

## CHAPTER XXII

That same evening Pierre went to the Rostóvs' to fulfill the commission entrusted to him. Natásha was in bed, the count at the club, and Pierre, after giving the letters to Sónya, went to Márya Dmítrievna who was interested to know how Prince Andrew had taken the news. Ten minutes later Sónya came to Márya Dmítrievna.

“Natásha insists on seeing Count Peter Kirílovich,” said she.

“But how? Are we to take him up to her? The room there has not been tidied up.”

“No, she has dressed and gone into the drawing room,” said Sónya.

Márya Dmítrievna only shrugged her shoulders.

“When will her mother come? She has worried me to death! Now mind, don't tell her everything!” said she to Pierre. “One hasn't the heart to scold her, she is so much to be pitied, so much to be pitied.”

Natásha was standing in the middle of the drawing room, emaciated, with a pale set face, but not at all shamefaced as Pierre expected to find her. When he appeared at the door she grew flurried, evidently undecided whether to go to meet him or to wait till he came up.

Pierre hastened to her. He thought she would give him her hand as usual; but she, stepping up to him, stopped, breathing heavily, her arms hanging lifelessly just in the pose she used to stand in when she went to the middle of the ballroom to sing, but with quite a different expression of face.

“Peter Kirílovich,” she began rapidly, “Prince Bolkónski was your friend—is your friend,” she corrected herself. (It seemed to her that everything that had once been must now be different.) “He told me once to apply to you...”

Pierre sniffed as he looked at her, but did not speak. Till then he had reproached her in his heart and tried to despise her, but he now felt so sorry for her that there was no room in his soul for reproach.

“He is here now: tell him... to for... forgive me!” She stopped and breathed still more quickly, but did not shed tears.

“Yes... I will tell him,” answered Pierre; “but...”

He did not know what to say.

Natásha was evidently dismayed at the thought of what he might think she had meant.

“No, I know all is over,” she said hurriedly. “No, that can never be. I'm only tormented by the wrong I have done him. Tell him only that I

beg him to forgive, forgive, forgive me for everything....”

She trembled all over and sat down on a chair.

A sense of pity he had never before known overflowed Pierre’s heart.

“I will tell him, I will tell him everything once more,” said Pierre.

“But... I should like to know one thing....”

“Know what?” Natásha’s eyes asked.

“I should like to know, did you love...” Pierre did not know how to refer to Anatole and flushed at the thought of him—“did you love that bad man?”

“Don’t call him bad!” said Natásha. “But I don’t know, don’t know at all....”

She began to cry and a still greater sense of pity, tenderness, and love welled up in Pierre. He felt the tears trickle under his spectacles and hoped they would not be noticed.

“We won’t speak of it any more, my dear,” said Pierre, and his gentle, cordial tone suddenly seemed very strange to Natásha.

“We won’t speak of it, my dear—I’ll tell him everything; but one thing I beg of you, consider me your friend and if you want help, advice, or simply to open your heart to someone—not now, but when your mind is clearer--think of me!” He took her hand and kissed it. “I shall be happy if it’s in my power...”

Pierre grew confused.

“Don’t speak to me like that. I am not worth it!” exclaimed Natásha and turned to leave the room, but Pierre held her hand.

He knew he had something more to say to her. But when he said it he was amazed at his own words.

“Stop, stop! You have your whole life before you,” said he to her.

“Before me? No! All is over for me,” she replied with shame and self-abasement.

“All over?” he repeated. “If I were not myself, but the handsomest, cleverest, and best man in the world, and were free, I would this moment ask on my knees for your hand and your love!”

For the first time for many days Natásha wept tears of gratitude and tenderness, and glancing at Pierre she went out of the room.

Pierre too when she had gone almost ran into the anteroom, restraining tears of tenderness and joy that choked him, and without finding the sleeves of his fur cloak threw it on and got into his sleigh.

“Where to now, your excellency?” asked the coachman.

“Where to?” Pierre asked himself. “Where can I go now? Surely not to the Club or to pay calls?” All men seemed so pitiful, so poor, in comparison with this feeling of tenderness and love he experienced: in comparison with that softened, grateful, last look she had given him through her tears.

“Home!” said Pierre, and despite twenty-two degrees of frost Fahrenheit he threw open the bearskin cloak from his broad chest and inhaled the air with joy.

It was clear and frosty. Above the dirty, ill-lit streets, above the black roofs, stretched the dark starry sky. Only looking up at the sky did Pierre cease to feel how sordid and humiliating were all mundane things compared with the heights to which his soul had just been raised. At the entrance to the Arbát Square an immense expanse of dark starry sky presented itself to his eyes. Almost in the center of it, above the Prechístenka Boulevard, surrounded and sprinkled on all sides by stars but distinguished from them all by its nearness to the earth, its white light, and its long uplifted tail, shone the enormous and brilliant comet of 1812—the comet which was said to portend all kinds of woes and the end of the world. In Pierre, however, that comet with its long luminous tail aroused no feeling of fear. On the contrary he gazed joyfully, his eyes moist with tears, at this bright comet which, having traveled in its orbit with inconceivable velocity through immeasurable space, seemed suddenly—like an arrow piercing the earth—to remain fixed in a chosen spot, vigorously holding its tail erect, shining and displaying its white light amid countless other scintillating stars. It seemed to Pierre that this comet fully responded to what was passing in his own softened and uplifted soul, now blossoming into a new life.