

CHAPTER V

That same evening there was an animated discussion among the squadron's officers in Denísov's quarters.

"And I tell you, Rostóv, that you must apologize to the colonel!" said a tall, grizzly-haired staff captain, with enormous mustaches and many wrinkles on his large features, to Rostóv who was crimson with excitement.

The staff captain, Kírsten, had twice been reduced to the ranks for affairs of honor and had twice regained his commission.

"I will allow no one to call me a liar!" cried Rostóv. "He told me I lied, and I told him he lied. And there it rests. He may keep me on duty every day, or may place me under arrest, but no one can make me apologize, because if he, as commander of this regiment, thinks it beneath his dignity to give me satisfaction, then..."

"You just wait a moment, my dear fellow, and listen," interrupted the staff captain in his deep bass, calmly stroking his long mustache. "You tell the colonel in the presence of other officers that an officer has stolen..."

"I'm not to blame that the conversation began in the presence of other officers. Perhaps I ought not to have spoken before them, but I am not a diplomatist. That's why I joined the hussars, thinking that here one would not need finesse; and he tells me that I am lying—so let him give me satisfaction..."

"That's all right. No one thinks you a coward, but that's not the point. Ask Denísov whether it is not out of the question for a cadet to demand satisfaction of his regimental commander?"

Denísov sat gloomily biting his mustache and listening to the conversation, evidently with no wish to take part in it. He answered the staff captain's question by a disapproving shake of his head.

"You speak to the colonel about this nasty business before other officers," continued the staff captain, "and Bogdánich" (the colonel was called Bogdánich) "shuts you up."

"He did not shut me up, he said I was telling an untruth."

"Well, have it so, and you talked a lot of nonsense to him and must apologize."

"Not on any account!" exclaimed Rostóv.

"I did not expect this of you," said the staff captain seriously and severely. "You don't wish to apologize, but, man, it's not only to him but to the whole regiment—all of us—you're to blame all round. The case is this: you ought to have thought the matter over and

taken advice; but no, you go and blurt it all straight out before the officers. Now what was the colonel to do? Have the officer tried and disgrace the whole regiment? Disgrace the whole regiment because of one scoundrel? Is that how you look at it? We don't see it like that. And Bogdánich was a brick: he told you you were saying what was not true. It's not pleasant, but what's to be done, my dear fellow? You landed yourself in it. And now, when one wants to smooth the thing over, some conceit prevents your apologizing, and you wish to make the whole affair public. You are offended at being put on duty a bit, but why not apologize to an old and honorable officer? Whatever Bogdánich may be, anyway he is an honorable and brave old colonel! You're quick at taking offense, but you don't mind disgracing the whole regiment!" The staff captain's voice began to tremble. "You have been in the regiment next to no time, my lad, you're here today and tomorrow you'll be appointed adjutant somewhere and can snap your fingers when it is said 'There are thieves among the Pávlograd officers!' But it's not all the same to us! Am I not right, Denísov? It's not the same!"

Denísov remained silent and did not move, but occasionally looked with his glittering black eyes at Rostóv.

"You value your own pride and don't wish to apologize," continued the staff captain, "but we old fellows, who have grown up in and, God willing, are going to die in the regiment, we prize the honor of the regiment, and Bogdánich knows it. Oh, we do prize it, old fellow! And all this is not right, it's not right! You may take offense or not but I always stick to mother truth. It's not right!"

And the staff captain rose and turned away from Rostóv.

"That's twue, devil take it!" shouted Denísov, jumping up. "Now then, Wostóv, now then!"

Rostóv, growing red and pale alternately, looked first at one officer and then at the other.

"No, gentlemen, no... you mustn't think... I quite understand. You're wrong to think that of me... I... for me... for the honor of the regiment I'd... Ah well, I'll show that in action, and for me the honor of the flag... Well, never mind, it's true I'm to blame, to blame all round. Well, what else do you want?..."

"Come, that's right, Count!" cried the staff captain, turning round and clapping Rostóv on the shoulder with his big hand.

"I tell you," shouted Denísov, "he's a fine fellow."

"That's better, Count," said the staff captain, beginning to address Rostóv by his title, as if in recognition of his confession. "Go and apologize, your excellency. Yes, go!"

"Gentlemen, I'll do anything. No one shall hear a word from me," said Rostóv in an imploring voice, "but I can't apologize, by God I

can't, do what you will! How can I go and apologize like a little boy asking forgiveness?"

Denísov began to laugh.

"It'll be worse for you. Bogdánich is vindictive and you'll pay for your obstinacy," said Kírsen.

"No, on my word it's not obstinacy! I can't describe the feeling. I can't..."

"Well, it's as you like," said the staff captain. "And what has become of that scoundrel?" he asked Denísov.

"He has reported himself sick, he's to be struck off the list tomorrow," muttered Denísov.

"It is an illness, there's no other way of explaining it," said the staff captain.

"Illness or not, he'd better not cross my path. I'd kill him!" shouted Denísov in a bloodthirsty tone.

Just then Zherkóv entered the room.

"What brings you here?" cried the officers turning to the newcomer.

"We're to go into action, gentlemen! Mack has surrendered with his whole army."

"It's not true!"

"I've seen him myself!"

"What? Saw the real Mack? With hands and feet?"

"Into action! Into action! Bring him a bottle for such news! But how did you come here?"

"I've been sent back to the regiment all on account of that devil, Mack. An Austrian general complained of me. I congratulated him on Mack's arrival... What's the matter, Rostóv? You look as if you'd just come out of a hot bath."

"Oh, my dear fellow, we're in such a stew here these last two days."

The regimental adjutant came in and confirmed the news brought by Zherkóv. They were under orders to advance next day.

"We're going into action, gentlemen!"

"Well, thank God! We've been sitting here too long!"