

CHAPTER XI

Early in the morning of the sixth of October Pierre went out of the shed, and on returning stopped by the door to play with a little blue-gray dog, with a long body and short bandy legs, that jumped about him. This little dog lived in their shed, sleeping beside Karatáev at night; it sometimes made excursions into the town but always returned again. Probably it had never had an owner, and it still belonged to nobody and had no name. The French called it Azor; the soldier who told stories called it Femgálka; Karatáev and others called it Gray, or sometimes Flabby. Its lack of a master, a name, or even of a breed or any definite color did not seem to trouble the blue-gray dog in the least. Its furry tail stood up firm and round as a plume, its bandy legs served it so well that it would often gracefully lift a hind leg and run very easily and quickly on three legs, as if disdainingly to use all four. Everything pleased it. Now it would roll on its back, yelping with delight, now bask in the sun with a thoughtful air of importance, and now frolic about playing with a chip of wood or a straw.

Pierre's attire by now consisted of a dirty torn shirt (the only remnant of his former clothing), a pair of soldier's trousers which by Karatáev's advice he tied with string round the ankles for warmth, and a peasant coat and cap. Physically he had changed much during this time. He no longer seemed stout, though he still had the appearance of solidity and strength hereditary in his family. A beard and mustache covered the lower part of his face, and a tangle of hair, infested with lice, curled round his head like a cap. The look of his eyes was resolute, calm, and animatedly alert, as never before. The former slackness which had shown itself even in his eyes was now replaced by an energetic readiness for action and resistance. His feet were bare.

Pierre first looked down the field across which vehicles and horsemen were passing that morning, then into the distance across the river, then at the dog who was pretending to be in earnest about biting him, and then at his bare feet which he placed with pleasure in various positions, moving his dirty thick big toes. Every time he looked at his bare feet a smile of animated self-satisfaction flitted across his face. The sight of them reminded him of all he had experienced and learned during these weeks and this recollection was pleasant to him.

For some days the weather had been calm and clear with slight frosts in the mornings—what is called an “old wives’ summer.”

In the sunshine the air was warm, and that warmth was particularly pleasant with the invigorating freshness of the morning frost still in the air.

On everything—far and near—lay the magic crystal glitter seen only at that time of autumn. The Sparrow Hills were visible in the distance, with the village, the church, and the large white house. The bare trees, the sand, the bricks and roofs of the houses, the green church spire, and the corners of the white house in the distance, all stood out in the transparent air in most delicate outline and with unnatural clearness.

Near by could be seen the familiar ruins of a half-burned mansion occupied by the French, with lilac bushes still showing dark green beside the fence. And even that ruined and befouled house—which in dull weather was repulsively ugly—seemed quietly beautiful now, in the clear, motionless brilliance.

A French corporal, with coat unbuttoned in a homely way, a skullcap on his head, and a short pipe in his mouth, came from behind a corner of the shed and approached Pierre with a friendly wink.

“What sunshine, Monsieur Kiril!” (Their name for Pierre.) “Eh? Just like spring!”

And the corporal leaned against the door and offered Pierre his pipe, though whenever he offered it Pierre always declined it.

“To be on the march in such weather...” he began.

Pierre inquired what was being said about leaving, and the corporal told him that nearly all the troops were starting and there ought to be an order about the prisoners that day. Sokolov, one of the soldiers in the shed with Pierre, was dying, and Pierre told the corporal that something should be done about him. The corporal replied that Pierre need not worry about that as they had an ambulance and a permanent hospital and arrangements would be made for the sick, and that in general everything that could happen had been foreseen by the authorities.

“Besides, Monsieur Kiril, you have only to say a word to the captain, you know. He is a man who never forgets anything. Speak to the captain when he makes his round, he will do anything for you.”

(The captain of whom the corporal spoke often had long chats with Pierre and showed him all sorts of favors.)

“‘You see, St. Thomas,’ he said to me the other day. ‘Monsieur Kiril is a man of education, who speaks French. He is a Russian seigneur who has had misfortunes, but he is a man. He knows what’s what.... If he wants anything and asks me, he won’t get a refusal. When one has studied, you see, one likes education and well-bred people.’ It is for your sake I mention it, Monsieur Kiril. The other day if it had not been for you that affair would have ended ill.”

And after chatting a while longer, the corporal went away. (The affair he had alluded to had happened a few days before—a fight between the prisoners and the French soldiers, in which Pierre had succeeded in pacifying his comrades.) Some of the prisoners who had heard Pierre talking to the corporal immediately asked what the Frenchman had said. While Pierre was repeating what he had been told about the army leaving Moscow, a thin, sallow, tattered French soldier came up to the door of the shed. Rapidly and timidly raising his fingers to his forehead by way of greeting, he asked Pierre whether the soldier Platoche to whom he had given a shirt to sew was in that shed.

A week before the French had had boot leather and linen issued to them,

which they had given out to the prisoners to make up into boots and shirts for them.

“Ready, ready, dear fellow!” said Karatáev, coming out with a neatly folded shirt.

Karatáev, on account of the warm weather and for convenience at work, was wearing only trousers and a tattered shirt as black as soot. His hair was bound round, workman fashion, with a wisp of lime-tree bast, and his round face seemed rounder and pleasanter than ever.

“A promise is own brother to performance! I said Friday and here it is, ready,” said Platón, smiling and unfolding the shirt he had sewn.

The Frenchman glanced around uneasily and then, as if overcoming his hesitation, rapidly threw off his uniform and put on the shirt. He had a long, greasy, flowered silk waistcoat next to his sallow, thin bare body, but no shirt. He was evidently afraid the prisoners looking on would laugh at him, and thrust his head into the shirt hurriedly. None of the prisoners said a word.

“See, it fits well!” Platón kept repeating, pulling the shirt straight.

The Frenchman, having pushed his head and hands through, without raising his eyes, looked down at the shirt and examined the seams.

“You see, dear man, this is not a sewing shop, and I had no proper tools; and, as they say, one needs a tool even to kill a louse,” said Platón with one of his round smiles, obviously pleased with his work.

“It’s good, quite good, thank you,” said the Frenchman, in French, “but there must be some linen left over.”

“It will fit better still when it sets to your body,” said Karatáev, still admiring his handiwork. “You’ll be nice and comfortable....”

“Thanks, thanks, old fellow.... But the bits left over?” said the Frenchman again and smiled. He took out an assignation ruble note and gave it to Karatáev. “But give me the pieces that are over.”

Pierre saw that Platón did not want to understand what the Frenchman was saying, and he looked on without interfering. Karatáev thanked the Frenchman for the money and went on admiring his own work. The Frenchman insisted on having the pieces returned that were left over and asked Pierre to translate what he said.

“What does he want the bits for?” said Karatáev. “They’d make fine leg bands for us. Well, never mind.”

And Karatáev, with a suddenly changed and saddened expression, took a small bundle of scraps from inside his shirt and gave it to the Frenchman without looking at him. “Oh dear!” muttered Karatáev and went away. The Frenchman looked at the linen, considered for a moment, then looked inquiringly at Pierre and, as if Pierre’s look had told him

something, suddenly blushed and shouted in a squeaky voice:

“Platoche! Eh, Platoche! Keep them yourself!” And handing back the odd bits he turned and went out.

“There, look at that,” said Karatáev, swaying his head. “People said they were not Christians, but they too have souls. It’s what the old folk used to say: ‘A sweating hand’s an open hand, a dry hand’s close.’ He’s naked, but yet he’s given it back.”

Karatáev smiled thoughtfully and was silent awhile looking at the pieces.

“But they’ll make grand leg bands, dear friend,” he said, and went back into the shed.