps as soon as tomorrow.



Prince Andrei hears someone cursing in French outside his shelter. He finds Pierre tripping over a pole. Pierre stutters awkwardly when he sees the hostility in Andrei's face. He says he's come because the battle seemed "interesting," and Prince Andrei mockingly asks what the Masons have to say about that. Turning serious, he also asks about his family's welfare and learns that they've made it safely to the Bolkonsky estate outside Moscow. With some nearby officers, they have tea and discuss different commanders.

Out of place as ever, Pierre stumbles into Andrei's camp and gets a chilly welcome, thanks to Andrei's bitter and pensive mood. Andrei needles Pierre about the fact that the Masons are technically pacifists. Andrei knows his friend well, and his struggles with inconsistent ethics. It's an inconsistency Andrei is familiar with, too.



Prince Andrei argues that a healthy Russia could be commanded by anyone, including a "precise German" like de Tolly. But a struggling Russia must be commanded by one of her own. Passionately, he adds that the army's success doesn't depend on commanders' instructions, on ammunition, or even on position—it depends instead on the spirit of the men. Battles, he thinks, are won by those who are determined to win them. In Andrei's mind, the outcome of the battle depends on who fights hardest—and he believes that will be the Russians.

Prince Andrei knows the Russian military situation well. He's been Kutuzov's adjutant, he's fought in many battles, and he's served alongside rank-and-file soldiers. On the eve of the biggest battle in his life, he expresses some of Tolstoy's own arguments: that Russia thrives under Russian leadership, and that ultimately, commanders' orders and battle dispositions are less critical than men's morale.



Prince Andrei and Pierre hear Wolzogen and Clausewitz riding by, conversing in German. They're discussing the importance of weakening the enemy, no matter how many individual lives must be spent. Prince Andrei sarcastically mocks these "German gentlemen" who can only reason and therefore cannot win the battle. He also asserts that he doesn't believe in taking prisoners. The French destroyed his home and will try to destroy Moscow, so they are his enemies—they deserve execution.

Up until now, Prince Andrei says, the armies have been merely "playing at war," pretending to be chivalrous. But there's nothing courteous about war—it's "the vilest thing in the world," and until people accept that, it's not worth going to war. He concludes this outburst by saying that it's become difficult for him to live—he understands too much. He embraces Pierre and goes back into his shed. Pierre is sure he won't see Andrei again.

Prince Andrei can't sleep that night. He remembers an evening in Petersburg when Natasha exuberantly told him a story about going mushroom-hunting in the forest. He smiles at the memory. He understood Natasha's open, sincere soul, he feels—and Anatole Kuragin didn't. He just saw an innocent young girl he didn't really care about—and he continues to live happily. Prince Andrei jumps up and starts pacing again.

VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 26–29

That same evening, the 25th of August, ministers from Paris and Madrid visit Napoleon at his camp in Valuevo. In his bedroom, the emperor is being vigorously scrubbed and sprayed by his valets. When Napoleon is fully uniformed, he leaves his bedroom and speaks with the colonel from Spain. Then he looks at the gift that Beausset, prefect of the palace, has brought, showing his favor by tugging the prefect's ear. Beausset pulls a cloth off a brightly-colored portrait of Napoleon's son. The son, the king of Rome, is playing a game of bilboquet using a ball in the shape of a globe and a stick that looks like a scepter. Napoleon tenderly admires the gift. Then he dictates his battle proclamation and rides off.

Because the Russian left flank has already moved back and is not fortified, it seems obvious that the French ought to attack it. But Napoleon doesn't think so at the time. After studying the terrain, he returns to headquarters and draws up his battle disposition—four directions which, in hindsight, are vague and impossible to carry out. For example, he orders that the French batteries be set up at locations that cannot reach the Russians, and he doesn't take sufficient account of the terrain.

Prince Andrei's point about reason is that, while well-reasoned strategies have a place in war, they're not decisive in battles, and those who rely on them won't be successful. His attitude about the war has also become noticeably harsher and more personal since the French invaded Russia; it's no longer a question of political alliances, but of national pride.



Prince Andrei argues that war must be faced head-on, its ugliness acknowledged upfront. As long as people pretend that there's anything beautiful or honorable about war, they won't fight with conviction. Andrei seems exhausted by his long search for truth and his embrace of hard realities.



Prince Andrei saw and loved Natasha for who she is. For that reason, he finds it hard to bear the fact that a heartless, uncaring man stole her from him. Though he's accepted some difficult truths about war, this truth seems the most painful of all.



Tolstoy enjoys humanizing Napoleon, in this case showing his vanity and idiosyncrasies. Napoleon's son with Empress Marie Louise, Napoleon II, would have been under two years old at this time. Bilboquet is a game in which a ball is attached by a string to a stick with a cup on top, the object being to catch the ball in the cup. The use of this toy in the painting is meant to evoke the little boy's future dominance as a world ruler.



Napoleon's survey of the battle situation illustrates Tolstoy's earlier point that what seems clear to later historians is seldom obvious at the time. It also suggests that Prince Andrei's instincts are correct—commanders' orders are not as decisive as they like to think. The instructions Napoleon provides are, in fact, mostly impracticable.



Napoleon's historians later suggest that he lost the battle because he had a cold. But this view overlooks the coincidence of the wills of all those present. It was, in fact, the French soldiers who each chose to fight and kill Russian soldiers. It only *seemed* to Napoleon that he was really in charge; thus the question of his having a cold or not is really immaterial.

Furthermore, Napoleon's instructions during this battle were really no worse than those given in any previous battle; they only *seem* to be because this is the first battle Napoleon lost. Had he won, the instructions would have seemed ingenious and would have been studied for generations.

After returning from another ride along the line, Napoleon drinks punch and chats with Beausset about changes he intends to make in the empress's house. Despite his nonchalant air, however, Napoleon can't sleep that night. He gets up before dawn and chats with his adjutant, Rapp, who assures him that the day will go well and that all preparations have been undertaken. Napoleon observes that his army has been much diminished since Smolensk and fusses about his cold. He goes outside and paces in the dark. By 5:30 in the morning, Napoleon is riding toward the Shevardino redoubt, and cannon fire rings through the dawn.

VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 30–35

The next morning, Pierre wakes up in a corner of Boris's cottage. The windows are rattling with gunfire, and almost everyone has left long ago. Pierre hurriedly rides to the hill from which he'd overlooked the battlefield yesterday; Kutuzov and his men are gathered there. Pierre is struck by the sunlit beauty of the panorama, covered with troops, smoke, and mist. He longs to be in the middle of the action. When a general goes down the hill, Pierre follows at a gallop.

When Pierre loses track of the general, he gets stuck in the middle of some infantry ranks, to the soldiers' annoyance. People yell at him to get out of the front of the line. Finally, he finds an adjutant he knows, who leads him toward a battery with a view of the left flank, where the action is growing hot. Only then does Pierre start to notice the dead lying around, and the adjutant points out that Pierre's horse has been wounded in the foreleg. The adjutant leaves Pierre at the battery and rides away; Pierre learns later that the adjutant's arm was shot off that day.

Historians give all kinds of dubious justifications for the way things turn out. Tolstoy supports this claim with a bold assertion: that Napoleon's agency was wildly exaggerated. According to Tolstoy's view of history, countless human wills coincide to produce historical events.



The context of historical events also colors people's perceptions of them. Tolstoy implicitly questions the concept of military genius altogether, a criticism he'll develop at the end of the book.



Despite being one of the war's most formidable personalities, Napoleon experiences the prelude to battle much like any other soldier—chatting about irrelevancies, fidgeting, and fighting to keep nerves in check. In life and death scenarios, both small and great wrestle with similar uncertainties and fears.

Boris, not accustomed to the rigors of battle, sleeps through the beginning of the action. But that doesn't lessen his compulsion to be right in the thick of things, wanting to prove himself useful in some way. He is more struck by the ambient beauty of the field than by the brutal realities of fighting.



As he often does, Pierre stumbles awkwardly into a mess and needs somebody else to extricate him. At first, he's also oblivious to the deadly violence playing out all around him—even underneath him. Letting his ideals lead the way, he is clueless about what he's gotten himself into.



The place where Pierre is standing is called the Raevsky battery, which the French consider to be the most important part of the Russian position. Smiling and staying out of the soldiers' way, Pierre strolls around the redoubt watching the action. At first, the soldiers are annoyed by Pierre's presence, but soon they begin to good-naturedly tease him, nicknaming him "our master." Pierre is so absorbed in the men's camaraderie that he doesn't notice what's happening through the surrounding cloud of smoke. Even as men are wounded and killed, the group remains cheerful. The deadlier things get, the more laughter there is.

Suddenly cannonballs begin to fall thickly on the battery. Pierre volunteers to run down the hill and bring the caissons from the reserves, but by the time he gets there, he forgets what he's doing. Just then, a tremendous shock throws him to the ground. When he comes to, there's nothing around him but charred grass and a screaming horse.

Without thinking, Pierre runs back to the battery for refuge. He doesn't realize that the senior colonel is lying dead on the rampart, or that a soldier who's shouting "Brothers!" is being restrained by the enemy. A man in a blue uniform collides with Pierre and seizes his collar, just as Pierre grabs him by the throat. Before they can sort out who's captured whom, another cannonball hits nearby, and they let go of each other. Pierre races back down the hill, running into a crowd of merrily shouting Russians, who retake the hill. Yet all of the men who'd become familiar to Pierre on the battery now seem to be dead. As he follows the stretchers down the hill, Pierre wonders why, seeing the horror that's ensued, they don't stop fighting at once.

The battle's main action takes place on a stretch of field between Borodino and Prince Bagration's defenses. From his position on the Shevardino redoubt, peering through field glasses at the billowing smoke, Napoleon can't determine what's happening. Though many adjutants gallop to Napoleon with news, their reports are invariably false: either they misunderstand what's happening in the confusion, or circumstances change by the time messages arrive. Such reports lead Napoleon to give instructions that are either redundant or can't be fulfilled.

While the Raevsky battery provides an ideal lookout, it's more than that: Pierre has unknowingly climbed the hill that the French will viciously target before the day is over. He observes the soldiers' determined brotherhood and perseverance under deadly fire—the fighting spirit Tolstoy sees as key to prevailing in battle.



Pierre tries to make himself useful by fetching more artillery, but, unused to the intensity of warfare, he gets disoriented even before there's a catastrophic impact nearby.



In the meantime, the French have seized the Raevsky redoubt. Many of the men he's briefly gotten to know now lie dead or are in the process of being taken captive. The same almost happens to Pierre, but the Russians soon retake the hill. But this rapid change of fortune isn't what strikes Pierre most; rather, the horror surrounding him seems sufficient reason to call off the fighting. Pierre's impression confirms Tolstoy's view that the violence of warfare is inherently irrational.



Ironically, though the outcome of the battle tends to be attributed largely to Napoleon, Napoleon knew less than most about what was going on that day—from his vantage point above the fray, he simply can't see or keep up with what's going on. This is a prime illustration of Tolstoy's point that commanders' instructions aren't as important as historians claim.



This battle is different from all Napoleon's previous battles. Instead of putting the enemy to flight, French troops straggle back from the zone of fire, disorganized and reduced in number. At one point, General Murat asks Napoleon for reinforcements. Napoleon, baffled, sternly refuses. After two more generals send the same request, Napoleon finally sends a reinforcement division. As the day wears on, the same request comes repeatedly, and Napoleon becomes more pensive and withdrawn. He begins to feel as if he's in a nightmare.

Eventually, Berthier suggests that they ride along the line to get a better sense of the situation. Napoleon shakes himself out of his daze. As they ride, he sees heaps of dead men and horses. When they reach Semyonovskoe, he sees only Russian uniforms and realizes this has ceased to be a battle; it's now a slaughter. A general suggests that Napoleon send the old guard into battle. After a long pause, Napoleon says he will not have his old guard annihilated.

Meanwhile, Kutuzov receives reports from his subordinates, agreeing or disagreeing with what's suggested. However, he knows that the battle's fate doesn't hang on his instructions, but on the spirit of his troops. He tries to encourage this spirit as best he can despite his age and weariness. In the late morning, he learns that Prince Bagration has been injured. Soon after, he hears the heartening news that General Murat has been captured. He says that the battle is won, but he urges calm.

By two o'clock in the afternoon, the French have stopped attacking. The day's tension has been too much for Kutuzov, and he occasionally dozes off. Wolzogen, the imperial adjutant, approaches Kutuzov while he's eating his dinner. Wolzogen, who doesn't respect the elderly Kutuzov, condescendingly says that commander in chief Barclay de Tolly has assessed the state of the left flank and determined that the battle is lost. Kutuzov suddenly gets up and shouts at Wolzogen, reprimanding him for his ignorance. Tomorrow, the Russians will repel the enemy from this holy land, he tells Wolzogen, growing tearfully emotional. Before long, Kutuzov's orders for the next day's attack spread from one end of the army to another, confirming what each Russian has already sensed in his soul.

Though Napoleon follows the same methods he's always followed in battle, they're not infallible this time. The French are technically winning, but they're also utterly exhausted by the resistance of the strong Russian defense.



Berthier and other generals did encourage Napoleon to send his most prestigious soldiers—the elite Imperial Guard—into battle in order to boost flagging morale. In the end, he refused, encouraging his men to hold their current position.



While Napoleon spends much time debating his orders, Kutuzov believes that Russian morale will decide the battle, and that this spirit is more important than issued commands. Bagration later died of his wounds at Borodino. However, most of what Kutuzov hears points to a Russian victory—at least for now.



The Prussian Wolzogen who, with Pfuel, planned the 1812 campaign, represents a European approach to warfare, based on meticulous assessments of conditions. In contrast, Kutuzov's approach is passionate and instinctive—he and his army know “in their souls” that they've won and will continue to prevail. The contrast supports Tolstoy's argument that, in the end, such instinctive Russian leaders and methods are more effective than the reasoned plans imposed by European outsiders.



VOLUME 3, PART 2: CHAPTERS 36–39

Prince Andrei's reserve regiment is stationed behind Semyonovskoe. In the afternoon, the regiment is moved into the line of fire, and it loses a third of its men without firing a shot. The men sit for hours on the ground, absorbing themselves in small tasks, trying to ignore it as more and more wounded are carried past. They grow ever more exhausted and demoralized. Even Prince Andrei has nothing to do but pace. He realizes he can't even rouse his men's spirits. Each of them, like him, is fully absorbed in ignoring the reality of death all around them.

At one point, a shell lands two paces from Prince Andrei. As he stands frozen, he looks with "new, envious eyes" at the meadow surrounding him, feeling his love for life and his reluctance to die. At the same time, he remembers that his men are watching. Suddenly the shell explodes, and Andrei is hurled sideways. Blood pools next to him. Muzhiks run over to move him, and despite Andrei's moans, they manage to load him onto a stretcher. Seeing his wound, an officer says, "That's the end!"

Prince Andrei is carried to the vast dressing station in the woods. While he waits to be treated, he listens to a sergeant with a bandaged head rapturously telling the story of General Murat's capture. Like the other listeners, Andrei feels comforted by the story, yet he wonders what difference it makes now. He reflects that there's something about life that he still doesn't understand.

When Prince Andrei is carried into a tent, those waiting grumble at the preferential treatment. Prince Andrei feels overwhelmed by the bloody sights in the tent, the memory of the "cannon fodder" in the pond weeks ago, and his own pain. He can't stop himself from watching as men near him undergo agonizing amputations. When the doctor prods Andrei's stomach wound, he falls unconscious. When he revives, his shattered hip and his stomach wound have been treated and dressed. He feels a deep, childlike sense of peace.

When Prince Andrei hears another man sobbing, he wants to weep in sympathy. The man's leg has been amputated. When the doctor steps away from the man, Andrei is shocked to recognize Anatole Kuragin. It takes him a moment to remember his connection with the man. Eventually, a clear memory of young, innocent Natasha surfaces in his mind, filling him with love. He even feels tender pity and compassion for Anatole, his enemy. Andrei realizes this is the kind of Christian love Princess Marya prayed for Andrei to feel; it's the lingering mystery of life he'd been wondering about. He knows he's come to understand it too late.

Back on the battlefield, Prince Andrei, having chosen to remain with the regiment instead of accepting a safer staff position, is in the thick of battle with his men. Contrary to what one might expect, this sometimes involves agonized waiting more than frenzied action.



In the instant before the shell explosion and sustaining an apparently deadly wound, Prince Andrei experiences an intense awareness of the beauty of nature around him—something he's experienced in battle before. Tolstoy uses such hyperaware moments to show how consciousness of life is often sharpest when one's life is threatened.



The news about General Murat encourages Russian morale, yet Andrei senses there are bigger questions at stake than who's winning the war.



After the battle of Smolensk, Andrei had a momentary, profound awareness that his comrades' bodies were being thrown away in battle like so much "cannon fodder." The sights in the medical tent make this apprehension even more acute.



When Andrei sees Anatole suffering, he no longer feels anger towards his enemy, whom he'd once stalked across Europe in hopes of provoking a duel. In that instant, the best of both Natasha's and Princess Marya's influences come together, stirring up love and pity where there'd once been hate. Prince Andrei realizes the meaning of life: love for others, even enemies.



Normally, Napoleon enjoys surveying the field after battle in order to test his mettle. Today, however, he can't stand it. He just cowers out of sight, feeling responsible for the action yet powerless to stop it. When an adjutant reports that, even though batteries are firing from the heights, the Russians keep coming, Napoleon orders them to keep firing. In doing so, he fulfills the "inhuman role" to which he's assigned. In fact, to the end of his life, Napoleon is unable to understand goodness—that would require him to renounce the cruelties for which he's renowned.

Yet, in his memoirs written on St. Helena, Napoleon later recalled the Russian war as a sensible and "pacific" one, fought in the interests of a good cause. He claims that if he had been able to found a comprehensive European system, the entire continent could have become one people. He would have resigned as dictator and fought no more wars. In claiming these things, Napoleon remains convinced that he acted for the people's good. This justification allows him to distance himself from the horror of the acts committed.

The fields belonging to the Davydov family, worked by peasants over centuries, are now blood-soaked and covered with bodies. The atmosphere smells of saltpeter and blood. A gentle rain starts. Slowly, the battle fizzles out. Both sides are decimated and exhausted. To an outsider, it might look as though either side could destroy their enemy with one last effort; yet, in reality, neither side can muster the strength for that.

For their part, the French have spent the last 15 years believing in Napoleon's invincibility. In retrospect, some historians claimed that, if only Napoleon had sent his old guard into battle, he could have dislodged the Russians from the road to Moscow, obtaining his overall objective. Yet, even if he had ordered this, it could not have been—the French army was simply too dispirited. Whereas the Russians gained a sense of moral superiority at Borodino, the French were totally demoralized for the first time.

VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 1–4

An ancient sophism states that if Achilles is walking 10 times faster than a tortoise, he can never overtake a tortoise that's walking ahead of him. Each time Achilles covers the distance that separates him from the tortoise, the tortoise still gets ahead of him by one-tenth of that distance. According to ancient mathematics, this problem seemed insoluble. Today, a branch of mathematics deals with infinitesimal quantities and is thus able to deal with the problem of continuous movement as well.

Napoleon feels repelled by what he's helped bring about at Borodino. At the same time, Tolstoy suggests that Napoleon's culpability is complicated. In one sense, he's merely played the role that's been given to him, but in another sense, he's answerable for his inherent cruelty. People have free will, but at the same time, they're small parts of a much bigger plan.



Like any historian, Napoleon later portrays his own actions in the best possible light, claiming that he never sought war, and that he fought only for the sake of ultimate peace. Tolstoy argues that people's moral compass gets broken by war, and such self-justifications reflect that.



Tolstoy links the Borodino battlefield to its role in Russian history, from being a life-sustaining estate for centuries to becoming, in the space of a day, one of the deadliest spots in the country's history. The battle is basically a draw. The French claim victory, yet their little remaining strength pushes them deeper into Russia, which ultimately destroys them.



Borodino has mixed results for both sides. If the French can be said to have "won," it was at the cost of the illusion of invincibility and the destruction of morale. If the Russians were exhausted and forced to retreat beyond Moscow, their morale was nevertheless strengthened by their strong defense and the damage they inflicted on the enemy.



Tolstoy opens this part with further reflections on history. Basically, his point here is that history is constantly on the move, and because of this fact, it's impossible to fully "catch up" with the tiny components that make up history's whole.



Something similar happens when dealing with the problem of historical movement. Humanity moves according to a countless number of simultaneously acting human wills. It's history's job to try to make sense of discrete events, yet that's not really possible, because each event continuously follows another; there's no "beginning." No matter how tiny the unit a historian selects, that unit is inevitably arbitrary. Historical laws can only be understood by attempting to integrate these countless infinitesimal units.

The first 15 years of the 1800s were an extraordinary time in Europe. To explain it, historians identify the French "revolution" (really the actions of a few dozen men in Paris), tell Napoleon's biography, name his supporters and detractors, and call this the origin of what happened in the wars. But this is inadequate. To really study history's laws, it's necessary to look at the "masses" instead of at kings and other larger-than-life figures.

On the evening of August 26th, the Russian army is convinced that they've won the battle of Borodino. That's why Kutuzov begins making plans for renewed battle the following day. But as reports come in of the extent of the army's devastation, the Russians realize that decisively crushing the French is impossible. There are too many wounded, they haven't been resupplied, dead commanders have not been replaced, and those capable of fighting are unrefreshed. Because of all this, and because of the remaining French momentum, the Russians ultimately cede Moscow to the French, retreating 80 miles beyond it. It's easy for armchair historians to criticize Kutuzov for this, but the reality is that he didn't choose to surrender Moscow; he made hundreds of smaller decisions along the way.

After retreating from Borodino, the Russians are camped at Fili. After surveying the position, Ermolov tells Kutuzov it's impossible to fight from here. Beside a road on Poklonnaya Hill, Kutuzov, a crowd of generals, and Rastopchin debate the position in detail, constituting an unofficial council of war. The more people talk, the more Kutuzov recognizes the helplessness of their position. He sees that even if it weren't physically impossible, both generals and men *believe* it is, and they can't fight under those circumstances.

In Andrei Savostyanov's peasant cottage, another war council gathers. Most of the family huddles in the kitchen, but Malasha, the six-year-old granddaughter, gets to stay; Kutuzov gives her a lump of sugar. Malasha watches as generals crowd around the table with maps and plans. The generals wait two hours for Bennigsen, who's savoring his dinner, to join them.

Tolstoy argues that it's impossible to isolate historical events in order to study them, because each is a product of a chain of other events that can't be traced back to a clear beginning. Historians must therefore make arbitrary choices. Typically, this means figuring out how individual events fit together.



Tolstoy argues that the conventional history of the Napoleonic Wars is insufficient. Traditionally, historians choose a handful of events, centering around a small number of "important" individuals, in order to explain how the wars came about. But Tolstoy holds that so-called "great men" are only a small part of the story.



After Borodino, Russian morale is high, but circumstances make it impossible to keep fighting. Kutuzov is much criticized for allowing the French to advance from Borodino to Moscow. But Tolstoy argues that the decision to abandon Moscow really wasn't a single, discrete decision for which Kutuzov can be blamed; such big decisions are really just the product of many lesser decisions that came before them.



Kutuzov, always sensitive to his people's morale, knows that his soldiers' state of mind is more important than the physical details, like position and supplies, that people usually bring up in councils of war. In other words, if his men don't believe a battle is winnable, it won't be.



Tolstoy illustrates the impact of war on seasoned generals and anonymous peasant families alike, as the highest Russian general takes notice of a six-year-old girl.



Bennigsen starts the discussion—can “Russia’s sacred and ancient capital” be abandoned? Kutuzov interjects that this is a meaningless question. The real question is whether to accept battle—thereby risking the loss of both Moscow and the army—or to surrender Moscow without a battle. Debate ensues. While a few side with Bennigsen, believing that Moscow’s fate isn’t sealed, most argue instead over the direction in which the army should retreat.

Bennigsen, who’s always ambitious and seeking his own angle for personal advancement, frames the discussion around a rather manipulatively emotional question. Kutuzov sees through this, knowing the real issue is whether the army can afford another costly battle.



Little Malasha doesn’t understand this discussion. Instead, she observes the anger between Kutuzov (whom she thinks of as “Grandpa”) and Bennigsen (whom she calls “Long-skirts”). She takes “Grandpa’s” side. Kutuzov reminds Bennigsen that defending Moscow would require re-forming the troops in close proximity to the enemy, which is always dangerous. After this, discussion fades. Finally, Kutuzov stands up and orders a retreat. The generals disperse gloomily. Malasha runs off to supper. Only Kutuzov keeps sitting there, asking himself when and how retreat became inevitable—he never expected this.

Malasha might not understand the debate, but she catches the salient point—that the two important generals don’t agree. Though Kutuzov wins, it’s a hollow victory—the decision not to defend Moscow is a tremendous blow to Russian pride. Like all historical events, however, that decision isn’t a singular moment, but something that a long string of circumstances renders inevitable.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 5–9

“Every Russian [...] on the basis of the feeling that is inside us” could have predicted what came next. As the enemy approached, townspeople and villagers remained calm. The rich abandoned their property, while the poor remained behind, destroying what they could. Rastopchin publishes posters proclaiming that it’s shameful to flee Moscow. Though people don’t like being considered cowards, they flee simply because they refuse to live under French rule. Rastopchin, wanting to be a patriotic hero, issues and retracts various orders relating to the abandonment and defense of Moscow, but his antics make no difference to the population at large.

Rather than heeding government orders, Russians respond instinctively to the looming invasion of Moscow. Though nobody wishes to abandon their homes to the French, they stay or flee depending on their means—another example of how social standing can determine one’s experience of war.



Meanwhile, in Petersburg, Hélène is in a tough albeit familiar position—juggling two different lovers, a foreign prince and a Petersburg dignitary. The prince asks her to marry him, and she considers this, claiming never to have slept with Pierre. So her lover goes to the Jesuits for advice, and soon a priest visits her regularly, preparing her for conversion to Catholicism

The action now focuses on Hélène, who is taking her usual adulterous entanglements to new levels—actually changing religions so that she can get a divorce without losing her social status. (If the Catholic Church views her marriage to Pierre as unconsummated and therefore invalid, she’ll be free to marry the prince.)



Hélène knows that the case of her marriage can be dealt with more easily in the religious realm than in the secular one. So she starts laying the groundwork for its acceptance within society. She provokes the old dignitary into proposing marriage, too, and lets the rumor of both proposals circulate in society, showing no embarrassment about them. Because of the way Hélène frames the dilemma—not as a question of divorce (which would have met with disapproval) but of the problem of whom to marry—people go along with it. They know that if they objected, they would appear foolish. The only one who doesn't care how she looks is Marya Dmitrievna Akhrosimov, who denounces Hélène's behavior in crude terms. Prince Vassily just tells Hélène to follow her heart.

One of the few people to argue against the legality of Hélène's remarriage is her mother, Princess Kuragin. The princess consults with a Russian priest and brings Hélène a biblical argument against remarriage after divorce. Hélène blithely rejects the argument, and when the young prince arrives, Princess Kuragin's doubts dissolve; it all seems simple to her now. By August, Hélène writes Pierre a letter telling him about her conversion to Catholicism and her decision to remarry. She asks him for a divorce. The letter arrives at Pierre's house while he's on the battlefield at Borodino.

After running down the hill from the Raevsky battery at the battle of Borodino, all Pierre wants to do is return to normal life and fall asleep in his own bed. After walking two miles along the Mozhaisk high road, Pierre lays down. He stays there past nightfall, occasionally startling at the imagined sound of cannonballs overhead. Eventually, three soldiers build a fire next to him and start eating supper. They ask Pierre about himself, and he feels he needs to reduce his social standing in order to seem more approachable. So he pretends to be a militia officer who's lost all his men in the battle. Accepting this, the soldiers offer him food and walk him back to town. Pierre's groom finds him there, but as there's no space at the inn, he falls asleep in his carriage.

Hélène's scheme to divorce Pierre is transparently cynical and calculating. Her position in society is what gives her life ultimate meaning, and everything else—marriage, religion—is a tool for maintaining it. She also plays on other people's fear of losing social status, brazenly pretending there's nothing scandalous about her actions and knowing that people who matter will play along.



Even those who object to Hélène's remarriage on conventionally religious grounds show that their moral disapproval doesn't run very deep; in aristocratic society, a marriage to a prince is too valuable to pass up. Ironically, Pierre, who's the main obstacle to Hélène's actions, has moved on from such superficial concerns—while all this is happening, he's dodging death on the warfront.



Pierre felt an urge to contribute more to the war effort than his wealth, but now that he's seen war up close, it's not clear that he's found the opportunity he sought. There's still a basic insecurity in Pierre's interactions with others—a sense that he doesn't quite belong (hence his reluctance to tell the soldiers the truth about himself—he seems ashamed of both his high social status and total lack of military standing). The lack of a place to sleep only reinforces that feeling.



Pierre struggles to sleep because he keeps hearing the noises of war in his mind. He marvels at the steadfast calm of the ordinary soldiers and wishes he could share their “common life.” He thinks of the duel with Dolokhov, his Masonic initiation, and dinners at the English club. At one point, he dreams of his Masonic benefactor speaking wisdom, but he wakes up before he can grasp the words. He remembers stray lines, like “War is the most difficult subjection of man’s freedom to [...] God,” and the idea that everything belongs to the one who doesn’t fear death. Somehow, the key to this is to “hitch together” all his thoughts. Suddenly Pierre wakes to his groom insistently calling that it’s time to hitch up. Pierre fears that he was moments away from understanding something, which he’s now lost forever.

Pierre sees that the soldiers have something he doesn’t—a firm sense of shared purpose. Despite efforts in many different arenas, he’s never found something comparable in his own life. His dreams reflect his discomfort—there’s a sense that he still needs to learn how to submit to something greater than himself, and that dread of dying still haunts him. But whatever the answers, Pierre won’t find the answers here at Borodino.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 10–14

On August 30th, Pierre returns to Moscow. He immediately runs into Count Rastopchin’s adjutant who says Pierre must go to the Count’s at once. At Rastopchin’s, Pierre finds a crowd of officials. They all know that Moscow is about to fall into French hands, and they’ve come to ask Rastopchin how to avoid blame. An adjutant shows Pierre a new poster. The poster tells the populace to remain calm—the prince is going to confront the French and will eventually summon the people to defend Moscow with pitchforks. The same adjutant mentions that he’s heard of Pierre’s “family troubles.” Pierre doesn’t know what he’s talking about.

With a French invasion of Moscow imminent, the main concern of most powerful people is to avoid the consequences for themselves, whether blame from their fellow citizens or enemy oppression. Perpetually out of step with society, however, Pierre has other things on his mind. He doesn’t realize that Moscow is full of rumors about his failed marriage.



Pierre is called into Rastopchin’s study. Rastopchin sternly asks him if he’s one of those Masons who wants to ruin Russia. Pierre admits to being a Mason, and Rastopchin warns him to avoid Masons like Klyucharev who’ve been accused of supporting France. Pierre leaves Rastopchin’s study in anger.

Klyucharev was a Moscow postmaster and Mason who, though innocent, got in trouble with Rastopchin for supposedly colluding in the distribution of Napoleon’s proclamations. Having just risked his life on the battlefield, Pierre is affronted by Rastopchin’s accusation that he’s unpatriotic.



At home that evening, Pierre reads Hélène’s letter, but he cannot make sense of it and collapses into bed. The next morning, his butler informs him that Count Rastopchin has sent a police official to see whether Pierre is still there. Pierre immediately gets dressed and goes out the back door.

Pierre can’t transition smoothly back into Moscow life. He’s surrounded by demands that don’t make sense to him—at this point, he can’t even accept his wife’s request for a divorce—and he has no opportunity to make sense of what he’s just experienced at Borodino.



The Rostovs stay in Moscow until September 1st. Now that Petya, too, has joined the army, the Countess is constantly fearful. The Count, in an effort to calm his wife's fears, has Petya transferred into Count Bezukhov's regiment, which is currently gathered outside Moscow. When this youngest, most mischievous son is in danger, the Countess feels that she loves him most of all her children. When Petya finally arrives on August 28th, he's uncomfortable with his mother's doting and treats her coldly, preferring Natasha's company.

The last days of August are chaotic, as citizens leave Moscow on carts piled with possessions, and thousands of wounded Borodino veterans are brought into the city at the same time. Wild, contradictory rumors circulate, and nobody knows for sure what's happening in the war. Yet everyone instinctively senses that catastrophe is about to befall Moscow and that they should escape while they can.

In the bustle surrounding Petya's visit, Sonya is the only Rostov who deals with the practical details of leaving. Yet she feels depressed about Nikolai's recent letter, in which he spoke of Princess Marya. The Countess is happy about this development, claiming she always predicted that Nikolai would marry Marya Bolkonsky. From a rational standpoint, Sonya agrees that a wealthy marriage is the only way for the Rostovs to resolve their money problems. But she feels bitter about it.

Petya and Natasha, on the other hand, don't help with packing. Instead they spend their time laughing together and running through the house like children. Petya is happy because army service has turned him from a boy into a man (at least that's what everyone says) and he knows there will be battle in Moscow any day; Natasha is happy because she is finally well, and because the rumors of war are exhilarating for any young person.

On the last day of August, the Rostovs' house is in disarray. Natasha is sitting on the floor of her bedroom, looking at the dress she'd worn to her first Petersburg ball. She's ashamed to not be helping with the preparations, but she's unable to do anything halfheartedly, and her heart isn't in packing. She's distracted from her thoughts by the commotion of a huge parade of wounded soldiers moving through the streets. She runs outside and, seeing the pale face of a soldier, asks the major if the wounded can stay at the Rostovs' house. He says yes. Natasha and the Rostovs' old housekeeper, Mavra Kuzminishna, begin inviting wounded soldiers to stop in their courtyard.

The Countess's world revolves around her family's wellbeing, and the Count lives to make the Countess happy. The Countess is most devoted to whichever one of her children is most vulnerable at a given time. Having two enlisted sons is particularly catastrophic to her.



The war affects soldiers and ordinary citizens equally, and their interests literally collide in the panicked city; the cultural heart of Russia is under threat, adding to the overall disorientation.



As usual, Sonya sacrificially cares for the rest of the Rostov family—this while grieving the fact that it looks like her relationship with Nikolai won't work out after all. As the dependent cousin, her happiness is dispensable.



As things turn out, this is Petya and Natasha's last chance to just be the children of the family. They'll both be disillusioned soon enough—Petya from his boyish enthusiasm for war and Natasha from her naïve exhilaration.



Natasha can only do things wholeheartedly, and at her best, she's generous. These traits lead her to the fateful decision to open the Rostovs' home to suffering veterans who have nowhere else to go.



Mavra Kuzminishna reminds Natasha that she'd better ask for permission, so she goes inside and, in a rush, asks the Countess—who's drowsy from a headache—if the wounded can lodge there. Both she and the Count, who's come home with bad news about the abandonment of Moscow, absentmindedly agree to Natasha's request. At dinner, Petya excitedly talks about the battle that's expected tomorrow. The countess begs her husband to take them away from Moscow as quickly as possible so that Petya won't fight.

The count and countess are both somewhat oblivious to the immediate impact of war on Moscow, their thoughts are focused on escape, while the children are both eager to be right in the thick of events. For both Natasha and Petya, however, the war—both housing soldiers and dubious rumors of battle—isn't so much a flesh-and-blood reality as an exciting diversion.



When Countess Rostov hears that there are drunken riots in the streets, the family starts packing more hastily. Once Natasha gets into the spirit of things, she suddenly takes charge, repacking things more efficiently and leaving unnecessary things aside. Before long, the servants are looking to her for direction, and even the Count doesn't protest.

Natasha goes from avoiding preparations to overseeing the family's evacuation. As usual, Count Rostov is ready to avoid unpleasant realities by ceding responsibility to someone else.



That night, while the rest of the household is asleep, Mavra Kuzminishna admits another wounded soldier at the gate. The soldier is traveling in a closed vehicle with a doctor following, so he seems important. The man, whose outlook isn't good, turns out to be Prince Andrei Bolkonsky.

Prince Andrei's arrival creates great dramatic irony. Natasha's hospitality has literally opened the door to an unforeseen reunion.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 15–17

On a cheerful autumn Sunday, the church bells ring as usual. For the most part, there's little sign of what's to come for Moscow. One exception is the crowd of mostly workers, peasants, and poor people who gather at Three Hills, weapons in hand. But when Count Rastopchin doesn't join them as promised, they disperse.

Moscow is deceptively peaceful. A popular uprising in defense of Russia doesn't materialize, despite Rastopchin's propaganda campaign.



That morning, more and more wounded show up at the house, begging for the use of carts, but the butler refuses, knowing they'll soon run out of carts and be left with nothing for the family. When the Count gets up, two men approach him directly, and the Count promptly offers them rides on his carts. Seeing this, more wounded men approach. By the time the Countess wakes up, so many wounded have been granted rides that the Rostovs' belongings are being unloaded from the carts. The Count timidly pleads with her, but the Countess objects to his decision.

The wounded from Borodino don't want to be left at the mercy of the French. The soft-hearted Count is helpless in the face of these pleas, while the Countess knows that being too generous might compromise her family's evacuation.



Outside in the courtyard, Petya tells Natasha that their parents are quarrelling over giving carts to the wounded. Natasha runs inside and passionately begs her mother that the wounded not be abandoned; it doesn't matter if their things get left behind. Ashamed, the Countess gives in. Natasha joyfully runs outside and begins giving orders for trunks to be stored and carts to be given to the wounded. Soon, random possessions are scattered across the courtyard, and wounded men come from neighboring houses seeking space on carts.

By two o'clock, the train of carts and carriages drives out of the Rostovs' courtyard. Prince Andrei's carriage catches Sonya's attention, and when she learns who's inside, she runs to tell the Countess. The Countess weeps when she hears that Andrei is said to be dying. They both know Natasha shouldn't find out.

At long last, the carriages bearing the Rostovs make their way down the street. Every so often, Natasha leans out and happily watches the train of carts bearing the wounded. A few streets later, she spots Pierre walking with a little old man. Initially lost in thought, Pierre notices Natasha and greets the astonished Rostovs, walking beside their carriage. He says he's staying behind in Moscow and that there will be a battle tomorrow. His last words to them are, "Terrible times!" Natasha beams at him as her carriage drives away.

VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 18–22

For the past two days, Pierre has been living in Bazdeev's empty apartment. Since the day after his arrival in Moscow, he has been overwhelmed with his old paralysis of helplessness and indecision. His butler informs Pierre that there's a letter from H el ene, and also that the widow of I. A. Bazdeev has sent a message asking Pierre to claim her late husband's books. Somehow, this latter issue seems the most pressing. That's when Pierre walks out of his house, ignoring everyone else, and takes a cab to Iosif Alexeevich's house.

On the way to his old mentor's house, the cabby tells Pierre about the battle that's expected at the Three Hills gate tomorrow. When he reaches the Bazdeevs', the little old servant, Gerasim, welcomes him. Gerasim explains that Iosif Alexeevich's half-mad and alcoholic brother, Makar Alexeevich, is staying here. Pierre goes into his old master's gloomy study and finds the original Scottish Masonic charters among the other important papers. For a long time, he's lost in thought. Eventually he asks Gerasim for peasants' clothes. He spends the night there, pacing and talking to himself. The next day, while walking with Gerasim to buy a pistol, Pierre encounters the Rostovs.

Energized by the opportunity to be generous in a crisis, Natasha continues to throw herself into the rescue effort and take charge of the situation.



For the time being, the Countess and Sonya mercifully spare Natasha the news that her dying ex-fianc e is among their caravan.



Pierre crosses paths with the Rostovs again, his intentions mysterious for the time being. Natasha continues to delight in the novelty and exhilaration of the evacuation, not yet guessing that she'll lose more than material possessions.



The focus returns to Pierre's story, as he was last seen struggling indecisively over the state of affairs in Moscow and under suspicion for being a Mason. Seeking direction, Pierre instinctively retreats to his old mentor's home, even though Bazdeev is no longer there to guide him.



At Bazdeev's, Pierre makes a surprising decision. Instead of hiding or dithering aimlessly, he appears to have decided to join the crowd anticipating battle at the Three Hills, laying aside the traditional Masonic commitment to pacifism Bazdeev had handed down to him.



On the night of September 1st, Kutuzov orders the army to retreat through Moscow. By mid-morning the next day, most have passed through the city. Napoleon stands on Poklonnaya Hill, overlooking the spectacle of Moscow in the brilliant autumn weather. He is struck by the “maternal” feel of the foreign city. He feels excited by the prospect of imminently taking possession of it. He thinks of his conquest in terms of conflict with the Emperor Alexander and fondly imagines “civilizing” this barbarous place and its people coming to revere him. He sends a general to bring the “boyars” to him and practices the magnanimous speech he’ll give when they arrive.

Meanwhile, generals and marshals hold a whispered debate. The general sent into Moscow had discovered that the city is practically vacant. How will they tell Napoleon? Should they gather a deputation of the few drunken men who remain? They fear putting Napoleon in the dreaded position of *le ridicule*. Before they can decide what to do, Napoleon gets impatient and orders troops to fire on the city.

Moscow is virtually empty; it looks like “a dying-out, queenless beehive.” Such a hive smells of both sweet honey and empty rot. There’s no longer a steady hum of bees at work, but a disorderly, scattered buzzing. Only robber bees and a few half-dead, sluggish and aimless survivors remain. Such a hive is only fit to be burned down when the beekeeper finds the time. This is what Moscow is like as Napoleon paces restlessly on the outskirts. When he learns that the city is empty, he glares and retreats to a suburban inn.

As troops and the wounded travel out of Moscow, the biggest jams occur at the bridges. When this happens, many soldiers slip back into the city and begin looting. Officers make a halfhearted attempt to stop the looting, but then a commotion breaks out at the Moskvoretsky bridge. They see dismounted cannons, an overturned cart, and a shrieking woman. The officers learn that General Ermolov dealt with the congestion by pretending he was going to fire on the bridge—leading to general chaos.

Back at the Rostovs’ house, the yard porter Ignat, the servant boy Mishka, and Mavra Kuzminishna have nothing much to do. A young Russian officer knocks at the gate, seeking the Count, and Mavra Kuzminishna explains that the family have just left. The young man, a relative of the Rostovs, is shabbily dressed and indicates he’d hoped that the Count might spare some money. Mavra Kuzminishna runs off and brings the officer 25 roubles, then watches, teary-eyed, as the young man hurries off in search of his regiment.

The “boyars” were an order of the medieval Russian aristocracy that had actually been abolished a century earlier by Peter the Great. With this detail, Tolstoy hints that Napoleon doesn’t know much about Russian history. This—along with his fantasy that he’ll “civilize” Russia, presumably to be more French—fits with his characterization of Napoleon as incredibly arrogant.



Napoleon seems to expect that he’ll be welcomed with open arms, making things awkward for his inferiors. The historical reality was that the vast majority of Moscow’s residents fled their homes rather than accept the French occupation of September-October, 1812.



Napoleon had dreamed of occupying a thriving Moscow, but only “robber bees” (looters), the wounded, and other poor people remain behind in the abandoned city, which is an empty husk unworthy of his aspirations.



As Napoleon sulks, the evacuation disintegrates into chaos as people fight to get out of the city before the French arrive, and others take advantage of the confusion—all examples of how war senselessly erodes society.



At this point in the evacuation, the Rostov home contains only servants. Ordinary life has vacated the city, and one wonders what will become of those who remain behind, probably through little choice of their own. The bedraggled young Rostov relative represents the devastated condition of the Russian rank and file by this time.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 23–26

In a shabby pot-house, drunken factory workers sing off-key. When a fight breaks out between their landlord and some neighboring blacksmiths, everyone rushes out to the porch. When one of the blacksmiths claims the landlord has killed a man, a whole crowd of workers marches off in search of the police (the landlord himself sneaks back to the pot-house, unnoticed). Along the way, they argue about the rumored abandonment of Moscow.

The crowd stops and gathers around a man who's reading an ukase, or government edict. The statement claims that the enemy will be eradicated by the following day. The crowd doesn't find the proclamation convincing, and when they see a police droshtky heading rapidly out of the city, they chase it. They know the city has been abandoned by the gentry and merchants and they've been left behind. In the crowd, people are heard to demand, "What, are we dogs or something?"

On the evening of September 1st, Count Rastopchin is upset. He wasn't invited to the war council, and Kutuzov ignored his suggestions about defending the capital. Demoralized, he returns to Moscow. Just as he's falling asleep that night, he receives a note requesting that he provide police escorts to the troops evacuating the city. Even though he knew that Moscow was going to be abandoned, he feels astonished that it's happening.

Later, in his notes, Rastopchin wrote that he had two goals during this time: keeping peace in Moscow and getting inhabitants to leave. If this is true, then in retrospect, Rastopchin's actions appear correct. Even the deception of citizens—in order to maintain calm—seems defensible. Indeed, one could say that even the Reign of Terror was justifiable for the sake of "public tranquility."

By nine o'clock the following morning, nobody asks Rastopchin for orders anymore. Everyone who intends to evacuate Moscow has left already; everyone else is figuring out what to do on their own. This leads Rastopchin to the realization every administrator dreads: that he is no longer necessary. The police chief comes and informs Rastopchin that a large crowd wishes to see him. He looks out at the restless mob and angrily blames the whole situation on the French. He decides that the crowd must be appeased by a victim. This idea occurs to him because he feels the same way.

Tolstoy considers the abandonment of Moscow from the perspective not just of soldiers or nobility, but of ordinary workers going about their lives.



Tolstoy portrays the workers as cynical about their rulers' and social superiors' intentions. They know very well that those with the means to escape the city are unlikely to help those who don't, or even to think of them.



Count Rastopchin, governor-general of Moscow, had hoped to defend the city to the last. In later years, he admitted to ordering the burning of Moscow's major public buildings in the early days of the French occupation.



In 1823, Rastopchin published a work titled "The Truth About the Burning of Moscow" which explained his actions in 1812. During the French Revolution's Reign of Terror (1793–1794), thousands were sent to the guillotine for execution. Tolstoy is being sarcastic here, criticizing the justifications rulers give for maintaining peace.



Having failed in his charge to defend Moscow, Rastopchin feels useless and wishes there were somebody else to blame—a natural human response that can be deadly in such a volatile situation.



Rastopchin steps onto the balcony and assures the mob that they will punish the “villain who has brought ruin to Moscow.” Rastopchin reappears on the front porch with the political prisoner Vereshchagin whom he’s ordered brought to him. He tells the crowd that this man, having gone over to Bonaparte, is responsible for Moscow’s fall. The ragged young man smiles sadly at the silent crowd. Rastopchin shrilly declares that he puts this man in the mob’s hands. The crowd does nothing.

Finally, one of the soldiers standing on the porch strikes Vereshchagin over the head with the flat of his sword. When Vereshchagin utters a cry of pain, the suspenseful silence breaks. The crowd’s sympathetic murmurs turn into a wrathful roar, and people surround the prisoner, tearing at him and beating him. There’s a sense that the people have to finish what they started, but Vereshchagin proves difficult to kill. Eventually, the man’s bruised, bloodied remains are dragged away by a pair of soldiers. The people shrink back, horrified at what they’ve done.

Shaking, Count Rastopchin gets into his carriage and orders that he be driven to his country house. As his journey gets underway, he tells himself that the rabble had to be appeased. If it had been up to him as a private individual, he might have made a different choice, but as the commander in chief, acting on the tsar’s behalf, he did what was necessary for the public good. Throughout history, people who’ve committed similar crimes have placated themselves with the same justification. Besides, Rastopchin tells himself, Vereshchagin was a traitor (though the Senate had sentenced him to hard labor, not death).

By the time he reaches Sokolniki, Rastopchin has forgotten the events in Moscow and is planning how he’s going to yell at Kutuzov for abandoning the capital. Suddenly a robed madman, released from the madhouse, starts running after the carriage. He tells Rastopchin that he has been killed three times and rose from the dead three times. Rastopchin turns pale and orders his driver to go faster. He realizes he’ll be haunted by Vereshchagin’s bloody face for the rest of his life.

Rastopchin’s carriage gallops up to Kutuzov at the Yauzsky bridge. Rastopchin accuses Kutuzov of betrayal; he’d told Rastopchin that he would never give up Moscow without offering battle. Kutuzov gazes thoughtfully at Rastopchin’s expression and agrees with him—no, he wouldn’t give up Moscow without a battle. It’s not clear if he’s not thinking about what he’s saying, or if he’s aware that his words are meaningless. In a rage, Count Rastopchin takes a whip and starts dispersing the carts that are crowding the bridge.

Rastopchin decides to blame the fall of Moscow on a convenient scapegoat—an allegedly pro-French political prisoner. He projects his own guilt and helplessness onto the man, hoping that the mob will expend their anger on this victim instead of blaming him.



Though the people resist briefly, it doesn’t take much for the mob to take out their anger at the French on the political prisoner. This horrifying scene is a prime example of Tolstoy’s argument that war dehumanizes people, leading them to commit senseless acts. It doesn’t just happen on the battlefield; ordinary citizens do it, too.



Count Rastopchin justifies his actions to himself, obviously feeling guilty and rationalizing that handing over Vereshchagin somehow benefited the people as a whole. Tolstoy makes it clear that he disagrees.



The inhabitants of the madhouse would have been released in advance of the French invasion, adding to the apocalyptic feel of the evacuation. Rastopchin briefly suppresses his guilt, but the madman’s words remind him of Vereshchagin come to life again and suggest that he’ll never be entirely free of what he’s done.



Unable to accept blame himself, Rastopchin blames General Kutuzov for putting him in this position. Kutuzov’s response is inscrutable, though Tolstoy later offers a defense of his words, suggesting that Kutuzov simply doesn’t think much about what he says, knowing that only actions are meaningful in war.



By late afternoon, Murat's troops enter Moscow. They ask some gathered citizens for directions to the Kremlin. At the Kremlin gates, French troops exchange fire with Russians within. The corpses of the Russian defenders, whose names are forgotten (they'd broken into the arsenal for guns), are moved aside. The French begin setting up camp in the Kremlin.

French soldiers disperse into various quarters and, when they leave weeks later, they've turned into looters. Though commanders issue orders forbidding this activity, all such measures prove fruitless. Soldiers squabble over houses and collect any valuables they can find. The city seems to absorb the French as sand absorbs water.

The French attribute the burning of Moscow to Rastopchin's "fierce patriotism" and the Russians to French savagery. However, the burning can't be attributed to any single person. The city burned as any wooden city would burn, especially when foreign troops are billeted there. If Russians hadn't abandoned their town, it might have been a different story.

The French occupation of Russia's spiritual and cultural heart would be felt as a deep offense, all the more because a landmark like the Kremlin isn't even meaningful to the invaders.



The French despoil Moscow with impunity, and the city is helpless to resist.



Tolstoy's point is one he often makes about history—that no event as big as the burning of Moscow can be reduced to a single cause. There might well have been both French and Russian culpability, but given the circumstances, it would have been more surprising if Moscow didn't burn.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 27–29

By the evening of September 2nd, the French reach Pierre's neighborhood. Pierre has been alone for two days, and he's nearly gone mad. He'd left his home and gone to Iosif Alexeevich's house for refuge and peace. While sitting in his dead mentor's study, reflecting on the battle of Borodino, he became convinced that he would somehow be involved in the people's defense of Moscow. He vaguely remembers his dabbling in numerology and the discovery that "*l'Russie Besuhof*" was destined to limit the "beast's" power. In his mind, the brief encounter with Natasha had confirmed that he was doing the right thing by staying in the city.

When an attempted people's defense at the Three Hills doesn't amount to anything, Pierre decides it is his job to kill Napoleon, even if he dies in the attempt. Two feelings motivate him—a desire for sacrifice, despite the comforts to which he's accustomed, and that "vague, exclusively Russian feeling of disdain" for the conventional. Besides, he's left behind his home, he's wearing a kaftan, and carrying a pistol. He feels he's taken irrevocable steps, and abandoning Moscow would make him feel ridiculous—something Pierre hates.

Pierre's rather unhinged reflections suggest that the events of recent days—the battle and the evacuation of Moscow—have driven him further from a settled sense of his role in the world instead of solidifying it. He's even resorting to dubious mystical interpretations of the Bible to justify his lingering in the city.



Pierre continues to become more and more deluded about his role in the war. Throughout the novel, he's been desperate to surrender himself to something, though he's never figured out what. Tolstoy also suggests that there's something distinctively Russian about seeking out the dramatic. In any case, Pierre is clearly grasping for justifications—as if wearing a peasant's outfit and carrying a gun mean that he can't choose another path.



As the French enter Moscow, Pierre pictures his heroism in killing Napoleon and imagines what he'll say as he strikes the fatal blow. Then Makar Alexeevich comes into the study drunk, and he suddenly steals Pierre's pistol. Gerasim and the porter wrestle it from him. At that moment, the cook screams, seeing French soldiers riding into the courtyard. The soldiers knock at the door.

A tall, handsome, limping officer enters the house and looks around, apparently satisfied with what he sees. He greets the household cheerfully in French. Pierre doesn't respond, not wanting to reveal that he knows French. Then Makar Alexeevich bursts out of the kitchen and aims at the officer with his pistol. Pierre tackles him, and Makar Alexeevich shoots into the wall instead. Pierre then speaks to the officer in French, making sure he's all right and speaking up in the madman's defense. The officer smiles at Pierre, assuming he's French because only a Frenchman would have saved his life. Pierre corrects him, but the officer refuses to hear it. For Pierre's sake, he agrees to let Makar Alexeevich go unpunished. He calls for dinner and wine.

The French officer continues to regard Pierre as an honorary Frenchman, and Pierre can't resist the man's friendly nature. He introduces himself as Captain Ramballe, and though he tries to withhold his identity at first, Pierre gives in and offers his first name, too. The two share a hearty dinner and some Bordeaux. Ramballe tells Pierre about his past battle wounds. They both reminisce about Paris, and Pierre, under the influence of the wine and gloomy days of solitude, enjoys the merry conversation.

After dinner, Pierre feels tormented. It's not because Moscow has fallen to the French, but because he's aware of his own weakness. After one meal with Ramballe, Pierre's resolve to kill Napoleon has faded. He now feels disgust toward the French officer, though he softens as Ramballe opens another bottle of wine, drinks to their friendship, and begins telling Pierre his life story, including his many adventures with women.

At this point in Pierre's musings, an actual madman somewhat ironically interrupts, and the invasion itself comes to Pierre's very door. Tolstoy would consider this to be an example of how a cascade of events can affect history; most things aren't attributable to a singular cause.



Pierre saves the life of the French officer who's chosen Bazdeev's house for his Moscow quarters—sparing himself from doing anything rash and also garnering the officer's approval, at least for the moment. While Pierre's knowledge of French could probably get him into trouble, in this case it's all to his advantage—for once, it helps that he's hard to categorize.



Pierre enjoys a friendly evening with someone who should be his enemy. The meal highlights Pierre's odd position in Russian society—in some ways, he is more comfortable socializing with a foreign invader than an actual countryman.



Despite the cheerful meal, Pierre is conflicted. Ramballe's interruption has thrown him off his intended course just when he'd resolved to follow something through. The fact that Pierre is more upset about this suggests that he's still confused about what his goals actually are.



As Pierre listens to the Frenchman's stories, he thinks of Natasha and their farewell a few days ago. He finds himself telling Ramballe the whole story—that Natasha is the only woman he's ever loved, that he never acted on it because of her youth and his illegitimacy, and his best friend Prince Andrei's love for her. He's so drunk he even reveals his real name, his wealth, and his social rank. Outside, he sees the first Moscow fire glowing at a distance. He also sees the **comet** of 1812 in the **sky**—a sight he's always associated with Natasha. He feels a deep sense of wellbeing. But just as suddenly, he remembers his earlier intention to kill Napoleon and feels sick. He falls dizzily into bed.

Everything in Pierre's life seems to be converging in a way that's hard to decipher. Lulled by alcohol and the freedom from normal social conventions, he feels free to confide his dearest secret to an enemy soldier. Even as his city ominously begins to burn, he also sees the hopeful sign of the comet that first cheered him after initially professing his love for Natasha. But that symbol has gotten mixed up with his desire to assassinate Napoleon. Pierre is still confused about his role in life.



VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 30–32

The second night after they leave Moscow, the Rostovs' carriages stop in Mytishchi, 13 miles away. That night, Count Rostov's servants speculate about a fire blazing in the distance. When the Count's valet Danilo realizes the fire is in Moscow, he begins to cry. Soon the rest of the servants are also weeping and praying for God's mercy on their city.

While Pierre watches the fire break out around him, the Rostovs watch it from a distance. The destruction of Moscow feels like a world-ending event.



The Count and Sonya go outside to look at the blaze; the Countess and Natasha stay inside. The Countess cries over the news, but Natasha doesn't respond. She's listening to the moaning of a wounded adjutant who's boarded a few houses away. Sonya comes in and tries to distract Natasha by showing her the fire, but Natasha keeps staring into space. She's been acting like this ever since Sonya inexplicably told her the news of Prince Andrei's war injury and his presence nearby. Now she has a decisive expression on her face. She goes through the motions of preparing for bed, but her eyes stare widely as she continues listening to the suffering soldier. She knows it isn't Andrei, but she's tormented nevertheless.

Though Sonya initially refrained from telling Natasha the news, her loyalty to her friend seems to win out in the end. Fittingly, the moment of the revelation of Andrei's presence isn't shown—the novel only depicts its aftermath, against the catastrophic background of the Moscow fire. While others lament the destruction of their city, Natasha faces a different turning point.



Natasha lies still until she's certain everyone else has fallen asleep. Then she creeps barefoot across the hall to the room where Prince Andrei is staying. All day she's known that she needs to see him, though she isn't sure why. In her imagination, he's the embodiment of the wounded adjutant's moaning. She sneaks past Timokhin (who has a wounded leg), the doctor, and the valet. She finds Prince Andrei looking the same as always, except boyishly innocent. When she kneels beside his bed, he smiles and gives her his hand.

Natasha reunites with Prince Andrei, feeling driven to his side. Besides the drama of his condition, there's the fact that she hasn't spoken to him since he left Russia during their engagement, and she doesn't know if he's forgiven her or whether they could have any future together.



It's been seven days since Prince Andrei regained consciousness at Borodino. He'd been unconscious for a long time, and the doctor believed he'd die. Today, upon being moved into the cottage to sleep, Andrei had again lost consciousness, but when he revived, he asked for tea. The doctor fears Andrei's improvement just means he'll suffer greater agony later. Andrei also asked for a copy of the Gospels. Memories of his wounding, seeing Anatole Kuragin, and his newfound hope of happiness come back to him. But in his condition, his thoughts are unfocused.

In delirium, Prince Andrei keeps thinking he hears a strange, rhythmic whispering and sees a delicate structure being raised above his face. He feels he has to maintain balance so that the structure won't collapse. He also sees a white figure in the doorway. All of this troubles him. Then clear thoughts return, and he feels the bliss of loving both neighbors and enemies. He realizes an enemy can only be loved by divine love, not human love, and that's why his love for Anatole gave him such joy. This train of thought also reminds him of Natasha, whom he both loves and hates more than anyone else. He pictures her soul and regrets the cruelty of refusing her. He wishes he could see her one more time.

At first Prince Andrei thinks that Natasha is part of his delirium, but he gradually understands that she's truly beside him. Natasha gently cradles Andrei's head and kisses him, repeating, "Forgive me!" He doesn't know what he has to forgive her for. He tells Natasha he loves her more than ever. But then the doctor wakes up and orders Natasha out of the room. She falls weeping into her own bed. For the rest of the journey, she takes care of Prince Andrei, never leaving his side.

VOLUME 3, PART 3: CHAPTERS 33–34

On September 3rd, Pierre wakes up feeling ashamed. He remembers his conversation with Ramballe the night before. He also recalls that Napoleon is due to enter Moscow that day. He dresses quickly and tries to figure out how to carry his pistol unobtrusively. He opts to carry a dagger instead.

The Moscow fire has grown overnight. As Pierre walks through the city, French soldiers look at him with astonishment, unable to classify him socially. But Pierre is oblivious to everything around him, only aware of the dread he carries inside. Unbeknownst to him, he's too late to encounter Napoleon. Napoleon has entered the city and now sits in the tsar's office in the Kremlin, moodily issuing orders to keep looting under control. But Pierre keeps going, not noticing the intensifying fire.

Only a week has passed since Andrei's initial injury. It's clear that during that time, much has been stirring inside Andrei who, at the beginning of the book, had no interest in religion.



Prince Andrei isn't in a stable mental state, yet one central idea keeps coming back to him—the idea of eternal love, which he felt so strongly when he saw Anatole suffering. Though forgiving Natasha has been difficult, he wants to apply this newfound love to her as well, regarding her as both beloved and an enemy.



When Andrei finally sees Natasha, he no longer regards her as an enemy, as the two are wordlessly reconciled, seemingly able to regard one another truly for the first time.



Pierre's awkwardness with weapons hearkens back to the duel many years ago. Pierre is once again acting rashly, this time with an even more questionable sense of duty.



Pierre is disguised as a peasant, but he doesn't really look like one—yet at this point in the occupation, French soldiers aren't expecting to see any noblemen left behind. So Pierre is a puzzle to everyone who sees him. While he's often been hard for others to classify, it's never been truer than now.



Suddenly Pierre hears a woman's cry nearby. He sees a middle-aged woman, some children, and a nanny sitting beside the street. The woman's husband is sorting through their belongings. When she sees Pierre, the weeping woman throws herself at his feet, saying that her youngest daughter has gotten left behind and burned up. Now alert, Pierre offers to find the girl. The family's maid leads him down the street to a burning, partially collapsed house. Pierre feels exhilarated and forgets his burdensome thoughts.

Pierre's reaction to the distraught woman—instantly attentive and eager to help—suggests that his true character is thinly veiled by his bizarre behavior and that, in fact, he doesn't really want to kill Napoleon. His basic impulse is to help others, not do destructive things.



A looting Frenchman leads Pierre to the garden behind the house. He finds a three-year-old girl hiding under a bench. She screams and bites Pierre's hands as he carries her out of the garden. Pierre runs through the crowded streets in search of the girl's family, noticing a beautiful young Armenian woman among the throng in the square. Other Russians point him in the direction of the child's family, but he's distracted by two French soldiers who've approached the Armenian woman and her family. He leaves the child with the Russians and moves toward the Armenian woman as a looter grabs the necklace she's wearing. Pierre flings the looter away. Gaining strength from his fury, Pierre pummels a second soldier, to the cheers of the crowd.

Even after Pierre fulfills his task of rescuing the little girl, he's quickly drawn to yet another person in need. The French looters give Pierre an opportunity to vent his anger at Napoleon, at the situation, and above all, to finally do something.



All of a sudden, Pierre feels his hands being tied. A crowd of French soldiers surrounds him. When the soldiers question him, Pierre refuses to answer them. He says he's their prisoner and asks to be taken away. He feels strangely ecstatic. The soldiers place Pierre under a strict guard. They've been rounding up suspected Russian "incendiaries," and Pierre seems like the most suspicious of them all.

Pierre's actions have immediate consequences, which he immediately accepts—he's always wanted to surrender to something, though it's a much different scenario than he'd ever imagined. This part of the story ends on a suspenseful note, with Pierre accused of being one of Moscow's arsonists. He gets arrested for a very different crime than the one he set out to commit, and it's not yet clear what that will mean for him or his still unsatisfied longing to find meaning in his life.



VOLUME 4, PART 1: CHAPTERS 1–3

In Petersburg's highest social circles, court life churns anxiously. But underneath that, city life continues much as before, with the same round of balls and theater. The dulling effect of luxury and entertainment makes it hard for people to realize Russia's peril. In the highest circles, people gossip about the two empresses. Empress Maria Feodorovna busily oversees the welfare of almshouses and orphanages, while Empress Elizaveta Alexeevna gives no orders, but staunchly claims that she will be the last to leave Petersburg.

While Moscow is imperiled by the French, Petersburg remains somewhat sheltered—especially for people who continue to spend their time in the usual round of aristocratic balls and parties. Maria Feodorovna was the dowager empress, or mother of Emperor Alexander. Elizaveta Alexeevna was Alexander's wife.



On the day of the battle of Borodino, August 26th, Anna Pavlovna throws a soirée. The party's centerpiece will be the dramatic reading of a patriotic letter from the metropolitan, which was written on the occasion of sending the emperor an icon of St. Sergius. Prince Vassily will perform the reading, as he's considered especially gifted at this. Anna Pavlovna invites some guests in order to shame them for attending the French theater.

Metropolitan Platon II served as bishop of Moscow from 1775 until his death a few months after the battle of Borodino; he was renowned for his sermons. St. Sergius was a medieval monastic reformer, one of the Russian Orthodox Church's most beloved saints. So Anna Pavlovna's soirée is heavily Russian in tone—in contrast to the very French one she threw at the beginning of the novel.



Today the big news in Petersburg is Countess Hélène Bezukhov's illness—angina. For several days now, she hasn't attended any social gatherings, and rumor has it that she's being treated by an innovative Italian doctor. Everyone believes the illness is due to the "inconvenience" of having two husbands at once, but nobody says that aloud.

While Pierre is at Borodino, Hélène is suffering at home, uncharacteristically withdrawn from society. While people speculate that she's suffering because of her moral transgressions, people who care about their reputations would never criticize her in public that way.



The last of the guests arrives, so Anna Pavlovna tells Prince Vassily to begin his reading. The metropolitan's letter refers to France as "the brazen and insolent Goliath" which will be crushed by "the sling of the Russian David." After Vassily finishes, everyone praises his performance as well as the letter's style. Everyone begins discussing the war, and Anna Pavlovna predicts that they'll hear good news soon.

The bishop likens France to the biblical giant and Russia to the plucky, resourceful young man who can beat him, even when it looks unlikely. In other words, even religious leaders publicly champion Russia; patriotism is woven throughout all parts of Russian identity.



Anna Pavlovna is right. The next day, the Emperor's birthday, Kutuzov sends a report of victory at Borodino. For the rest of that day, Petersburg is in a celebratory mood. Prince Vassily boasts that he always knew Kutuzov could beat Napoleon. But when the following day brings no update, everyone grows anxious, and Vassily no longer boasts. On top of this uncertainty, Hélène Bezukhov dies. Though angina is the official cause, people speculate that, when Pierre failed to answer Hélène's last letter, she took a suicidal dose of medicine and died in agony.

At first, Kutuzov steadfastly maintained that Russia had won the battle. In the aftermath of Borodino, the outcome appeared murkier, as it also became clear that the Russian army was too exhausted to annihilate the French. The triumphalist mood in Petersburg wavers. Helene's end is rumored to be as scandalous as her immoral life. Pierre is now free from his troubled marriage, though he doesn't know it yet.



The next day, news arrives of the surrender of Moscow to the French. Now Kutuzov is regarded as a traitor. Even Prince Vassily, grieving his daughter Hélène, now says that nothing else could have been expected from a blind old man like Kutuzov. The Emperor sends an envoy to Kutuzov demanding an explanation for the surrender.

When people hear that Moscow won't be defended from the French, public opinion of Kutuzov changes instantly—after being celebrated as the hero of Borodino, he's now denounced as a traitor.



Nine days after Moscow was abandoned, Kutuzov sends a messenger to Petersburg, Michaud (a Frenchman who's "Russian in heart"), with the official news. When Michaud tells the Emperor that Moscow is on fire, the Emperor starts to cry, then quickly collects himself. Michaud assures the sovereign that the Russians' morale is strong, and the Emperor promises that he would sooner eat potatoes with the peasants than surrender. Furthermore, he won't be deceived by Napoleon again.

Emperor Alexander, who's portrayed as characteristically Russian in his deep emotion and fervor for his motherland, is grief-stricken at the burning of Russia's spiritual capital. He sends the message that he won't surrender Russia to Napoleon altogether. Attitudes toward the French have reversed since the days of the treaties at Tilsit.



VOLUME 4, PART 1: CHAPTERS 4-8

Distanced chronologically from the events of 1812, it's easy for us to imagine that every last Russian was preoccupied in those days with grief, heroism, and self-sacrifice. But that's not how it really was. From our perspective, we don't see the human, everyday interests that filled people's lives. Yet in the end, those things were more important than sweeping historical events. And the people who took part in them were the most "useful" people of their day.

Tolstoy offers some general historical reflections again. He points out that, in the end, major events like the War of 1812 aren't the most important things in history. For most people at the time, daily life went on much as it always had, and it's those lives—which would never fill history books—that were more important in the long run.



At the same time, the people who sought out heroism were the most "useless" of the day, seeing "everything inside out." In such times, only actions that aren't self-conscious turn out to be fruitful. That's because a person can't understand the significance of a historical event while they're taking part in it. If they try to understand it, they become fruitless.

Tolstoy argues that people who tried to be heroes approached things backwards. They were too close to the unfolding of events to understand their significance, so their attempts at heroism backfired. In contrast, people who continued going about their daily lives contributed more meaningfully to the world.



At the time of Moscow's abandonment, people in Petersburg or far-off towns weep over the capital, while the retreating soldiers think and speak of almost anything else—getting paid, getting to rest, and such things. For his part, Nikolai Rostov takes a direct role in the defense of Russia, yet he doesn't think much about the bigger picture at the time. Several days before Borodino, Nikolai is sent to Voronezh to get horses for his division.

Tolstoy illustrates his point—most soldiers weren't self-aware about their role in history. That includes Nikolai, who just went about his duties without thinking about their broader impact. In fact, he wasn't even on the field at Borodino, but he still contributed in a concrete way to the war effort.



When Nikolai gets a break from active duty, he's overjoyed to travel through the countryside and see ordinary life untouched by war. He meets with the provincial governor and gets directions to an outlying stud farm where he buys 17 stallions. Then he gallops back to Voronezh for a soirée at the governor's. Though the best of local society is there, including Moscow exiles, Nikolai feels conscious that he, the well-liked hussar officer and war hero, is the star of the gathering. He feels drunk on the attention, especially from women. He's especially attracted to a plump, blonde officer's wife.

Unlike a character like Pierre, Nikolai isn't used to being the center of society's attention, and unlike Prince Andrei, he relishes the unfamiliar glory. In wartime, he's valorized as a hero—something he wouldn't experience in peacetime, given his status in a financially struggling noble family.



While Nikolai is flirting suggestively with the officer's wife, to her husband's dismay, the governor's wife pulls him aside. There's somebody she wants him to meet—Anna Ignatyevna Malvintsev, the aunt of Princess Marya Bolkonsky. She teases Nikolai for blushing at that name. When Nikolai meets Mrs. Malvintsev, an imposing, rich old widow, she invites him to visit her. After Nikolai accepts, the governor's wife takes him aside and offers to arrange a match between him and Marya Bolkonsky. Unthinkingly, Nikolai agrees.

Over supper, Nikolai remembers Sonya and panics, so before leaving the party, he takes the governor's wife aside and, on an impulse, confides in her. He says that he admires Marya and that their meeting seemed like fate; yet he promised to marry his cousin. The governor's wife argues that marrying Sonya is unthinkable—it would kill the Countess, and the Count's financial affairs are in disorder. This means that Sonya wouldn't be happy, either. Nikolai is pleased with these arguments and stops resisting the idea of the match with Marya.

After meeting Rostov, Princess Marya had gone to Moscow and found a letter from Prince Andrei, telling her and Nikolushka to go to their aunt, Mrs. Malvintsev, in Voronezh. In mourning for her father, worried about Prince Andrei, and fearing Russia's fate, Princess Marya is sad and anxious. Yet, deep down, she feels peace, believing she's suppressed the stirrings of love she'd felt upon meeting Rostov. So when the governor's wife, in league with Mrs. Malvintsev, mentions Rostov again, Marya is thrown off guard.

Before Rostov's visit, Princess Marya frets endlessly. She is sure that she'll embarrass herself. But when Rostov is announced, Marya's eyes light up, and she feels completely calm. From the moment she sees Rostov, Marya feels transformed from within, like a different person. Her inner spiritual beauty shines in her face. Nikolai sees and understands all this instinctively, as if he's known Marya his whole life. He thinks she's unique, and he feels he can be himself around her.

Though Princess Marya is limiting her social visits because she's in mourning, the governor's wife arranges a meeting between the two after church one day. Nikolai doesn't intend to propose, feeling this would be wrong because of his informal promise to Sonya, but he surrenders to (as it seems) irresistible circumstances, feeling that he's being led somewhere important, and that this is good.

One effect of Nikolai's newly elevated status is that he feels entitled to flirt with whomever he wants, believing that nobody will object to a "war hero" enjoying himself. Evidently, Nikolai's ambivalence about war and heroism don't apply when there are appealing ladies involved. Even when he's reminded of his recent meeting with Princess Marya, he forgets about Sonya for the time being.



In the end, Nikolai does remember his promises to Sonya, but it seems he's ready to accept a way out of that promise if it's offered. He readily concedes to the hostess's conventional arguments about Sonya's lack of social status. At home, in a fairytale atmosphere, he could overlook these; in the supposedly more real atmosphere of society, he finds them compelling.



Unexpectedly, Princess Marya is nearby in Voronezh while Nikolai is there. Marya has always been ambivalent about romantic love, reflexively denying herself when such feelings come up. But when there's a sudden possibility of seeing Nikolai again, the feelings are harder to suppress.



Marya and Nikolai understand one another instinctively. In contrast to Marya's brief, disastrous setup with Anatole Kuragin, she glows effortlessly when Nikolai is there, and Nikolai sees Marya's beauty without even trying. They see one another clearly, which Tolstoy suggests is a stronger basis than passion for enduring love.



Nikolai is in an awkward position, due to his unofficial agreement with Sonya; however, he chooses not to do anything rash, sensing that circumstances are falling into place though he can't yet understand how. Nikolai contrasts with Pierre and Natasha in his refusal to behave rashly while being swept along by others' wishes.



Princess Marya reads about her brother's wound in the newspaper and is ready to go searching for him. When Rostov hears about the surrendering of Moscow, he longs to be back in the regiment, where things make sense. A few days before Rostov's departure from Voronezh, he sees Princess Marya at a church service and is struck by her expression all over again. After the service, he expresses sympathy and encourages her to hope that Andrei's wound is slight.

That evening, Rostov paces his room, thinking about his life. Princess Marya's luminous beauty and grace will stick in his mind after he leaves Voronezh, he feels. Rostov has never liked spiritual men like Prince Andrei—they seem pretentious and dreamy—but in Princess Marya, the same temperament seems beautiful and angelic. He mentally compares her to Sonya, with whom he can picture a simple, predictable future life. But daydreams about Princess Marya frighten him because they're so hard to picture. Baffled by his dilemma, Nikolai stands before the icon and prays for a long time.

Lavrushka interrupts Nikolai's prayers with some letters. The first letter is from Sonya. Nikolai immediately rips it open and, after reading it, stands wide-eyed with astonishment. Sonya has written to give Nikolai his freedom. She claims that in light of the Rostovs' financial woes, the Countess's hostility, and Nikolai's recent silence, she no longer holds him to his promise. She can't bear to be a source of unhappiness or tension in the family's life. The other letter is from Countess Rostov, describing their departure from Moscow and Prince Andrei's condition. Nikolai shows the letter to Princess Marya and leaves for the regiment a few days later.

Sonya wrote her letter from the Trinity monastery. Lately, Countess Rostov has been more and more determined to marry Nikolai to a rich woman. A few days before leaving Moscow, the Countess speaks to Sonya, tearfully begging her to give up Nikolai out of gratitude for all the Rostovs have done for her. Sonya burst into tears at this request. She's used to sacrificing herself, but this is different. Before, Nikolai had always been the *reward* for her self-sacrifice. For the first time, Sonya feels bitter toward the Rostovs and envious of Natasha, who never has to sacrifice herself. She secretly resolves to bind herself to Nikolai forever.

Even though Nikolai is still drawn to Marya's beauty, he longs for the clarity of army life—it lacks the confusion and ambiguity of life in society.



Princess Marya has a mysterious pull on Nikolai. While lifelong familiarity makes a future with Sonya easy to picture, a life with Marya doesn't match his expectations. Marya draws an unprecedented spirituality out of Nikolai and challenges him.



Nikolai's prayer for guidance is unexpectedly answered—at least, that's how it looks. In reality, Sonya's letter is a good example of Tolstoy's view of the complexity of events. While multiple factors play into Sonya's decision, human beings prefer to focus on a single explanatory cause, like a timely miracle. In a way, though, Sonya's act isn't surprising. Her whole life, she's been sacrificing herself out of gratitude to the Rostovs.



The backstory of Sonya's letter is a bit more complex. In her determination to save the family by marrying Nikolai "well" (that is, to a woman rich enough to offset the Rostovs' debts, yet willing enough to marry "beneath" her), Countess Rostov pressures Sonya into giving up her claim. Sonya correctly observes that such things are never asked of Natasha, the indulged favorite.



When the wounded Prince Andrei is discovered among the Rostovs' wagon train, Sonya feels relieved. She knows that Natasha still loves Prince Andrei and that they'll probably still end up together. If that happens, she thinks, Nikolai will be unable to marry Princess Marya because they'll be indirectly related.

When the Rostovs stop for a stay at the Trinity monastery, Natasha has a long talk with Prince Andrei. She tells Sonya that she loves Andrei like before and can't bear it if he dies. Sonya, too, is overcome with emotion. She reminds Natasha of the time they looked into a mirror at Otradnoe to tell each other's fortunes. At the time, she told Natasha that she saw Prince Andrei in the mirror, even though she didn't see anything. Now she claims that she saw more details, such as a pink quilt covering Andrei while he rested with his eyes closed. As she says this, she believes it's what she really *did* see. Moved by this, Sonya feels self-sacrificial once again. She writes to Nikolai.

VOLUME 4, PART 1: CHAPTERS 9–13

The officers who arrested Pierre treat him respectfully at first. The next morning, however, after the shift changes, the soldiers see him as just another Russian. The other prisoners, who are all from the lower classes, mock Pierre because he's a French-speaking gentleman.

A few days later, Pierre is questioned in relation to the charge of arson. It's clear that the interrogators have made up their minds, and they ignore any statement that isn't incriminating. Pierre feels completely in their power. He sticks to his story, but he won't reveal his identity. He spends several difficult days waiting blindly for a decision.

On September 8th, Pierre and the other 13 prisoners are led from the shed where they've been kept and through the charred remains of Moscow. Except for the Kremlin and some churches, the city is unrecognizable. Pierre is struck by the French army's smooth, confident operation of business; they seem to be right at home in what once was Moscow.

Prince Andrei's unexpected reappearance gives Sonya hope that Nikolai could still be hers, since if both Rostov siblings married Bolkonsky siblings, church law would frown upon it. Ironically, though, Sonya was undeterred by the fact that she and Nikolai are cousins (which would also require a special dispensation from the church)—she's grasping for any hope she can find.



Tolstoy highlights people's capacity to talk themselves into things that aren't true. People are also complicated—Sonya loves Nikolai, but she also loves Natasha and wants her friend to be happy. She convinces herself that the girls' fortune-telling game did predict a happy ending for Natasha and Andrei. At the same time, she uses this "evidence" to assure herself that she's doing the right thing—even the fated thing—by giving up Nikolai.



As usual, Pierre struggles to fit in no matter where he goes. To the French, he's a worthless Russian prisoner; to his peasant fellow prisoners, he's culturally foreign, too.



The French look for people to scapegoat for the burning of Moscow. They don't care who Pierre is, and his fight with the French looters was just a pretext for arresting him.



When Pierre is brought outside, the beloved city he knew is gone. To the French, there's no poignancy in the destruction, since Moscow is just another city to be subdued.



Pierre and the other prisoners are taken to the house of Prince Shcherbatov, which Pierre used to visit and which is now being occupied by the French marshal. Eventually, Pierre is led inside to General Davout, who's known for his cruelty. When Davout asks Pierre's name, he feels frozen with fear and does not respond. Davout looks up at him and coldly claims that he is a Russian spy. Pierre energetically denies this. He tells Davout his name. When their gazes meet, Pierre is saved. There's a mutual, tacit recognition of shared humanity between them.

Just then, however, Davout is distracted by good news from an adjutant. He orders Pierre taken away. With the others, Pierre walks numbly, believing he's going to be executed. He wonders who has ordered this, who is depriving him of his life, and feels it is just the impersonal order of things.

The prisoners are taken to Devichye field, which Pierre knows to be the place of executions. In a garden, there's a post and a freshly dug pit. There's a crowd of French soldiers and other Napoleonic troops, as well as some Russians. The prisoners are placed in order—Pierre is sixth—and led to the post. Pierre can no longer reason; he only sees and hears and wishes that whatever is about to happen would end quickly.

Pierre hears some French soldiers debating about how to shoot them. The sentence is read in Russian and French. Then the first two criminals are brought forward. The soldiers blindfold them with sacks and then tie them to the post. Twelve soldiers step forward, and Pierre looks away while they fire. When the next two are led forward, Pierre sees their pleading, disbelieving looks. When the fifth man is led forward alone, it doesn't register in Pierre's mind that he's going to be spared. He doesn't look away as the man is shot. He sees the haste and fear in the Frenchmen's movements as they bury the bodies in the pit, and he believes they know they're doing something criminal. "That'll teach them to set fires," one of the soldiers says.

After the executions, Pierre is left alone for a while in an abandoned church. Later, some soldiers come and inform Pierre that he's been pardoned and will now be taken to the barracks. Pierre doesn't understand them and, when taken into the crowded, makeshift prison, can't make sense of anything around him. After witnessing the executions, carried out by unwilling men, he feels that something in his soul has broken. He no longer has faith in God, life, or in anything good.

Not only is Moscow's appearance altered, its once-familiar social landscape is now overlaid with a French hierarchy. Yet when Pierre meets with Davout, the general's brief moment of humanity ends up saving Pierre's life—suggesting that even though war often has a dehumanizing effect on people, the opposite can unexpectedly occur.



In the face of what he assumes is likely death, Pierre is struck by the anonymity of the moment—for something as personal as losing his life, there are no answers to why or by whose decree it's happening.



Pierre feels detached from everything around him. After so many years of seeking meaning in his life, he's instead confronted with the thing he's feared and refused to face—his death.



Tolstoy describes the executions in detail, effectively slowing down the action to heighten tension—naming small details and counting down the killings one by one. Pierre is so absorbed in what's happening that he doesn't realize at first that he's been spared for some reason. He does notice the stealthy air of guilt as the soldiers bury the evidence, trying to convince themselves that they're doing something just. In actuality, it's not clear that any of the executed men was responsible for the fires.



Far from feeling relieved, Pierre finds that witnessing the inhumanity of the executions has killed his idealism. There's a sense that his efforts to understand life's meaning have been mockingly cut short, and this fate is a death of sorts.



Next to him, barely visible in the darkness, a little man with a gentle, melodious voice is watching Pierre. When he asks Pierre, “So you’ve seen a lot of misery, master?” Pierre almost starts to cry. The man tells Pierre not to grieve; there are both good and bad people in the world.

They exchange stories; the other man was taken prisoner in a hospital, where he was suffering from a fever. He introduces himself as Platon Karataev. A peasant, he was sent into the army for going into another man’s grove. While this seemed a great grief at the time, he explains, it turned out to be a joy, because it spared his younger brother, who had many children, from having to go to the army. Then the man prays and lays down to sleep. Pierre lies awake for a long time, feeling that a new, beautiful world has arisen in his soul.

Pierre is held prisoner for four weeks. Though much of this remains a fog in Pierre’s mind, he always remembers Platon Karataev, who seems to Pierre “the embodiment of everything Russian.” What Pierre remembers most is the older man’s quick, persuasive speech, which Platon seems never to have to think about in advance. He keeps himself busy with menial tasks all day long and talks and sings in the evenings before falling into a contented sleep. He offers a steady flow of wholesome folk proverbs which Pierre finds profound, even when the sayings contradict one another.

Just as Pierre despairs, he is interrupted—much like his first encounter with Bazdeev, when he first learned about Freemasonry.



Platon is Bazdeev’s opposite in many ways. While Bazdeev was aristocratic and esoteric, teaching Pierre to seek meaning in mystical practices of self-purification, Platon is different: he’s a peasant, as down-to-earth as it gets, and he appears to find a simple joy in everyday life. Like last time, Pierre feels hopeful for a new beginning.



Platon Karataev is the novel’s archetypal Russian peasant, and in Tolstoy’s portrayal, that means only good things: Platon is simple, deceptively wise, hardworking, and content with what he has. Unlike the Masons, who strive for an abstract, hierarchical form of knowledge, Platon’s peasant wisdom is immediate and earthy. Tolstoy portrays such wisdom as wholesomely, essentially Russian.



VOLUME 4, PART 1: CHAPTERS 14–16

When Princess Marya hears that Prince Andrei is with the Rostovs in Yaroslavl, she immediately makes plans to go there herself, along with seven-year-old Nikolushka. The journey is difficult because they can’t take the Moscow road, and post-horses are often unavailable; yet Princess Marya’s energy is unflagging. Her love for Rostov has transformed her life, and she is happy. As she approaches Yaroslavl, however, her grief over Andrei weighs her down again. When the carriage stops, Sonya and the Countess hurry to welcome her. The Count looks different from the last time Marya saw him—lost and confused.

Impatient to see Prince Andrei, Princess Marya feels frustrated with the family’s polite chatter. When Natasha runs into the room—the same girl whom Princess Marya had disliked when she was engaged to Andrei—Marya embraces her, and they weep together. Marya can see instantly that Natasha has given herself wholeheartedly to caring for Andrei.

As in the aftermath of her father’s death, Princess Marya can boldly take charge of situations when the circumstances call for it. On top of that, Nikolai has broadened the horizons of her life. However, the gravity of the situation soon catches up with her. The Count, one of the most relentlessly cheerful people in the novel, looks bereft. The Rostovs are refugees, Andre may be dying, and nothing is as it should be.



Grief and suffering instantly change the context of Marya’s and Natasha’s relationship. Before, Marya saw Natasha as a threatening intruder in the family; now, Marya sees her as a ministering angel.



The two women stop to compose themselves outside Andrei's room. Natasha explains that Andrei's early fever, as well as the threat of gangrene, had passed. But when the Rostovs arrived in Yaroslavl, Andrei's wound began to fester. She tells Marya nothing more, but Marya senses what she means when she says, "This happened." As she's expected, Prince Andrei's face has assumed a childlike mildness and tenderness foretelling death. But when Andrei speaks, his voice is alarmingly flat. Marya thinks a shriek would be less frightening. Andrei can no longer relate to anything living, Marya knows, because he has come to understand something beyond the living.

Prince Andrei tells Princess Marya that Natasha is caring for him, and that it's strange how fate has brought them together. Marya is disturbed—if Andrei were himself, he wouldn't speak of Natasha in such a detached way in front of her. He also seems indifferent to news of the destruction of Moscow. Andrei tells Marya that Nikolai Rostov wrote to him, speaking highly of her, and that he thinks it would be good if they got married. Marya changes the subject, offering to bring Nikolushka in. Andrei's smile in response is mocking. Chilled, Marya realizes that he's mocking her for this last attempt to restore him to normalcy.

After an awkward visit with Nikolushka—Andrei doesn't know what to say to him—Princess Marya starts to cry. Andrei begins, "Marie, do you know the Gosp..." but he falls silent. In his mind, he struggles to comprehend their point of view. He knows his sister is crying because Nikolushka will be orphaned. The answer seems simple: "The birds of the air neither sow nor reap, but your Father feeds them." Yet Andrei knows that if he quotes this verse, they won't understand. They can't grasp that earthly thoughts and feelings, which seem so important to the living, don't finally matter.

Though Nikolushka is only seven years old, he understands everything that happens in his father's room that day. Starting that day, he avoids his tutor Dessales and spends most of his time around Princess Marya and especially Natasha. After this conversation, Princess Marya no longer hopes for Andrei's recovery. She joins Natasha in tending her brother and prays constantly.

Prince Andrei feels that he's already half dead. He feels distant from earthly things and strangely light. The unknown and eternal feels nearby, but he no longer dreads it; it's almost comprehensible, and he waits patiently for whatever comes next. He lost his fear of death when he returned to consciousness after being wounded. Though he didn't consciously renounce earthly life, he gradually became more and more absorbed in the contemplation of eternal love.

Natasha's unspoken meaning is that Andrei's condition has turned an irrevocable corner. This becomes obvious when he speaks—Andrei's detached demeanor tells Marya that even though his body is still here, his mind and soul have already turned toward things beyond.



Andrei doesn't really care about catastrophic news like the burning of Moscow—even after fighting in battle as recently as a few days ago, the events of war no longer hold any relevance for him. Tolstoy suggests that the chasm between earthly and eternal realities really is that stark. This is why Andrei smiles mockingly—to him, it's ludicrous to try to draw him back to worldly concerns, even people he loves.



Prince Andrei's quote is a shortened version of a line from Christ's Sermon on the Mount in the Gospel of Matthew. His point is that God cares for those who have no way of caring for themselves—a point that seems so obvious to him that it isn't worth worrying about. Grief is for those who, like Marya, are still attached to earthly life. Ironically, his spiritual younger sister is now more worldly than he is.



A sensitive boy, Nikolushka knows his father is dying and begins to draw closer to those he associates with Andrei. Princess Marya sees just as clearly that there's no reason to hope for his survival.



When Prince Andrei was injured on the field at Austerlitz, he felt distant from eternity. Now it's near enough to be felt. Andrei has realized that the meaning of earthly life is love, and this all-absorbing reality removes the dread of death.



He finds that loving everything and everyone necessarily means sacrificing himself, ceasing to live. This makes death a welcome prospect. And yet—ever since his reunion with Natasha, love for her has subtly bound him to life again. It reminds him of seeing Anatole Kuragin at the medical station. He’s tormented by the question of whether Kuragin is still alive.

Eternal love requires one’s whole self, and giving oneself in this way consumes a person’s life. Yet it seems that loving a particular person, as opposed to loving humanity as a whole, inevitably tethers a person to existence.



When Natasha refers to something that happened to Andrei two days earlier, she means Andrei’s last struggle between life and death. In the evening after dinner, Natasha sat by his bed, knitting. Andrei wondered if fate had brought them together just in time for him to die. He groaned, and when she leaned over to check on him, he told her he loved her more than anything. Natasha beamed rapturously when she heard this.

This is a flashback to Andrei’s decisive turning toward eternity. At the time, Andrei feels tormented with renewed love for Natasha.



Prince Andrei fell asleep thinking about love and death. It seemed to him that he understood everything, that everything exists, because of love; so to die means to return to love’s eternal source. Yet something bothered him. He had a nightmare about death forcing its way into the room. Yet just as Andrei dies in the dream, he wakes up, realizing that death itself is an “awakening.” From that moment on, a “strange lightness” never leaves him—an “awakening from life.”

Andrei had already come to understand that the meaning of everything is love; yet he still somewhat resisted the prospect of death. His nightmare led him to realize that death is like waking up from a dream, into a higher, eternal form of life.



Prince Andrei’s final days are quiet and simple. Princess Marya and Natasha sense that he has already left them and that they’re simply taking care of his body. They both understand, without talking about it, that Andrei is sinking away from them, and that this is how it must be. He receives the last rites and kisses Nikolushka goodbye, with an air of fulfilling what’s expected of him. Natasha and Marya are with him when he dies. As the family gathers around the coffin, Nikolushka weeps with a broken heart, but the women weep out of reverence for “the simple and solemn mystery of death” that they’ve just witnessed.

Having realized life’s meaning and the nature of death, Prince Andrei has exhausted his reasons to live. That’s why, though he loves his son, kissing Nikolushka goodbye is a perfunctory act. This undercuts the convention of a dramatic deathbed scene. Andrei’s survivors grieve because he’s cut off from them. As far as Andrei is concerned, he is already mostly gone.



VOLUME 4, PART 2: CHAPTERS 1–3

Human beings have an irrepressible need to search for causes, and they tend to latch onto the first plausible cause they can find. Often this supposed cause involves historical heroes. But if we look into the complexity of an event, we quickly see that even so-called heroes are being guided, even if we don’t understand how. We can only understand something about history when we stop looking to individuals’ wills as sole causes. It’s like discovering the laws of planetary movement, which only became possible when people stopped believing that the earth stood still.

Tolstoy returns to his recurrent reflections on history. He suggests that it’s human to try to understand the meaning of events, and people usually simplify this meaning in order to make it easier to understand. Tolstoy argues that looking to “heroes” is one way of simplifying history. In reality, if people stopped thinking this way, it would be a paradigm shift, allowing them to see much bigger “laws” at work.



After Borodino and the burning of Moscow, historians identify the Russian army's flanking march beyond Krasnaya Pakhra as the most important event in the War of 1812. This is when the army moved from the Ryazan to the Kaluga road in the direction of the Tarutino camp. Even French historians acknowledge that it was a brilliant move. But it's hard to see what was ingenious about it—it doesn't take a military genius to see that an army should move toward the area with the most provisions. And this move could just as easily have proven disastrous for the Russians as for the French.

Furthermore, the flanking march wasn't the decision of any single person. It proceeded one step at a time and was only considered as a whole in retrospect. At first, the army marched toward Nizhni Novgorod; then Kutuzov learned that it would be difficult to transport provisions across the river Oka once winter arrived. So the army deviated south, and kept doing so, little by little, depending on French movements and the availability of provisions. Only after the army reached Tarutino did people convince themselves that they'd always meant to go there.

Kutuzov isn't a genius, but he understands the significance of events better than most. He already senses the meaning of the French army's inactivity, continues to maintain that Borodino was a Russian victory, and avoids useless battles as much as possible. Napoleon, on the other hand, thinks that whatever's most recently come into his head is good. He sends Lauriston to Kutuzov to request terms of peace. Kutuzov staunchly refuses.

During the month after Borodino, when the French are looting Moscow and the Russians are stationed at Tarutino, the Russian army gains superior strength. Many signs point to the advisability of a Russian attack: the Russians are rested and well provisioned, the French are said to be in disarray, and the Russians long for revenge on the burning of their capital.

Following the abandonment of Moscow, the army has to create new war plans. Previous plans had been dependent on the capital staying in Russian hands. In addition, generals like Bagration have been killed, and Barclay has left his position. As roles are replaced, generals jockey and engage in various intrigues. They imagine they're conducting the vital business of war, but in reality, the war plays out independently of these maneuvers.

The march described here was part of Kutuzov's plan. After the Russian army withdrew from Moscow to Krasnaya Pakhra, they turned south toward Tarutino in order to block the French from the agriculturally rich southern provinces. Tolstoy points out that this is a perfectly sensible move and not unusually brilliant. But because historians can now look back at the longer-term effects, they attribute "genius" to a fairly ordinary decision.



Tolstoy also likes to point out that what seem to us to be isolated, discrete decisions were actually something different. That is, "decisions" are the sum of a chain of smaller steps that people simplify in retrospect. For example, Kutuzov's flanking march to Tarutino came about because of many smaller decisions along the way; Tarutino wasn't the end goal.



Tolstoy locates Kutuzov's success not in "genius," but in his instinct for the larger meaning of things. In his view, this instinct is more important than strokes of genius, and certainly more effective than Napoleon's arrogant short-sightedness.



In the lull following the battle of Borodino, conditions seem to point to renewed battle, as the Russians have had a chance to recover—and more importantly, they've been impassioned by the French invasion.



The situation after Borodino is complicated. Strategists hadn't anticipated the loss of Moscow, and there's a power vacuum, which inevitably leads to political maneuvering. Tolstoy suggests that such maneuvers, which people consider crucial at the time, actually have little effect on larger outcomes.



On October 2nd, after the battle of Tarutino, the Emperor writes to Kutuzov. He observes that Kutuzov hasn't gone on the offensive since Moscow was taken, and in fact, the army has retreated further back. Given that Napoleon is still in Moscow and the French army has broken up into several regiments, perhaps it is time to act—especially before the French have an opportunity to threaten Petersburg. The sovereign reminds Kutuzov that he still must answer for the loss of Moscow.

By the time Kutuzov receives this letter, the Russians have already initiated battle against the French. Earlier that day, a Cossack had stumbled into General Murat's army while hunting rabbits deep in the forest. This information made its way to the army staff and, despite his reluctance to offer battle, Kutuzov yielded to his inferiors' wishes and "blessed the accomplished fact."

VOLUME 4, PART 2: CHAPTERS 4-7

The attack is set for October 5th. Toll draws up the disposition and Kutuzov signs off on it. Toll reads it to Ermolov so that Ermolov can begin carrying it out, but he says he has no time right now. The disposition is beautifully written, but as is always the case with a disposition, not a single detail ("the first column will march to such and such a place," etc.) is executed as the disposition states.

Kutuzov's orderly is sent to Ermolov with copies of the disposition, but he can't find Ermolov after hours of searching. Someone directs him to General Kikin's ball, where exuberant singing and shouting can be heard. Inside, he finds all the most important generals gathered around another general who's dancing the *trepak*. Seeing the orderly, Ermolov takes the order, frowning. Later, the orderly speculates with a friend that tomorrow's battle will be a mess.

Kutuzov rises early the next morning. He dreads leading a battle of which he doesn't approve. He rides to the place three miles beyond Tarutino where the columns are to assemble, fighting to stay awake. Eventually, he notices soldiers eating breakfast who should already be preparing for an ambush. An officer informs Kutuzov that they've received no orders to advance. Kutuzov shouts and swears at the senior officer, though it isn't his fault. He feels humiliated. He finally returns home, listens to the generals' justifications, and is forced to agree that the battle can simply be postponed until tomorrow.

Alexander has never liked Kutuzov and doesn't seem to understand his instincts about war. He essentially asks Alexander to redeem himself by attacking the French before they're strong enough to continue the invasion. But Kutuzov isn't motivated by such considerations, time and patience being his preferred tools.



Kutuzov always avoids going on the offensive, lacking the aggression of younger generals and believing the defensive is more important. However, in this case, he goes along with the prevailing view. It's an "accomplished fact" because Kutuzov holds that men's willingness to fight is more important than plans or orders.



A battle disposition simply refers to the way troops will be positioned for battle—where different units should be and when. Tolstoy suggests that no matter how good dispositions are, they're useless, because the variables of battle render such plans obsolete.



There might be another reason that dispositions don't work. For all their insistence on strategy, the army staff appears to be more concerned about folk dances and revelry than about preparing for battle. Even a general's lowly servant can predict what this means: things won't go as planned.



Kutuzov once again finds himself in the position of leading an attack he only reluctantly authorized. Things are worse than expected—the orders were never passed down in the first place. So not only is Kutuzov's expertise overridden, his inferiors don't even pull themselves together to execute the attack he signed off on—a totally demoralizing position for a veteran like Kutuzov.

The next day the troops assemble and march toward their appointed places through the night. However, only Count Orlov-Denisov and his insignificant Cossack regiment arrive where they're supposed to be. Before dawn, a Polish deserter from the French army tells Count Orlov that if he's given an escort of 100 men, he can capture Murat, who's nearby. As Orlov studies the French army in the growing light, he thinks the Polish deserter must have been lying—there are too many troops present to kidnap a commander in chief from among them. He calls his men back.

Count Orlov prepares his Cossacks for attack, even though the supporting infantry columns haven't yet arrived. When the French see the Cossacks, they immediately scatter. If the Cossacks had chased them, they could have overrun all the French, but as soon as they seize booty and prisoners, they refuse to go farther. Meanwhile, the infantry regiments get lost, fall into confusion, and quarrel. When a division finally shows up, its general Bagovut, fresh from a heated argument, angrily marches his men straight into the line of fire, and many die.

Meanwhile, Kutuzov holds his men back, believing that nothing good will come from this chaos. Finally, at Ermolov's urging, and hearing that Murat's men are retreating, he orders an offensive. However, he halts the offensive at every hundred paces for most of an hour. Ultimately, Orlov's Cossacks are the only ones to do anything in the battle. After the battle, Kutuzov and many others receive honors. People grumble about this, suggesting that if *they* were in charge, the battle might have come off differently. But battles never happen the way they're planned. There are too many different forces in play. In spite of the incoherence of the battle of Tarutino, though, it helps achieve what the Russians want most—beginning to push the French out of Russia, and that with very few losses.

VOLUME 4, PART 2: CHAPTERS 8–14

When the French occupy Moscow, they're in a brilliant position. To hold onto this position, all Napoleon must do is make sure his army is adequately provisioned and doesn't loot. Yet that "genius of geniuses" fails to do this. In fact, he chooses the most destructive path—staying put in Moscow, allowing his troops to loot, and failing to initiate battle with Kutuzov. If Napoleon's goal had been to destroy his own army, he couldn't have chosen a better path. Yet his goal was always to do the best for himself and his army, and his actions in Moscow were no less astounding than his actions in Egypt, Austria, or Prussia.

The battle of Tarutino took place on October 6th, 1812, between Bennigsen's and Miloradovich's regiments and General Murat's 20,000 men. Though the Russians won, the battle fell short of Russian hopes since only Orlov-Denisov's column reached their appointed place at the right time.



Orlov's column undertakes a successful surprise attack, but without support, there's only so much they can do against a large French force. Because of the bungled orders, a devastating defeat isn't possible, and some die pointlessly.



Kutuzov only grudgingly commits his men to a battle he doesn't believe in. The whole battle is a mess, as he'd predicted beforehand. Tolstoy comments that battles are usually this way—even the best-planned battles are subject to countless variables. And even when things don't go according to plan, major objectives can still be achieved. The French invasion is effectively over.



Tolstoy mockingly refers to Napoleon as a genius. Though he doesn't have a high opinion of Napoleon in particular, his larger point is that in war, so-called "genius" isn't what's really essential anyway—it's more important to follow well-honed instincts and lead effectively. Further, Napoleon's actions here were neither better nor worse than at any other point in his wars.



As soon as he arrives in Moscow, Napoleon orders Murat to find Kutuzov, fortifies the Kremlin, and draws up a plan for his Russia campaign. He sends diplomats to Alexander in Petersburg. He orders arsonists punished and burns down Rastopchin's houses. He also sets up a constitution and city council for Moscow. He issues a statement to Moscow's citizens telling them that if they obey their new authorities, their misfortunes will be at an end. He issues another proclamation ordering workers and artisans to return to the city and providing free markets for the peasants to sell their wares. He visits almshouses and orphanages and constantly issues orders against looting.

Nothing goes as Napoleon plans. His army loses track of the Russian army. Alexander refuses to receive his diplomats. The administration Napoleon sets up doesn't stop looting from happening, and only benefits its own members. Peasants catch and kill the commissaries who visit them with Napoleon's orders. Napoleon's most ineffective measure is his attempt to stop looting—violent gangs of soldiers continue robbing with impunity. Finally, when the Russians seize supply trains and win the battle of Tarutino, the French in Moscow begin to panic. They finally begin leaving Moscow with long baggage trains of stolen loot. The French army is like a wounded animal hastening toward its own end.

These days Pierre wears tattered peasant's clothing, is thinner, and sports an overgrown beard. He is calm and composed. On this particular morning, October 6th, he gazes at his dirty, bare feet, which remind him pleasantly of everything he's survived. It's a bright autumn morning. A French corporal chats with Pierre in a friendly way about the impending departure from Moscow. Pierre has garnered the approval of this corporal and another captain, because of his French education and his ability to mediate between the prisoners and the French when clashes occur.

A French soldier comes by the prisoners' shed and pays Platon for a shirt Platon has sewn for him. The soldier asks Platon to give back the leftover fabric, but Platon, pretending not to understand, refuses. Finally Pierre translates, and Platon reluctantly hands over the scraps—he'd hoped to use them to make foot cloths for the prisoners. The French soldier thinks for a moment and, blushing, gives the scraps back for Platon to keep. Platon tells Pierre that people think the French are "heathenish, but they've got souls, too."

*In Moscow, Napoleon makes lots of plans. On paper, it looks like Napoleon did everything necessary to establish order and restore normal life in the city. He even goes above and beyond, trying to present himself as a benevolent ruler. Tolstoy quotes Napoleon's proclamations from the book *A Description of the Fatherland War of 1812*, published in 1839. Both of Napoleon's proclamations were written in bad Russian.*



The problem is that things seldom go as planned. Napoleon's ideas make sense, but history is full of unexpected variables—most of all, human nature. Napoleon fails to predict that he won't be welcomed with open arms and that his own administrators and soldiers care more about their own interests than promoting their emperor's glory. Moreover, Tolstoy has often made the point that the individual actions of the members of the army are more decisive than formal plans, and the French army has no morale left.



Pierre looks nothing like his usual self, yet he's happier than ever. For once, his oddity gives him an advantage—he can communicate with and even befriend the French. Focusing on day-to-day survival suits him better than his usual fretting about bigger questions.



The French soldier shows an unexpected moment of humanity, though it's over something as minor as fabric scraps. Platon's comment about the French is an example of his ability to accept and love whomever happens to be in front of him, regardless of background.



It's been four weeks since Pierre was taken prisoner, and he's insisted on staying in the soldiers' shed, though he was offered a transfer to the officers'. Under these privations, Pierre realizes how strong he really is, and he endures them joyfully. In his experiences and in knowing Karataev, he finally discovers the inner harmony and peace with himself that he'd sought in other places all his life. Witnessing the execution seems to have put his old thoughts and feelings into proper perspective. He no longer thinks about politics or the war, much less killing Napoleon. He doesn't worry about his marriage to Hélène, either.

Now that Pierre has nothing, he imagines that the greatest happiness in life is having one's basic needs met and choosing one's occupation. He forgets that the very satisfaction of those needs tends to destroy happiness, and that the freedom granted him by his wealth and social status had made it impossible for him to choose an occupation. He dreams of being free again; yet, for the rest of his life, he speaks of his month in prison as the happiest, freest time in his life. The awkwardness and simplicity that made Pierre ill-suited for society make him a hero to his fellow prisoners.

On the morning of October 7th, the prisoners are dressed to move out. Pierre comforts a sick soldier and approaches the friendly corporal to see what can be done for the man, but the corporal slams the door of the shed. Pierre feels once again the impersonal force that causes soldiers to kill even when they don't want to; he now knows it's useless to resist that force. He joins the crowd of prisoners as they're marched at the front of the army; they all stare in horror at Moscow's charred remains.

Pierre's group of prisoners gets stuck for several hours at an intersection, surrounded by the endless tramp and shouting of the traveling army. Pierre struggles to absorb the overwhelming impressions of people, horses, carriages, and wagons weighted down with loot, and the occasional fistfights all around him. Finally his group gets into the convoy on the Kaluga road and marches until sunset. As they all collapse in a field at twilight, they realize that they don't know where they're going and that the journey will be difficult.

When in difficult circumstances, Pierre is finally able to set aside his lifelong questions about the meaning of life and take each day as it comes, finding peace and beauty that way. Instead of striving for the right fit in society or in the war, he accepts the role that's been thrust upon him. Ironically, the degrading circumstances allow his integrity to shine through.



Pierre still longs for his old life, not realizing that it was really the circumstances of his old life that burdened him. Because he was used to having his needs satisfied all the time, he struggled with excessive indulgence, and because he was wealthy enough to do whatever he liked, he struggled to settle down to anything. Ironically, being stripped of those things makes Pierre truly happy for the first time.



Though Pierre has befriended his jailers, this isn't enough to overcome the "impersonal force" of a soldier carrying out orders—especially orders soldiers carry out against their own will. Such inexplicable scenarios, like the French soldiers who executed the prisoners, can actually be the most senseless and inhumane.



After being imprisoned for weeks, Pierre finds the chaos of occupied Moscow overwhelming. Pierre and his fellow prisoners are taken along on the desperate, exhausted French retreat from Russia, but neither they nor their captors know where the journey will end up.



The French officers now treat the prisoners worse than ever, giving them their dinner ration in horsemeat. They announce that stragglers will be shot. Pierre feels frightened of this impersonal, hostile force, yet he also feels a strong force of life stirring in his soul. That evening he sits down on the ground and thinks over what's happened. Suddenly he bursts into merry laughter at the mere fact that he, of all people, has been taken prisoner. He looks into the starry **sky** and thinks, "And all this is mine [...] and all this is me!" Yet the French caught all this and boarded it up in prison! With a smile, he returns to his comrades and goes to sleep.

At this point in the war, the French just want to get out of Russia as fast as they can. They resent having to provide for Russian captives and have no incentive to treat them well. Knowing what he does about the behavior of soldiers under duress, Pierre is fearful, and yet he's able to find humor in the situation—showing the new joy and simplicity he's uncovered while imprisoned. The sky reminds him of eternity and the fact that a soul, like the sky, can't be held captive.



VOLUME 4, PART 2: CHAPTERS 15–19

In early October, Napoleon sends Kutuzov another peace offer. The letter is addressed from Moscow, even though Napoleon is ahead of Kutuzov on the Kaluga road. Again, Kutuzov rejects the offer. Soon after, a small detachment is sent to Fominskoe to fight Broussier's division. Kutuzov doesn't want to do this, but the rest of the staff, energized by the victory at Tarutino, insists. Dokhturov, a humble, quiet general, is sent there—as indeed he appears at most of the war's major engagements, though history records little of him.

Kutuzov's goals are simple—he wants to eject the French from Russia and preserve Russian lives as much as possible. This explains why he rejects a peace treaty while also being reluctant to fight. The younger generals are more keen to fight, wanting to destroy the French outright. Inconspicuous generals like Dokhturov often play indispensable roles, though history focuses on bigger personalities.



On October 10th, the entire French army joins Broussier at Fominskoe for no apparent reason. In other words, where Dokhturov had expected to meet one division, he now faces Napoleon's full force. Refusing to act on his own orders, Dokhturov sends an officer galloping to Kutuzov's headquarters.

The engagement to come is known as the battle of Maloyaroslavets. General Dokhturov, facing more than he bargained for, looks for guidance rather than brazenly attacking Napoleon's whole army.



Kutuzov sleeps poorly that night. He's lying awake thinking about the battle of Tarutino and wishing his generals could understand that the French army is likely mortally wounded, and that the Russians just need patience and time. He thinks they behave like children, maneuvering restlessly as if fighting is an amusement in itself. Yet, even though he reproaches the younger generals for it, Kutuzov also lies awake picturing different scenarios by which the French might be conclusively beaten.

Kutuzov's strength as a general is that he understands the bigger picture, and with that insight comes a patience that younger, less experienced generals lack. He believes there's no need to proactively crush the French when, weakened and starving, the French are effectively destroying themselves. That doesn't mean he lacks the desire to crush the enemy.



As Kutuzov is lying in bed thinking about all this, Toll, another general, and Bolkhovitinov (Dokhturov's messenger) come in. Kutuzov listens to Bolkhovitinov's report and suddenly bursts into tears. He turns to the icons in the corner and thanks God for saving Russia.

Because of his insights as a general, Kutuzov knows instantly what the report means: the French can now be driven decisively out of Russia.



From now on, Kutuzov leads his army on retreat, while Napoleon's army retreats in the opposite direction. The army already contains the seeds of its own destruction. Still, they need a final push in that direction, and that push comes in the form of what the French call *le Hourra de l'Empereur*. The day after the council of war that decided to retreat, Napoleon rides along his line of troops. Some Cossacks, searching for booty, stumbled across Napoleon and could easily have captured him if they weren't distracted. After this, there's nothing left to do but flee—even Napoleon sees that. Soon the French army marches down the Smolensk road.

Because France is so far away, the defeated French long for Smolensk as if it's the promised land. Each individual soldier longs to surrender himself as a prisoner and be done with the whole business; but the whole body of the army moves too quickly and inexorably toward its goal to disintegrate. All the generals except Kutuzov want to go on the offensive and demolish the French. Kutuzov opposes this with all his strength. But at Vyazma, the generals, including Ermolov and others, can no longer restrain themselves, and they inform Kutuzov of their intentions by sending him a blank sheet of paper. All they succeed in doing is losing thousands of men. The French draw together tightly, avoid being overrun, and march determinedly toward Smolensk.

VOLUME 4, PART 3: CHAPTERS 1–4

The battle of Borodino, the occupation of Moscow, and the subsequent flight of the French are instructive historical events. Nations' political success has a great deal to do with their military success or lack thereof—even though it doesn't make a great deal of sense that the military victory or defeat of a nation would determine its status in relation to other nations. But it's always been true, ever since ancient times, and Napoleon's earlier wars further confirm this.

This pattern changes in 1812. The French take Moscow, yet suddenly, with no further battle, it's not Russia that submits, but Napoleonic France. This proved that winning a battle, as the French did at Borodino, isn't necessarily a guarantee of conquest. Historians tend to discuss these events as if they're describing a fencing duel in which the French were the fencer and the Russians were the enemy who dropped his sword and fought with a club instead, yet historians continue to describe the whole event as a fencing match.

The French phrase translates as “the Emperor’s hurrah.” In other words, the catastrophe of Napoleon’s near capture is his “last hurrah,” and the decimated French army no longer puts up any significant resistance.



The critical mass of the French army is in a hurry to get out of Russia; there's no longer any will to fight. Characteristically, however, the younger generals give in to their desire to crush the unresisting enemy. As Kutuzov had foreseen, this ends up being a pointless waste for the Russians.



Throughout history, military success usually translates to a nation's overall success. This pattern is so consistent that it becomes a truism. Up through the earlier Napoleonic Wars, the pattern holds true.



The War of 1812 doesn't fit the old historical pattern. The French victory at Borodino (itself questionable in many Russian eyes) proves to be a hollow one. Historians struggle to account for Napoleonic France's ultimate failure. They describe events as if the French and Russians fought by different rules.



One of these deviations from the “rules” of war is the behavior of scattered people against organized masses of people. This has been called partisan warfare. Such warfare directly opposes the well-established rule that attackers should always concentrate their troops in order to be ready for battle. This rule arises from military science’s belief that an army’s strength is identical to its numbers. Military science sees an army’s force as the product of mass times “some unknown x.” It suggests all sorts of things for this “x,” most often the genius of commanders.

In reality, though, the “x” is the spirit of an army—the army’s willingness to fight, no matter who they’re fighting under or whatever weapons they’re using. If soldiers *want* to fight, in other words, then they’ll “put themselves in the most advantageous conditions for fighting.” The conventional rule that soldiers should be massed for attack and dispersed for retreat actually confirms this truth about army spirit. When the French retreat in 1812, their spirits are low, so they press together—their mass is the only thing that keeps them together. At the same time, Russian morale is so high that they can afford to disperse and beat the attacking French without needing orders or discipline.

When the enemy enters Smolensk, the so-called partisan war begins. At this time, the partisan war wasn’t officially recognized by the government. Denis Davydov is responsible for legitimizing this unconventional form of warfare. In late August, he began forming partisan detachments. These detachments begin destroying Napoleon’s grand army in a piecemeal fashion. By October, there were hundreds of detachments. These ranged from large ones structured like armies to small parties of peasants or landowners.

The most intense time of the partisan war is in late October. The smaller partisan detachments, like the Cossacks and peasants, have gained confidence. On October 22nd, Denisov is caught up in partisan warfare. All day, he and his party have been watching a large French transport of cavalry supplies which includes Russian prisoners; it’s on its way to Smolensk. Dolokhov, too, has a small party of partisans nearby. Denisov has captured a French drummer boy to inform him about the transport, but the boy is “half-witted” and can’t tell him much. So Denisov sends a muzhik, Tikhon Shcherbaty, to capture at least one more soldier. In the meantime, a young officer arrives with a message from his general. The officer turns out to be Petya Rostov. Denisov warmly welcomes Nikolai’s little brother and lets him spend the night.

One of the new developments during the War of 1812 was partisan warfare, which is, to put it more simply, smaller groups fighting against larger forces. Partisan warfare played a key role in pushing Napoleon to retreat. In the past, an army’s strength was seen as being equivalent to its numbers, multiplied by a debatable factor like ingenious leadership.



Partisan warfare in 1812 undercuts military science’s conventional wisdom. The key to partisan warfare is the fact that morale is more important than anything else, including numbers or leadership. Morale explains why the larger French force could be successfully attacked by much smaller, less organized Russian forces.



Partisan warfare began in an unofficial, grassroots way and developed into a variety of different expressions. These small groups quickly found success in harrying the larger, demoralized French army.



Captain Denisov, Nikolai Rostov’s old friend, and the unscrupulous Dolokhov reappear as partisan fighters, as well as the youngest Rostov, reappearing unexpectedly. Partisan warfare depends on careful intelligence and scouting to ensure the best use of a detachment’s resources.



VOLUME 4, PART 3: CHAPTERS 5–11

Denisov and Petya overlook the French camp from a spot in the forest. Below, a large number of troops occupy a village and broken-down manor. Denisov calls for the drummer boy, but the boy, despite his eagerness to please Denisov, becomes confused and can't answer his questions. Before long, shots ring out, and a man in red runs through the camp below. It's Tikhon Shcherbaty, the scout. Though just a muzhik and often teased as a buffoon, the other soldiers respect Tikhon as the bravest man in the party.

Though everyone laughs at Tikhon's comical acting-out of his encounters with the French, Denisov is annoyed that the scout didn't bring back any prisoners. Petya joins in the laughter, but when he hears that Tikhon killed a Frenchman, he looks at the young drummer boy in concern. He tries to shake this off, wanting to seem mature enough for Denisov. When Denisov hears good news about Dolokhov, he cheers up and asks Petya to tell him about himself.

After the Rostovs left Moscow, Petya was attached as orderly to a general. After being promoted to officer and fighting in the battle of Vyazma, Petya has been euphoric, feeling grown up and never wanting to miss out on an opportunity for heroism. That's why, when his general wanted to send somebody to Denisov's detachment, he begged for the job. But, having seen Petya's tendency to behave wildly in battle, the general forbade Petya to participate in Denisov's actions. When Petya heard Denisov's plans for an attack, though, he quickly decided that Denisov was a hero and that he must stay, no matter what his general said.

At the guardhouse, Petya excitedly joins the officers' dinner. He keeps pulling gifts like raisins and flints out of his baggage and offering them to the other men. He suddenly thinks of the pitiful drummer boy and wants to ask about his welfare, but he fears he's already embarrassed himself with his gift-giving. Nevertheless, Denisov allows the boy to be brought in. Petya tries to comfort the timid boy and wishes he could do something for him. Denisov orders that the drummer boy be well fed and dressed.

When Dolokhov arrives and plans to scope out the French encampment, Petya defies Denisov and goes along. They dress in French uniforms and bluster their way into the camp. Questioning officers around a campfire, Petya feels certain that they'll be discovered as spies. But they ride out of the camp without incident, and before they part ways, Petya kisses Dolokhov, calling him a hero. Dolokhov laughs indulgently and rides off into the night.

Tolstoy highlights the role of peasants as well as enlisted nobility and officers in the war. Unconventional partisan warfare, with its reliance on spirit and instinct, has a distinctly "Russian" flavor in the story, made stronger by the peasant Tikhon.



Still new to war, sensitive Petya struggles with the realities of partisan fighting, even caring about those, like the drummer boy, that others might overlook or view as dispensable.



Despite his sensitivity, Petya also has a passion for heroism, likely influenced by stories of his older brother Nikolai's service in the earlier Napoleonic Wars. He desperately wants an opportunity to be a "hero" himself, seeming to equate this with reckless actions.



Petya has a naïve, boyish eagerness to please. He also worries about those he fears are forgotten, like the captive drummer boy. Out of friendship with the Rostovs, Denisov indulges Petya's kindly whims. There's a sense that Petya is too tender-hearted to last in this rough environment.



Petya gets the taste of "heroism" he'd hoped for. Unlike his older brother, who came to question the whole premise of such heroism (whether the individual French were indeed "enemies," etc.), Petya naïvely relishes the thrill and adventure.



Back at the guardhouse, Denisov is relieved that Petya returns safely. Unable to sleep, Petya chats with a Cossack who sharpens Petya's saber for him. As the **sky** lightens, Petya feels he could touch it with his hand. The rhythm of the saber being sharpened lulls him into a musical dream, an original melody played by violins and trumpets. Petya wishes he could share this music with someone. He wakes when he hears Denisov calling him.

Denisov gives last-minute orders for the attack. Petya stands with his horse, trembling. As they mount up, Denisov sternly warns Petya to listen to him. After a Cossack gives the signal of a single shot, Petya suddenly gallops ahead, disregarding Denisov. As he rides through the camp, he sees Frenchmen falling and feels that he keeps missing the exciting action. As he rides into the manor courtyard, he stops holding the reins and slips out of the saddle. When he falls to the ground, his limbs jerk. He's been shot through the head.

After receiving word that the French will surrender, Dolokhov looks at Petya's body and tells Denisov that the boy is "finished." The Cossacks look at Denisov in surprise as he holds Petya's pale, bloodied head and begins to cry. Denisov remembers Petya saying, "I'm used to something sweet. Excellent raisins, take them all." Later, Denisov and Dolokhov succeed in retaking Russian prisoners from the French. Among the prisoners is Pierre Bezukhov.

Knowing the symbolism of the sky earlier in the story (it tends to show up at pivotal moments in characters' lives, often foretelling a brush with death), Petya's feeling here, the night before battle, is ominous.



As his general had warned, Petya behaves rashly, charging heedlessly into the battle out of fear that he'll miss the heroics. He dies almost instantly; his idealism ends up costing him his life



Denisov is moved by Petya's youthful generosity and innocence and also knows how the boy's death will grieve the Rostov family. With Pierre's release from captivity, the central families' participation in the war (the Bolkonskys, Rostovs, and Bezukhovs) is brought to an end.



VOLUME 4, PART 3: CHAPTERS 12–15

Throughout their march, Pierre has noticed the French becoming more and more disorderly. Supply wagons have been captured or abandoned. Of the 330 prisoners who departed from Moscow, fewer than 100 remain. The French resent having to guard the Russian prisoners, who are as cold and hungry as themselves, and they treat them more harshly. Pierre reunites with Karataev and his sidekick, a bowlegged dog. Three days after leaving Moscow, Karataev comes down with a fever and rapidly weakens. Pierre finds himself withdrawing from the sick man, who smells bad and moans a lot.

During this long march, Pierre learns that there isn't anything truly frightening in the world. He's discovered that there's no situation in which he can be completely unhappy or unfree. There's only so bad suffering can get, he finds. Even when the sores on his feet become severe, he finds that it's just a matter of getting up and walking until he forgets the pain. He thinks neither about the stragglers who are shot nor about his own fate; his joyful thoughts and memories transcend his circumstances.

The action moves back in time slightly to Pierre's final days on the march. The straggling French retreat is obviously falling apart. Despite his love for Karataev and his more accepting attitude about life in general, even Pierre finds that a suffering man's company tests his patience.



The march teaches Pierre that outside circumstances can't rob him of joy or freedom. The ability to cope with suffering, the strength to withstand oppression, is within him, and it's stronger than he would have known otherwise.



On October 22nd, Pierre walks along with Gray the dog, thinking about a conversation with Platon Karataev the night before. When he walked up to Platon's campfire, he felt uncomfortable seeing the sickly old man but forced himself to stay and listen to a story. The story was about a God-fearing old merchant who was falsely accused of murder and sentenced to hard labor. Ten years later, when the merchant told his story around a fire, the real murderer happened to hear it. He fell at the merchant's feet in repentance, but the merchant said he didn't need to forgive the killer; his sentence has been punishment for his own sins. After some time, the merchant's situation was brought to the tsar, who ordered his release. But the merchant died in the meantime; God had already forgiven him. Upon finishing this story, Karataev's face had glowed with joy. Pierre thinks about it for a long time.

There's a commotion among the prisoners; they form up to let a well-dressed convoy pass by. About the same time, Pierre spots Karataev leaning against a tree, his face both tender and solemn. Karataev catches Pierre's eye, and Pierre knows he should go over to him, but he's too afraid, so he pretends he didn't see. Not long after, Pierre hears the sound of a shot, and he sees a soldier run past him with a smoking gun, looking troubled. Gray the dog starts to howl, but nobody turns to look.

The prisoners reach the village of Shamshevo, and Pierre falls asleep by the fire. He dreams vividly of Karataev, knowing that the hardest and happiest thing is to love life while suffering guiltlessly. When he wakes up, his mind puts together the details from earlier that day, and he acknowledges to himself that Karataev is dead. But, at the same moment, he drifts into a dream of a summer evening spent with a beautiful woman in Kiev.

The next time Pierre wakes, he hears joyful shouting. Cossacks surround the soldiers, offering them clothes and food. Pierre weeps with joy and kisses the first soldier he sees. Meanwhile, Dolokhov stands by the manor house, watching hundreds of French prisoners file past, a cruel gleam in his eye. Denisov follows some Cossacks to a pit where Petya Rostov will be buried.

This story was reworked and published separately in 1872 as the short story "God Sees the Truth but Waits" in Tolstoy's collection A New Primer. The old man in the story suffers innocently, but when the real murderer repents, the innocent man has no bitterness toward him. The moral of the story is that each person is accountable for their own soul before God, leaving no room for hatred toward anyone else. Also, the divine perspective on events is different, wiser, and ultimately more compassionate than the limited human perspective. Tolstoy associates the innocent sufferer in the story with Platon himself.



Platon gets shot for straggling behind, a fate he appears to accept. Afraid to be targeted himself, not yet at a point in life where he can accept death, Pierre tries to ignore what's happened.



Pierre's dream suggests that Karataev lived a complete and happy life, one that reflected the innocent sufferer in his campfire story. Though Pierre accepts the reality of what's happened to his friend, his subsequent dream suggests that he's not yet ready to let go of life's pleasures himself.



The story catches up to Denisov's and Dolokhov's liberation of the prisoners and Petya's death, a scene capturing many of war's emotions: joy, hatred, and grief.



VOLUME 4, PART 3: CHAPTERS 16–19

Starting from October 28th, until they reach Vyazma, the French army, which was 73,000 strong, is gradually reduced to 36,000. Only 5,000 were killed in battle. The same proportion is lost during each of the march's subsequent legs. From Smolensk, Berthier writes to Napoleon, explaining that the army has virtually disbanded. He urges that the men be granted rest and food at Smolensk, or else discipline will completely collapse. When the French do reach Smolensk, some kill one another in their desperation for provisions. Meanwhile, Napoleon and his staff keep writing orders that nobody follows. The army just keeps running.

Given the self-destruction of the French, it seems impossible that historians would credit the retreat to the genius of Napoleon or his marshals, but they do exactly that. They justify even Napoleon's base actions on his supposed "greatness," which seems to exclude the possibility of bad. It never occurs to anyone that this kind of "greatness" is actually a recognition of insignificance. But, according to the measures of good and bad given by Christ, there cannot be greatness without "simplicity, goodness, and truth."

When they read about the end of the 1812 campaign, Russian people feel dissatisfied. Why didn't the Russians simply destroy the weak, demoralized French? History blames Kutuzov's and other generals' failure to execute certain maneuvers. In reality, there was no need to capture Napoleon and the rapidly retreating French. Besides, in the brutal winter of 1812, it was all the Russians could do to stay alive themselves.

The contradiction between historical accounts and facts is due to the fact that historians record generals' "beautiful feelings" instead of the actual events. Interesting quotes from generals, military triumphs, and speculations are more interesting than the stories of the tens of thousands of ordinary men who died along the way. Yet if the ordinary masses' stories were considered, the contradiction would be resolved. All the people wanted was to expel the invaders, and that was achieved. They saw no need to provoke the French who were already running away.

VOLUME 4, PART 4: CHAPTERS 1–3

After Prince Andrei's death, both Natasha and Princess Marya find that every ordinary detail of life aggravates grief. Even though they don't talk about what happened, they only find comfort when they're together. Thinking about the future feels like a betrayal of Andrei's memory, and talking about him seems to violate the mystery of his death.

The French retreat from Russia is deadlier than battle, thanks to the extension of the French line beyond the army's capacity to keep soldiers fed and supplied. French morale has also totally collapsed, and even the leaders' orders are little more than perfunctory gestures.



Historians find ways to interpret the humiliating French retreat as evidence of Napoleon's genius, because they presuppose that everything he does must be great. Tolstoy suggests that this measure of "greatness" is inherently off base, because Napoleon was devoid of basic Christian virtues.



Much as historians tend to praise Napoleon no matter what he did, so do contemporary readers, even Russians themselves, look for reasons to blame Kutuzov. But just because annihilation of the French sounds ideal doesn't mean it was an achievable aim, and people overlook the bigger picture of suffering on both sides.



Historians often idealize events. They pick out inspiring and exciting events instead of giving the full picture, and they focus on the biggest personalities. If they considered the will of the Russian people at the time, however, the reason the French were allowed to escape becomes clear.



Natasha and Princess Marya struggle to come to terms with their grief. As the two people closest to Andrei, they form a bond, in contrast to their earlier suspicion and dislike.



After two weeks, however, Princess Marya has to respond to life's demands once again and begins preparing to move to Moscow. Natasha declines the invitation to live with her there, as she's on the verge of understanding something and must continue to wrestle with it. She recalls a particular conversation with Andrei when he said that "to bind yourself forever to a suffering man [...] is eternal torment." Natasha had brushed off these words by assuring Andrei that he would get well. Now Natasha wishes she could tell Andrei that she'd rather suffer than live without him.

Just as Natasha feels she's nearing a breakthrough, Dunyasha comes into the room, crying, and tells her to go to her father—there's been a misfortune. Natasha is shocked to see the Count weeping like a child. The Countess is sobbing and beating her head against the wall while Sonya and the maids try to restrain her. Over the coming days, her mother retreats into insanity, unable to believe she can live in a world without Petya. Natasha doesn't leave her side during that time.

Before Petya's death, the Countess had been a lively 50-year-old woman, but when she finally emerges from her room, she's become an old woman. Yet the wound of Petya's death actually brings Natasha to new life. After Prince Andrei's death, Natasha believed her life was over, but her love for her mother teaches her that there's still life in her: "love awoke, and life awoke."

Prince Andrei's and Petya's deaths draw Princess Marya and Natasha closer together. From that time, a deep, tender bond forms between the two women. Natasha comes to appreciate Marya's attitude of religious self-denial, and Marya admires Natasha's delight in life's pleasures. They still refrain from discussing Andrei. Little by little, they even begin to forget him. When Princess Marya goes to Moscow at the end of January, Natasha finally agrees to go with her.

VOLUME 4, PART 4: CHAPTERS 4-9

After the battle at Vyazma, the Russian army is exhausted and can no longer keep up with the fleeing French. Despite this, many generals grumble over Kutuzov's failure to capture Napoleon. For his part, Kutuzov does his best to subtly diminish the army's marches. History doesn't remember him kindly for this, seeing him as cowardly and weak. Yet it's hard to imagine a figure more successful than Kutuzov in doggedly pursuing and attaining a single goal.

In coping with Prince Andrei's death, Natasha squarely faces suffering for the first time—not just the consequences of her own actions. When Andrei was still alive, she shrank from the reality of his suffering. Now she would rather embrace his suffering than accept his death.



The news of Petya's death hastens Natasha's growth in accepting suffering and death. From being the indulged daughter, Natasha now shoulders her parents' grief, setting aside her own feelings to care for them.



Natasha begins to understand that as long as she has the capacity to love, she can live. From her immature confusion during her engagement to her denial on Andrei's deathbed, she now understands that real love unselfishly seeks another person's good.



Suffering and grief help create an enlivening bond between Marya and Natasha, which leads to the possibility of new beginnings.



Tolstoy suggests that historians often misunderstand the motivations of truly good leaders. While most Russian generals frantically pursue the next obvious step, Kutuzov takes a longer view of what's best (preserving Russia's strength by letting the French destroy themselves), which makes him an easy scapegoat for misguided critics.



Kutuzov seldom talked about himself. He enjoyed novels, wrote letters to his daughters, and joked around with his subordinates. He often spoke the first words that come into his head, not because he was thoughtless, but because he learned that an individual's words aren't what moves other people. Yet he never spoke against his main goal. All his life, he categorized the battle of Borodino as a Russian victory, stated that the loss of Moscow wasn't the loss of Russia, and recognized that there would never be peace until the people desired it.

Kutuzov's goal was simply to defeat the French and drive them out of Russia in order to relieve both the army and the people. Kutuzov alone understood the significance of the war, even when he was alone in his opinions and never expressed them to anyone. This was because of his deep, pure "national feeling." This was why the people chose him, even though the tsar disliked him, and why he cared more about sparing people than destroying them. Because of all this, Kutuzov "could not fit into that false form of the European hero" invented by history.

In November, during the Krasnoe battles, Kutuzov is called upon to offer remarks. After thanking the soldiers for their service, his voice becomes quieter, like an old man's instead of a general's. He tells the soldiers that while their situation is hard, the French are more pitiable, and they're human, too. But then, cursing, he adds that nobody invited the French here, and it's their own doing. The crowd roars joyfully as Kutuzov takes off at a full gallop, something he's never done before. The soldiers feel that Kutuzov has expressed precisely what they all feel.

On the last day of the Krasnoe battles, the troops arrive at their night camp to find that most of the available quarters are occupied by sick Frenchmen. With good-natured cursing and singing, the men chop down trees and dismantle abandoned cottages. While high command reviews the day's battle and proposes tomorrow's maneuvers, the soldiers smoke their pipes and steam lice from their clothes..

Despite the freezing conditions, lack of adequate winter gear, and substandard rations, the Russian soldiers are as cheerful as ever. By now, the weak and disheartened have all been thinned out of the ranks. The eighth company sits by a blazing campfire and speculates about when they'll get new boots. They reminisce about Borodino but agree that since then, all the fighting has been about making the French suffer. As most of the men settle down to sleep by the fire, a few wander over to the fifth company, where a lively Frenchman is said to be playing songs.

With his down-to-earth restraint, Kutuzov is the opposite of Napoleon. His focus on the long view and his faith in the people's will also contrast with Napoleon's ego-driven ambition. Kutuzov's seeming carelessness in speech explains some of his strange words, like claiming he didn't abandon Moscow when Rastopchin confronted him.



If Kutuzov has any failing in Tolstoy's view, it's that he's a man of a bygone age. While younger Russians take their cues from Europe, Kutuzov is traditionally, instinctively Russian in a way that benefits Russia, even when people can't see or appreciate it. His strengths don't suit him for the larger-than-life heroic mold of men like Napoleon.



The Krasnoe battles were some of the final skirmishes of the French retreat. Kutuzov's fatherly remarks on this occasion reveal his character. He acknowledges French humanity, but at the same time, he has a perfect instinct for what the rank and file soldiers want to hear, and he encourages their morale accordingly.



After his consideration of Kutuzov's legacy, Tolstoy portrays the everyday realities of army life, a reminder that these aspects of military life were ongoing at the same time.



Without downplaying the horrible conditions, Tolstoy also highlights Russian resilience and spirit. Though soldiers' lives generally revolve around mundane details like new boots instead of politics, they're also invested in the bigger picture of the war.



In the middle of the night, some soldiers think they hear a bear in the woods. Instead, they see two strangely dressed Frenchmen emerge from the trees. One, Ramballe, is tall and weak, barely staying on his feet. The second, Morel, is a stocky man with a kerchief, in stronger shape. The Russians bring them food and vodka. Two men carry Ramballe to the colonel's quarters to warm him up. A Russian soldier imitates Morel's drunken French singing, struggling comically over the pronunciation. Even the seasoned soldiers can't help but smile at the scene. Eventually, everyone falls asleep while the stars twinkle overhead.

Tolstoy uses this scene to give a more detailed picture of army camp life. Ramballe, the wine-loving officer who quartered with Pierre back in Moscow, reappears in bad shape, showing how devastating the past weeks have been for the French. There's a touching humanity about the soldiers' good-natured care for, and even teasing companionship of the Frenchmen. At this point in the war, a certain brotherhood prevails. As Nikolai, Andrei, and Pierre all realized, French and Russian alike sleep under the same eternal sky.



VOLUME 4, PART 4: CHAPTERS 10–11

Pfuel had drawn up a plan (far away in Petersburg) for the capture of Napoleon, but the battle of Berezina turned into a tragic spectacle. When the Berezina bridges were broken down, everyone—unarmed soldiers, Moscow inhabitants, women and children—ran into boats and even into the freezing water instead of surrendering. They sensed it was better to perish among their own than to suffer or die as a prisoner.

Pfuel's disastrous plan exemplifies the view that "European" strategizing doesn't go as planned. The French wanted to retreat over the Berezina River (in what's now Belarus), but the river had undergone an unseasonable thaw, and many soldiers and civilians drowned or froze.



After the Berezina plan fails, Russian commanders are even more intent on pursuing the French and even more disdainful of Kutuzov. Kutuzov receives word that the Emperor is unhappy with him and will be visiting any day. At that moment, Kutuzov understands that his time is up. He feels that his role is complete and that he needs rest.

Unlike Napoleon, Kutuzov doesn't have much of an ego to speak of. He's been fighting against the tide of the more aggressive younger generals and knows the Emperor feels no different; accepting that reality and satisfied that he's met his aims, he's ready to stop.



On November 29th, Kutuzov rides into Vilno, a city he'd previously governed, and immediately transitions into quiet habits, taking no more concern in political matters. On December 11th, the sovereign arrives at Kutuzov's castle. Emperor Alexander embraces the old man, who characteristically weeps. In private, the emperor criticizes Kutuzov for the slowness of the pursuit and for making mistakes at Krasnoe and Berezina and tells him his intentions for the rest of the campaign. Kutuzov listens submissively and says nothing. When Kutuzov leaves the study, Count Tolstoy meets him, holding out a shining object. Puzzled at first, Kutuzov smiles and accepts the Order of St. George, first degree.

Though he's a stereotypically emotional Russian, Kutuzov otherwise stoically accepts the Emperor's criticism, knowing his role is effectively over. Count Pyotr Aleksandrovich Tolstoy was a general and statesman under Alexander I; given his clear admiration for Kutuzov, it's probably not accidental that Tolstoy chooses to focus on this moment, when a character sharing his name gives Kutuzov Russia's highest military decoration.



Besides its significance to Russians, the War of 1812 also has a major European significance. Kutuzov is unable to understand this significance—the balance of powers in Europe and Napoleon's role in them. As far as he's concerned, the enemy has been destroyed, so as a Russian, his job is done. It's up to Alexander to oversee the restoration of Russia's frontiers. There's nothing else for Kutuzov to do, so he dies.

Kutuzov died on April 28, 1813, in what's now Poland, during the Russian army's campaign in Europe. Tolstoy portrays him as a Russian's Russian, with an all-consuming passion for his motherland. Europe's business is not his affair, and having defended Russia, he can die with contentment.



VOLUME 4, PART 4: CHAPTERS 12–14

After Pierre is released from captivity, he falls ill for three months. He can't remember much about the period between his release and his illness—it's a dull, numb memory of pain, intrusive questions from others, and difficulty in finding a carriage. On the day of his release, he saw Petya Rostov's body. He also learned of Prince Andrei's death over a month after his wounding at Borodino. On the same day, Denisov told him of Hélène's death. At the time, none of this sunk in.

Gradually, as Pierre recovers in Kiev, he gets used to the fact that nobody is going to force him to march anywhere or deprive him of food or a bed. He also gradually comes to understand the news of his wife's death, Prince Andrei's death, and the defeat of the French. During this time, he savors the feeling of both internal and external freedom. No one demands anything of him; even thoughts of his wife, which once tormented him, are no longer a burden.

Instead of seeking a purpose, Pierre now has faith in God. After his captivity, he learned that God has always been right in front of him and all around him. He used to gaze at what he thought were infinite things in the distance, only to be disappointed by their ordinary nature. Now he understands that the infinite is in the ordinary. The more he realizes this, the happier he becomes.

Outwardly, Pierre hasn't changed. He looks the same, and he's just as absentminded. Only now, instead of seeming tormented by his distractions, he carries a constant awareness of life's joy, wondering sympathetically if other people are as content as he is. People are drawn to his presence and confide in him, and he draws the best out of them.

One day Count Willarski, who had inducted Pierre into the Masonic lodge, passes through town and eagerly stops by for a visit. He thinks Pierre has become apathetic and self-absorbed, yet he enjoys his company. But Pierre finds it hard to believe that he used to identify with this man. Willarski thinks the ordinary business of life is beneath him, and he absorbs himself in military matters, politics, and the Masons instead of his family.

Though one would assume that Pierre's liberation would be a euphoric time, Tolstoy realistically portrays his difficulty in reentering normal life, as well as the torrent of personal griefs that waited for him.



Pierre slowly heals from the trauma of the forced march. For now, the interior freedom he learned in imprisonment remains with him—he has learned how to simply exist and appreciate life.



Pierre used to be obsessed with discovering the meaning of life, a meaning he assumed was "out there" somewhere. Whenever he got close to his goals, they inevitably disappointed him. From Platon Karataev and his experiences in captivity, Pierre has discovered contentment in himself and the divine all around him; he no longer has to go searching for it.



Similar to what's happened to Natasha, personal suffering has caused Pierre to turn outward in sympathy. No longer preoccupied with his own unhappiness, he's free to show kindness to others.



Count Willarski doesn't understand the "new" Pierre, mistaking his contentment for apathy. Pierre, in turn, finds Willarski's concerns to be trivial. Their different priorities show how dramatically Pierre has changed.



Somehow, Pierre is also more confident about the practical details of dispensing his fortune. Instead of giving indiscriminately, he has a knack for figuring out where his money should go. He quietly slips a former captive some much-needed money while calmly refusing a French colonel who tries to exploit him. With his chief steward, he determines that though the Moscow fire cost him two million, his income won't suffer if he lets go of some of his properties around Moscow. Happily, he observes that "My ruin has made me much richer."

However, Pierre changes his mind and decides to return to Moscow, deal with his late wife's debts, and rebuild his houses. As he travels to Moscow, he feels like a "schoolboy on vacation"—everything fascinates him. Willarski, who's traveling with Pierre, constantly complains of Russia's backwardness, but Pierre just smiles, moved by the resilience of Russia's people.

Even though Moscow is utterly destroyed, people swarm back into the city in October—there is something "immaterial but mighty and indestructible" about it. Peasants, clergy, and tradesmen trickle back in. Even Count Rastopchin starts writing proclamations again. By the fall of 1813, Moscow's population is higher than its population in 1812. Life gets back to normal.

VOLUME 4, PART 4: CHAPTERS 15–20

Pierre arrives in Moscow at the end of January. The capital is full of life. Everyone is glad to see Pierre, but he is a bit guarded with everyone, reluctant to commit to any definite plans. A few days after his arrival, he goes to visit Princess Marya. The last time he saw Prince Andrei, Andrei was in a bitter mood. Pierre wonders if Andrei died in the same state.

Princess Marya admits Pierre to her room. A lady in a black dress is also there, but Pierre doesn't pay much attention to her. Princess Marya greets him warmly as they talk of Pierre's rescue and Andrei's death. Marya keeps shifting her gaze to her companion, and when Pierre doesn't acknowledge the other woman, Marya asks, "Don't you recognize her?" Pierre sees something sweetly familiar in the woman's expression, but her pale, aged face puzzles him. Marya says, "Natasha," and, "like a rusty door opening," the woman smiles. A forgotten happiness envelops Pierre, and he knows that he loves Natasha. His happy blush and stumbling words tell both women how he feels. He feels that his freedom is gone, but he doesn't mind.

Though he's always been generous, Pierre used to be clueless about managing his estate. Captivity has taught him to look at his wealth apart from the social pressures that usually accompany it. This allows him to put his money to more effective use.



After captivity, Pierre finds new savor in ordinary life. Someone like Willarski, who's never stepped outside of society, is unable to see its beauty the way Pierre now can.



Within several weeks of the French invasion, the spiritual heart of Russia is restored to life. Not only that, it quickly thrives. Tolstoy suggests that the spirit of the Russian people is deeply resilient; like Pierre and Natasha, the people as a whole seem to be returning to life after their suffering.



Though Pierre returns to Moscow a different man, he doesn't yet know what normal life will look like for him in his changed state. Pierre and Andrei last spoke on the field at Borodino; Pierre doesn't know the story of Andrei's sufferings and death since then.



Since Andrei's and Petya's deaths and her mother's grief, Natasha has physically altered to the point that she's not recognizable at first. Once Natasha's smile reappears—it has lately been hidden—Pierre sees her instantly. Their respective sufferings seem to have refined them, making them able to "see" each other in a new way. Pierre's loss of freedom is tied to this, as his life now feels tethered to Natasha's.



Grateful to hear that Prince Andrei “softened” before he died, Pierre tells Natasha that her reunion with Andrei was a happy thing. She frowns but agrees, and then suddenly pours out all her feelings about the evacuation from Moscow and the weeks in Yaroslavl. Pierre watches her with tear-filled eyes, feeling compassion for her suffering. When she finishes the story and rushes out of the room, Pierre feels bereft. Marya invites him to stay for a late supper and adds, “It’s the first time she’s spoken of him like that.”

When Natasha enters the dining room, she’s calm. After the heartfelt conversation, everyone feels a little awkward, but gradually Pierre begins talking about his return to Moscow. He wryly notes that he’s become an “interesting person” and that others seem to know more about his adventures than he does. He also talks about H el ene’s death and his sorrow about her lonely end, despite the fact that they weren’t “exemplary spouses.” The women coax the story of his captivity out of him, and though he begins speaking in a self-deprecating way, he gradually becomes more earnest. Natasha is riveted by the account, and it seems to Pierre that she understands everything he can’t convey in words.

Pierre continues talking about rescuing the little girl and witnessing the executions; Natasha urges him not to leave any details out. When he describes Karataev, Pierre’s voice trembles. As he tells his story and Natasha listens, sensitively taking in each word and gesture, Pierre feels that the details acquire a new significance. Pierre finishes the story at three o’clock in the morning. He tells Natasha that suffering makes a person think all is lost, but that as long as there’s life, happiness is possible. Natasha starts to cry but smiles as she bids Pierre goodnight.

When Natasha and Princess Marya go to bed, they talk about Pierre. Natasha says it feels good to have talked about everything, and that Pierre seems somehow morally renewed, as if fresh from the bathhouse. A mischievous smile lights her face—one Marya hasn’t seen for a long time. At home, Pierre paces up and down. By morning, he’s convinced that he and Natasha must marry.

Arriving at Princess Marya’s, Pierre feels a momentary doubt about what happened yesterday, but he soon senses Natasha’s presence, like an “instant loss of freedom.” Now, though she’s dressed the same as yesterday, she looks youthful, her eyes bright and her smile mischievous. In the coming days, Pierre visits often, and he finally asks the Princess for help. He knows he’s unworthy of Natasha, but may he hope nevertheless?

Pierre has long been a confidant for Natasha, but now he has a unique ability to help her open up. Having endured suffering himself, Pierre has a deep, inviting compassion that she instinctively recognizes. Even Princess Marya doesn’t reach Natasha in the same way.



Where it was once an obstacle to him, Pierre now has a sense of humor about his sought-after role in society. He also has a more mature perspective on his failed marriage, even showing compassion to his troubled late wife. Tellingly, Natasha’s response to Pierre mirrors his when she talked about Prince Andrei’s death—she understands his deeper meaning without even needing to hear it.



Like Pierre, Natasha now has a special ability to draw the best out of others. And both of them seem to have arrived at a similar understanding of life’s meaning: that where there’s life, hope and happiness can still be found.



Talking with Pierre has brought out Natasha’s old spark. Their respective sufferings have had a purifying effect on them both, clearing away superfluous things and enabling them to see each other with compassion and clarity.



Even though Natasha has changed, her old, irrepressible spark is still there. Pierre continues to feel drawn to commit himself to her, but he hasn’t completely changed, either: there’s still a bit of awkward insecurity about him.



Princess Marya thinks for a minute and starts to say that it's too soon to speak to Natasha of love, but she realizes that's not true: for the past three days, Natasha has been completely different. She tells Pierre to leave things to her—she knows that Natasha loves him or *will* love him. Pierre jumps up with excitement and kisses Marya's hands in gratitude. The next day, before he leaves for Petersburg, Natasha bids him farewell, adding in a whisper, "I'll be waiting very much for you."

During his time in Petersburg, Pierre relives his visits with Natasha over and over. He wonders at his joy and occasionally fears it's all a dream. When other people speak of politics or the war, Pierre feels sorry for them, that for them happiness depends on such things. Pierre holds forever the views he forms during these weeks of "happy insanity," later believing that during this time he truly understood all that's worth knowing in the world. His "insanity" consists of the fact that, instead of loving people based on their merits, he loves without reason. In so doing, he discovers the reasons why people are worth loving.

Ever since her reunion with Pierre, something new has awakened in Natasha's soul. She forgets her grief and no longer dreads the future. At first, the change in Natasha troubles Princess Marya—did Natasha love Andrei so little? But Marya can't begrudge Natasha's irrepressible happiness; she knows there is nothing to be done.

When Natasha hears that Pierre has gone to Petersburg, she begins to cry and begs Marya to teach her—she's so afraid of being "bad." Marya forgives her immediately. Natasha says they'll both be so happy someday, when she marries Pierre and Marya marries Nikolai, but Marya doesn't want to talk about that. Natasha wonders why Pierre went to Petersburg, but she concedes that it had to be so.

EPILOGUE, PART 1: CHAPTERS 1–4

Seven years after 1812, war-torn Europe is calm. Nevertheless, the "mysterious forces that move mankind" continue to work unseen. Instead of roiling Europe, these forces churn far beneath the surface. Instead of going into battle, historical figures conduct diplomacy and enact laws. Historians call this "the reaction."

Princess Marya realizes that though Natasha is still in mourning, there's been a complete change in her and that she's free to love in a way that she wasn't before. Natasha's farewell suggests the same.



These weeks of being newly in love make an indelible impression on Pierre's worldview. His "insanity" is something like Platon Karataev's indiscriminate love for others. Such love brings the best out of its objects. This kind of love made him the kind of person who could love Natasha, and in turn, Natasha's love opens him up even more to love others.



Princess Marya can't help but feel a little defensive on her late brother's behalf. But she accepts Natasha as she is and understands that love can't be compartmentalized or restrained.



Pierre's trip reminds Natasha of Andrei's year abroad, and she immediately fears betraying Pierre as she did Andrei. Though the fear is natural, Natasha has grown in her understanding of love and isn't in danger of confusing it with a fleeting passion. Tolstoy ends the main part of the novel with the words "It has to be so," referring to the mystery of fate and necessity—something Natasha, too, has learned to embrace.



Tolstoy believes that a law of necessity works to bring about historical events, a point he'll expand on later in the epilogue. History doesn't stop when wars end; the same forces continue to work in less conspicuous ways. The Napoleonic Wars had far-reaching effects as countries adjusted their borders, attempted to re-balance power, and saw fledgling nationalist movements take root.



In Russia, the “reaction’s” leader was Alexander I—the same figure who’d earlier been hailed for his liberalism by the same historians. Historians roundly condemn Alexander for his actions during this period, “on the basis of that knowledge of the good of mankind which they possess.” They condemn him not for lacking virtue, but for lacking their own views of the good of humanity, 50 years later. Presumably, these views, too, will shift as time goes on.

When a modern thinker condemns Alexander or Napoleon, they do so because the man did not act according to their modern notion of the good—a notion that’s limited itself. Even if we could grant that there’s an unchanging measure of good and evil, even if Alexander could have acted according to present-day notions of progress, then what would have become of those who opposed Alexander in his own day?

If we believe that “great men” lead humanity to certain achievements, then we must explain history in light of the ideas of chance and genius. But what are these two things? If we think we don’t know why a phenomenon occurs, then we attribute it to “chance.” If we observe that some power produces an effect which seems to be beyond normal human qualities, and we don’t understand it, then we say it’s due to “genius.” On the other hand, if we renounce the idea that there’s an understandable purpose behind things, we don’t need the concepts of chance and genius.

The events of the early nineteenth century in Europe involved the movement of masses of people from west to east and then from east to west. In order for this to happen, it was first necessary to form a sufficiently large military body; second, to reject existing customs; and, third, to have a leader who could justify all that followed. This man, who wasn’t even a Frenchman, strangely arose to fill that role. The ignorance and weakness of those around him, his sincere lies, and his self-confidence propelled him there, along with countless other so-called chances.

After dodging destruction in both France and Italy, Napoleon sought so-called glory by invading Africa. This idea of “glory” consists of considering one’s actions to be supernaturally significant, incapable of being bad. Even though he left Africa on shameful terms, by the time he returned to Paris, the way was cleared for him to assume power there. Napoleon was terrified and had no plan, but he was also in love with himself, bold, and a good liar, so he could justify what needed to be done.

Historians’ criticisms of Alexander often have to do with his growing conservatism, such as granting Poland a constitution yet declaring it bound to the Russian throne, appointing conservative figures to government positions, and harshly punishing an entire mutinous regiment. Tolstoy points out that people think their view of humanity’s good is infallible, but that this view is ever-evolving.



Tolstoy’s point is that if Alexander had conformed to modern progressive ideas, then his own critics would have been the “reactionaries” of the day, and history would be much different; figures are best evaluated according to the standards of their own time.



Tolstoy critiques the view that history is guided by so-called great men. For this view to make sense, one must also uphold ideas of “chance” and “genius” that allow such great men to emerge. On the other hand, if there’s no guiding purpose behind history, such ideas aren’t necessary.



To give an example of the “great man” theory, Tolstoy here describes Napoleon and the Napoleonic Wars, describing the so-called chances that swept such a “genius” into his role.



Tolstoy continues to describe Napoleon’s career in terms of chance and genius. Tongue in cheek, he critiques the notion of “glory” as a way of deifying a person’s actions and thereby shielding them from criticism. In his thought experiment, Napoleon’s “genius” consisted only of arrogance and deceit.



As Napoleon gained more victories, Europe—which once condemned Napoleon’s “crimes”—began to recognize not only his power but his supposed greatness and glory, which now seemed “beautiful and reasonable.” As he gathered a larger group around himself and pushed eastward toward Russia, the justification of his power grew, too. It’s not so much that he prepared himself to fulfill a role as that everyone around him prepared the way for him. Everything continued apace until Moscow, when “chance” seemingly turned against him, and the movement around him moved westward once more. Now, Napoleon and his government were meaningless and reviled even by his erstwhile allies. Yet they simply sent him to an island and paid him several million.

Alexander I, who oversaw the movement of forces from east to west, shows the power of necessity even more strongly. Justified by his moral superiority, his concern for all of Europe, and his personal grievance against Napoleon, Alexander has reached the height of human power by 1815. But instead of seizing the opportunity to do good for humanity, he sees his power as insignificant and hands it over to “despicable” men instead. In the case of both figures—Alexander and Napoleon—all that’s possible is observation of the connection between their lives and other phenomena. The *whole* story is inaccessible to humanity.

Napoleon’s war victories persuaded people to view him as a genius, even though they’d previously seen him as a criminal. The more powerful he became, the more people submitted to him, until “chance” finally failed him in the War of 1812. After that, he was condemned once more. Tolstoy implicitly mocks the ideas of chance and genius as the factors that propel so-called great men into power—neither chance nor genius lasted very long during Napoleon’s reign.



Alexander I doesn’t conform to the “great man” theory, either. Though he amassed great power in the aftermath of Napoleon’s rule, he basically let it slip through his fingers. In sum, the great man view of history doesn’t explain very much. Their lives raise many more questions than historians can answer.



EPILOGUE, PART 1: CHAPTERS 5–7

Natasha married Pierre Bezukhov in 1813. It was the Rostovs’ last happy family event; the Count died in the same year, and at that point, the family broke up. The events of the previous year—the burning of Moscow, Prince Andrei’s death and Natasha’s sorrow, Petya’s death and the Countess’s grief—seemed too much for the Count. Even as he helped prepare for Natasha’s wedding, it was clear that he was not his old self. On his deathbed, he sobbed and asked his wife’s forgiveness for ruining her property.

When the Count dies, Nikolai is with the Russian troops in Paris. He immediately resigns and returns to Moscow, where he, along with everyone else, is shocked to learn the extent of the Count’s debts—their sum twice that of the Rostovs’ property. Though many urge Nikolai to renounce his inheritance so he won’t be saddled with the debts, he refuses to shame his father’s memory and commits to paying everything off. None of Nikolai’s plans to repay the debts work out, so after accepting 30,000 from his brother-in-law Pierre, he takes a civil service post to pay off the rest. He moves into a small apartment with his mother and Sonya.

Tolstoy once again moves from general reflections on history to the particular lives of characters. The aftermath of the War of 1812 is sorrowful for the Rostovs, as the Count’s recklessly generous life ends in poverty and regret. However, Natasha and Pierre’s marriage promises a new beginning.



In keeping with his strong sense of honor, Nikolai refuses to take the easy way out and does what’s necessary to pay off Count Rostov’s massive debts, though this means living in reduced circumstances.



Natasha and Pierre don't realize how bad Nikolai's situation is. He not only has to support the Countess and Sonya on a small salary, but to do so in such a way that his mother doesn't notice how poor they are—she's never lived without luxury. Sonya runs the household and conspires with Nikolai in deceiving her aunt. Nikolai appreciates Sonya and feels he can never repay his debt of gratitude, yet he cannot love her. He sees no hope for his situation—he refuses to take friends' advice by marrying a wealthy heiress—and simply endures it as stoically as possible.

Since they can no longer afford to live beyond their means, Nikolai and Sonya strive together to shield the Countess from further sorrow. Yet Sonya continues to sacrifice more than anyone, since she has no longer has any hope of marrying Nikolai.



That winter, when Princess Marya hears how Nikolai is sacrificing for his mother, she feels confirmed in her love for him. When Marya visits, however, Nikolai is cold and standoffish. When he returns the visit, he initially rebuffs her sympathy, but when she leaves the room in tears, Nikolai calls to her. They exchange a meaningful glance which suddenly makes the impossible become possible.

Princess Marya recognizes and loves Nikolai's generosity. But Nikolai, long resistant to the idea of marrying for money, only gradually realizes that in fact, he does genuinely reciprocate her feelings.



In 1814, Nikolai and Princess Marya get married, and Countess Rostov and Sonya join the couple at Bald Hills. The marriage allows Nikolai to repay his father's debts and to pay back Pierre as well. By 1820, he's negotiating to buy back his father's beloved Otradnoe estate. In the meantime, he becomes a passionate and successful farmer. He also develops a deep, instinctive understanding of the muzhiks and how to manage them effectively. Though he doesn't see himself as especially virtuous, Nikolai gains the peasants' affection and loyalty.

Countess Rostov ultimately gets her way—Nikolai marries a rich heiress—but Nikolai gets his, too, since he only married Marya after mutual love grew between them. Nikolai has always been a down-to-earth, sensible character, and his experience as a respected military officer apparently prepares him for the discipline and management he needs to run an estate—skills his father never had.



EPILOGUE, PART 1: CHAPTERS 8–16

Nikolai has a hot temper and is quick to fight. In the second year of his marriage, Nikolai beats the Bogucharovo headman, Dron's replacement, for various misdeeds. Princess Marya cries when Nikolai brings this up. Nikolai paces the room, deep in thought. To him, it's normal to treat peasants this way—but could she be right? He looks at Marya's grieved expression and tenderly promises never to act this way again. When he punched the man, he broke his cameo ring. In the future, whenever he gets angry at a muzhik, he looks at the ring to calm down.

Though Nikolai is usually kind to the peasants, he's never lost his fervor for justice, and this sometimes expresses itself in violence. Nikolai was taught that this is the right way to deal with peasants, but Marya helps him reconsider. He doesn't just do it out of love for her; her goodness genuinely brings something better out of him, too—an example of how a mature, loving marriage can elevate a person.



In the province, Nikolai isn't especially liked among the gentry. He doesn't concern himself with their interests—he's always absorbed in farming, hunting, reading, or family life. He treasures Princess Marya more and more. Marya knows of Nikolai's past feelings for Sonya and tries to treat her kindly, but she secretly resents her. One day, after Marya confides this, Natasha reminds her that everything has been taken away from Sonya. Marya can see that she's right, and that they take Sonya for granted at Bald Hills.

Sonya largely fades from the story. Because of her position as a poor orphan, the prospect of a good marriage has always been unlikely for her, and she continues to depend on the goodness of others. Despite her envy, Marya is able to see this and show Sonya more compassion.



In December, 1820, Natasha and her children are visiting Bald Hills while Pierre is doing business in Petersburg. Nikolai's old friend Denisov also comes to visit. On the feast of St. Nicholas, Nikolai's name-day, 20 people gather at the dinner table, including his wife and three children, Natasha and her three children, Sonya, Marya's nephew Nikolenka, and the late Prince Nikolai's old architect Mikhail Ivanovich. From his gestures, Princess Marya can tell that Nikolai is in a bad mood. Sometimes, especially during Marya's pregnancies, they don't get along well. She assumes it's because he finds her repulsive.

After dinner, however, Nikolai and Marya talk comfortably, three-year-old Natasha, Nikolai's favorite daughter, perched on his shoulders. When Marya leaves the room to check on Pierre's arrival, Nikolai allows himself to gallop around the room with his little daughter. He imagines dancing the mazurka with her at society balls when he's an old man. When Marya returns, she watches the two and thinks that she never believed she could be so happy. Yet, in the same moment, she's aware of a subtle sadness, as if she knows there's another happiness she can't attain in this life.

Natasha and Pierre married in the early spring of 1813, and by 1820, she has three daughters and a much-desired son whom she's nursing herself. She is stronger and sturdier, and her youthful passion has been replaced by a soft, peaceful look. The old fire appears when Pierre returns home from a journey, a child recovers from a sickness, when she talks with Marya about Prince Andrei (she doesn't speak of him to Pierre), or on the rare occasions that she sings.

Since they married, Pierre and Natasha have lived in both Petersburg and Moscow and with Nikolai. Society isn't very fond of Natasha; she is so occupied with her children and her husband that she doesn't pay much attention to anything else, and most people don't know what to make of the change in her. Only Countess Rostov understands it—she'd always sensed that Natasha would make a devoted wife and mother. Since marriage, Natasha has "let herself go," defying social expectations. She has given herself wholly to her husband from the start, so she doesn't feel the need to make an effort at charming him. And she doesn't have time to worry about anyone else's opinion.

Nikolai and Marya thrive at Bald Hills. Nikolai has a respectable estate and a full household, bringing together the Rostov and Bolkonsky families in a union that would have been quite unlikely if not for the war. (The former being a Count's family and the Bolkonskys being part of the imperial line.) Still, like all families, they contend with everyday challenges.



Always attentive to human complexity, Tolstoy observes that Marya's joy in family life necessarily means that other aspects of her personality—like her passionate spirituality—won't be fully realized. At the same time, Marya's self-sacrificing nature has balanced out as she's learned to embrace everyday joys.



Tolstoy characterizes the older Natasha as an idealized Russian mother—strong, peaceful, yet passionate. The irrepressible young woman isn't gone, but her energy is channeled into marriage, motherhood, and friendship.



As a young girl, Natasha didn't mind breaching social etiquette, and in a way, she shows a similar disregard for norms as an adult. A young countess would be expected to strive for certain standards of physical beauty and show herself within society, but Natasha pours herself single-mindedly into the things she cares about, and that's now her family, not society.



By this time, discussions about women's rights and roles have become more common, but Natasha isn't interested. Such questions mainly exist for those who don't look beyond marriage's romantic beginnings and don't consider the significance of the family. These questions assume that pleasure is all-important. Natasha wanted a husband and family, these were given to her, and she dedicates herself whole-heartedly to serving them; she can't imagine anything different.

When they got married, Pierre was surprised by Natasha's demand that his life belong to her, but he happily submitted. He doesn't spend time with other women or at clubs; he only travels for business. In exchange, whenever he's home, Natasha regards herself as his willing servant, anticipating all his wishes—or what she thinks his wishes are (even when Pierre changes his mind). After seven years of marriage, Pierre feels that the best of himself is reflected in his wife.

Two months earlier, Pierre had gone to Petersburg for several weeks. He stayed longer than they agreed, and Natasha grew sad and irritable in his absence. When Denisov came to visit, he found the once-enchanted Natasha perpetually distracted and dull. But when Pierre gets home and Natasha runs lightly out of the nursery with a beaming face, Denisov recognizes the old Natasha for the first time. When Natasha scolds Pierre for staying away too long, he dutifully cowers, even though he knows she isn't truly angry.

The household at Bald Hills consists of several completely different worlds. Pierre's homecoming has an effect on each of these. The servants are happy because this means Nikolai will be more cheerful, and they'll all receive nice gifts for the feast day. The children are happy because Pierre draws the whole household together with fun. Nikolenka, 15, admires his uncle passionately and wants to be intelligent and kind like him. As Nikolenka grows up, he fits together bits and pieces of Natasha's and Pierre's stories and gathers that his father Prince Andrei once loved Natasha, of whom he's also especially fond.

Pierre has always been absentminded, but this time he's carried out all the errands and brought back all the presents everyone requested. As a newlywed, he found it strange that Natasha expected him to do such things, but over time he's come to enjoy it. Though Natasha sometimes scolds him for spending too much, Pierre actually spends far less than he used to—family life restricts his options and makes his expenses more predictable. He distributes gifts to Natasha, the children, and the countess.

Natasha feels that new debates about women's rights don't apply to her because they focus on the relatively superficial satisfactions of a young woman's life. Pouring herself into her family's daily needs is the most meaningful life she can imagine.



Pierre always wanted to surrender himself to something—it turns out that what he couldn't find in Masonry, war, or anything else is possible within a mutually loving marriage.



Denisov's observations highlight the dynamic of the Bezukhov marriage. Though Natasha has aged, her youthful fire still shines in her marriage, and Pierre in turn dedicates himself to her happiness. They exemplify a mature love marked by mutual acceptance.



Pierre is truly the heart of the extended Rostov-Bezukhov clan, and he brings the best out of each element of the household, from the servants and children to his brother-in-law and orphaned nephew. The kind of love Pierre developed as a prisoner of war—loving the people right in front of him, not needing a justification—seems to be at work here.



Pierre enjoys the limiting demands of family life—in light of his wartime experiences, it's almost as though marriage provides a benevolent sort of "prison" that forces him to focus his resources on only the most important things.



When Pierre and Natasha bring gifts to the Countess, —who’s often moody these days, mainly looking forward to the peace of death—she’s annoyed at the interruption to her card game. After finishing her game, she admires her gifts, and the household has tea together while Pierre patiently answers the Countess’s questions and repeats things he’s told her many times. When Denisov sidetracks Pierre with a question about the Biblical Society—“that madness, Gossner and the [Tatarinov] woman”—Pierre makes critical remarks about the conspiracy-minded government. Then the Countess gets offended and leaves the room.

In the awkward silence that follows, the group listens to the laughter of the children in the next room. Pierre jumps up to see what the children are up to. He comments that the “music” of their laughter always assures him that things will be all right.

After the rest of the children go to bed, Nikolenka asks to stay behind so he can spend time with Pierre. Pierre tells Nikolenka he looks like his father Andrei. Nikolenka sits shyly in a corner and listens to the adults gossip about politics. Natasha notices that Pierre wants to discuss something else, so she redirects the conversation to Pierre’s meeting with Prince Fyodor. At this cue, the men, including Nikolenka, retreat to Nikolai’s study and the women go to the nursery. In his study, Pierre paces and gestures animatedly, criticizing the Emperor’s obsession with mysticism (he hates mysticism nowadays). The government stifles efforts at progress, and that, Pierre thinks, is why things are falling apart.

Pierre says that independent thinkers must stand against corrupting trends in government. Nikolai is skeptical; he thinks a secret society would do more harm than good. Pierre suggests the Tugendbund as a counterexample—a group which embodied the preaching of Christ. Natasha comes into the room at this moment and though she doesn’t care about the discussion, she rejoices in her husband’s rapturous expression, which she knows so well. However, Nikolai resists, saying that if Pierre opposed the government, Nikolai would be duty-bound to oppose him. Natasha breaks the awkward silence by arguing feebly with her brother.

The Biblical Society, founded in 1812, printed and distributed Bibles in Russia; Emperor Alexander was a member. Gossner was a director of the Society whose Lutheran preaching grew popular in Petersburg; Elizaveta Tatarinova, a supporter of the Society, founded a sect called the Spiritual Union. Pierre disdains these movements and believes they have a disproportionate effect on government.



The children anchor Pierre in the enjoyment of the present moment, both a tangible reminder of love and a promise that life will go on no matter what.



Though Pierre is now much more content with everyday life, that doesn’t mean his idealism has disappeared. He still retains politically progressive sympathies, though he also disdains a form of religious mysticism that doesn’t address daily problems.



Pierre displays his idealism in his political argument with the more pragmatic Nikolai, who’s uninterested in rebellion. The Tugendbund was an illegal “Union of Virtue” founded in 1808 to free Prussia from Napoleon’s rule. Natasha encourages Pierre’s ideas, not so much for their own sake, but because she loves the excitement his idealism brings out of him.



As they get up for supper, Nikolenka goes up to Pierre and asks if his father Prince Andrei would have shared Pierre's views. Pierre realizes how much Nikolenka has taken his words to heart and wishes he'd been more guarded in what he said. He says he thinks so and leaves. Embarrassed, Nikolenka notices that while he listened to the men talk, he fidgeted with Nikolai's pens and broke them. He apologizes to his uncle, who says with suppressed anger that Nikolenka shouldn't have been there in the first place.

Supper is friendlier, as Nikolai, Denisov, and Pierre reminisce about 1812. Afterward, when Nikolai goes to his bedroom, he finds Marya writing in a blue notebook which she explains is her diary. She shows Nikolai that day's entry, which describes her dealings with the children. Though Marya's thoughts about childrearing aren't particularly profound, Nikolai feels moved by them. He puts down the diary and looks at his wife admiringly. Though he's not aware of it, Nikolai has always been proud of Marya's private inner world and moral striving. He feels he's not on her spiritual level, but he is grateful that, as his wife, she's part of him.

Their conversation shifts to Nikolenka's intrusion into the debate in Pierre's study. Nikolai particularly resents Natasha's siding with Pierre, especially since she only parrots Pierre's arguments. (He disregards the fact that with Marya, he is much the same way.) Nikolai asks Marya's opinion, and she says that Pierre is right that we must help our neighbors, but also that our closest responsibilities are to our children. Nikolai says that Pierre just speaks vaguely about the Christian's duty to love one's neighbor, which probably influences Nikolenka.

Marya worries that Nikolenka is alone with his thoughts too much. She continues fretting over her nephew while Nikolai speaks of his estate business. Nikolai notices her troubled face and marvels at her lofty soul, feeling that someone like her won't last long in the world. Princess Marya is always striving for the eternal and can never find peace in this world.

Alone with Pierre, Natasha embraces her husband, and they begin talking in the allusive, intuitive way of a married couple who can finish one another's thoughts. They talk about the argument in the study, and Pierre observes that, for Nikolai, thinking is an amusing pastime, while for him, everything else is a pastime. He can't help thinking, and in Petersburg, he says, he succeeded in uniting his friends under the banner of virtue. Natasha struggles to grasp that such an important man is her husband.

Nikolenka is a timid, awkward, idealistic boy who's never had a consistent father figure in his life and seeks such approval from Pierre. Though Nikolai disapproves of such politics and his nephew's meddling in them, Nikolenka's passion suggests that something of his father will carry on into the next generation.



The 1812 veterans share memories in the kind of conversation that Tolstoy may have listened to growing up, as his father was an 1812 veteran as well. Nikolai admires Marya's dedication to the mundane details of motherhood. Though Marya feels that motherhood has required her to sacrifice spiritually, Nikolai sees Marya's spiritual beauty shining through her everyday activities, not in spite of them.



Nikolai's humorous oversight suggests that loving spouses tend to unconsciously support one another's views, even when they don't really understand them. Marya admires Pierre's idealism, but she thinks it's too detached from the specific duties of family and children.



With his more earthbound concerns, Nikolai balances out Marya's spirituality. Unlike him, Marya is much more attuned to the spiritual health of her loved ones.



Pierre is always preoccupied with ideals, whereas Nikolai is relentlessly practical. It's hinted that Pierre is working on organizing the Decembrists in Petersburg. Decembrists favored serf liberation and other liberal reforms, and in 1825, they mounted a coup when Nicholas I seized the throne after Alexander I's death.



Natasha asks Pierre if Platon Karataev would have approved of his activities. Pierre reflects that Platon would have approved of Pierre's peaceful family life. Natasha agrees that their married life is happy, even happier now than on their honeymoon.

The moment passes, and they both start talking at once. Pierre continues talking about his time in Petersburg—he feels it's his duty to guide Russian society in a new direction. He reasons that if wicked people can band together to effect change, then honest people simply need to do the same. Pierre coaxes Natasha to say whatever she'd been about to say. She no longer wants to share the "trifle," but she finally describes a sweet moment with baby Petya that morning. Then she leaves the room.

Downstairs, Nikolenka wakes up from a bad dream in which he and Pierre were marching in a huge army. The rest of the army consists of slanting white lines like spiderwebs. They are marching toward "glory." As they get closer, the white lines entangle them. They see uncle Nikolai standing ahead of them, looking stern. Nikolai points at the broken pens and says that he's been ordered to kill Nikolenka for this. Nikolenka turns to look at Pierre, but instead of Pierre, he is aware of his father Andrei's formless, pitying presence. But Nikolai moves closer, and Nikolenka awakens in terror. He reflects that if his father approved of Pierre, then he'll do whatever Pierre says. He wants to be like him and to do something admirable, like the men in Plutarch. In that way, he hopes his father will be pleased with him, too.

Eight years later, Pierre still looks back on Platon as his biggest influence. However, he doesn't seem sure that Platon, unflinchingly content with what he had, would understand Pierre's recurrent desire to change the world.

Pierre's lofty goals for society contrast with Natasha's motherly preoccupations. Though Natasha downplays the "trifle," there's a sense that their respective passions make their marriage stronger; Natasha keeps Pierre grounded, and Pierre's aspirations make Natasha proud.



Tolstoy leaves the families behind on an ambiguous, even slightly ominous note. Nikolenka dreams of some kind of military glory; it's already been implied that this might be connected to the Decembrist uprising a few years from now. Nikolai, who's conservative on such political matters, angrily opposes him. But Nikolenka aspires to do something noteworthy that Pierre—and even his father Andrei—would be proud of. (The ancient Greek historian Plutarch wrote Parallel Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans, which would have been included in Nikolenka's studies.) But whether Nikolenka indeed finds "glory" or its opposite (like many who were killed or exiled after the uprising) is left a mystery. Either way, Tolstoy makes it clear that the travails of both war and peace will persist in the next generation.



EPILOGUE, PART 2: CHAPTERS 1–5

Ancient historians used to describe entire peoples in terms of their individual rulers. They believed that deities subjected peoples to these rulers and guided the rulers toward a particular goal. Modern history rejects these ideas. Instead of studying manifestations of power, modern historians study its underlying causes. Instead of gods, they elevate human heroes; instead of divine goals, they identify goals like the good of a particular nation or of mankind as a whole. Modern historians just arrive at the same ideas (that peoples are led by rulers toward specific goals) by a different route.

If modern historians still held to ancient views, they would say that Napoleon was a divinely ordained ruler. Instead, they look back to the rule of Louis XIV of France and his heirs. They ruled poorly. By the end of the 18th century, about two dozen men gathered in Paris to discuss ideals of equality. This led to violence all over France, including the killing of the king.

In the second part of the Epilogue, Tolstoy returns to a general discussion of history. He begins by suggesting that people used to think about history in terms of divine power. In modern times, however, belief in divine power is replaced by the study of human causes.



By way of illustration, Tolstoy describes how modern historians might account for Napoleon's rule. Since they don't believe he was divinely appointed, they identify the French Revolution as a cause for Napoleon's rise.



Around the same time, Napoleon, a genius, rose to power by killing lots of people. He killed more people across Europe, until Russia's Emperor, Alexander, decided to restore order in Europe by fighting Napoleon. They made a truce, then fought again, ultimately forcing Napoleon out of Russia and then, with the help of Napoleon's old allies, drove him into exile. While sovereigns and diplomats argued in Paris, Napoleon seized power in France again, fought with the other monarchs, and was exiled once more, eventually dying. Then came the reaction, when rulers started ruling badly again.

Though this account is comical, it's because modern history is like someone who answers questions they haven't been asked. It doesn't show the connection between great rulers and the movement of people. If divine power *doesn't* govern people through rulers, then what force moves them? Modern historians don't say.

Historians often attribute this "force" to the Napoleons and Alexanders of the world. But once multiple historians begin describing the same event from different perspectives, it becomes clear that their answers are mutually contradictory. General historians, as opposed to specialized ones, look for causes in many different people's interactions. They alternate between seeing figures as products of their time and seeing them as causes of other events (for example, Napoleon was at once a product of the French revolution and responsible for quashing revolutionary ideas). General historians identify many composite factors, but these aren't sufficient—they still fail to identify a motivating force that acts upon these factors.

There's also a third group of historians—historians of culture. They find a motivating force in intellectual activity. Phenomena like the murder of people resulting from the preaching of equality during the French revolution, however, cast doubt on the idea that intellectual activity moves people. And even if it could be proven, it's still not clear how ideas and the masses are connected. It's plausible to think that Napoleon's power somehow led to an event; it's much less clear how the book *The Social Contract* led French people to start drowning one another. It's hard to think how cultural historians draw these conclusions, except that, as scholars, they find it satisfying to suppose that *their* work moves masses of people; also, concepts like "culture" and "ideas" are conveniently vague.

Tolstoy continues with his humorously simplified account of Napoleon's rise, reign, and fall. Basically, Napoleon seized and kept power because he was a "genius" (a concept Tolstoy will deconstruct later) and killed many people; after he died, Europe declined once more. This abbreviated history doesn't explain much of anything—but that's Tolstoy's point.



There's something missing in modern history—namely, in the absence of belief in a divine power, historians don't explain what does move rulers and the people subject to them.



Tolstoy explains that different historians describe the same event in different ways. The most common are general historians. General historians study people's interactions to explain how events happen—how human interactions give rise to each other. But while these historians can demonstrate many interesting connections, they still don't explain why things happen.



Besides general and specialist historians, cultural historians narrow their focus to intellectual ideas. But to Tolstoy, this connection is even more tenuous, as his extreme Social Contract example makes clear. Basically, intellectual ideas don't have a strong enough hold on a sufficient number of people to create mass movements.



When a peasant claims that a devil moves a locomotive, it's impossible to refute him unless one could first prove that the devil doesn't exist. When another person says that the turning wheels move a train, they have to trace their analysis back to the compression of steam in the train's boiler. And one who claims that the blowing of the smoke moves the train just assumes that the first sign he notices must be the cause.

The train's movement can only be explained by the concept of a force equal to its movement. It's the same with the movement of peoples. Some historians—those who favor heroic figures—are like the peasant who believes in the devil. Generalists who look to a force produced by other forces are like the man who points out the turning of the wheels. And the cultural historian is like the one who identifies the blowing smoke as a cause.

Until the history of all people is written, instead of histories of separate individuals, it will be impossible to explain humanity's movement without recourse to a force that acts on people. As it stands, the only force historians know about is power. Even those who renounce the concept of power inevitably rely on it in their historical accounts. Historians will not advance knowledge until they are able to answer the question, "What is power?"

Historians must either return to the belief that events are divinely directed, or they must explain the meaning of power. Belief has been destroyed, so the latter is the only option. If power doesn't reside within a person—either in physical strength or moral qualities—then it must be outside of that person, in relation to the masses. Power is "the sum total of the wills of the masses, transferred [...] to rulers chosen by the masses." But this definition raises many questions about, for example, revolutions and conquests.

Historians explain this transfer of the will in various ways. Some see the masses transferring their wills unconditionally, and anything that opposes that power is a breach of power, or violence. This unsophisticated view can't account for complex power struggles. Other historians see the transfer of the will as conditional, dependent on figures carrying out the people's will. Depending on what he sees as the goal of a people's movement, a historian might name those conditions as wealth, freedom, enlightenment, or something else.

For another example of what he means by a motivating force, Tolstoy looks at the example of what makes a train move. While different people point to different explanations, none of these is sufficient in itself (or necessarily even valid).



Just like with a train, the movement of people in history can only be explained by a sufficiently strong force. None too flatteringly, Tolstoy identifies each of his train-observers with a historian who makes a flawed argument.



To name a sufficiently strong force that moves masses of people, historians resort to "power," but they don't know how to define this.



If the ancient belief in divine power no longer works as an explanation, then "power" must be explained in some other way. Tolstoy defines it as the total of the masses' will, which is then transferred to rulers.



The transfer of the people's will to their rulers doesn't always happen smoothly, as history amply illustrates. And if people choose a ruler to carry out their will—to ensure their prosperity or freedom, for instance—and that ruler fails to do so, then a transfer of will might not have happened in the first place.



So historians usually claim that such abstractions as freedom, equality, and progress are the goals of the people. In order to prove this, historians typically study the documents left behind by history's most conspicuous figures. In doing so, they leave out the activities of the great majority of people. Historians of culture do no better, because instead of rulers, they only explain the motives of given writers or reformers.

The act of transferring the wills of the people to historical figures can't be verified, so the theory doesn't actually explain anything. If historians say that power is the cause of historical events but can't explain under what conditions power is transferred, it suggests that they don't understand what power means in the first place.

Both reason and experience suggest that an individual's will is only one part of an event such as a war. In fact, events often run completely counter to a ruler's will. Unless divine participation is part of human affairs, then power alone can't explain events. If a divine being ordered its will to be carried out, nothing could thwart that will. But when a person orders that their will be carried out, that person depends on others to carry out that will.

EPILOGUE, PART 2: CHAPTERS 6–12

A divine being exists outside of time and can determine the direction of humanity's movement over time. But human beings necessarily participate in time. When a human being issues an order, it never exists spontaneously without representing a whole chain of events that have gone before it. For example, saying that Napoleon ordered the army to go to war actually reflects a long series of consecutive events that led up to his order. Plenty of orders are issued that are never carried out. So an order shouldn't be viewed as the cause of an event. Describing any given order is always a generalization.

Then what is the relationship between orders and events? The answer lies in the fact that the individual who orders is also a participant in events. The relationship between the one who orders and the ones who are ordered is called power. This relationship is exemplified in an army, which can be pictured as a pyramid with the largest number of people (the army's privates, who participate most directly in the action) on the bottom and fewer and fewer people (officers, generals, the commander) rising toward the apex. Both here and in other areas of joint action, the greater mass of people participate more directly and give fewer orders; the smaller number give more orders and participate little or not at all. In other words, the one who orders does little else.

Historians commonly resort to abstract ideas to explain the transfer of the people's will to rulers, but this raises a problem: the nature of documentary evidence. By its nature, surviving documents represent the perspectives of a very small number of people.



In the end, Tolstoy maintains that it doesn't conclusively explain anything to claim that power is the transfer of the people's will to their rulers. That "transfer" can't be pinpointed; it's just an ethereal idea.



Tolstoy concludes that even ruler's wills can't be said to achieve much within historical events. Unless a sovereign will is imposed by a divine being, then it must be assumed that a ruler's will can be thwarted in any number of ways.



Modern history is more complicated than ancient history because it exists within time. If a divine being gives an order, that order isn't caused by anything else, and nothing can thwart its being carried out. But human orders, existing within time, aren't like that. They're the product of many other events, and there's no guarantee they'll be carried out.



Unlike divine beings, human beings participate in the events over which they exercise power. Here Tolstoy offers a definition of power in terms of the relationship between the one who orders and the ones who are ordered. Generally, the more directly someone participates in the action (like an ordinary soldier), the fewer orders that person will give; the less they participate, the more orders they'll give (like a general).



When events take place, like Europeans slaughtering one another, people offer various justifications—like the welfare of France, the ideal of liberty, and others. These justifications don't make much sense, but they help remove people's sense of moral responsibility for what they're doing.

When historians only consider historical figures' orders, they conclude that events depend on orders. When we consider the relationship between figures and the masses, we find that they and their orders depend on the event.

Now it is possible to answer “those two essential questions of history”: first, what is power? —The relationship between people in which one who expresses opinions and justifications for a joint action has taken the less direct part in it. Second, how is a group action produced? —Not by power, but by all people's joint activity, such that those who participate in the event most directly take the least responsibility upon themselves, and vice versa.

If history were simply about external things, then this argument would be sufficient. But history has to do with humanity. Therefore the matter of human free will is important. If people truly had free will and were able to act as they pleased, then history would just be a series of accidental events. On the other hand, if people's actions are governed by any laws, then there can't be free will, because human actions would have to submit to laws.

Human beings are conscious of themselves as free. Experiments and arguments show that human beings are subject to laws like gravity, for example; the same kind of experiments could show that a human being's actions are subject to constitution, character, and motives. But even if the results of such an experiment could be shown to a person, they wouldn't believe it. Nobody could live that way, because a person's efforts, the very impulse to live, are “strivings towards greater freedom.”

Tolstoy suggests that one who gives orders for events often tries to absolve himself of doing so by offering justifications that distance him from said events.



When power is understood as the relationship between those who give orders and the masses who carry them out, it complicates the conventional historical view that major figures bring about events by giving orders.



Tolstoy brings together his last few points by describing power as being wielded by someone who participates less directly in events but offers justifications for it; and the production of an event is carried out by a mass of people who are more directly involved, but who take less responsibility. Again, this should be pictured as a pyramid.



History involves another complicated set of questions involving free will and law. Tolstoy argues that in order for history to make sense, it has to be one or the other.



Human beings feel as if they're free, and this feeling is essential to life. If people believed their every action was governed by law, they would lose the will to live.



Theology, jurisprudence, ethics, and history have addressed the question of free will in various ways. It's only in our day that so-called "advanced" people— "a crowd of ignoramuses"—have determined that the naturalists' response to the question gives the full answer. Naturalists, citing the theory of evolution, claim that the soul and freedom do not exist. But human beings' origins—whether through evolution or through direct creation by God at a specific point in time—make no difference in addressing the question of free will. It leaves unanswered how human consciousness of freedom combines with the law of necessity to which humans are subject.

History has an advantage over theology, ethics, and philosophy in addressing the question, because it's not concerned with the essence of the human will, but with the manifestation of that will under certain conditions. In other words, it studies the conjunction of free will and necessity after that combining has already occurred. Instead of defining freedom and necessity in advance, history studies many phenomena to derive definitions of freedom and necessity. Every such phenomenon is a product partly of freedom and partly of necessity. Depending on the perspective from which an action is examined, the ratio of freedom and necessity in that action differs, but it's always inversely proportional—the greater necessity appears, the lesser freedom appears, and vice versa.

Understanding the relationship between freedom and necessity rests on three bases. The first is the relationship of the person committing an action to the external world. If a person is considered in isolation, their actions appear free. But when that person's relationships are taken into account—whether other people, work, or their environment—it becomes clear that the person is influenced by other things. Freedom decreases, necessity increases.

The second basis is a person's relationship to time. In such cases, our sense of a person's freedom decreases or increases depending on the amount of time that's passed between the committing of the act and our judgment of it. An action close to us in time seems more free, while an event that's distant in time appears foreordained because we can't imagine it not happening as it did. For example, the Napoleonic Wars, relatively recent in time, appear to be the product of heroes' wills. In contrast, the Crusades appear to be the product of necessity, because of the way the history of Europe subsequently unfolded.

In Tolstoy's day, some naturalists argued that the theory of evolution proved that there's no such thing as free will. Tolstoy dismisses this claim as a non-answer, not because he's making a judgment about evolution one way or the other, but because human beings believe they have free will, and that's what's at issue in his argument.



In other words, history isn't trying to make a scientific or theological claim about human free will. It's just trying to answer the question of how much free will accounts for a given event, and how that free will combines with laws of necessity.



To understand this relationship, a historian has to understand a person's relationships. If a person is considered in isolation, they look like they're acting freely; but the more their relationships are examined, the more complex the picture becomes.



The passage of time affects our interpretation of events. The closer in time an event, the easier it is to identify the many variables involved. But when an event is in the distant past, we can see everything that's taken place since, and such an event appears to have been determined by laws—we can't picture things happening in a different way than they did.



The third and final basis is the relationship to the causes that produced the act. When we don't understand the cause of an act, we recognize more freedom in the act. But the more causes we recognize, the more we see the law of necessity at work. For example, if we know that a criminal was raised by wicked people, it mitigates his guilt.

No matter how we examine a historical event, however, we cannot imagine total freedom or total necessity. We can't imagine a person totally freed from external influences, whether freedom within space, within time, or from any causes. In fact, a being who is outside of space and time and totally independent of causes isn't actually a human being.

In the same way, we can't imagine a person who's subject only to the law of necessity. It is impossible to know all the spatial conditions within which a person operates, time is infinite, and the chain of causes of any event is endless—so we necessarily imagine some room for freedom.

Reason concludes that human beings are subject to laws of necessity. A human being's consciousness is aware only of freedom. Necessity (reason) studies freedom (consciousness). Thus these two forms of thinking are related to each other as form (necessity) to content (freedom). When we separate these two forms, we get the concepts of freedom and necessity; when we unite them, we see human life clearly. For the historian, what is knowable is called the laws of necessity; what is unknowable is freedom. Freedom is "the expression of the unknown remainder of what we know about the laws of human life."

If history recognized human freedom as a force that influences events, it would be the same as if astronomy recognized a free force that moves the planets. The recognition of free action destroys the existence of laws. History's task is to examine laws. All sciences are like this. When Newton formulated the law of gravity, he applied it to all heavenly bodies, both great and small. In the same way, history shouldn't concern itself with causes, but should instead look for the laws common to all events.

Ancient cosmology was destroyed when Copernicus proved that the earth moves, not the sun. Ever since historians began to look at mathematical laws, relationships, and conditions that contribute to human events, the foundations of history were shaken. Yet history continued to be studied as if events were the result of free will. Both approaches are engaged in a fierce struggle. However, the law of necessity doesn't destroy the foundations of society, as its detractors fear.

Cause is another factor. Basically, the more we see the complexity of an event, the more it appears that the event must have been foreordained.

It's not possible to imagine a totally free human being, because a human being is defined in large part by their relationships to other things.



On the other hand, a human being governed completely by laws is impossible as well. No human being is completely defined by relationships to other things.



In short, human beings feel that they are free, but they are also subject to laws. While both necessity and freedom are indispensable for human life, historians can't access or understand freedom completely. They can only define laws.



Again, Tolstoy suggests that it isn't history's job to try to understand freedom; it can only study laws, like any other scientific discipline does.



Tolstoy suggests that there has been a revolution in history equivalent to the Copernican revolution in science. People fear that history's emphasis on law destroys human freedom, but Tolstoy argues that this is unfounded.



In astronomy people fought over the supposed immobility of the earth; in history they fight over human freedom. Just as we can't feel the earth moving, we can't feel our dependence on externalities and causes. In both cases, it is necessary "to renounce a nonexistent freedom and recognize a dependence we do not feel."

As far as astronomy is concerned, the earth's movement is established fact. It's the same in history—human beings are dependent on laws that don't feel real to them. While human beings will always feel conscious of freedom, history cannot address that feeling; it can only address law.



APPENDIX: A FEW WORDS APROPOS OF THE BOOK WAR AND PEACE

Tolstoy wants to state his view of *War and Peace* for those readers who may be interested. He asserts that *War and Peace* is not a novel. It is simply what Tolstoy wanted to express, in the form in which it was expressed. This actually conforms to the history of Russian literature from Pushkin's time to the present. No Russian work from Gogol's *Dead Souls* to Dostoevsky's *Dead House* fits neatly into the genre of novel, epic, or story.

This article appeared in the March 1868 edition of the Russian Archive journal, while Tolstoy was working on the fifth of six projected volumes of the novel. He argues that War and Peace fits well within the tradition of Russian literature, in that it defies conventional categories.



Readers have objected that Tolstoy's portrayal doesn't reflect the brutality of the period. Based on his study of the documents of the time, Tolstoy doesn't believe it was more brutal than any other age. It possessed the same "complex mental and moral life" we have today. There is, however, a character of that time which is captured in the gap between the upper classes and lower ones, expressed in such things as the use of French. Tolstoy has sought to capture this class discrepancy instead. He also defends the use of French in a Russian work, while acknowledging that he may have gotten carried away.

Tolstoy defends the novel's historical authenticity by explaining that his emphasis has been class difference, suggesting that the gap between classes, and other markers of class difference, is more foreign to his contemporaries than the supposed brutality of the Napoleonic age.



There is an inevitable divergence between Tolstoy's accounts of historical events and a historian's. That's because a historian and an artist have different aims. Just as a historian wouldn't try to portray a figure in all his complexity, so an artist doesn't always present figures simply in their historical significance. A historian portrays heroes; an artist should not have heroes, but people. He tries to convey a human being, not a famous person.

Both historians and artists make choices in their portrayals of figures. A writer like Tolstoy isn't strictly seeking what we might call historical accuracy, but rather trying to convey a figure as a fully rounded person.



When it comes to events, a historian is concerned with the results, an artist with the fact of the event. The artist studies the details of an event, but from these he derives his own image of the event and often draws a different conclusion about it than the historian.

Similarly, a historian is doing something complex with historical facts. Instead of seeking to produce a factual narrative—the task of the historian—the artist presents an interpretation of history that may or may not neatly align with a historian's view.



For example, military history is based on the military discipline assumed in commander's reports. In the immediate aftermath of a battle, a researcher would gain a complex, diverse, and vague impression of what happened. A few days later, all these details are flattened into a deceptively clear, flattering report. Within a few months, even veterans describe their experiences in ways that conform to official reports. Furthermore, Tolstoy assures the reader that his portrayal of historical figures' speech and actions are not invented, but based on a whole library of research, and that he can always provide references.

Finally, Tolstoy's most important consideration has been the insignificance of "great men." Why did millions of men try to kill one another, while knowing such things are bad? There can't be a single isolated cause. There seems to be no answer besides the "zoological law" of male creatures exterminating one another. But because human beings are convinced of their individual freedom, they search for proof of this answer.

When we commit an act, we're convinced that we do it by our own free choice. But when we look at actions as part of humanity's common life, we're convinced that they're predetermined. How does this mistake happen? The answer is that there are really two sorts of acts: those that depend on one's will and those that do not. The mistake occurs when we transfer the awareness of freedom to those acts we commit jointly with others. Thus our more abstract actions are more free, and our more connected acts are more unfree.

Having become convinced of this, it makes sense that in his descriptions of the years 1805, 1807, and especially 1812, Tolstoy emphasizes the law of predetermination. He believes this law governs history, and he was interested in the characters' activity insofar as it illustrates that law. He was also interested in the psychological law which enables people who commit unfree acts to convince themselves that they are in fact free.

Tolstoy illustrates his point by considering military reports. The aftermath of a battle is always confusing; the narrative solidifies over time. An artist might study the reports (something Tolstoy hastens to assure his readers that he's done!), but an artist's portrayal aims for a more colorful, textured, and complicated story.



An event like war is so inexplicable, in Tolstoy's view, that people lionize "great men" like Napoleon in order to explain such events to themselves. In reality, such events can't really be explained by a single cause, or in any way except for the existence of animalistic drives.



People tend to assume that all their actions are free, but this isn't true. The confusion comes in when people forget that when they act in concert with other people, their acts become less free.



For Tolstoy, the Napoleonic Wars are a perfect illustration of his thesis that predetermination governs history, and he believes that his characters' actions prove this—especially since, in his view, mass events like war are only explainable by law. Yet those same characters, from the greatest to the least, make the fundamentally human mistake of believing all their actions are freely chosen.





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