

CHAPTER XXIX

When the French officer went into the room with Pierre the latter again thought it his duty to assure him that he was not French and wished to go away, but the officer would not hear of it. He was so very polite, amiable, good-natured, and genuinely grateful to Pierre for saving his life that Pierre had not the heart to refuse, and sat down with him in the parlor—the first room they entered. To Pierre's assurances that he was not a Frenchman, the captain, evidently not understanding how anyone could decline so flattering an appellation, shrugged his shoulders and said that if Pierre absolutely insisted on passing for a Russian let it be so, but for all that he would be forever bound to Pierre by gratitude for saving his life.

Had this man been endowed with the slightest capacity for perceiving the feelings of others, and had he at all understood what Pierre's feelings were, the latter would probably have left him, but the man's animated obtuseness to everything other than himself disarmed Pierre.

“A Frenchman or a Russian prince incognito,” said the officer, looking at Pierre's fine though dirty linen and at the ring on his finger.

“I owe my life to you and offer you my friendship. A Frenchman never forgets either an insult or a service. I offer you my friendship. That is all I can say.”

There was so much good nature and nobility (in the French sense of the word) in the officer's voice, in the expression of his face and in his gestures, that Pierre, unconsciously smiling in response to the Frenchman's smile, pressed the hand held out to him.

“Captain Ramballe, of the 13th Light Regiment, Chevalier of the Legion of Honor for the affair on the seventh of September,” he introduced himself, a self-satisfied irrepressible smile puckering his lips under his mustache. “Will you now be so good as to tell me with whom I have the honor of conversing so pleasantly, instead of being in the ambulance with that maniac's bullet in my body?”

Pierre replied that he could not tell him his name and, blushing, began to try to invent a name and to say something about his reason for concealing it, but the Frenchman hastily interrupted him.

“Oh, please!” said he. “I understand your reasons. You are an officer... a superior officer perhaps. You have borne arms against us. That's not my business. I owe you my life. That is enough for me. I am quite at your service. You belong to the gentry?” he concluded with a shade of inquiry in his tone. Pierre bent his head. “Your baptismal name, if you please. That is all I ask. Monsieur Pierre, you say.... That's all I want to know.”

When the mutton and an omelet had been served and a samovar and vodka brought, with some wine which the French had taken from a Russian cellar and brought with them, Ramballe invited Pierre to share his dinner, and himself began to eat greedily and quickly like a healthy and hungry man,

munching his food rapidly with his strong teeth, continually smacking his lips, and repeating—"Excellent! Delicious!" His face grew red and was covered with perspiration. Pierre was hungry and shared the dinner with pleasure. Morel, the orderly, brought some hot water in a saucepan and placed a bottle of claret in it. He also brought a bottle of kvass, taken from the kitchen for them to try. That beverage was already known to the French and had been given a special name. They called it limonade de cochon (pig's lemonade), and Morel spoke well of the limonade de cochon he had found in the kitchen. But as the captain had the wine they had taken while passing through Moscow, he left the kvass to Morel and applied himself to the bottle of Bordeaux. He wrapped the bottle up to its neck in a table napkin and poured out wine for himself and for Pierre. The satisfaction of his hunger and the wine rendered the captain still more lively and he chatted incessantly all through dinner.

"Yes, my dear Monsieur Pierre, I owe you a fine votive candle for saving me from that maniac.... You see, I have bullets enough in my body already. Here is one I got at Wagram" (he touched his side) "and a second at Smolénsk"—he showed a scar on his cheek—"and this leg which as you see does not want to march, I got that on the seventh at the great battle of la Moskowa. Sacré Dieu! It was splendid! That deluge of fire was worth seeing. It was a tough job you set us there, my word! You may be proud of it! And on my honor, in spite of the cough I caught there, I should be ready to begin again. I pity those who did not see it."

"I was there," said Pierre.

"Bah, really? So much the better! You are certainly brave foes. The great redoubt held out well, by my pipe!" continued the Frenchman. "And you made us pay dear for it. I was at it three times—sure as I sit here. Three times we reached the guns and three times we were thrown back like cardboard figures. Oh, it was beautiful, Monsieur Pierre! Your grenadiers were splendid, by heaven! I saw them close up their ranks six times in succession and march as if on parade. Fine fellows! Our King of Naples, who knows what's what, cried 'Bravo!' Ha, ha! So you are one of us soldiers!" he added, smiling, after a momentary pause. "So much the better, so much the better, Monsieur Pierre! Terrible in battle... gallant... with the fair" (he winked and smiled), "that's what the French are, Monsieur Pierre, aren't they?"

The captain was so naïvely and good-humoredly gay, so real, and so pleased with himself that Pierre almost winked back as he looked merrily at him. Probably the word "gallant" turned the captain's thoughts to the state of Moscow.

"Apropos, tell me please, is it true that the women have all left Moscow? What a queer idea! What had they to be afraid of?"

"Would not the French ladies leave Paris if the Russians entered it?" asked Pierre.

"Ha, ha, ha!" The Frenchman emitted a merry, sanguine chuckle, patting Pierre on the shoulder. "What a thing to say!" he exclaimed. "Paris?... But Paris, Paris..."

“Paris—the capital of the world,” Pierre finished his remark for him.

The captain looked at Pierre. He had a habit of stopping short in the middle of his talk and gazing intently with his laughing, kindly eyes.

“Well, if you hadn’t told me you were Russian, I should have wagered that you were Parisian! You have that... I don’t know what, that...” and having uttered this compliment, he again gazed at him in silence.

“I have been in Paris. I spent years there,” said Pierre.

“Oh yes, one sees that plainly. Paris!... A man who doesn’t know Paris is a savage. You can tell a Parisian two leagues off. Paris is Talma, la Duchénois, Potier, the Sorbonne, the boulevards,” and noticing that his conclusion was weaker than what had gone before, he added quickly: “There is only one Paris in the world. You have been to Paris and have remained Russian. Well, I don’t esteem you the less for it.”

Under the influence of the wine he had drunk, and after the days he had spent alone with his depressing thoughts, Pierre involuntarily enjoyed talking with this cheerful and good-natured man.

“To return to your ladies—I hear they are lovely. What a wretched idea to go and bury themselves in the steppes when the French army is in Moscow. What a chance those girls have missed! Your peasants, now—that’s another thing; but you civilized people, you ought to know us better than that. We took Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, Naples, Rome, Warsaw, all the world’s capitals.... We are feared, but we are loved. We are nice to know. And then the Emperor...” he began, but Pierre interrupted him.

“The Emperor,” Pierre repeated, and his face suddenly became sad and embarrassed, “is the Emperor...?”

“The Emperor? He is generosity, mercy, justice, order, genius—that’s what the Emperor is! It is I, Ramballe, who tell you so.... I assure you I was his enemy eight years ago. My father was an emigrant count.... But that man has vanquished me. He has taken hold of me. I could not resist the sight of the grandeur and glory with which he has covered France. When I understood what he wanted—when I saw that he was preparing a bed of laurels for us, you know, I said to myself: ‘That is a monarch,’ and I devoted myself to him! So there! Oh yes, mon cher, he is the greatest man of the ages past or future.”

“Is he in Moscow?” Pierre stammered with a guilty look.

The Frenchman looked at his guilty face and smiled.

“No, he will make his entry tomorrow,” he replied, and continued his talk.

Their conversation was interrupted by the cries of several voices at the gate and by Morel, who came to say that some Württemberg hussars had come and wanted to put up their horses in the yard where the captain’s

horses were. This difficulty had arisen chiefly because the hussars did not understand what was said to them in French.

The captain had their senior sergeant called in, and in a stern voice asked him to what regiment he belonged, who was his commanding officer, and by what right he allowed himself to claim quarters that were already occupied. The German who knew little French, answered the two first questions by giving the names of his regiment and of his commanding officer, but in reply to the third question which he did not understand said, introducing broken French into his own German, that he was the quartermaster of the regiment and his commander had ordered him to occupy all the houses one after another. Pierre, who knew German, translated what the German said to the captain and gave the captain's reply to the Württemberg hussar in German. When he had understood what was said to him, the German submitted and took his men elsewhere. The captain went out into the porch and gave some orders in a loud voice.

When he returned to the room Pierre was sitting in the same place as before, with his head in his hands. His face expressed suffering. He really was suffering at that moment. When the captain went out and he was left alone, suddenly he came to himself and realized the position he was in. It was not that Moscow had been taken or that the happy conquerors were masters in it and were patronizing him. Painful as that was it was not that which tormented Pierre at the moment. He was tormented by the consciousness of his own weakness. The few glasses of wine he had drunk and the conversation with this good-natured man had destroyed the mood of concentrated gloom in which he had spent the last few days and which was essential for the execution of his design. The pistol, dagger, and peasant coat were ready. Napoleon was to enter the town next day. Pierre still considered that it would be a useful and worthy action to slay the evildoer, but now he felt that he would not do it. He did not know why, but he felt a foreboding that he would not carry out his intention. He struggled against the confession of his weakness but dimly felt that he could not overcome it and that his former gloomy frame of mind, concerning vengeance, killing, and self-sacrifice, had been dispersed like dust by contact with the first man he met.

The captain returned to the room, limping slightly and whistling a tune.

The Frenchman's chatter which had previously amused Pierre now repelled him. The tune he was whistling, his gait, and the gesture with which he twirled his mustache, all now seemed offensive. "I will go away immediately. I won't say another word to him," thought Pierre. He thought this, but still sat in the same place. A strange feeling of weakness tied him to the spot; he wished to get up and go away, but could not do so.

The captain, on the other hand, seemed very cheerful. He paced up and down the room twice. His eyes shone and his mustache twitched as if he were smiling to himself at some amusing thought.

"The colonel of those Württembergers is delightful," he suddenly said. "He's a German, but a nice fellow all the same.... But he's a German."

He sat down facing Pierre. "By the way, you know German, then?"

Pierre looked at him in silence.

"What is the German for 'shelter'?"

"Shelter?" Pierre repeated. "The German for shelter is Unterkunft."

"How do you say it?" the captain asked quickly and doubtfully.

"Unterkunft," Pierre repeated.

"Onterkoff," said the captain and looked at Pierre for some seconds with laughing eyes. "These Germans are first-rate fools, don't you think so, Monsieur Pierre?" he concluded.

"Well, let's have another bottle of this Moscow Bordeaux, shall we? Morel will warm us up another little bottle. Morel!" he called out gaily.

Morel brought candles and a bottle of wine. The captain looked at Pierre by the candlelight and was evidently struck by the troubled expression on his companion's face. Ramballe, with genuine distress and sympathy in his face, went up to Pierre and bent over him.

"There now, we're sad," said he, touching Pierre's hand. "Have I upset you? No, really, have you anything against me?" he asked Pierre. "Perhaps it's the state of affairs?"

Pierre did not answer, but looked cordially into the Frenchman's eyes whose expression of sympathy was pleasing to him.

"Honestly, without speaking of what I owe you, I feel friendship for you. Can I do anything for you? Dispose of me. It is for life and death. I say it with my hand on my heart!" said he, striking his chest.

"Thank you," said Pierre.

The captain gazed intently at him as he had done when he learned that "shelter" was Unterkunft in German, and his face suddenly brightened.

"Well, in that case, I drink to our friendship!" he cried gaily, filling two glasses with wine.

Pierre took one of the glasses and emptied it. Ramballe emptied his too, again pressed Pierre's hand, and leaned his elbows on the table in a pensive attitude.

"Yes, my dear friend," he began, "such is fortune's caprice. Who would have said that I should be a soldier and a captain of dragoons in the service of Bonaparte, as we used to call him? Yet here I am in Moscow with him. I must tell you, mon cher," he continued in the sad and measured tones of a man who intends to tell a long story, "that our name is one of the most ancient in France."

And with a Frenchman's easy and naïve frankness the captain told Pierre the story of his ancestors, his childhood, youth, and manhood, and all about his relations and his financial and family affairs, "ma pauvre mère" playing of course an important part in the story.

"But all that is only life's setting, the real thing is love—love! Am I not right, Monsieur Pierre?" said he, growing animated. "Another glass?"

Pierre again emptied his glass and poured himself out a third.

"Oh, women, women!" and the captain, looking with glistening eyes at Pierre, began talking of love and of his love affairs.

There were very many of these, as one could easily believe, looking at the officer's handsome, self-satisfied face, and noting the eager enthusiasm with which he spoke of women. Though all Ramballe's love stories had the sensual character which Frenchmen regard as the special charm and poetry of love, yet he told his story with such sincere conviction that he alone had experienced and known all the charm of love and he described women so alluringly that Pierre listened to him with curiosity.

It was plain that l'amour which the Frenchman was so fond of was not that low and simple kind that Pierre had once felt for his wife, nor was it the romantic love stimulated by himself that he experienced for Natásha. (Ramballe despised both these kinds of love equally: the one he considered the "love of clodhoppers" and the other the "love of simpletons.") L'amour which the Frenchman worshiped consisted principally in the unnaturalness of his relation to the woman and in a combination of incongruities giving the chief charm to the feeling.

Thus the captain touchingly recounted the story of his love for a fascinating marquise of thirty-five and at the same time for a charming, innocent child of seventeen, daughter of the bewitching marquise. The conflict of magnanimity between the mother and the daughter, ending in the mother's sacrificing herself and offering her daughter in marriage to her lover, even now agitated the captain, though it was the memory of a distant past. Then he recounted an episode in which the husband played the part of the lover, and he—the lover—assumed the role of the husband, as well as several droll incidents from his recollections of Germany, where "shelter" is called Unterkunft and where the husbands eat sauerkraut and the young girls are "too blonde."

Finally, the latest episode in Poland still fresh in the captain's memory, and which he narrated with rapid gestures and glowing face, was of how he had saved the life of a Pole (in general, the saving of life continually occurred in the captain's stories) and the Pole had entrusted to him his enchanting wife (parisienne de cœur) while himself entering the French service. The captain was happy, the enchanting Polish lady wished to elope with him, but, prompted by magnanimity, the captain restored the wife to the husband, saying as he did so: "I have saved your life, and I save your honor!" Having repeated these words the captain wiped his eyes and gave himself a shake, as if driving away the

weakness which assailed him at this touching recollection.

Listening to the captain's tales, Pierre—as often happens late in the evening and under the influence of wine—followed all that was told him, understood it all, and at the same time followed a train of personal memories which, he knew not why, suddenly arose in his mind. While listening to these love stories his own love for Natásha unexpectedly rose to his mind, and going over the pictures of that love in his imagination he mentally compared them with Ramballe's tales. Listening to the story of the struggle between love and duty, Pierre saw before his eyes every minutest detail of his last meeting with the object of his love at the Súkharev water tower. At the time of that meeting it had not produced an effect upon him—he had not even once recalled it. But now it seemed to him that that meeting had had in it something very important and poetic.

“Peter Kirílovich, come here! We have recognized you,” he now seemed to hear the words she had uttered and to see before him her eyes, her smile, her traveling hood, and a stray lock of her hair... and there seemed to him something pathetic and touching in all this.

Having finished his tale about the enchanting Polish lady, the captain asked Pierre if he had ever experienced a similar impulse to sacrifice himself for love and a feeling of envy of the legitimate husband.

Challenged by this question Pierre raised his head and felt a need to express the thoughts that filled his mind. He began to explain that he understood love for a woman somewhat differently. He said that in all his life he had loved and still loved only one woman, and that she could never be his.

“Tiens!” said the captain.

Pierre then explained that he had loved this woman from his earliest years, but that he had not dared to think of her because she was too young, and because he had been an illegitimate son without a name. Afterwards when he had received a name and wealth he dared not think of her because he loved her too well, placing her far above everything in the world, and especially therefore above himself.

When he had reached this point, Pierre asked the captain whether he understood that.

The captain made a gesture signifying that even if he did not understand it he begged Pierre to continue.

“Platónic love, clouds...” he muttered.

Whether it was the wine he had drunk, or an impulse of frankness, or the thought that this man did not, and never would, know any of those who played a part in his story, or whether it was all these things together, something loosened Pierre's tongue. Speaking thickly and with a faraway look in his shining eyes, he told the whole story of his life: his marriage, Natásha's love for his best friend, her betrayal of him, and

all his own simple relations with her. Urged on by Ramballe's questions he also told what he had at first concealed—his own position and even his name.

More than anything else in Pierre's story the captain was impressed by the fact that Pierre was very rich, had two mansions in Moscow, and that he had abandoned everything and not left the city, but remained there concealing his name and station.

When it was late at night they went out together into the street. The night was warm and light. To the left of the house on the Pokróvka a fire glowed—the first of those that were beginning in Moscow. To the right and high up in the sky was the sickle of the waning moon and opposite to it hung that bright comet which was connected in Pierre's heart with his love. At the gate stood Gerásim, the cook, and two Frenchmen. Their laughter and their mutually incomprehensible remarks in two languages could be heard. They were looking at the glow seen in the town.

There was nothing terrible in the one small, distant fire in the immense city.

Gazing at the high starry sky, at the moon, at the comet, and at the glow from the fire, Pierre experienced a joyful emotion. "There now, how good it is, what more does one need?" thought he. And suddenly remembering his intention he grew dizzy and felt so faint that he leaned against the fence to save himself from falling.

Without taking leave of his new friend, Pierre left the gate with unsteady steps and returning to his room lay down on the sofa and immediately fell asleep.