

CHAPTER XVII

In June the battle of Friedland was fought, in which the Pávlograds did not take part, and after that an armistice was proclaimed. Rostóv, who felt his friend's absence very much, having no news of him since he left and feeling very anxious about his wound and the progress of his affairs, took advantage of the armistice to get leave to visit Denísov in hospital.

The hospital was in a small Prussian town that had been twice devastated by Russian and French troops. Because it was summer, when it is so beautiful out in the fields, the little town presented a particularly dismal appearance with its broken roofs and fences, its foul streets, tattered inhabitants, and the sick and drunken soldiers wandering about.

The hospital was in a brick building with some of the window frames and panes broken and a courtyard surrounded by the remains of a wooden fence that had been pulled to pieces. Several bandaged soldiers, with pale swollen faces, were sitting or walking about in the sunshine in the yard.

Directly Rostóv entered the door he was enveloped by a smell of putrefaction and hospital air. On the stairs he met a Russian army doctor smoking a cigar. The doctor was followed by a Russian assistant.

"I can't tear myself to pieces," the doctor was saying. "Come to Makár Alexéevich in the evening. I shall be there."

The assistant asked some further questions.

"Oh, do the best you can! Isn't it all the same?" The doctor noticed Rostóv coming upstairs.

"What do you want, sir?" said the doctor. "What do you want? The bullets having spared you, do you want to try typhus? This is a pesthouse, sir."

"How so?" asked Rostóv.

"Typhus, sir. It's death to go in. Only we two, Makéev and I" (he pointed to the assistant), "keep on here. Some five of us doctors have died in this place.... When a new one comes he is done for in a week," said the doctor with evident satisfaction. "Prussian doctors have been invited here, but our allies don't like it at all."

Rostóv explained that he wanted to see Major Denísov of the hussars, who was wounded.

"I don't know. I can't tell you, sir. Only think! I am alone in charge of three hospitals with more than four hundred patients! It's well that the charitable Prussian ladies send us two pounds of coffee and some lint each month or we should be lost!" he laughed. "Four hundred, sir, and they're always sending me fresh ones. There are four

hundred? Eh?" he asked, turning to the assistant.

The assistant looked fagged out. He was evidently vexed and impatient for the talkative doctor to go.

"Major Denísov," Rostóv said again. "He was wounded at Molliten."

"Dead, I fancy. Eh, Makéev?" queried the doctor, in a tone of indifference.

The assistant, however, did not confirm the doctor's words.

"Is he tall and with reddish hair?" asked the doctor.

Rostóv described Denísov's appearance.

"There was one like that," said the doctor, as if pleased. "That one is dead, I fancy. However, I'll look up our list. We had a list. Have you got it, Makéev?"

"Makár Alexéevich has the list," answered the assistant. "But if you'll step into the officers' wards you'll see for yourself," he added, turning to Rostóv.

"Ah, you'd better not go, sir," said the doctor, "or you may have to stay here yourself."

But Rostóv bowed himself away from the doctor and asked the assistant to show him the way.

"Only don't blame me!" the doctor shouted up after him.

Rostóv and the assistant went into the dark corridor. The smell was so strong there that Rostóv held his nose and had to pause and collect his strength before he could go on. A door opened to the right, and an emaciated sallow man on crutches, barefoot and in underclothing, limped out and, leaning against the doorpost, looked with glittering envious eyes at those who were passing. Glancing in at the door, Rostóv saw that the sick and wounded were lying on the floor on straw and overcoats.

"May I go in and look?"

"What is there to see?" said the assistant.

But, just because the assistant evidently did not want him to go in, Rostóv entered the soldiers' ward. The foul air, to which he had already begun to get used in the corridor, was still stronger here. It was a little different, more pungent, and one felt that this was where it originated.

In the long room, brightly lit up by the sun through the large windows, the sick and wounded lay in two rows with their heads to the walls, and

leaving a passage in the middle. Most of them were unconscious and paid no attention to the newcomers. Those who were conscious raised themselves or lifted their thin yellow faces, and all looked intently at Rostóv with the same expression of hope, of relief, reproach, and envy of another's health. Rostóv went to the middle of the room and looking through the open doors into the two adjoining rooms saw the same thing there. He stood still, looking silently around. He had not at all expected such a sight. Just before him, almost across the middle of the passage on the bare floor, lay a sick man, probably a Cossack to judge by the cut of his hair. The man lay on his back, his huge arms and legs outstretched. His face was purple, his eyes were rolled back so that only the whites were seen, and on his bare legs and arms which were still red, the veins stood out like cords. He was knocking the back of his head against the floor, hoarsely uttering some word which he kept repeating. Rostóv listened and made out the word. It was "drink, drink, a drink!" Rostóv glanced round, looking for someone who would put this man back in his place and bring him water.

"Who looks after the sick here?" he asked the assistant.

Just then a commissariat soldier, a hospital orderly, came in from the next room, marching stiffly, and drew up in front of Rostóv.

"Good day, your honor!" he shouted, rolling his eyes at Rostóv and evidently mistaking him for one of the hospital authorities.

"Get him to his place and give him some water," said Rostóv, pointing to the Cossack.

"Yes, your honor," the soldier replied complacently, and rolling his eyes more than ever he drew himself up still straighter, but did not move.

"No, it's impossible to do anything here," thought Rostóv, lowering his eyes, and he was going out, but became aware of an intense look fixed on him on his right, and he turned. Close to the corner, on an overcoat, sat an old, unshaven, gray-bearded soldier as thin as a skeleton, with a stern sallow face and eyes intently fixed on Rostóv. The man's neighbor on one side whispered something to him, pointing at Rostóv, who noticed that the old man wanted to speak to him. He drew nearer and saw that the old man had only one leg bent under him, the other had been amputated above the knee. His neighbor on the other side, who lay motionless some distance from him with his head thrown back, was a young soldier with a snub nose. His pale waxen face was still freckled and his eyes were rolled back. Rostóv looked at the young soldier and a cold chill ran down his back.

"Why, this one seems..." he began, turning to the assistant.

"And how we've been begging, your honor," said the old soldier, his jaw quivering. "He's been dead since morning. After all we're men, not dogs."

"I'll send someone at once. He shall be taken away—taken away at

once,” said the assistant hurriedly. “Let us go, your honor.”

“Yes, yes, let us go,” said Rostóv hastily, and lowering his eyes and shrinking, he tried to pass unnoticed between the rows of reproachful envious eyes that were fixed upon him, and went out of the room.