

CHAPTER XVIII

It was a long time before Pierre could fall asleep that night. He paced up and down his room, now turning his thoughts on a difficult problem and frowning, now suddenly shrugging his shoulders and wincing, and now smiling happily.

He was thinking of Prince Andrew, of Natásha, and of their love, at one moment jealous of her past, then reproaching himself for that feeling. It was already six in the morning and he still paced up and down the room.

“Well, what’s to be done if it cannot be avoided? What’s to be done? Evidently it has to be so,” said he to himself, and hastily undressing he got into bed, happy and agitated but free from hesitation or indecision.

“Strange and impossible as such happiness seems, I must do everything that she and I may be man and wife,” he told himself.

A few days previously Pierre had decided to go to Petersburg on the Friday. When he awoke on the Thursday, Savélich came to ask him about packing for the journey.

“What, to Petersburg? What is Petersburg? Who is there in Petersburg?” he asked involuntarily, though only to himself. “Oh, yes, long ago before this happened I did for some reason mean to go to Petersburg,” he reflected. “Why? But perhaps I shall go. What a good fellow he is and how attentive, and how he remembers everything,” he thought, looking at Savélich’s old face, “and what a pleasant smile he has!”

“Well, Savélich, do you still not wish to accept your freedom?” Pierre asked him.

“What’s the good of freedom to me, your excellency? We lived under the late count—the kingdom of heaven be his!—and we have lived under you too, without ever being wronged.”

“And your children?”

“The children will live just the same. With such masters one can live.”

“But what about my heirs?” said Pierre. “Supposing I suddenly marry... it might happen,” he added with an involuntary smile.

“If I may take the liberty, your excellency, it would be a good thing.”

“How easy he thinks it,” thought Pierre. “He doesn’t know how terrible it is and how dangerous. Too soon or too late... it is terrible!”

“So what are your orders? Are you starting tomorrow?” asked Savélich.

“No, I’ll put it off for a bit. I’ll tell you later. You must forgive

the trouble I have put you to,” said Pierre, and seeing Savélich smile, he thought: “But how strange it is that he should not know that now there is no Petersburg for me, and that that must be settled first of all! But probably he knows it well enough and is only pretending. Shall I have a talk with him and see what he thinks?” Pierre reflected. “No, another time.”

At breakfast Pierre told the princess, his cousin, that he had been to see Princess Mary the day before and had there met—“Whom do you think? Natásha Rostóva!”

The princess seemed to see nothing more extraordinary in that than if he had seen Anna Semënovna.

“Do you know her?” asked Pierre.

“I have seen the princess,” she replied. “I heard that they were arranging a match for her with young Rostóv. It would be a very good thing for the Rostóvs, they are said to be utterly ruined.”

“No; I mean do you know Natásha Rostóva?”

“I heard about that affair of hers at the time. It was a great pity.”

“No, she either doesn’t understand or is pretending,” thought Pierre. “Better not say anything to her either.”

The princess too had prepared provisions for Pierre’s journey.

“How kind they all are,” thought Pierre. “What is surprising is that they should trouble about these things now when it can no longer be of interest to them. And all for me!”

On the same day the Chief of Police came to Pierre, inviting him to send a representative to the Faceted Palace to recover things that were to be returned to their owners that day.

“And this man too,” thought Pierre, looking into the face of the Chief of Police. “What a fine, good-looking officer and how kind. Fancy bothering about such trifles now! And they actually say he is not honest and takes bribes. What nonsense! Besides, why shouldn’t he take bribes? That’s the way he was brought up, and everybody does it. But what a kind, pleasant face and how he smiles as he looks at me.”

Pierre went to Princess Mary’s to dinner.

As he drove through the streets past the houses that had been burned down, he was surprised by the beauty of those ruins. The picturesqueness of the chimney stacks and tumble-down walls of the burned-out quarters of the town, stretching out and concealing one another, reminded him of the Rhine and the Colosseum. The cabmen he met and their passengers, the carpenters cutting the timber for new houses with axes, the women hawkers, and the shopkeepers, all looked at him with cheerful beaming eyes that seemed to say: “Ah, there he is! Let’s see what will come of

it!”

At the entrance to Princess Mary’s house Pierre felt doubtful whether he had really been there the night before and really seen Natásha and talked to her. “Perhaps I imagined it; perhaps I shall go in and find no one there.” But he had hardly entered the room before he felt her presence with his whole being by the loss of his sense of freedom. She was in the same black dress with soft folds and her hair was done the same way as the day before, yet she was quite different. Had she been like this when he entered the day before he could not for a moment have failed to recognize her.

She was as he had known her almost as a child and later on as Prince Andrew’s fiancée. A bright questioning light shone in her eyes, and on her face was a friendly and strangely roguish expression.

Pierre dined with them and would have spent the whole evening there, but Princess Mary was going to vespers and Pierre left the house with her.

Next day he came early, dined, and stayed the whole evening. Though Princess Mary and Natásha were evidently glad to see their visitor and though all Pierre’s interest was now centered in that house, by the evening they had talked over everything and the conversation passed from one trivial topic to another and repeatedly broke off. He stayed so long that Princess Mary and Natásha exchanged glances, evidently wondering when he would go. Pierre noticed this but could not go. He felt uneasy and embarrassed, but sat on because he simply could not get up and take his leave.

Princess Mary, foreseeing no end to this, rose first, and complaining of a headache began to say good night.

“So you are going to Petersburg tomorrow?” she asked.

“No, I am not going,” Pierre replied hastily, in a surprised tone and as though offended. “Yes... no... to Petersburg? Tomorrow—but I won’t say good-by yet. I will call round in case you have any commissions for me,” said he, standing before Princess Mary and turning red, but not taking his departure.

Natásha gave him her hand and went out. Princess Mary on the other hand instead of going away sank into an armchair, and looked sternly and intently at him with her deep, radiant eyes. The weariness she had plainly shown before had now quite passed off. With a deep and long-drawn sigh she seemed to be prepared for a lengthy talk.

When Natásha left the room Pierre’s confusion and awkwardness immediately vanished and were replaced by eager excitement. He quickly moved an armchair toward Princess Mary.

“Yes, I wanted to tell you,” said he, answering her look as if she had spoken. “Princess, help me! What am I to do? Can I hope? Princess, my dear friend, listen! I know it all. I know I am not worthy of her, I know it’s impossible to speak of it now. But I want to be a brother to

her. No, not that, I don't, I can't..."

He paused and rubbed his face and eyes with his hands.

"Well," he went on with an evident effort at self-control and coherence. "I don't know when I began to love her, but I have loved her and her alone all my life, and I love her so that I cannot imagine life without her. I cannot propose to her at present, but the thought that perhaps she might someday be my wife and that I may be missing that possibility... that possibility... is terrible. Tell me, can I hope? Tell me what I am to do, dear princess!" he added after a pause, and touched her hand as she did not reply.

"I am thinking of what you have told me," answered Princess Mary. "This is what I will say. You are right that to speak to her of love at present..."

Princess Mary stopped. She was going to say that to speak of love was impossible, but she stopped because she had seen by the sudden change in Natásha two days before that she would not only not be hurt if Pierre spoke of his love, but that it was the very thing she wished for.

"To speak to her now wouldn't do," said the princess all the same.

"But what am I to do?"

"Leave it to me," said Princess Mary. "I know..."

Pierre was looking into Princess Mary's eyes.

"Well?... Well?..." he said.

"I know that she loves... will love you," Princess Mary corrected herself.

Before her words were out, Pierre had sprung up and with a frightened expression seized Princess Mary's hand.

"What makes you think so? You think I may hope? You think...?"

"Yes, I think so," said Princess Mary with a smile. "Write to her parents, and leave it to me. I will tell her when I can. I wish it to happen and my heart tells me it will."

"No, it cannot be! How happy I am! But it can't be.... How happy I am! No, it can't be!" Pierre kept saying as he kissed Princess Mary's hands.

"Go to Petersburg, that will be best. And I will write to you," she said.

"To Petersburg? Go there? Very well, I'll go. But I may come again tomorrow?"

Next day Pierre came to say good-by. Natásha was less animated than

she had been the day before; but that day as he looked at her Pierre sometimes felt as if he was vanishing and that neither he nor she existed any longer, that nothing existed but happiness. "Is it possible? No, it can't be," he told himself at every look, gesture, and word that filled his soul with joy.

When on saying good-by he took her thin, slender hand, he could not help holding it a little longer in his own.

"Is it possible that this hand, that face, those eyes, all this treasure of feminine charm so strange to me now, is it possible that it will one day be mine forever, as familiar to me as I am to myself?... No, that's impossible!..."

"Good-by, Count," she said aloud. "I shall look forward very much to your return," she added in a whisper.

And these simple words, her look, and the expression on her face which accompanied them, formed for two months the subject of inexhaustible memories, interpretations, and happy meditations for Pierre. "'I shall look forward very much to your return....' Yes, yes, how did she say it? Yes, 'I shall look forward very much to your return.' Oh, how happy I am! What is happening to me? How happy I am!" said Pierre to himself.