

CHAPTER V

“Well, begin!” said Dólokhov.

“All right,” said Pierre, still smiling in the same way. A feeling of dread was in the air. It was evident that the affair so lightly begun could no longer be averted but was taking its course independently of men’s will.

Denísov first went to the barrier and announced: “As the adve’sawies have wefused a weconciliation, please pwoceed. Take your pistols, and at the word thwee begin to advance.

“O-ne! T-wo! Thwee!” he shouted angrily and stepped aside.

The combatants advanced along the trodden tracks, nearer and nearer to one another, beginning to see one another through the mist. They had the right to fire when they liked as they approached the barrier. Dólokhov walked slowly without raising his pistol, looking intently with his bright, sparkling blue eyes into his antagonist’s face. His mouth wore its usual semblance of a smile.

“So I can fire when I like!” said Pierre, and at the word “three,” he went quickly forward, missing the trodden path and stepping into the deep snow. He held the pistol in his right hand at arm’s length, apparently afraid of shooting himself with it. His left hand he held carefully back, because he wished to support his right hand with it and knew he must not do so. Having advanced six paces and strayed off the track into the snow, Pierre looked down at his feet, then quickly glanced at Dólokhov and, bending his finger as he had been shown, fired. Not at all expecting so loud a report, Pierre shuddered at the sound and then, smiling at his own sensations, stood still. The smoke, rendered denser by the mist, prevented him from seeing anything for an instant, but there was no second report as he had expected. He only heard Dólokhov’s hurried steps, and his figure came in view through the smoke. He was pressing one hand to his left side, while the other clutched his drooping pistol. His face was pale. Rostóv ran toward him and said something.

“No-o-o!” muttered Dólokhov through his teeth, “no, it’s not over.” And after stumbling a few staggering steps right up to the saber, he sank on the snow beside it. His left hand was bloody; he wiped it on his coat and supported himself with it. His frowning face was pallid and quivered.

“Plea...” began Dólokhov, but could not at first pronounce the word.

“Please,” he uttered with an effort.

Pierre, hardly restraining his sobs, began running toward Dólokhov and was about to cross the space between the barriers, when Dólokhov cried:

“To your barrier!” and Pierre, grasping what was meant, stopped by his saber. Only ten paces divided them. Dólokhov lowered his head to the snow, greedily bit at it, again raised his head, adjusted himself, drew in his legs and sat up, seeking a firm center of gravity. He sucked and swallowed the cold snow, his lips quivered but his eyes, still smiling, glittered with effort and exasperation as he mustered his remaining strength. He raised his pistol and aimed.

“Sideways! Cover yourself with your pistol!” ejaculated Nesvítski.

“Cover yourself!” even Denísov cried to his adversary.

Pierre, with a gentle smile of pity and remorse, his arms and legs helplessly spread out, stood with his broad chest directly facing Dólokhov and looked sorrowfully at him. Denísov, Rostóv, and Nesvítski closed their eyes. At the same instant they heard a report and Dólokhov’s angry cry.

“Missed!” shouted Dólokhov, and he lay helplessly, face downwards on the snow.

Pierre clutched his temples, and turning round went into the forest, trampling through the deep snow, and muttering incoherent words:

“Folly... folly! Death... lies...” he repeated, puckering his face.

Nesvítski stopped him and took him home.

Rostóv and Denísov drove away with the wounded Dólokhov.

The latter lay silent in the sleigh with closed eyes and did not answer a word to the questions addressed to him. But on entering Moscow he suddenly came to and, lifting his head with an effort, took Rostóv, who was sitting beside him, by the hand. Rostóv was struck by the totally altered and unexpectedly rapturous and tender expression on Dólokhov’s face.

“Well? How do you feel?” he asked.

“Bad! But it’s not that, my friend—” said Dólokhov with a gasping voice. “Where are we? In Moscow, I know. I don’t matter, but I have killed her, killed... She won’t get over it! She won’t survive....”

“Who?” asked Rostóv.

“My mother! My mother, my angel, my adored angel mother,” and Dólokhov pressed Rostóv’s hand and burst into tears.

When he had become a little quieter, he explained to Rostóv that he was living with his mother, who, if she saw him dying, would not survive it. He implored Rostóv to go on and prepare her.

Rostóv went on ahead to do what was asked, and to his great surprise

learned that Dólokhov the brawler, Dólokhov the bully, lived in Moscow with an old mother and a hunchback sister, and was the most affectionate of sons and brothers.