

## CHAPTER IV

It was a warm rainy autumn day. The sky and the horizon were both the color of muddy water. At times a sort of mist descended, and then suddenly heavy slanting rain came down.

Denísov in a felt cloak and a sheepskin cap from which the rain ran down was riding a thin thoroughbred horse with sunken sides. Like his horse, which turned its head and laid its ears back, he shrank from the driving rain and gazed anxiously before him. His thin face with its short, thick black beard looked angry.

Beside Denísov rode an esaul, \* Denísov's fellow worker, also in felt cloak and sheepskin cap, and riding a large sleek Don horse.

\* A captain of Cossacks.

Esaul Lováyski the Third was a tall man as straight as an arrow, pale-faced, fair-haired, with narrow light eyes and with calm self-satisfaction in his face and bearing. Though it was impossible to say in what the peculiarity of the horse and rider lay, yet at first glance at the esaul and Denísov one saw that the latter was wet and uncomfortable and was a man mounted on a horse, while looking at the esaul one saw that he was as comfortable and as much at ease as always and that he was not a man who had mounted a horse, but a man who was one with his horse, a being consequently possessed of twofold strength.

A little ahead of them walked a peasant guide, wet to the skin and wearing a gray peasant coat and a white knitted cap.

A little behind, on a poor, small, lean Kirghíz mount with an enormous tail and mane and a bleeding mouth, rode a young officer in a blue French overcoat.

Beside him rode an hussar, with a boy in a tattered French uniform and blue cap behind him on the crupper of his horse. The boy held on to the hussar with cold, red hands, and raising his eyebrows gazed about him with surprise. This was the French drummer boy captured that morning.

Behind them along the narrow, sodden, cut up forest road came hussars in threes and fours, and then Cossacks: some in felt cloaks, some in French greatcoats, and some with horsecloths over their heads. The horses, being drenched by the rain, all looked black whether chestnut or bay. Their necks, with their wet, close-clinging manes, looked strangely thin. Steam rose from them. Clothes, saddles, reins, were all wet, slippery, and sodden, like the ground and the fallen leaves that strewed the road. The men sat huddled up trying not to stir, so as to warm the water that had trickled to their bodies and not admit the fresh cold water that was leaking in under their seats, their knees, and at the back of their necks. In the midst of the outspread line of Cossacks two wagons, drawn by French horses and by saddled Cossack horses that had been hitched on in front, rumbled over the tree stumps and branches and splashed through the water that lay in the ruts.

Denísov's horse swerved aside to avoid a pool in the track and bumped his rider's knee against a tree.

"Oh, the devil!" exclaimed Denísov angrily, and showing his teeth he struck his horse three times with his whip, splashing himself and his comrades with mud.

Denísov was out of sorts both because of the rain and also from hunger (none of them had eaten anything since morning), and yet more because he still had no news from Dólokhov and the man sent to capture a "tongue" had not returned.

"There'll hardly be another such chance to fall on a transport as today. It's too risky to attack them by oneself, and if we put it off till another day one of the big guerrilla detachments will snatch the prey from under our noses," thought Denísov, continually peering forward, hoping to see a messenger from Dólokhov.

On coming to a path in the forest along which he could see far to the right, Denísov stopped.

"There's someone coming," said he.

The esaul looked in the direction Denísov indicated.

"There are two, an officer and a Cossack. But it is not presupposable that it is the lieutenant colonel himself," said the esaul, who was fond of using words the Cossacks did not know.

The approaching riders having descended a decline were no longer visible, but they reappeared a few minutes later. In front, at a weary gallop and using his leather whip, rode an officer, disheveled and drenched, whose trousers had worked up to above his knees. Behind him, standing in the stirrups, trotted a Cossack. The officer, a very young lad with a broad rosy face and keen merry eyes, galloped up to Denísov and handed him a sodden envelope.

"From the general," said the officer. "Please excuse its not being quite dry."

Denísov, frowning, took the envelope and opened it.

"There, they kept telling us: 'It's dangerous, it's dangerous,'" said the officer, addressing the esaul while Denísov was reading the dispatch. "But Komaróv and I"—he pointed to the Cossack—"were prepared. We have each of us two pistols.... But what's this?" he asked, noticing the French drummer boy. "A prisoner? You've already been in action? May I speak to him?"

"Wostóv! Pétya!" exclaimed Denísov, having run through the dispatch. "Why didn't you say who you were?" and turning with a smile he held out his hand to the lad.

The officer was Pétya Rostóv.

All the way Pétya had been preparing himself to behave with Denísov as befitted a grown-up man and an officer—without hinting at their previous acquaintance. But as soon as Denísov smiled at him Pétya brightened up, blushed with pleasure, forgot the official manner he had been rehearsing, and began telling him how he had already been in a battle near Vyázma and how a certain hussar had distinguished himself there.

“Well, I am glad to see you,” Denísov interrupted him, and his face again assumed its anxious expression.

“Michael Feoklítych,” said he to the esaul, “this is again fwom that German, you know. He”—he indicated Pétya—“is serving under him.”

And Denísov told the esaul that the dispatch just delivered was a repetition of the German general’s demand that he should join forces with him for an attack on the transport.

“If we don’t take it tomowwow, he’ll snatch it fwom under our noses,” he added.

While Denísov was talking to the esaul, Pétya—abashed by Denísov’s cold tone and supposing that it was due to the condition of his trousers—furtively tried to pull them down under his greatcoat so that no one should notice it, while maintaining as martial an air as possible.

“Will there be any orders, your honor?” he asked Denísov, holding his hand at the salute and resuming the game of adjutant and general for which he had prepared himself, “or shall I remain with your honor?”

“Orders?” Denísov repeated thoughtfully. “But can you stay till tomowwow?”

“Oh, please... May I stay with you?” cried Pétya.

“But, just what did the genewal tell you? To weturn at once?” asked Denísov.

Pétya blushed.

“He gave me no instructions. I think I could?” he returned, inquiringly.

“Well, all wight,” said Denísov.

And turning to his men he directed a party to go on to the halting place arranged near the watchman’s hut in the forest, and told the officer on the Kirghíz horse (who performed the duties of an adjutant) to go and find out where Dólokhov was and whether he would come that evening. Denísov himself intended going with the esaul and Pétya to the edge of the forest where it reached out to Shámshevo, to have a look at the part of the French bivouac they were to attack next day.

“Well, old fellow,” said he to the peasant guide, “lead us to Shámshevo.”

Denísov, Pétya, and the esaul, accompanied by some Cossacks and the hussar who had the prisoner, rode to the left across a ravine to the edge of the forest.