The opening of Volume II marks important character transitions for both Pierre Bezukhov and Nikolai Rostov, so the coverage below is a bit more detailed.

**Highlights of War and Peace, Volume II**

**Part One**

**Chapter 1:** Nikolai Rostov returns from the failed campaign, accompanied by his hussar friend Captain Denisov, and is received joyfully by his family. Natasha tells him that she no longer has any romantic interest in Boris.

**Chapter 2:** Nikolai becomes an eligible bachelor and a “young man about town”; exhilarated by his new sense of “manliness,” he draws away from Sonya, begins socializing with Dolokhov, and becomes disdainful of “women’s society”—except, of course, for the “lady of the boulevard” that he “visits in the evenings.”

Count Ilya Rostov, as the leader of Moscow society (and who is also generous enough to cover the expenses), is put in charge of a special dinner honoring Prince Bagration at the English Club. Anna Mikhailovna reveals that Pierre’s wife Helene has been “totally compromised” by Dolokhov. The three major rationalizations for the Russian defeat are presented and refuted by Tolstoy’s narrative voice.

**Chapter 4:** Pierre attends the dinner for Bagration in a disturbed and distracted state of mind: he has received an anonymous letter informing him of his wife’s infidelity with Dolokhov. At the dinner, Dolokhov treats Pierre with undisguised contempt, calling him Petrusha (a child’s nickname for Pyotr), and offering a toast to “beautiful women and their lovers.” Note that Dolokhov is referred to as “cruel”; he is the only character in War and Peace to be thus described. Pierre ultimately explodes in anger and challenges Dolokhov, a known and dangerous duellist, to a duel, to be held the next morning. Pierre refuses all attempts to encourage him to call off the duel, even though he knows in his heart that it is wrong.

**Chapter 5:** Pierre “wincers” several times during the duel and its aftermath, reinforcing his sense of the inappropriateness of the whole affair, but somehow he manages to wound Dolokhov and survives his rival’s determined attempts to kill him despite a bullet hole in his side. Pierre is horrified at what has happened. Nikolai Rostov, Dolokhov’s “second,” is surprised to discover that the seemingly remorseless Dolokhov is a loving son and brother who is concerned about how his possibly mortal injury will affect his family.

**Chapter 6:** After the duel, Pierre spends another sleepless night agonizing over his and his wife’s culpability for the terrifying event he has just experienced. He reflects on Helene’s “coarse” language and “vulgarity of expression.” Several times he uses the term, “depraved woman.” He accepts his own guilt as well, since he chose to marry a woman that he did not love, and invited a man he barely knew into his house, who then did something that he might have done under the same circumstances. After a violent confrontation with Helene, he separates from her and leaves most of his fortune in her hands.