

## CHAPTER XV

When returning from his leave, Rostóv felt, for the first time, how close was the bond that united him to Denísov and the whole regiment.

On approaching it, Rostóv felt as he had done when approaching his home in Moscow. When he saw the first hussar with the unbuttoned uniform of his regiment, when he recognized red-haired Deméntyev and saw the picket ropes of the roan horses, when Lavrúshka gleefully shouted to his master, "The count has come!" and Denísov, who had been asleep on his bed, ran all disheveled out of the mud hut to embrace him, and the officers collected round to greet the new arrival, Rostóv experienced the same feeling as when his mother, his father, and his sister had embraced him, and tears of joy choked him so that he could not speak. The regiment was also a home, and as unalterably dear and precious as his parents' house.

When he had reported himself to the commander of the regiment and had been reassigned to his former squadron, had been on duty and had gone out foraging, when he had again entered into all the little interests of the regiment and felt himself deprived of liberty and bound in one narrow, unchanging frame, he experienced the same sense of peace, of moral support, and the same sense of being at home here in his own place, as he had felt under the parental roof. But here was none of all that turmoil of the world at large, where he did not know his right place and took mistaken decisions; here was no Sónya with whom he ought, or ought not, to have an explanation; here was no possibility of going there or not going there; here there were not twenty-four hours in the day which could be spent in such a variety of ways; there was not that innumerable crowd of people of whom not one was nearer to him or farther from him than another; there were none of those uncertain and undefined money relations with his father, and nothing to recall that terrible loss to Dólokhov. Here, in the regiment, all was clear and simple. The whole world was divided into two unequal parts: one, our Pávlograd regiment; the other, all the rest. And the rest was no concern of his. In the regiment, everything was definite: who was lieutenant, who captain, who was a good fellow, who a bad one, and most of all, who was a comrade. The canteenkeeper gave one credit, one's pay came every four months, there was nothing to think out or decide, you had only to do nothing that was considered bad in the Pávlograd regiment and, when given an order, to do what was clearly, distinctly, and definitely ordered—and all would be well.

Having once more entered into the definite conditions of this regimental life, Rostóv felt the joy and relief a tired man feels on lying down to rest. Life in the regiment, during this campaign, was all the pleasanter for him, because, after his loss to Dólokhov (for which, in spite of all his family's efforts to console him, he could not forgive himself), he had made up his mind to atone for his fault by serving, not as he had done before, but really well, and by being a perfectly first-rate comrade and officer—in a word, a splendid man altogether, a thing which seemed so difficult out in the world, but so possible in the regiment.

After his losses, he had determined to pay back his debt to his parents in five years. He received ten thousand rubles a year, but now resolved to take only two thousand and leave the rest to repay the debt to his parents.

Our army, after repeated retreats and advances and battles at Pultusk and Preussisch-Eylau, was concentrated near Bartenstein. It was awaiting the Emperor's arrival and the beginning of a new campaign.

The Pávlograd regiment, belonging to that part of the army which had served in the 1805 campaign, had been recruiting up to strength in Russia, and arrived too late to take part in the first actions of the campaign. It had been neither at Pultusk nor at Preussisch-Eylau and, when it joined the army in the field in the second half of the campaign, was attached to Plátov's division.

Plátov's division was acting independently of the main army. Several times parts of the Pávlograd regiment had exchanged shots with the enemy, had taken prisoners, and once had even captured Marshal Oudinot's carriages. In April the Pávlograds were stationed immovably for some weeks near a totally ruined and deserted German village.

A thaw had set in, it was muddy and cold, the ice on the river broke, and the roads became impassable. For days neither provisions for the men nor fodder for the horses had been issued. As no transports could arrive, the men dispersed about the abandoned and deserted villages, searching for potatoes, but found few even of these.

Everything had been eaten up and the inhabitants had all fled—if any remained, they were worse than beggars and nothing more could be taken from them; even the soldiers, usually pitiless enough, instead of taking anything from them, often gave them the last of their rations.

The Pávlograd regiment had had only two men wounded in action, but had lost nearly half its men from hunger and sickness. In the hospitals, death was so certain that soldiers suffering from fever, or the swelling that came from bad food, preferred to remain on duty, and hardly able to drag their legs went to the front rather than to the hospitals. When spring came on, the soldiers found a plant just showing out of the ground that looked like asparagus, which, for some reason, they called "Máshka's sweet root." It was very bitter, but they wandered about the fields seeking it and dug it out with their sabers and ate it, though they were ordered not to do so, as it was a noxious plant. That spring a new disease broke out among the soldiers, a swelling of the arms, legs, and face, which the doctors attributed to eating this root. But in spite of all this, the soldiers of Denísov's squadron fed chiefly on "Máshka's sweet root," because it was the second week that the last of the biscuits were being doled out at the rate of half a pound a man and the last potatoes received had sprouted and frozen.

The horses also had been fed for a fortnight on straw from the thatched roofs and had become terribly thin, though still covered with tufts of felty winter hair.

Despite this destitution, the soldiers and officers went on living just as usual. Despite their pale swollen faces and tattered uniforms, the hussars formed line for roll call, kept things in order, groomed their horses, polished their arms, brought in straw from the thatched roofs in place of fodder, and sat down to dine round the caldrons from which they rose up hungry, joking about their nasty food and their hunger. As usual, in their spare time, they lit bonfires, steamed themselves before them naked; smoked, picked out and baked sprouting rotten potatoes, told and listened to stories of Potëmkin's and Suvórov's campaigns, or to legends of Alësha the Sly, or the priest's laborer Mikólka.

The officers, as usual, lived in twos and threes in the roofless, half-ruined houses. The seniors tried to collect straw and potatoes and, in general, food for the men. The younger ones occupied themselves as before, some playing cards (there was plenty of money, though there was no food), some with more innocent games, such as quoits and skittles. The general trend of the campaign was rarely spoken of, partly because nothing certain was known about it, partly because there was a vague feeling that in the main it was going badly.

Rostóv lived, as before, with Denísov, and since their furlough they had become more friendly than ever. Denísov never spoke of Rostóv's family, but by the tender friendship his commander showed him, Rostóv felt that the elder hussar's luckless love for Natásha played a part in strengthening their friendship. Denísov evidently tried to expose Rostóv to danger as seldom as possible, and after an action greeted his safe return with evident joy. On one of his foraging expeditions, in a deserted and ruined village to which he had come in search of provisions, Rostóv found a family consisting of an old Pole and his daughter with an infant in arms. They were half clad, hungry, too weak to get away on foot and had no means of obtaining a conveyance. Rostóv brought them to his quarters, placed them in his own lodging, and kept them for some weeks while the old man was recovering. One of his comrades, talking of women, began chaffing Rostóv, saying that he was more wily than any of them and that it would not be a bad thing if he introduced to them the pretty Polish girl he had saved. Rostóv took the joke as an insult, flared up, and said such unpleasant things to the officer that it was all Denísov could do to prevent a duel. When the officer had gone away, Denísov, who did not himself know what Rostóv's relations with the Polish girl might be, began to upbraid him for his quickness of temper, and Rostóv replied:

“Say what you like.... She is like a sister to me, and I can't tell you how it offended me... because... well, for that reason....”

Denísov patted him on the shoulder and began rapidly pacing the room without looking at Rostóv, as was his way at moments of deep feeling.

“Ah, what a mad bweed you Wostóvs are!” he muttered, and Rostóv noticed tears in his eyes.