

CHAPTER XXXIV

Having run through different yards and side streets, Pierre got back with his little burden to the Gruzínski garden at the corner of the Povarskóy. He did not at first recognize the place from which he had set out to look for the child, so crowded was it now with people and goods that had been dragged out of the houses. Besides Russian families who had taken refuge here from the fire with their belongings, there were several French soldiers in a variety of clothing. Pierre took no notice of them. He hurried to find the family of that civil servant in order to restore the daughter to her mother and go to save someone else. Pierre felt that he had still much to do and to do quickly. Glowing with the heat and from running, he felt at that moment more strongly than ever the sense of youth, animation, and determination that had come on him when he ran to save the child. She had now become quiet and, clinging with her little hands to Pierre's coat, sat on his arm gazing about her like some little wild animal. He glanced at her occasionally with a slight smile. He fancied he saw something pathetically innocent in that frightened, sickly little face.

He did not find the civil servant or his wife where he had left them. He walked among the crowd with rapid steps, scanning the various faces he met. Involuntarily he noticed a Georgian or Armenian family consisting of a very handsome old man of Oriental type, wearing a new, cloth-covered, sheepskin coat and new boots, an old woman of similar type, and a young woman. That very young woman seemed to Pierre the perfection of Oriental beauty, with her sharply outlined, arched, black eyebrows and the extraordinarily soft, bright color of her long, beautiful, expressionless face. Amid the scattered property and the crowd on the open space, she, in her rich satin cloak with a bright lilac shawl on her head, suggested a delicate exotic plant thrown out onto the snow. She was sitting on some bundles a little behind the old woman, and looked from under her long lashes with motionless, large, almond-shaped eyes at the ground before her. Evidently she was aware of her beauty and fearful because of it. Her face struck Pierre and, hurrying along by the fence, he turned several times to look at her. When he had reached the fence, still without finding those he sought, he stopped and looked about him.

With the child in his arms his figure was now more conspicuous than before, and a group of Russians, both men and women, gathered about him.

"Have you lost anyone, my dear fellow? You're of the gentry yourself, aren't you? Whose child is it?" they asked him.

Pierre replied that the child belonged to a woman in a black coat who had been sitting there with her other children, and he asked whether anyone knew where she had gone.

"Why, that must be the Anférovs," said an old deacon, addressing a pockmarked peasant woman. "Lord have mercy, Lord have mercy!" he added in his customary bass.

“The Anférovs? No,” said the woman. “They left in the morning. That must be either Mary Nikoláevna’s or the Ivánovs’!”

“He says ‘a woman,’ and Mary Nikoláevna is a lady,” remarked a house serf.

“Do you know her? She’s thin, with long teeth,” said Pierre.

“That’s Mary Nikoláevna! They went inside the garden when these wolves swooped down,” said the woman, pointing to the French soldiers.

“O Lord, have mercy!” added the deacon.

“Go over that way, they’re there. It’s she! She kept on lamenting and crying,” continued the woman. “It’s she. Here, this way!”

But Pierre was not listening to the woman. He had for some seconds been intently watching what was going on a few steps away. He was looking at the Armenian family and at two French soldiers who had gone up to them. One of these, a nimble little man, was wearing a blue coat tied round the waist with a rope. He had a nightcap on his head and his feet were bare. The other, whose appearance particularly struck Pierre, was a long, lank, round-shouldered, fair-haired man, slow in his movements and with an idiotic expression of face. He wore a woman’s loose gown of frieze, blue trousers, and large torn Hessian boots. The little barefooted Frenchman in the blue coat went up to the Armenians and, saying something, immediately seized the old man by his legs and the old man at once began pulling off his boots. The other in the frieze gown stopped in front of the beautiful Armenian girl and with his hands in his pockets stood staring at her, motionless and silent.

“Here, take the child!” said Pierre peremptorily and hurriedly to the woman, handing the little girl to her. “Give her back to them, give her back!” he almost shouted, putting the child, who began screaming, on the ground, and again looking at the Frenchman and the Armenian family.

The old man was already sitting barefoot. The little Frenchman had secured his second boot and was slapping one boot against the other. The old man was saying something in a voice broken by sobs, but Pierre caught but a glimpse of this, his whole attention was directed to the Frenchman in the frieze gown who meanwhile, swaying slowly from side to side, had drawn nearer to the young woman and taking his hands from his pockets had seized her by the neck.

The beautiful Armenian still sat motionless and in the same attitude, with her long lashes drooping as if she did not see or feel what the soldier was doing to her.

While Pierre was running the few steps that separated him from the Frenchman, the tall marauder in the frieze gown was already tearing from her neck the necklace the young Armenian was wearing, and the young woman, clutching at her neck, screamed piercingly.

“Let that woman alone!” exclaimed Pierre hoarsely in a furious voice,

seizing the soldier by his round shoulders and throwing him aside.

The soldier fell, got up, and ran away. But his comrade, throwing down the boots and drawing his sword, moved threateningly toward Pierre.

“Voyons, pas de bêtises!” * he cried.

* “Look here, no nonsense!”

Pierre was in such a transport of rage that he remembered nothing and his strength increased tenfold. He rushed at the barefooted Frenchman and, before the latter had time to draw his sword, knocked him off his feet and hammered him with his fists. Shouts of approval were heard from the crowd around, and at the same moment a mounted patrol of French Uhlans appeared from round the corner. The Uhlans came up at a trot to Pierre and the Frenchman and surrounded them. Pierre remembered nothing of what happened after that. He only remembered beating someone and being beaten and finally feeling that his hands were bound and that a crowd of French soldiers stood around him and were searching him.

“Lieutenant, he has a dagger,” were the first words Pierre understood.

“Ah, a weapon?” said the officer and turned to the barefooted soldier who had been arrested with Pierre. “All right, you can tell all about it at the court-martial.” Then he turned to Pierre. “Do you speak French?”

Pierre looked around him with bloodshot eyes and did not reply. His face probably looked very terrible, for the officer said something in a whisper and four more Uhlans left the ranks and placed themselves on both sides of Pierre.

“Do you speak French?” the officer asked again, keeping at a distance from Pierre. “Call the interpreter.”

A little man in Russian civilian clothes rode out from the ranks, and by his clothes and manner of speaking Pierre at once knew him to be a French salesman from one of the Moscow shops.

“He does not look like a common man,” said the interpreter, after a searching look at Pierre.

“Ah, he looks very much like an incendiary,” remarked the officer. “And ask him who he is,” he added.

“Who are you?” asked the interpreter in poor Russian. “You must answer the chief.”

“I will not tell you who I am. I am your prisoner—take me!” Pierre suddenly replied in French.

“Ah, ah!” muttered the officer with a frown. “Well then, march!”

A crowd had collected round the Uhlans. Nearest to Pierre stood the

pockmarked peasant woman with the little girl, and when the patrol started she moved forward.

“Where are they taking you to, you poor dear?” said she. “And the little girl, the little girl, what am I to do with her if she’s not theirs?” said the woman.

“What does that woman want?” asked the officer.

Pierre was as if intoxicated. His elation increased at the sight of the little girl he had saved.

“What does she want?” he murmured. “She is bringing me my daughter whom I have just saved from the flames,” said he. “Good-by!” And without knowing how this aimless lie had escaped him, he went along with resolute and triumphant steps between the French soldiers.

The French patrol was one of those sent out through the various streets of Moscow by Durosnel’s order to put a stop to the pillage, and especially to catch the incendiaries who, according to the general opinion which had that day originated among the higher French officers, were the cause of the conflagrations. After marching through a number of streets the patrol arrested five more Russian suspects: a small shopkeeper, two seminary students, a peasant, and a house serf, besides several looters. But of all these various suspected characters, Pierre was considered to be the most suspicious of all. When they had all been brought for the night to a large house on the Zúbov Rampart that was being used as a guardhouse, Pierre was placed apart under strict guard.