The Cutting of the Forest

The Story of a Yunker

Leo Tolstoy

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Contents

Chapter 1

In midwinter of 185 — the division of our batterywas doing frontier service in the Great Chechnya. Having learned, on the evening of the 14th of February, that the platoon, which I was to command in the absence of the officer, was detailed for the following day to cut timber, and having received and given the proper orders on that very evening, I repaired earlier than usual to my tent; as I did not have the bad habit of warming it up with burning coal, I lay down in my clothes on my bed, which was constructed of paling, drew my lambskin cap down to my eyes, wrapped myself in a fur coat, and fell into that peculiar, profound, and heavy sleep which one sleeps in moments of alarm and agitation before an imminent peril. The expectancy of the engagement of the following day had induced that condition in me.

At three o'clock in the morning, while it was still very dark, somebody pulled the warm fur coat from me, and the purple light of a candle disagreeably startled my sleepy eyes.

"Please get up!" said somebody's voice. I closed my eyes, unconsciously pulled the fur coat over me, and again fell asleep." Please get up!" repeated Dmitri, pitilessly shaking me by the shoulder." The infantry is starting." I suddenly recalled the actuality, shuddered, and sprang to my feet. Having swallowed in a hurry a glass of tea and washed myself with ice-crusted water, I went out of the tent and walked over to the park (the place where the ordnance is stationed).

It was dark, misty, and cold. The night fires, which glimmered here and there in the camp, lighting up the figures of the drowsy soldiers who were lying about them, only intensified the darkness by their purple glamour. Near by one could hear the even, calm snoring of men; in the distance there was the motion, talking, and clanking of the infantry's weapons, getting ready for the march; there was an odor of smoke, dung, slow-matches, and mist; a morning chill ran down one's back, and one's teeth involuntarily clattered against each other.

By the snorting and occasional stamping alone could one make out, in this impenetrable darkness, where the hitched-up limbers and caissons were standing, and only by the burning dots of the linstocks could one tell where the ordnance was. With the words, " God be with you!" the first gun began to clatter, then the caisson rattled, and the platoon was on the move. We took off our hats and made the sign of the cross. Having taken up its position among the infantry, the platoon stopped, and for about fifteen minutes awaited the drawing up of the whole column and the arrival of the commander.

"We lack one soldier, Nikolay Petrovich!" said, approaching me, a black figure, which I recognized by the voice only as being that of the platoon gun-sergeant, Maksim o v.

"Who is it?"

"Velenchiik is not here. As we were hitching up, he was here, and I saw him, but now he is gone."

As there was no reason to suppose that the column would march at once, we decided to send Lance Corporal Antonov to find Velenchiik. Soon after, several horsemen galloped past us in the darkness : that was the commander with his suite; immediately there was a stir, the van of the

column started, and then we began to march, — but Antonov and Velenchiik were not with us. We had scarcely taken one hundred steps, when both soldiers caught up with us.

"Where was he?" I asked of Antonov.

"Asleep in the park."

"Is he drunk?"

"No, sir."

"Why, then, did he go to sleep?"

"I can't tell you."

For something like three hours we moved slowly in the same silence and darkness over unplowed, snowless fields and low bushes, which crackled under the wheels of the ordnance. Finally, after fording a shallow, but extremely rapid torrent, we halted, and in the van could be heard intermittent volleys of musketry. These sounds, as always, had an awakening effect upon all. The detachment seemed to have wakened from slumber : in the ranks could be heard conversation, animation, and laughter. Some soldiers were wrestling with their comrades; others leaped now on one foot, now on another; others again were munching their hardtack, or, to pass the time, pretended to stand sentry or keep time walking. In the meantime the mist was becoming perceptibly white in the east, the dampness grew more penetrating, and the surrounding objects emerged more and more from the darkness. I could discern the green gun-carriages and caissons, the brass of the ordnance, covered by a misty dampness, the familiar forms of my soldiers, and the bay horses, which I had involuntarily learned to know down to their minutest details, and the rows of the infantry, with their sparkling bayonets, knapsacks, wad-hooks, and kettles over their backs.

Shortly afterwards we were again put in motion, taken a couple of hundred steps across the field, and had a place pointed out to us. On the right could be seen the steep bank of a winding brook and tall wooden posts of a Tartar cemetery; on the left and in front of us shimmered a black streak, through the mist. The platoon came down from the limbers. The eighth company, which was flanking us, stacked arms, and a battalion of soldiers went into the woods with guns and axes.

Less than five minutes had elapsed when on all sides crackled and burned camp-fires; the soldiers scattered about them, fanning the fire with their hands and feet, carrying boughs and logs, and in the forest resounded without interruption hundreds of axes and falling trees.

The artillerists, vying with the infantrymen, had made a fire of their own, and though it was burning so well that it was impossible to come within two paces of it, and a dense smoke was passing through the ice-crusted branches, from which drops fell sizzling into the fire, and which the soldiers kept pressing down with their feet, and though coal had formed underneath the fire, and the grass was burnt white all around it, — the soldiers were not yet satisfied; they dragged up whole logs, threw steppe-grass upon it, and fanned it more and more.

As I went up to the camp-fire to light a cigarette, Velenchuk, who was always officious, but who now, having failed in his duty, was unduly busy about the fire, in an attack of zeal pulled out with his naked hand a burning coal from the very middle, and, vaulting it a couple of times from one hand to another, threw it down on the ground.

"You had better light a stick and hand it," said some one.

"Hand him the linstock, boys!" cried another.

When I finally lighted my cigarette without Velenchuk's aid, who was again ready to pick up the coal with his hands, he wiped his singed fingers against the hind skirts of his fur coat, and,

evidently anxious to be doing something, lifted a large plane-tree log and flung it into the fire with all his might. When, at last, it seemed to him that it was time to rest himself, he went up as near as he could to the burning wood, spread his overcoat, which he wore like a mantle on the back button, extended in front of him his large black hands, and, distorting his mouth a little, blinked with his eyes.

"Ah, I have forgotten my pipe. That's bad, brothers!" he said, after a moment's silence, and addressing no one in particular.

Chapter 2

In Russia there are three prevailing types of soldiers, among which may be classed the soldiers of all the armies : of the Caucasus, the Ипе, the guards, the infantry, the cavalry, the artillery, and so forth.

These three types, capable of many subdivisions and blendings, are the following :

1. The submissive.
2. The commanding.
3. The desperate.

The submissive soldiers may be subdivided into (a) indifferently submissive and (b) busily submissive.

The commanding may be subdivided into (a) austerely commanding and (b) sagaciously commanding.

The desperate may be subdivided into (a) desperate jokers and (b) desperate debauchees.

The commonest type is a gentle, sympathetic type, which unites the best Christian virtues, meekness, piety, patience, and submission to the will of God, and is that of the submissive in general. The distinctive features of an indifferently submissive soldier are an imperturbable calm and contempt for all the vicissitudes of fortune to which he may be subjected. The distinctive feature of the submissive drunkard is a quiet, poetical inclination and sentimentahty. The distinctive feature of the busily submissive is a limited mental capacity, united with an aimless industry and zeal.

The commanding type is found preponderantly in the higher spheres of the noncommissioned officers, among corporals, under-officers, sergeants, and so forth. Among these, the austerely commanding type is noble, energetic, preeminently martial, and not devoid of high poetical impulses. To this type belonged Corporal Antonov, with whom I intend to acquaint the reader. The second sub-division is formed by the sagaciously commanding, who of late have been getting quite common. A sagaciously commanding noncommissioned officer is always eloquent, knows how to read and write, wears a pink shirt, does not eat from the common kettle, at times smokes Musat tobacco, considers himself incomparably higher than a common soldier, and is rarely as good a soldier as the commanding of the first order.

The desperate type, like the commanding type, is good only in the first subdivision : the distinctive traits of desperate jokers are their imperturbable cheerfulness, their ability to do everything, a well-endowed nature, and dashing spirit of adventure; this type is just as dreadfully bad in the second subdivision of desperate debauchees, who, however, to the honor of the Eussian army be it said, occur very rarely, and wherever they are found are removed from companionship by the community of the soldiers themselves. The chief characteristics of this sub-division are faithlessness and a certain adventurousness in vice.

Velenchiik belonged to the order of the busily submissive. He was a Little-Eussian by birth, fifteen years in active service, and though not a very fine-appearing man, and not a very agile soldier, he was simple-hearted, kindly, overzealous, though generally inopportunely so, and exceedingly honest. I say " exceedingly honest," because the year before there had been an incident when he had very palpably displayed this characteristic quality. It must be remarked that nearly every soldier has some trade; the most popular trades are those of a tailor and a shoemaker. Velenchiik had learned the first, and, to judge from the fact that Sergeant Mikhail Dorofeich himself had him make his clothes for him, he must have reached a certain artistic perfection in it.

The year before, while in camp, Velenchuk had undertaken to make a fine overcoat for Mikhail Dorofeich; but in the night, when, after cutting the cloth and fixing the lining, he lay down to sleep with the goods under his head, a misfortune befell him : the cloth, which had cost seven rubles, had disappeared. With tears in his eyes, trembling lips, and restrained sobs, Velenchuk announced the fact to the sergeant. Mikhail Dorofeich was furious. In the first moment of his anger he threatened the tailor, but later, being a man of means, and good at heart, he dropped the whole matter and did not ask any restitution of the value of the overcoat. However much bustling Velenchuk fretted and wept, as he was telling about his misfortune, the thief did not show up. Though there were strong suspicions against a desperate debauchee of a soldier, Chernov by name, who was sleeping in the same tent with him, there were no positive proofs. The sagacious commander, Mikhail Dorofeich, being a man of means and in some kind of partnership with the superintendent of arms and the steward, the aristocrats of the battery, very soon completely forgot the loss of that particular overcoat; Velenchuk, on the contrary, could not forget his misfortune. The soldiers said that they were afraid all the time that he would lay hands on himself or run away into the mountains, for this unfortunate accident had affected him powerfully. He did not eat, nor drink; he could not work, and wept all the time. Three days later he appeared before Mikhail Dorofeich, and, all pale, drew with trembliug hands a gold coin out of his rolled up sleeve, and handed it to him.

"Upon my word, this is all I have, Mikhail Dorofeich, and I have borrowed it from Zhdanov," he said, sobbing a^rain." The two rubles that are wantin» I will sfive you, upon my word, as soon as I have earned them. He " (Velenchuk himself did not know who that " he " was) " has made me out a thief in your eyes. His vHe, contemptible soul has taken the last thing away from his brother soldier; here I have been serving fifteen years, and —" To Mikhail Dorofeich's honor, it must be said that he did not take from liim the lacking two rubles, though Velenchuk offered them to him two months later.

Chapter 3

Besides Velenchiik, five other soldiers of my platoon were warming themselves at the fire.

In the best place, protected from the wind, on a cask, sat the gun-sergeant of the platoon, Maksimov, smoking a pipe. In the pose, the look, and all the motions of this man could be observed the habit of commanding and the consciousness of his personal dignity, even independently of the cask, on which he was sitting, and which, at a halt, formed the emblem of authority, and of the nankeen-covered fur half-coat.

When I came up, he turned his head toward me; but his eyes remained fixed upon the fire, and only much later did they follow the direction of his head, and rest upon me. Maksimov was a freeman; he was possessed of some means, had taken instruction in the school of the brigade, and had picked up some information. He was dreadfully rich and dreadfuUy learned, as the soldiers expressed themselves.

I remember how once, at gun-practice with the quadrant, he explained to the soldiers who were crowding around him that the level was " nothing else than that it originates because the atmospheric quicksilver has its motion." In reality, Maksimov was far from being stupid, and he knew his work very well, but he had an unfortunate peculiarity of speaking at times purposely in such a way that it was totally impossible to understand him, and so that, as I am convinced, he did not understand his own words. He was especially fond of the words " originates " and " to continue," and when he introduced his remarks with " originates " and " continuing," I knew in advance that I should not understand a word of what followed. The soldiers, on the contrary, so far as I was able to observe, liked to hear his " originates," and suspected that a deep meaning lay behind it, though, like myself, they did not comprehend a word. They referred this lack of comprehension to their own stupidity, and respected Fedor Maksimych the more for it. In short, Maksimych was a sagacious commander.

The second soldier, who was taking ofif the boots from his red, muscular legs, was Antonov, the same bombardier Antonov, who in the year '37, having been left with two others at a gun, without protection, had kept up a fire against a numerous enemy, and, with two bullets in his hip, had continued to attend to the gun and load it." He would have been a gun-sergeant long ago, if it were not for his character," the soldiers would say of him. Indeed, his was a strange character : in his sober mood there was not a quieter, prompter, and more peaceful soldier; but when he became intoxicated, he was an entirely different man : he did not respect the authorities, brawled, fought, and was an altogether useless soldier. Not more than a week before he had gone on a spree during Butter-week, and, in spite of all threats, persuasions, and calls to duty, he continued his drunken bouts and brawls until the first Monday in Lent. But during the whole fast, in spite of the order for all men in the division to eat meat, he lived on nothing but hardtack, and in the first week he did not even take the prescribed dram of brandy. However, it was only necessary to see this undersized figure, built as though of iron, with his short, crooked legs and shining, whiskered face, take into his muscular hands the balalayka, while under the influence of liquor, and, carelessly casting his glances to both sides, strum some " lady's " song, or, to see him.

his overcoat, with the decorations danghng from it, thrown over shoulder, and his hands thrust into the pockets of his bhie nankeen trousers, stroll down the street, — it was only necessary to see the expression of military pride and contempt of everything un-military, which was displayed in his face at such a time, in order to understand how utterly impossible it was for him to keep from fighting at such a moment an impertinent or even innocent orderly, who got in his way, or a Cossack, a foot-soldier, or settler, in general one who did not belong to the artillery. He fought and was turbulent not so much for his own amusement, as for the sake of supporting the spirit of the whole soldierhood, of which he felt himself to be a representative.

The third soldier, with an earring in one ear, bristly mustache, a sharp, birdlike face, and a porcelain pipe between his teeth, who was squatting near the fire, was the artillery-rider Chikin. The dear man Chikin, as the soldiers called him, was a joker. Wliether in bitter cold, or up to his knees in mud, for two days without food, in an expedition, on parade, at instruction, the dear man always and everywhere made faces, pirouetted with his feet, and did such funny things that the whole platoon roared with laughter. At a halt or in camp there was always around Chikin a circle of young soldiers, with whom he played cards; or he told them stories about a cunning soldier and an English milord, or imitated a Tartar or a German, or simply made his own remarks, which caused them nearly to die with laughter. It is true, his reputation as a joker was so well established in the battery that it was enough for him to open his mouth and wink, in order to provoke a general roar of laughter; but there was really something truly comical and unexpected in all he said and did. In everything he saw something especial, something that would not have occurred to anybody else, and what is more important, this ability to see something funny did not fail him under any trial.

The fourth soldier was a homely young lad, a recruit of the last year's draft, who was now for the first time taking part in an expedition. He was standing in the smoke, and so close to the fire that it looked as though his threadbare fur coat would soon ignite; but, notwithstancUng this, it was evident, from the way he spread the skirts of liis coat, from his self-satisfied pose with his arching calves, that he was experiencing great pleasure.

And, finally, the fifth soldier, seated a little distance from the fire, and whittling a stick, was Uncle Zhdanov. Zhdanov had seen more service than any other soldier in the battery; he had known them all as recruits, and they called him uncle, from force of habit. It was reported that he never drank, nor smoked, nor played cards (not even nosM), nor ever swore. All his time which was free from military service he spent in plying the shoemaker's trade; on hohdays he went to church, whenever it was possible, or placed a kopeck taper before the image, and opened the psalter, the only book which he could read. He associated little with the soldiers : he was coldly respectful to those who were higher in rank but younger in years; his equals he had little chance to meet, since he did not drink; but he was especially fond of recruits and young soldiers, — he always protected them, read the instructions to them, and frequently aided them. Everybody in the battery considered him a capitalist because he was possessed of twenty-five rubles with which he was prepared to assist those who really needed assistance. That same Maksimov, who was now gun-sergeant, told me that when he had arrived ten years ago as a recruit, and the older soldiers, who were given to drinking, drank up with him all the money he had, Zhdanov, noticing his unfortunate plight, called him up, upbraided him for liis conduct, even gave him some blows, read lum the instruction about the behavior of a soldier, and sent him away, giving him a shirt, for Maksimov had got rid of his, and half a ruble in money.

"He has made a man of me," Maksimov would say of him, with respect and gratitude. He had also helped Velenchuk, whom he had protected ever since he arrived as a recruit, at the time of the unfortunate loss of the overcoat, and he had aided many, many more during his twenty-five years of service.

It was impossible to expect in the service a man who knew his business better, or a soldier who was braver and more precise; but he was too meek and retiring to be promoted to the rank of gun-sergeant, though he had been bombardier fifteen years. Zhdanov's one pleasure, and even passion, was songs; he was especially fond of some of them, and he always gathered a circle of singers from among the young soldiers, and, though he could not sing himself, stood behind them, and, putting his hands into the pockets of his fur coat, and closing his eyes, expressed his satisfaction by the movement of his head and cheeks. I do not know why, but for some reason or other I discovered much expression in this even movement of the cheeks under his ears, which I had observed in nobody else but him. His snow-white head, his mustache dyed black, and his sunburnt, wrinkled face gave him, at first sight, a stern and austere expression; but, upon looking more closely into his large, round eyes, especially when they were smiling (he never smiled with his lips), you were impressed by something extraordinarily meek and almost childlike.

Chapter 4

“Ah, I have forgotten my pipe. That’s bad, brothers,” repeated Velenchuk.

“You ought to smoke cigars, dear man!” remarked Chikin, screwing up his mouth and winking.” I always smoke cigars at home; they are sweeter.”

Of course, everybody rolled in laughter.

“So you forgot your pipe,” interrupted Maksimov, not paying any attention to the general merriment, and, with the air of a superior, proudly knocking out the ashes by striking the pipe against the palm of his left hand.” What have you been doing there? Eh, Velenchuk?”

Velenchuk turned half-aroimd to him, put his hand to his cap, and then dropped it.

“You evidently did not get enough sleep yesterday, and so you are now falling asleep standing. You won’t get any reward for such behavior.”

“May I be torn up on the spot, Fedor Maksimych, if I have had a drop in my mouth; I do not know myself what is the matter with me,” replied Velenchuk.” What occasion did I have to get drunk?” he muttered.

“That’s it. One has to be responsible for you fellows before the authorities, and you keep it up all the time, — it is disgusting,” concluded eloquent Maksimov, but in a calmer tone.

“It is really wonderful, brothers,” continued Velenchuk, after a moment’s silence, scratching the back of his head, and not addressing any one in particular.” Really, it is wonderful, brothers! Here I have been sixteen years in

the service, and such a thing has never happened to me before. When we were ordered to get ready for the march, I got up as usual, — there was nothing the matter; but suddenly it caught me in the park — it caught me and threw me down on the ground, and that was all — And I myself do not know how I fell asleep, brothers! It must be the sleeping disease,” he concluded.

“Yes, I had a hard time waking you,” said Antdnov, pulling on his boot.” I kept pushing and pushing you, as though you were a log!”

“I say,” remarked Velenchvlk, “ just as though I were drunk —”

“There was a woman at home,” began Chikin, “ who had not left the oven bed for at least two years. They began to wake her once, thinking that she was asleep, but they found she was dead, — though her death resembled sleep. Yes, my dear man!”

“Just tell us, Chikin, how you put on style when you had your leave of absence,” said Maksimov, smiling and looking at me, as though to say, “ Would you not like to hear the story of a foolish man?”

“What style, Maksimych?” said Chikin, casting a cursory side glance at me.” I just told them all about the Caucasus.”

“Of course, of course! Don’t be so shy — tell us how you led them on.”

“It is very simple : they asked me how we were hving,” Chikin began, speaking hurriedly, having the appearance of a man who has told the same story several times.” I said : ‘ We live well, dear man : we get our provisions in full, — in the morning and evening of chocolate a cup to each soldier is brought up; and for dinner we get soup, not of oats, but of noble barley groats,

and instead of brandy we get a cup of Modeira, Modeira Divirioo which, without the bottle, is at fortytwo!'"

"Great Modeira!" shouted Velenchiik, louder than the rest, and bursting out laughing."That's what I call Modeira!"

"Well, and did you tell them about the Esiatics?" Maksimov continued his inquiry, when the general laughter had subsided.

Chikin bent down toward the fire, got a coal out with a stick, put it in his pipe, and for a long while puffed in silence his tobacco roots, as though unconscious of the silent curiosity of his hearers. When he finally had puffed up sufficient smoke, he threw away the coal, poised his cap farther back on his head, and, shrugging his shoulder and lightly smiling, he continued." ' What kind of a man is your small Circassian down there? ' says one. * Or is it the Turk you are fighting in the Caucasus? ' Says I : ' Dear man, there is not one kind of Circassians down there, but many different Circassians there are. There are some mountaineers who live in stone mountains, and who eat stone instead of bread. They are big,' says I, ' a big log in size; they have one eye in the middle of the forehead,' and they wear red caps that glow like yours, dear man!" he added, addressing a young recruit, who, in fact, wore a funny little cap with a red crown.

At this unexpected turn, the recruit suddenly sat down on the ground, slapped his knees, and burst out laughing and coughing so hard that he could hardly pronounce with a choking voice, "Those are fine mountaineers!"

"' Then there are the Boobies,' " continued Chikin, with a jerk of his head drawing his cap back on his forehead, " ' these are twins, wee little twins, about this size. They always run in pairs, holding each other's hands,' says I, ' and they run so fast that you can't catch them on horseback.' ' Are those Boobies,' says one, ' born with clasped hands, my dear fellow? ' " Chikin spoke in a guttural bass, as though imitating a peasant." ' Yes/ says I, ' dear man, he is such by nature. If you tear their hands apart, blood will ooze out, just as from a Chinaman; if you take off their caps, blood will flow.' ' Now tell me, good fellow, how do they carry on war? ' says he. ' Like this,' says I, * if they catch you, they sHt open your belly, and begin to wind your guts about your arms. They wind them, but you laugh and laugh, until you give up the ghost — ' "

"Well, did they believe you, Chikin?" said Maksimov, with a slight smile, while the others were rolling in laughter.

"They are such strange people, Fedor ' Maksimych. They believe everything, upon my word, they do. But when I began to tell them about Mount Kazbek, telling them that the snow did not melt all summer there, they ridiculed me. ' Don't tell such fibs, good fellow,' they said. ' Who has ever heard such a thing : a big mountain, and the snow not melting on it! Wliy, even with us the snow melts on the mounds long before it has melted in the hollows.' So, go and explain matters to them," concluded Chikin, winking.

Chapter 5

The bright disk of the sun, shining through the milkwhite mist, had risen quite high; the grayish-violet horizon was widening all the time, and though it was farther away, it was also sharply closed in by the deceptive white mist wall.

In front of us, beyond the forest which had been cut down, there was opened up a fairly large clearing. Over the clearing there spread on all sides the smoke from the fires, now black, now milk-white, now violet, and the white layers of the mist were forming themselves into fantastic shapes. Far in the distance, occasionally appeared groups of Tartar horsemen, and were heard the infrequent reports of our carbines, and their guns and cannon.

"This was not yet an engagement, but mere child's play," as the good Captain Khlopov used to say.

The commander of the ninth company of sharpshooters, who were to flank us, walked up to the guns, pointed to three Tartar horsemen, who were at that time riding near the forest, at a distance of more than six hundred fathoms from us; he asked me, with that eagerness to see an artillery fire which is characteristic of all infantry officers in general, to give them a shot or a shell.

"Do you see," he said, with a kindly and convincing smile extending his hand from behind my shoulder, " there where the two high trees are? One of them, in front, is on a white horse, and dressed in a white mantle, and there, behind him, are two more. Do you see them? Couldn't you just —"

"And there are three others, riding near the forest," added Antonov, who had remarkably sharp eyes, approaching us, and conceahng behind his back the pipe which he had been smoking." The one in front has just taken out the gun from its case. You can see him plainly, your Honor!"

"I say, he has fired it off, brothers! There is the white puff of the smoke," said Velenchuk, in a group of soldiers who were standing a short distance behind us.

"He must have aimed at our cordon, the rascal!" remarked another.

"See what a lot of them the forest is pouring out. I suppose they are trying to find a place to station their cannon," added a third." If we could just burst a shell in the midst of them, — that would make them spit —"

"What is your opinion? will it reach so far, dear man?" asked Chikin.

"Five hundred or five hundred and twenty fathoms, not more," Maksimov said, coolly, as though speaking to himself, though it was evident that he was anxious to fire off the cannon, as the rest were." If we were to give forty-five lines to the howitzer, we might hit it, — hit it square in the middle."

"Do you know, if you were to aim straight at this group, you would certainly hit somebody. See how they have all gathered in a mass! Now, quickly, give the order to fire," the commander of the company continued his entreaties.

"Do you order the gun to be aimed?" Antonov suddenly asked, in a jerky bass voice, with gloomy malice in his eyes.

I must confess that I myself was anxious for it, and so I ordered that the second cannon be brought into position.

No sooner had I given the order than the shell was powdered, and rammed in, and Antonov, clinging to the gun-cheek, and placing his two fat fingers on the carriageplate, was ordering the block-trail to the right and left.

"A trifle more to the left — a wee bit to the right — now, the least Httle bit more — now it's all right," he said, walking away from the gun with a proud face.

The infantry officer, I, and Maksimov, one after another put our eyes to the sight, and each expressed his particular opinion.

"Upon my word, it will carry across," remarked Velenchuk, clicking with his tongue, although he had only been looking over Antonov's shoulder, and therefore did not have the least reason for such a supposition." Upon my word, it wiU carry across, and will strike that tree, brothers!"

"Second!" I commanded.

The crew stepped aside. Antonov ran to one side, in order to see the flight of the projectile; the fuze flashed, and the brass rang out. At the same time we were enveloped in powder-smoke, and through the deafening boom of the report was heard the metallic, whizzing sound of the projectile, flying with the rapidity of lightning, dying away in the distance amid a universal silence. A little behind the group of the horsemen appeared white smoke, the Tartars galloped away in both directions, and we heard the sound of the explosion.

"That was fine! How they are scampering! See, the devils don't like it!" were heard the approvals and jests in the ranks of the artillery and infantry.

"If we had aimed a little lower, we should have hit Mm straight," remarked Velenchuk." I told you it would strike the tree, and so it did, — it went to the right."

Chapter 6

Leaving the soldiers to discuss the flight of the Tartars when they saw the shell, and why they were riding there, and how many of them still might be in the woods, I walked away with the commander of the company a few steps to one side, and seated myself under a tree, waiting for the warmed forcemeat cutlets which he had offered me. The commander of the company, Bolkhdv, was one of those officers who, in the regiment, are called " bonjours." He had means, had served in the guards, and spoke French. Yet, notwithstanding this, his comrades liked him. He was quite clever, and had enough tact to wear a St. Petersburg coat, to eat a good dinner, and to speak French, without unduly offending the society of his fellow officers. After speaking of the weather, of military engagements, of our common acquaintances among the officers, and convincing ourselves, by our questions and answers, and by our view of things, that there was a satisfactory understanding between us, we involuntarily passed to a more intimate conversation. Besides, in the Caucasus, among people of the same circle naturally arises the question, though not always expressed, " Why are you here?" To this silent question my companion, so it seemed to me, was trying to give a reply.

"When will this frontier work end?" he said, lazily. « It is dull!"

"Not to me," said I." It is more tiresome on the staff."

"Oh, on the staff it is ten thousand times worse," he said, angrily." No, when will all this end?"

"What is it you want to end?"

"Everything, altogether! — Are the cutlets ready, Nikolaev?" he asked.

"Why did you go to the Caucasus to serve, if the Caucasus is so displeasing to you?"

"Do you know why?" he replied, with absolute frankness." By tradition. In Eussia, you know, there exists an exceedingly strange tradition about the Caucasus, aз though it were a promised land for all kinds of unhappy people."

"Yes, that is almost true," I said, " the greater part of us —"

"But what is best of all," he interrupted me, " is, that all of us who come to the Caucasus make dreadful mistakes in our calculations. Really, I can't see why, on account of an unfortunate love-afifair or disorder in money matters, one should hasten to serve in the Caucasus rather than in Kazan or Kaluga. In Russia they imagine the Caucasus as something majestic, with eternal virgin snows, torrents, daggers, cloaks, Circassian maidens, — all this is terrifying, but, really, there is nothing jolly in it. If they only knew that you never are in the virgin snows, and that there is no special pleasure in being there, and that the Caucasus is divided into Governments, Stavropol, Tiflis, and so forth —"

"Yes," I said, laughing, " in Russia we take an entirely different view of the Caucasus from what we do here. Have you not experienced this? when you read poetry in a language that you do not know very well, you imagine it to be much better than it really is —"

"I don't know, only I have no use for the Caucasus," he interrupted me.

"No, not so with me. I like the Caucasus even now, but differently —"

“Maybe the Caucasus is all right,” he continued, as though provoked a little, “ but I know this much : I am not good for the Caucasus.”

“Why not?” I asked, in order to say something.

“Because, in the first place, it has deceived me. All that from which I had come away to be cured in the Caucasus, as the tradition has it, has followed me up here, — but with this difference. Formerly I was led to it on a large staircase, and now it is a small, dirty staircase, at each step of which I find millions of petty annoyances, meanness, insults; in the second place, because I feel that I am every day falling morally lower and lower, and, what is most important, because I feel unfit for this kind of service; I am unable to bear danger — I am simply not a brave man —”

He stopped and looked earnestly at me.

Although this unasked-for confession surprised me very much, I did not contradict him, as my interlocutor had evidently expected me to do, but awaited from him the refutation of his own words, which is always forthcoming under such circumstances.

“Do you know, I am to-day taking part in an action for the first time since I have been in the frontier guard,” he continued, “and you will hardly believe what happened to me yesterday. When the sergeant brought the order that my company was to be in the column, I grew as pale as a sheet, and was unable to speak from trepidation. And if you only knew what a night I have passed! If it is true that people grow gray from fright, I ought to be entirely white to-day, for not one man condemned to death has suffered so much in one night as I have; though I am feeling a little more at ease now than I did in the night, it still goes around here,” he added, moving his clinched hand in front of his breast.” Now this is certainly ridiculous,” he continued, “ a most terrible drama is being played here, and I myself am eating cutlets with onions, and persuading myself that all this is very gay. Have you any wine, Nikolaev?” he added, with a yawn.

“There he is, brothers!” was heard at that moment the alarmed voice of one of the soldiers, and all eyes were directed to the edge of the far-off forest.

In the distance rose a bluish cloud of smoke, borne upwards by the wind, and constantly growing larger. When I understood that this was a shot which the enemy had aimed at us, everything that was before my eyes, everything suddenly assumed a new and majestic character. The stacked guns, and the smoke of the camp-fires, and the blue sky, and the green gun-carriages, and the sunburnt, whiskered face of Nikolaev, — everything seemed to tell me that the cannon-ball which had emerged from the smoke and which at that moment was flying through space might be directed straight at my breast,

“Where did you get your wine?” I asked Bolkhov, lazily, while in the depth of my soul two voices were speaking with equal distinctness; one said, “ Lord, receive my soul in peace,” and the other, “ I hope I shall not cower, but smile as the ball flies past me,” and at the same instant something dreadfully disagreeable whistled over our heads, and struck the ground within two steps of us.

“Now, if I were a Napoleon or a Frederick,” Bolkhov remarked at that time, turning toward me with extraordinary composure, “ I should utter some witticism.”

“But you have told one just now,” I replied, with difficulty concealing the alarm caused within me by the danger just past,

“Even if I have, nobody will make a note of it,”

“I will.”

“Yes, if you make a note of it, it will be to put in a critical paper, as Mishchenkov says,” he added, smiling.

“Pshaw, you accursed one!” said Antonov, who was sitting behind us, angrily spitting to one side, “ just missed my legs,”

All my endeavors to appear cool and all our cunning phrases suddenly seemed intolerably stupid after this simple-hearted exclamation.

Chapter 7

The enemy had really stationed two guns where the Tartars had been riding, and every twenty or thirty minutes they sent a shot at our wood-cutters. My platoon was moved out into the clearing, and the order was given to return the fire. At the edge of the forest appeared a puff of smoke, there was heard a discharge, a whistling, — and the ball fell behind or in front of us. The projectiles of the enemy lodged harmlessly, and we had no losses.

The artillerists conducted themselves well, as they always did, loaded expeditiously, carefully aimed at the puffs of smoke, and quietly joked each other. The flanking infantry detachment lay near us, in silent inaction, waiting for their turn. The wood-cutters did their work : the axes sounded through the woods faster and more frequently; only, whenever the whistling of the projectile was heard, everything suddenly grew quiet, and amid the dead silence could be heard the not very calm voices, " Get out of the way, boys!" and all eyes were directed toward the ball, ricocheting over the fires and the brush.

The fog was now completely lifted, and, assuming the forms of clouds, was slowly disappearing in the dark blue vault of the sky; the un shrouded sun shone brightly and cast its gleaming rays on the steel of the bayonets, the brass of the ordnance, the thawing earth, and the sparkling hoarfrost. The air was brisk with the freshness of the morning frost, together with the warmth of the vernal sun; thousands of different shadows and hues were mingled in the dry leaves of the forest, and on the hard shiniDg road were distinctly visible the traces of the wheel tires and horse-shoe sponges.

Between the troops the motion grew more animated and more noticeable. On all sides flashed more and more frequently the bluish puffs of the discharges. The dragoons, with the pennons fluttering from their lances, rode out in front; in the companies of the infantry, songs were started, and the wagons with the wood were being drawn up in the rear. The general rode up to our platoon, and ordered us to get ready for the retreat. The enemy took up a position in the bushes, opposite our left flank, and began to harass us with musketry-fire. On the left side a bullet whizzed by from the forest and struck a gun-carriage, then a second, a third — The flanking infantry, which was lying near us, rose noisily, picked up their guns, and formed a cordon. The fusilade grew fiercer, and the bullets kept flying oftener and oftener. The retreat began, and, consequently, the real engagement, as is always the case in the Caucasus.

It was quite evident that the artillerists did not like the bullets, as awhile ago the foot-soldiers had enjoyed the cannon-balls. Antonov frowned. Chikin imitated the sound of the bullets and made fun of them; but it was apparent that he did not like them. Of one he said, " What a hurry it is in!" another he called a " little bee; " a third one, which flew over us slowly, and whining pitifully, he called an " orphan," which provoked a universal roar.

The recruit, who was not used to this, bent his head aside and craned his neck every time a bullet passed by, which, too, made the soldiers laugh." Is it an acquaintance of yours, that you are bowing to it?" they said to him, Velenchiik, who otherwise was exceedingly indifferent to danger, now was in an agitated mood : he was obviously angry because we did not fire any canister-shot

in the direction from which the bullets proceeded. He repeated several times, in a discontented voice : " Why do we let Mm shoot at us for nothing? If we trained our gun upon him, and treated him to a canister-shot, he probably would stop."

It was indeed time to do so. I ordered the last shell let out, and a canister-shot loaded.

"Canister-shot!" cried Antonov, lustily, before the smoke had dispersed, and walking up with the sponge to the gun the moment the shell had been discharged.

Just then I suddenly heard a short distance behind me the ping of a whizzing bullet striking against something. My heart was compressed." It seems to me it has struck somebody," I thought, but at the same time I was afraid to turn around, under the influence of a heavy presentiment. Indeed, immediately following upon this sound was heard the heavy fall of a body, and " Oh, oh, oh!" the piercing cry of a wounded man." It has struck me, brothers!" uttered with difficulty a voice which I recognized. It was Velenchuk. He lay fiat on his back between the limber and the gun. The cartridge-box which he carried was thrown to one side. His forehead was blood-stained, and down his right eye and nose ran the thick red blood. The wound was in the abdomen, but he had hurt his forehead in his fall.

All this I found out much later; in the first moment I saw only an indistinct mass, and a terrible lot of blood, as I thought.

Not one of the soldiers, who were loading the gun, said a word, only the recruit mumbled something like, " I say, all bloody," and Antonov, scowling, angrily cleared his throat; but it was manifest that the thought of death had passed through the mind of each. Everybody went to work with a vim. The gun was loaded in a twinkle, and the cannoneer, in bringing the shot, made a couple of steps around the place on which the wounded man lay groaning.

Chapter 8

Every one who has been in an action has no doubt experienced that strange and strong, though not at all logical, feeling of disgust with the place where one has been killed or wounded. In the first moment my soldiers were obviously experiencing this feeling, when it was necessary to lift up Velenchiik and carry him to the vehicle which had just come up. Zhdanov angrily went up to the wounded man, in spite of his increasing shrieks took him under his arms, and raised him." Don't stand around! Take hold of him!" he shouted, and immediately some ten men, even superfluous helpers, surrounded him. But the moment he was moved away, Velenchiik began to cry terribly and to struggle.

"Don't yell like a rabbit!" said Antonov, rudely, holding his leg, " or we will throw you down."

The wounded man really quieted down, and only occasionally muttered, " Oh, I shall die! Oh, brothers!"

When he was laid on the vehicle he stopped groaning, and I heard him speaking with his comrades in a soft, but audible voice, — he evidently was bidding them goodbye.

During an action, nobody likes to look at a wounded man, and I, instinctively hastening to get away from this spectacle, ordered that he be taken at once to the ambulance, and walked over to the guns; but a few minutes later I was told that Velenchiik was calling me, and I went up to the vehicle.

In the bottom of it, clinging with both hands to the edges, lay the wounded man. His healthy, broad face had completely changed in a few seconds : he looked rather haggard and had aged by several years; his lips were thin, pale, and compressed under an evident strain; the restless, dull expression of his glance had given way to a clear, quiet gleam, and on his blood-stained forehead and nose already lay the imprint of death.

Notwithstanding the fact that the least motion caused him untold sufferings, he asked them to remove the money-pouch which was tied around his left leg, below the knee.

A terrible oppressive sensation overcame me at the sight of his white healthy leg, when the boot was taken off, and the pouch was ungirded.

"Here are three rubles and a half," he said to me, as I took the purse into my hand; " you keep them for me."

The vehicle started, but he stopped it.

"I was making an overcoat for Lieutenant Sulimovski. He has given me two rubles. For one ruble and a half I bought buttons; the remaining half-ruble is in the bag with the buttons. Give it to him!"

"Very well, very well," I said, " only get well, my friend!"

He made no reply; the vehicle started, and he again began to sob and groan in the most heartrending manner. It looked as though, having arranged all his worldly affairs, he no longer saw cause for restraining himself, and considered it permissible to alleviate his suffering.

Chapter 9

“Where are you going? Come back! Where are you going?” I cried to the recruit, who, having put his reserve hnstock under his arm, and with a stick in his hand, was coolly following the vehicle in which the wounded soldier was lying.

But the recruit only looked lazily at me, muttered something, and went ahead, so that I had to send a soldier after him. He doffed his red cap, and, smiling stupidly, gazed at me.

“Where are you going?” I asked.

“To the camp.”

“What for?”

“Why, Velenchuk is wounded,” he said, smiling again.

“What have you to do with that? You must remain here.”

He looked at me in surprise, then coolly wheeled around, put on his cap, and went back to his place.

The engagement was favorable to us : it was reported that the Cossacks had made a fine attack and had taken three Tartar bodies; the infantry was provided with wood, and lost only six wounded, and in the artillery only Velenchuk and two horses were put out of action. To atone for these losses, they cut out about three versts of timber, and so cleared the place that it was impossible to recognize it : in place of the dense forest now was opened up an immense clearing, covered with smoking fires and with the cavalry and infantry moving toward the camp.

Although the enemy continued to harass us with artillery and musketry fire, until we reached the brook by the cemetery, where we had forded in the morning, the retreat was successfully accomplished. I was already beginning to dream of cabbage soup and a leg of mutton with buckwheat groats, which were awaiting me in the camp, when the information was received that the general had ordered the construction of redoubts, and that the third battalion of the K regiment and a detachment of four

batteries were to remain here until to-morrow. The wagons with the wood and the wounded, the Cossacks, the artillery, the infantry with their guns, and wood on their shoulders, — all passed by us, with noise and songs. All faces expressed animation and pleasure, induced by the past danger and the hope for a rest. But the third battahon and we were to postpone these pleasant sensations for the morrow.

Chapter 10

While we, of the artillery, were still busy about the ordnance, and placing the limbers and caissons, and picketing the horses, the infantry had stacked their arms, built camp-fires, constructed booths of boughs and cornstalks, and were boiling their buckwheat grits.

It was growing dark. Pale blue clouds scudded over the sky. The fog, changed into a drizzly, damp mist, wet the earth and the overcoats of the soldiers; the horizon grew narrower, and the surroundings were overcast with gloomy shadows. The dampness, which I felt through my boots and behind my neck, the motion and conversation, in which I took no part, the viscous mud, in which my feet sHpped, and my empty stomach, put me in a very heavy and disagreeable mood, after a day of physical and moral fatigue. Velenchuk did not leave my mind. The whole simple story of his military life uninterruptedly obtruded on my imagination.

His last minutes were as clear and tranquil as all his life. He had hved too honestly and too simply for his whole-souled faith in a future, heavenly Hfe to be shaken at such a decisive moment.

"Your Honor," said Nikolaev, approaching me, " you are invited to take tea with the captain."

Making my way between the stacked arms and the fires, I followed Nikolaev to Bolkhov's, dreaming with pleasure of a glass of hot tea and a cheerful conversation, which would drive away my gloomy thoughts." Well, have you found him?" was heard Bolkhov's voice from a corn-stalk tent, in which a candle was glimmering.

"I have brought him, your Honor!" was Nikolaev's reply in a heavy bass.

In the booth, Bolkhov sat on a felt mantle, his coat being unbuttoned, and his cap off. Near him a samovar was boiling, and a drum stood with a lunch upon it. A bayonet, with a candle on it, was stuck in the ground." Well, how do you like this?" he said, proudly, surveying his cozy little home. Indeed, the booth was so comfortable, that at tea I entirely forgot the dampness, the darkness, and Velenchiik's wound. We talked about Moscow and about objects that had no relation whatsoever to the war and to the Caucasus.

After one of those minutes of silence, which frequently interrupt the most animated conversations, Bolkhov glanced at me with a smile.

"I suppose our morning conversation must have appeared very strange to you?" he said.

"No. Why should it? All I thought was that you were very frank, whereas there are some things which we all know but which one ought not to mention."

"Not at all! If I had a chance of exchanging this life for a most wretched and petty life, provided it were without perils and service, I should not consider for a minute."

"Why do you not go back to Eussia?" I said.

"Wliy?" he repeated." Oh, I have been thinking of it quite awhile. I cannot return to Eussia before receiving the Anna and the Vladimir crosses, — the Anna decoration around my neck and a majorship, as I had expected when I came out here."

"But why should you, when, as you say, you feel unfit for the service here?"

"But I feel myself even more unfit to return to Eussia in the condition in which I left it. This is another tradition, current in Eussia and confirmed by Pdssek, Slyeptsov, and others, that all one has to do is to come to the Caucasus, in order to be overwhelmed with rewards. Everybody expects and demands this of us; and here I have been two years, have taken part in two expeditions, and have not received anything yet. I have so much egotism that I will not leave this place until I am made a major with the Vladimir and Anna around my neck. I have got so far into this, that nothing will mortify me so much as to have Gnilokishkin get this promotion, and me not get one. Then again, how can I show up in Eussia before my elder, the merchant Kotelnikov, to whom I sell my grain, before my Moscow aunt, and before all those gentlemen, after two years in the Caucasus, without any advancement? It is true, I do not care to know these gentlemen, and, no doubt, they care very little for me; and yet a man is so built that, although he does not care one bit for such gentlemen, he wastes the best years, the whole happiness of his life, and his whole future on account of them."

Chapter 11

Just then the voice of the commander of the battalion was heard outside the tent : " With whom are you there, Nikolay Fedorovich?"

Bolkhov gave him my name, and thereupon three officers entered the booth : Major Kirsanov, the adjutant of his battahon, and the captain, Trosenko.

Kirsanov was a short, plump man, with a black moustache, ruddy cheeks, and sparkling eyes. His small eyes were the most prominent feature of his face. Whenever he laughed, all there was left of them were two moist little stars, and these stars, together with his stretched lips and craning neck, assumed a very strange expression of blankness. Kirsanov conducted himself in the army better than anybody else; his inferiors did not speak ill of him, and his superiors respected him, although the common opinion was that he was exceedingly dull. He knew his duties, was exact and zealous, always had money, kept a carriage and a cook, and very naturally knew how to pretend that he was proud.

"What are you chatting about, Nikolay Fedorovich?" he said, upon entering.

"About the amenities of the service in the Caucasus."

But just then Kirsanov noticed me, a yunker, and, to let me feel his importance, he asked, as though not hearing Bolkhov's answer, and glancing at the drum :

"Are you tired, Nikolay Fedorovich?"

"No, we —" Bolkhov began.

But again the dignity of the commander of the battalion seemed to demand that he should interrupt and propose a new question.

"Was it not a fine engagement we had to-day?"

The adjutant of the battahon was a young ensign, who had but lately been promoted from yunker, — a modest and quiet lad, with a bashful and good-naturedly pleasant face. I had seen liim before at Bolkhov's. The young man used to call on him often, when he would bow, take a seat in the corner, for hours roll cigarettes and smoke them in silence, get up again, salute, and walk away. He was a type of a poor Eussian yeoman, who had selected the military career as the only possible one with his culture, and who placed the calling of an officer higher than anything else in the world, — a simple-hearted, pleasing type in spite of its ridiculous inseparable appurtenances, the tobacco-pouch, the dressing-gown, the guitar, and the mustache brush, with which we are accustomed to connect it. They told of him in the army that he had boasted of being just, but severe with his orderly, that he had said, "I rarely punish, but when I am provoked they had better look out," and that, when his drunken orderly had stolen a number of things of him and had even begun to insult him, he had brought him to the guardhouse, and ordered him to be chastised, but that when he saw the preparations for the punishment, he so completely lost his composure that he was able only to say, " Now, you see — I can —" and that in utter confusion he ran home, and never again was able to look straight into the eyes of his Chernov. His comrades gave him no rest, and teased him about it, and I had several times heard the simple-minded lad

deny the allegation, and, blushing up to his ears, insist that it was not only not true, but that quite the opposite was the fact.

The third person, Captain Trosenko, was an old Caucasus soldier in the full sense of the word, that is, a man for whom the company which he was commanding had become his family, the fortress where the staff was stationed his home, and the singers his only amusement in life, — a man for whom everythmg which was not the Caucasus was worthy of contempt, and almost undeserving belief; but everything which was the Caucasus was divided into two halves, ours, and not ours; the first he loved, the second he hated with all the powers of his soul, and, what is most important, he was a man of tried, quiet bravery, rare kindness of heart in relation to his comrades and inferiors, and of an aggravating straightforwardness and even rudeness in relation to adjutants and bonjours, whom he for some reason despised. Upon entering the booth, he almost pierced the roof with his head, then suddenly lowered it, and sat down on the ground.

"Well?" he said, and, suddenly noticing my unfamiliar face, he stopped, gazing at me with his turbid, fixed glance.

"So, what were you talking about?" asked the major, taking out his watch and looking at it, though I was firmly convinced that there was no need for his doing so.

"He was asking me why I was serving here."

"Of course, Nikolay Fedorovich wants to distinguish himself here, and then go back home."

"Well, you tell me, Abram Ilich, why do you serve in the Caucasus?"

"Because, you see, in the first place, we are all obhged to serve. What?" he added, though all were silent."Yesterday I received a letter from Eussia, Nikolay Fedorovich," he continued, evidently desiring to change the subject."They write to me — they make such strange inquiries."

"What inquiries?" asked Bolkhov.

He laughed. — Really, strange questions — they want to know

whether there can be any jealousy without love — What?" he asked, looking at all of us.

"I say!" said Bolkhdv, smiling.

"Yes, you see, it is good in Eussia," he continued, as though his phrases naturally proceeded each from the previous one." AVlien I was in Tambdv in '52, I was everywhere received Ике an aid-de-camp. Will you believe me, at the governor's ball, when I entered, don't you know, I was beautifully received. The wife of the governor, you know, talked with me and asked me about the Caucasus, and all — really I did not know — They looked at my gold saber as at a rarity, and they asked me what I got the saber for, and for what the Anna cross, and for what the Vladimir cross, and I told them — What? — This is what the Caucasus is good for, Nikolay Fedorovich!" he continued, not waiting for an answer." There they look at us, Caucasus officers, very well. Young man, you know, a staff-officer with an Anna and a Vladimir cross, — that means a great deal in Eussia — What?"

"I suppose you did a httle bragging, Abram Ilich?" said Bolkhov.

"He-he!" he laughed his stupid smile." You know one must do that. And I did feast during those two months!"

"Is it nice there, in Eussia?" asked Trosenko, inquiring about Eussia as though it were China or Japan.

"Yes, it was an awful lot of champagne we drank during those two months!"

"I don't believe it. You must have drunk lemonade. If I had been there, I would have burst drinking, just to show them how officers of the Caucasus drink. My reputation would not be for nothing. I would have showed them how to drink — Hey, Bolkhov?" he added.

“But you, uncle, have been for ten years in the Caucasus,” said Bolkh6v, “ and do you remember what Ermoldv said? And Abram Ilich has been only six —”

“Ten years? It is nearly sixteen.”

“Bolkhov, let us have some of your sage. It is damp, bmr! Hey?” he added, smiling.” Let us have a drink, major!”

But the major was dissatisfied with the first remarks of the old captain, and now was even more mortified, and sought a refuge in his own grandeur. He tuned a song, and again looked at his watch.

“I will never travel to Eussia,” continued Trosenko, paying no attention to the frowning major.” I have forgotten how to walk and talk like a Eussian. They will say, * What monster is this that has arrived.’ I say, this is Asia. Is it not so, Nikolay Fedorovich? What am I to do in Eussia? All the same, I shall be shot some day here. They will ask, ‘ Where is Trosenko? ‘ Shot. What are you going to do with the eighth company — eh?” he added, addressing the major all the time.

“Send the officer of the day along the battalion!” shouted Kirsanov, without replying to the captain, though I was again convinced that he had no orders to give.

“I suppose you are glad, young man, that you are receiving double pay now?” said the major, after a few minutes’ silence, to the adjutant of the battalion.

“Of course, very much so.”

“I find that our pay is now very large, Nikolay Fedorovich,” he continued.“A young man can hve quite decently, and even allow liimself some luxuries.”

“No, really, Abram Ilich,” timidly said the adjutant, “ though the pay is double, yet — one must keep a horse —”

“Don’t ten me that, young man! I have myself been an ensign, and I know. Believe me, one can Hve, with proper care. Now, figure up,” he added, bending the little finger of his left hand.

“We take all our pay in advance, — so here is your calculation,” said Trosenko, swallowing a wine-glass of brandy.

« Well, what do you want for that — What?”

At this moment a white head with a flat nose was thrust through the opening of the booth, and a sharp voice with a German accent said :

“Are you here, Abram Ilich? The officer of the day is looking for you.”

“Come in, Kraft!” said Bolkhov.

A long figure in the coat of the general staff squeezed through the door, and began to press everybody’s hands with great fervor.

“Ah, dear captain! you are here, too?” he said, addressing Trosenko.

The new guest, in spite of the darkness, made his way toward him, and to the captain’s great surprise and dissatisfaction, as I thought, kissed his lips.

“This is a German who wants to be a good comrade,” I thought.

Chapter 12

My supposition was soon confirmed. Captain Kraft asked for some brandy, calling it by its popular name, and clearing his throat terribly, and throwing back his head, drained the wine-glass.

"Well, gentlemen, we have crisscrossed to-day over the plains of the Chechnya," he began, but, upon noticing the officer of the day, he grew silent, so as to give the major a chance to give his orders.

"Well, have you inspected the cordon?"

"I have, sir."

"Have the ambushes been sent out?"

"They have been, sir."

"Then communicate the order to the commanders of the companies to be as cautious as possible!"

"Yes, sir."

The major closed his eyes and became thoughtful.

"Tell the people that they may now cook their grits."

"They are cooking them now."

"Very well. You may go."

"Well, we were figuring out what an officer needed," continued the major, with a condescending smile, addressing us." Let us figure out!"

"You need one uniform and a pair of trousers. Is it not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Let us call it fifty rubles for two years; consequently, this makes twenty-five rubles a year for clothes; then for board forty kopecks a day. Is that right?"

"Yes; it is even too much."

"Well, let us suppose it. Then, for the horse with the saddle for the remount, thirty rubles, — that is all. That makes in all twenty-five, and one hundred and twenty, and thirty, equal to one hundred and seventy-five rubles. There is still left enough for luxuries, for tea and sugar, and for tobacco, — say twenty rubles. Don't you see? Am I right, Nikolay Fedorovich?"

"No, excuse me, Abram Ilich!" timidly remarked the adjutant." Nothing will be left for tea and sugar. You figure one pair for two years, whereas in these expeditions you can't get enough pantaloons. And the boots? I wear out a pair almost every month. Then the underwear, the shirts, the towels, the sock-rags, all these have to be bought. Count it up and nothing will be left. Upon my word, it is so, Abram Ilich."

"Yes, it is fine to wear sock-rags," Kraft suddenly remarked after a moment's silence, vdth special dehght pronouncing the word " sock-rags." " You know it is so simple, so Russian!"

"I will tell you something," said Trosenko, " Count as you may, it will turn out that we fellows ought to be shelved, whereas in reality we manage to live, and to drink tea, and to smoke tobacco, and to drink brandy. After you have served as long as I have," he continued, addressing the ensign, " you wHl learn how to get along. Do you know, gentlemen, how he treats his orderly?"

And Trosenko, almost dying with laughter, told us the whole story of the ensign with his orderly, although we had heard it a thousand times before.

"My friend, what makes you look Uke a rose?" he continued, addressing the ensign, who was blushing, perspiring, and smiling so that it was a pity to look at him.

"Never mind, I was just like you, and yet I have turned out to be a fine fellow. You let a young fellow from Russia get down here, — we have seen some of them.

— and he will get spasms and rheumatism, and all such things! But I am settled here, — here is my house, my bed, and everything. You see —"

Saying which, he drained another wine-glass of brandy.

"Ah!" he added, looking fixedly into Kraft's eyes.

"This is what I respect! This is a genuine old Caucasus officer! Let me have your hand!"

Kraft pushed us all aside, made his way toward Trosenko, and, grasping his hand, shook it with much feeling.

"Yes, we may say that we have experienced everything here," he continued." In the year '45 — you were there, captain? — do you remember the night of the 12th which we passed knee-deep in the mud and how the next day we went into the abatis? I was then attached to the commander-in-chief, and we took fifteen abatises in one day. Do you remember it, captain?"

Trosenko made a sign of confirmation with his head, and closed his eyes, and protruded his lower lip.

"So you see —" began Kraft, with much animation, and making inappropriate gestures while addressing the major.

But the major, who no doubt had heard the story more than once, suddenly looked vnth such dim, dull eyes at his interlocutor that Kraft turned away from him and addressed Bolkh6v and me, glancing now at one, now at the other. At Trosenko he did not once look during his recital.

"So you see, when we went out in the morning, the commander-in-chief said to me, * Kraft, take the abatises! ' You know, our military service demands obedience without reflection, — so, hand to the visor, * Yes, your Excellency! ' and off I went. When we reached the first abatis I turned around and said to the soldiers, * Boys, courage! Look sharp! He who lags behind will be cut down by my own hand.' With a Eussian soldier, you know, you must speak plainly. Suddenly — a shell. I looked, one soldier, another soldier, a third, then bullets — whiz! whiz! whiz! Says I, * Forward, boys, after me! ' No sooner had we reached it, you know, we looked, and there I saw that — you know — what do you call it?" and the narrator waved his arms in his attempt to find the proper word.

"A ditch," Bolkhov helped him out.

"No — ah, what is it called? My God! Well, what is it? — a ditch," he said, hurriedly." "We, ' Charge bayonets! ' — Hurrah! Ta-ra-ta-ta-ta! Not a soul of the enemy. You know we were all surprised. Very well. We marched ahead, — the second abatis. That was another matter. We were now on our mettle. No sooner did we walk up than we saw, I observed, the second abatis, — impossible to advance. Here — what do you call it, well, what is that name? — ah, what is it? —"

"Again a ditch," I helped him out.

"Not at all," he continued, excitedly, " No, not a ditch, but — well, what do you call it?" and he made an insipid gesture with his hand." Ah, my God! What do you call it?"

He was apparently suffering so much that we wanted to help him out.

"Maybe a river," said Bolkhov.

“No, simply a ditch. But the moment we went up there was such a fire, a hell —”

Just then somebody asked for me outside the tent. It was Maksimov. Since there were thirteen other abatises left after having listened to the varied story of the first two, I was glad to use this as an excuse for leaving for my platoon. Trosenko went out with me.” He is lying,” he said -to me after we had walked several steps away from the booth, “ he never was in the abatises,” and Trosenko laughed so heartily that I, too, felt amused.

Chapter 13

It was dark night, and the fires dimly illuminated the camp, when I, having put everything away, walked up to my soldiers. A large stump was ghmmering on the coals. Three soldiers only were sitting around it : Ant6nov, who was turning around on the fire a httle kettle in which hardtack soaked in lard was cooking, Zhdanov, who was thoughtfully poking the ashes with a stick, and Chikin, with his eternally unhghted pipe. The others had already retired for their rest, some under the caissons, others in the hay, and others again around the fires. In the faint light of coals I could distinguish the famihar backs, legs, and heads; among the latter was also the recruit, who was lying close to the fire and was apparently asleep. Antonov made a place for me. I sat down near him and lighted my pipe. The mist and the pungent smoke from the green wood was borne through the air, and made my eyes smart, and the same damp mist drizzled down from the murky sky.

Near us could be heard the even snoring, the crackling of the branches in the fire, a light conversation, and occasionally the clattering of the infantry muskets. All about us glowed the fires, illuminating in a small circle the black shadows of the soldiers. At the nearest fires I could distinguish in the lighted spaces the figures of naked soldiers waving their shirts over the very fire. Many other men were not asleep, but moving about and speaking in the space of fifteen square fathoms; but the dark, gloomy night gave a peculiar, mysterious aspect to all this motion, as though all felt this melancholy quiet and were afraid to break its tranquil harmony. When I began to speak, I felt that my voice sounded quite differently; in the faces of all the soldiers who were sitting near the tire I read the same mood. I thought that previous to my arrival they had been speaking of their wounded companion, but that was not at all the case: Chikiu was telling about the reception of goods at Tiuis, and about the schoolboys of that city.

Always and everywhere, but especially in the Caucasus, have I noticed the peculiar tact of our soldiers, who, during peril, pass over in silence and avoid all such things as might unhappily affect the minds of their comrades. The spirit of the Russian soldiers is not based, like the bravery of the southern nations, on an easily inflamed, and just as easily extinguished, enthusiasm. They do not need effects, speeches, military cries, songs, and drums; they need, on the contrary, quiet, order, and the absence of all banality. In Russian, real Russian, soldiers, you will never observe vain bragging, posing, a desire to obscure themselves and to excite themselves in time of danger; on the contrary, modesty, simplicity, and an ability to see in a danger sometliing else than the danger itself, are the distinctive features of their character.

I have seen an outrider, who had been wounded in his leg, in the first moment express his regrets only for the torn fur coat, and then creep out from under the horse, which had been killed under him, and loosen the straps, in order to take off the saddle. Who does not remember the incident at the siege of Gergebel, when the fuze of a bomb which had just been filled caught fire in the laboratory, and the artificer told two soldiers to take the bomb and run away as fast as possible, in order to throw it into a ditch; the soldiers did not throw it away in the nearest place, which was not far from the colonel's tent, which stood over the ditch, but carried it farther

away. not to wake the gentlemen who were sleeping in the tent, and so they were both torn to pieces. I remember how, during frontier service in 1852, one of the young soldiers, for some reason, remarked during an action, that he thought the platoon would never come out alive from it, and how the whole platoon angrily upbraided him for such evil words, which they would not even repeat.

Even now, when the thought of Velenchilk ought to have been in everybody's mind, and when any moment a volley might be fired by Tartars creeping up to the camp, everybody was listening to Cliikin's animated story, and nobody recalled the action of the morning, nor the imminent danger, nor the wounded man, as though all that had happened God knows how long ago, or not at all. But it seemed to me that their faces were a little more melancholy than usual; they did not listen very attentively to Cliikin's story, and even Chikin felt that he was not listened to, and kept talking from mere force of habit.

Maksimov went up to the fire and sat down near me. Chikin made a place for him, grew silent, and again started sucking his pipe.

"The foot-soldiers have sent to camp for brandy," said Maksimov, after a considerable silence." They have just returned." He spit into the fire." An under-officer told me that he saw our man."

"Well, is he still alive?" asked Antonov, turning his kettle.

"No, he is dead."

The recruit in the small red cap suddenly raised his head above the fire, for a moment looked fixedly at Maksimov and at me, then swiftly lowered his head, and wrapped himself in his overcoat.

"You see, death did not come to him for nothing this morning, as I was waking him in the park," said Antonov.

"Nonsense!" said Zhdanov, turning around a glowing stump, and all grew silent.

Amid a universal silence, there was heard a shot behind us in the camp. Our drummers took note of it, and gave the tattoo. When the last roll died down, Zhdanov was the first to rise; he took off his cap, and we all followed his example.

Amid the deep hush of the night was heard the harmonious chorus of male voices :

"Our Father which art in heaven. Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us to-day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."

"It was in the year '45 that one of our men was contused in the same spot," said Ant6nov, after we had put on our caps, and had seated ourselves again at the fire." We carried him for two days on the ordnance — Zhdanov, do you remember Shevchenko? We left him there under a tree."

Just then an infantry soldier, with immense whiskers and mustache, and wearing his cartridge-box, walked over to us.

"Coimtrymen, may I have some fire to Hght my pipe with?" he said.

"Light it, there is plenty of fire here," remarked Chikin.

"Countryman, you are, I suppose, telling about Dargi," the foot^soldier said, turning to Antonov.

"Yes, about the year '45, at Dargi," replied Antdnov.

The foot-soldier shook his head, closed his eyes, and squatted down near us.

"It was dreadful there," he remarked.

"Wliy did you leave him?" I asked of Antdnov.

“He had terrible pain in his abdomen. As long as we stood still, it was all right; but the moment we moved, he shrieked terribly. He entreated us to leave him, but we pitied him. But when he began to harass us, and had killed three men on our guns, and an officer, and we had gone astray from our battery, it was terrible, — we thought we should never get the gun away. It was so muddy.”

“The worst was, it was muddy at Indian Mountain,” remarked a soldier.

“Well, and he grew worse! Then we considered, — An6shenka and I, — Anoshenka was an old gun-sergeant, — that he could not hve anyway, and that he invoked God to leave him. And so we concluded we would do so. There was a brandling tree growing there.“We put down near him soaked hardtack, — Zhdanov had some, — and leaned him against the tree; we put a clean shirt on him, bade him farewell, as was proper, and left him.”

“Was he a good soldier?”

“A pretty good one,” remarked Zhdanov.

“God knows what became of him,” continued Antonov.” We left many soldiers there.”

“In Dargi?” said the foot-soldier, rising and poking his pipe, and again closing his eyes and shaking his head.” Yes, it was terrible there.”

And he went away from us.

“Are there many soldiers in the battery who have been at Dargi?” I asked.

“Well! Zhdanov, I, Patsan, who is now on leave of absence, and six or seven other men. That is all.”

“I wonder whether Patsan is having a good time on his leave of absence,” said Chikin, stretching out his legs and putting his head on a log. *’ It wiU soon be a year since he left.”

“Did you take the annual leave?” I asked Zhdanov.

“No, I did not,” he answered, reluctantly.

“But it is good to go,” said Antonov, “ when one is from a well-to-do house, or still able to work. It is pleasant, and people at home are glad to see you.”

“What use is there in going, when there are two brothers?” continued ZhcUnov. «They have enough to do to support themselves, so what good would one of us soldiers be to them? A man is a poor helper when he has been a soldier for twenty-five years. And who knows whether they are alive?”

“Have you not written to them?” I asked.

“Of course I have! I have written them twice, but they have not yet answered. They are either dead, or they simply don’t care to answer, which means, they are poor, and have no time.”

“How long ago did you write?”

“ЛДТ1еп I came back from Dargi, I wrote my last letter!”

“Sing the song of the ‘ Birch-tree,’ “ Zhdanov said to Antonov, who, leaning on his knees, was humming a song.

Antouov sang the “ Birch-tree “ song.

“This is Uncle Zhdanov’s favorite song,” Chikin said to me in a whisper, pulling me by the overcoat.” Many a time, when Filipp Antonych sings it, he weeps.”

Zhdanov sat at first motionless, his eyes directed on the glowing coals, and his face, illuminated by the reddish hght, looked exceedingly melancholy; then his cheeks under his ears began to move faster and faster, and finally he got up, spread out his overcoat, and lay down in the shadow, behind the fire. It may be the way he was tossing and groaning, or Velenchiik’s death and the gloomy weather had so affected me, but I really thought he was crying.

The lower part of the stump, changed into coal, flickered now and then and illuminated Antdnov's figure, with his gray mustache, red face, and his decorations on the overcoat thrown over liim, or lighted up somebody's boots or head. From above, drizzled the same gloomy mist; in the air was the same odor of dampness and smoke; all around me were seen the same bright points of dying fires, and were heard amid a general silence the sounds of Antonov's melancholy song; and whenever it stopped for a moment, its refrain was the sounds of the faint nocturnal motion of the camp, of the snoring, of the clattering of the sentries' guns, and of subdued conversation.

"Second watch! Makatyuk and Zhdanov!" shouted Maksimov.

Antonov stopped singing; Zhdanov rose, sighed, stepped across a log, and slowly walked over to the guns.

June 15, 1855.

Leo Tolstoy
The Cutting of the Forest
The Story of a Yunker
1855

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