

## CHAPTER VIII

The arrival of Dólokhov diverted Pétya's attention from the drummer boy, to whom Denísov had had some mutton and vodka given, and whom he had had dressed in a Russian coat so that he might be kept with their band and not sent away with the other prisoners. Pétya had heard in the army many stories of Dólokhov's extraordinary bravery and of his cruelty to the French, so from the moment he entered the hut Pétya did not take his eyes from him, but braced himself up more and more and held his head high, that he might not be unworthy even of such company.

Dólokhov's appearance amazed Pétya by its simplicity.

Denísov wore a Cossack coat, had a beard, had an icon of Nicholas the Wonder-Worker on his breast, and his way of speaking and everything he did indicated his unusual position. But Dólokhov, who in Moscow had worn a Persian costume, had now the appearance of a most correct officer of the Guards. He was clean-shaven and wore a Guardsman's padded coat with an Order of St. George at his buttonhole and a plain forage cap set straight on his head. He took off his wet felt cloak in a corner of the room, and without greeting anyone went up to Denísov and began questioning him about the matter in hand. Denísov told him of the designs the large detachments had on the transport, of the message Pétya had brought, and his own replies to both generals. Then he told him all he knew of the French detachment.

"That's so. But we must know what troops they are and their numbers," said Dólokhov. "It will be necessary to go there. We can't start the affair without knowing for certain how many there are. I like to work accurately. Here now—wouldn't one of these gentlemen like to ride over to the French camp with me? I have brought a spare uniform."

"I, I... I'll go with you!" cried Pétya.

"There's no need for you to go at all," said Denísov, addressing Dólokhov, "and as for him, I won't let him go on any account."

"I like that!" exclaimed Pétya. "Why shouldn't I go?"

"Because it's useless."

"Well, you must excuse me, because... because... I shall go, and that's all. You'll take me, won't you?" he said, turning to Dólokhov.

"Why not?" Dólokhov answered absently, scrutinizing the face of the French drummer boy. "Have you had that youngster with you long?" he asked Denísov.

"He was taken today but he knows nothing. I'm keeping him with me."

"Yes, and where do you put the others?" inquired Dólokhov.

"Where? I send them away and take a receipt for them," shouted Denísov,

suddenly flushing. “And I say boldly that I have not a single man’s life on my conscience. Would it be difficult for you to send thirty or three hundred men to town under escort, instead of staining—I speak bluntly—staining the honor of a soldier?”

“That kind of amiable talk would be suitable from this young count of sixteen,” said Dólokhov with cold irony, “but it’s time for you to drop it.”

“Why, I’ve not said anything! I only say that I’ll certainly go with you,” said Pétya shyly.

“But for you and me, old fellow, it’s time to drop these amenities,” continued Dólokhov, as if he found particular pleasure in speaking of this subject which irritated Denísov. “Now, why have you kept this lad?” he went on, swaying his head. “Because you are sorry for him! Don’t we know those ‘receipts’ of yours? You send a hundred men away, and thirty get there. The rest either starve or get killed. So isn’t it all the same not to send them?”

The esaul, screwing up his light-colored eyes, nodded approvingly.

“That’s not the point. I’m not going to discuss the matter. I do not wish to take it on my conscience. You say they’ll die. All wight. Only not by my fault!”

Dólokhov began laughing.

“Who has told them not to capture me these twenty times over? But if they did catch me they’d string me up to an aspen tree, and with all your chivalry just the same.” He paused. “However, we must get to work. Tell the Cossack to fetch my kit. I have two French uniforms in it. Well, are you coming with me?” he asked Pétya.

“I? Yes, yes, certainly!” cried Pétya, blushing almost to tears and glancing at Denísov.

While Dólokhov had been disputing with Denísov what should be done with prisoners, Pétya had once more felt awkward and restless; but again he had no time to grasp fully what they were talking about. “If grown-up, distinguished men think so, it must be necessary and right,” thought he. “But above all Denísov must not dare to imagine that I’ll obey him and that he can order me about. I will certainly go to the French camp with Dólokhov. If he can, so can I!”

And to all Denísov’s persuasions, Pétya replied that he too was accustomed to do everything accurately and not just anyhow, and that he never considered personal danger.

“For you’ll admit that if we don’t know for sure how many of them there are... hundreds of lives may depend on it, while there are only two of us. Besides, I want to go very much and certainly will go, so don’t hinder me,” said he. “It will only make things worse....”