

## Chapter XXIII

Olenin's life went on with monotonous regularity. He had little intercourse with the commanding officers or with his equals. The position of a rich cadet in the Caucasus was peculiarly advantageous in this respect. He was not sent out to work, or for training. As a reward for going on an expedition he was recommended for a commission, and meanwhile he was left in peace. The officers regarded him as an aristocrat and behaved towards him with dignity. Cardplaying and the officers' carousals accompanied by the soldier-singers, of which he had had experience when he was with the detachment, did not seem to him attractive, and he also avoided the society and life of the officers in the village. The life of officers stationed in a Cossack village has long had its own definite form. Just as every cadet or officer when in a fort regularly drinks porter, plays cards, and discusses the rewards given for taking part in the expeditions, so in the Cossack villages he regularly drinks chikhir with his hosts, treats the girls to sweet-meats and honey, dangles after the Cossack women, and falls in love, and occasionally marries there. Olenin always took his own path and had an unconscious objection to the beaten tracks. And here, too, he did not follow the ruts of a Caucasian officer's life.

It came quite naturally to him to wake up at daybreak. After drinking tea and admiring from his porch the mountains, the morning, and Maryanka, he would put on a tattered ox-hide coat, sandals of soaked

raw hide, buckle on a dagger, take a gun, put cigarettes and some lunch in a little bag, call his dog, and soon after five o'clock would start for the forest beyond the village. Towards seven in the evening he would return tired and hungry with five or six pheasants hanging from his belt (sometimes with some other animal) and with his bag of food and cigarettes untouched. If the thoughts in his head had lain like the lunch and cigarettes in the bag, one might have seen that during all those fourteen hours not a single thought had moved in it. He returned morally fresh, strong, and perfectly happy, and he could not tell what he had been thinking about all the time. Were they ideas, memories, or dreams that had been flitting through his mind? They were frequently all three. He would rouse himself and ask what he had been thinking about; and would see himself as a Cossack working in a vineyard with his Cossack wife, or an abrek in the mountains, or a boar running away from himself. And all the time he kept peering and watching for a pheasant, a boar, or a deer.

In the evening Daddy Eroshka would be sure to be sitting with him. Vanyusha would bring a jug of chikhir, and they would converse quietly, drink, and separate to go quite contentedly to bed. The next day he would again go shooting, again be healthily weary, again they would sit conversing and drink their fill, and again be happy. Sometimes on a holiday or day of rest Olenin spent the whole day at home. Then his chief occupation was watching Maryanka, whose every movement, without realizing it himself, he followed greedily from his window or his porch. He regarded Maryanka and loved her (so he thought) just as he

loved the beauty of the mountains and the sky, and he had no thought of entering into any relations with her. It seemed to him that between him and her such relations as there were between her and the Cossack Lukashka could not exist, and still less such as often existed between rich officers and other Cossack girls. It seemed to him that if he tried to do as his fellow officers did, he would exchange his complete enjoyment of contemplation for an abyss of suffering, disillusionment, and remorse. Besides, he had already achieved a triumph of self-sacrifice in connexion with her which had given him great pleasure, and above all he was in a way afraid of Maryanka and would not for anything have ventured to utter a word of love to her lightly.

Once during the summer, when Olenin had not gone out shooting but was sitting at home, quite unexpectedly a Moscow acquaintance, a very young man whom he had met in society, came in.

'Ah, mon cher, my dear fellow, how glad I was when I heard that you were here!' he began in his Moscow French, and he went on intermingling French words in his remarks. 'They said, "Olenin". What Olenin? and I was so pleased.... Fancy fate bringing us together here! Well, and how are you? How? Why?' and Prince Beletski told his whole story: how he had temporarily entered the regiment, how the Commander-in-Chief had offered to take him as an adjutant, and how he would take up the post after this campaign although personally he felt quite indifferent about it.

'Living here in this hole one must at least make a career--get a cross--or a rank--be transferred to the Guards. That is quite indispensable, not for myself but for the sake of my relations and friends. The prince received me very well; he is a very decent fellow,' said Beletski, and went on unceasingly. 'I have been recommended for the St. Anna Cross for the expedition. Now I shall stay here a bit until we start on the campaign. It's capital here. What women! Well, and how are you getting on? I was told by our captain, Startsev you know, a kind-hearted stupid creature.... Well, he said you were living like an awful savage, seeing no one! I quite understand you don't want to be mixed up with the set of officers we have here. I am so glad now you and I will be able to see something of one another. I have put up at the Cossack corporal's house. There is such a girl there. Ustenka! I tell you she's just charming.'

And more and more French and Russian words came pouring forth from that world which Olenin thought he had left for ever. The general opinion about Beletski was that he was a nice, good-natured fellow. Perhaps he really was; but in spite of his pretty, good-natured face, Olenin thought him extremely unpleasant. He seemed just to exhale that filthiness which Olenin had forsworn. What vexed him most was that he could not--had not the strength--abruptly to repulse this man who came from that world: as if that old world he used to belong to had an irresistible claim on him. Olenin felt angry with Beletski and with himself, yet against his wish he introduced French phrases into his own conversation, was interested in the Commander-in-Chief and in their

Moscow acquaintances, and because in this Cossack village he and Beletski both spoke French, he spoke contemptuously of their fellow officers and of the Cossacks, and was friendly with Beletski, promising to visit him and inviting him to drop in to see him. Olenin however did not himself go to see Beletski. Vanyusha for his part approved of Beletski, remarking that he was a real gentleman.

Beletski at once adopted the customary life of a rich officer in a Cossack village. Before Olenin's eyes, in one month he came to be like an old resident of the village; he made the old men drunk, arranged evening parties, and himself went to parties arranged by the girls--bragged of his conquests, and even got so far that, for some unknown reason, the women and girls began calling him grandad, and the Cossacks, to whom a man who loved wine and women was clearly understandable, got used to him and even liked him better than they did Olenin, who was a puzzle to them.