# A Gentleman in Moscow

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF AMOR TOWLES

Amor Towles was born and raised in Massachusetts, in the Boston area. He graduated from Yale College and received an M.A. in English from Stanford University. Towles then worked as an investment professional for over twenty years in New York City. He wrote his first novel, *Rules of Civility*, in 2011, while still working in finance. The book was a *New York Times* bestseller. In 2013, after publishing *Rules of Civility*, Towles retired from finance and began to devote himself to writing full time. He published *A Gentleman in Moscow* in 2016, which also made it to the *New York Times* bestseller list. Towles continues to write in Manhattan, where he lives with his wife and two children.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The novel takes place over a period of Russian history between 1922 and 1954, but it is also important to understand the dynamics of Russian society leading up to this period. Prior to 1917, Russian society was structured into a rigid class system, with a Tsar at its head. The upper class of landed nobility often did not work, instead owning estates that were staffed by lower-class servants. The lower class also provided the rest of the labor for the country. The peasants experienced severe working conditions through the first two decades of the 20th century and were frustrated with the inequality between the classes. These issues were compounded by Russia's military failure throughout much of World War I, due largely to Tsar Nicholas II's decision to take personal command of the army. Spurred by a desire to escape autocratic rule, mutinies sprang up and Nicholas was ousted in 1917 in what became known as the February Revolution. The October Revolution in the same year then abolished all classes of nobility and began Soviet rule in Russia. Though there were some challenges to the revolution, many members of the Russian nobility fled the country and the Soviet Union was created in 1922, when the novel begins. The novel also goes into depth on other events in Russian history, such as its loss to Japan in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905, major famines in the 1930s, its participation in World War II, and the beginning of the Cold War in the early 50s.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Towles writes in the literary legacy of many great Russian novelists, and he makes several references to Russian works and authors, such as Gogol's *Dead Souls*, Alexander Pushkin, and Fyodor Dostoevsky. He is particularly complimentary to Chekhov and Tolstoy, stating in the novel that they are "the bronze bookends on the mantlepiece of narrative." Characters read or mention both *Anna Karenina* and *War and Peace*, and the epic scope of those novels could be seen as a model for Towles's book. The intricacy and recurrence of small details in Towles's historical narrative also bear comparison with many of David Mitchell's books, including *The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet*.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** A Gentleman in Moscow
- **When Written:** 2009-2016
- **Where Written:** New York City
- **When Published:** 2016
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Historical Fiction
- **Setting:** The Metropol Hotel, Moscow, 1922-1954
- **Climax:** The Count escapes from the Metropol
- **Antagonist:** The Bishop; the Bolsheviks
- **Point of View:** Third person omniscient

### EXTRA CREDIT

**The Grand Metropol Hotel.** Although most of the characters in the novel are fictional, the Metropol Hotel is a real hotel in Moscow's Theatre Square. It opened in 1905 and remains in business today.

**An Author's Alliteration.** All of the words in the chapter titles in *A Gentleman in Moscow* begin with the letter "A." Towles has stated that this is his own way of playing *Zut*, the game invented by the Count and Sofia in the novel, in which they must come up with answers that fit a given category.

## PLOT SUMMARY

On June 21, 1922, Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov is sentenced to a life of house arrest in Moscow's Metropol Hotel. The sentence is handed down by a Bolshevik tribunal because the Count had written a poem in 1913 with revolutionary undertones. He is a member of the Russian nobility, which is quickly being dissolved in favor of a Communist government structure, and so when he returns to the hotel following his hearing, most of his possessions are confiscated, and he is moved from his luxurious suite on the third floor to a single room on the sixth floor.

In the first few weeks and months, the Count has a difficult time coping with his new life. He feels restless and purposeless as he spends his days reading, visiting the barber, dining in the Metropol's two restaurants (the Boyarsky and the Piazza), and drinking in the hotel bar, the Shalyapin.

His boredom is alleviated a little when he befriends a young girl named Nina, who is precocious, stubborn, and most importantly, adventurous. Her single father is temporarily posted to Moscow on state business, but as he did not enroll her in school, she spends most of her time exploring the hotel. Nina has acquired a **passkey** for all of the hotel's doors, and she shows the Count its various rooms and passageways. She then gifts him the key as a Christmas present.

One year into the Count's imprisonment, he receives a visit from his old friend Mishka, a poet who is eager for the changes occurring in Russian society. He is excited to see how Communism will allow a new form of poetry to take shape. That same day, the Count meets Anna Urbanova, a famous film actress who arrives at the hotel. The night they meet, she invites him back to her suite and seduces him. Though he enjoys being with her, he begins to feel even more invisible, and as if he is losing control of his life's path.

The Count also sees that his way of life is being forgotten, since the aristocracy is no longer valued. He is frustrated to see a man whom he sarcastically calls the Bishop rise through the ranks of the hotel's restaurants and management, because he feels that the Bishop has no tact or experience when it comes to good service. When the Bishop—who feels that wines encourage snobbery and individuality—files a complaint to have all of the wine labels on the hotel's bottles removed, the Count sees this as an attack on his own values because he had prided himself on knowing exactly which wine to pair with a meal.

In despair, the Count attempts to kill himself in 1926, on the tenth anniversary of his sister Helena's death, by throwing himself off of the hotel roof. Fortunately, he is stopped by one of the hotel's handymen, Abram, who is also an amateur beekeeper and who shares honey with the Count. The taste of the honey has a hint of apples and reminds the Count of his home province, which is known for its orchards.

After this experience on the roof, the Count decides to take more control of his life and gets a job in the Boyarsky as a waiter. Though he has never held a job before, he finds that some of the manners and etiquette he learned as a part of his upbringing are helpful in preparing him for the role, and he rises quickly through the ranks to Headwaiter. He befriends the maître d' of the restaurant, Andrey, and the head chef, Emile.

As the 1930s progress, hardship hits Russia. Nina, now a young woman, travels to the provinces to aid in farm collectivization. Many Russian peasants are resistant to this idea, and as a result, most of them are exiled and unskilled labor is hired to run the farms. This skilled labor shortage, combined with poor weather, creates a massive famine across Russia's farming provinces, and Nina's faith in the Communist party is tested. Mishka is also worried about the party's rigid censorship of artists, and is distressed that one of his favorite poets has killed himself.

Not everyone's path has taken a downward turn, however: after a few years of falling out of fame, Anna's career makes a comeback when she starts to play roles of hardworking women who persevere in pursuit of the common good. She and the Count periodically rekindle their romance whenever she stays in the Metropol. The Count still works in the Boyarsky, and now that Russia has opened some of its foreign relations again, an officer of the Party named Osip asks him to tutor him in French and English language and society.

In 1938, Nina returns to the Metropol, now with a five-year-old daughter, Sofia. She explains to the Count that her husband has been arrested and sent to Siberia, and she needs someone to watch Sofia for a few months while she attempts to find him. The Count agrees to look after Sofia, but he struggles at first while juggling his job in the Boyarsky. After a few days, and with the help of the seamstress who works in the hotel, Marina, the Count starts to adjust to living with a child.

Meanwhile, Mishka's editor, Shalamov, asks him to cut out a passage in the anthology of Chekhov's letters that he is working on. In the passage, Chekhov praises German **bread**, and Shalamov views Chekhov's statements as too anti-Russian. Mishka has an outburst, railing against Shalamov and the notion of censorship, and he is sent off to Siberia. The narrator states that Nina will also not return to the Metropol, and despite the Count's attempts to find her, he never hears from her again.

In 1946, Russia is reeling from its involvement in World War II. Sofia has grown into a gracious thirteen-year-old, though she also has a playful streak. She plays a game with the Count in which he leaves her sitting in one of the hotel's rooms, and by the time he arrives at a new location within the hotel, she is already sitting there. In one attempt at playing this game, however, Sofia falls on the stairs and cracks her head open. Without a thought, the Count rushes out into the night in order to take her to the hospital, despite the fact that he could be shot for leaving the hotel. She undergoes surgery and recovers without a problem. With the help of Osip, the Count is able to go back to the hotel unnoticed.

In 1950, Sofia has grown into a beautiful young woman and a talented pianist, thanks to lessons from the conductor of the hotel band, Viktor Stepanovich. The Count worries for Sofia's future, however, and does not want her to be limited by a life in Communist Russia. He also receives a visit from Katerina, Mishka's lover, who informs the Count that Mishka has died. Katerina gives the Count Mishka's final project, which is a compilation of quotes from famous works of literature that have to do with bread—ending with the lines he was asked to

censor from Chekhov's letters. The Count then reveals to Katerina that it was in fact Mishka who had written the poem for which the Count was imprisoned. They had published the poem in 1913 under the Count's name so that Mishka wouldn't be killed for it, knowing that the Count would likely only be imprisoned. Looking back, the Count sees the irony: that this action had actually saved his own life, because as a member of the nobility he would have been shot or exiled in 1922.

Hearing about the death of his friend, the Count resolves to take action and escape the hotel. When Sofia is invited on a tour to Paris with a music conservatory in 1953, the Count sees an opportunity for both of them to escape. Over the course of the next several months, he plans every detail. He steals clothes from an Italian guest, a bottle of hair dye from the barber, and a hat and jacket from an American journalist. He finds travel guide books for Paris and draws a path for Sofia to follow on a map.

The night that Sofia leaves for her tour, she and the Count share a final dinner together. Afterward, the entire hotel staff sees her off. Four days later, the night before the Count plans to escape, he steals the last item he needs: a passport from a Finnish guest. When the Count returns to his room, he finds the Bishop (who has become the hotel manager) sitting at his desk. Having discovered one of the Count's maps and figured out that Sofia plans to run away from the tour, the Bishop then walks down to his office, intending to inform the authorities. When he arrives at his office, the Count is already sitting there with pistols in hand. He had found the pistols years earlier behind a wall panel in the manager's office on one of Nina's excursions in the hotel. The Count holds the Bishop at gunpoint and locks him in one of the store rooms using Nina's passkey.

The next evening, Sofia performs at the Salle Pleyel. After she plays, she puts on the Italian clothes, cuts and dyes her hair, and runs to the American embassy. At the embassy, a friend of the Count's named Richard Vanderwhile helps her seek asylum and make a new life in America. Richard also helps the Count escape, dialing thirty phones in the Metropol at exactly midnight to confirm that Sofia made it safely. In the pandemonium of the ringing phones, the Count quietly dons the American's hat and jacket and walks out of the hotel. He then meets Stepanovich at a train station, and Stepanovich takes the hat, jacket and Finnish passport, and boards a train to Helsinki in order to confuse the police. Rather than joining Sofia in America, however, the Count heads back to his home province, where Anna Urbanova is waiting for him in a tavern.

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov** – The Count is the protagonist and titular character of *A Gentleman in Moscow*. A member of the Russian aristocracy, the Count was raised in an estate in the Nizhny Novgorod province along with his sister Helena. His parents died when he was ten years old, and he was subsequently raised by his grandmother, the Countess. After the October revolution in 1917 and the assassination of the Tsar, many of the Count's relatives, including his grandmother, left Russia in order to avoid being killed by the Bolsheviks. The Count remains in Russia, however, and moves into the Metropol Hotel in Moscow. Four years later, in 1922, the Count is sentenced to house arrest for life in the Metropol because he had written a poem with revolutionary subtext. At first, the Count finds it difficult to live in such a constricted space, particularly as he watches the Bolsheviks attempt to erase every vestige of the aristocratic way of life. After four years, he attempts to jump off of the hotel roof, but fortunately is prevented from doing so. The Count then decides to take more control of his life by taking a job in one of the hotel's restaurants. Along his journey to achieving a life of purpose in the hotel, he gains several friends who allow him to adapt to his imprisonment and the changing times, making him feel more free and giving him a sense of family and purpose. Nina, a young girl who lives in the Metropol, spends her days exploring the hotel with the Count, and he takes on a fatherly role towards her; he also embarks on a long-term relationship with film actress Anna Urbanova. His best friend from school, Mishka, keeps the Count informed about Russian society outside the hotel and becomes like a brother to him. What ultimately provides the Count with the most sense of purpose is raising Nina's daughter, Sofia, who essentially becomes a daughter to him. Sofia's chance appearance affirms his worldview, and the view of the novel, that there is an order to the universe and a reason for every accident and coincidental occurrence in one's life.

**Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich (Mishka)** – The Count's best friend, whom he met at school and who keeps him company at the hotel. Even though they come from different class backgrounds (Mishka is not noble), they became fast friends when the Count rushed to Mishka's aid in a schoolyard fight. Mishka is a poet, and at first he appears to be excited by the revolution and the Bolsheviks' ascension to power because of what it might mean for the progression of poetry. However, over the course of the novel, he sees the negative effects that censorship has on the arts. When Mishka is asked to censor a volume of Chekhov's letters he is editing, he has an outburst and rails against the Party. He is then arrested and sent to Siberia to work in a labor camp for a few years, but he returns to Moscow in secret in order to complete a new project. Gradually the oppression of the new society takes its toll on Mishka, and towards the end of the novel his lover, Katerina, informs the Count that Mishka has died. The Count also reveals after his death that Mishka had in fact written the poem for which the Count was imprisoned. They had agreed to publish it under the Count's name because they knew that the Count's

punishment would be less harsh than Mishka's, demonstrating the deep love and sacrifice that the Count maintained for his friend. Ultimately, Mishka is an example of a character who is unable to adapt to the changes in society around him, unlike the Count.

**Anna Urbanova** – A film actress and a lover of the Count's. When the two meet in 1923, Anna is at the height of fame, having starred in several popular films. She initially makes a poor impression on the Count, but she invites him to dinner and quickly seduces him. Over the course of the novel, Anna has some major setbacks in her career when people start to see that most of her films celebrate old values of individualism and contain a lot of nostalgia for princes and princesses. Anna loses most of her possessions and her home, but she persists. Gradually, she is able to get small parts, often as a working woman who asks others to push on for the common good. This relaunches her film career until she gradually makes the transition to theater, demonstrating her ability to adapt to the attitudes of the time. Throughout this tumultuous period, Anna keeps up her romance with the Count whenever she visits the Metropol. The two take comfort in confiding in each other about the hardships they are experiencing in life, and their bond becomes deeper and more loving. Like other characters such as Mishka, Nina, and Sofia, Anna takes on a role that is more familial than friendly. When the Count escapes the hotel, he goes to see Anna, implying the immense value of their relationship to him.

**Nina Kulikova** – One of the first friends the Count makes during his imprisonment in the hotel. At the start of the novel, Nina is a precocious nine-year-old who is obsessed with the aristocracy and the rules and etiquette of being a princess, which the Count is happy to explain to her. In return, Nina also helps alleviate some of the Count's boredom, as she explores the hotel with him and shows him each back room and hidden passageway. She does so by way of a **passkey** that she has acquired, which she eventually gifts to him on Christmas. But gradually, as Nina grows older, she becomes more serious, more immersed in her schooling, and a very loyal Communist Party member. The Count watches her transformation with a kind of fatherly concern, as he hopes that she will not miss the joys of youth. At seventeen, she joins an agricultural planning committee and travels to Ivanovo to aid in agricultural collectivization. But when she sees millions of people starving as a result of the Party's efforts, she and her new husband's loyalty becomes tested. When her husband is arrested eight years later and sent to Siberia, she brings her five-year-old daughter Sofia to the Metropol, asking if the Count can watch her while she goes to find her husband. Unfortunately, Nina never returns, continuing the narrative pattern in which characters who are unable to accept the values of the new Russia become completely exiled from it.

**Sofia** – Nina's daughter, whom she brings to the Metropol when her husband is arrested and sent to Siberia. The Count agrees to watch Sofia, who is five years old at the time, for a few months. Nina never returns to the Metropol, however, and the Count becomes her de facto father. As a child, Sofia is precocious like her mother, but less assertive. She grows into a demure thirteen-year-old, but she also has a mischievous streak, playing games with the Count and even a few pranks. By the end of the novel, she has become a graceful young woman and a talented pianist. The Count sees her potential and does not want her to be restricted by Russian society. When she goes on tour to Paris with a Moscow conservatory, the Count sees an opportunity for her to escape. With the help of Richard Vanderwhile, the Count arranges for her to run away and seek asylum in America. Overall, the Count's relationship with Sofia and his role as an adoptive parent gives him a sense of purpose, as he explains that he feels he was fulfilling life's plan when he agreed to watch Sofia.

**The Bishop** – A Bolshevik who works at the hotel, whom the Count refers to as "the Bishop" due to his "narrow head and superior demeanor." The Bishop starts the novel working as a waiter in the hotel's less elegant restaurant, the Piazza, before rising through the ranks to a position in the hotel's premier restaurant, the Boyarsky. He then becomes the assistant hotel manager and finally the hotel manager. The Count takes an immediate dislike to him due to his lack of tact, his lack of experience and knowledge about waiting, and because he does not pick up on traditional dining cues. The Bishop, in turn, dislikes the Count because he views the count as representative of an old and outmoded way of life. He complains that keeping a wine list in the hotel is contrary to the values of the new Soviet society, and thus all of the wine labels are removed in order to equalize the bottles. The Count finds this action disastrous, as each bottle is unique, and views it as an attack on his way of life. Thus, the Bishop becomes representative of a regime obsessed with tearing down traditional ways of life simply because they are traditional.

**Andrey Duras** – The maître d' of the hotel's fine restaurant, the Boyarsky. The Count explains that the Boyarsky would not run without Andrey, who appears to anticipate the needs of every guest, much to the Count's delight. Prior to this job, Andrey had been a juggler in the circus, a skill that aids him as he appears to pull out chairs for every member of a table at once, or catches a cake midair as it falls. Together Andrey, the Count (who becomes headwaiter at the Boyarsky), and the Boyarksy's chef, Emile, become such good friends that they are referred to as "the Triumvirate." They work to outmaneuver the Bishop when he tries to impose new rules and regulations on the Boyarsky.

**Emile Zhukovsky** – The head chef of the Boyarksy and the third member of "the Triumvirate," along with the Count and Andrey. Their friendship becomes crucial to Emile as they support him against the Bishop's tyranny. The Count describes Emile as a genius, coming up with ways to adapt to food

shortages by replacing certain ingredients with others. Emile begins his days as a pessimist, but cooking gives him such joy that he gains a rosier perspective over the course of the day, as he improvises the perfect dishes for his guests.

**Marina** – The Metropol's seamstress. Marina not only mends the Count's pants several times (particularly when he is exploring the hotel with Nina), but she also serves as a confidante for him. A mother of two, Marina counsels the Count in the ways of fatherhood when he starts to feel protective over Nina, and later when he is in over his head in agreeing to watch Sofia. Marina helps take care of Sofia as a young girl, but also helps the Count realize that he is capable of being a father.

**Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov** – A former Colonel of the Red Army who becomes the Chief Administrator of the secret police in Russia. When the Soviets reopen Russia to foreign relations, he asks the Count to tutor him in French and English—both for the language and for the culture. He argues with the Count on why Bolshevism is good, even though its revolutionary methods seem particularly rigid, providing the novel with a more sympathetic perspective on the Bolsheviks.

**Richard Vanderwhile** – an American aide-de-camp of a general who stays in the Metropol in the mid-1940s. In the 1950s, Richard starts to gather intelligence on Russian politics, and asks for the Count's help in doing so. Richard also becomes crucial in helping Sofia seek asylum in America when she escapes the Moscow Conservatory Orchestra while on tour in Paris.

**Abram** – a handyman in the Metropol who also keeps bees on the roof. When the Count happens upon the rooftop one night, Abram offers him honey, and he and the Count speak about how they are from the same province, which is known particularly for its apple orchards. When the Count goes up to the roof to commit suicide, Abram interrupts him and offers him honey that has a distinct taste of apples, which changes the Count's mind about committing suicide.

**Helena** – The Count's sister, a gentle and kind girl who died at the age of twenty of scarlet fever while the Count was in Paris. He had loved her dearly and been very protective of her, particularly after both their parents had died when they were young. He views missing her last months as one of the great tragedies of his life.

**The Hussar Officer** – A young man and a rival of the Count whom he encounters at a birthday party for a princess. Due to a series of small incidents, the princess had favored the Count over the officer. In revenge, the officer had courted Helena only to break her heart by raping her handmaiden. The Count had then shot the officer in the arm, and he was subsequently sent to Paris as punishment, missing the death of his sister.

**The Countess** – the Count's grandmother, who raises Helena and the Count after their parents pass away. When the Russian nobility is dissolved, the Count returns to his family estate from Paris in order to ensure her safe passage out of the country. The Count describes her as independent, authoritative, and impatient with pettiness.

**The Grand Duke Demidov** – The Count's godfather and a former adviser to the Tsar. After the Count's parents died when he was ten years old, the Grand Duke helped to raise the Count and gave him the advice that would help him the most in the future: that if a man does not master his circumstances then he is bound to be mastered by them.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**The Round-Faced Fellow** - Referred to most often as the "round-faced fellow with a receding hairline," this man is an early fan of Anna's. When he becomes a Minister of culture, he contributes to the resurgence of Anna's career by telling many directors in town how wonderful she is.

**Vasily** – The Metropol's concierge, who has a knack for knowing where any of the hotel's guests are at a given time. He often informs the Count where Nina is, and later in the novel, where Sofia is.

**Jozef Halecki** – The Metropol's manager at the beginning of the novel. The Count describes him as a master of delegation because he rarely sees Halecki. Ultimately, Halecki's position is taken over by the Bishop.

**Joseph Stalin** – The real-life Soviet revolutionary who served as the country's General Secretary (the highest office in the government) from 1922 to 1952. Stalin led Russia against Germany during World War II and drove Russia to become a world power.

**Nikita Khrushchev** – One of eight men who had a claim to Stalin's position following his death; in the novel, Khrushchev is able to become the heir apparent by casting himself on the side of a progressive technology: nuclear power plants.

**Viktor Stepanovich Skadovsky** – The conductor of the orchestra in the lesser of the Metropol's two restaurants, the Piazza. Later he gives Sofia piano lessons.

**Katerina** – A poet and Mishka's lover. Katerina informs the Count of Mishka's passing and gives him Mishka's final project as a gift.

**Audrius** – The bartender of the Metropol's bar, the Shalyapin, who serves the Count many times over the course of his thirty-two-year stay.

**Viktor Shalamov** – The editor of Mishka's volumes of Anton Chekhov's letters, who asks him to censor certain lines he feels are too anti-Russian.

**Konstantin Konstantinovich** – A Greek man who helps the Count keep his finances up to date and delivers necessary items to him when he is first imprisoned.

**Arkady** – The desk captain of the Metropol.

## TERMS

The Bolsheviks – A revolutionary socialist political party which came to power during the Russian Revolution of 1917. They were responsible for the dismantling the Tsarist autocracy and the aristocracy in Russia, which then led to the establishment of the communist Soviet Union. They ultimately became the Communist Party and are often referred to in the novel as simply "the Party." The novel portrays them as wanting to empower the peasants and the workers, but sometimes their actions come at the expense of the freedoms of those working-class citizens.

## 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.

### IMPRISONMENT, FREEDOM, AND PURPOSE

*A Gentleman in Moscow* begins in 1922 and centers on the life of Russian aristocrat Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov. Before the novel's opening, the Count had lived a life of luxury in Moscow's Metropol hotel. When a poem with revolutionary subtext is attributed to the Count, however, he is sentenced to house arrest in the Metropol for the remainder of his lifetime. At first, the Count feels severe isolation, anxiety, and aimlessness because of his confinement. Yet the Count slowly realizes that by exploring the hotel's physical limits and by finding new experiences that make him feel useful, he can gain a measure of liberty even within the building's confines. By expanding the Count's conception of life's possibilities within the hotel, Towles suggests that a person can feel free, even in a confining situation, as long as they have purpose and an optimistic perspective.

Though the Count lived in the Metropol Hotel for four years prior to his arrest, by the end of the first three weeks of his sentence he feels mired in boredom and agitation due to his lack of space and excess of time. The Count feels confined by the smallness of his new space. His old suite had an interconnected bedroom, bathroom, dining room, and grand salon, but his new room on the sixth floor is one hundred square feet. Additionally, each time he refers to his new window he compares it to smaller and smaller things to describe it (a chessboard, a letter, a postage stamp). At first, the Count attempts to go about his normal routine—reading the paper, having a meal, getting a haircut—but he quickly starts to realize that he is counting the steps on the stairs, accidentally reading yesterday's paper, and calculating the minutes to his next meal. Therefore, in addition to his limited space, the limitlessness of his time becomes oppressive to the point where he attempts to jump off the hotel roof in despair.

However, with the help of a nine-year-old girl named Nina who is also staying in the hotel, the Count explores the hotel's various rooms and corridors, and his sense of constriction begins to ebb. Though Nina has only lived in the Metropol Hotel for ten months, she has acquired a hotel-wide **passkey**, and she shows the Count the hotel's networks of corridors and rooms. They begin the Count's education in the boiler room, where she remarks that one could destroy "secret messages and illicit love letters." She next shows him the electrical room where one could plunge the hotel into darkness, providing cover for "the snatching of pearls." Thus, she not only expands the Count's physical world, but she also expands the imaginative possibilities of each room. After one of the Count's escapades with Nina, he returns to his room in the attic. Armed with Nina's sense of adventure, the Count finds a passageway behind his closet into the closet of an adjoining room. The Count moves half of his possessions into this new room, and Towles remarks that "a room that exists in *secret* can, regardless of its dimensions, seem as vast as one cares to imagine." Therefore, even though the Count's physical space has not changed by much, his wider access gives him a sense of liberty.

Coupled with this new sense of imaginative possibility, the Count also gains a sense of purpose by expanding the possibilities of what he can do within the hotel through having a job and caring for a child. After the Count's suicide attempt fails, he takes a job at the hotel restaurant, the Boyarsky. Though this is unusual for someone who is noble, the job provides him with new friendships with the hotel staff and a newfound sense of purpose, because he is using many of the skills and the tact that he had learned growing up in the aristocracy. Sixteen years into the Count's time in the Metropol, Nina returns as an adult, and asks if the Count can watch over her five-year-old daughter Sofia for a few months. Sofia's stay at the Metropol becomes much longer than anticipated, as the Count does not ever hear from Nina again. While taking care of Sofia, the Count gains an even greater sense of purpose. His days become full as he juggles taking care of Sofia with maintaining his job at the Boyarsky.

Though initially the Count is unsure whether he would last three weeks in the hotel, expanding his literal sense of space and finding purpose as a worker and a father allows him to no longer feel constricted. Though his sentence had not altered, his change in attitude in the face of imprisonment allows him to regain a sense of freedom.

## CHANGE AND ADAPTATION

Though *A Gentleman in Moscow* focuses on the Count's thirty-two-year confinement in a Moscow hotel, Towles also explores the social and political landscape outside the hotel, detailing the drastic shifts occurring in Russian society from 1922 to 1954, due mostly to the rise of the Communist Bolshevik Party. Towles examines these large shifts by exploring their effects on individuals within his narrative, as each character tries to adjust to the changing political landscape. On an individual level, characters who are able to adapt to the new political sensibilities enjoy success, while characters who remain moored in old ways are either sent to Siberia or vanish from the narrative. As radical as these governmental changes are for Russia as a whole, Towles uses the historical context to demonstrate how it is necessary for individuals to adapt to a rapidly changing society in order to survive.

The Count is the most prominent example of an individual who at first falters under communism, but eventually finds success within the new Russian society by adapting to its norms. At the opening of the novel, the Count is a member of the Russian nobility and had never worked a day in his life. During the first few years of the Count's house arrest, he notes how the Bolsheviks "would not rest until every last vestige of his Russia had been uprooted, shattered, or erased." He is particularly dismayed when all of the wine labels on the bottles in the hotel's cellar are removed in order to equalize the wines, because he had prided himself on knowing exactly which kind of wine should be paired with a meal. He takes this as a sign that he no longer has a place in the current culture and attempts to jump off the hotel's roof. The Count's action quite literally demonstrates that he feels unable to live in a society whose values are so drastically different from his own. Fortunately, the Count is prevented from committing suicide by a chance encounter with the hotel handyman, Abram, on the roof. After this key juncture, the Count then throws off his title and takes a job in the hotel's restaurant as headwaiter. Even though he still does not fully subscribe to communism, by adapting to the new class structure the Count feels that he can continue to live.

Anna Urbanova, an actress who becomes romantically involved with the Count, is a second example of a character who is able to adapt to Russia's changing attitudes. Like the Count, Anna also begins the novel in the lap of luxury, until critics begin to note that her movies often celebrate individuals and involve princes and princesses, harkening back to aristocratic eras whose values no longer hold up in communist Russia. Her films quickly fall out of favor, and Anna then loses all of her wealth along with most of her possessions. Rather than giving up her career, however, Anna reinvents herself. She takes a small part in a film as an unnamed factory worker who delivers an impassioned speech about the necessities of pushing on in the face of harsh conditions. Anna therefore crafts her persona in order to keep up with the changing times and maintain her career. After that initial opportunity, Anna regains fame by taking on roles that celebrate workers. By taking on acting roles that showcase Bolshevik ideals, then, Anna is able to rejuvenate her career.

The adaptability of both the Count and Anna is contrasted with the experiences of Mikhail Fyodorovich (Mishka), an old poet friend of the Count's, and Nina, a young girl in the hotel who grows up to be a part of the Soviet agricultural planning committee. At first, Mishka sympathizes with the Bolsheviks, but gradually, he realizes the pitfalls of the new regime. When Mishka is asked to edit the playwright Anton Chekhov's collected letters, he is disturbed when the senior editor asks him to censor a paragraph in which Chekhov remarks about the quality of the **bread** in Berlin, because the editor believes praising German bread is too anti-Russian. Mishka then storms into his chief editor's office and rants about the lines he has been forced to edit. As a result of his outburst, he is taken to the authorities for questioning and is soon exiled from Russian society to Siberia. Thus, his inability to adapt to the society forces him out of it completely.

Nina's journey is similar to Mishka's. When she returns to the hotel as a seventeen-year-old, she is helping the Soviets with the collectivization of farms. But the narrator notes how her faith in the party will eventually be tested by seeing millions of peasants starving in Ukraine. When Nina returns a final time to the hotel eight years later, she tells the Count that her husband has been arrested and sent to Siberia (it is implied as a result of breaking ties with the Bolsheviks). She leaves her daughter Sofia with the Count while she attempts to track down her husband, but the Count never hears from her again. Like Mishka, Nina finds the new Russian society at odds with her own morals, and she ultimately disappears from it altogether.

Societies are always changing, but the dramatic and fast-paced nature of change in Russia during this period is particularly jarring for many of the novel's characters. The arcs that Towles has given his characters demonstrate how devastating it can be when one feels out of place in a culture, but Towles offers only two solutions: one must change, or one must get out.

## FRIENDSHIP, FAMILY, AND LOVE

At the beginning of the Count's house arrest, he experiences a deep sense of isolation and loneliness. His lack of mobility makes him unable to visit most of his friends and family, many of whom fled Russia after the political revolution. Yet the friendships and love that he is able to cultivate in the Metropol become even more important to him than his previous familial relationships. Unlike the Count's relationships with his relatives, these new relationships are built at a time of crisis in his life, to the point where these new friends become a kind of substitute family.

The Count's friend Mishka, with whom the Count had been close before his imprisonment, becomes even more like a brother after the Count is placed under house arrest in the Metropol Hotel. The two had become unlikely friends at school despite the difference in their backgrounds: the Count is a member of the aristocracy, while Mishka is a poet and a member of the working class. Even though the two often differ politically, Mishka still comes to visit the Count every year to update the Count on the political developments in Russia, to reminisce about their youth, and to ask for advice when he is confronted with censorship. When the Count discovers Mishka's death at the end of the novel, he weeps because Mishka was the last person alive who had known him as a younger man, which resembles a relationship that one might have with a sibling. Upon Mishka's death, the Count reveals a major twist in the novel. The reason the Count is imprisoned in the first place is because a poem with revolutionary undertones had been attributed to him, but in fact, it had been Mishka who had written the poem. The pair had decided to publish the poem under the Count's name because the government would have killed Mishka for it, whereas they only imprisoned the Count. This self-sacrifice demonstrates the incredible love that the Count has for Mishka, and the importance of his friend's life even when it comes at the expense of his own freedom.

The Count's imprisonment makes the prospect of romantic love or marriage difficult. Yet he and the actress Anna Urbanova, who occasionally stays in the hotel, are able to cultivate a relationship filled with deep friendship and love. The Count meets Anna one year into his sentence. Although she makes a negative first impression on him, she invites the Count to a quiet candlelit dinner in her suite. He is impressed by her directness and the stories she tells about her life, and later the two make love. Over the years, Anna falls in and out of favor with filmgoers, but she continues to return to the hotel to have dinner with various directors. On these occasions, Anna and the Count often resume their flings, but they also deepen their admiration and friendship, share intimate moments, and provide support for each other when facing hardships throughout their lives. On the final page of the novel, after the Count escapes from the hotel, he goes to see Anna. This action implies that their relationship will last far beyond their time in the Metropol Hotel. While the two may not share a marriage in any traditional sense, their longstanding romance still provides him with the love and companionship belonging to any happy partnership.

The Count's friendships with Nina and her daughter Sofia also allow the Count to take on the role of a father, which comes to provide him with greater purpose and meaning than anything else he is able to find in the hotel. The Count meets Nina Kulikova in 1922 when she is nine years old and her single father has temporarily been posted to work in Moscow. The two strike up an unlikely friendship. The Count accompanies Nina on various adventures as she shows him the back passages of the hotel and the purpose of each room. He enjoys these adventures and takes on a fatherly sense of care for her until she moves away from the hotel a few years later. Nina returns to the hotel in 1938, at age twenty-five, because her husband has been sent to Siberia by the government. She asks the Count to watch over her five-year-old daughter Sofia for a few months while she finds her husband. The Count does not hear from Nina again, and so he must take on the responsibility of caring for Sofia. He makes room for Sofia in his attic suite, raises her, educates her, and watches as she grows into a poised young woman. During their last dinner before Sofia is to leave to travel with the Moscow Conservatory's Orchestra, the Count tells her that he was certain that "Life needed [him] to be in a particular place at a particular time" when Nina brought Sofia to the lobby and asked him to take care of her. Therefore, in looking after Sofia and becoming a father figure to her, the Count felt he fulfilled a fated purpose.

Although the Count has lost almost all of his family before the start of the novel, he is not without the comfort of people who love him. Though he does not have a brother, a wife, or daughters in the traditional sense, the friendships he forges and retains while living in the Metropol are as deep as the bonds of family, and this love is what provides him with the sense of a meaningful life.

## CHANCE, LUCK, AND FATE

*A Gentleman in Moscow* highlights how small decisions and interactions add up to life-changing events. The novel makes a point of documenting the effects of seemingly small incidents, like a hair appointment gone awry or the slip and fall of a man before a party. Ultimately, Towles uses these small incidents to show that the big events that define a life are actually the result of small chance occurrences. In crafting a narrative in which little details later become much more important, Towles himself affirms the Count's sense that in hindsight, there is an order to life.

One of the most significant events in the Count's life was the death of his sister, Helena, while he was in Paris. His inability to be with her in her last months haunts him throughout his life. The Count explains at length the series of minor chance incidents that led him to be in Paris when Helena died, including a princess's party, a slip on the ice, a card game, and an accidental rivalry that ended in violence and caused the Count's grandmother to send him to Paris as punishment. In reviewing these incidents, the Count forms a worldview that the pivotal events of life are based on a chain of chance events.

Late in the novel, the Count reaffirms his belief that small actions can determine one's destiny or fate. When he explains how he came to be a father figure for Sofia, readers can see how incidents have caused another chain reaction that alters the Count's fate. At the beginning of the novel, the Count has a

well-groomed moustache and he goes to the hotel barber for a trim at the exact same time each week. One day, another customer becomes outraged that the Count is served first, even though the customer had been waiting longer. In a fury, the man snips off the Count's moustache. A few days later, a nine-year-old girl named Nina approaches the Count while he is eating lunch and asks where his moustache went. This question begins their fast friendship, and ultimately leads to Nina bringing her own daughter, Sofia, to the hotel years later. Nina asks the Count to watch Sofia for a few months, but Count does not hear from Nina again and so he becomes Sofia's de facto father. The Count retells this story to Sofia, explaining that he feels those seemingly innocent circumstances led him to his purpose in life: raising her.

Towles himself affirms the Count's worldview in his writing style, as many details that seem innocuous early in the narrative become crucial later on. The Count recounts a story for Nina of a duel that took place in the hotel itself, noting that it was rumored that the hotel manager at the time kept a pair of pistols behind a panel in his wall for such a purpose. The Count then discovers the pistols when he visits the office of the hotel manager, Mr. Halecki. At the end of the novel, when the Bishop threatens to foil the Count's escape, he uses the pistols to hold the Bishop at gunpoint so that his plan is not discovered, making the pistols—previously an unimportant detail—essential to the Count's fate. Another example involves the handyman, Abram, who keeps bees on the roof. The Count discovers his apiary by chance, and the two of them speak about how they grew up in the same province, which is known particularly for its apples. These details become vital when, years later, the Count is about to throw himself from the roof, but Abram interrupts him and lets him try the honey that the bees have just collected. The honey has the distinct taste of apples, and they realize that the bees have traveled all the way to their home province to collect the nectar. This action provides the Count with a new sense of meaning and he does not attempt suicide again.

In a novel filled with sweeping historical changes like the rise of the Bolsheviks and the outbreak of World War II, Towles depicts the Count's life as being more determined by small, chance encounters than by the major machinations of history. Though historical events can certainly shape one's path, Towles's introduction of small but crucial details affirms the idea that in hindsight, there is a sense of order to the world.

## BOLSHEVISM AND CLASS STRUGGLE

The political backdrop of *A Gentleman in Moscow* largely focuses on the rise of the Communist Bolshevik Party following the Russian Revolution of 1917. The Count is often at odds with the Bolsheviks because he was a member of the nobility, which the Bolsheviks abolished after the revolution. Although the story focuses on the Count, Towles makes a point of providing different perspectives on Bolshevism and the class struggle. On the one hand, the Bolsheviks try to eliminate economic inequality and some of the Bolsheviks are portrayed sympathetically. At the same time, the Count laments that traditional values like etiquette and tact are no longer valued simply because they are traditional. He also dislikes the fact that some of the Bolsheviks seem bent on destroying old ways of life simply to make their party stronger, even at the expense of poor citizens. Through these varied opinions, Towles makes the argument that while class inequality leads to a privileged elite, communist notions of creating an egalitarian society can also harm people.

A Bolshevik Party member named Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov, who asks the Count to tutor him in French and English, provides the strongest argument for the necessity of the Revolution and the overthrow of the nobility. He says that in 1916, Russia was the most illiterate nation in Europe and most of its population lived in modified serfdom. For the majority of people, society had not progressed for five hundred years. On an individual level, Towles also critiques the Count at the beginning of the novel for his obsession with possessions, as the Count chooses to overcrowd his room and limit his already small living space significantly rather than relinquish any of his furniture. Towles also implies that the Count values his possessions even more than he values his family and friends. Much of the rest of the novel's criticisms of the elite come from a person whom the Count refers to only as the Bishop (due to his appearance and demeanor). The Bishop is a Bolshevik who begins the novel as a waiter, before rising to the position of hotel manager. He upbraids the Count harshly for his elitism, "How convinced you have always been of the rightness of your actions," he sneers, "as if God Himself was so impressed with your precious manners and delightful way of putting things that He blessed you to do as you pleased." Thus, the Bishop highlights a major critique of the nobility: their belief that their wealth and manners alone justify superior treatment.

Yet the Count also makes some worthy points about the hypocrisy of the new ruling class. He not only points out how the comrades are just as drawn to superiority and pomp as the former aristocracy, but also how their notions of "progress" often come at the expense of the people. Towles makes a point of highlighting that the new Soviet constitution drafted in 1922 guarantees freedoms of conscience, expression, and assembly, but also that these rights could be revoked if they are "utilized to the detriment of the socialist revolution." Thus, Party loyalty is valued more than actual freedom. Though the Bolsheviks put a high premium on technology and progress, sometimes this progress is at the detriment of common people. For example, churches are razed so that the metal in the bells can be reclaimed, but as a result, many people have to go to great lengths in order to find a place to pray. Worse, when the farms are collectivized, many of the peasants are resistant and so

they slaughter their livestock rather than join the collectivization efforts. As a result, they are exiled, but the lack of skilled farmers then causes a widespread famine in Russia. Thus, the desire to promote the common good is, in fact, what initiates the starvation of millions of people.

While the idea of eradicating economic inequality is a valiant one, Towles demonstrates that the goals of the Bolsheviks are sometimes at odds with the people they propose to be supporting. In addition, the book also shows that just because something is traditional doesn't automatically make it classist, and that some traditions (like etiquette, or the Russian tradition of serving **bread** when one is hosting another person) are worth preserving because they truly improve society.

## SYMBOLS

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

### NINA'S PASSKEY

Nina's passkey, which allows her to access any room within the hotel, comes to represent the Count's sense of freedom in the Metropol. Using the key, Nina is able to show him the underbelly of the Metropol, including its back rooms and secret passageways. This allows the Count's world to expand, which is psychologically comforting to him when he starts to feel as though the walls are closing in on him. Nina ultimately gives the Count the key as a Christmas gift, and he uses it throughout the remainder of his time in the hotel. Ultimately, it also lets the Count sneak into certain rooms and acquire items that he needs to escape the Metropol, which makes the key instrumental in achieving both imaginative and literal freedom.

### BREAD

In Russian culture, bread is an old symbol for hospitality. In the novel, however, bread takes on a larger symbolism, representing Russian tradition itself. Bread becomes particularly symbolic of the humbler traditions of the peasants that the Bolsheviks feel they have to destroy simply because they are traditions. For while the Bolsheviks attempt to eradicate the nobility, they also tear down churches and rigidly pursue agricultural technologies that cause widespread famine (including a lack of bread) in Russia. Therefore, when Mishka's editor, Shalamov, asks him to censor lines that Chekhov writes about German bread because he feels the lines are too anti-Russian, Mishka actually views this action as a threat to Russian artistic freedoms and the Russian canon. Mishka's final project then becomes a compilation of lines about bread from famous works of literature (mostly works of Russian literature), and so bread again represents traditions that Mishka feels are worth preserving.

### THE MOTHS OF MANCHESTER

The story of the moths of Manchester is a favorite of the Count's, and these moths are symbols of the ability to adapt to one's circumstances. The narrator explains that the moths of Manchester are an example of speedy evolution: in Manchester, for thousands of years, most of the moths had white wings and black flecking (though a few in each generation would have pitch black wings). The lighter coloring provided them with camouflage against the region's trees. But when Manchester became littered with factories, the barks of the trees became covered in soot, and the moths with pitch black wings were camouflaged much better. Within a hundred years, over 90% of the moths had black wings. This progress parallels the adjustments of certain members of society that the Count points out: an architect who uses his art skills to sketch buildings for a travel agency; Stepanovich, who conducts the band in the Piazza in order to make ends meet even though he is a classically trained musician. The Count and Anna are also examples of "moths," as they are able to use skills and traits they had already had in order to adapt to the new Russian society. The Count uses his knowledge of seating arrangements, wine, and etiquette to become a waiter in the Boyarksy, while Anna plays into her rough voice and hardworking ethic to restart her career when she moves past being an ingenue.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Random House edition of *A Gentleman in Moscow* published in 2016.

### Prologue Quotes

"History has shown charm to be the final ambition of the leisure class. What I do find surprising is that the author of the poem in question could have become a man so obviously without purpose.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 5

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the beginning of the novel, the Count is on trial in 1922 as a former member of the aristocracy. He charms the gallery with his jokes, but one of the Bolshevik Secretaries

presiding over his trial comments that he is not surprised the Count is so charming. The Secretary's first sentence exemplifies the class struggle that serves as the backdrop of the novel. Here, the Secretary criticizes the Count (who has never held a job) and the rest of the aristocracy because they have led lives of leisure at the expense of the lower classes. While history demonstrates that the Bolsheviks clearly won this class conflict, much of the story involves the Count attempting to make space for himself within this new social structure.

In the second part of this quote, the Secretary is surprised to see that the Count is so purposeless, considering that he wrote a poem on the meaning of purpose. Yet perhaps the ironic fortune of the Count's imprisonment is that in adapting to this confinement and new political landscape, he is able to take on a job, become a father, and in doing so, find that sense of purpose.

## Book 1, 1922, An Ambassador Quotes

❝ From the earliest age, we must learn to say good-bye to friends and family. […] But experience is less likely to teach us how to bid our dearest possessions adieu. And if it were to? We wouldn't welcome the education. For eventually, we come to hold our dearest possessions more closely than we hold our friends.

**Related Characters:** The Grand Duke Demidov, The Countess, Helena, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

After the Count has been sentenced to life imprisonment in the Metropol, he returns to the hotel to find that he will also be moving from his luxurious multi-room suite on the third floor to a one-hundred-square-foot room on the sixth. As such, the Count is forced to relinquish most of the possessions he has. In this passage, the narrator describes from the Count's point of view the difficulty of giving up one's possessions. On a first read, the inclusion of this quote appears to be a critique of the upper class and the Count, who seems to value objects more than people. Yet the objects he chooses to keep all have sentimental value purely because of their attachment to a member of the Count's family: his sister Helena's portrait and a pair of scissors that belonged to her; his grandmother's opera glasses and a set of her china; his godfather's (the Grand Duke's) desk; his father's books. All of these people are family members to whom the Count has already had to say goodbye. So instead, saying goodbye to certain possessions represents another way in which he is forced to reconcile with his family's passing, in addition to the loss of his lifestyle.

❝ Thus did the typewriters clack through the night, until that historic document had been crafted which guaranteed for all Russians freedom of conscience (Article 13), freedom of expression (Article 14), freedom of assembly (Article 15), and freedom to have any of these rights revoked should they be "utilized to the detriment of the socialist revolution" (Article 23)!

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 15

### Explanation and Analysis

When the Count moves from his third-floor suite to his sixth-floor room, he laments the loss of space but is glad to have moved away from the typists occupying the second floor. In this footnote, the narrator describes the different articles of the country's new constitution (the document being typed on the second floor). The narrator notes with irony that the constitution grants different freedoms, but also reserves the freedom to revoke any of them if they are used against the Bolsheviks—for what is the point of providing a right to freedom if that freedom can be taken away at any time? This footnote serves as another dimension of the narrative's overall critique of the Bolsheviks, which is that even though the party purports to be in support of the common good and the working man, sometimes the way the party attempts to carry out these goals comes at the expense of those same people and their liberties.

❝ In the seventeen years since the making of that peace—hardly a generation—Russia had suffered a world war, a civil war, two famines, and the so-called Red Terror. In short, it had been through an era of upheaval that had spared none. Whether one's leanings were left or right, Red or White, whether one's personal circumstances had changed for the better or changed for the worse, surely at long last it was time to drink to the health of the nation.

**Related Characters:** Andrey Duras, Vasily , Marina , The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 17

**Explanation and Analysis**

At the beginning of the novel, after the Count has been sentenced to house arrest and moved to his sixth-floor room, Marina, Vasily, and Andrey come upstairs to celebrate the Count's survival. The Count acknowledges that they are also celebrating all of their survival given the large amount of political upheaval that has occurred in the past seventeen years, which he lists here. Yet the change does not stop in 1922, as over the course of the novel, all of the characters, irrespective of their politics, are forced to adapt to different political structures, new rules, and unwelcome changes to their way of life. Even for those whose personal circumstances may have changed for the better, like a working-class man such as Andrey, the narrator later reveals some of the difficulties that the new Bolshevik society has brought about for him and his wife. In any evolution, however, the importance does not rest on the survival of any given individual, but rather that the group as a whole has survived and moved forward, and that concept is what the Count acknowledges here.

❝ And when the Count's parents succumbed to cholera within hours of each other in 1900, it was the Grand Duke who took the young Count aside and explained that he must be strong for his sister's sake; that adversity presents itself in many forms; and that if a man does not master his circumstances then he is bound to be mastered by them.

**Related Characters:** Helena, The Grand Duke Demidov, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 18

**Explanation and Analysis**

On the Count's first night of his imprisonment, he remembers some of the advice that his godfather, the Grand Duke, had given him after his parents had died. He recalls this set of advice because it remains relevant to him in his current situation. First, although the Count has lived a privileged life, he has still faced a great deal of adversity and loss: the death of his parents, his sister, his godfather, and having to say goodbye to his grandmother, his estate, and his way of life. Now, he adds on to that a sentence of life imprisonment, which simply serves as another obstacle that he must face in finding a life of purpose. The last piece of advice that the Grand Duke gives him serves as a means of dealing with that loss and that adversity, something that the Count is not very good at through the first part of the novel. He has a hard time understanding how to adapt to his circumstances, as he is so steeped in his aristocratic way of life. Eventually, however, he is able to master his circumstances by taking a job in the Boyarsky and achieving that sense of purpose in doing so.

## Book 1, An Appointment Quotes

❝ Ever since its opening in 1905, the hotel's suites and restaurants had been a gathering spot for the glamorous, influential, and erudite; but the effortless elegance on display would not have existed without the services of the lower floor.

**Related Characters:** Nina Kulikova, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 33

**Explanation and Analysis**

On the second day of the Count's imprisonment, he goes to his religiously kept appointment with the hotel barber at the stroke of noon. On his way down the stairs, the narrator takes a moment to acknowledge the working-class members of society who have allowed the world to run both outside and inside the Metropol. While the Count has certainly experienced the fruits of that excellent service and accommodation, and while he appreciates the skill of those who are good at their jobs, it is only after his imprisonment that he starts to gain a true view of those jobs both literally and figuratively. At first, Nina opens his mind to the physical possibilities of the underbelly of the hotel when the two go on adventures together. Eventually, however, the Count appreciates the job even more when he decides to join the staff at the Boyarsky and gains a true sense of purpose while doing so. This implies that while the upper-class atmosphere might be more elegant, the satisfaction of doing a day's work well belongs to those who create those elegant atmospheres.

And when that celestial chime sounds, perhaps a mirror will suddenly serve its truer purpose—revealing to a man not who he imagines himself to be, but who he has become.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 37

**Explanation and Analysis**

During the Count's weekly scheduled trip to the barber just one day into his imprisonment, a customer grows angry because he believes the Count has cut him in line and snips off one side of the Count's moustache. The Count is forced to survey himself in the mirror, which he says he believes is often a tool of self-deceit because one can alter one's own appearance in a mirror quite drastically. Yet this moment serves as a reckoning for the Count. He had up to this point maintained a long handlebar moustache typical of the aristocracy. In a first acknowledgement that society has progressed past the nobility and past this fashion, the Count realizes that he must become a typical member of society now, and asks the barber to give him a completely clean shave. Not all the relics of the Count's past go away so easily—he spends the first four years of his imprisonment not working, longing for his old suite and his lavish life—but eventually he comes to adjust to the changes that have occurred in Russian society.

## Book 1, An Acquaintanceship Quotes

If he continued along this course, it would not take long for the ceiling to edge downward, the walls to edge inward, and the floor to edge upward, until the entire hotel had been collapsed into the size of a biscuit tin.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 38

**Explanation and Analysis**

Only a few days into his imprisonment, the Count starts to feel a sense of constriction settle in. He describes how he has been counting the steps to the lobby or calculating the time to his next meal, particularly because he has very few concrete ways to pass the days in the hotel. The issue of the Count's vast expanse of idle time is coupled with this quote describing how the hotel seems to be literally closing in on him. What is notable about the quote, however, is that the Count's sense of constriction stems completely from his mind. Lacking a sense of purpose, the hotel feels confining to the Count. But once the Count is able to find meaningful ways to spend his time (like exploring the hotel with Nina in the next few chapters, or gaining a job in the Boyarsky much later), he no longer feels like the hotel is closing in on him and is able to live within its walls for almost thirty more years.

## Book 1, Around and About Quotes

For however decisive the Bolsheviks' victory had been over the privileged classes on behalf of the Proletariat, they would be having banquets soon enough.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 59

**Explanation and Analysis**

On one of the Count's first explorations of the hotel with Nina, they find the hotel's silver service—everything from gravy boats to asparagus servers—in a locked closet in the basement. The Count wonders why the Bolsheviks did not take it away, but he and Nina come to figure that the Bolsheviks will eventually need it for the grand banquets they will surely be having. This quote represents another aspect of the critiques that the narrator and the Count level against the Bolsheviks. In noting that eventually all leaders like a little pomp and grandeur, the quote implies that the Bolsheviks may not ultimately look so different from the aristocracy they overthrew. This is reinforced in a later chapter when the Count once again notes how the Bolsheviks' social cues mirror those of the upper class in many ways, and then in another incident closer to the end after Stalin has died and an ornate dinner is held that exhibits just such luxury the Count describes.

For if a room that exists under the governance, authority, and intent of others seems smaller than it is, then a room that exists in secret can, regardless of its dimensions, seem as vast as one cares to imagine.

**Related Characters:** Nina Kulikova, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 64

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Count goes on his first day of adventures with Nina, he discovers that his closet is attached to the closet of a neighboring room. He breaks into the other room, takes out all of the debris and broken furniture, and nails the door shut so that someone could only enter it through his room. He then makes a study for himself. Even though this second room is exactly the same size as the first, the fact that it is secret makes it full of possibility, as the Count describes here. Though his space hasn't increased by much, his sense of freedom has expanded significantly. This sense has also been aided by his adventures with Nina, whose secret knowledge of the hotel has opened up his imaginative possibilities of what the rooms might hold as well. Thus, her friendship also gives the Count a new sense of vitality.

## Book 1, Advent Quotes

I should note that despite the brief appearance of the round-faced fellow with a receding hairline a chapter hence, he is someone you should commit to memory, for years later he will have great bearing on the outcome of this tale.

**Related Characters:** The Round-Faced Fellow, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 102

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Count runs into a former prince, the narrator explains in a footnote that the prince is a relatively unimportant character. The narrator does note here, however, that a certain round-faced gentleman that is going to be introduced in the next chapter will have a great bearing on the outcome of the tale. This note has an interesting effect: not only does it confirm the narrator's omniscience, but it serves a larger purpose in making it seem like the round-faced fellow is fulfilling a fated purpose in appearing in the story. Ultimately, the round-faced fellow is introduced as an admirer of Anna's and eventually aids in the resurgence of her career. In creating the appearance that even small characters can play a large role in the lives of the protagonists, Towles shows that the narrative subscribes to the same philosophical theory that the Count does: small chance details can have large cumulative effects.

## Book 2, 1924, Anonymity Quotes

Yes, a bottle of wine was the ultimate distillation of time and place; a poetic expression of individuality itself. Yet here it was, cast back into the sea of anonymity, that realm of averages and unknowns.

**Related Characters:** Andrey Duras, The Bishop, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 144

**Explanation and Analysis**

About two years into the Count's imprisonment, he is dining in the Boyarsky when the Bishop informs him that the restaurant is now only serving Red or White wine. Not comprehending, the Count goes to the basement with Andrey to discover what the Bishop meant: all of the labels have been removed from the wine bottles, because the Bishop had complained that the wine list runs counter to the Bolshevik ideals. This act hits the Count particularly hard, due to a few different factors: first, he is upset by the absurdity of the reasoning behind the action, viewing it as a way of eradicating individuality and tradition simply for the sake of doing so. Second, he had prided himself that as a part of his upbringing, he had learned to pair wines with certain foods, and so it becomes a more personal injury as well. So though it seems like a small enough change, for him it becomes a representation of class struggle, and how he and his way of life are losing that struggle. Spurred by this incident, the Count he resolves to kill himself two years later because he cannot deal with this kind of change.

Because the Bolsheviks, who were so intent upon recasting the future from a mold of their own making, would not rest until every last vestige of his Russia had been uprooted, shattered, or erased.

**Related Characters:** The Bishop, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 144

**Explanation and Analysis**

After the Count discovers the travesty of the removal of the wine labels, he is shocked when he hears that it is because the Bishop complained that the wine list ran counter to the

ideals of the Revolution. He is upset because he feels not only the aristocracy as an institution disappearing, but also the way of life that had been attached to the upper class disappearing, such as the ability to pair wines, the knowledge how to arrange seats at a party, or the tact of anticipating a guest's needs. This worry stems from the appearance that the Bolsheviks are bent on making sure that the Count's way of life is completely eradicated, but this makes him feel in turn like a living ghost whose entire generation is slowly being forgotten. When the Count initially has difficulty adjusting to these changes, he resolves to kill himself two years later, proving how much he feels he does not fit into the new society.

## Book 2, 1926, Adieu Quotes

And he believed, most especially, in the reshaping of destinies by the slightest change in the thermometer.

**Related Characters:** Helena, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 147

**Explanation and Analysis**

On the day the Count tries to commit suicide, the narrator begins to explain the Count's guiding philosophy. Though the Count sometimes means for this quote to be taken literally—that destinies can be shaped by changes in the weather and temperature—at its essence the Count believes in the idea that small details and chance encounters can accumulate into large changes or events in one's life. The Count explains this philosophy further when he remembers over the course of this and another chapter how several small details at a birthday party led to him missing the death of his sister Helena. Towles himself affirms this philosophy as well in the way he writes the novel, as so many small details that appear early have a key purpose later on in the narrative (not unlike the precision of Chekhov and his infamous gun). It seems that this guiding philosophy gives the Count comfort, as he states regularly that he believes life has a purpose for every person that they will eventually fulfill, and he eventually does fulfill what he feels is his own purpose in becoming Sofia's father.

## Book 3, Arachne's Art Quotes

With the slightest turn of the wrist the shards of glass tumble into a new arrangement. The blue cap of the bellhop is handed from one boy to the next, a dress as yellow as a canary is stowed in a trunk, a little red guidebook is updated with the new names of streets, and through Emile's swinging door walks Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov—with the white dinner jacket of the Boyarsky draped across his arm.

**Related Characters:** Andrey Duras, Emile Zhukovsky , Nina Kulikova, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 176

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote comes at the beginning of 1930, four years after the Count attempts suicide. The narrator explains how the late 1920s could be described like turns of a kaleidoscope, as the pieces make small adjustments, but reconfigure into what looks like a completely new pattern. This passage gives examples of these small shifts in the scope of the city, but which mark big adjustments on the part of the characters. The staffing at the Metropol continues to change; Nina moves away; the streets continue to be renamed. All of these are examples of the ways in which the Count feels he no longer belongs. But in order to counteract that feeling, the Count represents the biggest change of all: starting work in the Boyarsky. The Count uses some of the skills he learned as a part of his upbringing to adjust to this new life and give himself a sense of purpose.

## Book 3, Antics, Antitheses, an Accident Quotes

Our churches, known the world over for their idiosyncratic beauty, for their brightly colored spires and improbable cupolas, we raze one by one. We topple the statues of old heroes and strip their names from the streets, as if they had been figments of our imagination. Our poets we either silence, or wait patiently for them to silence themselves.

**Related Characters:** Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich (Mishka) (speaker), The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 290

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote comes from Mishka, when he visits the Count in the Metropol after he has been sent to Siberia and given a Minus Six sentence (meaning he is exiled from the six principle cities of Russia). He returns to speak to the Count, telling him that the burning of Moscow was one of Russia's greatest contributions. This monologue exhibits how far Mishka has fallen out of step with the ideology of the Bolsheviks. Whereas at first, he was excited by the prospect of empowering the working class and also forming a new style of poetry, Mishka has become disenchanted with the methods used to achieve this progress. He disagrees with the eradication of anything the Bolsheviks dislike, whether it be the subtlest of anti-Russian rhetoric (which is what they asked Mishka to censor) or even anything within Russia's own history, as Mishka lists here. But unlike the Count, who had long relinquished his own history and the history of his class, Mishka's realization of the erasure of history is more recent, and he is less equipped to deal with it.

"Who would have imagined," he said, "when you were sentenced to life in the Metropol all those years ago, that you had just become the luckiest man in all of Russia."

**Related Characters:** Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich (Mishka) (speaker), The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 292

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Mishka returns to Moscow in secret to finish a project, he pays one last visit to the Count, lamenting the ideological turns the Bolsheviks have taken. These are his parting words to the Count. There are several layers of irony and also tragedy to this statement. First, there is some truth to what Mishka says: although the Count has not had an easy time in his years of imprisonment, he has been able to avoid much of the political turmoil happening outside the Metropol's walls. He was spared death and exile in being sentenced to house arrest, and ultimately, by the end of the novel, the Count does realize how fortunate he was to have been in the Metropol, because it allowed him to form valuable relationships and gain a daughter that he would not have had otherwise. At the same time, the statement is a bit unfair on Mishka's part, particularly with the later revelation that Mishka had in fact written "Where Is It Now," but the Count had protected Mishka from execution by publishing it under his name. This required a good deal of sacrifice on the Count's part, and the fact that Mishka calls him the luckiest man in Russia for saving Mishka's life in a way shows how desolate Mishka has become, because it implies that he would rather have died for his poem than survive to endure the current society.

In 1916, Russia was a barbarian state. It was the most illiterate nation in Europe, with the majority of its population living in modified serfdom: tilling the fields with wooden plows, beating their wives by candlelight, collapsing on their benches drunk with vodka, and then waking at dawn to humble themselves before their icons. That is, living exactly as their forefathers had lived five hundred years before. Is it not possible that our reverence for all the statues and cathedrals and ancient institutions was precisely what was holding us back?

**Related Characters:** Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov (speaker), Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich (Mishka) , The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 297

**Explanation and Analysis**

After Mishka returns, upset over how Russian society is razing its churches, renaming its streets, and taking down its statues, the Count asks Osip later for his opinion on the matter. Osip responds to Mishka's points with this quote, illustrating the ways in which the lives of the majority of Russians improved with the overthrow of the Tsar. Although it comes through the lens of a Bolshevik official and former colonel, the points provide the strongest argument for communism in the novel. However, it doesn't fully explain how the statues and cathedrals had been holding the society back, other than the fact that they are part of a fuller scope of tradition to which the Tsar and the aristocracy belonged. Thus, the idea of destroying tradition purely because it is traditional is not fully formed, and harms many of the common citizens in Moscow who try to find places to pray or who felt like old statues were still an important part of history. In addition, there are other costs of the rise of the Bolsheviks, such as the famines and overcrowding; however, this still provides a good counterargument to the largely anti-Bolshevik perspective the narrator gives.

In the end, a parent's responsibility could not be more simple: To bring a child safely into adulthood so that she could have a chance to experience a life of purpose and, God willing, contentment.

**Related Characters:** Nina Kulikova, Sofia, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 309

**Explanation and Analysis**

When Sofia is thirteen years old, she often plays a game with the Count in which she appears to teleport through the hotel, appearing in one room when she had just been sitting in another. One day while she plays this game, she falls on the stairs and hits her head. While the Count sits in surgery waiting for her, he thinks about his relationship with her and experiences a turning point in his personal sense of parenthood. He realizes that unlike Nina, with whom he only played games, Sofia has fully become his daughter, and how she has given him a sense of purpose in providing him with the responsibility of a father. She means so much to him that he would risk his own life in bringing her to the hospital—because he could be shot for stepping outside the hotel. In addition, this also begins the idea of how to provide Sofia with a life of purpose, as he eventually comes to see that Russia is too oppressive, which leads to his resolve for both of them to escape.

## Book 4, 1950, Adagio, Andante, Allegro Quotes

The pace of evolution was not something to be frightened by. For while nature doesn't have a stake in whether the wings of a peppered moth are black or white, it genuinely hopes that the peppered moth will persist.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 336

**Explanation and Analysis**

The Count introduces the idea of the moths of Manchester when he sees, late in the novel, the people around him who have adapted their primary passion to hold a related job or to pursue something that will allow them to use the same skillset in a drastically changed society. He likens it to how natural selection can sometimes force a species to change very quickly, as when the majority of the moths of Manchester went from white wings to black wings over the course of a few generations because the soot on the trees from factories helped the black-winged moths thrive. The Count here describes how there is something comforting about the tale of the moths, because even though their wings change color and individual moths succeed or fail, the moth still progresses. In the metaphor of the moths, for example, the aristocracy has died out, but some of them remain (like the Count). Meanwhile, the rest of the "moths" have progressed and adapted as a society to have characteristics that ensure their survival. Thus the Count sees change and adaptation as a necessity, even though he may not agree with or have benefited from the changes that have occurred in Russian society.

## Book 5, Anecdotes Quotes

Looking back, it seems to me that there are people who play an essential role at every turn [...] as if Life itself has summoned them once again to help fulfill its purpose. Well, since the day I was born, Sofia, there was only one time when Life needed me to be in a particular place at a particular time, and that was when your mother brought you to the lobby of the Metropol.

**Related Characters:** The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov (speaker), Nina Kulikova, Sofia

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 420-421

**Explanation and Analysis**

When the Count and Sofia share a final dinner together before her tour, the Count explains how he feels he has fulfilled Life's purpose in becoming her father. This sentiment also plays into the Count's philosophy as a whole, because there were little pieces of luck along the path that ultimately led to his introduction to Sofia. The man who clipped his moustache off led to his introduction to Nina, when she asked them where his moustache had gone; her adventures and friendship in turn led to her trust that the Count could take care of Sofia. But as much as life (and Sofia) needed the Count to be in the hotel lobby to receive her, the Count equally needed the chance of meeting Sofia. In raising her, not only has he gained a sense of purpose, but he has also gained a daughter that he would almost certainly not have had otherwise. Because he was so

untethered from his family, this relationship gave him more of a sense of meaning than any other.

## Book 5, Antagonists at Arms (And an Absolution) Quotes

"Your sort," he sneered. "How convinced you have always been of

the rightness of your actions. As if God Himself was so impressed with your precious manners and delightful way of putting things that He blessed you to do as you pleased. What vanity."

**Related Characters:** The Bishop (speaker), The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 433

**Explanation and Analysis**

One day before the Count makes his escape, the Bishop discovers the plan for Sofia to run away. The Count then holds the Bishop at gunpoint, waiting to move until the middle of the night. As they sit in the Bishop's office, their rivalry comes to a head as the Bishop reveals the reasoning behind so much of his hatred. The Bishop's critiques are the crux of many of those raised against the upper class: that because they have been blessed with wealth, they feel their superiority is justified and that the inequality between themselves and the lower classes is deserved. The Bolshevik model, on the other hand, aimed to counteract this inequality. However, it is a bit odd that the Bishop brings up this criticism at this point in the story, considering that the aristocracy hasn't existed for thirty years. Additionally, the Bishop has had his fair share of superiority over the Count in the intervening years, and so his criticism comes less from a place of political justice and more from a personal grudge.

## Book 5, Apotheosis Quotes

It was, without question, the smallest room that he had occupied in his life; yet somehow, within those four walls the world had come and gone.

**Related Characters:** Sofia, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 439

**Explanation and Analysis**

As the Count prepares to escape, he leaves his room for the final time. He observes how much has transpired within it during his tenure there, in the same way that a few chapters earlier the architect had observed that a room is a summation of all that happens in it. The Count's imprisonment has forced him to lead a much different life than he might have expected to otherwise. His comment about its size reminds the reader of his origins of wealth and luxury. But ultimately, as much as the changes happening around him have taken their toll, he was able to survive. Additionally, along the way he has found meaningful friendships, a loving relationship, and a true sense of purpose in raising a daughter. Thus, in a coincidental sort of way, his imprisonment may have been for the best. Only with the sense that he has accomplished this last responsibility of raising Sofia does he decide that his time in the Metropol is complete, and his escape also feels somewhat destined.

At that moment, it somehow seemed to the Count that no one was out of place; that every little thing happening was part of some master plan; and that within the context of that plan, he was meant to sit in the chair between the potted palms and wait.

**Related Characters:** The Bishop, Sofia, Richard Vanderwhile, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 439

**Explanation and Analysis**

Once Sofia makes it to the American Embassy, Richard confirms her safe journey by calling thirty phones simultaneously at the Metropol at midnight. This signal also allows the Count to escape in the chaos. As he waits in the lobby for the stroke of midnight, he is struck by the feeling of destiny around him. This sense of order is due to his meticulous planning, carefully laying out his escape and dodging obstacles like the Bishop that were thrown in his way. And knowing the Count's guiding philosophy, it makes sense that the culmination of these details feels like a sense of fate. But in addition, there is a grander design that the Count is a part of: Towles's narrative. For Towles has in fact

crafted a narrative in which nothing is out of place, where small details return to have monumental importance, and where the Count is meant to be exactly where he is at exactly that time. Thus, Towles affirms this guiding philosophy and this sense of fate in his own design.

## Afterword, And Anon Quotes

And there in the corner, at a table for two, her hair tinged with gray, the willowy woman waited.

**Related Characters:** Anna Urbanova, The Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 462

**Explanation and Analysis**

In the final chapter of the novel, the Count returns to his childhood province of Nizhny Novgorod. He stops at a tavern, and when he walks through it to the back, he sees the final image of the novel: Anna sitting, waiting for him (though unnamed, and described only with the word that was the Count's first impression of her, decades ago: "willowy"). This final development demonstrates Anna's lasting importance to the Count. Now that he has fulfilled his parental responsibility in allowing Sofia to pursue a life of purpose, he uses his own freedom to continue another crucial relationship in his life. Though Anna and the Count have not had a traditional marriage in any sense, their long-lasting partnership and romance has endured three decades. They have seen each other change and adapt, supporting each other during both hardships and triumphs. Anna has also served as another kind of parental figure for Sofia in many ways. All of this goes to show the strength of their relationship, and this final sentence confirms that after Sofia, Anna is the person who gives the Count the most sense of meaning in his life, and so he naturally ends his tale with her.

# 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.

## PROLOGUE

The novel begins with the first nineteen lines of "Where Is It Now?"—a 1913 poem attributed to Count Alexander Ilyich Rostov. The poem's central question asks, "where is our purpose now?", describing how purpose had once "dwelt a while amongst us." The poem then explains where purpose cannot be found: not lost among the autumn leaves on Peter's Square, not in the ashes of Greek trash cans, or in Chinese buildings. It is not in "Vronsky's saddlebags" or "Sonnet XXX."

*The opening poem serves as a critique of the upper class, asking what the purpose of the nobility is, and whether it is outdated. The poem is written in 1913, prior to the official dissolution of the nobility, and so it becomes an example of "prerevolutionary rebellion." The Count is able to publish the poem under his name because, as an aristocrat, it is safer for him to do so (under the Tsar's rule) than it would be for a member of the lower classes. This inequality between the classes regarding freedom of speech became one the reasons for the Revolution in the first place. "Vronsky" is a reference to Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, while "Sonnet XXX" refers to Shakespeare.*

The novel then shifts to a transcript format. The date is June 21, 1922. The Count is on trial in front of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, which conducts police work for the Bolsheviks. The Count states his name and titles, but the prosecutor says he has no more use for the Count's titles. He also comments on the large number of buttons on the Count's jacket, clarifying that he doesn't mean it as a compliment. The Count jokes about dueling the prosecutor in response, which gets a laugh out of the gallery.

*At the beginning of the novel, in 1922, the Count is still entrenched in the ways of the nobility, despite the fact that the nobility was abolished in 1917 after the October Revolution. The prosecutor here takes issue with the Count's titles and the large number of buttons on the Count's jacket, viewing both as emblems of an old regime that is more concerned with tradition than progress.*


The prosecutor asks the Count about his upbringing and his current living situation. The Count explains that he has lived in the Metropol Hotel for four years and does not have a job. The prosecutor continues his questions, asking if the Count is the author of the poem "Where Is It Now?" The Count says that it "has been attributed to" him and explains that it was written at his family's estate, called Idlehour.

*The Count's phrasing about the poem being "attributed to" him foreshadows that he is not the actual author of the poem. He had published it under his own name to protect Mishka, his friend and the actual author of the poem. This offer of protection shows their strong bond even when he and the Count were both young.*

The prosecutor explains to the gallery that the Count had left Russia for Paris in the spring of 1913, but then had returned in 1918. He asks if the Count returned to fight for or against the revolution. The Count jokes that he did not want to fight, but simply missed the climate.

*Though the Count's decision not to fight for either side in the revolution was due to a bad experience with a duel, as he explains later, his unwillingness to fight could also have had to do with his political leanings. Though the Count is very much entrenched in his noble upbringing, there are still parts of his entitlement that he criticizes.*

One of the Secretaries presiding over the trial scolds the Count for not taking the proceedings seriously. He states that many in the gallery might find him charming, but that "history has shown charm to be the final ambition of the leisure class." He tells the Count that he seems like a man without purpose.

*The Secretary's scolding brings the Bolshevik/upper class conflict to the forefront. His description of the Count as being without purpose is not inaccurate, as it is only through the Count's imprisonment that he is able to find purpose in his life.*

The Committee takes a short recess, and upon returning they give the Count's sentence. They believe that the Count has obviously become loyal to the nobility once again. However, the Committee also notes that some people view the Count as a "prerevolutionary hero" for writing the Poem, and so they decide to sentence the Count to lifelong house arrest in the Metropol Hotel instead of executing him. If he sets foot outside the hotel's confines, however, he will be shot.

*The sentence that the Bolsheviks pass drastically changes the Count's life, as he will spend the next thirty-two years under house arrest. It is worth noting that the poem was originally attributed to the Count to save Mishka's life from the Tsarist nobility. That attribution, in a fortunate turn of events, has also saved the Count's life from the Bolsheviks.*

## BOOK 1, 1922, AN AMBASSADOR

The novel's style shifts to prose. The Count is escorted back to the Metropol Hotel by two Soviet soldiers. As the Count waves to the hotel staff, they only stare in response. The Count and the two soldiers climb to the Count's suite on the third floor, which has an interconnected bedroom, bathroom, dining room, and grand salon. One of the officers informs him that he will no longer be staying in the suite.

*The Count's imprisonment is not his only punishment; he is also at the mercy of the Bolsheviks regarding his living quarters and possessions. His life is restricted to a single building, but perhaps more shockingly, his living quarters are restricted to a single room.*

The Count is escorted to his new room on the sixth floor in the attic, which was originally built to house the butlers and ladies' maids of the hotel's guests. More recently, the room has been used to store assorted broken furniture and debris. Two of the hotel bellhops help the Count move all of the belongings he can fit into his new room. The rest, he is told, will become "the property of the People."

*The history of the Count's new living space is notable. He has fallen from his status as a nobleman to the status of the former servant class (and his room to the status of a trash heap). As a final affront to his social standing, most of his possessions are given to the government.*

The Count points at what he wants to keep: two chairs, his grandmother's coffee table, a set of her plates, two table lamps made from ebony elephants, a portrait of his sister, Helena, a leather case that had been made especially for him, all of his books, and his desk, given to him by his godfather, the Grand Duke.

*In the end, the Count whittles down his possessions mostly to those that had previously belonged to family members, highlighting his sentimentality and the importance of those history and family to him.*

The Count looks out the window of his old suite, thinking about the experiences he will miss: the view from his window, drinking at the English Club, arriving late to the Bolshoi Ballet across the square.

*Even the experiences the Count will miss highlight the privileged life he has led up to this point: possessing a luxurious suite; drinking at a prestigious club; casually attending one of the most famous ballets in the world.*

The Count then takes an inventory of everything he will be leaving behind. His possessions at the hotel are already a small fraction of his former possessions, since moving from his family's estate to the hotel meant that he couldn't take very much in the first place.

*This fact serves as a reminder that while the Count has lived a privileged life, he has still been able to change with the times. When the nobility were abolished, he left behind most of his possessions to come to the hotel.*

The Count remembers the journey that brought him to the Metropol. In 1918, when the former Tsar had been executed by Bolshevik troops, the Count had feared for his grandmother's life and returned to the family estate from Paris. He arranged passage for her out of the country, but told her he would not be going with her.

*Throughout the novel, Towles lays out pieces of information about the Russian Revolution and the various stages of conflict between the old and new governments. The execution of the Tsar represents a turning point at which many of the nobility began to fear for their lives in their own country.*

The Count and his grandmother (who had raised him since he was ten) parted without shedding a tear. They tried not to become emotional because his grandmother had taught him in childhood not to give his opponent the satisfaction of seeing him upset if he lost in a game.

*Even though the Count does not join his grandmother when leaving the country, the closeness of their relationship is clear, as parting with her meant saying goodbye to his last living family member. This causes him later to create deep, lasting friendships that become like his family in order to make up for their absence.*

After his grandmother left, the Count had loaded up a single wagon with their furniture, bolted the doors of the estate, and set out for Moscow. In the present, the Count reflects how people learn to say goodbye to friends and family at an early age, but that it is much harder to say goodbye to possessions. The Count takes one additional object—a pair of his sister Helena's scissors—and says goodbye to the rest of the family heirlooms.

*Even though the Count thinks that it is more difficult to say goodbye to possessions than family and friends, his argument makes clear that the possessions he has chosen only have sentimental value based on their relationship to the people close to him.*

The Count returns to the attic and marvels at how in his youth he had loved the small space of a train berth, as he had stayed in one overnight when he traveled from Moscow to France. He thinks that at least he will not have to listen to the typists on the second floor, writing out the country's new constitution.

*The Count once again demonstrates some of his political bias. He views the typing of the new constitution as a nuisance rather than as a momentous occasion in the country's history.*

A footnote states that the new constitution includes freedom of conscience, expression, and assembly, but also that these rights could be revoked if they are "utilized to the detriment of the socialist revolution."

*This footnote, like many of the other footnotes in the novel, becomes an editorial statement by the narrator criticizing the Bolsheviks. Here, the narrator takes a jab at the hypocrisy of ensuring freedom of speech—except when it is used against the Bolsheviks.*

The Count unpacks a few more things, including his father's twice-tolling clock and his grandmother's opera glasses. At that moment, a pigeon taps and scratches at the single small window in the room. The Count sympathizes with the pigeon's restlessness.

*Again, the Count evidences his attachment to sentimental objects. His sympathy with the pigeon also demonstrates that even a few hours into his imprisonment, he already feels a creeping sense of anxiety.*

The Count hears someone clear his throat in the hallway. He opens his door and finds Andrey (the maître d' of the hotel restaurant, the Boyarsky), Vasily (the hotel's concierge), and Marina (the hotel seamstress) standing outside. The Count explains his sentence of house arrest. He opens his leather case, which contains twenty-six pairs of different kinds of drinking glasses, and pours a glass of brandy for each of them. They toast to the Metropol.

*The three people who visit the Count on the first night of his sentence are three people with whom his relationship grows over the course of his imprisonment. When the Count eventually takes a job in the hotel, his relationships with other staff members are also able to grow because he becomes more of their equal.*

The Count, Andrey, Vasily, and Marina then have a night of good cheer and conversation. He is grateful that they seem so pleased that he narrowly escaped a death sentence, but he believes that their night of celebration is also a celebration of their survival in the face of seventeen years of mass upheaval. Since 1905, Russia had suffered a world war, a civil war, two famines, and the Red Terror. Thus, it was just as necessary, he believed, to drink to Russia itself.

*This list of events that have caused upheaval in Russian society over the prior seventeen years demonstrates the sheer necessity of being open to change and being able to adapt to different political landscapes.*

At ten o'clock, the Count says goodnight to Andrey, Vasily, and Marina. He sits at his desk, which had been left to him by his godfather, Grand Duke Demidov. The Grand Duke had become a substitute father for the Count and his sister Helena when their parents had died of cholera in 1900. The Grand Duke told him at that time to be strong for his sister, and that "if a man does not master his circumstances then he is bound to be mastered by them."

*The Count uses the Grand Duke's advice as a kind of personal mantra as he tries to navigate his new life in the Metropol. At first, he feels unable to be the master of his circumstances, but gradually he realizes that mastering his circumstances can also involve adapting to those circumstances (like taking a job in the Boyarsky).*

The Count runs his hands over the desk, and finds a secret catch behind one of the desk's front legs. A seamless door opens to reveal stacks of gold coins within the leg. Each of the other legs has its own stack of gold as well.

*The Count has still retained a good deal of his wealth despite losing most of his possessions, which he maintains in secret to avoid having to give the money over to the Bolsheviks.*

## BOOK 1, AN ANGLICAN ASHORE

The next morning, before the Count truly wakes up, he thinks about the day to come. Normally, he would buy the newspaper, stop in his favorite bakery for a pastry, and perhaps visit an art gallery or a concert hall before meeting his bankers and joining his friends for lunch at the Jockey Club. He wakes up, remembers his house arrest, and sighs as he acknowledges that he will be doing none of those things.

*The Count's thoughts before he wakes up once again highlight the relative purposelessness of his days prior to his imprisonment, as he doesn't mention doing anything of true substance. His house arrest thus becomes a drastic, but ultimately worthwhile process of discovering what meaning his life should have.*

A young hotel worker delivers the Count's breakfast. As the boy leaves, the Count asks him to deliver a letter to a man named Konstantin Konstantinovich. The Count then begins his breakfast, which he notes with satisfaction is just as hot as his breakfast had been when he lived three floors lower. As he eats, he notices the hotel's one-eyed cat has come to examine his new quarters. As the Count looks around himself, he realizes he probably could have done without half of the furniture he kept.

*This first morning eventually serves as a counterpoint to a morning years later in which the Count does things for himself rather than having everything done for him. The realization that he has brought too much furniture is a first step in the process of adapting to his new living situation.*

The Count surveys the other rooms on the attic level, most of which are blocked from the inside by broken furniture and debris. In the last room on the floor, there is some space into which he can clear his furniture. Dragging most of his possessions into the second room, he reduces the furniture in his own room to the essentials: a desk and chair, a bed and table, and a high-back chair for guests.

*The Count acts on this realization that he has brought too much furniture in his first attempt to expand his living space. Knowing that he has really only been allowed a single room, the Count is also forced to move his things himself rather than having bellhops do it for him (as they did when he moved from his third-floor suite).*

The Count keeps a single book in his room: the essays of Michel de Montaigne, which he had been meaning to read for a decade. He begins to read the first essay: "By Diverse Means We Arrive at the Same End." The Count tilts back his chair as he reads.

*The fact that the Count cannot get through Montaigne's essays becomes a running joke throughout the novel, but the book also serves an important purpose later, reinforcing the Count's sense of life's order and purpose.*

The narrator explains that reading in a tilted chair had long been a habit of the Count's; in his youth, he and Helena would spend many days together in which he would read aloud as she embroidered. In the present, the Count looks up from Montaigne at his sister's portrait. He thinks about how kind she had been at that age—fourteen—and how much grace she might have had at age twenty-five.

*The narrator here reveals that Helena, like all of the Count's other relatives, has died. This fact allows the reader to better understand why he ultimately finds the friendships he makes in the hotel so valuable.*

There is another knock at the door. The man to whom the Count had penned the letter earlier, Konstantin Konstantinovich, enters. The Count reintroduces himself to Konstantinovich and gestures to his room as a way of showing the man how his financial circumstances have changed. Konstantinovich asks if the Count needs to borrow money. The Count instead shows Konstantinovich one of his gold coins.

*As the Count's financial circumstances have changed, so too has his understanding of what he finds truly necessary in life. As is revealed later, he does not ask Konstantinovich to acquire anything lavish, but instead requests simple, practical comforts.*

The Count and Konstantinovich strike up an arrangement, and Konstantinovich agrees to deliver three notes for the Count. As the man leaves, he asks whether the Count will be writing any more poetry. The Count says that his days of poetry are behind him.

*The Count's response that his days of poetry are behind him again foreshadows that he did not, in fact, write the poem. Yet it also implicitly acknowledges that he no longer has the same freedom (of speech or mobility) as when the poem was written.*

The narrator shifts to the Boyarsky, which is described as "the finest restaurant in Moscow" and is located on the hotel's second floor. Before 1920, the restaurant would attract crowds every night and the service had been flawless. But after 1920, the Bolsheviks had prohibited the use of rubles in fine restaurants (accepting only foreign currencies), thereby closing them to nearly the entire Russian population.

*The narrator again makes an editorial note on the Bolsheviks' hypocrisy: they say they are pro-Russia and work towards the empowerment of the country's proletariat, and yet they do not allow most of the Russian citizens to eat in fine restaurants.*

The narrator goes on to describe the restaurant's chef, Emile Zhukovsky, who had been the most celebrated chef in Russia when he took up the post in 1912. But his real test came during times of war, when food was scarce. That, the narrator states, is when a chef's ingenuity is truly tested, because he must craft delicious meals with replacement ingredients. The Count takes great joy in guessing those replacement ingredients. As he eats dinner, the Count asks Andrey if the secret ingredient in his dish is nettle.

*Emile's ingenuity presents another example of characters who must learn to adapt to changing times, as he is required to come up with replacement ingredients in his dishes due to the scarcity of certain foods.*

As Andrey goes to ask Emile about the nettle, the Count reflects how the Boyarsky could not run without Andrey. Andrey seems to be always a step ahead of his guests: pulling back the chairs of all the women at a table at once, or producing a cigarette lighter at a moment's notice.

*Andrey's ease with the patrons of the Boyarsky represents the epitome of good service to the Count. He later contrasts Andrey's anticipation and tact with the Bishop's blundering, which to him is representative of the Bolsheviks' thoughtlessness and lack of appreciation for etiquette.*

Andrey and Emile return, and Emile sarcastically congratulates the Count on correctly guessing that there is nettle in the dish. The Count smiles in satisfaction and returns to his room.

*The narrator foreshadows how the Count's skills and sharp knowledge of foods will allow him to succeed when he eventually takes a job in the Boyarsky.*

The Count thinks about how to master his circumstances while living a life of confinement. He finds inspiration in Robinson Crusoe, who was stranded on an island and needed to seek shelter and find water, make fire, study the flora and fauna of the island, and keep an eye out for sails on the horizon. The Count views this as a life committed to being practical, which is why the Count had sent the three notes with Konstantin Konstantinovich that morning. He had then received three practicalities in return: fine linens and a nice pillow, four bars of his favorite soap, and his favorite pastry from the bakery down the street.

*The Count's concern over practicalities is helpful for him when he first starts his house arrest, but there is a large difference between his situation and Robinson Crusoe's. While Crusoe is fighting for survival, the Count's life is never in danger at the hotel. Indeed, the biggest threat to his life is himself, and his sense of boredom. Thus, practicalities are not the only thing necessary to the Count's survival; what he truly needs is a sense of purpose.*


## BOOK 1, AN APPOINTMENT

The next day, the Count tries again with Montaigne's essays. He begins at ten o'clock, but quickly finds his attention wandering. The book's density is daunting, and he starts to think that the essays are tedious and contradictory. He reads to the third essay before having to double back, discovering that he did not recall the last three pages because his mind had been drifting. Upon finishing the sixteenth essay, the Count's twice-tolling clock strikes twelve. The Count jumps up and quickly goes to visit the hotel barber.

*As the Count attempts Montaigne once again, boredom starts to creep into the story more and more. Even with limitless time, the Count cannot dedicate himself to reading Montaigne without his mind wandering, which is why he becomes so excited for his barber appointment, because it gives him something he must attend for a set amount of time.*

As the Count descends the stairs, the narrator remarks that if the progress of Russian culture can be attributed to the St. Petersburg salons, this progress is ensured only by the help of the butlers, cooks, and footmen.

*This time, the narrator's remarks act as a critique of the upper classes: while they are thought to advance the culture, it is the working class that actually enables this progress.*

The Count arrives at his "religiously kept appointment" at the barber's. The Count greets the barber and asks for a trim of his moustache. Another customer interrupts, saying that he was next in line. The Count tries to clarify that he has a standing weekly appointment with the barber, but the customer grows furious. He grabs a pair of scissors, takes the Count by the collar, and snips off one side of his moustache before leaving.

*This incident serves as the first in a series of chance events leading to the Count's friendship with Nina and his taking care of her daughter Sofia. Late in the novel he even confirms that he owes a lot to this angry customer, because the loss of his moustache, in a very circuitous path, allowed him to find purpose in his life as a father.*

The barber tries to apologize, but the Count says that he should have let the customer go ahead of him. He surveys himself in the mirror, which he had long thought of as a tool of self-deceit because it could show a person only what they wanted to see in themselves. But he realizes that mirrors also show a person what they have become, and, relinquishing a symbol of the aristocracy, the Count asks the barber to shave off his moustache.

*This moment of self-reflection plots another point on the Count's transformation, and his acknowledgement that both society and his life have changed. Here a physical transformation also becomes a symbolic one, as he throws off a fashion that had belonged to men of nobility in order to achieve a look that better suits his current situation.*

## BOOK 1, AN ACQUAINTANCESHIP

The narrator introduces the second restaurant in the Metropol, which the Count affectionately calls the Piazza. The Piazza does not aspire to "elegance, service, or subtlety" like the Boyarsky does, but instead works towards efficiency.

*The description of the Piazza, in contrast to the Boyarsky, parallels the Count's thinking about the fine service of someone who came up under the old regime, like Andrey, and the poor service of someone who is a part of the new Bolshevik regime, like the soon-to-be-introduced Bishop.*

A few days after the barbershop mishap, the Count is being served in the Piazza by a new waiter. The Count refers to this man only as the Bishop because of his narrow head and superior demeanor. The Count notes how the Bishop misses many dining cues, like eating with a newspaper to indicate that the Count is alone, or closing his menu to indicate that he is ready to order. He also corrects the Bishop's wine recommendations.

*When the Count later discovers that the Bishop was hired because he has a friend with influence in the Party, he correlates his bad service and inexperience with this fact. He believes that the Bolsheviks eschew traditional values like tact and etiquette in service simply* because *they are traditional values.*

As the Count waits for his food and wine, he thinks to himself how his morale could use a boost. He has been finding himself counting the steps to the lobby, or calculating the time to his next meal. He worries that the hotel is closing in on him.

*The Count's restlessness has grown in the past few days. This is accompanied by a more literal feeling of confinement, which is what makes his later adventures with Nina so valuable to him, because she literally expands the space he can inhabit.*

The Count then notices a young girl in a yellow dress (who is later introduced as Nina) spying on him from her table. According to Vasily, she is the daughter of a widowed Ukrainian diplomat. After the Bishop delivers the Count's soup, Nina approaches his table and asks where his moustache has gone. He jokes that it has flown away for the summer.

*Nina's introduction is another chance occurrence that serves as a step to the Count finding a sense of purpose. Because of the incident in the barbershop, Nina is compelled to ask him where his moustache has gone, initiating their friendship.*


Nina questions the Count about his life as a count, and whether he has known any princesses. She questions him about how princesses live, whether he has been to balls, dined in castles, or been in a duel. The Count answers affirmatively to all of her questions, but qualifies that the duel he had been in was more figurative than literal.

*Though Nina starts off with an obsession of princesses, as the daughter of a Party member she quickly progresses past this phase, soon rejecting ideas of nobility and viewing the Bolshevik party as more equal and empowering.*

The Count becomes more engaged with Nina, telling her a story about how a duel had begun in the lobby of the hotel. The hotel manager at the time kept a pair of pistols behind a secret panel in his office, and so the feuding parties were whisked away to a remote spot.

*This small detail later serves an important and fateful purpose, as the Count happens to find the pistols and eventually uses them years later to enact his escape plan.*

Nina interrupts the Count's story, that Lensky was killed by Onegin in a duel. He finds it amusing that she feels the need to whisper, as she is simply referencing a Pushkin poem. As Nina gets up, she remarks that she prefers the Count without his moustache, curtseys, and disappears.

*Nina's innocence and precocious wonder amuses the Count, and he starts to take on a fatherly sensibility towards her as their friendship blooms and she leads him on adventures.*

Later that night, the Count sits alone at the hotel bar. He has had several drinks, to the point where the bartender, Audrius, offers to help him with his jacket, because he is struggling to put it on. He is shocked to learn it is only ten o'clock.

*The Count continues to struggle with his imprisonment because of the seemingly endless expanse of his time and his in ability to fill it.*

As Audrius helps the Count back to his room, the Count drunkenly tells him that when dueling was first taken up by Russian officers in the early 1700s, the Tsar had to forbid it because the soldiers were so enthusiastic about the practice that he feared there would be no one left to lead his army. The Count thinks about how duels had once been epic and grand, but had slowly devolved to the point where they were being fought over small things like "the tilt of a hat." He thinks that men should have to take so many paces away from each other that it should be virtually impossible to kill one another.

*This is the Count's first large critique of the upper class, as he acknowledges some of the shortcomings of theoretically "noble" traditions. The practice of dueling, he believes, ultimately lost the honor it purported to be guarding. Like the Bolsheviks, he sees some of the harm in following traditions simply because they are traditions.*

## BOOK 1, ANYWAY...

Five days later, Nina invites the Count for afternoon tea. As soon as the tea is poured, Nina begins to talk about her actual purpose for speaking with him: she asks if he would share some of the rules of being a princess.

*Nina continues her fascination with princesses while taking part in a typically upper-class tradition: having tea. In a way, Nina's friendship is appreciated by the Count because she recognizes some of the value and romance of the aristocracy.*

The Count describes some of the things expected of princesses: table manners, posture, respecting the elders of every class. The Count relays an example in which the Princess Golitsyn once stopped for an old woman to drive her home in her carriage. When the old woman invited her for tea, she graciously accepted the invitation, missing a ball at the Tushins in the process. Nina asks if the princess then married the old woman's son. The Count assures her that she did not, and Nina seems disappointed. The Count does not add that this action would have caused a rift between the Golitsyns and the Tushins for three generations, if the Russian Revolution had not ended the family lines altogether.

*While Nina views the story through a romantic lens (hoping that the princess would fall in love with a peasant), the Count continues to see some of the shortcomings of the old social structure. The two families he describes in the story had been so obsessed with small slights and affronts and so preoccupied with family hierarchies and grudges that they were blind to the needs of the rest of the country and provided the impetus for revolution.*

The Count holds out the tea cakes for Nina, and she takes two. He tells her that princesses say please and thank you when asking for and being offered tea cakes. Nina is indignant. She acknowledges that saying please is polite, but that she has no intention of saying thank you for something she was freely offered and for which she never asked.

*Nina's practicality here demonstrates that even though she likes princesses, she has no hesitation in setting aside traditions with which she does not agree. Additionally, by learning by chance this small detail about Nina (that she would never say thank you for something she was offered), the Count is able to realize years later that she has returned to the Metropol hotel.*

## BOOK 1, AROUND AND ABOUT

On July 12, Nina catches the Count's eye on the way to dinner, giving him a signal that they have established. She tells him that a certain gentleman has gone out to dine. They run upstairs towards suite 317—the Count's old suite—before the narrator backtracks.

*Within a few weeks, the Count's friendship with Nina has deepened even more, as the two have established secret signals to go on adventures together.*

The Count stopped going to the hotel bar after having to be dragged up the steps by Audrius earlier that week. He had begun to be plagued by restlessness and ennui after only three weeks of his sentence, and he worried how he might feel after three years. But on the first Wednesday in July, while the Count is sitting in the lobby with nothing to do, he notices Nina zipping by.

*Nina helps the Count with the sense of restlessness that had continued to build in the first three weeks of his imprisonment because of his lack of purpose and no way to spend his time productively within the hotel.*

The Count catches Nina and asks where she is headed. She reluctantly tells him the card room. When he asks why, she hesitates again, but then tells him that four women regularly met in the card room at three o'clock on Wednesdays. If she gets there at 2:30, she can hide in the cupboard, listen in on their conversation, and eat their cookies when they leave. When the Count asks where else she spends her time, she tells him to meet her in the lobby the next day at two o'clock.

*Nina's explanation of where she is going gives more insight into her mischievous and adventurous spirit. At first the Count acts more like a protective adult, but soon his curiosity gets the better of him and he joins Nina on these adventures. These activities later prepare him for taking care of Nina's daughter, Sofia, with whom he takes much more of a fatherly role.*

Thus begins the Count's education on the inner workings of the hotel. He has lived in the Metropol for four years, but Nina has had ten months of her own kind of confinement. Her father had not put her in school, as he was posted only temporarily in Moscow. Thus, Nina has spent her time discovering every room of the hotel, its purpose, and how it might be used better.

*Nina demonstrates that she is familiar with all of the different rooms of the hotel, and also how each one is used and how those rooms can be taken advantage of for one's own purposes, opening up the hotel to far wider possibilities than if she had simply been satisfied with the rooms available to her as a guest, as the Count had been.*

To initiate the Count's explorations, Nina starts in the basement. She shows him the furnace room—where one could destroy secret messages and illicit love letters. She next opens the electrical room, where one lever could throw the ballroom into darkness and provide perfect cover for stealing pearls. At the far end of the basement, Nina and the Count pass a bright blue door. She says that she has not yet been in that room, and takes out her **passkey** for the hotel.

*Nina begins to pass on the information she has gained and her own creative fantasies, opening up the Count's mind to the possibilities that the hotel can offer, even in confinement. This new sense of freedom he acquires is symbolized by Nina's passkey, which opens both literal and metaphorical doors for the Count.*

Nina and the Count opens the door to reveal the hotel's silver service. From floor to ceiling are soup bowls and asparagus servers and silver utensils, enough for a grand banquet. The Count wonders why the Bolsheviks had not taken it all away, and Nina surmises that perhaps they need it. The Count thinks to himself that yes, they would likely be having banquets soon enough, because all leaders eventually like pomp and fanfare, regardless of their political leanings.

*The Count's thoughts here bring in an additional critique of the Bolshevik party. For all their talk of getting rid of tradition and making society equal, they have still kept the hotel's expensive silver service so that they might eventually throw banquets like a new aristocracy—which is exactly what comes to pass later in the novel.*

In the following days, Nina leads the Count from room to room, including the hotel suites, as each room has a different view. If one wants to watch guests arrive at the Bolshoi, the best vantage point is the northwest window of suite 317. So, on July 12, the Count and Nina find themselves in his old suite. They watch as the attendees disappear through the doors, when one final taxi pulls up and a woman in a red dress rushes up the stairs. Nina sighs, wishing that she and the woman could change places. The Count thinks to himself that longing for another life is a universal sentiment.

*When Nina observes that she would love to change places with the woman in red across the street, the Count sympathizes greatly, though perhaps out of simpler desires. He too would love the ability to stand across the street without fearing for his life, but he would likely even settle for living in the suite they are standing in, which is representative of the life that he had to give up, and in many ways wishes he could return to.*


Later that night, the Count thinks about his visit to his old room. He had noticed the tea service on the table next to a folded newspaper. He imagines that the room's resident had returned from some outing, ordered afternoon tea, and had whiled away an hour before dressing for dinner. The Count envies the anonymous man's liberty and looks over his own room.

*When the Count returns to his current suite, he is filled with even more jealousy in comparing the room and the life he has lost to the room and the life he currently has. Even though he has plenty of time for leisure, without freedom to accompany that time, he feels that he is spending a meaningless life.*

The Count rises from his bed and examines the closet, wondering if it had been built in an old doorframe. He kicks the inner wall in and slips through the crack, discovering himself in the interior of a neighboring closet, attached to a neighboring room whose door had been blocked. He clears the door and moves his furniture to create a new study for himself. He then nails the front door shut so that the only way of entering the room is through the closet in his bedroom. He thinks to himself that a room existing in secret can be "as vast as one cares to imagine."

*Newly armed with Nina's sense of curiosity and adventure, the Count discovers a new room, doubling his amount of space. Yet at the same time, it is not simply the amount of space that makes him feel less constricted. He implies here that the fact that the room is secret makes it even more invaluable, just as discovering the secret rooms of the hotel made him feel freer and more inspired.*


## BOOK 1, AN ASSEMBLY

Nina is convincing the Count to join her on one of her favorite excursions: spying from the balcony of the ballroom. Today there will likely be an assembly of the Bolsheviks in the ballroom. It is the second of August and already very hot in the ballroom; when Nina and the Count sneak out onto the very thin balustrade, they are forced onto their hands and knees and the Count's pants split open.

*As Nina brings the Count on more adventures, their friendship becomes stronger and stronger and he becomes like a peer to her, literally crawling out onto the balcony on his hands and knees like a kid.*

As they watch the Bolshevik Assembly begin, the Count thinks to himself how the social cues of the Bolsheviks are not unlike those of the aristocracy. He watches as two young men pay respects to an old man seated by the wall in a chair that had belonged to a Duchess; another charming man tours the room, shaking hands in the manner of a prince.

*Just like the silver service earlier, the Count takes pleasure in seeing some of the social structures and cues that the Bolshevik officials share with the old aristocracy, particularly as the meeting occurs in an old ballroom.*

The Secretary calls the meeting to order. A few administrative duties are dispensed with, and then a more contentious matter is called up: to amend a paragraph in the Union's charter. The final sentence of the paragraph in question says that the Railway Workers of Russia "facilitate communication and trade." A few men argue that "facilitate" is too timid, and many alternative words are proposed. "Enable and ensure" are eventually agreed upon, though not without an objection over the lack of concision of two words in place of one.

*This episode perhaps draws parallels with the Count's earlier description of dueling: how it is sometimes grand, but often gets mired in the smallest of details. Likewise, the writing of the Soviet Union's charter is a momentous occasion in Russian history, but the officials here seem concerned with the semantics of a rather unimportant phrase.*

When the Assembly concludes, Nina and the Count crawl off the balcony. The Count is pleased to discover so many parallels between his own class and the Bolsheviks. Nina tells him that she found their debate fascinating—like discovering how a train is built after a person has ridden one their entire life.

*Again, the whole assembly (both the initial greeting and the amending of the charter) reinforces some of the Count's thinking that there are more similarities than one might think between the new and old regimes.*

The Count then pays a visit to Marina, the hotel seamstress, in order to repair his pants. He tells her about his adventures with Nina, and how surprised he is to find Nina so enthralled by the Assembly when a few weeks earlier she had been asking about princesses. Marina says that all little girls outgrow their interest in princesses.

*The Count's concerns over Nina are twofold. Not only does he have a semi-parental concern with how fast she is growing up, but he is also growing worried that princesses, and his entire way of life, have fallen out of favor and out of existence altogether.*

When the Count leaves Marina's office with his pants intact, a bellhop stops him and tells him that Mr. Halecki, the hotel manager, wants to have a word with the Count in his office. The Count is astounded to be called down because he rarely sees the man: Mr. Halecki has mastered the art of delegating most of his work, and holes himself up in his office to complete the rest of it.

*Once again, the Count shows his appreciation for those who have mastered the art of their jobs. The Count contrasts Mr. Halecki's aversion to micromanagement with the tyranny of the Bishop when he eventually becomes hotel manager.*

The Count arrives at Halecki's office, unsure what the manager wants with him. The Count praises the old engravings of hunting scenes on Halecki's wall before asking how he can be of service to him. Halecki proceeds awkwardly, saying that he has been made aware that the staff still addresses the Count as "Your Excellency." Halecki cautiously tells the Count that this puts him in a difficult position. The Count assures Halecki that it is fine for them to stop addressing him according to his title. Halecki is grateful for his understanding.

*The issue that Halecki brings up represents another way in which the new Soviet society is trying to erase the history of the aristocracy. Even though the Count understands the need for the staff to stop addressing him by his title, it adds to the already creeping sense that his way of life is disappearing and is no longer valued.*

When Halecki is called away by a staff member, the Count turns once more to the hunting scenes. He acknowledges that the engraving depicts a scene of beauty and tradition, but that it no longer has much of a place in the modern world. He thinks about the objects that have outlived their usefulness, like his grandmother's opera glasses. As the Count ponders modernity, he takes one more look at the wall with the etchings. Pressing on a panel, the Count discovers the two rifles that had been hidden there in the event of a duel in the hotel.

*The appearance of the pistols that the Count had mentioned earlier becomes one of many details that Towles introduces early in the narrative and later become important, creating a sense of order within the world he's constructed. This is in step with the Count's philosophy that even little details can have an important role in one's life, which becomes true when he uses the pistols years later. This is also a literal example of the trope of "Chekhov's gun," which is especially fitting for a novel so steeped in Russian literature. "Chekhov's gun" is the idea that the introduction of any element in a story must have a use at some point: "If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there."*

## BOOK 1, ARCHAEOLOGIES

The Count is once again in the hotel bar, performing a magic trick for three of the Bolshoi's newest ballerinas. As he asks one of them to pick a card, he is pulled away by Arkady. Arkady explains that a gentleman (later revealed to be the Count's friend Mishka) had knocked on the suite door of a Bolshevik Secretary. Mishka had been surprised to see the Secretary behind the door and burst into the suite, searching the rooms and discovering the Secretary's wife on the toilet. The Count asks why Arkady is telling him this tale. Arkady explains that it had been the Count's old suite—and that Mishka had been looking for the Count.

*This introduction of Mishka presents some of his characteristics, which will be consistent throughout the novel: his strong-mindedness and passion, his general disregard for decorum, and his eventual disdain for the Bolsheviks. Unlike the Count, Mishka has a hard time adapting to the changing society around him, and insists that the way he does things is the correct way, even when it causes trouble.*

Arkady takes the Count to the lobby and points out the gentleman. The Count immediately recognizes Mikhail Fyodorovich Mindich (Mishka), who is like a brother to him even though they had very different upbringings. While the Count had been raised in a mansion, Mishka grew up in a two-room apartment with his mother. They had met at University when the Count rushed to Mikhail's aid in a fight, and they became fast friends.

*Mishka's friendship becomes even more valuable to the Count now that he has been imprisoned in the Metropol. This is because, as the Count points out later, Mishka becomes one of the last people alive who knew the Count as a young man, and who knew him before his time in the hotel.*

The Count and Mishka (the Count's nickname for Mikhail) retreat to the Count's new room. Mishka notes that the Count didn't like Montaigne's essays, as they are being used to help prop up the Count's desk. The Count asks why Mishka has come. Mishka produces a bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape, and the Count, now understanding why he's come, brings Mishka back into his secret study.

*Mishka is just as much a part of the Count's family as any biological relative, demonstrated by the fact that he has brought the bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape in order to continue a tradition that the Count's family has had for many years.*

Mishka thinks back to the summers when he would go to visit the Count's family estate. The Countess enjoyed Mishka's and the Count's discourse questioning the standing of the church or the ruling class. Then the two friends would go in search of Helena, where the Count would tell her ridiculous tales of what had happened to him at school or on the train home. Helena, like the other members of the Count's family, would often ask what was to become of the Count. Mishka thinks that those summers were idyllic, but that they belonged in the past with outmoded traditions and the servitude of the lower class.

*In relaying some of the Count and Mishka's boyhood antics, it is clear that the two men's political leanings were not very different. However, it is perhaps easier for Mishka to accept the Russian Revolution because it did not come at the detriment of himself and his family, like it did for the Count. Additionally, it is notable that even at a young age, many of the Count's family members felt that he lacked purpose, playing into the idea that it is only through his time in the hotel that he is able to find meaning in his life.*

Mishka picks up a photo on the Count's bookcase, which contains a picture of the Grand Duke when he signed the treaty that ended the Russo-Japanese War. He thinks back to 1910, when he first witnessed the Rostov family's tradition of gathering on the tenth anniversary of a family member's death and raising a glass of Châteauneuf-du-Pape. At that time, the Grand Duke had raised a glass to the Count's late parents. Interrupting Mishka's reverie, the Count hands him a glass, and they toast to the Grand Duke, whom Mishka describes with reverence as "a man of another time."

*Despite Mishka's belief that the aristocracy and its traditions had largely been outdated, this does not mean that one should forget them entirely or that there are not elements of history that deserve respect. This becomes central to Mishka's struggle with change in the novel, when he feels that old literary forms are being completely eradicated by the Bolsheviks simply because they predated the Soviet Union.*

Later in the evening, Mishka tells the Count about the upcoming congress of RAPP, the Russian Association of Proletarian writers. Mishka conveys his excitement about how they will forge a new style of poetry for the age. Mishka compares the ages of poetry to the Stone, Bronze, and Iron ages of history. He says that they have now entered the age of Steel—exemplified by the Shukhov Radio Tower, which can broadcast information for miles. Mishka says that poetry is also keeping up with this age, that the new poetry will become an art of action.

*At this point in Mishka's character arc, he is still very excited for the changes that are occurring in his art form, and he is excited to be a part of the association that is forging a new school of poetry. His argument that art and culture should mirror a society in progress is impeded, however, when the Bolsheviks start to censor and curtail his art form.*

The Count is glad to hear Mishka speak so passionately, because he always worried that Mishka was out of step with the times. Now, he sees, Mishka is finally in the right place at the right time. When the twice-tolling clock strikes twelve, Mishka and the Count toast not only to the Grand Duke but also to Helena and the Countess, to Russia and the Rostov estate, to poetry and any other worthy thing they can think of.

*The Count's happiness is perhaps premature. Though Mishka is finally aligned with some of the political leanings of society as a whole (and no longer has to publish poems under someone else's name, for example), the changes in this society are so rapid that he quickly falls out of step, and unlike the Count, is unable to adapt to those changes.*

## BOOK 1, ADVENT

In late December, the Count notices a draft coming from an unattended coatroom as he walks to dinner. Overcome with curiosity, he steps inside and examines the array of coats, noting the smells of perfume or the smoke of a fireplace. He reminisces about how he and Helena would venture out on Christmas Eve, braving the cold to visit neighbors and enjoy feasts and fireplaces. On the way home, they would listen to the bells pealing from the Church of the Ascension.

*Many of the chapters in the first book of the novel include flashbacks such as this (and the one in the previous chapter, as another example). These flashbacks demonstrate how the Count is still mired in the past and upset about the direction of the future. As the novel goes on, these flashbacks grow fewer and fewer as the Count finds more and more joy and purpose in his present life.*

The Count contrasts this memory with the memory of his return from Paris in 1918, when he had come upon the same church. The Bolsheviks heaved the bells from the Church one by one, presumably to reclaim the metal and manufacture artillery. The coatroom attendant returns and shakes the Count from his memory.

*This memory expands on the criticism of the Bolsheviks. In a later chapter, the narrator explains that people struggle to find places to pray because so many churches have been destroyed, making the case that some of the new regime's progress actually comes at a cost for the general public.*

The Count goes to the Piazza, and is a bit disappointed to find it undecorated for Christmas. He is cheered, however, when he sees Nina at her usual table, and that she has ordered a tower of ice creams for dessert. The Count asks if she is excited to begin school in January; she remarks that even though everyone says they enjoyed school, she is not looking forward to it.

*The Count continues to take on a fatherly role with Nina. When she goes to school, however, she will follow the pattern of most children and start to grow out of her childhood habits and playmates, leaving the Count once again without a friend.*

The Count tells Nina that school will broaden her horizons; Nina counters by saying that travel would broaden her horizons more effectively. She wonders why people would rather listen to *Scheherazade*—an opera she had attended the night before—than actually go to Arabia. The Count concedes that she makes a good argument.

*While the Count concedes the argument, he does not point out that the new Soviet regime has made it impossible for its citizens to travel, as it refuses to allow any migration in or out of the country. This is another way in which progress in Russia has come at the expense of certain freedoms.*

The Count moves on to say how fortunate he feels to have become Nina's friend. He gives her a Christmas present: his grandmother's opera glasses. She is surprised by this gesture, and admits to him that he knows her better than anyone. As the two say goodnight, Nina gives the Count a gift in return, but says he must not open it until midnight.

*By giving Nina his grandmother's glasses, he not only reminds her of her interest in princesses, but the glasses also serve as a kind of heirloom from a man who has lost all of his biological family.*

After Nina leaves the Piazza, the Count notices a young couple at a table nearby who seem to be on a first date. The woman appears very serious; the man seems nervous and trying to impress her. Just as the man starts to form a good impression by revealing that his grandmother had taken him to *The Nutcracker* every year, the Bishop interrupts and asks if they are ready to order, which they clearly are not. The Count is furious at his lack of tact.

*The Count continues to note how unaware the Bishop is of the needs of his customers. The Count comes to associate this flaw with the Bolsheviks because the Bishop received his job through friends in the party. The Count's criticisms and knowledge help his own success when he eventually takes a job as a waiter in the Boyarsky years later.*

The couple orders two bowls of the Latvian stew, and the Bishop asks if they would like wine to go with it. When the man struggles with choosing a wine, the Bishop suggests a wine that the Count knows is both too expensive and will clash with the dinner they have selected. He thinks to himself that there is no substitute for experience, and leans over to suggest a different wine. He then orders the same dish as the couple. As they eat, they raise a glass to him in gratitude and kinship.

*When the Count corrects the Bishop, his dislike for the man becomes mutual. The Bishop, in turn, views the Count's corrections as elitism This incident later causes the Bishop to have the wine labels removed from all of the hotel's wine bottles, an act that disturbs the Count greatly because he views it as an attack on individualism and history.*

The Count returns to the lobby, noticing a set of musicians. He recognizes one of them as former prince Nikolai Petrov. The Prince tells the Count about the whereabouts of various relatives who have left Russia, and then laments that it is not easy for people like himself and the Count to find work. The Prince says he has to dash off, but that perhaps he and the Count could meet for a drink on the upcoming Saturday.

*The Count sees how others of his class have been able to cope with the changes in society. The Count is pleased to see that the former Prince has been able to find a job as a musician and feel like he is leading a purposeful life, which is something that the Count is also eventually able to do.*

In a footnote, the narrator notes that many names in Russian novels are notorious for their length and that it is often difficult for readers to keep track of characters. The narrator informs the reader that the Prince is a relatively unimportant character and will not keep the appointment with the Count. Instead, on Saturday his room will be searched, and a picture of the Tsar will be found in an old textbook of his. As this is illegal, he will be taken to prison and sentenced to never again set foot in Russia's six largest cities (a punishment called a Minus Six).

*Again, the narrator points out some of the more drastic actions of the Bolsheviks. The discovery of an old picture of the Tsar in a textbook of the Prince's causes him to be arrested, even though it was (presumably) unintentionally kept. This incident illustrates the lengths to which the Bolsheviks will go to literally erase or strike out any evidence whatsoever of the old ways of life.*

The narrator then states that while the Prince is a character that the reader needn't bother to remember, a "round-faced fellow with a receding hairline" in the next chapter will become a very important character.

*The narrator once again hints at the importance of a detail (this time a character) to come, making it seem as though the character is fulfilling a fated purpose in the narrative.*

The Count returns to his room, and, noting that it is only eleven o'clock, he decides to read *A Christmas Carol* until the clock strikes twelve and he can open his present from Nina. The Count's mind wanders to his youth as he remembers his Christmases as a child. He and Helena would wait all night until his father would give the signal to open the drawing room. He would then be enchanted by the tree in the drawing room, the bowls of oranges and candies, and the simplicity of an unexpected gift like a wooden sword that could provide hours of adventure.

*The second Christmas episode that the Count recalls from his past illustrates how loving his family had been, and how their absence has left him with an additional emptiness that adds to his feeling of being erased and forgotten. Thus, he attempts to fill this emptiness with his friendships with Mishka, Nina, and later Anna and other members of the hotel staff.*

When the clock chimes midnight, the Count sets his book aside and opens Nina's gift. Inside lies a smaller box, then another and another until the sixth box is no larger than a matchbox. Inside it, the Count finds Nina's **passkey**.

*Nina's gift to the Count not only communicates the depth of their friendship, but also symbolizes his newfound freedom in the hotel.*

The Count returns to *A Christmas Carol*, reaching the part where Scrooge meets the Ghost of Christmas Present. He had forgotten the visit Scrooge pays to a family of miners in a ramshackle hut, and then another visit to two lighthouse keepers, and then another on the deck of a ship. The Count is warmed by reading of these visits, or perhaps by the chance meeting with the Prince, or by Nina's friendship, he thinks. He falls asleep with a great sense of well-being.

*Even though the Count is warmed by "Christmas Present" both in A Christmas Carol and in his own life, the future seems more ominous, as the narrator has already indicated that the Count's encounters with both of these people will soon take a turn for the worse. The Prince, as the narrator has explained, will be arrested, while Nina, having gifted her passkey to the Count, will soon stop going on adventures with him because she becomes so immersed in school.*

The narrator warns, however, that had the Count looked into his future, he would have seen that less than four years later, the Count would climb to the roof of the hotel in order to throw himself into the street below.

*The narrator confirms this ominous feeling in explaining that the Count will soon try to kill himself. Once again, this provides the narrative with a clear sense of destiny, because the future seems so fixed.*

## BOOK 2, 1923, AN ACTRESS, AN APPARITION, AN APIARY

At five o'clock on June 21st, 1923, one year since the Count's imprisonment, the Count ponders how to celebrate the anniversary. He thinks about men in prison cells who carve notches into wood to mark the days, in order to note the year of hardship they have endured. Feeling a sense of survival, the Count dons his finest smoking jacket and heads downstairs to meet Mishka.

*While the Count has not endured the hardship of being trapped in a prison, he has certainly had to undergo the increased burden of a restless mind; one that will continue to grow through the coming years up until the incident on the roof.*

Upon reaching the lobby, the Count notices a willowy figure (later introduced as Anna Urbanova) coming through the hotel doors. She is a woman in her mid-twenties with auburn hair and a striking presence. She attracts attention quickly, particularly because of the two massive hunting dogs she has on a leash. They tug every which way while she tries to keep them under control.

*Anna's description at her introduction, as the narrator explains later, places her at the height of her first wave of fame. Though her self-confidence never wavers, over time she gains a humility from being forced to adapt and revive her career several times.*

At that moment, the one-eyed cat appears, and the dogs leap out of Anna's grip. They quickly knock over a lamp and a standing ashtray. The cat reverses course and the dogs skid across the floor into another guest. After watching this chaos for a few moments, the Count whistles and the dogs heel at his feet.

*The dogs that Anna is carrying are another detail that lead to this chance meeting in the Count's life. Without their presence, he might never have had reason to meet and begin a relationship with Anna Urbanova.*

Anna thanks the Count, apologizing that the dogs are not well-behaved. The Count contradicts her, saying that it is the dogs' handling that is at fault. Anna's tone becomes noticeably sharper as she remarks that some of the best-bred dogs belong on the shortest leashes; the Count rejoins that the best-bred dogs belong in the surest hands.

*Ironically, the dogs' unruliness gives the Count a negative first impression of Anna, but later on she is able to change his mind. Their matching of wits in an argument is one of the reasons that they become such close friends and lovers.*

One hour later, the Count sits in the hotel bar waiting for Mishka when he notices Anna once again, sitting with a "round-faced fellow with a receding hairline." He meets her gaze, and the two pretend that they have not seen each other.

*In the prior chapter, the narrator pointed out the importance of the round-faced fellow. However, the character will not actually become narratively significant until much later, again creating a sense of fate in the novel.*

Mishka arrives in the bar, but explains that he can only stay for a drink, not for dinner. The Count is disappointed, but understands that Mishka is here on important business with the Russian Association of Proletarian Writers. Mishka explains how excited he is by the congress's declarations that they are in solidarity with writers, publishers, and editors, but also with the street sweepers and welders, as well.

*As the congress of the RAPP progresses, Mishka is excited that the intentions of poetry are coming in line with his political sensibilities of everyone working together and being equal—values supported by the Bolsheviks.*

Mishka describes a spontaneous poem recited by one of his favorite writers, Mayakovsky. Then, another writer, whom Mishka disliked, had proclaimed that all poets must bow before the haiku. The Count jokes that he is glad Homer wasn't born in Japan.

*Even though the Count and Mishka joke about the future of Russian poetry, Mishka eventually comes to see that there will be limits placed on artistic freedom, and doubts that he can adapt to a censored form of art.*


Mishka laughs and says that he will have to tell the Count's joke to Katerina—another young poet from Kiev. The Count notes that Mishka has been dressing better and grooming his beard, and sees that Katerina might be sparking some interest in his friend. The Count is glad to hear about his friend's happenings, but he is also a bit jealous of his freedom.

*When the narrator ultimately reveals that the Count published "Where Is It Now" to save Mishka's life, moments like this become particularly charged. The Count put himself at risk for his friend, but still cannot help being jealous of the experiences that are unavailable to him.*

Half an hour later, Mishka leaves the bar. As the Count gets up, Audrius beckons him and gives him a note from Anna Urbanova, who he explains is a famous film star. The note reads "Please allow me a second chance at a first impression in suite 208."

*While the Count expresses his jealousy over Mishka's budding romance, little does he know that his fated first encounter with Anna will lead to his own romance.*


The Count arrives at suite 208 and is let in by an older woman, who then steps out of the suite. Anna greets him and introduces herself officially. Room service arrives with a candlelit dinner for two. Anna asks the Count to join her for dinner, and he agrees.

*Anna's directness and her boldness leaves the Count one step behind her for the evening, which both surprises him and causes his admiration for her to grow.*

Anna uncovers their dinner to find one of Emile's signature dishes: whole bass roasted with olives. Before the Count can serve her, Anna quickly debones the fish and prepares two perfect plates. The Count is impressed. Anna explains that she had been raised in a fishing village, and that she would help her father mend his nets at the docks when she was a little girl. The Count inwardly acknowledges the virtues of withholding judgement, considering how much Anna's second impression on him has improved.

*Similar to the way in which the Count admires Emile for his proficiency in cooking, or Andrey for his proficiency in taking care of guests, the Count sees Anna's skill in serving the fish as a quality he associates with etiquette and old-fashioned talents. Additionally, hearing about her childhood also surprises him and makes him more and more attracted to her.*

The Count speaks a bit about his own childhood. The province in which he grew up, Nizhny Novgorod, was the apple capital of the world, and he would eat apples constantly. He tells Anna that according to lore, deep in the forest lies a tree that grew apples as black as coal, and if one could eat this apple, one could start life anew. She asks him if he would start life anew. He says that he would not want to relinquish his memories: of his sister Helena, of his home, and of this night. Anna stands, takes him by the collar and kisses him.

*The Count opens up to Anna in a way that he has not with any other character in the novel thus far. Anna's question regarding whether he would begin life anew also marks an interesting turning point for the Count. He says that he would not want to relinquish his memories of his home and his family, which makes sense for a man stuck in the past. But in saying that he also does not want to forget this night, the Count implies that he would not change his imprisonment, which led him to meeting Anna.*

The Count is both bewildered and excited by being seduced in this way, as he did not anticipate any of the events of the night. He had been surprised by the dinner, by Anna's stories, and by her fish preparing skills, and the surprises continue. He is surprised to find her back decorated with freckles, surprised to find himself on his back as the two make love, and awestruck when she tells him close the curtains as he leaves.

*Anna's kiss initiates a longstanding relationship between her and the Count, one to which they return every time Anna stays in the Metropol. In this way, their relationship grows more and more like a partnership (in place of a traditional marriage, which would be difficult for the Count to maintain).*

The Count closes the curtains, hangs Anna's blouse in the closet, and shuts the door softly behind him. As he walks down the empty corridor, the Count feels like a ghost. He wonders why ghosts roam the halls at night rather than during the day, and comes to the conclusion that they do not want to see the living. At least, interjects the narrator, that is what he tells himself. The Count runs into the one-eyed cat on the way up and attempts to tuck his shirt in, embarrassed. He worries that instead of etching his mark on the wall for his first year, the wall had "etched its mark on him."

*Even with this newfound relationship, the Count's late-night exile causes him to liken himself to a ghost. The remark that he feels like the wall had etched its mark on him mirrors the earlier counsel of the Grand Duke to make sure that the Count's circumstances did not master him. Thus, Anna's self-assuredness, purpose, and vitality only serve to make the Count feel more invisible, because he has none of those things.*

Just before the Count opens the door to his rooms, he feels a slight summer breeze. Intrigued, he walks to the end of the hall and discovers a ladder to a hatch in the roof. The Count climbs up is amazed at seeing the view of Moscow from this vantage point.

*The chance of the open door and the breeze leads the Count to the roof, where he is able to be outside again for the first time in years, allowing him to feel a little less confined.*

One of the hotel handymen, Abram, greets the Count, startling him. Abram makes him coffee and shows him his apiary. The bees are hard at work making honey, and Abram offers the Count a taste. The Count is amazed to taste a hint of lilacs, which Abram explains comes from the flowers in the Alexander Gardens. The Count asks how far the bees go, and Abram says that a bee's only limit is the ocean. The Count explains that his childhood home had lots of apple blossoms; Abram says he had been raised in the same province. The two men continue to speak about their childhood as the sun rises.

*While the discovery of the roof eventually leads to the Count's attempt to commit suicide, it also leads him to the person who ultimately saves his life: Abram, who happens to be from the same province as the Count. In making this new friend, the Count is able to relate to someone who shares some of his childhood experiences, which has become difficult for him to do with the loss of his family.*

## BOOK 2, ADDENDUM

Anna had watched with satisfaction as the Count hung her blouse in the closet, but on her trip back to St. Petersburg, it troubles her. Gradually, she finds it infuriating that he would be so bold as to hang her blouse in the closet.

*Anna's fury perhaps stems from the fact that she values her independence, and is frustrated that the Count thinks she would have to rely on him to take care of herself. This may be one of the reasons they never develop a traditional relationship, despite their love for each other.*

Anna's fury grows to the point where one night, returning from a party, she throws her red silk gown on the floor and instructs the staff not to pick it up. Every night for two weeks, she continues to throw her clothing on the floor until her dresser, Olga, tells Anna that she is acting like a child and needs to pick up her clothes. In response, Anna picks up twenty outfits and throws them out the window into the street below. When Olga tells her that the neighbors will be entertained to see evidence of her petulance, Anna responds that she doesn't care about her neighbors. But at two in the morning, Anna comes down the stairs and picks up her clothes.

*This fury reveals some of Anna's stubbornness, which perhaps derives from her status as a famous actress in her mid-twenties. When Anna reappears in the novel several years later, she has come to realize how important the public's perceptions of her are. Regardless of her talent, she must adapt to changes in public opinion in order to continue her career.*

## BOOK 2, 1924, ANONYMITY

The narrator discusses some of the advantages of invisibility, and how many stories have centered on heroes having this power. But fewer tales have been told about invisibility as a curse. The narrator states that Anna cast just such a curse on the Count after their date in 1923. In the weeks that follow, the Count notices that he seems to be disappearing from view of other guests or going unnoticed by staff members. One day the Count crosses the lobby and it takes a full minute for Vasily to notice him at the concierge desk.

*The Count's downward spiral into erasure continues. His imprisonment, coupled with a lack of purpose, has seemingly rendered him invisible to other people. He no longer holds sway as a guest and a member of the nobility, but he has also not yet adapted to the changes in his life and taken up a job in the hotel, becoming a peer to the staff.*

The Count asks Vasily where Nina is. He responds that she is in the card room, and the Count goes to seek her out. He finds her sitting at the card table and attempts to get her to go on a new adventure with him, to no avail. She is singularly focused on a math project: making a list of all prime numbers.

*Even the Count's new preoccupation with going on adventures with Nina fails him, as she is growing up and has other priorities like school. Unlike Nina, the Count's life, has no real progress to make in its current state.*

The Count begins to help Nina, looking over her list. He points out that 1,173 is not a prime number because its digits add to a number divisible by three, and therefore it is divisible by three. She is astounded by this simple trick and goes over her completed papers.

*The Count still takes the time to help Nina with her problem, demonstrating that he is still a good friend to her, and a kind of fatherly figure providing wisdom to help her with her schoolwork.*

The Count leaves Nina to her work and decides to read the paper before his dinner with Mishka, but he is surprised by the repetitiveness of the newspaper. He thinks to himself that the Bolsheviks dwell on the same subject matter every day, with such a narrow set of views and the same vocabulary that he feels he has read it all before. He suddenly realizes that he *has* read it all before, because it is yesterday's paper.

*The Count critiques the unyielding single-mindedness of the Bolsheviks before realizing that he is reading yesterday's paper. The Count is literally stuck in the past, where without new experiences he is doomed to repeat the same activities over and over again.*

The Count tosses the paper aside and looks at the clock, seeing that Mishka is now fifteen minutes late for dinner. Unlike the Count, Mishka has been busy after the 1923 RAPP congress, as was commissioned to edit and annotate an anthology of Russian short stories. Additionally, Mishka's interest in Katerina has blossomed into a full romance.

*Both Mishka's business and his romance are once again held up in contrast to the Count, who has neither romance nor a busy life to attend to. Though he watches events happen around him, he does very little to change or be a part of them.*

Arkady passes the Count in the lobby before realizing that he has a message for the Count from Mishka: Katerina is under the weather, and thus Mishka will be returning to St. Petersburg early and will not be joining his friend for dinner. The Count tries to mask his disappointment, but realizes that Arkady has already turned his attention to another guest.

*The Count's invisibility continues due to his stagnation, as Arkady does not notice him at the beginning of their interaction, and quickly moves away from him when he has finished relaying Mishka's message.*

The Count goes to the Boyarsky alone and finds he must wait a few minutes for his table. The USSR has recently been recognized by Germany, England, and Italy, and so the Metropol is becoming busier and busier with foreign guests. The Count notices a man with a pointed beard march down the hallway with purpose, and Andrey signals for a waiter to seat him immediately.

*Having firmly established the Soviet Union, and now being recognized by some of the larger governments in Europe, the Bolsheviks in turn adapt to their newfound recognition by opening the country's doors to foreigners.*

The Count asks Andrey if the man with the beard is that same Commissar who had been in a fistfight in the Boyarsky with a Belarusian man a few days prior. Andrey realizes quickly that the table towards which the waiter is heading with the Commissar is next to a table where the Belarusian man is sitting. Andrey redirects them and thanks the Count for his tact and quick thinking.

*The Count's quick thinking with the Commissar and the Belarusian man not only prefigures the story of his proficiency with seating arrangements, but also foreshadows his eventual ability to adapt that proficiency when he takes a waitering job in the Boyarsky.*

The narrator explains that the Count has been a master of seating tables since he was fifteen. He used to help his grandmother plan her dinner arrangements, where considerations of various family feuds and eccentricities were essential. The Count had labored over these seating puzzles, telling Helena that if Paris had not been seated next to Helen, the Trojan War would never have happened. But the Count also thinks to himself that now the old Russian aristocrats have wound up just like Hector and Achilles.

*The anecdote about the Count's seating skill represents another detail that Towles introduces early and will later become important—especially at the climactic dinner of the novel, where the Count is able to report on the seating arrangement and interpret who will become the next head of government after Stalin.*

After waiting a few minutes, the Count sits at his table and selects the osso buco (a cut of meat) for the evening. He is shocked, however, at the appearance of his waiter—the Bishop, who has been promoted from the Piazza to the Boyarsky. The Bishop seems to understand the Count's dismay, but the Count tries to be gracious. The Bishop asks how the Count wants his osso buco, which the Count finds to be a ridiculous question, considering it is a dish of stewed meat. Additionally, though the Count orders a very specific wine, the Bishop continues to ask him whether he will be having red or white.

*To the Count, the promotion of the Bishop to the Boyarsky represents the decline of some of the values that once belonged to the aristocracy. The Count identifies the Bishop as an ignorant, thoughtless Bolshevik with neither a sense of etiquette nor the ability to anticipate and interpret the needs of a customer. This perception of the Bishop is exacerbated by what the Count believes to be idiotic questions, given the context.*

When the Count tries to specify that his wine selection *is* a red wine, the Bishop explains that there are only two wine options: red or white. The Count summons Andrey and asks how the Bishop came to work at the Boyarsky. Andrey explains that he was promoted by Mr. Halecki, likely due to the fact that he has a friend with some influence.

*It is ironic that the Bishop has been promoted to the Boyarsky due to a relationship with a high-ranking party member, because the ideals of the party are meant to treat everyone equally—perhaps implying that while the Bishop espouses some Bolshevik ideals, he is mostly just self-interested.*

When the Count tries to explain his trouble with ordering wine, Andrey brings the Count down to the wine cellar. Andrey shows him that the labels have been removed from every bottle in the cellar. Andrey explains that a complaint was filed with the Commissar of Food, explaining that the wine list runs counter to the ideals of the Revolution. Thus, the Boyarsky will serve only red and white with a single price in order to equalize the wines.

*The removal of the wine labels (particularly when it's revealed that it was the Bishop's decision) serves as one example of the Bolsheviks trying to eradicate the vestiges of the aristocracy for purely symbolic—and in this case petty and spiteful—reasons.*

The Count asks who filed the complaint, and Andrey states that it may have originated with the Bishop. The Count remembers the incident at Christmas when he had corrected the Bishop's wine recommendation, realizing that this action may have been taken in revenge. When Andrey turns to go back to the Boyarsky, the Count observes that each bottle is unique—an "ultimate distillation of time and place; a poetic expression of individuality itself." The Count grows depressed, realizing that like the wines, he has been cast into anonymity; that his traditions have become a relic of the past.

*The Count here views the wine as a symbol of individuality, and that like the wine, he is slowly losing his own identity. This incident hits him hard particularly because this political symbol also deals him a personal slight: he had prided himself on knowing the nuances of individual wines, and he had learned how to pair wines with various meals as a part of his upbringing.*

The narrator explains that usually it takes generations for traditions to fade, and so individuals rarely feel that their entire way of life is obsolete. But political turmoil can cause an abrupt evolution, and the Count is struck by the realization that the Bolsheviks will not rest until every vestige of his way of life has been "uprooted, shattered, or erased."

*The points the narrator makes here also echo the story that the Count tells later about the moths of Manchester, whose evolution was abruptly changed with the invention of factories. At this point in the story, however, the Count does not feel as though he will be able to adapt to the changes occurring around him.*

Just as the Count turns to leave, he takes one more moment to search among the bottles. He systematically scans the shelves until he comes to a stop. He selects a bottle among the thousands, holding it up and smiling at the two crossed keys embossed on the glass: the insignia of the Châteauneuf-du-Pape, which his family would use to toast late relatives. The Count decides that on June 22nd, 1926—the tenth anniversary of his sister Helena's death—he will drink to her, and then kill himself.

*Even though the Count decides to commit suicide as a result of this incident, it is notable that Towles gives a glimmer of hope for individuality and identity. The fact that the Châteauneuf-du-Pape is still recognizable because of the engraving on its bottle foreshadows the fact that the Count will also retain his sense of self, even though the society around him is bent on destroying his way of life.*

## BOOK 2, 1926, ADIEU

Standing at his old window in suite 317, the Count thinks to himself that one must eventually choose a philosophy that helps one make sense of life. For most Russians, their philosophies had been found within the Church, but many of the Count's schoolmates turned their back on the Church and instead turned to Darwin or Nietzsche or Hegel. The Count instead had always leaned heavily on the influence of weather: snows, summers, clouds, rains, and "the reshaping of destinies by the slightest change in the thermometer."

*In this chapter, the Count introduces his guiding philosophy, which plays into a very broad theme of the novel: that fate is built from a series of small, chance details. In a way, Towles also affirms his own belief in this philosophy, at least as far as the narrative is concerned, because so many of the novel's details play a large part in its outcome later on.*

The Count gives an example as he looks out his window: only three weeks before, the square had been empty. With a slight increase in temperature, the trees began to blossom, and couples began to sit on the benches. History could also be transformed by temperature: the Count cites Napoleon's disastrous attempt to invade Russia in winter as an example.

*The Count gives a few examples of his philosophy of chance occurrences: slight changes in temperature can have a large effect on the atmosphere of a city, or even the progress of a country.*

The Count gives a final example. When he and his friends had been invited to the birthday party of Princess Novobaczky, the temperature dropped just below freezing on the night of the party. A cold fall rain then became a magical snowfall just as the Count set out. On the way, the Count's carriage was run from the road by a young officer of the Hussars. The Count arrived late, at the same time as a friend. He then watched as his friend got out of his carriage, only to slip promptly on a patch of ice. The two then made their way inside.

*The Count then gives a more personal example, the details of which (the weather at the party, the friend who slips on a patch of ice, the appearance of the young officer) will not only have consequences through this chapter, but also have a large effect on the circumstances surrounding the death of the Count's sister and resulting decisions he makes for the rest of his life.*

When the Count and his friend entered the dining room, they discovered that the Count had been placed just to the right of the princess, while the young officer who had run him off the road was seated on her left. The officer clearly fancied himself the primary recipient of her attention; however, he was quickly distracted by the English roast that the chef had prepared. And so, the Count entertained the princess instead.

*Two details here also play into the outcome of the night: first, the luck of the Count to be seated next to the princess, and second, the officer's distraction due to the delicious food that had been prepared for the evening, leaving the Count to form a relationship with her instead.*

At the end of the dinner, when the orchestra began in the ballroom, the officer held out his hand for the princess. At that moment, the Count's friend reappeared, and said that due to his fall, he'd rather play a game of cards than dance. The Count agreed to play with him, but the officer also overheard this exchange and joined the game as well, passing the princess on to another gentleman.

*Here, Towles starts to weave the different details in order to show how one affects another: the slip on the ice has led to a game of chance instead of dancing, as well as to the officer once again shunning the princess.*

After two hours, the officer had lost one thousand rubles to the Count. The Count graciously decided to tear up his marker and call it even in the princess's honor. The story made its way around the ballroom, and the princess sought out the Count in order to thank him for his gallantry. The Count then waltzed with the princess, and, when it became too warm, took her arm and escorted her to the terrace.

*Here Towles highlights how there were several dimensions to fate's apparent conspiracy on this night: not only the chance of the ballroom being so warm or the rain turning to a snowfall to allow the Count and the princess to steal away outside, but also the luck of the Count winning a thousand rubles from the officer.*

The Count sums up the events, saying that if the roast had not been perfect, the Count's friend had not fallen on the ice, the card game had not been played, and the ballroom fires not been stoked so high, he would never have ended up in the arms of the princess. The Count also thinks, ominously, that the events following that evening would also never have come to pass, but he is interrupted in his thoughts.

*As the Count has mentioned previously in the novel, fate would not have the reputation it does if things turned out the way one expects. So, while this evening had certainly turned out in the Count's favor, it began a chain of events, which he describes later in the novel, whereby he misses the death of his sister.*


The residents of suite 317 interrupt the Count's musings at the window, asking who he is. He quickly lies that he is from the drapers, says that everything seems in order, and leaves. He returns to the lobby and asks Vasily about Nina's whereabouts; Vasily responds that Nina is in the ballroom.

*The fact that the Count has once again returned to suite 317 demonstrates how he is still somewhat stuck in the past, trying to relive the experiences he had as a free man and a member of the upper class.*


Now thirteen, Nina has given up many of her favorite pastimes in exchange for books and professors. When the Count finds her in the ballroom, she and a boy named Boris are testing Newton's calculation of gravity and Galileo's principle that objects with different masses fall at the same speed. The Count watches as they drop a coin and an egg from the ballroom balcony. The Count asks if Nina can join him for dinner. When she says she has another experiment to run in the Red Square, he is disappointed, but leaves her to her work.

*The interaction with Nina is also laden with small, symbolic details that tie into the Count's imminent attempt to jump off of the roof. When she does not join him for dinner, he grows even more lonely and depressed. Though Towles does not reveal at what point the Count decides that jumping from the roof will be his method of killing himself, the sight of various objects being dropped from the ballroom balcony could serve as inspiration, or at least foreshadowing.*


At ten o'clock, the Count is finishing dinner and a bottle of White at the Boyarsky. That morning, he had set his financial accounts in order, paid a visit to the barber, and written a letter to Mishka. He donned his burgundy smoking jacket and in its pocket placed a gold coin with instructions for his funeral. He had asked to be buried in his family's plot at Idlehour, in the suit that he has laid out on his bed.

*In a chapter that is so concerned with fate, it is ironic that in preparing for his death the Count tries to have as much control over what will happen to him as possible. This instinct makes sense, as his primary motivation for committing suicide is a lack of control over his life and the changes occurring around him.*

The Count takes comfort that everything is in order, and also that the world will continue without him. The night before, he had seen Vasily produce a map of Moscow for a guest, and he had not recognized more than half of the street names on the map. The blue and gold lobby of the Bolshoi had been painted over; a famous statue of Gogol had been replaced with one of Gorky.

*The changes the Count brings up demonstrates some of the transformations going on in Moscow that he feels are out of his control, and thus why he feels it is so important for him to provide instructions following his death so that he can at least feel in control of his own fate.*

The changes in the hotel have been just as striking as those outside of them. The staffing trend of hiring inexperienced waiters at the Boyarsky has continued, Marina now has a junior seamstress, and Nina is moving with her father to an apartment for Party officials. Mishka had followed Katerina back to Kiev. Abram, the handyman with whom the Count still occasionally shares a cup of coffee on the roof, is soon to retire.

*The Count observes how many of his friends are progressing, changing, or moving away and continuing with their lives. By contrast, the Count feels immobile in a world whose values are becoming at odds with his own priorities.*

The Count remembers the first night of his house arrest, when he had thought about the Grand Duke's advice to master his circumstances. But now he thinks of another story the Grand Duke had told him, in which an Imperial Russian Navy ship was struck by a mine when it was returning home during the Russo-Japanese war. Even though the battle had been won and the ship's Admiral could see the shores of Russia, the Admiral had ascended to the helm and gone down with his ship.

*In contrast to the advice that a person should master his circumstances, the Count uses the second story about the Admiral to argue (to himself) that when circumstances have made life untenable, a person should remain true to himself while reconciling with death. In this metaphor, the Count is the admiral, and the ship is the aristocracy as a whole. When the Count gives up his notions of leading an aristocratic life, he is able to escape this fate.*

The Count goes to the Shalyapin for a final glass of brandy. As he drinks, he overhears a conversation between a young Brit and a German traveler. The British man is very enthusiastic about Russia, but the German man argues that the only contribution Russia had made to the West was the invention of vodka. The German says that he will buy a glass of vodka for anyone who can name three more contributions.

*The challenge that the German man makes to anyone listening hits the Count in particular because, in spite of the Bolsheviks and the changes in Russian society, the Count still bears a deep love for his country that becomes an important reason he wishes to stay alive.*

The Count steps in, taking up the challenge. He issues his own challenge: that for each contribution he names, the three men will drink a glass of vodka together. Audrius lays out the glasses for him. The Count names the first: writers Chekhov and Tolstoy. He says that Chekhov is precise, while Tolstoy's narratives are unchallenged in scope as they span from the parlor to the battlefield. They drink.

*The three contributions that the Count names are in many ways a repudiation of the Bolsheviks. Chekhov and Tolstoy are both writers entrenched in the time of the aristocracy—and eventually Mishka's editor will even ask him to censor one of Chekhov's lines.*

The second contribution, the Count continues, is act one, scene one of *The Nutcracker*. He argues that Tchaikovsky captures Christmas better than any other composer, and that every European child imagines Christmas as it is depicted in the ballet. They drink another glass.

*The second contribution the Count names is also deeply rooted in an aristocratic tradition, depicting a wealthy young girl celebrating a lavish Christmas.*

For the third contribution, the Count simply gestures to a waiter that has appeared with a silver platter (conjured via a quick note to Audrius he had written on the back of a napkin). The waiter reveals a serving of caviar along with blini and sour cream. The German smiles at the appearance of the food, and puts his head down, too drunk to take the third drink.

*The simple trick that the Count is able to pull off in summoning the food for the gentlemen at the bar not only helps him win him the challenge, but it also proves how much he is attempting to be in control of his final night.*

The Brit is impressed at the magical conjuration of the food, and asks who the Count is. The Count introduces himself, and the Brit introduces himself in turn as Charles Abernathy, presumptive heir to the Earl of Westmorland. Charles comments on the political state of Russia and asks if the Count tried to leave after the Revolution. The Count explains that he came back because of the Revolution, as he had been in Paris due to certain "circumstances."

*The Count opens up to Charles because of their shared background in the upper class of their respective countries. After the Count explains how he missed his sister's death, it becomes clearer why he came back to Russia during the revolution—because he feared he might miss seeing his grandmother for a final time as well.*

Charles is curious about the Count's "circumstances" in Paris, and the Count retells the story of the Princess Novobaczky's twenty-first birthday. This time, he continues the story. Seven months later, the Count had returned to the family estate and finds his sister Helena with the young Hussar officer. He had sought out the Count's sister and courted her in revenge. The Count felt he could not tell his sister the truth.

*The Count continues the story he told earlier in the chapter, reinforcing the long chain of details that seemed to conspire against him: had he not humiliated the officer and courted the princess, the officer would never have tried to seduce the Count's sister, Helena.*

The Count waited, hoping that the officer would slip up and reveal his true nature. On Helena's twentieth birthday, the officer returned to the estate. When she rushed to meet him, she found that he had raped her handmaiden. Helena collapsed in a chair, while the officer smiled and told the Count to call it even in honor of Helena's birthday.

*Even the officer's actions highlight the importance of small details, as he waits until Helena's birthday (as a parallel to the princess's birthday) to carry out his crime. He provides another parallel in using the Count's own words during their card game (to "call it even") in a sarcastic, cruel way.*

The Count had then taken up a pistol from the wall and followed the officer outside. The officer started to drive away at full speed, and the Count raised his gun and pulled the trigger, knocking the officer off of his carriage. Charles asks if he killed the man. The Count says yes—but he clarifies that the officer died eight months later. The Count had only wounded the officer, but he returned to the war without the use of his right arm. Eight months later, he was knocked from his horse and killed with a bayonet.

*The action of shooting the officer is not only borne of chance occurrences, but also serves as a link in a chain of fateful events to come in the future: causing the officer's death eight months later, causing the Count to miss his sister's death, and also causing him to refuse to take up arms in the Revolution (which he explains later on in the novel).*

The Count concludes his story: after he injured the officer, he was sent to Paris by his grandmother as punishment. But while he was in Paris—exactly ten years ago—Helena had died of scarlet fever, and the Count was unable to be by her side.

*Whereas fate had been on the Count's side at the beginning of the story, it makes for a tragic conclusion when he misses Helena's death. The Count's story also explains why friendships are so important to him, as none of his family members remain in his life.*

Later, shortly before midnight, the Count climbs to the roof. He looks out on the city for a final time. He thinks that for as long as men have lived, there have been men in exile, but the Russians were the first people to send men into exile at home. When one exiles a man into his own country, there is no way to start again.

*The Count thinks here that being imprisoned at home makes him unable to start over, but it is really his pride and the fact that he is holding on to his past that is not allowing him to adapt to his new life.*

The Count takes out the Châteauneuf-du-Pape and pours a glass. He raises it to Helena and drinks. He approaches the parapet and says goodbye to his country. But just as he is about to jump, Abram interrupts him. He excitedly tells the Count that the bees have returned, and hands him a spoonful of fresh honey. The Count quickly recognizes the taste of apple, and realizes that the bees had traveled all the way to Nizhny Novgorod—his home province.

*For a final time in the chapter, fate intervenes. Abram's appearance with honey that has come from flowers in his home province saves the Count's life, and (perhaps subconsciously) spurs him to want to eventually return to his home province, as he does at the end of the novel.*

At nearly two in the morning, the Count says goodnight to Abram and returns to his bedroom. He takes the gold coin from his pocket and replaces it inside the Grand Duke's desk. The following evening at six, when the Boyarsky opens, the Count walks through the doors and asks if Andrey can spare a moment.

*In order for the Count to lead a meaningful life, he does return to the advice his godfather gave him and seek to become the master of his own circumstances. The next chapters reveal that the Count becomes a waiter at the Boyarsky, relinquishing the last relic of his aristocratic life and taking a paying job for the first time.*

## BOOK 3, 1930

Six years after the Count's failed suicide attempt, he climbs from his bed and makes himself a cup of coffee. He takes out a pitcher of cream, two biscuits, and a piece of fruit. He is cleaning up his breakfast when he notices an envelope on the floor, which must have been slipped under his door in the middle of the night. The Count picks up the envelope, on the front of which is written "Four o'clock?" He looks inside and exclaims "*Mon Dieu*."

*This account of the Count's new morning routine contrasts with the Count's first morning of house arrest. Before, he had been served by the hotel's staff and had been unsure of what to do with his extensive time. Now, he prepares his own breakfast and is juggling many different appointments and responsibilities.*

## BOOK 3, ARACHNE'S ART

The narrator explains that the job of the historians is to look back on a period and identify various dates that represent turning points, like January 3, 1928, with the launch of the First Five Year Plan, or November 17, 1929, when Stalin paved the way for a return to autocracy. But those dates, the narrator explains, did not throw Moscow into upheaval. The 1920s, instead, were like the turn of a kaleidoscope, where events would cause the city to settle into a slightly new configuration.

*The narrator explains that the late 1920s brought change and, by necessity, adaptation to the city of Moscow itself. Using the metaphor of the kaleidoscope, the city would adjust slightly with each new big event, eventually creating what looks like a very different Moscow, but upon closer examination only represents a few crucial adjustments.*

In 1930, Theatre Square and the Metropol are much the same as they had always been: Vasily still sits at the concierge desk across from Arkady; Mr. Halecki still sits in the manager's office (though with the Bishop as the new assistant manager). The Boyarsky still serves the very best from Emile Zhukhovsky, who is chopping away in the center of the kitchen (though the narrator notes that he uses the knife to point as much as to chop). Andrey still keeps the restaurant spinning, prompt as ever. But there is one addition to the Boyarksy's staff: the Count, who has worked his way up to head waiter.

*The narrator then explains both the things that have changed and the things that have remained the same in the Metropol: while many of the hotel's staff members are still working away, the Count has joined them. So, while Moscow has adapted over the course of the last four years, the Count has also adapted and even thrived in his new job in the Boyarsky.*

Emile, Andrey, and the Count, whom the narrator calls "the Triumvirate," gather for their daily meeting. On this day, there are no parties or anything out of the ordinary. The Count peers at the list of reservations, giving Andrey suggestions as to where he should seat people.

*The Count's addition to the Boyarsky staff has also provided him with a new set of close friends, now that they have become peers to him. The Count uses the seating arrangement skills he learned as a boy, adapting them to his new job.*

The sous-chef comes in with the special for the evening: a cucumber soup and rack of lamb. The Count tries the dish and notes the addition of mint. Andrey asks what he might recommend with the lamb. Wine labels were returned to the Metropol's cellar in 1927, after a Russian diplomat had tried to order a bottle of Bordeaux for the French ambassador. The Count gives his suggestions for those who can afford a more expensive wine, and for those who cannot.

*Though the Bolsheviks had deemed the wine list counter to the ideals of the revolution, the return of the labels proves that it is sometimes counterproductive to eradicate all traditions simply because they are traditional.*

Before they adjourn, the Count presents one more matter: the envelope that had been slipped under his door, which is filled with saffron. Emile is delighted. The men then scheme about how to acquire oranges for a dish Emile wants to serve. Andrey says he can find them; Emile tells them that they should reconvene at half past twelve.

*Once again, a small detail introduced in a prior chapter proves its importance: the saffron the Count has acquired provides the Triumvirate with another key ingredient to a delicious dish Emile had been wanting to serve, and a key step towards a night filled with camaraderie.*

The Count leaves the Boyarsky in a good mood due to several factors: the increase in temperature in the preceding weeks, his success in finding saffron, and his commendation from Emile. The Count passes through the lobby, where a boy from the mail room calls out "Comrade" several times before the Count feels him tugging at his own sleeve. The boy gives the Count a letter from Mishka, which he promptly opens.

*Even though the Count has become part of the working class by taking the job in the Boyarsky, it is clear that he still does not feel completely integrated into Communist society because he is totally unresponsive to being called "Comrade."*

Mishka's letter describes how he was unable to sleep the night before writing the letter and had stumbled outside at four in the morning. He strolled along the Nevsky Prospekt and felt that he was walking "the length of Russian literature," passing the cemetery where Dostoevsky and Tchaikovsky are buried, the house where Pushkin died, and places in which Gogol and Tolstoy wrote. He was overcome with emotion that Russian literature would carry on.

*The Count has not been the only one noticing the change in Russian society: as Mishka observes the different legacies of Russian literature, he appreciates that the form will continue to evolve, which is what had excited him so much about the Russian Revolution and the rise of the Bolshevik party in the first place.*

The Count stops reading after the first page, deeply moved, particularly because he can see how Mishka will carry on himself. Four years earlier, Mishka had moved to Kiev with Katerina. Three years later, she left him for another man. Six months after that, Mishka returned to Saint Petersburg to hole himself up in books. And now he is inspired once again by the very street on which he had fallen in love with Katerina.

*The Count takes Mishka's letter optimistically, and is happy that his best friend seems so content, even though the progression of Mishka's life has recently had its share of tragic twists and turns. Yet had the Count finished reading the letter, he might have been more concerned for Mishka, because one of his favorite writers had committed suicide.*

The Count picks up the letter again but is interrupted by three youths leaving the Piazza, who carry on a conversation next to him. The group consists of a handsome young man and a blonde and brunette woman. A fourth member of the party, a shorter and younger man, returns with a jacket for the blonde. She accepts it without thanking him.

*This time, discovering by chance a small detail about Nina helps the Count identify her years later, due to the fact that she does not thank the young man—because she had told the Count in her youth that she would never thank someone for something she did not ask for.*

The Count realizes that the young woman is Nina (due to her lack of thanks). He is delighted to see her. Nina tells the rest of her company to wait for her, and the two take each other in, having not seen each other for two years. Nina explains that she and the others are leaving the next morning to help collectivize the farms in the Ivanovo province. She says she has to go, and then leaves with her comrades.

*Nina has become fully integrated into the Party cause, as she is leaving the next day to help with farm collectivization. Even though she has moved beyond her interest in princesses, her party loyalty will be tested by the resistance of peasants to this collectivization and the subsequent famine.*

The Count pays a visit to Marina to fix a button on his jacket. He insists on fixing it himself, as Marina taught him to sew when he began working at the Boyarsky so that he could take care of his own appearance.

*The Count demonstrates another way in which he has changed: learning a working-class skill (sewing) to be more in control of his appearance and more presentable at his job.*

As the Count sews, he mentions to Marina that he ran into Nina. He tells Marina that Nina is still self-assured, passionate, and curious, but that she seems almost humorless. He worries that she won't be able to enjoy her youth. Marina tells him not to worry, that life would eventually alleviate her seriousness. The Count is comforted by this thought.

*Although Marina assures the Count that life (i.e., fate) will intervene in Nina's future, fate is not always positive. For though fate will give Nina a daughter, her imminent conflict with the Party also will soon cause her disappearance.*

The Count then realizes the time: 4:05pm. The Count quickly dashes through the lobby and vaults up the stairs until he arrives at suite 311. When he arrives, he finds the door open. He enters the suite and goes to the bedroom, as Anna Urbanova lets her dress slip to the floor.

*The Count's and Anna's intermittent romance makes their relationship less of a fling and more of a longstanding romantic partnership, as they return to each other again and again over the years.*

## BOOK 3, AN AFTERNOON ASSIGNATION

The narrator exclaims in false wonder how the twisting paths of Anna and the Count could have led them back into each other's arms. The narrator goes on to say that the path that twisted was not the Count's, but Anna's.

*The narrator continues to comment on the way chance and fate interplay and interfere in the characters' lives, explaining how Anna and the Count found their way back to each other.*

The narrator goes back to 1923, the first time the Count met Anna. She had been an unambiguous celebrity, starring in two historical romances directed by Ivan Rosotsky after he discovered her in a regional theater. Both of the films were popular with the public, and by 1923 she was given the mansion of a former fur merchant.

*Although Anna was not born wealthy, she came into wealth and quickly adapted to a life of fame and fortune. Her subsequent fall from grace would cause her to sympathize with the Count's situation, and reevaluate how she could keep up her career.*

But at the premiere of Anna's fourth film (in which she played a princess mistaken for an orphan), the audience noted that General Secretary Stalin was not smiling at the screen. An open letter was written about the film saying that it was entertaining, but too obsessed with the era of princes and princesses, and too focused on individuals.

*The narrator describes Anna's fall from grace, due to the fact that her films and roles had seemed out-of-step with the changing political landscape. Due to Stalin's disapproval, the rest of the country followed suit, demonstrating the leader's powerful influence over the people's opinions.*

When these sentiments were echoed in other papers, Anna tried to distance herself from the director, but her downfall was provided not by this development but by the invention of the talking picture. Anna had a far huskier voice than audiences imagined, and so in 1928, at age 29, Anna became a "has-been." In a matter of months, her possessions and her mansion were gone, and she and her dresser moved into a one-room apartment.

*Fate intervenes once again, as Anna's deep and seasoned voice conflicts with people's idea of what she might sound like after the invention of the talking picture. In a coincidental twist, however, Anna's voice is also what later contributes to the resurgence of her career.*

The Count had then seen Anna a second time, in November 1928, eight months after she lost her mansion. She reserved a table in the Boyarsky for herself and a director. To the Count, it appeared that they had a pleasant conversation and that she was perfectly charming, but the director had to run out instead of joining her for one more drink.

*Even in the midst of a failing career, Anna never gives up. She gets dinner and drinks with various directors and works persistently to improve her situation. Only through this perseverance is she able to acquire the experience that helps her find success again.*

Disappointed, Anna turned from the door and instantly saw the Count. She invited him back to her room, number 428—a modest room with a small bedroom and a small sitting area. She had prepared a serving of caviar and a bottle of vodka for the director. Not wanting it to go to waste, the two drank to old times.

*This chance of the director not joining Anna for a drink had also allowed her and the Count to rekindle their romance, creating a pattern that would last for years. Their relationship becomes more and more familiar as a result.*

The narrator explains that, faced with disappointment and setbacks, one has two options. One can either hide all evidence that one's circumstances have changed; or, like the Count and Anna, one can join the "Confederacy of the Humbled." The Count then asked Anna how the dogs were. When she replied that they were better off than her, they toasted to the dogs.

*The narrator's comparison of Anna to the Count connects the idea that they have both adjusted their lives when faced with adversity and failure. Anna and the Count also acknowledge the luck of their meeting when toasting to the dogs, without whom they would not have interacted.*

Over the following year and a half, Anna had visited the Metropol every few months, getting dinner with a director, but not inviting him for an additional drink. Anna would then return to her room on the fourth floor, change into a simple dress, and wait for the Count.

*As Anna and the Count see each other more frequently, they also act more like they are in a traditional relationship, establishing patterns and routines, and making their meetings less extravagant and more intimate.*

Due to one such dinner, Anna was cast in a small role as a middle-aged worker in a factory that was struggling to meet its quota. Anna's character gave a short, impassioned speech to inspire the workers to push on. The audience could tell from her voice that both the character and the actress had a life of experience doing hard work.

*Anna's voice, which had been a liability before, now becomes an asset as people see her as a hardworking woman. By taking this role, she has also adapted to changing political sentiments, opting for a factory worker instead of a princess.*

When the film had premiered, a round-faced fellow with a receding hairline had been in attendance. He had once met Anna in the Metropol in 1923, but now he was a senior official in the Ministry of Culture. He asked every director if they had seen her performance. But Anna also had a reputation for working hard, appearing on time, and never complaining. And so while official preference shifted towards realistic movies, there was often a role for Anna.

*Here, the narrator finally reveals the importance of the round-faced fellow, who had been hinted at in a footnote and then introduced quietly alongside Anna. As a Minister of Culture, he becomes one of the reasons that Anna is able to get more jobs.*

The narrator remarks that there were many factors within and without Anna's control that contributed to her comeback, which is true of any successful person. And so, Anna had once again become a star with a mansion—though now, she greets her guests at the door instead of making them wait as she descends the stairs.

*The narrator sums up the interplay of two themes in the chapter: that so much of what determines success is up to fate, but it is also important to adapt in whatever ways a person can control, just as Anna had.*

At 4:45 in the afternoon, the Count traces the constellations on Anna's back. He points out one that looks like Delphinus, the dolphin, between her shoulder blades. He asks if she knows the story of Delphinus, as a fisherman's daughter. She asks him to tell it. He relays the story: a wealthy poet and lyre player named Arion was returning from Sicily when his crew mutinied. They gave him the option of killing himself or being thrown into the sea. Arion sang a sorrowful song, and as a result a group of dolphins gathered around the ship and carried him to shore. As a reward, Apollo placed the dolphin among the stars to shine for eternity.

*The story of Arion and Delphinus has some parallels with the Count's own story. The Count is a wealthy man whose society rebelled against him, and so he had to either commit suicide (which he attempted to do) or fend for himself and attempt to survive. Perhaps the implication here is that Anna is one of the dolphins who saves him, because she provides him with comfort and a sense of family.*

The Count asks Anna to tell a tale of the sea. She admits that she doesn't know any, because she wasn't actually raised by a fisherman. Her father was a peasant and she had learned how to debone fish when she worked in a tavern. The Count is disappointed that she lied to him, and gets up to go. She stops him, saying she does remember a sea story that her grandmother had once told her.

*The fact that Anna's father was a peasant makes her meteoric rise even more impressive, but the Count seems to be preoccupied with the fact that Anna lied. The Count has thought of her as a partner, and so he seems disappointed that she might not have been open or honest with him.*

Anna begins a tale about a rich merchant with a fleet of ships and three sons. One spring, the merchant gave his older sons ships with many expensive goods, instructing one to travel east and one to travel west. When the youngest son, who was rather small in stature, asked where his boat was, the merchant and older sons only laughed at him. The merchant gave him a ragged boat, a toothless crew, and told him to sail until the sun never set in December.

*Anna's story plays into one of the novels' main themes, and also bears some comparison to her own journey. Given what the Count has just learned about her very modest upbringing, it is possible that the young son is a stand-in for Anna herself, as he also perseveres against difficult odds to become successful.*

So, the son sailed southward until the crew reached a land where the sun never set in December. They landed on an island with a mountain of salt. Even though it was very common to them, they loaded up the ship's ballast with salt. They continued to sail until they reached a kingdom with which they could trade their salt. The king, however, said he had never heard of salt and sent them on their way. Nonetheless, the son paid a visit to the kitchens and discreetly sprinkled salt on all the food. The king remarked at how much better the food was, and the next afternoon, the merchant's son set sail in a ship with a bag of gold for every sack of salt. The Count tells Anna that her story is a good one, but that it does not absolve her of her lies.

*The young son, like Anna, also benefits from a combination of determination, a willingness to adapt, and luck. For even though the crew didn't think salt would be a very profitable commodity, their willingness to take a chance was rewarded when they came upon a kingdom that did not have salt, and so they were able to offer just what the king needed. Similarly, Anna's voice was useful just at the right place and the right time, when someone with her experience and her voice was needed in movies about persistent factory workers.*

## BOOK 3, AN ALLIANCE

At 5:45 that evening, the Count makes his nightly rounds at the Boyarsky. The narrator compares the Count to the choreographer at the Bolshoi: overseeing a performance that is precise but gives the appearance of effortlessness, every night of the year.

*The Count always appreciated those who master their art (such as Andrey and Emile), and here he becomes his own kind of master as he adapts his skills to waitering.*

The Count peers in to check on Emile, who always begins the day as a pessimist, but who throughout the day remembers the joys of cooking, gains a much rosier outlook on life, and is ready to serve his customers by 6:00 P.M. At 5:55, when the Count sees Emile dip a spoon into a bowl of chocolate mousse, he knows it is time to open the doors.

*The Count not only knows how to anticipate the needs of his guests, but also how to read the attitudes of his friends. The joy that cooking brings Emile is also what makes that evening so meaningful when he, the Count, and Andrey are able to pull together a difficult dish.*

At nine o'clock, the Count surveys the restaurant, pleased with the smoothness of the evening. At that moment, Andrey signals to the Count in distress. There is going to be a private function in the Yellow Room after all, and the guests have asked the Count to serve them specifically.

*As the evening progresses, the narrator continues to demonstrate the Count's skill and ease as a waiter, to the point where Andrey is relying on him to fix urgent matters, and guests request him by name.*

The Count goes into the Yellow Room and meets a Soviet official (later introduced as Osip), whom he describes as a man that is "no stranger to brute force," particularly given the severe scar above his left ear. Osip asks the Count to join him for dinner. He requests a bottle of wine and toasts to the Count, stating all of the Count's titles. The Count feels that he is at a disadvantage, as he does not know who the man is. Osip asks the Count to make some deductions about him.

*Because Osip withholds his name, the narrator introduces him by the scar above his left ear—a detail which will be important later in identifying him as a high-ranking official in the secret police. In this chapter, Osip serves as a kind of counterexample to the Bishop in regard to Bolsheviks and their ideals. He is steadfast to the revolutionary cause, but he also does not shun tradition for its own sake.*

The Count surmises that Osip is about forty and became a colonel by the end of World War I. The Count guesses that he is from eastern Georgia, because the bottle of wine that the man has selected is Georgian and it reminds him of home.

*As a man attuned to small details and people's inclinations, the Count is able to surmise Osip's background in Sherlock Holmes fashion.*

Dinner arrives, and Osip serves a portion of roast duck for himself and the Count. Osip starts to rattle off facts about the Count's life, stating that the Count has an interesting background. After asking about the Count's incident with the young Hussar officer and the Count's travels to Paris, Osip wonders why the Count did not join either army during the Revolution. The Count states he swore he would never shoot another Russian after the incident with the officer.

*The Count finally reveals the concluding detail of the complex story concerning the princess, the young officer, and the Count's sister: the Count had not joined either army during the revolution because he had not wanted to shoot another Russian, which fact then led to his imprisonment rather than his execution or exile.*

Osip is surprised to hear that the Count thinks of the Bolsheviks as his countrymen, and asks if the Count thinks of them as gentlemen. The Count hedges, saying he believes some of them are gentlemen. Osip picks up on his distinction and asks why the Count does not consider *him* to be a gentleman. The Count explains that it is due to a number of small gestures: that Osip served himself before his guest, that he speaks with his mouth full, and that he did not introduce himself.

*The Count points out a number of small details preventing him from considering Osip a gentleman. The irony, however, is that the Communist Osip would likely never want to be considered a gentleman. Even though the rules of etiquette the Count mentions are thought of as polite, the aristocracy that followed these traditions also caused centuries of political stagnation and oppression in Russia.*

Osip finally introduces himself as Osip Ivanovich Glebnikov, former colonel of the Red Army and an officer of the Party. Osip states that his job is keeping track of certain men of interest, but his reasons for wanting to meet the Count are not sinister. He wants the Count to teach him French and English so that he can help with the newly revived diplomatic relations with Britain and France. He also wants to understand the privileged classes in those countries. The Count agrees to help him and instruct him.

*Though Osip disagrees with the lifestyle and politics of the aristocracy, this does not leave him so narrow-minded as to completely ignore that the aristocracy has ever existed, in the way that many Bolsheviks have tried to completely erase that history. Instead, he tries to learn about the lives of members of the upper class in other countries—especially for practical reasons.*

## BOOK 3, ABSINTHE

That same night, the Count heads to the Shalyapin at 12:15 A.M. and is amazed at the sound of "gay abandon" in the bar, which would have been unthinkable ten years before. He attributes it to the return of American jazz, foreign correspondents, and three beautiful hostesses that joined the staff in 1929. Once a week, however, the hostesses visit a gray building and report whatever they happen to hear from the foreign journalists. But the foreign journalists are quite aware of these reports, and have a standing bet that anyone who could be summoned by the Kremlin for their outrageous statements would win ten American dollars.

*The Count observes how much has changed in the life of the Metropol's bar in the past ten years: not only a reopening of the hotel to foreign journalists and foreign forms of entertainment and styles, but also a deep skepticism of foreign people by the Russian government. Yet, the foreign correspondents have also adapted to this new cynicism in Russia, learning and playing into the fact that the Kremlin is listening to their every conversation, and even making a game out of it.*

The Count approaches Audrius at the bar and asks for absinthe. He takes his drink upstairs to the Boyarsky's kitchen. The Count, Andrey, and Emile had long had a desire to share a certain dish, but many of the ingredients were hard to find. A stroke of luck and a mistaken delivery had brought haddock and mussels to the Metropol, and a favor had to be called in from Anna in order to get saffron. Now they have all fifteen ingredients necessary.

*Luck plays its part in giving the Count, Andrey, and Emile their success in crafting a long-awaited meal: in the mistaken delivery of mussels and haddock; in Anna's ability to get saffron; in Andrey's quickness in acquiring oranges. All the ingredients happen to come together, not unlike the "ingredients" of the narrative itself.*

On the way to the Boyarsky, the Count is stopped by the Bishop, who asks where the Count is going. The Count says that he has lost his pen in the Boyarsky. The Bishop quips, "Where is it now?" before disappearing down the hall.

*As the story goes on, it seems that the Bishop does not represent the ideals of Bolshevism so much as he represents a petty spitefulness and blind hatred for the aristocracy, as he taunts the Count with his own poem.*

The Count arrives in the kitchen, absinthe in hand. A few moments later, as Emile prepares, Andrey arrives from the back stair with a pile of oranges tumbling from his arms. As he tries to gather them up, the doorway to the kitchen opens and reveals the Bishop once again. The Bishop asks what brings them all to the kitchen. Andrey says that the three of them are taking inventory, but Emile simply steams at the Bishop's tone and inquiry. He threatens the Bishop as he reaches for his knife and the Bishop runs out the door. When Emile looks up, however, he has accidentally grabbed a celery stalk. The three men burst into laughter.

*As all of the pieces come together, the Bishop makes a reappearance to put a stop to their scheming. Yet here, Emile and Andrey prove their absolute loyalty to the Count and their deep friendship. They find a common enemy in the Bishop and his stringency, but also find a common goal to work towards in pulling together the meal that they are about to share. Thus, not only does the Count find purpose and freedom as a result of his job, but he also finds friendship that gives his life even more meaning.*

At one in the morning, the Count, Emile, and Andrey enjoy the fruits of their labors: three bowls of bouillabaisse (a decadent seafood stew). They pay their compliments to the chef and spend the evening talking about their childhoods, their loves, and their passions. Andrey reveals he had worked in a circus as a juggler, demonstrating his skills with the unused oranges before moving on to knives.

*The Count, Emile, and Andrey then have what the Count eventually considers to be one of the happiest nights of his life, as they share their experiences in the way that true friends do. The reveal of Andrey's circus days demonstrates how he has, like the Count, adapted his skills to fit his job.*

At 3:30 in the morning, the Count stumbles back to his room. He thinks about the day he has had, and how Marina had been right about Nina. In stories, Death often lurks in the shadows and waits to pay a visit. But Life, he thinks, is as devious as Death. It had given Mishka love and sent Andrey to the circus, and would one day find Nina, too. The Count falls asleep in his chair.

*In personifying the idea of "Life," the Count reveals again how he believes that people and lucky occurrences all work together to fulfill a fated purpose. Ironically, the purpose that Life seems to have for Nina and the purpose that it has for the Count are inextricably linked, as he eventually raises her daughter.*

The following morning, the Count goes to finish Mishka's letter, but cannot find it in his pocket. He thinks that it must have fallen out during the course of the day, but in fact it he had taken it out of his pocket when he returned to his room and drunkenly knocked it behind his bookcase. The narrator speculates that this might have been for the better, because the real reason that Mishka had written was because one of his favorite poets, the poet laureate of the Revolution, had shot himself through the heart.

*This ominous detail that the narrator reveals foreshadows the difficulty that Mishka will soon encounter with the Bolshevik party. Like the poet laureate he looked up to and who killed himself, he will have a hard time surviving in a literary society that is comfortable with censorship and willing to exile anyone who uses free speech against the government.*

## BOOK 3, ADDENDUM

The same morning that the Count looks for Mishka's letter, Nina and her comrades board a train headed for Ivanovo in order to help increase agricultural production. But to pave the way for their efforts, a million kulaks (wealthier peasants) had been exiled because they resisted collectivization. They had been deemed enemies of the common good, but they were also the region's most capable farmers. The remaining peasants were skeptical of innovation and unskilled in agriculture. The combination of these forces and uncooperative weather meant that millions of peasants would starve to death in Ukraine.

*This development in the Russian agricultural provinces becomes one of the larger travesties brought about by the Bolsheviks. Believing the wealthier peasants to be anti-socialist, they are then exiled, resulting in a massive famine and widespread starvation. Thus, the rigidity of their ideals results in them hurting the very people that they had meant to champion—poor, working peasants.*

A footnote states that Nina and many other young loyalists would have their faith in the Party tested by what they saw. Most of Russia and the rest of the world, however, would not know what had happened, because journalists would be forbidden to enter the countryside, mail was suspended, and train windows were blackened. In fact, a *New York Times* journalist would deny rumors of the famine and go on to win a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage.

*Nina will have a difficult time adapting to this "progress" made by the Bolshevik party, and while the narrator reveals here that her faith in the Party will be tested, she also disappears into Siberia as a result. Thus, anyone at odds with this society's ideals is forced completely out of it.*

But at the time, when Nina's train arrives in the fields of Ivanovo, she is overwhelmed by the beauty of the landscape and is struck by the feeling that her life has begun.

*While it is true, as Marina and the Count had predicted, that life finds Nina, its fated purpose for her is seemingly tragic rather than hopeful.*

Sofia asks the Count if he is awake. He responds that he is awake now. She tells him that she left her doll in Marina's room.

*The narrator slips in one final detail to demonstrate that the Count has a lot to adjust to while learning to parent.*

On June 23, Andrey is riding the bus after paying a visit to Sofia. He stops at the market for some groceries and then returns to his small third-floor apartment. His wife, he knows, is not there; she is waiting at the new milk store that has opened at a decommissioned church. It became popular because at the back of the church there was a mosaic of Christ that no one had dismantled, and people went there to pray.

*This small chapter following Andrey provides insight on the thoughts and attitudes of more of the general public in Russia. Here the narrator introduces the real-life effects of an idea that other characters have only mentioned: the razing of churches by the Bolsheviks. Because of this act, many people are searching desperately for a place to pray.*

Andrey makes dinner for his wife, sets the table, and then walks down the hall. Without quite realizing it, he turns into the room of his late son Ilya, who had been killed in the Battle of Berlin. They left his room just as it had been before he left, but he worries that doing so is only prolonging their grief.

*Sofia's survival in the prior chapter is contrasted with Andrey's son's death, and how much loss and change the average, working-class man like Andrey has had to endure over the past twenty years.*

Andrey knows, however, that soon enough someone in the building will tell the housing authorities that their only son has died, and then they will be moved into an even smaller apartment and the room will have to be packed up regardless. Even so, he goes and smooths the blanket on the bed before turning out the light.

*There is even a further tragedy for Andrey in losing a son, beyond his actual death: having to say goodbye to the home in which they shared memories of Ilya. This is due to the housing policies that again illustrate the harshness of the Bolshevik systems.*

## BOOK 3, 1938, AN ARRIVAL

The narrator concedes that the early thirties in Russia were "unkind." In addition to the famine, there was overcrowding, shortages of goods, constraints on artistic freedom, and the razing of churches.

*The narrator sets up the landscape of some of the fallout from the famines and other hardships plaguing Russia in order to then explain how individuals like Nina and Mishka are unable to adapt.*

But at the same time, the direction of the Party veered. Given the unqualified success of the Revolution, many believed that it was time to support a little more glamour, luxury, and laughter. Girls were encouraged to look less like peasants and more like Parisians. The Central Universal Department Store, which had long only served foreigners and Party officials, became open to citizens in '36, as long as the young women could pay for their skirts in foreign money, silver, or gold.

*Even while Russia endures hardships, one can see how the Bolsheviks and the country as a whole are staring to bring back some of the pomp and hierarchical structure of the aristocracy, as the Count had predicted when discovering the silver service in the hotel. Yet again, the fact that department store goods can only be paid for with foreign money closes them off to most of the population, creating a sense of inequality that the Party claims to want to rid itself of.*

The Count sees these skirts as a sign that spring is ending, and he says this to Vasily in the lobby, because it is so warm out even at seven o'clock at night. Nina then arrives unexpectedly, now twenty-five years old. She quickly explains that her husband had been arrested when they were attending a conference on agricultural planning. She then discovered that he had been sent to Siberia, but she needs someone to watch her five-year-old daughter Sofia for a month or two while she gets herself settled. She tells him that she has no one else to turn to.

*The chance of being in the lobby when Nina appears and requests for the Count to watch her daughter is, as he says later, how he was meant to fulfill life's purpose. Nina's explanation of her and her husband's situation also demonstrates how, unable to accept the hardships they have seen (which the narrator explained in the prior chapter) and having broken with the Party, they have been completely ousted from it.*

The Count and Nina cross the lobby to where Sofia is sitting. Nina introduces Sofia to the Count and tells her that she will be staying with the Count for a few weeks while Nina goes to prepare their new home. Sofia tries to match her mother's strength, but begins to cry. Nina leaves the Count with a knapsack of her daughter's things and a photograph of her and her husband. She kisses Sofia goodbye and exits the hotel.

*Even though the Count has never been a father, Nina trusts him without question to take care of her five-year-old daughter, perhaps because she knows how he was able to be such a good friend to her when she herself was a little girl.*

The Count begins to consider the scope of what he has agreed to in taking care of a five-year-old, but knows that he would have agreed to it no matter what, because his friendship with Nina has been so valuable to him. The Count takes Sofia upstairs to the attic. Once there, he plans to make her a small bed on the floor beside his own. When he returns with a blanket, however, she has already climbed under his covers and fallen asleep.

*Like Nina, the Count does not truly question whether he will be able to take care of Sofia because, regardless of his lack of experience as a father, he was so much of a father figure to Nina years earlier. Learning how to take care of Sofia is a difficult challenge, but one that gives him his greatest sense of purpose in life.*

## BOOK 3, ADJUSTMENTS

The next morning, the Count is unsettled by the fact that Sofia is so quiet for such a young child. She looks at him expectantly about the day ahead, but he is daunted by the task of taking care of her and entertaining her. He doesn't know how to begin to converse with her, so he asks what her dolly's name is. She had not named her dolly, and so she decides that she will call her "Dolly." The Count then tries to tell her a story about a princess, but Sofia says that the age of the nobility has given way to the common man.

*The Count must quickly adjust to taking care of a young girl; unlike with Nina, he is solely responsible for her daily wellbeing. Thus, Sofia becomes even more like a daughter to him than Nina was. Also, while the Count related to Nina through princesses, he must find another tactic with Sofia, because she has grown up in a time that has completely dispensed with any romance surrounding the nobility.*

The Count gives Sofia a book with pictures to entertain her while he shaves and reflects on what to do. He realizes that Sofia is going to disrupt not only his living space, but his entire way of life. He laughs at himself, thinking that his younger self would never have been stuck in his ways or inconvenienced by another person. Sofia interrupts his shaving to deliver a letter that had slipped under his door with the query "Three o'clock?" He stuffs the letter into his jacket.

*For all the adjustments that the Count has had to make in his life, the most drastic come in making space and time for this young girl—but he also explains later that he finds these "inconveniences" to be the most rewarding. Like a true new parent, other plans become unimportant in comparison with taking care of Sofia.*

When the clock strikes noon, the Count suggests that he and Sofia get lunch, but Sofia is staring at the clock with interest. She tells the Count she thinks his clock his broken, because it only chimed at noon, and not nine, ten, or eleven. The Count explains that his father made the clock to only chime twice a day, which he will explain over lunch.

*Though it has been ingrained in her not to like princesses, Sofia can't help but be interested in an era of history that she never knew. This demonstrates that even though the Bolsheviks have taken great pains to eradicate the vestiges of the Count's way of life, they cannot take away his personal experiences.*

The Count and Sofia go to the Piazza, where she is amazed by the size of the room and its elegance. The Count begins to tell her about the clock: his father believed that a person should not be too tied up in keeping time. One only needed two tolls to delineate the needs of the day. When the noon bell sounded, one could take pride in having worked diligently in the morning and sit down for lunch with ease. The afternoon could then be spent in endeavors that have no set hour. The second chime is a judgment, because the Count's father believed that one should never be awake at midnight. Inherent in the second chime is the question, "What are you up to?"

*The Count's explanation of the clock also shows how much the he has changed. While in the first few chapters he followed the advice of his father (sitting down to pursue some work only until noon, like reading Montaigne), this kind of leisurely schedule had actually become oppressive to him. Now, with his work at the Boyarsky, he almost never works before noon and he is almost always up at midnight, and must keep a strict schedule throughout the day—but this is a lifestyle that suits him better.*

The waiter serves the Count and Sofia their lunch, but he lingers and asks if he should cut Sofia's meat for her. The Count realizes that she is staring at her plate, and cuts the veal for her. She then asks questions about the clock, and about the Count's life at Idlehour. At the end of the meal, the Count asks if Sofia wants dessert. She shakes her head, and the waiter tells him that he thinks Sofia needs to use the restroom, as he notices she is shifting in her chair.

*Again, even though the Count was friends with Nina as a young girl, he had known her when she was nine (not five, as Sofia is), and had never been attuned to her most basic needs. Thus, even in the few months that Nina says she will be gone, the Count will learn a lot about the minute details of parenthood.*

The Count takes Sofia to the ladies' room and is relieved when she says she does not need him to accompany her. He chastises himself for his ignorance, noting that he also did not help her unpack and that she is wearing the same clothes as the day before. When Sofia emerges from the bathroom, she asks the Count if they can still have dessert. He tells her of course.

*The Count quickly discovers the areas in which he has to learn to anticipate the things that Sofia cannot ask for (just like his need for the tact he possesses as a waiter). But even so, there are still pieces of the job that he picked up with Nina, like knowing to offer Sofia dessert.*

## BOOK 3, ASCENDING, ALIGHTING

At two o'clock, the Count and Sofia pay a visit to Marina, who is surprised to see him with a little girl in tow. Marina leads Sofia around her office and instructs an assistant to show Sofia their collection of fabrics and buttons. The Count explains the events of the day before and asks if Marina can watch Sofia for an hour while he is at the Boyarsky's daily meeting, which she agrees to do. Seeing how good Marina is with Sofia, he starts to hint that Sofia needs someone with a mother's touch. Marina stops him and tells him not to ask her to take on that responsibility, but instead to take it on himself.

*The Count continues to exhibit some of the qualities of new parenthood, particularly when he doubts his own ability altogether. Seeing how good Marina is with Sofia, he wonders if she might not make a better caregiver to Sofia. Like a true friend, Marina is direct with the Count that he accepted the responsibility, and thus he must be the one to take care of Sofia.*

The Count rushes off to the Boyarsky meeting, trying to think up a long-term solution regarding who can watch Sofia while he is at work. For tonight, he simply plans to request the evening off. When he arrives at the meeting, however, Andrey reminds him that he has his usual appointment with Osip that night, and that there is a dinner for the country's leading car manufacturer at seven in the Red Room. The Count assures Andrey that he will see to the event personally.

*The Count is late to every appointment he has from here through the rest of the day, demonstrating that not only has Sofia given him a new way of leading a meaningful life, but she has also completely evaporated the expanses of time and ennui that had been so lethal to him early on in his imprisonment.*


The Count prepares the seating for the dinner. When he finishes, he realizes that it is already 3:15 and that he is late for Anna's requested rendezvous. He dashes up the stairs to Anna's room and apologizes that he will not be able to see her today. He instead asks if he can borrow her two suitcases.

*As with any new parent, the Count must learn to juggle his responsibilities of raising a child, keeping his job at the Boyarsky, and seeing other friends—and often, dates with friends become the first casualties.*

The Count then takes the suitcases to the laundry room, packing sheets, a bedcover, a towel, and two pillows. He brings the suitcases back up to his room and unpacks. Next, he pulls a mattress from an adjacent room, but realizes that it will take up the remaining space on the floor. Remembering his enjoyment of sleeping in train cars as a child, he takes food cans from the Boyarsky and stacks them on top of his mattress to make a second bunk for Sofia.

*As the Count starts to adjust his time and space, he realizes that Sofia staying even a month or two (though her stay eventually becomes much longer) means making plans for large and long-term adjustments. He tries to anticipate the necessary changes he has to make in order to provide her with a good life at the hotel.*


The Count returns to Marina's office, discovering that Sofia and Marina have spent the time sewing a new dress for her doll. Marina then offers to watch Sofia for the evening—but she says that the Count must find another person after that. She suggests one of the unmarried chambermaids who works in the hotel. Marina then assures the Count that he is up for the challenge of taking care of Sofia. Giving him a thimble as a gesture, she tells him that children take pleasure in the smallest things.

*Though Marina refuses to be Sofia's exclusive caregiver, she still offers her services when she can and gives her typical valued advice, akin to the way a sister might. She assures the Count that he has the ability to be a good father. This needed reassurance is what allows the Count to ultimately find so much purpose in raising a daughter.*

The Count takes Sofia back to the attic, showing her the secret room for the first time. He suggests that they play a game: she will go into the other room and count to one hundred twice (she cannot count to two hundred), while the Count hides the thimble somewhere in the room. She agrees, and the Count hides it in a relatively easy place on his bookcase. She finds it almost immediately. The Count hides the thimble a second time, trying to provide more of a challenge. He places it on the other side of the room from the bookcase, under his leather case. It takes her twenty seconds to find.

*Marina's small gift of a thimble serves as a simple object that can provide hours of entertainment. This gesture harkens back to the Count's own enjoyment of getting a wooden sword from his parents at Christmas, which he had described in an earlier chapter. Thus, the Count tries to create some of the same experiences for Sofia that he had as a child, in a way passing on a family tradition.*

Sofia tells the Count that it is her turn to hide the thimble. As he goes out of the room, Sofia tugs on his sleeve and makes him promise not to peek. As he counts, he hears the room shuffling. He returns and gives a quick survey of the room, but he does not see the thimble. He looks more earnestly, pondering the problem from Sofia's point of view, but still cannot find it. He looks wildly around the room, but eventually gives up. She gets up and takes the thimble out of his jacket pocket. The Count protests, but Sofia argues that his pocket was in the room when she hid the thimble and while the Count searched. He bows to her cleverness.

*Sofia's turn in playing the thimble game introduces her playful and clever streak, as up to this point she has been described as an obedient and quiet child. This introduces the series of games that she and the Count will play in the years to come. The Count is amused by these games, constantly surprised by Sofia's intellect and unexpectedly mischievous nature.*

At six o'clock, the Count returns to the Boyarsky. He oversees the dinner in the Red Room and then heads down to the Yellow room at ten o'clock for his appointment with Osip. They have been dining once a month since 1930. At first, they dedicated their studies to the French, then to the British. But more recently, they have shifted their attention to the United States.

*The shift in the attention of Osip and the Count from French and British culture to American culture reflects the new inclusion of America among Europe's and the Bolsheviks' alliances, and Osip works to adjust with those changing coalitions.*

For this meeting, the Count had told Osip to read Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. But as Osip starts to discuss the book, it becomes clear to him that the Count has not, in fact, read it. Osip angrily throws the book into a painting. The Count apologizes, saying that he had planned to read much of the book that day, but he was interrupted by Sofia's arrival. Osip understands, and the two agree to discuss de Tocqueville at their next meeting.

*The Count continues to realize the massive effect that Sofia will have on his time. He no longer has the free hours that he once did in to read the book he assigned to Osip. The "de Toqueville Affair," as it will come to be known, also causes the Count and Osip to adjust even more as they switch to studying films.*

At eleven o'clock the Count starts to run back to Marina's office to pick up Sofia. At the top of the stairs, however, he is surprised to find his friend Mishka. The Count sees that something is troubling his friend, and so he takes him back to his study. Mishka explains that he has nearly completed editing volumes of Anton Chekhov's collected letters, a project he has been working on for four years.

*Even though Sofia has become so immediately important to him, the Count still makes time for Mishka, again showing a brother-like devotion to him, particularly when he sees that Mishka seems troubled by something.*

That morning, Mishka's editor, Shalamov, had asked him to come to his office. Shalamov pointed to a passage in which Chekhov praises the **bread** in Berlin, and said that Russians who hadn't traveled didn't know how good bread could be. Shalamov then asked that that sentence be edited out. Mishka had been shocked by this proposal of censorship, but he struck the passage and walked out of the room without a word.

*The reason Shalamov asks Mishka to edit the sentence is because bread is a Russian symbol of hospitality, and so praising the bread in Germany appears particularly anti-Russian. Additionally, the sentence plays on some of the hardships of the time: there is widespread famine and most people are still not allowed to travel outside Russia, and so to Shalamov, this also feels specifically like anti-Bolshevik rhetoric, even though the letters predate the Revolution.*


The Count tells Mishka that he is in the right to do what he did—that it is only one sentence out of thousands. He counsels Mishka to go back to his hotel and get some rest, and they could see each other the next night and toast to the completion of the work. He then moves Mishka gently towards the door so that he can pick Sofia up.

*Even though the Count considers Mishka to be like a brother, he realizes that he has an even greater responsibility to the child he is now caring for.*

The Count picks Sofia up at 11:40. Despite the late hour, Sofia had insisted on staying up. It is clear that she is tired, however, as she practically drags him back to the room. She quickly changes and prepares for bed. Before turning in, she watches as the clock's minute hand catches up with its hour hand, and hears the twice-tolling clock chime midnight. She promptly goes to bed.

*Sofia, for her part, has also taken to treating the Count like a father. She quickly becomes attached to him and also wants to make sure that he will be coming back for her, now that she has lost her biological father and Nina has gone off in search of him.*

The Count then prepares for bed as quickly as Sofia had, exhausted from the long day. But as the Count sinks into bed, a series of worries keeps him awake. He is worried about Mishka's battle with the editor, about Nina and her journey east, and about Sofia. He is concerned that some bureaucrat will become aware of Sofia's residency and forbid it. He also worries about how he will entertain her the next morning.

*Perhaps one of the reasons that the Count is so concerned, particularly about these three people, is that he has already lost so many members of his family. Thus, the thought of losing people whom he has essentially adopted as his family is especially anxiety-inducing for him.*

The narrator tells the reader that the Count had good reason to be worried about Mishka. The next morning, Mishka passes a statue of writer Maxim Gorky, who had established Socialist Realism as the sole artistic style of the Russian people. As a result, other writers that Mishka had looked up to had not written in years.

*The narrator describes some of Mishka's difficulty in accepting the changes of society: even though one of his favorite poets had been in charge of establishing the new poetry, this also led to the stifling of other artistic talents.*

Mishka returns to Shalamov's office, and angrily asks if he plans to cut *The Brothers Karamazov* in half today. Shalamov sees that he is upset and asks to meet with him later. Mishka cries out that he is sure Shalamov has other important business to attend to, like moving statues and erasing lines of poetry. He concludes by screaming that the future of Russian poetry is the haiku and storms out. Within a week, Mishka will be invited to the offices of the secret police for questioning. The following March, he is sent on a train to Siberia.

*Spurred by remembering the fallout of rigid limits on artistic freedoms, Mishka becomes even more outraged at the censorship he has been asked to accept. But in disagreeing with the Bolsheviks and the society that they have formed, Mishka is forced completely out of it when he is sent to Siberia.*

The narrator states that the Count is also probably right to worry about Nina, for she will never return to the Metropol. The Count will try to contact her to no avail. She also disappears into Siberia.

*Nina experiences a similar fate to Mishka: unable to accept the changes in society and the harshness of famine brought about by the Bolsheviks, she disappears as well.*

The Count is also right to worry about Sofia's presence being noted. The narrator reveals that within two weeks, a report will be sent to the Kremlin. However, it will be noted that the Count has a relationship with Anna, who is also reportedly having an affair with a certain round-faced Commissar. Thus, it will be suspected that this young girl—who appeared on the same day the actress was in residence at the hotel—is the illegitimate child of the Commissar. And so the report will be stuffed in a drawer under lock and key.

*Though the Count is right to worry about Sofia's ability to stay in the hotel, several strokes of luck allow her to stay: the fact that the Count is still in a relationship with Anna; the fact that Anna is also rumored to be in a relationship with the round-faced fellow, who makes another fateful appearance here; and the fact that Anna was staying at the hotel when Sofia first arrived.*

But, the narrator reassures the reader that the Count does not have to worry about entertaining Sofia in the morning, as she continues to ask questions about his life at Idlehour. The narrator returns to the present night. Instead of counting sheep, the Count calculates the flights of stairs he climbed throughout the day, discovering the total to be fifty-nine before he slips into a well-deserved sleep.

*Following the small addendum that accompanies this chapter, the next chapter begins eight years later—the longest skipping of time in the novel. This formal device also reflects the feeling of parenthood, as the activity and sense of purpose cause time to pass in a blur, as the Count has already begun to experience on this first full day with Sofia.*

## BOOK 3, 1946

Eight years later, on June 21, 1946, Russia is recovering from World War II; there are men limping in borrowed clothes in every quarter of the city, and in every city of Europe. Yet many of the façades in Theatre Square, including the Metropol Hotel's, are unchanged.

*Now that the Bolsheviks have rejoined the world stage, Russia itself must continue to adapt to the greater changes in Europe and the United States, getting involved in World War II and subsequently the Cold War.*

Five years prior, in June 1941, the Germans had launched an operation to send three million soldiers to Moscow. In October, the Germans were approaching the capital. By this time, the city was in a state of lawlessness and the government was being relocated. The streets were crowded with refugees cooking stolen food over open fires.

*In this chapter, it is notable that even in times of global war, the Bolsheviks' ideals are still on display. Though they had previously been resistant to foreign immigrants, they still accept refugees in order to protect them from the tyranny of the German government and to promote the common good.*

On October 30, Stalin arrived in Moscow and convened the Party leadership. He said he planned to remain in Moscow rather than relocate, and that in a week's time, the annual festivities in honor of the Revolution would be celebrated as usual. This celebration constituted a turning point in morale for many people, which would be aided by 700,000 soldiers that would arrive in November. Hitler's troops arrived in January, but they would never pass through the city's gates.

*In celebrating the Revolution, Stalin and the rest of the Bolsheviks also play upon feelings of patriotism in order to boost morale. Thus, even though times had been difficult throughout the 1930s and the early 40s, the Revolution is still officially looked upon as a great success.*

## BOOK 3, ANTICS, ANTITHESES, AN ACCIDENT

At 1:30, the Count is sitting in the manager's office, which is now the Bishop's office. He is unsure why he has been summoned. The Bishop begins to ask him about his daily habits, noting that he usually wakes early, eats breakfast, and reads the paper in the lobby around eight o'clock. The Bishop then asks if the Count is aware of the incident that occurred that morning at about a quarter to eight.

*The Bishop continues his antagonization of the Count, asking him questions almost as if he is once again on trial.*

The narration flashes back to that morning. The Count had eaten breakfast, bathed, shaved, and dressed before departing for the lobby. As he descended to the fourth floor, he had heard a commotion. Nearly every door was open and nearly every guest was in the hall—along with three adult geese who were scurrying about the floor as they were being chased by three young boys.

*The fact that the Count is following such a regimented routine is a good marker of how purposeful he feels now that he has a job and a daughter. Whereas before, he felt like his time could be spent in leisure, now he feels like he needs to take advantage of all of the time he has.*

The noise became so great that some of the fifth-floor guests came down to investigate, including an American general in his robe. The general promptly threw one goose out the window and grabbed a second, but his robe became undone and his underwear was revealed. A woman fainted at the sight. The general's aide-de-camp (later introduced as Richard Vanderwhile), who was standing next to the Count, commented on how much he loves the hotel.

*The antics of the geese lead to the Count's interactions with Richard Vanderwhile, whom the Count later meets again in the hotel bar, sparking a friendship between them that lasts many years. Richard even aids him in escaping the hotel.*

So, indeed, the Count is aware of the events of the morning. But he is still unsure why the Bishop has summoned him. The Bishop explains that the geese had been locked in a cage in the Boyarsky's pantry, and says that the antics suggest "childishness." The Count tells the Bishop that he is certain the Bishop will get to the bottom of things.

*The Count's turn of phrase (that the Bishop will get to "the bottom" of things) is a joke about the fiasco with the American general, and also demonstrates how the Count still views himself as being in opposition to the kind of blind hatred that the Bishop exhibits towards him.*

As the Count leaves, he is rankled by the Bishop's implication that Sofia was involved. Even though she is now thirteen, she is studious, shy, and demure, and would never have done such a thing. In eight years, her most outlandish act was a harmless game: the Count and Sofia would be sitting somewhere in the hotel, reading, when he would leave to attend to another appointment. Upon arriving at his destination, Sofia would already be there. She would never be breathless, and she would never giggle or smirk. She would simply continue her reading.

*Like any father would be, the Count is outraged at the Bishop's implicit accusation that Sofia was involved in letting the geese out. Yet though he describes her as demure, Sofia also has a playful streak that recurs throughout the rest of the novel, as she and the Count create their own kind of adventures similar to those Nina and the Count invented decades earlier.*

As the Count climbs the stairs back to his room, he thinks that it is true that Sofia overheard a Swiss diplomat say that the poultry in the Boyarsky was not fresh. But how could she get three geese to the fourth floor of the hotel without detection?

*This wry question shows that even if the Count was not in on the joke, he certainly approves of the trick Sofia has played in a demonstration of loyalty to the Boyarsky's staff.*

The Count arrives in his room and Sofia, who had been in the lobby just moments before, is sitting at his desk. She is reading Montaigne's essays, which he had been using to prop up his desk. He is slightly outraged that she has placed *Anna Karenina* under the desk because it is the closest in thickness to Montaigne's essays.

*Montaigne's essays reappear once again, as details from the early part of the novel have more small payoffs, demonstrating the intricate weaving of the different facets of the narrative Towles has created.*

The Count then goes to his daily meeting in the Boyarsky with Andrey and Emile, who agree that it is outrageous that the Bishop accused Sofia of such an act. On a separate note, Andrey asks the Count to have someone sweep out the dumbwaiter, because it is littered with feathers.

*Andrey and Emile also show themselves to be in on the joke, as they continue to find a common enemy in the Bishop and together enjoy the prank that Sofia has played on the guest who criticized them.*

The meeting is interrupted by Emile's young sous-chef Ilya. When Emile asks what the matter is, Ilya simply points through the office window toward the kitchen, where a ragged-looking man stands in the door. Ilya assures them that he is not a beggar because he did not ask for food; he instead asked for the Count. The Count realizes that the man is Mishka, and immediately goes to greet him.

*Mishka's return from Siberia has left him much the worse for wear. Yet despite his arrest, his exile, and being down on his luck, the Count still greets him as his closest and oldest friend, much like he would a brother.*

Andrey suggests that Mishka and the Count catch up in Emile's office. Emile places **bread** and salt on the table (an old Russian symbol of hospitality) and gives the pair privacy. The Count sees that his friend is thirty pounds lighter and dragging one leg behind him. Mishka says that he has been given a Minus Six. To visit Moscow, he borrowed a passport.

*The recurrence of bread here is particularly symbolic, as it is not only the reason that Mishka was asked to censor Chekhov's letters in the first place, but it also represents a kind of humbler Russian tradition that Mishka does not want to give up.*


Mishka explains that he now lives in the town of Yavas with many other prisoners, though he seems plagued by his time in labor camps. He tells the Count that one night, after returning to the barracks, he thought about the German who claimed that vodka was Russia's only contribution to the West and challenged the Count to give three more. Mishka states that there is a fifth contribution: the burning of Moscow in 1812.

*In a way, Mishka endures a more condensed, harsher version of the Count's life: faced with imprisonment, he feels abject and longs for a sense of meaning. Thus, he sneaks into Moscow in order to complete a project that is giving him a renewed sense of purpose.*

Mishka goes on to tell the Count that Russians are unusually adept at destroying what they have created, citing the churches being razed, the statues of heroes being toppled, and the poets being silent. He says that when the government announced the mandatory collectivization of farming, half of the peasants slaughtered their livestock rather than giving them up. He says that the reason that Russians do these things is because they understand the power of these gestures. He concludes his speech by saying that the people have not burned Moscow to the ground for the final time.

*Mishka's experiences illustrate just how far he has fallen out of step with the Bolsheviks. Whereas before he had been so excited by the new forms of poetry that he would have a hand in shaping, now he sees that the Bolsheviks have created the atmosphere for a poetry of silence rather than a poetry of action. And just as the Count had to deal with his own reckoning earlier, Mishka has to reconcile with the ongoing erasure of history that is now affecting his values and heroes.*


Mishka sees that he has unsettled the Count, and tells the Count why he has returned to the city. He wants to visit the library for a project he is working on but is not ready to share just yet. The Count sees Mishka out of the kitchen, and Emile gives Mishka a bit of food for the road. Mishka leaves, wondering aloud who could have imagined that when the Count was sentenced to life in the Metropol, he became the luckiest man in Russia.

*Mishka's final statement to the Count bears a hint of jealousy, which is slightly ironic because at the beginning of the novel the Count had been jealous of Mishka's freedom. Yet, when the Count reveals later in the novel that Mishka had written "Where Is It Now," the statement becomes a little more unfair—because the Count had saved Mishka's life in claiming authorship of the poem.*

At 7:30 that evening, the Count meets with Osip, who notices quickly that something is off with the Count. The Count tells him not to worry, and they begin to watch a film. Two months after "The de Tocqueville Affair," Osip had put books behind him and they advanced their studies of America through film. Osip is fascinated with the way that Americans used films as a way of placating the working class during the Great Depression, and he is determined to study the phenomenon.

*The Count and Osip's transition from French and British literature to American films not only demonstrates the changing cultural interests in Russia, but also the rising popularity of different genres of media that have sprung up around the globe. Still, Osip views American film through a very Communist lens.*

Osip became engrossed in each film, and dissected each one afterward. The musicals were mere entertainment to "placate the impoverished." The horror movies were "slights of hand." The comedies were "narcotics." The westerns were false fables that prized individualism. Hollywood in his mind became a dangerous force in the history of class struggle—that is, until he watched film noir. He was particularly taken with Humphrey Bogart, and they watched all of his movies at least twice, with the exception of *Casablanca* (a woman's movie, in his mind).

*Osip explains his perspective on American films to the Count, as he views them as a way of disempowering the working class by making them pay to be distracted from their own problems. He also sees it as a way of idolizing individual successes and experiences—part of a key tenet of American capitalism.*

And so on this evening, Osip and the Count watch *The Maltese Falcon* again. As they watch, the Count asks if Osip thinks Russians are particularly brutish. At first, Osip tells him not to interrupt, but when the Count protests that he has seen the movie three times, Osip asks what is wrong. The Count relays Mishka's points from earlier in the day.

*During this meeting in particular, Osip proves himself to be a very different kind of Bolshevik from the Bishop. For while the Bishop dislikes the Count for his perceived arrogance, Osip and the Count are able to become friends, and the Count can have a decent political discussion with Osip despite their differing views.*

Osip argues that heritage must be swept aside in order to allow the people to progress. He says that in 1916, Russia was the most illiterate nation in Europe and most of its population lived in modified serfdom. For the majority, society had not progressed for five hundred years. Osip asks if the reverence for the statues and cathedrals and ancient traditions was in fact the thing holding the society back.

*In this moment, Osip makes the most positive case for Communism, refuting points that the Count, Mishka, and even the narrator have made, demonstrating how even though there is still hardship in Russia, the majority of people are much better off than they were under the aristocracy.*

The Count wonders at what cost progress must come. Osip states that it comes at the greatest cost, pointing to America and its history of slavery, even though it had been a progressive nation. But Osip argues that Russia and America will lead the rest of the century because they are the only two countries that have learned to brush the past aside.

*This argument about America and its history of slavery is misguided, and does display some of the issues in Bolshevik thinking. The narrator has pointed out elsewhere that progress should not have to come at this kind of cost (for example, when agricultural "progress" caused the death of millions of peasants).*

When the Count and Osip say goodnight, the Count returns to the Shalyapin, where the American general's aide-de-camp, Richard, is telling the tale of the goose incident to a raucous group of journalists. When he concludes the story, he suggests that the group head over to the National for some music. The group stumbles into the street, leaving the bar relatively quiet.

*Although the geese were a fun prank, they also become one of the small details that leads to an important friendship the Count is about to gain, as Richard will become instrumental in helping Sofia and the Count escape from the Metropol.*


The Count gets a drink, but to his surprise, also sees Richard at the bar. When the Count asks why he didn't join the group, Richard says that he likes being left behind. Richard introduces himself, telling the Count how much he loves Russia. Richard sobers up a bit and notes that it seems like there is something on the Count's mind. He tells the Count that bars are often good places to unburden oneself to a stranger. He asks if it is women, money, or writer's block that is troubling him.

*Even though the two have only interacted very briefly, the Count quickly opens up to Richard. They have come from very different backgrounds, but the Count immediately appreciates Richard's positive outlook and wise counsel, and the two become good friends for years to come.*

The Count explains Mishka's lament of Russia's disappearing history, and Osip's argument that brushing the past aside is necessary for progress. Richard argues that both Mishka and Osip are very smart, but that they both are missing part of the picture. He states that humans can't control or know what parts of history and culture become immortal.

*Richard's argument boils down to the idea that progress is inevitable, and because the legacy of a given time period is unknowable, one can only try to adapt to the changes that are occurring in society at the present time—which the Count and other characters have tried to do.*

The Count leaves the bar after two more drinks with Richard and sees Sofia reading in the lobby. He walks through calmly, but sprints up the stairs as soon as he is out of sight in order to catch her in her game. When he gets upstairs, he has beaten her to the room. He sits at his desk and waits for her, reading Montaigne.

*The Count, showing his own adventurous streak, tries to beat his daughter at her own game, much as he tried to outsmart her with the thimble game when she first arrived. Her presence again gives him an energy and a vitality that he lacked prior to her arrival.*

After five minutes, the Count concedes that she may not have been trying to play. At that moment, however, the door swings open, and one of the chambermaids tells the Count that Sofia has fallen in the service staircase. He bolts down two flights of stairs and sees Sofia splayed unconscious on the steps with blood on her face.

*When Sofia slips and falls on the service staircase, the Count experiences an emotion that he has not yet experienced before. This crisis is a test of parenthood that shows how much he cares about Sofia, and what he will do to make sure that she will be okay.*

The Count carries Sofia down the steps and runs through the lobby and out the front door for the first time in over twenty years. He calls a taxi and tells the driver to go to St. Anselm's. But when he arrives, he realizes that what had once been one of the finest hospitals in the city thirty years ago has now become a shabby clinic. Still, he takes her to the desk and is told to go to Surgery Four.

*The Count shows the depth of his love for Sofia and how much he truly believes her to be his daughter when he exits the hotel without a second thought. Even though this could mean his own death, he immediately works to ensure Sofia gets the care she needs.*

An internist wheels Sofia into Surgery Four, where a nurse has brought in a young physician who looks as if he has just woken up. The Count asks if the doctor is able to perform the surgery, and the doctor is furious that his capability is being questioned.

*The Count's long imprisonment proves another obstacle, as he does not realize that St. Anselm's is no longer the top hospital in the city, and he is forced to deal with a less than competent staff.*

At that moment, a tall man enters the door to the surgery. He introduces himself as Lazovsky, chief of Surgery at First Municipal, and asks for the Count. As the Count explains what happened to Sofia, another young doctor appears. Lazovsky tries to reassure the Count by telling him that the skull is designed to withstand a bit of rough treatment, and the two surgeons begin to prepare for the surgery. They ask the Count to sit outside.

*In what at first appears to be a stroke of luck, two other doctors appear in St. Anselm's who appear to be much more in control of the situation. It becomes clear later, however, that the two doctors had been summoned by Osip, showing a surprising act of kindness.*

The Count sits on a bench just outside the surgery and prays. He wonders how he could have let Sofia play such a reckless game, thinking to himself that he didn't fulfill a parent's primary responsibility: to bring a child safely into adulthood so that she could have a chance to experience a "life of purpose."

*The Count chastises himself for being too much of a friend to Sofia by playing games and pranks with her, and not being enough of a father figure by making sure that she is safe.*

When the surgery is finished, Lazovsky joins the Count outside. He tells the Count that Sofia has suffered a concussion and that she needs rest, but that soon she will be just fine. The Count begins to thank the doctor when Osip appears.

*The Count's comment that Sofia needs to live a life of purpose makes his relief when the doctor says she is all right more palpable. Her recovery will allow her to lead that purposeful life, but the Count also knows that she gives him a life of purpose as well.*

The Count is confused why Osip is there, and Osip reiterates that it is his job to keep track of certain men of interest. He tells the Count that he cannot remain outside the hotel any longer, and must take the back alley to find a car waiting to return him to the hotel. The Count is hesitant to leave Sofia, but Osip has arranged for Marina to stay with her in his absence.

*Even though this is the first time that the Count has left the hotel in over twenty years, his only hesitation in returning to it is that he will not be with Sofia. She has become more important than both his own life and his freedom.*

Osip leads the Count to the back of the hospital, saying as they part that it is best if he doesn't mention the incident to anyone. The Count says that he does not know how to repay Osip, but Osip says that he is glad to be of service to the Count after fifteen years.

*The later revelation that Osip is an official in the secret police makes this moment even more generous, as he breaks the law and helps the Count go back to the hotel undetected in order to repay their years of friendship.*

As the Count leaves the hospital, in the alley he sees a white van with the words "Red Star Baking Collective" on it. The Count climbs into the van, and realizes in surprise how much the government commits to its ruses, because the van is filled with two hundred fresh loaves of **bread**. As the van drives back to the hotel, the Count tries to recognize the various landmarks, though many of the buildings have become obscured because of newer, taller buildings.

*There is an irony in the fact that the van that picks up the Count is filled with bread, as it remains a symbol of Russian hospitality. For many farmers and peasants, however, the government caused a shortage of bread with collectivization followed by the famines, and so its choice to waste bread as a cover for its activities again proves some of the hypocrisy of the Bolsheviks, or how removed they have become from the people's needs.*

Back in the attic, the Count sobs with relief. He feels like he is the luckiest man in all of Russia. After a few minutes, he goes to return the Montaigne to its shelf, but he realizes that there is a black leather case that has been left on his desk. The Count reads the note that is attached to it and sees that it is a gift from Richard.

*When Mishka called the Count the luckiest man in Russia, his comment was based on the Count's ability to bypass the changes in society, but the Count considers himself the luckiest man in Russia because he has avoided the loss of his daughter.*

The Count opens the case, revealing a portable phonograph and a small stack of records. The first disk is a recording of Vladimir Horowitz Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto at Carnegie Hall. He plugs the phonograph in, puts on the record, and the swell of the music fills the room.

*Richard's gift demonstrates the strength of his and the Count's instantaneous friendship, sparked by their mutual love of Russia. It also foreshadows Sofia's talent for piano, which she learns in order to surprise the Count for his birthday.*

## BOOK 4, 1950, ADAGIO, ANDANTE, ALLEGRO

Vasily and the Count are chatting about how much Sofia has grown, and the Count thinks that her growth from thirteen to seventeen occurred in the blink of an eye. He also thinks about how he had presumed that she would be a dark-haired version of Nina when she grew up, but in fact she is very different in demeanor. Where her mother had been impatient with the world and assertive, Sofia is demure and views the world as well-intentioned.

*Now twelve years into fatherhood, the Count (like other members of the hotel staff) thinks about Sofia as truly a daughter, even speaking like a typical father in remarking how much she has grown (something that he also did with Nina's change in interests).*

The Count also thinks about the paradox that in adulthood, one experiences time so quickly that many years pass in a blur, often with few memories. But in childhood and early adulthood, every experience becomes indelibly imprinted in one's mind. The Count posits it as a way of balancing the world's aggregate experience of time: adults forget a period of life so that children might be able to remember it.

*The structure that Towles has built in the novel, particularly in the first half, echoes the paradox the Count describes. The Count's early adulthood is given great weight, and then his years of later adulthood and parenthood are skipped through until the narrative approaches his escape. This is perhaps also indicative of his attitude towards time as a result of his imprisonment; with all the time in the world, he remembers every detail, but with very little free time everything blurs together.*

The Count then asks Vasily where Sofia is. Vasily says that she is in the ballroom with Viktor Stepanovich, the conductor of the orchestra at the Piazza. The Count, fearing that Stepanovich has some kind of ill-intention with his daughter, rushes to the ballroom and takes the man by the lapels.

*The Count continues to exhibit a fatherly protectiveness for his daughter in assuming that Viktor was making trouble, and in threatening him physically.*

Stepanovich says that there must be some mistake, and Sofia explains to the Count that Stepanovich is teaching her how to play the piano. She plays the Count a nocturne by Chopin. He is astonished by her skill but even more so by her musical expression, which conveys so much love and loss, even as a seventeen-year-old.

*When the Count hears Sofia play, his astonishment is also an overwhelming parental pride, perhaps accompanied by the realization that Sofia has found a life of purpose, as he had hoped she would.*

When Sofia finishes, the Count asks her why she didn't tell him she was learning piano. She explains that she had wanted it to be a surprise for his birthday and is sorry if she upset him. He compliments her on her playing, telling her that only one in a hundred thousand piano students could bring the piece to life as she did.

*Sofia's desire to surprise her father on his birthday not only leads to her discovery of an innate talent, but also eventually provides the circumstances and the cover for her to escape Russia, and for the Count to escape the Metropol.*

The Count asks Sofia how she conveys so much heartache in her playing; Sofia tells him that she thinks of Nina, and how her memories of her mother seem to be fading. The Count tells Sofia that he used to feel the same way about Helena. He goes on to explain how the ballroom was one of Nina's favorite rooms, and how he would crawl on the balcony with her. He tells Sofia about her mother's experiments, testing the principles of Newton and Galileo. They are quiet for a moment until Sofia kisses the Count on the cheek.

*The heartache that Sofia conveys and her explanation of losing the memories of her mother is something that the Count also knows well, because he understands the feeling of losing members of one's family. This is why the Count's friendships become so important to him, and partly why the Count and Sofia become so important to each other, because they have both in a sense been adopted.*

Sofia goes to meet a friend, and the Count goes to lunch in the Piazza. He notices a young man at a neighboring table sketching. When he enquires about the sketch, the young man says that he is sketching the interior of the restaurant. The Count looks at the drawing, which captures the restaurant perfectly. The man explains that he is an architect, but that there is little need for architects in Moscow at the moment (a footnote explains that aesthetic individuality in buildings has been eschewed in favor of efficiency and universality). Thus, he is drawing sketches of Moscow's hotels so that he can draw them more elegantly than they actually appear.

*The story of the architect begins an exploration of other individuals who have, like the Count, adapted their skills in order to survive in the new society. Because the architect can no longer design buildings, he uses his drawing skills to get a new job, much as the Count had to relinquish the etiquette that had been expected of him as a nobleman, but he still uses those skills in his job as headwaiter.*

The Count explains that the restaurant has never been defined by its furnishing or architecture, but instead by its citizens. It is a gathering place for the city of Moscow. He explains that he has seen romances bloom, debates spark, and people of all kinds rub elbows. The architect observes that a room is the summation of all that has happened inside of it.

*As someone who has spent nearly his whole adult life inside the Metropol and observing the goings-on there, the Count is aware of how small interactions combine to create the atmosphere of the restaurant, and of the hotel in general.*

That evening, the Count gets a drink with Richard and explains how Sofia came to learn piano. She had taught herself to play a Mozart Variation and was practicing when Stepanovich heard her and asked her where she was studying. When she said that she was not studying with anyone, he immediately offered to take her on as a student. Richard and the Count toast to Sofia.

*The Count continues to take on the qualities of an older parent figure, catching up with Richard but giving updates about Sofia instead of himself, and conveying his pride in her, showing how much she gives him a sense of meaning and purpose in his life.*

Richard is now attached to the State Department in America and usually stays at the embassy, but he stops by the Metropol on occasion to get a drink with the Count. They drink to old friends, as they feel that they are kindred spirits even though they have known each other for only four years.

*As with the friendships that the Count has made with the hotel staff, finding a new but true friendship with someone like Richard also gives him the sense that his life continues to be meaningful, and that there are new experiences still waiting for him despite his confinement.*

Richard comments that he can't believe it's the conductor from the Piazza who is teaching Sofia, but the Count remarks that Stepanovich had actually studied at the Conservatory in Moscow. He only conducts to make ends meet. Audrius chimes in from behind the bar that one must make ends meet or "meet one's end." Audrius's statement launches the Count into a story about the **moths of Manchester**, a story that his father enjoyed telling him as a child. But just as he starts to tell it, Richard gets a phone call from his wife, saying that he must come home.

*This section serves as a large meditation by the Count on the idea of evolution and adaptation, and how, when the sociopolitical landscape changes, one must adapt one's skills. Stepanovich is also an example of this: wanting to be a professional musician, but conducting at the Piazza in order to survive.*

The narrator explains the **moths of Manchester**, an example of Darwin's theory of natural selection. As a boy, the Count had learned about evolution and it made sense to him, but he was surprised to hear his father say that natural selection did not always take hundreds of years.

*The Count, who learned about this as a boy, has then learned to adapt in his own way: even though the aristocracy were wiped out, he still persisted and was able to adapt his own skills.*

The Count's father had pointed to the **moths of Manchester**, most of which for thousands of years had white wings and black flecking (though a few in each generation would have pitch black wings) The lighter coloring provided them with camouflage against the region's trees. But when Manchester became crowded with factories, soot settled onto the barks of the trees. Suddenly, the moths that had pitch black wings were camouflaged much better, and within a hundred years, over 90% of the moths had black wings.

*The moths of Manchester serve as a symbol for many of the characters in the book. As the conditions in Russia change, so do the characteristics of the people that have the best chance of surviving (for example, after the Revolution, the aristocracy were like the moths with white wings). The Count, in a way, is one of the lucky few white moths that did not die out, even though he as had to adjust to the world around him.*

This lesson did not sit well with the Count at the time, but years later, he realizes he had been looking at the matter wrong. Though the color of the moth's wings had changed, the **moth** species still persisted as a whole. The Count sees Stepanovich, and the man sketching, and even Mishka, as examples of these moths.

*The Count expands the extended metaphor to include anyone who adjusts their skills to the new society. Because the architect cannot build, he draws. Because Mishka feels that his era of poetry is over, he edits volumes of letters and is working on a new project.*

The Count heads upstairs for bed, and the narrator remarks that even while the Count is brushing his teeth, Viktor Stepanovich is setting aside an arrangement for Sofia. Mishka is sewing together pages for a book. The young architect is working on a drawing of a crowded restaurant. Under the restaurant's floor is a mechanism of axles, cogs, and gears, and towering over the room through a glass ceiling is an older gentleman with his hand on a crank.

*The narrator puts a final coda on this meditation about adaptation, illustrating how each person is doing that thing that "makes ends meet" but still allows them to find passion and purpose within their new venture. The drawing of the Count over the restaurant implies that the Count, too, is one of these moths, and also shows how crucial he has become to the life of the Metropol.*

## BOOK 4, 1952, AMERICA

On a Wednesday evening in late June, the Count and Sofia walk into the Boyarsky. It is his night off, and they are ushered into the dining room by Andrey. Anna Urbanova is sitting at a nearby table with a few fans. Recently, she had been lured back to the stage, which was a stroke of fortune for the fifty-year-old actress. This was also fortunate for the Count, as she was now in residence at the Metropol for months at a time.

*Anna shows herself to be adept at change as well, as she moves from film to the stage in order to maintain her career—and also to maintain her relationship with the Count. The continuation of their romance over so many years demonstrates their importance to each other, in a way that has moved far beyond the occasional fling.*


The Count and Sofia study their menus and order. They then begin to play a game that they have made up entitled *Zut*. *Zut*'s rules are as follows: the first player proposes a category, like stringed instruments or famous islands. The two players go back and forth until one of them fails to come up with a fitting example of the category. Victory goes to the first player who wins two out of three rounds. The Count proposes famous foursomes as the first round, and the two go back and forth until Sofia is unable to come up with a set.

Zut *is another playful invention between the Count and Sofia, which has been devised as entertainment for the time between ordering and eating. This perhaps had blossomed out of the Count's fear that he would not be able to entertain Sofia when she was a young girl, and extended from the other games that he created for her.*

Sofia comes up with the second category: animals that are black and white. Sofia is on the verge of losing when she comes up with herself (as she has dark hair with a strip of white hair where she hit her head). As Sofia counts down the seconds, the Count is interrupted by a professor from Leningrad State University. He asks for the Count to join him for a drink after dinner in suite 317. The Count agrees. When he turns back to Sofia, she declares his time is up.

*Sofia demonstrates that through the years and through their many games, she still often stays one step ahead of the Count in cleverness (just like with the thimble game), keeping the dynamic of the daughter who outsmarts her father.*

The Count and Sofia's first course is served, and they never play while they eat, so they put the tying round on hold. Sofia remarks that Anna is in the restaurant, and asks why the Count never invites her for dinner. The Count laughs nervously and asks if he should invite Charlie Chaplin as well, trying to close the conversation. Sofia continues, saying that Marina thinks that the Count is worried that Sofia would be scandalized. The Count is shocked to hear that she and Marina discussed their relationship. Sofia tells him that Marina says he likes to keep his "buttons in their boxes," meaning he likes to keep his relationships separate.

*Even though the Count's relationships with Sofia and Anna are both extremely meaningful to him, it is interesting that he attempts to keep them so separate from one another. Perhaps this is because the Count's and Anna's relationship predated Sofia, and the nontraditional nature of it might be difficult to explain to her as a young girl—just as it would be with any single father, particularly from a conservative, aristocratic background.*

The second course is served, and the Count states that Emile has outdone himself, once again hoping to change subjects. Sofia says that Anna thinks the Count is set in his ways. At this, the Count nearly coughs up his entire swallow of wine. Sofia says that she and Anna have known each other for years. The Count is aghast and gets up, turning to go upstairs.

*Despite the Count's best efforts, Sofia and Anna have met and gotten to know each other, and as demonstrated later, Anna has become in some ways a kind of motherly figure who instructs Sofia in the ways of the world.*

As the Count heads for the stairwell, he bumps into Anna. He tells her that he can't believe that she and Sofia have been conversing behind his back. He tells her that wanting to keep one's buttons in their boxes is not necessarily a bad thing. He goes upstairs.

*The Count starts to experience a bit of a family dynamic, worrying about his partner and his daughter ganging up on him behind his back.*

The Count knocks on the door of his old suite, which he has not visited since that fateful day in 1926 when he stood on the parapet. He follows the professor into the sitting room, where he finds Richard, to his surprise. Richard explains that he wanted to speak with the Count in private before he leaves, as he will be working out of the embassy in Paris for a few years.

*Although this chance encounter with Richard serves little purpose now, there are a few key details that become vital to the Count's escape later: Richard's desire to work with him on state matters, and the fact that Richard will be stationed in Paris.*

Richard then explains that relations between America and Russia have been less than ideal after the war, and that when Stalin dies, things will be unpredictable. Depending on the next person in charge, the doors of the city could either be flung open to the world, or bolted shut. The Count says that they must hope for the former; Richard agrees that they certainly cannot hope for the latter, but either way it is helpful to anticipate the events to come.

*As the political landscape is poised to shift once again, the Count and Richard's discussion show just how much the Bolshevik party has changed over the course of Stalin's rule (and the Count's imprisonment). Whereas at first it was completely isolationist, now the country is open to foreigners and will soon begin to allow its citizens outside the country.*

Richard asks the Count if he is willing to keep an eye on political events at the Metropol and report back. The Count politely declines, asking that they not speak of this again. Instead, the men spend the next hour catching up. The Count tells Richard about Sofia's progress at the Conservatory; Richard tells the Count about his young sons. At nine o'clock, they part ways.

*For all of the trouble that the current government has caused the Count, he still has great loyalty for his country overall, regardless of who is in power. Thus, instead of agreeing to spy, the Count gently returns instead to his friendship with Richard, and speaking about their children.*

Almost nine months later, in March 1953, Stalin dies in the aftermath of a stroke. Over a million citizens stand in line to watch as his coffin is transported. Western observers wonder why so many would stand in line to see the corpse of a tyrant, but the attendees mourn the loss of the man who led them to victory against Hitler and drove Russia to be a world power, and also because a new era of uncertainty is now beginning.

*The narrator brings in more reasons why the Bolshevik party, led by Stalin, was a positive change for the people of Russia. After the Revolution, Stalin served as a strong and particularly stable leader, and even if many of the decisions of the government were ultimately to the detriment of the people, Russia survived.*

Eight different men could reasonably claim the right to be the next leader. The favorite is the progressive Malenkov, who is appointed as both Premier of the Party and General Secretary of the Central Committee, like Stalin had been. But a consensus forms that no man should be allowed to simultaneously hold these two positions, and so he passes his General Secretary position to Nikita Khrushchev, setting the stage for a battle between the two.

*Now, with a new era of uncertainty and change, the future of Soviet Russia depends on its next leader. Of course, history shows that Khrushchev emerges victorious, but one of the upcoming plots of the novel concerns how he painted himself to be a progressive even though he was highly conservative.*

Later in the evening, the Count lies in Anna's bed, debating what he and Richard had spoken about. The Count says that if the Former (opening the city doors) is even a remote possibility, the forces of the Latter (bolting them shut) will never win. Anna doesn't disagree with the Count, but says that in New York, there would never even be a question of closing the city's doors.

*The Count and Anna once again show the depth of their relationship, as their topics of conversation move into the political future of the country. Anna is not only a romance for the Count, but also a sounding board for his thoughts and a true partner.*

The Count comments that it sounds like Anna wants to live in America. She counters that everyone wants to live in America, if only for the conveniences: clothes washing machines, dishwashing machines, vacuum cleaners, toasters, televisions, automatic garage doors. The Count says that if he were a garage door, he would miss the old days. He says that the best conveniences are sleeping until noon and having someone bring in a breakfast tray, or having a carriage waiting at the door of a party to take you to another. He says that at one point, he had them all, but in the end, it was the inconveniences that mattered the most. Anna kisses him on the nose.

*Until the end of the novel, this is the most definitive the Count ever is about saying that Anna, Sofia, and the other relationships he has made are more important to him than his old lifestyle was. In a way, this implies that he feels fortunate that he was imprisoned in the Metropol, because even though he lost the conveniences of the upper class, he gained the "inconveniences" of a daughter and a romantic partner.*

## BOOK 4, 1953, APOSTLES AND APOSTATES

The Count is pacing in his room for what has seemed an interminable amount of time. Sofia is playing at a concert and the performance is scheduled to end by eleven and the reception by twelve. He wonders if perhaps she and the group attending the performance had stopped for a pastry on their way back., and he is surprised to hear the clock strike only midnight. He thinks to himself how this day has been a day of exasperations.

*The Count again shows his protective side, as he worries about Sofia's performance at the concert. As his daughter ventures out into the world, he also starts to be cognizant of the fact that he once again feels trapped within the hotel because he cannot join her. This eventually sparks his idea to escape the hotel.*

Earlier in the afternoon, the Boyarsky staff had been assembled by the assistant manager, who explained that orders from now on would be taken with pen and paper. The bookkeeper would make an entry for the order and a cooking slip. Then an entry would be made in the cooking log and the cooking could begin. When the food was ready, a confirmation slip would be provided to the waiter who would serve the food. When the new regimen had been put into practice that evening, the customers were bemused to see the slips of paper, but beside themselves to find all of their food cold.

*The change in the Boyarsky's serving system is a bureaucratic change that the Bishop makes in the name of efficiency and keeping everything above board, but in reality makes things more difficult. This serves as another example of getting rid of a traditional way of doing things simply for the satisfaction of doing so.*

In the middle of the evening, the Bishop had paid a visit to the Boyarsky. The Count appealed to him, asking if they could abolish the pencil and paper. The Bishop stated that he was trying to eliminate the discrepancies between how much food started in the kitchen and how much food was served. The Count grew cold at the implication of theft, and told the Bishop that he would relate their conversation to Emile and Andrey in their daily meeting. And so, the new system continued throughout the evening.

*The Bishop also seems particularly picky about the Boyarsky and its systems because the Count had been so critical of him when he was a waiter, and this serves as another piece of his personal vendetta against the Count and the traditional systems he represents.*

Back in the Count's study, he starts humming Mozart's Piano Sonata No. 1 in C Major, the piece Sofia is playing at her competition. He wonders if the judges might think that the song is too "delightful" and not weighty enough. But he understands that it is the job of a parent to share opinions but then to take three or four steps back.

*As Sofia grows older, the Count begins to realize that one of the aspects of parenthood involves slowly letting one's child lead a life of purpose themselves, as he hopes she does. But this is still difficult for him, as the Count himself feels purposeful as Sofia's parent.*

The study door swings open, and Anna bursts in with Sofia, declaring that Sofia has won the competition. Anna showers her with praise, describing how she awed them both with her grace and the tenderness of her playing. She won the heart of every audience member. The Count produces champagne and toasts to the start of a grand adventure for her.

*Even though Anna's relationship with Sofia is only through the Count, Anna still treats her as a daughter in many ways as well, beaming with pride as she announces that Sofia has won the concert.*

The Count, Anna, and Sofia quickly cut off their celebration when they hear a voice in the bedroom. The Count exits to the other room through his closet, where he gives Emile and Andrey such a shock that Emile drops the cake they had brought in celebration. Fortunately, Andrey (the former juggler) catches the cake in midair. They ask what he was doing in the closet.

*Towles continues to weave together more loose details as the narrative starts to draw to a close, providing payoff for things he introduced early on. This is a small example of this, as Andrey is able to catch the cake because of his background as a juggler.*

Seeing that it is no use keeping his room a secret, the Count leads Andrey and Emile through the closet to his study. They congratulate Sofia on her success. At that moment, Vasily enters the closet to inform the Count that the Bishop is on his way to the Count's room. A petite gentleman in a brimmed hat has just arrived in the hotel and asked for the Count. The Bishop, who was in the lobby, offered to show the man to the Count's room personally. Vasily suspects that they have almost arrived.

*In taking Andrey and Emile into the secret study, the Count confirms how much their friendship means to him, as up until this point, only Mishka, Sofia, and Anna have entered the study. The study is a key part of his ability to feel free, and so entrusting them with that secret proves how loyal he knows them to be.*


The Count tells everyone to stay silent. He goes back through the closet to his bedroom. Just as he sits at his desk to pick up a book, the Bishop knocks on the door. He enters and introduces comrade Frinovsky. Frinovsky explains that he is the director of the Red October Youth Orchestra. He watched Sofia's performance that night, and wants to give her a position as his second pianist. The Count tells him it is a wonderful offer, but upon hearing that the orchestra is based six hundred miles away in Stalingrad, the Count states that Sofia would not be interested. Frinovsky then implies that it is not an optional offer.

*When Frinovsky explains that Sofia joining the orchestra is not optional, the Count sees more of the ways the Bolshevik party has been able to completely control people's lives, something that he has not experienced inside of the hotel. But this experience shows him how Sofia could face her own form of imprisonment inside Russian society with this newly discovered talent, as in the orchestra she would be at the whim of government control of artists.*

The Bishop congratulates the Count on this development, which makes him want to strangle the man. At that moment, Anna enters through the closet, surprising the men. Anna asks if Frinovsky knows comrade Nachevko (the round-faced Minister of Culture). She says that he has taken a personal interest in Sofia. Frinovsky, not wanting to come into conflict with a Minister of Culture, tells the Count to contact him if Sofia would ever like to join the orchestra. He and the Bishop leave. Anna then reveals that she just lied to get Sofia out of the commitment.

*Again, the vendetta the Bishop has against the Count comes to a head when the Bishop takes joy in the fact that Sofia would have to become a part in the orchestra. Fortunately, the round-faced fellow makes another fortunate appearance (if only in name), as Anna uses him as leverage so that Sofia will not have to join the Red October Youth Orchestra and leave the Metropol.*

The celebration of Sofia's success revives even more heartily after the Bishop's visit. Sofia makes a toast to the Count, saying that she has no intention of ever leaving the Metropol. The group decides to continue their festivities downstairs, but the Count hangs back in his room when he sees a woman in late middle age appear from the shadows in his hall.

*When Sofia states that she has no intention of leaving the Metropol, both the Count and readers begin to see how Sofia is also somewhat subject to a life of imprisonment in the Metropol by proxy, as she is tethered to the Count.*

The woman introduces herself as Katerina, Mishka's old love. The Count leads her back to his study. He assumes that something has happened to Mishka, and Katerina confirms that he died a week prior. The Count does not ask how he died. She says that they had been together again for six months, and that he spoke often of the Count. The Count says that he was a loyal friend and a fine poet. Katerina says that both Mishka and the Count were fine poets.

*Katerina's appearance confirms the long downfall of Mishka, who was unable to accept the new values of the country he loved so deeply. Though it is never revealed how he died, the incident of censorship, the exile to Siberia, and his subsequent Minus Six sentence all certainly took a great toll on his well-being.*

The Count confesses that he is not a fine poet, as it was actually Mishka who had written "Where Is It Now?" The Count and Mishka had decided to publish the poem under the Count's name because the secret police at that time (still under the government of the Tsar) would have sentenced Mishka to death, but they would not have done anything to a nobleman. The Count points out the irony: that had the poem not been published under his name, and had he not been sentenced to house arrest, he would have been shot in 1922.

*The Count's final revelation about the poem demonstrates the love that the two men had for each other, and how they helped each other survive. The Count had taken credit for the poem at first in order to spare Mishka's life, and then in turn, the poem's credit saved his own life when he was put on trial by the Bolsheviks as a member of the aristocracy at the beginning of the novel.*

Katerina gives the Count a package containing Mishka's project, and then she says that she should go. The Count asks where she will go, and she responds, "does it matter?" She tells the Count to remember Mishka, and leaves. The Count unwraps the project. Inside the title page is tucked a photograph of the Count and Mishka when they were young, which the Count had insisted they take.

*Katerina's response to the Count's question demonstrates that she has also lost hope in how Russia is progressing. Mishka had described how vibrant and excited she was at the poetry congresses, but here she is disconsolate and aimless.*

The Count then begins to read the book, which turns out to be a compilation of quotes from seminal texts arranged in chronological order, all of which relate to **bread** in some way. It begins with the Bible and moves through Shakespeare, Milton, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky. He is particularly struck by a quote from *The Brothers Karamazov*, in which the little boy, Ilyushechka, asks his father to crumble a crust of bread over his grave so that the sparrows will come to eat and he will not be alone in death. The Count weeps for Mishka's death, particularly because he was the last person alive to have known the Count as a younger man.

*Mishka's project, which is simply a compilation of quotes, still becomes an act of rebellion against Bolshevik society because it encompasses so much traditional literature, using a symbol of Russian tradition. The Count's reaction to Mishka's death reinforces how much they were like family. Like a brother, Mishka had known the Count as a young man, and because of the death of so many of the Count's family members, he was the only person remaining who knew him before his imprisonment.*


The compilation ends with the passage from Chekhov's letters that Mishka had cut so many years before. The Count understands why Shalamov had wanted to cut the passage, given the hardships of the 1930s, but the irony is that contrary to what Chekhov wrote, the Russians know better than anyone how good a piece of **bread** can be.

*The Bolsheviks, weary of any words that could be used against the party, censored the passage because of the famines that Party missteps had brought about, and the fact that most Russians could not travel to a place like Germany, which Chekhov had mentioned in the passage.*


When the Count closes Mishka's book, he is lost in thought. But he is thinking of Katerina, and how a woman who had been so vibrant and with whom Mishka had been so in love could think that where she was headed did not matter.

*Katerina's question worries the Count about what society can do to a bright young woman, and her question inspires him to help Sofia escape Russia, and to escape the Metropol himself.*


## BOOK 5, 1954, APPLAUSE AND ACCLAIM

Andrey and Emile are in the kitchen, in disbelief that in six months, on June 21, Sofia will be in Paris. The narrator explains that Russians who had seen Paris prior to the Revolution thought that they would never see it again. The Count enters the kitchen and explains that the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries has arranged it.

*Andrey and Emile's surprise about Sofia's trip to Paris shows how much society has changed, and how much they have been forced to change with it. They had simply accepted that no Russian would ever be able to leave the country again in their lifetime.*


Andrey, Emile, and the Count are wondering whether Paris has changed, when the newest member of their daily meeting, the Bishop, enters. The Bishop edits Emile's menu, provides seating instructions to Andrey, and determines that the real flower arrangements should be replaced with silk flowers. The meeting concludes.

*The Bishop, as a result of his good standing with the party and rising to the hotel manager position, has also taken control of the Triumvirate's daily meeting, micromanaging the way they run the restaurant and making them change their traditions.*


When the others leave to complete their tasks for the evening, the Count surreptitiously returns to the reservation book to scan for large events. He notes with particular interest a dinner on June 11 for the Presidium and the Council of Ministers. He starts to formulate a plan, as he had resolved to escape the hotel following Katerina's visit. This resolve turned to action at the news of the Conservatory's concert tour.

*This chapter begins a large scheme that Towles starts to carry out in the narrative. Without explaining exactly how the Count will escape, readers watch as he uses luck, skill, and a series of seemingly unimportant objects to escape and allow Sofia to run away from the Conservatory tour.*

That evening, the Count accepts a flute of champagne from Audrius in the Shalyapin as congratulations for Sofia's tour. But as he raises his glass, he is interrupted by Viktor Stepanovich. Stepanovich, who is very concerned, tells him that Sofia has declined the invitation to travel with the Conservatory's orchestra. The Count tells the man that he had no idea she had done so. He worries that she is nervous to play for such large venues, but assures Stepanovich that he will convince her to change her mind.

*As a parent, the Count certainly wants to make sure that Sofia has all the opportunities available to her, but he has also already realized that her performing with the Conservatory is crucial to his escape plan, and wants to work to make sure that all of the details can be executed perfectly.*

One hour later, Sofia and the Count are dining in the Boyarsky. Instead of playing *Zut*, the Count opts to tell her a story (even though she has already heard it a few times). As a boy, he had an aptitude for marksmanship, and was the favorite to win in the archery competition at school. He became so nervous leading up to the event that his hands began to shake and his eyes watered. He considered inventing an illness to avoid the competition entirely. But just as he took aim during the competition, he noticed a professor trip and fall into a pile of manure. He became so amused that he released the bow, and his arrow landed in the center target.

*The Count continues to exhibit typical qualities of an older parent, like telling a story about an experience at an archery competition in his youth in order to teach Sofia a lesson (and telling a story he has told her several times already). It is also ironic that Towles now reveals how the Count had an aptitude for marksmanship, considering that his good shot at the young officer made him swear off of wielding a weapon ever again.*

The Count tries to expand the moral to imply that Sofia should not feel nervous at the idea of performing, but she stops him and assures him that she is not afraid. She tells him that she simply does not want to go, and that she wants to stay in the hotel with him.

*Sofia's concern shows the Count just how much she has become attached to him and the hotel as her home, but this proves to the Count even more that he must make sure Sofia can also live her own life outside of the hotel.*

The Count then tells another story about the Christmas that he celebrated with Nina in 1922. He tells Sofia about her mother's argument that if one wished to broaden one's horizons, one should travel beyond the horizon. He worries that he will do Sofia a disservice by keeping her unintentionally confined to the hotel. He tells her that the most important thing in life is to have the courage to venture out into the world despite the uncertainty of acclaim. She tells him that if she plays in Paris, she would want him to hear her. He assures her that he would hear every chord even if she played on the moon.

*In referencing Nina and her opinion on venturing out into the world, the Count hopes to give Sofia the strength to do so as well. The Count tells Sofia stories of her mother particularly when he needs to give her confidence that she has inherited her mother's strength. Because even though the Count has become Sofia's whole family, as the Count well knows, stories of one's biological family can be powerful in reminding a person of their identity.*

## BOOK 5, ACHILLES AGONISTES

The Count stands at the front desk and writes a one-sentence note, slipping it into the bell boys' desk before heading to his weekly barber appointment. There, the Count asks for a trim and a shave. As the barber shaves the Count, a bellboy appears with an urgent note from the manager asking to see the barber immediately. When the barber leaves the room in a hurry, the Count leaps up from his chair as well.

*The Count starts to acquire items he needs for his escape. This particular antic has ties with the game that Sofia used to play in trying to run through the hotel while seeming like she was always in the same spot; Sofia has also taught the Count how to be adventurous, like her mother did before her.*

The narrator interjects that when the Count was a young man, he prided himself on being unmoved by the clock. He enjoyed an unrushed life. While others saw appointments with bankers and catching trains as urgent, he thought cups of tea and friendly chats were much more important. But if one makes time for idle pursuits, the narrator mock-questions, how can one attend to adult matters?

*The Count's view of time in his youth is also calibrated by his wealth and class. While he could afford to focus on "idle pursuits," as the narrator states here, the vast majority of people had to be strict with their time because they simply did not have the luxury of idleness.*

The philosopher Zeno answered this conundrum in the fifth century B.C.: Achilles should be able to run the twenty-yard dash quickly. But in order to advance a yard, he must first advance eighteen inches, and to advance eighteen inches, he must advance nine, and so on. Therefore, there are an infinite number of lengths he must run, which would take an infinite amount of time. Using this argument, the man who has an appointment at noon has an infinite number of intervals between now and then for idle pursuits.

*Here the narrator refers to "Zeno's paradox," which is an example of reducing an argument to the point of absurdity. As much as the young Count may have wanted to believe that he had infinite time (and perhaps he felt that way at first in the hotel), his life is limited, and he does not want to waste the rest of his days in the Metropol.*

However, after Sofia had been chosen for the tour, the Count becomes more acutely aware of time. He has six months until her departure, and there is much to be done in that span of time. The Count used one of the coins in the Grand Duke's desk to buy a small tan suitcase and some toiletries as a Christmas gift for Sofia. He also hired Stepanovich to help Sofia rehearse her piece, and Marina to make her a dress. The Count had also been teaching Sofia French, and visited the hotel's lost and found in the basement in order to find a *Baedeker* (a travel guide book) for Paris.

*The Count starts to gather his necessities for escape: for Sofia, a small suitcase with the barest of needs, preparations for her concert, knowledge of French, and a guide book for her to navigate. He does this with the same meticulousness with which he prepared for his suicide many years prior, hoping to be in control and keep fate from intervening—though, of course, anticipating fate is a futile attempt.*

And now, alone in the barber shop, the Count opens the glass cabinet, surveying the various soaps and oils inside. In the back of the cabinet, he finds what he is looking for: a bottle that his old barber had referred to as the Fountain of Youth. The Count also places one of the barber's spare razors in his pocket, and then sits back down just in time for the barber to return.

*The plot to steal a bottle from the barber's cabinet is another small piece in the Count's master plan, which will be used later to help Sofia dye the white strip in her hair.*

Back in his room, the Count puts the bottle in the back of his desk. Using the razor, he takes the Paris travel book and cuts out a detailed map of the eighth arrondissement. He carefully draws a line on the map with a red pen. Setting that aside, he opens the copy of Montaigne's Essays once more. As the twice-tolling clock chimes noon, he takes the razor and begins removing two hundred of its central pages.

*Finally (and humorously), the Count's extreme distaste for the Montaigne results in its destruction. However, it, too, serves its own fated purpose in the Count's plan, as he will use it as a means of smuggling money undetected with Sofia.*

## BOOK 5, ARRIVEDERCI

One evening in early May, the Count is sitting in the lobby when he spies a young Italian couple exit the hotel. He quickly runs upstairs to the fourth floor. At suite 428, he takes out **Nina's key** and lets himself inside. He goes into the closet and steals a pair of tan pants and a white shirt, stuffing the clothes into a pillowcase. When the Count leaves the room, he considers going back to pick up a newsboy cap he saw in the closet, but he hears the wheels of a room service cart and bolts back up the stairs.

*Where before Nina's key had expanded the Count's sense of freedom by allowing him access to more of the hotel, here the key begins to grant him his literal freedom, as he uses it to procure different objects to help him escape. This scene even mimics the one in the "Around and About" chapter in which Nina and the Count wait for a man to leave in order to go to his suite.*

At eleven o'clock that evening, the Count reviews his checklist over a glass of brandy in the bar. Nearly everything he needs has been acquired or accomplished. As he leaves, Audrius offers him a drink on the house, which he politely accepts. He sees an American salesman named Webster who has been trying to get meetings with officials in the government to sell vending machines in Russia. The man reminds him of Richard, particularly when he sees the man wave at a certain eminent professor.

*The chance of seeing Webster wave to the eminent professor makes the Count realize that Webster might know Richard, as a few years prior, Richard had used the same professor to get the Count to meet with him in private in his suite. This fortunate observation allows the Count to get in contact with Richard.*

Shortly after midnight, Webster returns to his room on the fourth floor—only to find the Count sitting in his chair. The man is confused at first, until the Count clarifies that he has a letter he needs delivered to Richard in Paris, thinking that Webster might know him. He and Webster then share two more drinks before the Count leaves the suite.

*Speaking with Webster allows the Count to send a message to Richard, whose friendship has been invaluable to the Count, and who becomes yet another key piece in helping Sofia and the Count escape.*

The Count walks down the fourth-floor hall and spies room 428 again. He knocks, and when no one answers, he slips into the room and opens the closet to retrieve the newsboy cap he had spied earlier. He notices a bundle wrapped in paper he had missed before, and carefully unwraps it. Inside is a set of nesting dolls, which he thinks could easily be used to hide something.

*Once again, this chance of returning to the Italians' room and happening upon the nesting dolls sparks the Count's idea to hide various objects within others so that he can smuggle money and information to Sofia when she escapes.*

Suddenly the Count hears a key in the door. He jumps into the closet and quietly closes the door. He hears a couple get ready for bed, read for about fifteen minutes, and then turn out the lights. The Count exits the closet, creating quite a stir as he goes, and shocking the Italian couple. He exits the room with a final crash and an "Arrivederci!"

*The Count's escapades are not without a few humorous turns, as he causes quite a stir retrieving the newsboy cap and discovering the nesting dolls. Like Sofia with the geese, in order to escape, the Count will have to ruffle a few feathers.*

## BOOK 5, ADULTHOOD

The Count and Anna sit in the actress's suite, waiting for the big reveal. Marina opens the bedroom door to show Sofia in a blue, long-sleeved, trumpet-style gown. Anna gasps in awe, while the Count simply sees his daughter as crossing the threshold into adulthood.

*The Count is amazed by Sofia's passage into adulthood, and knows that he has fulfilled the responsibility of a parent that he laid out when she had her accident: to allow her to lead a life of purpose.*

The Count and Anna compliment Sofia on how beautiful she looks. Sofia spins in delight, and the Count sees that the dress is completely backless. He sputters in fatherly protectiveness, saying that he does not want the audience to be staring at her back instead of listening to her playing. Anna asks Sofia what she thinks, and she says that it is splendid. Anna gives her one final ornament: a choker with a sapphire pendant.

*With the reveal of Sofia's dress, Anna and the Count demonstrate their different parent/advisor roles; the Count is a protective and tradition-minded father, as always. Anna also takes on a parental role with Sofia, as she does not have any children of her own, enabling Sofia to make her own decisions as an adult. Thus there is a bond between the three of them that takes on the quality of a more traditional family.*

Anna and the Count walk down the hallway after the fitting. Anna asks the Count why he is being so stodgy. He says that he is Sofia's father, and he has a certain responsibility in that role. The Count then says goodbye and exits into the service stair to get to the Boyarsky's daily meeting. Anna follows him into the stairwell. The Count is put off by her joining him, and continues his argument by saying that the dress did not have to show all of Sofia's vertebrae. Anna points out that he has often admired her own vertebrae, and backs him against the wall.

*Just as the Count was hesitant to learn that Anna and Sofia were speaking to each other without his knowing, the Count takes on a certain protectiveness of Sofia, perhaps because he is unsure of how to fit his relationship with Anna and his relationship with Sofia together. Yet the span and depth of his and Anna's relationship lends it a maturity that also allows Anna to be a part of Sofia's life.*

Later, the Count, Emile, Andrey, and the Bishop all sit in the Bishop's office. The Boyarsky's daily meeting has been moved to this location in April on the grounds that the kitchen was distracting. The Bishop looks over Emile's menu and edits it, then moves on to making instructions on the seating arrangements for the night.

*The Bishop continues his reign of tyranny and micromanagement over the Boyarsky's daily meetings, as through the years the animosity between the Count and the Bishop has remained the same, only the Bishop has gained more power over him.*


The Bishop asks about the preparations for the dinner of the Presidium and the Council of Ministers. Andrey assures him that everything is in order and that the Count will be overseeing the dinner while he remains at the Boyarsky. The Bishop then switches their assignments, noting the event's importance. The Count goes cold, as he had been banking on overseeing the dinner for his escape plan. As the meeting ends, he asks Andrey to spare a moment.

*As meticulously as the Count tries to prepare for his escape, fate (and the Bishop) finds a way to intervene in his plans. And so, he must enlist the help of his friends in order to make sure that he can sit in on the government dinner.*


## BOOK 5, AN ANNOUNCEMENT

On June 11, the evening of the event, the Count stands in suite 417 and ensures that all of the place settings are in order. Though the Count was excused from this duty, Andrey has been experiencing terrible tremors in his hand the day prior and so he asked the Count to assume his duties. Andrey told the Bishop that he already contacted comrade Propp, the liaison at the Kremlin, to confirm.

*Andrey gets his and the Count's assignments switched, and it is eventually revealed that Andrey did not in fact have tremors in his hand. Thanks to their close friendship, Andrey aids the Count in his plan so that he can be at the Presidium dinner.*

Comrade Propp had been relieved to hear that the Count was overseeing the dinner. While he did not know the Count's background as a former noble, he did know the Count to be a wonderful headwaiter. The two men had gone over the details of the dinner that morning. The only thing Propp did not give the Count was a seating arrangement, but Propp told him not to worry: there was no seating arrangement.

*The interactions with Propp reveal how much the Count's life has changed: since becoming a waiter, most people do not know his background or the details of his imprisonment. In one way, this is a testament to his ability to adapt, but in another way, this is a manifestation of the erasure of his past.*

The Count was pleased to hear there was no seating arrangement, because the tables were arranged in a "U" shape, and to invite forty-six leaders to navigate seating without guidance would likely lead to some disorder. But in reality, the Communist party is what the narrator describes as "the hierarchy of all hierarchies," and so when the guests arrived, the forty-six attendees would know exactly their place at the table. The seating arrangement would tell an observer all they needed to know about how Russia would be governed for the next twenty years.

*The narrator points out another contradiction within the philosophy of the Party. For even though it purports to hold up equality and a lack of hierarchy, it is so rigidly hierarchical that people know exactly where to sit without being told (unlike, for example, the aristocracy, for whom the Count had to make extensive seating plans).*

The doors are opened precisely at 9:00 P.M. The two center seats of the table are taken by Premier Malenkov and General Secretary Khrushchev. Over the next two hours, the men eat, drink, and raise toasts. Meanwhile, the Count, attentive as ever, overhears every private exchange made at the dinner.

*As the Count predicts, the lack of seating arrangement reveals the true hierarchy of the Party, with the two people most likely to take up the Party's reins sharing the head of the table.*

At 10:50, at the end of the dinner, Khrushchev makes a speech. He says that the Metropol is no stranger to historic events, and tonight, the group gathered will have the privilege of witnessing another. Khrushchev tells the guests to gather at the window, because Minister Malyshev has a demonstration.

*Khrushchev's introduction of a "historic event," as well as this lavish dinner in general, fulfill the prediction that the Count had many years ago that all leaders, regardless of political leanings, eventually enjoy a bit of grandeur.*

Malyshev announces that a new power plant, which had started to be built nearly three years prior, became fully operational that week. He continues, saying that the power plant will begin providing power to half of Moscow in exactly two minutes. The guests watch as the lights flicker out in a wave across the city, until the lights of the Kremlin go dark, followed quickly by the Metropol. Then the lights revive, block by block, powered by the first nuclear power plant in the world.

*Khrushchev's exhibition of pomp is not only a gesture of power, but a shrewd way to adapt nuclear power (which was used in the ongoing arms race in America) to cast himself as a man of technological progress, which was a value crucial to the Bolsheviks. This would shore up his bid as the heir to Stalin.*

Though it is an impressive demonstration of political power, a few of Moscow's citizens are inconvenienced by this outage. Anna and her fellow actors performing *The Seagull* improvise when the lights go out. Two waiters collide in the Piazza; Webster, the American, is trapped in an elevator. But in the dining room of the Boyarsky, which is lit by candlelight, the customers are served without interruption.

*This passage shows that sometimes there is an advantage to remaining traditional and keeping the romanticism of a time uncomplicated by technology, as the Boyarsky is the only place that is not inconvenienced by the brief power outage.*

## BOOK 5, ANECDOTES

On June 16, the Count lays out everything Sofia needs beside her knapsack and suitcase. The night before, he had explained exactly the plan she was to follow. Though she had objected initially to the plan, gradually she agreed to follow through with it. As the Count finishes preparing, Sofia enters and cries out that they have changed the venue to the Salle Pleyel. The Count tears out a new map from the guidebook and draws another path for her.

*A small twist of fate almost leads to the undoing of the entire plan. When the venue changes, the Count forgets to throw away the old map of Paris he had created for Sofia. When the Bishop finds the map later, he nearly prevents their entire operation.*

The Count then leads Sofia into the study, where he has prepared a candlelit dinner of a heartwarming soup, served on the hotel's silver. Sofia notices a small bell on the table, and when she rings it, Andrey appears. He presents Emile's newest specialty: Goose à la Sofia. The Count proceeds to recall that morning in which the geese were found on the fourth floor and thrown out the window, followed by the story of Anna throwing her own clothes out the window.

*As the Count and Sofia enjoy a final dinner together prior to her going away on tour, they recall some of the episodes and antics they've enjoyed over the years. These stories combine into a kind of typical family lore, as they are a series of memories unique to the family that they have created together.*

The Count then restricts himself to giving two pieces of advice: that if one does not master one's circumstances, one is bound to be mastered by them. The second is Montaigne's belief that constant cheerfulness is the surest sign of wisdom. He then tells Sofia how sad he will be in her absence, but how happy he is at the thought of her adventure. Finally, the Count gives Sofia a picture of himself as a young man, knowing how much she treasured the picture of her biological parents.

*In another demonstration of the Count's love for Sofia, he gives her the advice that he found so valuable from the Grand Duke. He also understands that even though Sofia has biological parents whom she loves, he is also her father, which he shows by giving her a photo of himself.*

Sofia exclaims at the grandeur of the young Count's moustache. When she asks what happened to it, the Count recalls the incident in the barbershop when his moustache had been unceremoniously clipped off. He admits to her, however, that he could thank that man for his life with Sofia: the disappearance of his moustache had prompted Nina to ask him where it had gone, thus initiating their friendship.

*The connections that the Count makes from the customer clipping off his moustache to Nina bringing Sofia to the Metropol serve as another long chain of events and chance details that led to the Count feeling like he has fulfilled a fated purpose.*

Sofia asks the Count if he regrets coming back to Russia after the Revolution. He responds that life has a plan, and that it summons people to help fulfill its purpose. He says that the only time life needed him to be in a particular place at a particular time was when Nina brought Sofia to the Metropol. Sofia gets up and kisses him on the cheek.

*By explaining that he feels that life intended him to become Sofia's father, the Count reveals how much purpose he felt he gained from her, as she gave his life much more meaning than he had in his prior years of imprisonment.*

Sofia then initiates a game of *Zut* with the topic of famous threesomes. The game goes on for a long time, until the Count admits defeat when Sofia comes up with Andrey, Emile, and Alexander (the Count).

*Just as the Count realizes the value of "The Triumvirate," Sofia also sees how the three men's friendship has played an important role in the Count's life—and in the life of the hotel.*

At ten o'clock, Marina knocks at the door. Sofia packs up her things and the three of them head downstairs to the lobby. The entire hotel staff has come to see her off, wishing her well in Paris. Finally, the Count embraces Sofia, and she walks through the doors of the Metropol.

*Not only has Sofia become a part of the Count's family, but she's also become part of the adoptive family at the Metropol, as the entire staff sees her off to Paris. Finally, she does what the Count still cannot do: leave the Metropol.*


The Count returns to his bedroom, which he already feels is too quiet. He drinks a glass of brandy, writes five letters, brushes his teeth, puts on his pajamas, and sleeps on the mattress without packing up Sofia's mattress above him.

*Upon the Count's return to his room, he begins to act like a typical parent with an "empty nest," feeling that it is too quiet, and in slight denial that Sofia is really gone.*

## BOOK 5, AN ASSOCIATION

The Count and Osip watch *Casablanca* together. Over the last several years, they have met less and less frequently, until they stopped meeting altogether. So when Osip happened to visit the Boyarsky in early June, they made plans to watch a film together on June 19. The Count had suggested *Casablanca*—the one Humphrey Bogart movie that Osip had never seen.

*Like almost all of the Count's other relationships (such as with Mishka or Anna), the strength of the friendship is not based on the length of the relationship or the frequency of seeing the other person, but rather the ability to fall right back into a sense of camaraderie.*

When the film starts, Osip is engrossed. After twenty minutes, Osip admits that this may be Bogart at his best. But as the Count watches the character of Rick think of his days in Paris with Ilsa, the Count thinks about Sofia's time in Paris and imagines where she might be at that moment, under the watchful gaze of the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations. But the Count returns from his reveries in time to watch his friend's engagement during the final minutes of the film.

*The Count continues to have a parental worry for Sofia as the day of their escapes nears. His reference to the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations reinforces how he believes that even though Sofia is following her passion, she is still locked within her own form of imprisonment in Russian society.*


## BOOK 5, ANTAGONISTS AT ARMS (AND AN ABSOLUTION)

On June 20, the Count is in the Boyarsky, serving a Finnish couple. As they order, he asks for their room number. When the Count formulated his plan, he quickly determined that he would need to steal a passport from a Scandinavian guest, without the person noticing. Here is an unmissable opportunity, he thinks, and he knows he must visit their suite that night. When he asks if they want dessert, the Count is pleased to hear that they plan to go right to bed.

*Over the course of the Count's planning, fate intervenes in both positive and negative ways (such as the change of the venue, or the political dinner that is held in the Metropol), and here fate gives the Count a fortunate break in providing him with Scandinavian guests that plan to go right to bed, so that he can visit their room.*

Shortly after midnight, the Count goes to suite 322, setting his shoes by the door so as not to make any noise. He slips easily in and out of the room with the passport and 150 Finnish marks in hand. He discovers, however, that while he was inside the night service had picked up his shoes for shining. Taking comfort in the fact that everything else has gone to plan, he climbs back up to his suite.

*Although the Count gets a lucky break, one of the ideas threading the novel is that people cannot rely solely on fate to allow things to work out; they must also be proactive in taking advantage of unexpected situations, as the Count is here.*

When the Count arrives in his room, the Bishop is sitting at his desk with the Count's first map of Paris, with Sofia's escape path drawn through it in red pen. The Bishop says coolly that the Count is a man of many interests. The Count lies and says that he has been reading Proust lately, and thus wanted to reacquaint himself with the layout of the city. The Bishop gets up and walks past the Count, descending the stairs to the ground floor, presumably to inform the authorities. When he arrives there, he is shocked to find the Count already sitting behind his desk with a pistol in hand.

*Of course, fate can also provide obstacles, as it does when the Bishop discovers the old map of Paris from before Sofia's venue had changed. For the Bishop, on the other hand, this is a rather fortunate development, as it finally allows him to gain the upper hand over the Count, and perhaps be rid of him once and for all as their personal and political rivalry finally comes to a head.*

The narrator flashes back: when the Bishop left the Count, the Count was struck by fury, fear, and frustration. Then, he had quickly sprung into action, running down the main staircase while the Bishop took the belfry staircase. He used **Nina's passkey** to open the door to the manager's office and found the panel behind which lay the old dueling pistols.

*The Count uses the games and adventures that he had with Nina and Sofia to his advantage: bolting down the stairs like Sofia had, he uses Nina's key and the panel that he had found when it was still Mr. Halecki's office to make sure that the Bishop cannot reveal their plans.*

Seeing the Count, the Bishop insists that he leave. The Count tells him to sit. When the Bishop starts to dial the police, the Count takes the pistol and fires it at a portrait of Stalin on the wall. The Bishop sits, and the Count asks for his watch, which tells him that it is almost 1:00 A.M.

*For all of the animosity the Count bears the Bishop, he does not kill him, because as he explained to Osip years earlier, he never wanted to shoot another one of his countrymen.*

As the Count waits in the office with the Bishop, the Bishop sneers that the nobility have always been convinced of their supremacy, and have thought that their wealth was a confirmation of the rightness of their actions. But, he goes on, what the Count says and does now will come to light, and he will be held accountable for it.

*Here the Bishop comes in with one of the larger and more common attacks on the nobility: that their wealth and manners alone justify their superiority. Yet the Bishop's criticisms are somewhat outdated, as the nobility has not existed for thirty years by this point, and the Count has proven himself a capable worker and true "gentleman" rather than just an exploitative, lazy nobleman.*

The Count looks over the Bishop's filing cabinets and asks for the key to them. The Bishop hands over his keyring, losing his sense of superiority in the process. The cabinets reveal files on members of the hotel staff, which contain notes about things such as flaws in the staff members' work or personal shortcomings. The Count pulls the files of his friends.

*It is also somewhat hypocritical of the Bishop to claim that the nobility has always been corrupt, when here the Bishop demonstrates his own corruption by keeping files on the hotel staff's flaws (but not their virtues).*

At 2:30 in the morning, the Count leads the Bishop to the boiler room, forcing him to dump the files into the furnace. Then the Count finds another travel guidebook in the basement—this time, for Finland. The last stop on the tour through the basement is the room in which the silver service is stored. He locks the Bishop in the room, knowing that there is a banquet on Tuesday and someone will find him then.

*The rooms the Count visits are the same rooms that he visited on his first day of adventures with Nina. The detail of the guidebook also proves important, as it informs the Bishop that the Count intends to go to Finland, before the Count subjects the Bishop to his own form of imprisonment.*

At three in the morning, the Count heads back to his room when he encounters the one-eyed cat, who sees him with the stolen passport, money, the travel guide, stockings on his feet, and two pistols in his belt. The one-eyed cat turns his blind eye upon the Count and disappears down the stairs.

*The Count's plan has not been without its twists, turns, and strange details, but overall, he is able to overcome the odds and start to carry out his escape.*

## BOOK 5, APOTHEOSIS

On June 21, the Count rises at his usual hour. He has breakfast, reads the papers in the lobby, and lunches in the Piazza. He pays a visit to Marina in the afternoon and has a drink in the Shalyapin. He dines at the Boyarsky in the evening, as it is his night off. On his way out, he slips into the coatroom to "borrow" an American journalist's raincoat and fedora.

*Exactly thirty-two years after the day of his imprisonment, the Count is finally ready to be free again so that he can carry on with his life. Ironically, this entails acting like nothing is different, and continuing the routine he's been following for most of his life (with the addition of a raincoat and fedora, à la Humphrey Bogart, Osip's favorite film star).*

The Count gathers his things in the rucksack he used in 1918 when returning to Russia from Paris. He takes only the essentials: three changes of clothes, a toothbrush and toothpaste, *Anna Karenina*, Mishka's project, and the bottle of Châteauneuf-du-Pape he intends to drink on the tenth anniversary of Mishka's death. He says goodbye to his room, which was the smallest room in which he had ever lived, but in which nearly his whole life has come and gone.

*The Count's packing list is in direct contrast to how he first arrived at the hotel from his estate, and then moved from his third floor suite to the sixth floor. He dispenses with most of his family's possessions, taking only the practicalities as well as a few tokens of Mishka, who had grown to be like family over the years.*

At the same time as the Count descends to the lobby, Sofia concludes her performance in Paris. She takes a final bow, and as the next piece begins she heads back to the dressing room's bathroom. She takes off her shoes, dress, and necklace, donning the Italian clothes that the Count had stolen weeks before. She then takes Helena's scissors, which her father had given her, and cuts off her hair. She uses the bottle from the Metropol barber to dye the white strip of her hair black.

*Sofia also begins to carry out the escape, as many of the unexplained details from earlier chapters start to come together, such as the Italian clothes, the bottle of dye from the barber, and Helena's scissors. Just as the Count had given Nina his grandmother's opera glasses, Helena's scissors are not only practical but also serve as a kind of heirloom for Sofia.*

As Sofia puts on the Italian cap, she realizes that they never considered her shoes; she only has a pair of high heels. Dumping her old clothes in the trash (but keeping Anna's necklace), she heads toward the back of the building and leaves barefoot.

*Sofia keeps what represents another kind of family heirloom: her necklace. In an additional parallel with the Count from the night before, she is also forced to carry out part of her plan completely shoeless.*

Using the Count's map, Sofia follows the path from the Salle Pleyel to the American embassy, though she stops short at the beauty of the Louvre and the Arc de Triomphe in the night. In that moment, she remembers her father's advice when she was hesitant about his plan. He told her that people's lives are steered by uncertainty, but sometimes people are granted a moment of lucidity as they stand on the threshold of a bold new life. Standing in awe of various Parisian monuments, Sofia starts to understand what he meant.

*Even though Sofia had been hesitant to follow through with the Count's plan and to leave both him and the Metropol, in venturing out into Paris, she reaches a turning point in her life. Like her mother, she is inspired by the possibilities of travel and what she can do without the dictation of the Russian government keeping track of her every move.*

Richard Vanderwhile and his wife, Mrs. Vanderwhile, sit in his apartment after returning from a dinner. A member of his staff says that there is a young man seeking asylum. Richard lets the young man in, and realizes quickly that it is not a young man at all, but is in fact Sofia. Richard is amazed to see her, as the Count did not tell Richard when or how Sofia would be arriving at the embassy.

*While Richard's friendship has been a gift for the Count, his stationing at the American embassy in Paris is very practically fortunate, and is what allows both Sofia and the Count to make their escapes, and for Sofia to seek asylum in America.*

Richard suggests that Sofia have some food, and Mrs. Vanderwhile goes in search of some clothes for her. Richard asks if Sofia has something for him; Sofia says that the Count told her that Richard would have something for her first. Richard gives her a package wrapped in brown paper. She unwraps the package and finds Montaigne's *Essays*. Sofia then opens the book, revealing a rectangular cavity cut into it that contains eight small stacks of gold coins.

*Inspired by the nesting dolls in the Italians' closet (and his dislike of Montaigne), the Count uses the book to smuggle his daughter money, providing her with some of his own inheritance so that she might be able to lead a life of purpose, as he had hoped, and make a new life in America with Richard's help.*

Sofia then takes off her knapsack and empties it of her belongings, handing the empty bag to Richard. She instructs him to cut the seam that has been sewn into it, and in it he finds a tightly rolled piece of paper. On the front is a record of the seating arrangement for the dinner of the Council of Ministers and the Presidium; on the back is a detailed description of that evening.

*The Count, in turn, uses the chance of the dinner at the Metropol to be able to do a favor for Richard in return: describing the events of the dinner and providing a hint as to how the future of Russian politics might turn out.*

In the description, the Count notes that Khrushchev was the only person who knew where the dinner was going to be held. He also described how Khrushchev, even though he was more conservative than Malenkov, had cast himself as a man of the future by using nuclear power to light the city.

*The Count uses his ability to read people's intentions, backgrounds, and interactions to tell Richard that it is in fact Khrushchev who will lead the Russian government in the coming years.*

Richard smiles at the description, but also notices another letter from the Count that arrived on his desk while he was out for the evening. Reading it, he jumps up, as it contains instructions on how to confirm that Sofia arrived at the embassy safely. He tells the embassy staff to have everyone man the telephone switchboard.

*Richard provides one final key detail in the Count's master plan: creating a bit of chaos for the Count to know that Sofia has arrived safely, but also to allow him to escape. He has orchestrated every detail as the different threads of his plan come together perfectly.*

A few minutes before midnight, the Count arrives in the lobby with his rucksack. He sits and watches the guests of the hotel come and go. Then, at almost exactly midnight, thirty different telephones in the hotel begin to ring. As pandemonium ensues and people begin to wake up and investigate, the Count quietly puts on the journalist's hat and coat and walks out of the Metropol Hotel.

*With Richard's help and keen planning, the Count is able to escape the Metropol Hotel. Without Sofia there, he no longer has a real purpose or finds meaning in staying in the hotel, and he sees that it is time to master his circumstances once more and begin a new chapter in his life.*

## AFTERWORD, AFTERWARDS...

On June 21, 1954, Viktor Stepanovich leaves his apartment just before midnight in order to keep his appointment, takes a bus to St. Petersburg Station, and waits in a café. The Count enters and orders a cup of coffee. The Count thanks Viktor for coming, and then they see a scuffle between two fruit sellers on the other side of the café. After a brief exchange of blows, the manager drags the combatants out the doors and the accordion player starts to play, hoping to restore some cheer. The Count asks if Viktor has seen *Casablanca*. When he says that he has not, the Count describes the scene in which a crook is dragged away by the police, and the saloonkeeper instructs his bandleader to play on.

*Viktor's friendship also becomes valuable to the Count in helping to misdirect the police. The recurring references to* Casablanca *that pop up in the final chapters of the novel also help chronicle the change in artistic media over the course of this time period. While the beginning of the book is more in the style of a* War and Peace *or* Anna Karenina*, the adventure and escape of the Count at the end (particularly his fedora and jacket) have traces of film noir and* Casablanca.

The following morning, members of the Russian intelligence agency arrive at the hotel to seek out the Count, but they cannot find him. The officers try to question the Bishop, but they cannot seem to find him either. Andrey and Emile hear a rumor that Sofia has gone missing in Paris.

*The mystery of the Count and Sofia's joint escape finally begins to be revealed to the other characters.*

As Andrey and Emile discuss whether the Count could truly have escaped, the concierge delivers an envelope to each of them. They discover letters from the Count, thanking them for their friendship and gifting them each four gold coins. Emile shakes his head, asking what is to become of him now that the Count is gone and Andrey is afflicted with palsy. Andrey laughs and says that there is nothing wrong with his hands, taking four of the coins and juggling them agilely.

*The Count provides Andrey and Emile with one final parting gesture in order to thank them for all they have done for him. Not only have they provided their friendship, but in having the job at the Boyarsky, the Count was also able to find purpose.*

At five o'clock that afternoon, the Chief Administrator of a special branch of the country's security (who is revealed to be Osip by the scar above his left ear) is reviewing a file when a young man knocks on his door and informs him that Sofia and the Count have both gone missing. They have also found the Bishop locked in a storeroom. He told him that he discovered Sofia's plan to escape and was forced into the storeroom at gunpoint by the Count.

*Small details that Towles has set up continue to recur, creating a sense of order and fate in the world of the narrative. Though readers have heard of the office of the secret police a few times by this point, the scar above the man's left ear reveals one of its major officials to be Osip.*

The young man goes on to say that it appears that the Count had stolen a Finnish passport and Finnish currency, as well as a hat and coat. Then investigators were sent to Leningradsky Railway station, where it was confirmed that a man wearing the hat and coat got on a train to Helsinki. The connection to the Finnish passport was made by the Bishop, who had seen the Count pick up a travel guide book for Finland. The young man wonders, however, why the Count did not shoot the Bishop. Osip answers that it is because the Bishop was not an aristocrat.

*More details that the Count had set up continue to be discovered: the misdirection of the Finnish passport, money, and the guidebook that the Count picked up in front of the Bishop. As a final payoff from Towles regarding the Count's escape, Osip reveals the reason the Count did not shoot the Bishop, because of the story he had told Osip years before about shooting the young Hussar officer. It's also suggested that the Count never saw the Bishop as an equal, and therefore saw him as not even honorable enough to deserve being shot in a duel.*

The narrator reveals that it was in fact Viktor Stepanovich who had boarded the train to Helsinki in the hat and coat. He had left the maps and clothes in the station in Vyborg, traveling unnoticed back to Moscow on the next train. A year later, Viktor finally watches *Casablanca*, seeing the police drag the crook from the salon. He notices that in the midst of all this chaos, Rick sets a cocktail glass upright, which had been knocked over during the skirmish—exhibiting a belief, Stepanovich reckons, that the smallest of actions can restore a sense of order to the world.

*The small moment in* Casablanca *sums up the theme of fate, chance, and the thoughtfulness of a true "gentleman." For in the midst of what seems like a life of chaos, small chance details can reveal a chain of events hinting at some order in the world. This is the philosophy in which the Count believed, and the guiding style in which Towles writes, making sure that every detail introduced in the beginning has some meaning or purpose by the story's end.*

## AFTERWORD, AND ANON

The Count stands in an orchard in the Nizhny Novgorod province. As he walks along an overgrown road, he hears a voice from one of the trees. A young brother and sister jump down, asking if the Count is going to the local mansion. They lead him to it, but it has been burned to the ground—reduced to two chimneys. Though many stories counsel that it is unwise for a person to return home after decades of absence, the narrator relays that the Count is able to revisit the past quite pleasantly.

*For all of the events that have transpired over the past several decades, and all of the ways the Count has adapted to the changes in society, he finds that he loves Russia too much to leave it. He is also in many ways a man of the past, and so he takes comfort in returning to his childhood province.*

Leaving the two children, the Count goes to the local village about five miles away, seeking an inn at the edge of town. He heads into the tavern, and finds a little room with an old Russian stove at the back. There in the corner, at a table for two, a "willowy woman" (Anna) sits, waiting.

*At its conclusion, the story hints at how the Count will spend the remainder of his life in his old home: resuming his relationship with Anna, as their love continues to be a way for him to find meaning and a sense of family.*

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