

CHAPTER XX

Pierre did not stay for dinner, but left the room and went away at once. He drove through the town seeking Anatole Kurágin, at the thought of whom now the blood rushed to his heart and he felt a difficulty in breathing. He was not at the ice hills, nor at the gypsies', nor at Komoneno's. Pierre drove to the Club. In the Club all was going on as usual. The members who were assembling for dinner were sitting about in groups; they greeted Pierre and spoke of the town news. The footman having greeted him, knowing his habits and his acquaintances, told him there was a place left for him in the small dining room and that Prince Michael Zakhárych was in the library, but Paul Timoféevich had not yet arrived. One of Pierre's acquaintances, while they were talking about the weather, asked if he had heard of Kurágin's abduction of Rostóva which was talked of in the town, and was it true? Pierre laughed and said it was nonsense for he had just come from the Rostóvs'. He asked everyone about Anatole. One man told him he had not come yet, and another that he was coming to dinner. Pierre felt it strange to see this calm, indifferent crowd of people unaware of what was going on in his soul. He paced through the ballroom, waited till everyone had come, and as Anatole had not turned up did not stay for dinner but drove home.

Anatole, for whom Pierre was looking, dined that day with Dólokhov, consulting him as to how to remedy this unfortunate affair. It seemed to him essential to see Natásha. In the evening he drove to his sister's to discuss with her how to arrange a meeting. When Pierre returned home after vainly hunting all over Moscow, his valet informed him that Prince Anatole was with the countess. The countess' drawing room was full of guests.

Pierre without greeting his wife whom he had not seen since his return—at that moment she was more repulsive to him than ever—entered the drawing room and seeing Anatole went up to him.

“Ah, Pierre,” said the countess going up to her husband. “You don't know what a plight our Anatole...”

She stopped, seeing in the forward thrust of her husband's head, in his glowing eyes and his resolute gait, the terrible indications of that rage and strength which she knew and had herself experienced after his duel with Dólokhov.

“Where you are, there is vice and evil!” said Pierre to his wife.
“Anatole, come with me! I must speak to you,” he added in French.

Anatole glanced round at his sister and rose submissively, ready to follow Pierre. Pierre, taking him by the arm, pulled him toward himself and was leading him from the room.

“If you allow yourself in my drawing room...” whispered Héléne, but Pierre did not reply and went out of the room.

Anatole followed him with his usual jaunty step but his face betrayed

anxiety.

Having entered his study Pierre closed the door and addressed Anatole without looking at him.

“You promised Countess Rostóva to marry her and were about to elope with her, is that so?”

“Mon cher,” answered Anatole (their whole conversation was in French), “I don’t consider myself bound to answer questions put to me in that tone.”

Pierre’s face, already pale, became distorted by fury. He seized Anatole by the collar of his uniform with his big hand and shook him from side to side till Anatole’s face showed a sufficient degree of terror.

“When I tell you that I must talk to you!...” repeated Pierre.

“Come now, this is stupid. What?” said Anatole, fingering a button of his collar that had been wrenched loose with a bit of the cloth.

“You’re a scoundrel and a blackguard, and I don’t know what deprives me from the pleasure of smashing your head with this!” said Pierre, expressing himself so artificially because he was talking French.

He took a heavy paperweight and lifted it threateningly, but at once put it back in its place.

“Did you promise to marry her?”

“I... I didn’t think of it. I never promised, because...”

Pierre interrupted him.

“Have you any letters of hers? Any letters?” he said, moving toward Anatole.

Anatole glanced at him and immediately thrust his hand into his pocket and drew out his pocketbook.

Pierre took the letter Anatole handed him and, pushing aside a table that stood in his way, threw himself on the sofa.

“I shan’t be violent, don’t be afraid!” said Pierre in answer to a frightened gesture of Anatole’s. “First, the letters,” said he, as if repeating a lesson to himself. “Secondly,” he continued after a short pause, again rising and again pacing the room, “tomorrow you must get out of Moscow.”

“But how can I?...”

“Thirdly,” Pierre continued without listening to him, “you must never breathe a word of what has passed between you and Countess Rostóva. I know I can’t prevent your doing so, but if you have a spark of

conscience...” Pierre paced the room several times in silence.

Anatole sat at a table frowning and biting his lips.

“After all, you must understand that besides your pleasure there is such a thing as other people’s happiness and peace, and that you are ruining a whole life for the sake of amusing yourself! Amuse yourself with women like my wife—with them you are within your rights, for they know what you want of them. They are armed against you by the same experience of debauchery; but to promise a maid to marry her... to deceive, to kidnap.... Don’t you understand that it is as mean as beating an old man or a child?...”

Pierre paused and looked at Anatole no longer with an angry but with a questioning look.

“I don’t know about that, eh?” said Anatole, growing more confident as Pierre mastered his wrath. “I don’t know that and don’t want to,” he said, not looking at Pierre and with a slight tremor of his lower jaw, “but you have used such words to me—‘mean’ and so on—which as a man of honor I can’t allow anyone to use.”

Pierre glanced at him with amazement, unable to understand what he wanted.

“Though it was tête-à-tête,” Anatole continued, “still I can’t...”

“Is it satisfaction you want?” said Pierre ironically.

“You could at least take back your words. What? If you want me to do as you wish, eh?”

“I take them back, I take them back!” said Pierre, “and I ask you to forgive me.” Pierre involuntarily glanced at the loose button. “And if you require money for your journey...”

Anatole smiled. The expression of that base and cringing smile, which Pierre knew so well in his wife, revolted him.

“Oh, vile and heartless brood!” he exclaimed, and left the room.

Next day Anatole left for Petersburg.