

CHAPTER XX

Rostóv had come to Tilsit the day least suitable for a petition on Denísov's behalf. He could not himself go to the general in attendance as he was in mufti and had come to Tilsit without permission to do so, and Borís, even had he wished to, could not have done so on the following day. On that day, June 27, the preliminaries of peace were signed. The Emperors exchanged decorations: Alexander received the Cross of the Legion of Honor and Napoleon the Order of St. Andrew of the First Degree, and a dinner had been arranged for the evening, given by a battalion of the French Guards to the Preobrazhénsk battalion. The Emperors were to be present at that banquet.

Rostóv felt so ill at ease and uncomfortable with Borís that, when the latter looked in after supper, he pretended to be asleep, and early next morning went away, avoiding Borís. In his civilian clothes and a round hat, he wandered about the town, staring at the French and their uniforms and at the streets and houses where the Russian and French Emperors were staying. In a square he saw tables being set up and preparations made for the dinner; he saw the Russian and French colors draped from side to side of the streets, with huge monograms A and N. In the windows of the houses also flags and bunting were displayed.

"Borís doesn't want to help me and I don't want to ask him. That's settled," thought Nicholas. "All is over between us, but I won't leave here without having done all I can for Denísov and certainly not without getting his letter to the Emperor. The Emperor!... He is here!" thought Rostóv, who had unconsciously returned to the house where Alexander lodged.

Saddled horses were standing before the house and the suite were assembling, evidently preparing for the Emperor to come out.

"I may see him at any moment," thought Rostóv. "If only I were to hand the letter direct to him and tell him all... could they really arrest me for my civilian clothes? Surely not! He would understand on whose side justice lies. He understands everything, knows everything. Who can be more just, more magnanimous than he? And even if they did arrest me for being here, what would it matter?" thought he, looking at an officer who was entering the house the Emperor occupied. "After all, people do go in.... It's all nonsense! I'll go in and hand the letter to the Emperor myself so much the worse for Drubetskóy who drives me to it!" And suddenly with a determination he himself did not expect, Rostóv felt for the letter in his pocket and went straight to the house.

"No, I won't miss my opportunity now, as I did after Austerlitz," he thought, expecting every moment to meet the monarch, and conscious of the blood that rushed to his heart at the thought. "I will fall at his feet and beseech him. He will lift me up, will listen, and will even thank me. 'I am happy when I can do good, but to remedy injustice is the greatest happiness,'" Rostóv fancied the sovereign saying. And passing people who looked after him with curiosity, he entered the porch

of the Emperor's house.

A broad staircase led straight up from the entry, and to the right he saw a closed door. Below, under the staircase, was a door leading to the lower floor.

"Whom do you want?" someone inquired.

"To hand in a letter, a petition, to His Majesty," said Nicholas, with a tremor in his voice.

"A petition? This way, to the officer on duty" (he was shown the door leading downstairs), "only it won't be accepted."

On hearing this indifferent voice, Rostóv grew frightened at what he was doing; the thought of meeting the Emperor at any moment was so fascinating and consequently so alarming that he was ready to run away, but the official who had questioned him opened the door, and Rostóv entered.

A short stout man of about thirty, in white breeches and high boots and a batiste shirt that he had evidently only just put on, standing in that room, and his valet was buttoning on to the back of his breeches a new pair of handsome silk-embroidered braces that, for some reason, attracted Rostóv's attention. This man was speaking to someone in the adjoining room.

"A good figure and in her first bloom," he was saying, but on seeing Rostóv, he stopped short and frowned.

"What is it? A petition?"

"What is it?" asked the person in the other room.

"Another petitioner," answered the man with the braces.

"Tell him to come later. He'll be coming out directly, we must go."

"Later... later! Tomorrow. It's too late..."

Rostóv turned and was about to go, but the man in the braces stopped him.

"Whom have you come from? Who are you?"

"I come from Major Denísov," answered Rostóv.

"Are you an officer?"

"Lieutenant Count Rostóv."

"What audacity! Hand it in through your commander. And go along with you... go," and he continued to put on the uniform the valet handed

him.

Rostóv went back into the hall and noticed that in the porch there were many officers and generals in full parade uniform, whom he had to pass.

Cursing his temerity, his heart sinking at the thought of finding himself at any moment face to face with the Emperor and being put to shame and arrested in his presence, fully alive now to the impropriety of his conduct and repenting of it, Rostóv, with downcast eyes, was making his way out of the house through the brilliant suite when a familiar voice called him and a hand detained him.

“What are you doing here, sir, in civilian dress?” asked a deep voice.

It was a cavalry general who had obtained the Emperor’s special favor during this campaign, and who had formerly commanded the division in which Rostóv was serving.

Rostóv, in dismay, began justifying himself, but seeing the kindly, jocular face of the general, he took him aside and in an excited voice told him the whole affair, asking him to intercede for Denísov, whom the general knew. Having heard Rostóv to the end, the general shook his head gravely.

“I’m sorry, sorry for that fine fellow. Give me the letter.”

Hardly had Rostóv handed him the letter and finished explaining Denísov’s case, when hasty steps and the jingling of spurs were heard on the stairs, and the general, leaving him, went to the porch. The gentlemen of the Emperor’s suite ran down the stairs and went to their horses. Hayne, the same groom who had been at Austerlitz, led up the Emperor’s horse, and the faint creak of a footstep Rostóv knew at once was heard on the stairs. Forgetting the danger of being recognized, Rostóv went close to the porch, together with some inquisitive civilians, and again, after two years, saw those features he adored: that same face and same look and step, and the same union of majesty and mildness.... And the feeling of enthusiasm and love for his sovereign rose again in Rostóv’s soul in all its old force. In the uniform of the Preobrazhénsk regiment—white chamois-leather breeches and high boots—and wearing a star Rostóv did not know (it was that of the Légion d’honneur), the monarch came out into the porch, putting on his gloves and carrying his hat under his arm. He stopped and looked about him, brightening everything around by his glance. He spoke a few words to some of the generals, and, recognizing the former commander of Rostóv’s division, smiled and beckoned to him.

All the suite drew back and Rostóv saw the general talking for some time to the Emperor.

The Emperor said a few words to him and took a step toward his horse. Again the crowd of members of the suite and street gazers (among whom was Rostóv) moved nearer to the Emperor. Stopping beside his horse, with his hand on the saddle, the Emperor turned to the cavalry general

and said in a loud voice, evidently wishing to be heard by all:

“I cannot do it, General. I cannot, because the law is stronger than I,” and he raised his foot to the stirrup.

The general bowed his head respectfully, and the monarch mounted and rode down the street at a gallop. Beside himself with enthusiasm, Rostóv ran after him with the crowd.