

### CHAPTER III

The weather was already growing wintry and morning frosts congealed an earth saturated by autumn rains. The verdure had thickened and its bright green stood out sharply against the brownish strips of winter rye trodden down by the cattle, and against the pale-yellow stubble of the spring buckwheat. The wooded ravines and the copses, which at the end of August had still been green islands amid black fields and stubble, had become golden and bright-red islands amid the green winter rye. The hares had already half changed their summer coats, the fox cubs were beginning to scatter, and the young wolves were bigger than dogs. It was the best time of the year for the chase. The hounds of that ardent young sportsman Rostóv had not merely reached hard winter condition, but were so jaded that at a meeting of the huntsmen it was decided to give them a three days' rest and then, on the sixteenth of September, to go on a distant expedition, starting from the oak grove where there was an undisturbed litter of wolf cubs.

All that day the hounds remained at home. It was frosty and the air was sharp, but toward evening the sky became overcast and it began to thaw. On the fifteenth, when young Rostóv, in his dressing gown, looked out of the window, he saw it was an unsurpassable morning for hunting: it was as if the sky were melting and sinking to the earth without any wind. The only motion in the air was that of the dripping, microscopic particles of drizzling mist. The bare twigs in the garden were hung with transparent drops which fell on the freshly fallen leaves. The earth in the kitchen garden looked wet and black and glistened like poppy seed and at a short distance merged into the dull, moist veil of mist. Nicholas went out into the wet and muddy porch. There was a smell of decaying leaves and of dog. Mílka, a black-spotted, broad-haunched bitch with prominent black eyes, got up on seeing her master, stretched her hind legs, lay down like a hare, and then suddenly jumped up and licked him right on his nose and mustache. Another borzoi, a dog, catching sight of his master from the garden path, arched his back and, rushing headlong toward the porch with lifted tail, began rubbing himself against his legs.

“O-hoy!” came at that moment, that inimitable huntsman's call which unites the deepest bass with the shrillest tenor, and round the corner came Daniel the head huntsman and head kennelman, a gray, wrinkled old man with hair cut straight over his forehead, Ukrainian fashion, a long bent whip in his hand, and that look of independence and scorn of everything that is only seen in huntsmen. He doffed his Circassian cap to his master and looked at him scornfully. This scorn was not offensive to his master. Nicholas knew that this Daniel, disdainful of everybody and who considered himself above them, was all the same his serf and huntsman.

“Daniel!” Nicholas said timidly, conscious at the sight of the weather, the hounds, and the huntsman that he was being carried away by that irresistible passion for sport which makes a man forget all his previous resolutions, as a lover forgets in the presence of his mistress.

“What orders, your excellency?” said the huntsman in his deep bass, deep as a proto-deacon’s and hoarse with hallooing—and two flashing black eyes gazed from under his brows at his master, who was silent. “Can you resist it?” those eyes seemed to be asking.

“It’s a good day, eh? For a hunt and a gallop, eh?” asked Nicholas, scratching Mílka behind the ears.

Daniel did not answer, but winked instead.

“I sent Uvárka at dawn to listen,” his bass boomed out after a minute’s pause. “He says she’s moved them into the Otrádnoc enclosure. They were howling there.” (This meant that the she-wolf, about whom they both knew, had moved with her cubs to the Otrádnoc copse, a small place a mile and a half from the house.)

“We ought to go, don’t you think so?” said Nicholas. “Come to me with Uvárka.”

“As you please.”

“Then put off feeding them.”

“Yes, sir.”

Five minutes later Daniel and Uvárka were standing in Nicholas’ big study. Though Daniel was not a big man, to see him in a room was like seeing a horse or a bear on the floor among the furniture and surroundings of human life. Daniel himself felt this, and as usual stood just inside the door, trying to speak softly and not move, for fear of breaking something in the master’s apartment, and he hastened to say all that was necessary so as to get from under that ceiling, out into the open under the sky once more.

Having finished his inquiries and extorted from Daniel an opinion that the hounds were fit (Daniel himself wished to go hunting), Nicholas ordered the horses to be saddled. But just as Daniel was about to go Natáša came in with rapid steps, not having done up her hair or finished dressing and with her old nurse’s big shawl wrapped round her. Pétya ran in at the same time.

“You are going?” asked Natáša. “I knew you would! Sónya said you wouldn’t go, but I knew that today is the sort of day when you couldn’t help going.”

“Yes, we are going,” replied Nicholas reluctantly, for today, as he intended to hunt seriously, he did not want to take Natáša and Pétya. “We are going, but only wolf hunting: it would be dull for you.”

“You know it is my greatest pleasure,” said Natáša. “It’s not fair; you are going by yourself, are having the horses saddled and said nothing to us about it.”

“No barrier bars a Russian’s path’—we’ll go!” shouted Pétya.

“But you can’t. Mamma said you mustn’t,” said Nicholas to Natásha.

“Yes, I’ll go. I shall certainly go,” said Natásha decisively.

“Daniel, tell them to saddle for us, and Michael must come with my dogs,” she added to the huntsman.

It seemed to Daniel irksome and improper to be in a room at all, but to have anything to do with a young lady seemed to him impossible. He cast down his eyes and hurried out as if it were none of his business, careful as he went not to inflict any accidental injury on the young lady.