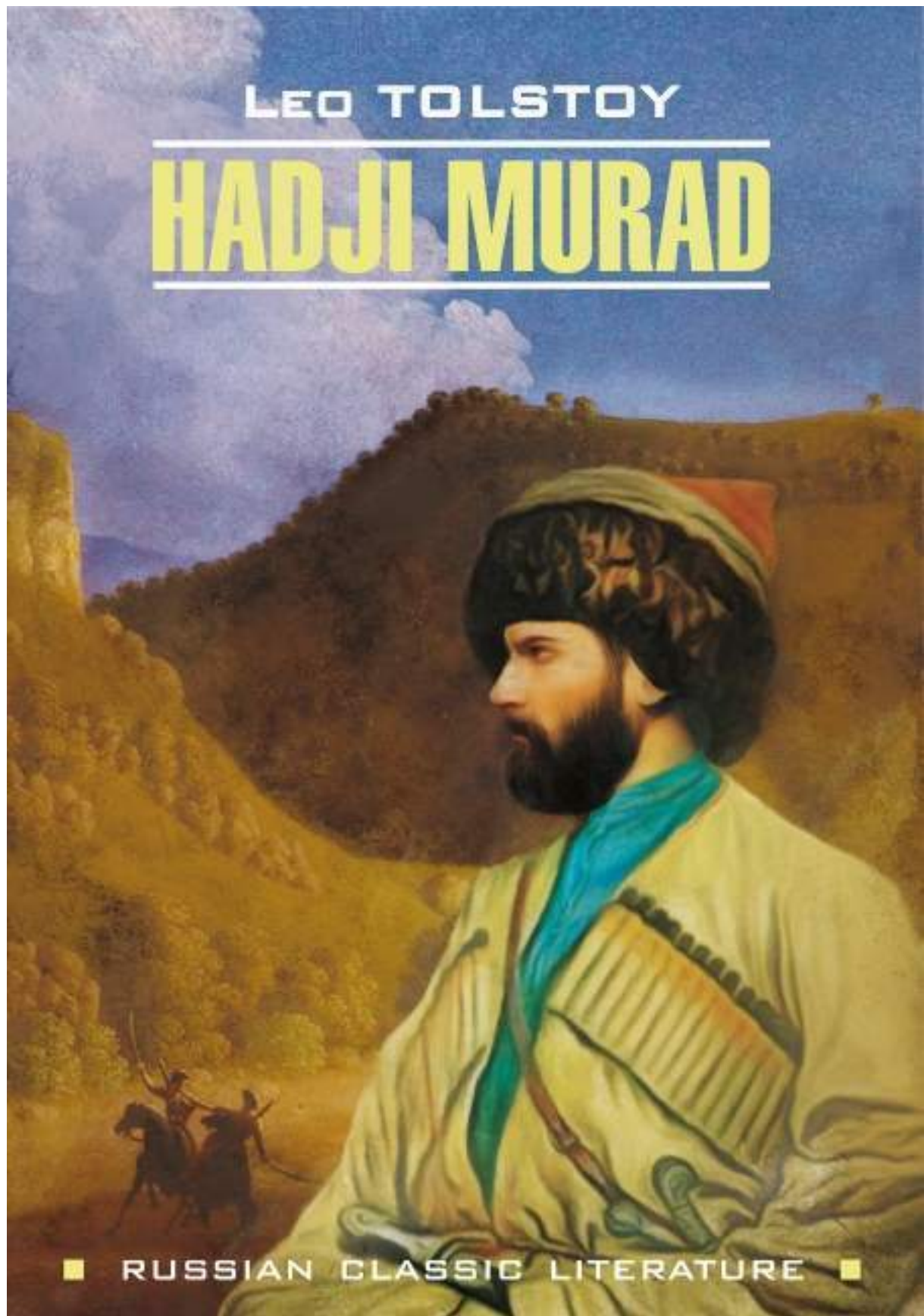


LEO TOLSTOY

HADJI MURAD



Русская классическая литература
на иностранных языках (Каро)

Лев Толстой

**Hadji Murad / Хаджи-Мурат. Книга
для чтения на английском языке**

«КАРО»

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Leo Tolstoy

Hadji Murad

Chapter I

I was returning home by the fields. It was midsummer, the hay harvest was over and they were just beginning to reap the rye. At that season of the year there is a delightful variety of flowers – red, white, and pink scented tufty clover; milk-white ox-eye daisies with their bright yellow centers and pleasant spicy smell; yellow honey-scented rape blossoms; tall campanulas with white and lilac bells, tulip-shaped; creeping vetch; yellow, red, and pink scabious; faintly scented, neatly arranged purple plaintains with blossoms slightly tinged with pink; cornflowers, the newly opened blossoms bright blue in the sunshine but growing paler and redder towards evening or when growing old; and delicate almond-scented dodder flowers that withered quickly. I gathered myself a large nosegay and was going home when I noticed in a ditch, in full bloom, a beautiful thistle plant of the crimson variety, which in our neighborhood they call “Tartar” and carefully avoid when mowing – or, if they do happen to cut it down, throw out from among the grass for fear of pricking their hands. Thinking to pick this thistle and put it in the center of my nosegay, I climbed down into the ditch, and after driving away a velvety bumble-bee that had penetrated deep into one of the flowers and had there fallen sweetly asleep, I set to work to pluck the flower. But this proved a very difficult task. Not only did the stalk prick on every side – even through the handkerchief I wrapped round my hand – but it was so tough that I had to struggle with it for nearly five minutes, breaking the fibers one by one; and when I had at last plucked it, the stalk was all frayed and the flower itself no longer seemed so fresh and beautiful. Moreover, owing to a coarseness and stiffness, it did not seem in place among the delicate blossoms of my nosegay. I threw it away feeling sorry to have vainly destroyed a flower that looked beautiful in its proper place.

“But what energy and tenacity! With what determination it defended itself, and how dearly it sold its life!” thought I, remembering the effort it had cost me to pluck the flower. The way home led across black-earth fields that had just been ploughed up. I ascended the dusty path. The ploughed field belonged to a landed proprietor and was so large that on both sides and before me to the top of the hill nothing was visible but evenly furrowed and moist earth. The land was well tilled and nowhere was there a blade of grass or any kind of plant to be seen, it was all black. “Ah, what a destructive creature is man... How many different plant-lives he destroys to support his own existence!” thought I, involuntarily looking around for some living thing in this lifeless black field. In front of me to the right of the road I saw some kind of little clump, and drawing nearer I found it was the same kind of thistle as that which I had vainly plucked and thrown away. This “Tartar” plant had three branches. One was broken and stuck out like the stump of a mutilated arm. Each of the other two bore a flower, once red but now blackened. One stalk was broken, and half of it hung down with a soiled flower at its tip. The other, though also soiled with black mud, still stood erect. Evidently a cartwheel had passed over the plant but it had risen again, and that was why, though erect, it stood twisted to one side, as if a piece of its body had been torn from it, its bowels drawn out, an arm torn off, and one of its eyes plucked out. Yet it stood firm and did not surrender to man who had destroyed all its brothers around it... .

“What vitality!” I thought. “Man has conquered everything and destroyed millions of plants, yet this one won’t submit.” And I remembered a Caucasian episode of years ago, which I had partly seen myself, partly heard of from eye-witnesses, and in part imagined.

The episode, as it has taken shape in my memory and imagination, was as follows.

*

It happened towards the end of 1851.

On a cold November evening Hadji Murad rode into Makhmet, a hostile Chechen aoul¹ that lay some fifteen miles from Russian territory and was filled with the scented smoke of burning Kizyak². The strained chant of the muezzin had just ceased, and though the clear mountain air, impregnated with kizyak smoke, above the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep that were dispersing among the saklyas³ (which were crowded together like the cells of honeycomb), could be clearly heard the guttural voices of disputing men, and sounds of women's and children's voices rising from near the fountain below.

This Hadji Murad was Shamil's naib⁴, famous for his exploits, who used never to ride out without his banner and some dozens of murid⁵, who caracoled and showed off before him. Now wrapped in a hood and burka⁶, from under which protruded a rifle, he rode, a fugitive with one murid only, trying to attract as little attention as possible and peering with his quick black eyes into the faces of those he met on his way.

When he entered the aoul, instead of riding up the road leading to the open square, he turned to the left into a narrow side street, and on reaching the second saklya, which was cut into the hill side, he stopped and looked round. There was no one under the penthouse in front, but on the roof of the saklya itself, behind the freshly plastered clay chimney, lay a man covered with a sheepskin. Hadji Murad touched him with the handle of his leather-plaited whip and clicked his tongue, and an old man, wearing a greasy old beshmet⁷ and a nightcap, rose from under the sheepskin. His moist red eyelids had no lashes, and he blinked to get them unstuck. Hadji Murad, repeating the customary "Selaam aleikum!" uncovered his face. "aleikum, selaam!" said the old man, recognizing him, and smiling with his toothless mouth. And raising himself on his thin legs he began thrusting his feet into the wooden-heeled slippers that stood by the chimney. Then he leisurely slipped his arms into the sleeves of his crumpled sheepskin, and going to the ladder that leant against the roof he descended backwards, while he dressed and as he climbed down he kept shaking his head on its thin, shrivelled sunburnt neck and mumbling something with his toothless mouth. As soon as he reached the ground he hospitably seized Hadji Murad's bridle and right stirrup; but the strong active murid had quickly dismounted and motioning the old man aside, took his place. Hadji Murad also dismounted, and walking with a slight limp, entered under the penthouse. A boy of fifteen, coming quickly out of the door, met him and wonderingly fixed his sparkling eyes, black as ripe sloes, on the new arrivals.

"Run to the mosque and call your father," ordered the old man as he hurried forward to open the thin, creaking door into the saklya.

As Hadji Murad entered the outer door, a slight, spare, middle-aged woman in a yellow smock, red beshmet, and wide blue trousers came through an inner door carrying cushions.

"May thy coming bring happiness!" said she, and bending nearly double began arranging the cushions along the front wall for the guest to sit on.

"May thy sons live!" answered Hadji Murad, taking off his burka, his rifle, and his sword, and handing them to the old man who carefully hung the rifle and sword on a nail beside the weapons of

¹ **aoul** – a Tatar village

² **kizyak** – a fuel made of straw and manure

³ **saklya** – a Caucasian house, clay-plastered and often built of earth

⁴ **naib** – a Tatar lieutenant or governor

⁵ **murid** – a disciple or follower: "One who desires" to find the way in Muridism. Muridism Almost identical with Sufism.

⁶ **burka** – a long round felt cape

⁷ **beshmet** – a Tatar undergarment with sleeves

the master of the house, which were suspended between two large basins that glittered against the clean clay-plastered and carefully whitewashed wall.

Hadji Murad adjusted the pistol at his back, came up to the cushions, and wrapping his Circassian coat closer round him, sat down. The old man squatted on his bare heels beside him, closed his eyes, and lifted his hands palms upwards. Hadji Murad did the same; then after repeating a prayer they both stroked their faces, passing their hands downwards till the palms joined at the end of their beards.

“Ne habar?” (“Is there anything new?”) asked Hadji Murad, addressing the old man.

“Habar yok⁸” (“Nothing new”), replied the old man, looking with his lifeless red eyes not at Hadji Murad’s face but at his breast. “I live at the apiary and have only today come to see my son... . He knows.”

Hadji Murad, understanding that the old man did not wish to say what he knew and what Hadji Murad wanted to know, slightly nodded his head and asked no more questions.

“There is no good news,” said the old man. “The only news is that the hares keep discussing how to drive away the eagles, and the eagles tear first one and then another of them. The other day the Russian dogs burnt the hay in the Mitchit aoul... . May their faces be torn!” he added hoarsely and angrily.

Hadji Murad’s murid entered the room, his strong legs striding softly over the earthen floor. Retaining only his dagger and pistol, he took off his burka, rifle, and sword as Hadji Murad had done, and hung them up on the same nails as his leader’s weapons.

“Who is he?” asked the old man, pointing to the newcomer.

“My murid. Eldar is his name,” said Hadji Murad.

“That is well,” said the old man, and motioned Eldar to a place on a piece of felt beside Hadji Murad. Eldar sat down, crossing his legs and fixing his fine ram-like eyes on the old man who, having now started talking, was telling how their brave fellows had caught two Russian soldiers the week before and had killed one and sent the other to Shamil in Veden.

Hadji Murad heard him absently, looking at the door and listening to the sounds outside. Under the penthouse steps were heard, the door creaked, and Sado, the master of the house, came in. He was a man of about forty, with a small beard, long nose, and eyes as black, though not as glittering, as those of his fifteen-year-old son who had run to call him home and who now entered with his father and sat down by the door. The master of the house took off his wooden slippers at the door, and pushing his old and much-worn cap to the back of his head (which had remained unshaved so long that it was beginning to be overgrown with black hair), at once squatted down in front of Hadji Murad.

He too lifted his palms upwards, as the old man had done, repeated a prayer, and then stroked his face downwards. Only after that did he begin to speak. He told how an order had come from Shamil to seize Hadji Murad alive or dead, that Shamil’s envoys had left only the day before, that the people were afraid to disobey Shamil’s orders, and that therefore it was necessary to be careful.

“In my house,” said Sado, “no one shall injure my kunak⁹ while I live, but how will it be in the open fields? ... We must think it over.”

Hadji Murad listened with attention and nodded approvingly. When Sado had finished he said:

“Very well. Now we must send a man with a letter to the Russians. My murid will go but he will need a guide.”

“I will send brother Bata,” said Sado. “Go and call Bata,” he added, turning to his son.

The boy instantly bounded to his nimble feet as if he were on springs, and swinging his arms, rapidly left the saklya. Some ten minutes later he returned with a sinewy, short-legged Chechen, burnt

⁸ **yok** – no, not

⁹ **kunak** – a sworn friend, an adopted brother

almost black by the sun, wearing a worn and tattered yellow Circassian coat with frayed sleeves, and crumpled black leggings.

Hadji Murad greeted the newcomer, and again without wasting a single word, immediately asked:

“Canst thou conduct my murid to the Russians?”

“I can,” gaily replied Bata. “I can certainly do it. There is not another Chechen who would pass as I can. Another might agree to go and might promise anything, but would do nothing; but I can do it!”

“All right,” said Hadji Murad. “Thou shalt receive three for thy trouble,” and he held up three fingers.

Bata nodded to show that he understood, and added that it was not money he prized, but that he was ready to serve Hadji Murad for the honor alone. Every one in the mountains knew Hadji Murad, and how he slew the Russian swine.

“Very well... . A rope should be long but a speech short,” said Hadji Murad.

“Well then I’ll hold my tongue,” said Bata.

“Where the river Argun bends by the cliff,” said Hadji Murad, “there are two stacks in a glade in the forest – thou knowest?”

“I know.”

“There my four horsemen are waiting for me,” said Hadji Murad.

“Aye,” answered Bata, nodding.

“Ask for Khan Mahoma. He knows what to do and what to say. Canst thou lead him to the Russian Commander, Prince Vorontsov?”

“Yes, I’ll take him.”

“Canst thou take him and bring him back again?”

“I can.”

“Then take him there and return to the wood. I shall be there too.”

“I will do it all,” said Bata, rising, and putting his hands on his heart he went out.

Hadji Murad turned to his host.

“A man must also be sent to Chekhi,” he began, and took hold of one of the cartridge pouches of his Circassian coat, but let his hand drop immediately and became silent on seeing two women enter the saklya.

One was Sado’s wife – the thin middle-aged woman who had arranged the cushions. The other was quite a young girl, wearing red trousers and a green beshmet. A necklace of silver coins covered the whole front of her dress, and at the end of the short but thick plait of hard black hair that hung between her thin shoulder-blades a silver ruble was suspended. Her eyes, as sloe-black as those of her father and brother, sparkled brightly in her young face which tried to be stern. She did not look at the visitors, but evidently felt their presence.

Sado’s wife brought in a low round table on which stood tea, pancakes in butter, cheese, churek (that is, thinly rolled out bread), and honey. The girl carried a basin, a ewer, and a towel.

Sado and Hadji Murad kept silent as long as the women, with their coin ornaments tinkling, moved softly about in their red soft-soled slippers, setting out before the visitors the things they had brought. Eldar sat motionless as a statue, his ram-like eyes fixed on his crossed legs, all the time the women were in the saklya. Only after they had gone and their soft footsteps could no longer be heard behind the door, did he give a sigh of relief.

Hadji Murad having pulled out a bullet from one of the cartridge-pouches of his Circassian coat, and having taken out a rolled-up note that lay beneath it, held it out, saying:

“To be handed to my son.”

“Where must the answer be sent?”

“To thee; and thou must forward it to me.”

“It shall be done,” said Sado, and placed the note in the cartridge-pocket of his own coat. Then he took up the metal ewer and moved the basin towards Hadji Murad.

Hadji Murad turned up the sleeves of his beshmet on his white muscular arms, held out his hands under the clear cold water which Sado poured from the ewer, and having wiped them on a clean unbleached towel, turned to the table. Eldar did the same. While the visitors ate, Sado sat opposite and thanked them several times for their visit. The boy sat by the door never taking his sparkling eyes off Hadji Murad’s face, and smiled as if in confirmation of his father’s words.

Though he had eaten nothing for more than twenty-four hours Hadji Murad ate only a little bread and cheese; then, drawing out a small knife from under his dagger, he spread some honey on a piece of bread.

“Our honey is good,” said the old man, evidently pleased to see Hadji Murad eating his honey. “This year, above all other years, it is plentiful and good.”

“I thank thee,” said Hadji Murad and turned from the table. Eldar would have liked to go on eating but he followed his leader’s example, and having moved away from the table, handed him the ewer and basin.

Sado knew that he was risking his life by receiving such a guest in his house, for after his quarrel with Shamil the latter had issued a proclamation to all the inhabitants of Chechnya forbidding them to receive Hadji Murad on pain of death. He knew that the inhabitants of the aoul might at any moment become aware of Hadji Murad’s presence in his house and might demand his surrender. But this not only did not frighten Sado, it even gave him pleasure with himself because he was doing his duty.

“Whilst thou are in my house and my head is on my shoulders no one shall harm thee,” he repeated to Hadji Murad.

Hadji Murad looked into his glittering eyes and understanding that this was true, said with some solemnity – “Mayst thou receive joy and life!”

Sado silently laid his hand on his heart in token of thanks for these kind words.

Having closed the shutters of the saklya and laid some sticks in the fireplace, Sado, in an exceptionally bright and animated mood, left the room and went into that part of his saklya where his family all lived. The women had not yet gone to sleep, and were talking about the dangerous visitors who were spending the night in their guest chambers.

Chapter II

At Vozvizhensk, the advanced fort situated some ten miles from the aoul in which Hadji Murad was spending the night, three soldiers and a non-commissioned officer left the fort and went beyond the Shahgirinsk Gate. The soldiers, dressed as Caucasian soldiers used to be in those days, wore sheepskin coats and caps, and boots that reached above their knees, and they carried their cloaks tightly rolled up and fastened across their shoulders. Shouldering arms, they first went some five hundred paces along the road and then turned off it and went some twenty paces to the right – the dead leaves rustling under their boots – till they reached the blackened trunk of a broken plane tree just visible through the darkness. There they stopped. It was at this plane tree that an ambush party was usually placed.

The bright stars, that had seemed to be running along the tree tops while the soldiers were walking through the forest, now stood still, shining brightly between the bare branches of the trees.

“A good job it’s dry,” said the non-commissioned officer Panov, bringing down his long gun and bayonet with a clang from his shoulder and placing it against the plane tree.

The three soldiers did the same.

“Sure enough I’ve lost it!” muttered Panov crossly. “Must have left it behind or I’ve dropped it on the way.”

“What are you looking for?” asked one of the soldiers in a bright, cheerful voice.

“The bowl of my pipe. Where the devil has it got to?”

“Have you got the stem?” asked the cheerful voice.

“Here it is.”

“Then why not stick it straight into the ground?” “Not worth bothering!”

“We’ll manage that in a minute.”

Smoking in ambush was forbidden, but this ambush hardly deserved the name. It was rather an outpost to prevent the mountaineers from bringing up a cannon unobserved and firing at the fort as they used to. Panov did not consider it necessary to forego the pleasure of smoking, and therefore accepted the cheerful soldier’s offer. The latter took a knife from his pocket and made a small round hole in the ground. Having smoothed it, he adjusted the pipe stem to it, then filled the hole with tobacco and pressed it down, and the pipe was ready. A sulphur match flared and for a moment lit up the broad-cheeked face of the soldier who lay on his stomach, the air whistled in the stem, and Panov smelt the pleasant odor of burning tobacco.

“Fixed up?” said he, rising to his feet.

“Why, of course!”

“What a smart chap you are, Avdeev! ... As wise as a judge! Now then, lad.”

Avdeev rolled over on his side to make room for Panov, letting smoke escape from his mouth.

Panov lay down prone, and after wiping the mouthpiece with his sleeve, began to inhale.

When they had had their smoke the soldiers began to talk.

“They say the commander has had his fingers in the cashbox again,” remarked one of them in a lazy voice. “He lost at cards, you see.”

“He’ll pay it back again,” said Panov.

“Of course he will! He’s a good officer,” assented Avdeev.

“Good! good!” gloomily repeated the man who had started the conversation. “In my opinion the company ought to speak to him. If you’ve taken the money, tell us how much and when you’ll repay it.”

“That will be as the company decides,” said Panov, tearing himself away from the pipe.

“Of course. The community is a strong man,” assented Avdeev, quoting a proverb.

“There will be oats to buy and boots to get towards spring. the money will be wanted, and what shall we do if he’s pocketed it?” insisted the dissatisfied one.

“I tell you it will be as the company wishes,” repeated Panov. “It’s not the first time; he takes it and gives it back.”

In the Caucasus in those days each company chose men to manage its own commissariat. they received 6 rubles 50 kopeks a month per man from the treasury, and catered for the company. They planted cabbages, made hay, had their own carts, and prided themselves on their well-fed horses. The company’s money was kept in a chest of which the commander had the key, and it often happened that he borrowed from the chest. This had just happened again, and the soldiers were talking about it. The morose soldier, Nikitin, wished to demand an account from the commander, while Panov and Avdeev considered that unnecessary.

After Panov, Nikitin had a smoke, and then spreading his cloak on the ground sat down on it leaning against the trunk of the plane tree. The soldiers were silent. Far above their heads the crowns of the trees rustled in the wind and suddenly, above this incessant low rustling, rose the howling, whining, weeping and chuckling of jackals.

“Just listen to those accursed creatures – how they caterwaul!”

“They’re laughing at you because your mouth’s all on one side,” remarked the high voice of the third soldier, an Ukrainian.

All was silent again, except for the wind that swayed the branches, now revealing and now hiding the stars.

“I say, Panov,” suddenly asked the cheerful Avdeev, “do you ever feel dull?”

“Dull, why?” replied Panov reluctantly.

“Well, I do... I feel so dull sometimes that I don’t know what I might not be ready to do to myself.”

“There now!” was all Panov replied.

“That time when I drank all the money it was from dullness. It took hold of me ... took hold of me till I thought to myself, I’ll just get blind drunk!”

“But sometimes drinking makes it still worse.”

“Yes, that’s happened to me too. But what is a man to do with himself?”

“But what makes you feel so dull?”

“What, me? ... Why, it’s the longing for home.” “Is yours a wealthy home then?”

“No; we weren’t wealthy, but things went properly – we lived well.” And Avdeev began to relate what he had already told Panov many times.

“You see, I went as a soldier of my own free will, instead of my brother,” he said. “He has children. They were five in family and I had only just married. Mother began begging me to go. So I thought, Well, maybe they will remember what I’ve done.’ So I went to our proprietor ... he was a good master and he said, You’re a fine fellow, go!’ So I went instead of my brother.”

“Well, that was right,” said Panov.

“And yet, will you believe me, Panov, it’s chiefly because of that that I feel so dull now? Why did you go instead of your brother?” I say to myself. He’s living like a king now over there, while you have to suffer here;’ and the more I think of it the worse I feel... It seems just a piece of ill-luck!”

Avdeev was silent.

“Perhaps we’d better have another smoke,” said he after a pause.

“Well then, fix it up!”

But the soldiers were not to have their smoke. Hardly had Avdeev risen to fix the pipe stem in its place when above the rustling of the trees they heard footsteps along the road. Panov took his gun and pushed Nikitin with his foot.

Nikitin rose and picked up his cloak.

The third soldier, Bondarenko, rose also, and said:

“And I have dreamt such a dream, mates... .”

“Sh!” said Avdeev, and the soldiers held their breath, listening. The footsteps of men in soft-soled boots were heard approaching. The fallen leaves and dry twigs could be heard rustling clearer and clearer through the darkness. Then came the peculiar guttural tones of Chechen voices. The soldiers could now not only hear men approaching, but could see two shadows passing through a clear space between the trees; one shadow taller than the other. When these shadows had come in line with the soldiers, Panov, gun in hand, stepped out on to the road, followed by his comrades.

“Who goes there?” cried he.

“Me, friendly Chechen,” said the shorter one. This was Bata. “Gun, yok! ... sword, yok!” said he, pointing to himself. “Prince, want!”

The taller one stood silent beside his comrade. He too was unarmed.

“He means he’s a scout, and wants the Colonel,” explained Panov to his comrades.

“Prince Vorontsov ... much want! Big business!” said Bata.

“All right, all right! We’ll take you to him,” said Panov. “I say, you’d better take them,” said he to Avdeev, “you and Bondarenko; and when you’ve given them up to the officer on duty come back again. Mind,” he added, “be careful to make them keep in front of you!”

“And what of this?” said Avdeev, moving his gun and bayonet as though stabbing someone. “It’s just give a dig, and let the steam out of him!”

“What’ll he be worth when you’ve stuck him?” remarked Bondarenko.

“Now, march!”

When the steps of the two soldiers conducting the scouts could no longer be heard, Panov and Nikitin returned to their post.

“What the devil brings them here at night?” said Nikitin.

“Seems it’s necessary,” said panov. “But it’s getting chilly,” he added, and unrolling his cloak he put it on and sat down by the tree.

About two hours later Avdeev and Bondarenko returned.

“Well, have you handed them over?”

“Yes. They weren’t yet asleep at the Colonel’s – they were taken straight in to him. And do you know, mates, those shaven-headed lads are fine!” continued Avdeev. “Yes, really. What a talk I had with them!”

“Of course you’d talk,” remarked Nikitin disapprovingly.

“Really they’re just like Russians. One of them is married. Molly,’ says I, bar?’ Bar,’ he says. Bondarenko, didn’t I say bar?’ Many bar?’ A couple,’ says he. A couple! Such a good talk we had! Such nice fellows!”

“Nice, indeed!” said Nikitin. “If you met him alone he’d soon let the guts out of you.”

“It will be getting light before long.” said panov.

“Yes, the stars are beginning to go out,” said Avdeev, sitting down and making himself comfortable.

And the soldiers were silent again.

Chapter III

The windows of the barracks and the soldiers' houses had long been dark in the fort; but there were still lights in the windows of the best house.

In it lived Prince Simon Mikhailovich Vorontsov, Commander of the Kurin Regiment, an Imperial Aide-de-Camp and son of the Commander-in-Chief. Vorontsov's wife, Marya Vasilevna, a famous Petersburg beauty, was with him and they lived in this little Caucasian fort more luxuriously than any one had ever lived there before. To Vorontsov, and even more to his wife, it seemed that they were not only living a very modest life, but one full of privations, while to the inhabitants of the place their luxury was surprising and extraordinary.

Just now, at midnight, the host and hostess sat playing cards with their visitors, at a card table lit by four candles, in the spacious drawing room with its carpeted floor and rich curtains drawn across the windows. Vorontsov, who had a long face and wore the insignia and gold cords of an aide-de-camp, was partnered by a shaggy young man of gloomy appearance, a graduate of Petersburg University whom Princess Vorontsov had lately had sent to the Caucasus to be tutor to her little son (born of her first marriage). Against them played two officers: one a broad, red-faced man, Poltoratsky, a company commander who had exchanged out of the Guards; and the other the regimental adjutant, who sat very straight on his chair with a cold expression on his handsome face.

Princess Marya Vasilevna, a large-built, large-eyed, black-browed beauty, sat beside Poltoratsky – her crinoline touching his legs – and looked over his cards. In her words, her looks, her smile, her perfume, and in every movement of her body, there was something that reduced Poltoratsky to obliviousness of everything except the consciousness of her nearness, and he made blunder after blunder, trying his partner's temper more and more.

"No ... that's too bad! You've wasted an ace again," said the regimental adjutant, flushing all over as Poltoratsky threw out an ace.

Poltoratsky turned his kindly, wide-set black eyes towards the dissatisfied adjutant uncomprehendingly, as though just aroused from sleep.

"Do forgive him!" said Marya Vasilevna, smiling. "There, you see! Didn't I tell you so?" she went on, turning to Poltoratsky.

"But that's not at all what you said," replied Poltoratsky, smiling.

"Wasn't it?" she queried, with an answering smile, which excited and delighted Poltoratsky to such a degree that he blushed crimson and seeing the cards began to shuffle.

"It isn't your turn to deal," said the adjutant sternly, and with his white ringed hand he began to deal himself, as though he wished to get rid of the cards as quickly as possible.

The prince's valet entered the drawing room and announced that the officer on duty wanted to speak to him.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said the prince speaking Russian with an English accent. "Will you take my place, Marya?"

"Do you all agree?" asked the princess, rising quickly and lightly to her full height, rustling her silks, and smiling the radiant smile of a happy woman.

"I always agree to everything," replied the adjutant, very pleased that the princess – who could not play at all – was now going to play against him.

Poltoratsky only spread out his hands and smiled.

The rubber was nearly finished when the prince returned to the drawing room, animated and obviously very pleased.

"Do you know what I propose?"

"What?"

"That we have some champagne."

"I am always ready for that," said Poltoratsky.

"Why not? We shall be delighted!" said the adjutant.

"Bring some, Vasili!" said the prince.

"What did they want you for?" asked Marya Vasilevna.

"It was the officer on duty and another man."

"Who? What about?" asked Marya Vasilevna quickly.

"I mustn't say," said Vorontsov, shrugging his shoulders.

"You mustn't say!" repeated Marya Vasilevna. "We'll see about that."

When the champagne was brought each of the visitors drank a glass, and having finished the game and settled the scores they began to take their leave.

"Is it your company that's ordered to the forest tomorrow?" the prince asked Poltoratsky as they said goodbye.

"Yes, mine ... why?"

"Then we shall meet tomorrow," said the prince, smiling slightly.

"Very pleased," replied Poltoratsky, not quite understanding what Vorontsov was saying to him and preoccupied only by the thought that he would in a minute be pressing Marya Vasilevna's hand.

Marya Vasilevna, according to her wont, not only pressed his hand firmly but shook it vigorously, and again reminding him of his mistake in playing diamonds, she gave him what he took to be a delightful, affectionate, and meaning smile.

Poltoratsky went home in an ecstatic condition only to be understood by people like himself who, having grown up and been educated in society, meet a woman belonging to their own circle after months of isolated military life, and moreover a woman like Princess Vorontsov.

When he reached the little house in which he and his comrade lived he pushed the door, but it was locked. He knocked, with no result. He felt vexed, and began kicking the door and banging it with his sword. Then he heard a sound of footsteps and Vovilo – a domestic serf of his – undid the cabin hook which fastened the door.

"What do you mean by locking yourself in, blockhead?"

"But how is it possible, sir ... ?"

"You're tipsy again! I'll show you how it is possible!" and Poltoratsky was about to strike Vovilo but changed his mind. "Oh, go to the devil! ... Light a candle."

"In a minute."

Vovilo was really tipsy. He had been drinking at the name day party of the ordnance sergeant, Ivan Petrovich. On returning home he began comparing his life with that of the latter. Ivan Petrovich had a salary, was married, and hoped in a year's time to get his discharge.

Vovilo had been taken "up" when a boy – that is, he had been taken into his owner's household service – and now although he was already over forty he was not married, but lived a campaigning life with his harum-scarum young master. He was a good master, who seldom struck him, but what kind of a life was it? "He promised to free me when we return from the Caucasus, but where am I to with my freedom? ... It's a dog's life!" thought Vovilo, and he felt so sleepy that, afraid lest someone should come in and steal something, he fastened the hook of the door and fell asleep.

*

Poltoratsky entered the bedroom which he shared with his comrade Tikhonov.

"Well, have you lost?" asked Tikhonov, waking up. "No, as it happens, I haven't. I've won seventeen rubles, and we drank a bottle of Cliquot!"

"And you've looked at Marya Vasilevna?"

"Yes, and I have looked at Marya Vasilevna," repeated Poltoratsky.

"It will soon be time to get up," said Tikhonov. "We are to start at six."

“Vovilo!” shouted Poltoratsky, “see that you wake me up properly tomorrow at five!”

“How can I wake you if you fight?”

“I tell you you’re to wake me! Do you hear?”

“All right.” Vovilo went out, taking Poltoratsky’s boots and clothes with him. Poltoratsky got into bed and smoked a cigarette and put out his candle smiling the while. In the dark he saw before him the smiling face of Marya Vasilevna.

*

The Vorontsovs did not go to bed at once. When the visitors had left, Marya Vasilevna went up to her husband and standing in front of him, said severely —

“Eh bien! vous allez me dire ce que c’est.”

“Mais, ma chère ...”

“Pas de ma chère! C’était un émissaire, n’est-ce pas?”

“Quand même, je ne puis pas vous le dire.”

“Vous ne pouvez pas? Alors, c’est moi qui vais vous le dire!”

“Vous?”¹⁰

“It was Hadji Murad, wasn’t it?” said Marya Vasilevna, who had for some days past heard of the negotiations and thought that Hadji Murad himself had been to see her husband. Vorontsov could not altogether deny this, but disappointed her by saying that it was not Hadji Murad himself but only an emissary to announce that Hadji Murad would come to meet him next day at the spot where a wood-cutting expedition had been arranged.

In the monotonous life of the fortress the young Vorontsovs – both husband and wife – were glad of this occurrence, and it was already past two o’clock when, after speaking of the pleasure the news would give his father, they went to bed.

¹⁰ “Eh bien! vous allez me dire ce que c’est.” – Well! You tell me what it is. “Mais, ma chère ...” – But, my dear... “Pas de ma chère ! C’était un émissaire, n’est-ce pas?” – Don’t my dear me! He was an emissary, was he not? “Quand même, je ne puis pas vous le dire.” – Even so, I can not tell you. “Vous ne pouvez pas? Alors, c’est moi qui vais vous le dire!” – You can not? So I’ll tell you! “Vous?” – You?

Chapter IV

After the three sleepless nights he had passed flying from the murids Shamil had sent to capture him, Hadji Murad fell asleep as soon as Sado, having bid him goodnight, had gone out of the saklya. He slept fully dressed with his head on his hand, his elbow sinking deep into the red down-cushions his host had arranged for him.

At a little distance, by the wall, slept Eldar. He lay on his back, his strong young limbs stretched out so that his high chest, with the black cartridge-pouches sewn into the front of his white Circassian coat, was higher than his freshly shaven, blue-gleaming head, which had rolled off the pillow and was thrown back. His upper lip, on which a little soft down was just appearing, pouted like a child's, now contracting and now expanding, as though he were sipping something. Like Hadji Murad he slept with pistol and dagger in his belt. the sticks in the grate burnt low, and a night light in a niche in the wall gleamed faintly.

In the middle of the night the floor of the guest-chamber creaked, and Hadji Murad immediately rose, putting his hand to his pistol. Sado entered, treading softly on the earthen floor.

"What is it?" asked Hadji Murad, as if he had not been asleep at all.

"We must think," replied Sado, squatting down in front of him. "A woman from her roof saw you arrive and told her husband, and now the whole aoul knows. A neighbor has just been to tell my wife that the Elders have assembled in the mosque and want to detain you."

"I must be off!" said Hadji Murad.

"The horses are saddled," said Sado, quickly leaving the saklya.

"Eldar!" whispered Hadji Murad. And Eldar, hearing his name, and above all his master's voice, leapt to his feet, setting his cap straight as he did so.

Hadji Murad put on his weapons and then his burka. Eldar did the same, and they both went silently out of the saklya into the penthouse. The black-eyed boy brought their horses. Hearing the clatter of hoofs on the hard-beaten road, someone stuck his head out of the door of a neighboring saklya and a man ran up the hill towards the mosque, clattering with his wooden shoes. There was no moon, but the stars shone brightly in the black sky so that the outlines of the saklya roofs could be seen in the darkness, the mosque with its minarets in the upper part of the village rising above the other buildings. From the mosque came a hum of voices.

Quickly seizing his gun, Hadji Murad placed his foot in the narrow stirrup, and silently and easily throwing his body across, swung himself onto the high cushion of the saddle.

"May God reward you!" he said, addressing his host while his right foot felt instinctively for the stirrup, and with his whip he lightly touched the lad who held his horse, as a sign that he should let go. The boy stepped aside, and the horse, as if it knew what it had to do, started at a brisk pace down the lane towards the principal street. Eldar rode behind him. Sado in his sheepskin followed, almost running, swinging his arms and crossing now to one side and now to the other of the narrow sidestreet. At the place where the streets met, first one moving shadow and then another appeared in the road.

"Stop ... who's that? Stop!" shouted a voice, and several men blocked the path.

Instead of stopping, Hadji Murad drew his pistol from his belt and increasing his speed rode straight at those who blocked the way. They separated, and without looking round he started down the road at a swift canter. Eldar followed him at a sharp trot. Two shots cracked behind them and two bullets whistled past without hitting either Hadji Murad or Eldar. Hadji Murad continued riding at the same pace, but having gone some three hundred yards he stopped his slightly panting horse and listened.

In front of him, lower down, gurgled rapidly running water. Behind him in the aoul cocks crowed, answering one another. Above these sounds he heard behind him the approaching tramp of horses and the voices of several men. Hadji Murad touched his horse and rode on at an even

pace. Those behind him galloped and soon overtook him. They were some twenty mounted men, inhabitants of the aoul, who had decided to detain Hadji Murad or at least to make a show of detaining him in order to justify themselves in Shamil's eyes. When they came near enough to be seen in the darkness, Hadji Murad stopped, let go his bridle, and with an accustomed movement of his bridle, and with an accustomed movement of his left hand unbuttoned the cover of his rifle, which he drew forth with his right. Eldar did the same.

"What do you want?" cried Hadji Murad. "Do you wish to take me? ... Take me, then!" and he raised his rifle. The men from the aoul stopped, and Hadji Murad, rifle in hand, rode down into the ravine. The mounted men followed him but did not draw any nearer. When Hadji Murad had crossed to the other side of the ravine the men shouted to him that he should hear what they had to say. In reply he fired his rifle and put his horse to a gallop. When he reined it in his pursuers were no longer within hearing and the crowing of the cocks could also no longer be heard; only the murmur of the water in the forest sounded more distinctly and now and then came the cry of an owl. The black wall of the forest appeared quite close. It was in the forest that his murids awaited him.

On reaching it Hadji Murad paused, and drawing much air into his lungs he whistled and then listened silently. The next minute he was answered by a similar whistle from the forest. Hadji Murad turned from the road and entered it. When he had gone about a hundred paces he saw among the trunks of the trees a bonfire, the shadows of some men sitting round it, and, half lit-up by the firelight, a hobbled horse which was saddled. Four men were sitting by the fire.

One of them rose quickly, and coming up to Hadji Murad took hold of his bridle and stirrup. This was Hadji Murad's sworn brother who managed his household affairs for him.

"Put out the fire," said Hadji Murad, dismounting.

The men began scattering the pile and trampling on the burning branches.

"Has Bata been here?" asked Hadji Murad, moving towards a burka that was spread on the ground.

"Yes, he went away long ago with Khan Mahoma."

"Which way did they go?"

"That way," answered Khanefi pointing in the opposite direction to that from which Hadji Murad had come.

"All right," said Hadji Murad, and unslinging his rifle he began to load it.

"We must take care – I have been pursued," he said to a man who was putting out the fire.

This was Gamzalo, a Chechen. Gamzalo approached the burka, took up a rifle that lay on it wrapped in its cover, and without a word went to that side of the glade from which Hadji Murad had come.

When Eldar had dismounted he took Hadji Murad's horse, and having reined up both horses's heads high, tied them to two trees. Then he shouldered his rifle as Gamzalo had done and went to the other side of the glade. The bonfire was extinguished, the forest no longer looked as black as before, but in the sky the stars still shone, thought faintly.

Lifting his eyes to the stars and seeing that the Pleiades had already risen half-way up in the sky, Hadji Murad calculated that it must be long past midnight and that his nightly prayer was long overdue. He asked Khanefi for a ewer (they always carried one in their packs), and putting on his burka went to the water.

Having taken off his shoes and performed his ablutions, Hadji Murad stepped onto the burka with bare feet and then squatted down on his calves, and having first placed his fingers in his ears and closed his eyes, he turned to the south and recited the usual prayer.

When he had finished he returned to the place where the saddle bags lay, and sitting down on the burka he leant his elbows on his knees and bowed his head and fell into deep thought.

Hadji Murad always had great faith in his own fortune. When planning anything he always felt in advance firmly convinced of success, and fate smiled on him. It had been so, with a few rare

exceptions, during the whole course of his stormy military life; and so he hoped it would be now. He pictured to himself how – with the army Vorontsov would place at his disposal – he would march against Shamil and take him prisoner, and revenge himself on him; and how the Russian Tsar would reward him and how he would again rule not only over Avaria, but over the whole of Chechnya, which would submit to him. With these thoughts he unwittingly fell asleep.

He dreamt how he and his brave followers rushed at Shamil with songs and with the cry, “Hadji Murad is coming!” and how they seized him and his wives and how he heard the wives crying and sobbing. He woke up. The song, *Lya-ilallysha*, and the cry “Hadji Murad is coming!” and the weeping of Shamil’s wives, was the howling, weeping and laughter of jackals that awoke him. Hadji Murad lifted his head, glanced at the sky which, seen between the trunks of the trees, was already growing light in the east and inquired after Khan Mahoma of a murid who sat at some distance from him. On hearing that Khan Mahoma had not yet returned, Hadji Murad again bowed his head and at once fell asleep.

He was awakened by the merry voice of Khan Mahoma returning from his mission with Bata. Khan Mahoma at once sat down beside Hadji Murad and told him how the soldiers had met them and had led them to the prince himself, and how pleased the prince was and how he promised to meet them in the morning where the Russians would be felling trees beyond the Mitchik in the Shalin glade. Bata interrupted his fellow-envoy to add details of his own.

Hadji Murad asked particularly for the words with which Vorontsov had answered his offer to go over to the Russians, and Khan Mahoma and Bata replied with one voice that the prince promised to receive Hadji Murad as a guest, and to act so that it should be well for him.

Then Hadji Murad questioned them about the road, and when Khan Mahoma assured him that he knew the way well and would conduct him straight to the spot, Hadji Murad took out some money and gave Bata the promised three rubles. Then he ordered his men to take out of the saddle bags his gold-ornamented weapons and his turban, and to clean themselves up so as to look well when they arrived among the Russians.

While they cleaned their weapons, harness, and horses, the stars faded away, it became quite light, and an early morning breeze sprang up.

Chapter V

Early in the morning, while it was still dark, two companies carrying axes and commanded by Poltoratsky marched six miles beyond the Shagirinsk Gate, and having thrown out a line of sharpshooters set to work to fell trees as soon as the day broke. Towards eight o'clock the mist which had mingled with the perfumed smoke of the hissing and crackling damp green branches on the bonfires began to rise and the wood-fellers – who till then had not seen five paces off but had only heard one another – began to see both the bonfires and the road through the forest, blocked with felled trees. The sun now appeared like a bright spot in the fog and now again was hidden.

In the glade, some way from the road, Poltoratsky, his subaltern Tikhonov, two officers of the Third Company, and Baron Freze, an ex-officer of the Guards and a fellow student of Poltoratsky at the Cadet College, who had been reduced to the ranks for fighting a duel, were sitting on drums. Bits of paper that had contained food, cigarette stumps, and empty bottles, lay scattered around them. The officers had had some vodka and were now eating, and drinking porter. A drummer was uncorking their third bottle.

Poltoratsky, although he had not had enough sleep, was in that peculiar state of elation and kindly careless gaiety which he always felt when he found himself among his soldiers and with his comrades where there was a possibility of danger.

The officers were carrying on an animated conversation, the subject of which was the latest news: the death of General Sletpsov. None of them saw in this death that most important moment of a life, its termination and return to the source when it sprang – they saw in it only the valour of a gallant officer who rushed at the mountaineers sword in hand and hacked them desperately.

Though all of them – and especially those who had been in action – knew and could not help knowing that in those days in the Caucasus, and in fact anywhere and at any time, such hand-to-hand hacking as is always imagined and described never occurs (or if hacking with swords and bayonets ever does occur, it is only those who are running away that get hacked), that fiction of hand-to-hand fighting endowed them with the calm pride and cheerfulness with which they say on the drums – some with a jaunty air, others on the contrary in a very modest pose, and drank and joked without troubling about death, which might overtake them at any moment as it had overtaken Sletpsov. And in the midst of their talk, as if to confirm their expectations, they heard to the left of the road the pleasant stirring sound of a rifle shot; and a bullet, merrily whistling somewhere in the misty air, flew past and crashed into a tree.

“Hullo!” exclaimed Poltoratsky in a merry voice; “Why that’s at our line... . There now, Kostya,” and he turned to Freze, “now’s your chance. Go back to the company. I will lead the whole company to support the cordon and we’ll arrange a battle that will be simply delightful ... and then we’ll make a report.”

Freze jumped to his feet and went at a quick pace towards the smoke-enveloped spot where he had left his company.

Poltoratsky’s little Kabarda dapple-bay was brought to him, and he mounted and drew up his company and led it in the direction whence the shots were fired. The outposts stood on the skirts of the forest in front of the bare descending slope of a ravine. The wind was blowing in the direction of the forest, and not only was it possible to see the slope of the ravine, but the opposite side of it was also distinctly visible. When Poltoratsky rode up to the line the sun came out from behind the mist, and on the other side of the ravine, by the outskirts of a young forest, a few horsemen could be seen at a distance of a quarter of a mile. These were the Chechens who had pursued Hadji Murad and wanted to see him meet the Russians. One of them fired at the line. Several soldiers fired back. The Chechens retreated and the firing ceased.

But when Poltoratsky and his company came up he nevertheless gave orders to fire, and scarcely had the word been passed than along the whole line of sharpshooters the incessant, merry, stirring rattle of our rifles began, accompanied by pretty dissolving cloudlets of smoke. The soldiers, pleased to have some distraction, hastened to load and fired shot after shot. The Chechens evidently caught the feeling of excitement, and leaping forward one after another fired a few shots at our men. One of these shots wounded a soldier. It was the same Avdeev who had lain in ambush the night before.

When his comrades approached him he was lying prone, holding his wounded stomach with both hands, and rocking himself with a rhythmic motion moaned softly. He belonged to Poltoratsky's company, and Poltoratsky, seeing a group of soldiers collected, rode up to them.

"What is it, lad? Been hit?" said Poltoratsky. "Where?"

Avdeev did not answer.

"I was just going to load, your honor, when I heard a click," said a soldier who had been with Avdeev; "and I look and see he's dropped his gun."

"Tut, tut, tut!" Poltoratsky clicked his tongue. "Does it hurt much, Avdeev?"

"It doesn't hurt but it stops me walking. A drop of vodka now, your honor!"

Some vodka (or rather the spirit drunk by the soldiers in the Caucasus) was found, and Panov, severely frowning, brought Avdeev a can-lid full. Avdeev tried to drink it but immediately handed back the lid.

"My soul turns against it," he said. "Drink it yourself."

Panov drank up the spirit.

Avdeev raised himself but sank back at once. They spread out a cloak and laid him on it.

"Your honor, the colonel is coming," said the sergeant-major to Poltoratsky.

"All right. then will you see to him?" said Poltoratsky, and flourishing his whip he rode at a fast trot to meet Vorontsov.

Vorontsov was riding his thoroughbred English chestnut gelding, and was accompanied by the adjutant, a Cossack, and a Chechen interpreter.

"What's happening here?" asked Vorontsov.

"Why, a skirmishing party attacked our advanced line," Poltoratsky answered.

"Come, come – you arranged the whole thing yourself!"

"Oh no, Prince, not I," said Poltoratsky with a smile; "they pushed forward of their own accord."

"I hear a soldier has been wounded?"

"Yes, it's a great pity. He's a good soldier."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously, I believe ... in the stomach."

"And do you know where I am going?" vorontsov asked.

"I don't."

"Can't you guess?"

"No."

"Hadji Murad has surrendered and we are now going to meet him."

"You don't mean to say so?"

"His envoy came to me yesterday," said Vorontsov, with difficulty repressing a smile of pleasure. "He will be waiting for me at the Shalin glade in a few minutes. Place sharpshooters as far as the glade, and then come and join me."

"I understand," said Poltoratsky, lifting his hand to his cap, and rode back to his company. He led the sharp shooters to the right himself, and ordered the sergeant-major to do the same on the left side.

The wounded Avdeev had meanwhile been taken back to the fort by some of the soldiers.

On his way back to rejoin vorontsov, Poltoratsky noticed behind him several horsemen who were overtaking him. In front on a white-maned horse rode a man of imposing appearance. He wore

a turban and carried weapons with gold ornaments. This man was Hadji Murad. He approached Poltoratsky and said something to him in Tartar. Raising his eyebrows, Poltoratsky made a gesture with his arms to show that he did not understand, and smiled. Hadji Murad gave him smile for smile, and that smile struck Poltoratsky by its childlike kindness. Poltoratsky had never expected to see the terrible mountain chief look like that. He had expected to see a morose, hard-featured man, and here was a vivacious person whose smile was so kindly that Poltoratsky felt as if he were an old acquaintance. He had only one peculiarity: his eyes, set wide apart, which gazed from under their black brows calmly, attentively, and penetratingly into the eyes of others.

Hadji Murad's suit consisted of five men, among them was Khan Mahoma, who had been to see Prince Vorontsov that night. He was a rosy, round-faced fellow with black lashless eyes and a beaming expression, full of the joy of life. Then there was the Avar Khanefi, a thick-set, hairy man, whose eyebrows met. He was in charge of all Hadji Murad's property and led a stud-bred horse which carried tightly packed saddle bags. Two men of the suite were particularly striking. The first was a Lesghian: a youth, broad-shouldered but with a waist as slim as a woman's, beautiful ram-like eyes, and the beginnings of a brown beard. This was Eldar. The other, Gamzalo, was a Chechen with a short red beard and no eyebrows or eyelashes; he was blind in one eye and had a scar across his nose and face. Poltoratsky pointed out Vorontsov, who had just appeared on the road. Hadji Murad rode to meet him, and putting his right hand on his heart said something in Tartar and stopped. The Chechen interpreter translated.

"He says, I surrender myself to the will of the Russian Tsar. I wish to serve him," he says. I wished to so do long ago but Shamil would not let me."

Having heard what the interpreter said, Vorontsov stretched out his hand in its wash-leather glove to Hadji Murad. Hadji Murad looked at it hesitatingly for a moment and then pressed it firmly, again saying something and looking first at the interpreter and then at Vorontsov.

"He says he did not wish to surrender to any one but you, as you are the son of the Sirdar and he respects you much."

Vorontsov nodded to express his thanks. Hadji Murad again said something, pointing to his suite.

"He says that these men, his henchmen, will serve the Russians as well as he."

Vorontsov turned towards them and nodded to them too. The merry, black-eyed, lashless Chechen, Khan Mahoma, also nodded and said something which was probably amusing, for the hairy Avar drew his lips into a smile, showing his ivory-white teeth. But the red-haired Gamzalo's one red eye just glanced at Vorontsov and then was again fixed on the ears of his horse.

When Vorontsov and Hadji Murad with their retinues rode back to the fort the soldiers released from the lines gathered in groups and made their own comments.

"What a lot of men that damned fellow has destroyed! And now see what a fuss they will make of him!"

"Naturally. He was Shamil's right hand, and now – no fear!"

"Still there's no denying it! he's a fine fellow – a regular djhigit¹¹!"

"And the red one! He squints at you like a beast!"

"Ugh! He must be a hound!"

They had all specially noticed the red one. Where the wood-felling was going on the soldiers nearest to the road ran out to look. Their officer shouted to them, but Vorontsov stopped him.

"Let them have a look at their old friend."

"You know who that is?" he added, turning to the nearest soldier, and speaking the words slowly with his English accent.

¹¹ **djhigit** – the same as a brave among American Indians, but the word is inseparably connected with the idea of skilful horsemanship

“No, your Excellency.”

“Hadji Murad... . Heard of him?”

“How could we help it, your Excellency? We’ve beaten him many a time!”

“Yes, and we’ve had it hot from him too.”

“Yes, that’s true, your Excellency,” answered the soldier, pleased to be talking with his chief. Hadji Murad understood that they were speaking about him, and smiled brightly with his eyes. Vornotsov returned to the fort in a very cheerful mood.

Chapter VI

Young Vorontsov was much pleased that it was he, and no one else, who had succeeded in winning over and receiving Hadji Murad – next to Shamil Russia's chief and most active enemy. There was only one unpleasant thing about it: General Meller-Zakomelsky was in command of the army at Vozdvizhenski, and the whole affair ought to have been carried out through him. As Vorontsov had done everything himself without reporting it there might be some unpleasantness, and this thought rather interfered with his satisfaction. On reaching his house he entrusted Hadji Murad's henchmen to the regimental adjutant and himself showed Hadji Murad into the house.

Princess Marya Vasilevna, elegantly dressed and smiling, and her little son, a handsome curly-headed child of six, met Hadji Murad in the drawing room. The latter placed his hands on his heart, and through the interpreter – who had entered with him – said with solemnity that he regarded himself as the prince's kunak, since the prince had brought him into his own house; and that a kunak's whole family was as sacred as the kunak himself.

Hadji Murad's appearance and manners pleased Marya Vasilevna, and the fact that he flushed when she held out her large white hand to him inclined her still more in his favor. She invited him to sit down, and having asked him whether he drank coffee, had some served. He, however, declined it when it came. He understood a little Russian but could not speak it. When something was said which he could not understand he smiled, and his smile pleased Marya Vasilevna just as it had pleased Poltoratsky. The curly-haired, keen-eyed little boy (whom his mother called Bulka) standing beside her did not take his eyes off Hadji Murad, whom he had always heard spoken of as a great warrior.

Leaving Hadji Murad with his wife, Vorontsov went to his office to do what was necessary about reporting the fact of Hadji Murad's having come over to the Russians. When he had written a report to the general in command of the left flank – General Kozlovsky – at Grozny, and a letter to his father, Vorontsov hurried home, afraid that his wife might be vexed with him for forcing on her this terrible stranger, who had to be treated in such a way that he should not take offense, and yet not too kindly. But his fears were needless. Hadji Murad was sitting in an armchair with little Bulka, Vorontsov's stepson, on his knee, and with bent head was listening attentively to the interpreter who was translating to him the words of the laughing Marya Vasilevna. Marya Vasilevna was telling him that if every time a kunak admired anything of his he made him a present of it, he would soon have to go about like Adam...

When the prince entered, Hadji Murad rose at once and, surprising and offending Bulka by putting him off his knee, changed the playful expression of his face to a stern and serious one. He only sat down again when Vorontsov had himself taken a seat.

Continuing the conversation he answered Marya Vasilevna by telling her that it was a law among his people that anything your kunak admired must be presented to him.

"Thy son, kunak?" he said in Russian, patting the curly head of the boy who had again climbed on his knee.

"He is delightful, your brigand!" said Marya Vasilevna to her husband in French. "Bulka has been admiring his dagger, and he has given it to him."

Bulka showed the dagger to his father. "C'est un objet de prix!"¹² added she.

"Il faudra trouver l'occasion de lui faire cadeau"¹³, said Vorontsov.

Hadji Murad, his eyes turned down, sat stroking the boy's curly hair and saying: "Djhigit, djhigit!"

¹² C'est un objet de prix! – It is an item of value!

¹³ Il faudra trouver l'occasion de lui faire cadeau – We will have to find an opportunity to make him a gift.

“A beautiful, beautiful dagger,” said Vorontsov, half drawing out the sharpened blade which had a ridge down the center. “I thank thee!”

“Ask him what I can do for him,” he said to the interpreter.

The interpreter translated, and Hadji Murad at once replied that he wanted nothing but that he begged to be taken to a place where he could say his prayers.

Vorontsov called his valet and told him to do what Hadji Murad desired.

As soon as Hadji Murad was alone in the room allotted to him his face altered. The pleased expression, now kindly and now stately, vanished, and a look of anxiety showed itself. Vorontsov had received him far better than Hadji Murad had expected. But the better the reception the less did Hadji Murad trust Vorontsov and his officers. He feared everything: that he might be seized, chained, and sent to Siberia, or simply killed; and therefore he was on his guard. He asked Eldar, when the latter entered his room, where his murids had been put and whether their arms had been taken from them, and where the horses were. Eldar reported that the horses were in the prince’s stables; that the men had been placed in a barn; that they retained their arms, and that the interpreter was giving them food and tea.

Hadji Murad shook his head in doubt, and after undressing said his prayers and told Eldar to bring him his silver dagger. He then dressed, and having fastened his belt, sat down on the divan with his legs tucked under him, to await what might befall him.

At four in the afternoon the interpreter came to call him to dine with the prince.

At dinner he hardly ate anything except some pilau¹⁴, to which he helped himself from the very part of the dish from which Marya Vasilevna had helped herself.

“He is afraid we shall poison him,” Marya Vasilevna remarked to her husband. “He has helped himself from the place where I took my helping.” Then instantly turning to Hadji Murad she asked him through the interpreter when he would pray again. Hadji Murad lifted five fingers and pointed to the sun. “Then it will soon be time,” and Vorontsov drew out his watch and pressed a spring. The watch struck four and one quarter. This evidently surprised Hadji Murad, and he asked to hear it again and to be allowed to look at the watch.

“Voilà l’occasion! Donnez-lui la montre,” said the princess to her husband.

Vorontsov at once offered the watch to Hadji Murad.

The latter placed his hand on his breast and took the watch. He touched the spring several times, listened, and nodded his head approvingly.

After dinner, Meller-Zakomelsky’s aide-de-camp was announced.

The aide-de-camp informed the prince that the general, having heard of Hadji Murad’s arrival, was highly displeased that this had not been reported to him, and required Hadji Murad to be brought to him without delay. Vorontsov replied that the general’s command should be obeyed, and through the interpreter informed Hadji Murad of these orders and asked him to go to Meller with him.

When Marya Vasilevna heard what the aide-de-camp had come about, she at once understood that unpleasantness might arise between her husband and the general, and in spite of all her husband’s attempts to dissuade her, decided to go with him and Hadji Murad.

“Vous feriez bien mieux de rester – c’est mon affaire, non pas la vôtre... .”¹⁵

“Vous ne pouvez pas m’empêcher d’aller voir madame la générale!”¹⁶

¹⁴ **pilau** – an oriental dish prepared with rice and mutton or chicken

¹⁵ **Vous feriez bien mieux de rester – c’est mon affaire, non pas la vôtre...** – You’d better stay – it’s my business, not yours...

¹⁶ **Vous ne pouvez pas m’empêcher d’aller voir madame la générale!** – You can not prevent me from going to see Madam General!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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