

## VII.

Behind was France and the village and the pear tree, covered now with autumn fruit. I shut my eyes and I saw Perrine there praying for me. Praise God! I would be brave! Advance, present, fire! Bayonets! "Ah! He has done well, that conscript. Thy name, boy?"

"Pierre, Sire."

"Pierre, I make you a brigadier."

## VIII.

Brigadier! Perrine, my Perrine. Long live the feast of battles! To succeed in an army is nothing but to put one foot before the other. Right, left!

"You again, Pierre?"

"Yes, Majesty."

"There an epaulet!"

And oh, how many there were on the shoulders of the dead.

## IX.

"Thanks, Sire!"

So they marched to Moscow—but no farther. It was a wilderness of snow with a way marked over it in corpses. Here the river. There the enemy. On one side the dead.

"Who pushed off the first boat?"

"I, Sire!"

"Always you, Captain!"

He gave me the cross from his bosom.

## X.

Praise God! Perrine, my Perrine, you shall be proud of me. The campaign is over. I have my release. Ring the chimes, pull the bells for our wedding day. The way is long, but I come quickly. Over there on the other side of the hills, that is my country. I know the bells and I know what they say.

## XI.

Yes, the bells ring. But the pear tree? The month of blossom is here and yet I do not see it. I catch no glimpse of milestone of flowers. Once one could see it a long, long way off. Can it be that it has fallen? Have they cut down the tree of my young dreams? See it has flowered, but

now all its blossomed branches lie withering on the grass.

## XII.

"Why do they ring, Matthew?"

"For a wedding, Captain."

Matthew does not know me. A wedding. He is right.

The bridal procession enters the porch of the church. The bride is Perrine, my Perrine, laughing and more beautiful than ever. The bridegroom is my brother Jean.

## XIII.

Around me the good people are saying:

"How they love each other!"

"But Pierre?" I ask.

"What Pierre?"

They have forgotten me.

## XIV.

I fall on my knees in the grass at the back of the church. I pray for Perrine and I pray for Jean, the two I love.

When the mass is over I pick one blossom from the pear tree; one poor dead blossom and then I go on my way and I never look back. Praise God! They love each other; they will be happy.

## XV.

"You again, Pierre?"

"Yes, Sire."

"You are twenty-two years old and you are a commander, you are decorated; if you will, you shall have a countess for your wife."

Pierre took from his bosom the blossom of the pear tree, the poor dead flower.

"Sire, my heart is like this. What I want is a post in the thick of the fight that I may die like a soldier."

## XVI.

He had a post in the thick of the fight. And now at the end of the village, in the place where the pear tree stood, there is a grave, the grave of a colonel, dead at twenty-two years on a day of victory. And where the name should stand they have written just two words: Praise God!

FANFAN.