

CHAPTER XXXIII

On the third of September Pierre awoke late. His head was aching, the clothes in which he had slept without undressing felt uncomfortable on his body, and his mind had a dim consciousness of something shameful he had done the day before. That something shameful was his yesterday's conversation with Captain Ramballe.

It was eleven by the clock, but it seemed peculiarly dark out of doors. Pierre rose, rubbed his eyes, and seeing the pistol with an engraved stock which Gerásim had replaced on the writing table, he remembered where he was and what lay before him that very day.

"Am I not too late?" he thought. "No, probably he won't make his entry into Moscow before noon."

Pierre did not allow himself to reflect on what lay before him, but hastened to act.

After arranging his clothes, he took the pistol and was about to go out. But it then occurred to him for the first time that he certainly could not carry the weapon in his hand through the streets. It was difficult to hide such a big pistol even under his wide coat. He could not carry it unnoticed in his belt or under his arm. Besides, it had been discharged, and he had not had time to reload it. "No matter, the dagger will do," he said to himself, though when planning his design he had more than once come to the conclusion that the chief mistake made by the student in 1809 had been to try to kill Napoleon with a dagger. But as his chief aim consisted not in carrying out his design, but in proving to himself that he would not abandon his intention and was doing all he could to achieve it, Pierre hastily took the blunt jagged dagger in a green sheath which he had bought at the Súkharev market with the pistol, and hid it under his waistcoat.

Having tied a girdle over his coat and pulled his cap low on his head, Pierre went down the corridor, trying to avoid making a noise or meeting the captain, and passed out into the street.

The conflagration, at which he had looked with so much indifference the evening before, had greatly increased during the night. Moscow was on fire in several places. The buildings in Carriage Row, across the river, in the Bazaar and the Povarskóy, as well as the barges on the Moskvá River and the timber yards by the Dorogomílov Bridge, were all ablaze.

Pierre's way led through side streets to the Povarskóy and from there to the church of St. Nicholas on the Arbát, where he had long before decided that the deed should be done. The gates of most of the houses were locked and the shutters up. The streets and lanes were deserted. The air was full of smoke and the smell of burning. Now and then he met Russians with anxious and timid faces, and Frenchmen with an air not of the city but of the camp, walking in the middle of the streets. Both the Russians and the French looked at Pierre with surprise. Besides his height and stoutness, and the strange morose look of suffering in his

face and whole figure, the Russians stared at Pierre because they could not make out to what class he could belong. The French followed him with astonishment in their eyes chiefly because Pierre, unlike all the other Russians who gazed at the French with fear and curiosity, paid no attention to them. At the gate of one house three Frenchmen, who were explaining something to some Russians who did not understand them, stopped Pierre asking if he did not know French.

Pierre shook his head and went on. In another side street a sentinel standing beside a green caisson shouted at him, but only when the shout was threateningly repeated and he heard the click of the man's musket as he raised it did Pierre understand that he had to pass on the other side of the street. He heard nothing and saw nothing of what went on around him. He carried his resolution within himself in terror and haste, like something dreadful and alien to him, for, after the previous night's experience, he was afraid of losing it. But he was not destined to bring his mood safely to his destination. And even had he not been hindered by anything on the way, his intention could not now have been carried out, for Napoleon had passed the Arbát more than four hours previously on his way from the Dorogomílov suburb to the Krémílin, and was now sitting in a very gloomy frame of mind in a royal study in the Krémílin, giving detailed and exact orders as to measures to be taken immediately to extinguish the fire, to prevent looting, and to reassure the inhabitants. But Pierre did not know this; he was entirely absorbed in what lay before him, and was tortured—as those are who obstinately undertake a task that is impossible for them not because of its difficulty but because of its incompatibility with their natures—by the fear of weakening at the decisive moment and so losing his self-esteem.

Though he heard and saw nothing around him he found his way by instinct and did not go wrong in the side streets that led to the Povarskóy.

As Pierre approached that street the smoke became denser and denser—he even felt the heat of the fire. Occasionally curly tongues of flame rose from under the roofs of the houses. He met more people in the streets and they were more excited. But Pierre, though he felt that something unusual was happening around him, did not realize that he was approaching the fire. As he was going along a footpath across a wide-open space adjoining the Povarskóy on one side and the gardens of Prince Gruzínski's house on the other, Pierre suddenly heard the desperate weeping of a woman close to him. He stopped as if awakening from a dream and lifted his head.

By the side of the path, on the dusty dry grass, all sorts of household goods lay in a heap: featherbeds, a samovar, icons, and trunks. On the ground, beside the trunks, sat a thin woman no longer young, with long, prominent upper teeth, and wearing a black cloak and cap. This woman, swaying to and fro and muttering something, was choking with sobs. Two girls of about ten and twelve, dressed in dirty short frocks and cloaks, were staring at their mother with a look of stupefaction on their pale frightened faces. The youngest child, a boy of about seven, who wore an overcoat and an immense cap evidently not his own, was crying in his old nurse's arms. A dirty, barefooted maid was sitting on a trunk, and, having undone her pale-colored plait, was pulling it straight

and sniffing at her singed hair. The woman's husband, a short, round-shouldered man in the undress uniform of a civilian official, with sausage-shaped whiskers and showing under his square-set cap the hair smoothly brushed forward over his temples, with expressionless face was moving the trunks, which were placed one on another, and was dragging some garments from under them.

As soon as she saw Pierre, the woman almost threw herself at his feet.

"Dear people, good Christians, save me, help me, dear friends... help us, somebody," she muttered between her sobs. "My girl... My daughter! My youngest daughter is left behind. She's burned! Ooh! Was it for this I nursed you.... Ooh!"

"Don't, Mary Nikoláevna!" said her husband to her in a low voice, evidently only to justify himself before the stranger. "Sister must have taken her, or else where can she be?" he added.

"Monster! Villain!" shouted the woman angrily, suddenly ceasing to weep. "You have no heart, you don't feel for your own child! Another man would have rescued her from the fire. But this is a monster and neither a man nor a father! You, honored sir, are a noble man," she went on, addressing Pierre rapidly between her sobs. "The fire broke out alongside, and blew our way, the maid called out 'Fire!' and we rushed to collect our things. We ran out just as we were.... This is what we have brought away.... The icons, and my dowry bed, all the rest is lost. We seized the children. But not Katie! Ooh! O Lord!..." and again she began to sob. "My child, my dear one! Burned, burned!"

"But where was she left?" asked Pierre.

From the expression of his animated face the woman saw that this man might help her.

"Oh, dear sir!" she cried, seizing him by the legs. "My benefactor, set my heart at ease.... Aníska, go, you horrid girl, show him the way!" she cried to the maid, angrily opening her mouth and still farther exposing her long teeth.

"Show me the way, show me, I.. I'll do it," gasped Pierre rapidly.

The dirty maidservant stepped from behind the trunk, put up her plait, sighed, and went on her short, bare feet along the path. Pierre felt as if he had come back to life after a heavy swoon. He held his head higher, his eyes shone with the light of life, and with swift steps he followed the maid, overtook her, and came out on the Povarskóy. The whole street was full of clouds of black smoke. Tongues of flame here and there broke through that cloud. A great number of people crowded in front of the conflagration. In the middle of the street stood a French general saying something to those around him. Pierre, accompanied by the maid, was advancing to the spot where the general stood, but the French soldiers stopped him.

"On ne passe pas!" * cried a voice.

* “You can’t pass!”

“This way, uncle,” cried the girl. “We’ll pass through the side street, by the Nikúlin’s!”

Pierre turned back, giving a spring now and then to keep up with her. She ran across the street, turned down a side street to the left, and, passing three houses, turned into a yard on the right.

“It’s here, close by,” said she and, running across the yard, opened a gate in a wooden fence and, stopping, pointed out to him a small wooden wing of the house, which was burning brightly and fiercely. One of its sides had fallen in, another was on fire, and bright flames issued from the openings of the windows and from under the roof.

As Pierre passed through the fence gate, he was enveloped by hot air and involuntarily stopped.

“Which is it? Which is your house?” he asked.

“Ooh!” wailed the girl, pointing to the wing. “That’s it, that was our lodging. You’ve burned to death, our treasure, Katie, my precious little missy! Ooh!” lamented Aníska, who at the sight of the fire felt that she too must give expression to her feelings.

Pierre rushed to the wing, but the heat was so great that he involuntarily passed round in a curve and came upon the large house that was as yet burning only at one end, just below the roof, and around which swarmed a crowd of Frenchmen. At first Pierre did not realize what these men, who were dragging something out, were about; but seeing before him a Frenchman hitting a peasant with a blunt saber and trying to take from him a fox-fur coat, he vaguely understood that looting was going on there, but he had no time to dwell on that idea.

The sounds of crackling and the din of falling walls and ceilings, the whistle and hiss of the flames, the excited shouts of the people, and the sight of the swaying smoke, now gathering into thick black clouds and now soaring up with glittering sparks, with here and there dense sheaves of flame (now red and now like golden fish scales creeping along the walls), and the heat and smoke and rapidity of motion, produced on Pierre the usual animating effects of a conflagration. It had a peculiarly strong effect on him because at the sight of the fire he felt himself suddenly freed from the ideas that had weighed him down. He felt young, bright, adroit, and resolute. He ran round to the other side of the lodge and was about to dash into that part of it which was still standing, when just above his head he heard several voices shouting and then a cracking sound and the ring of something heavy falling close beside him.

Pierre looked up and saw at a window of the large house some Frenchmen who had just thrown out the drawer of a chest, filled with metal articles. Other French soldiers standing below went up to the drawer.

“What does this fellow want?” shouted one of them referring to Pierre.

“There’s a child in that house. Haven’t you seen a child?” cried Pierre.

“What’s he talking about? Get along!” said several voices, and one of the soldiers, evidently afraid that Pierre might want to take from them some of the plate and bronzes that were in the drawer, moved threateningly toward him.

“A child?” shouted a Frenchman from above. “I did hear something squealing in the garden. Perhaps it’s his brat that the fellow is looking for. After all, one must be human, you know....”

“Where is it? Where?” said Pierre.

“There! There!” shouted the Frenchman at the window, pointing to the garden at the back of the house. “Wait a bit—I’m coming down.”

And a minute or two later the Frenchman, a black-eyed fellow with a spot on his cheek, in shirt sleeves, really did jump out of a window on the ground floor, and clapping Pierre on the shoulder ran with him into the garden.

“Hurry up, you others!” he called out to his comrades. “It’s getting hot.”

When they reached a gravel path behind the house the Frenchman pulled Pierre by the arm and pointed to a round, graveled space where a three-year-old girl in a pink dress was lying under a seat.

“There is your child! Oh, a girl, so much the better!” said the Frenchman. “Good-by, Fatty. We must be human, we are all mortal you know!” and the Frenchman with the spot on his cheek ran back to his comrades.

Breathless with joy, Pierre ran to the little girl and was going to take her in his arms. But seeing a stranger the sickly, scrofulous-looking child, unattractively like her mother, began to yell and run away. Pierre, however, seized her and lifted her in his arms. She screamed desperately and angrily and tried with her little hands to pull Pierre’s hands away and to bite them with her slobbering mouth. Pierre was seized by a sense of horror and repulsion such as he had experienced when touching some nasty little animal. But he made an effort not to throw the child down and ran with her to the large house. It was now, however, impossible to get back the way he had come; the maid, Aníska, was no longer there, and Pierre with a feeling of pity and disgust pressed the wet, painfully sobbing child to himself as tenderly as he could and ran with her through the garden seeking another way out.