Nadezhda Durova

THE CAVALRY MAIDEN

Journals of a Russian Officer in the Napoleonic Wars

Translation, Introduction, and Notes by Mary Fleming Zirin

"Cornet Aleksandrov," Nadezhda Andreevna Durova, in the uniform of the Mariupol' Hussars. From oil portrait, c. 1810.
Nadezhda Durova, Russia’s “Cavalry Maiden”

In 1866 Russia’s beloved young Emperor Alexander I was facing the greatest challenge of his five-year reign. The attempt of a combined Austro-Russian army to counter Napoleon’s continental ambitions had ended in crushing defeat at Austerlitz in late 1805, and the Austrians signed a separate peace. Now France threatened Prussia, and Russia was arming once more to check Napoleon, this time near her own western borders.

In September of that year Nadezhda Durova (1783–1866), disguised as a boy, ran away from her home in the foothills of the Ural mountains and joined the Russian cavalry. That she could do so is not surprising: women throughout history have been swept up in war. Durova, however, is exceptional among them in her determination to escape what she later described as the “sphere prescribed by nature and custom to the female sex,” in her dedication to the military vocation and, above all, in her gift to posterity of a lengthy account of the nine years of service during which she saw combat in the 1807 and 1812–1814 wars against Napoleon.

Durova embarked upon an equally remarkable, even briefer, literary career in the late 1830s. She published a series of autobiographical and fictional works drawn largely from the adventures and settings of the military years. Her dated fiction is still of interest to scholars of the late romantic period, but it is her edited journals, The Cavalry Maiden (1836), and to a lesser extent The Notes of Aleksandrov (Durova) (1839), that merit a secure place they have yet to win in Russian literature, the universal annals of women’s experience, and the cultural history of the Russian Empire.¹

For the present-day English-reading audience The Cavalry Maiden, one of the first autobiographical works of any kind to be published in Russia, is a “period piece” in the best sense of the phrase: an idiosyncratic portrait of the times as Durova witnessed them. With family and friends in mind as eventual audience, she kept sporadic journals, noting amusing and significant anecdotes and recording her adventures and reactions to events that ranged from earthshaking (the French invasion of Russia in June 1812) to trivial (a visit to a Jesuit monastery; a major’s courtship).
Her pages reflect the fervor, idealism, and disillusion that swept Russia during the Napoleonic era. Today *The Cavalry Maiden* stands also as a unique record of the outlook and emotions of one of the rare Russian women of her time who managed to create an autonomous life outside the patriarchal confines of home and family.

*The Cavalry Maiden* consists of an introductory memoir, “My Childhood Years” (1783–1801), and Durova’s selection of excerpts from the journals of the military years (1806–1816). In this introduction I discuss some of the characteristics of *The Cavalry Maiden*, what we know or can guess about the text, the missing years of Durova’s life (1799–1806), her other published writings, her long life in retirement, and the vicissitudes of her posthumous reputation. The introduction, annotation, appended documents, and bibliography will appeal variously to different readers. They are meant to supplement *The Cavalry Maiden* rather than supplant it, and some readers may prefer to skip lightly over them and concentrate on Durova’s own words.

**Alexander Pushkin and Durova’s Literary Career**

It was Russia’s revered poet Alexander Pushkin who, through serendipity, discovered the existence of *The Cavalry Maiden* and, in mid-1836, first published a long excerpt from it. In 1829 Pushkin had made the acquaintance of Durova’s eccentric brother, Vasily, and offered him a ride in his carriage back to Moscow from the Caucasus, where Durov was “re recuperating from some kind of surprising illness, a sort of catalepsy, and gambling from morning to night.” Pushkin later recalled that Durov spent the journey discussing bizarre ways to secure the one hundred thousand rubles he considered indispensable to his future “peace of mind and prosperity.” 1 This good deed bore unexpected fruit six years later, when Pushkin became the editor-publisher of his own magazine, *The Contemporary*. In 1835 Durov wrote to him and offered him his sister’s military journals. Publication was delayed by mishance: the first manuscript, which Durova sent by post (part 1 of *The Cavalry Maiden*, or chaps. 1–6 below), never reached Pushkin. It was eventually returned to her at home in Elabuga, and she carried it personally to him in Petersburg in May 1836.

Durova was well aware that the aplomb Pushkin displayed at their first meeting concealed amusement. In retirement years she kept to the man’s clothing and masculine speech forms that marked her independence, and her amiable account shows that she was accustomed to reactions to her appearance varying from curiosity to consternation:

He took my manuscript . . . and, after finishing his obliging speech, kissed my hand. I hastily snatched *vrykhvitala*, in which the -a marks feminine gender] it away, blushed, and said, I don’t in the least know why, “Oh, my God! I got out of that habit long ago!” [Ja tak davn o otrv (masculine consonantal ending) or etogo!] Not even the shadow of an ironic smile appeared on Aleksandr Sergeevich’s face, but I dare say that at home he did not restrain himself and, as he related the circumstances of our first meeting to his family, undoubtedly laughed wholeheartedly over this exclamation. (From *A Year of Life in Petersburg*, Durova’s account of her disillusioning experiences of literary lionization in 1836–1837)

Durova had offered Pushkin her manuscript as raw material for his pen, but he convinced her that it needed no revision from him and rushed into print Durova’s account of the 1812 campaign from part 2 (chaps. 7–13), the first to reach him by post. “Charming! Vivid, original, beautiful style. Their success is undoubted,” he wrote to her brother on March 27, 1836. Pushkin had trouble persuading the distressed author to accept the use of her own name in the title (“Notes of N. A. Durova”) when she would have preferred her longtime military pseudonym, “Aleksandr Andreevich Aleksandrov”: “Be daring—step into your literary career as courageously as into that which made you famous.” Pushkin further offered to see the entire manuscript into print, but, burdened as he was with other affairs, he could not work fast enough to suit the impetuous Durova, and his friends persuaded her that to ask him to undertake the edition at all was an imposition he could ill afford. Tsarist censorship forbade any direct mention of the duel which cost Pushkin his life in January 1837, but the bitterness that Durova expresses against Petersburg society in *A Year of Life in Petersburg* undoubtedly reflects the tragedy that deprived Russia of its greatest poet and Durova of an enthusiastic sponsor.

Durova turned to her cousin, the writer and doctor Ivan Butovsky, to edit the two volumes of *The Cavalry Maiden*. He made no effort to help her sell the books when they came from the printer in late 1836, and her room in Petersburg remained stacked with copies until she managed to place them with booksellers. From the shops they filtered slowly into a literary community shocked by Pushkin’s untimely death. This first selection from her journals, Durova’s finest work, received only one condescending review, but as her further writings brought the “cavalry maiden” enthusiastic notices from Russian critics, *The Cavalry Maiden* sold out.

Durova afterward attributed her ensuing literary career to her need to compensate for Butovsky’s reckless mishandling. From 1837 to 1840 Durova, hoping to profit from the popularity of *The Cavalry Maiden* and curiosity about its author, brought out a spate of “tales, describing now the legends, now the traditions [powerjal], now one or another of the stories of the inhabitants of the area where I was quartered while I was
still serving." In 1839 she added one last volume of Notes gleaned from the military journals to the autobiographical corpus (The Cavalry Maiden, Year, "A Few Traits from Childhood Years," and several fictional tales that have authorial frame narration). Writing was not a viable profession in Russia in the 1830s. Even Pushkin struggled to make a living from his pen, and later in the century many hopeful authors still led the rough life of the dispossessed in Peterburg and Moscow garrets. In 1840 Durova abandoned literature as abruptly as she had the cavalry and returned to the obscurity of Elabuga. Her works, never reprinted, soon became bibliographic rarities.

**Durova and the Russian Autobiographical Tradition**

Chronologically, the Russian tradition of autobiography stretches from the moving life story of the seventeenth-century Old Believer martyr, Archpriest Avvakum, to a flood of works reflecting the Soviet experience. By the mid-eighteenth century, members of the newly westernized Russian nobility had begun keeping diaries and writing reminiscences for their heirs. (Pushkin used the convention of the family memoir to frame his 1836 historical novel The Captain's Daughter: Petr Grinev records his youthful experiences during the Pugachev rebellion for the edification of his grandson.) We would expect and, indeed, we find that Russian women as well as men left personal records of the unmatched epoch during which four empresses, including Catherine the Great, occupied the throne for nearly seventy years. In the 1830s, however, this respectable collection of autobiographical literature was largely a mass of manuscripts moldering in family cupboards and government archives. Russia was still struggling to recover the broad outlines of her history, and individual experience had not yet become an established part of historiography. Few of these early memoirs saw print before the late nineteenth century, when the proliferation of popular historical magazines led descendants and scholars to ferret them out.

The Cavalry Maiden was the first major Russian autobiography to be published during the author's lifetime. Perhaps the fact that so many pages of the journals of this essentially private woman are devoted to depicting the life of "Aleksandrov," a somewhat distanced male persona, made it possible for her to consider publication at all. We may deplore Durova's failures of candor, but we have to respect her courage in deciding to share as much of her remarkable life as she did with a Russian public not yet used to seeing authors exposing their private experience to print.  

Two specialized offshoots of autobiography did begin to find their way into print in Russia by the early years of the nineteenth century: the subjective travel journal that was the Russian reflex of Laurence Sterne's

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Sentimental Journey (discussed in the next section); and the military memoir. The approaching twenty-fifth anniversary of the War of 1812 gave impetus to the idea of recording the national epos, and the publication of other eyewitness accounts of the Napoleonic campaigns probably played a role in prompting Durova to dig out her scattered notes. The Cavalry Maiden fits formally into the category of military memoir; Durova authenticates her unlikely story with the names of her commanders and fellow officers (many of them still alive in 1836), the dates and places of her service, and inimitable details of army life. Overall, however, Maiden's relationship to the genre is marked more by contrast than by influence; the diaries of a woman cavalry officer are by definition sui generis.

It was taken for granted that the cavalry was a desirable career for a man, but Durova had to justify her decision to infiltrate the bastion of male privilege. The Cavalry Maiden differs from male reminiscences in starting from a narrative of the childhood experiences that led Durova to take up her martial vocation. The authors of military reminiscences were for the most part noblemen of prominent families who moved easily in the rarefied atmosphere of Peterburg and elite guards regiments. Many of them could expect to reach high rank in the army. Although the unlikely realization of Durova's dream of a cavalry commission led her to hope for further miracles, realistically she could expect no future beyond duty in a line regiment. A good part of the charm and value of The Cavalry Maiden as military memoir lies in its depiction of the life of the junior officer; there are few military autobiographies in any literature so completely focused on the day-to-day life of the squadron and platoon. Durova served in regiments stationed far from Russia's two capitals. Much of her time was spent on the western borders in lands acquired when Russia, Austria, and Prussia dismembered Poland in the late eighteenth century. Two of her three regiments were Polish/Lithuanian, and there were Polish officers and soldiers in the third as well. The Cavalry Maiden appeared soon after the Polish rebellion of 1830–1831, but Durova expresses a great affection for Poland and her peoples—tinged, however, with that unwitting sense of superiority to other nationalities within the state that marks Russian attitudes even today. Her comments on the mores of the border regions offer a rare glimpse of everyday life in Polish territory during the first years of Russian rule. Her account echoes Adam Mickiewicz's depiction of the Lithuania of 1811 in Pan Tadeusz, as an epoch when Poles could still feel that:

... if at times we saw a Russian helm,  
The Muscovite left but a memory warm  
Behind him of a glittering uniform—  
We knew the serpent only by his skin.
The military men usually wrote retrospectively, reviewing strategy and battlefield movements with the confidence born of education in elite academies. The untutored Durova records only her immediate impressions and limits herself to bewildered comments about tactics which seem odd to her. The men tend to treat peace mainly as preparation for campaigns to come. Durova covers her experiences in the Napoleonic wars of 1807 and 1812–1814 lightly; approximately two-thirds of the pages of The Cavalry Maiden are devoted to the routine of peacetime service, and, of the wartime chapters, only chapters 2 and 8 describe actual combat. Durova deals extensively with the life that Tolstoy described as the state of prelapsedarian "obligatory and blameless idleness which has been and will continue to be the main attraction of military service." Those idle days are not dwelt on because they gave Durova more leisure to write her journal; they also afforded her the minor "adventures" that could best test her adaptation to masculine liberties. As the hussar poet Denis Davydov remarked, there was no time on the battlefield to worry about niceties like gender (see Appendix B). Durova seeks her adventures in quieter times and in the freedoms denied her sex: roaming where she pleases, exploring the communities where she is quartered, and meeting the world alone and on her own terms. 

Military memoirists generally concentrated on the public experience and left the expression of private emotion to Davydov and his followers. The poems in which Davydov defined the light cavalry ethos were known, quoted, and taken as a model by his fellow officers throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century. Durova shares her feelings about her new life with lyric verve, uninhibitedly, and at times clumsily. She speculates on her fearlessness almost as a phenomenon independent of her volition. The closest cognate portrayal of army life viewed by an outsider comes a century later in Isaak Babel’s Red Cavalry cycle, masterfully honed sketches of the experiences of a bespectacled Jewish propaganda officer among rough Cossacks during the Soviet Civil War.

**Durova’s Literary Antecedents**

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century Russian writers were still eagerly absorbing foreign models in the search for a national literary identity. Durova’s works display a mixed set of values stemming from voracious reading of whatever texts came to hand in Russian or French. She refers often to figures from classic mythology and expects her readers to grasp the passing allusion. She quotes Racine and La Fontaine’s fables and mentions Voltaire and Corneille. Her fiction shows that she had absorbed the works of Mrs. Radcliffe and other Gothic novelists in translation. She knew late eighteenth-century Russian poetry and drama. References to Polish and Lithuanian history and literature inform her accounts of life in Russia’s newly acquired western borderlands; Conrad

Wallenrod, Queen Bona Sforza, and the legendary King Popel are all mentioned in her pages. In the Notes Durova tells how embarrassed she was by a proposal that she read aloud to a lady landowner a racy passage from Sterne’s Sentimental Journey (in French or the 1793 Russian translation). She undoubtedly knew the Letters of a Russian Traveller (1801) by the “Russian Sterne” Nikolaj Karamzin. The influence of Sterne in military circles is attested by Fedor Glinka’s Letters of a Russian Officer (1808, 1815–1816). Durova’s journals are closer in spirit than Glinka’s letters to Pastor Yorick’s humorous, somewhat deprecating self-analysis. Whereas Russian male Sterneans tended to look for the socially or politically significant in their travels, the influence of Sterne on The Cavalry Maiden is most evident in Durova’s descriptions of her rambles on foot, usually alone and often by night, which are emblematic of the broader freedoms she gained in the military life.

Durova’s profound religious sense appears to stem as much from the deism of the Enlightenment as from Orthodox Christianity. Her belief in the rational is at the heart of her courage and enables her to face and overcome unknown terrors. She expresses her sense of the godhead in figures ranging from the personal, protective deity invoked by her grandmother to a more generalized sense of a nature that set her potentialities and a providence that guides her destiny. Durova occasionally pays homage to contemporary civic ideals of duty to the state and filial loyalty both to her own father and to Russia’s “little father,” the tsar. She addresses these ideals in the exaggerated rhetoric of neoclassicism, as if to emphasize that she has not only taken on masculine status, but is determined to exemplify patriarchal values writ large.

Although Durova’s rhetoric, literary terms of reference, and philosophical outlook stem largely from classic and sentimental models, her thirsting spirit responds directly to the nascent romanticism that was to peak in Russia in the 1830s. She catches the spirit of Davydov’s hussar lyrics in their glorification of cavalry dash and splendor, while necessarily remaining only a spectator of the warriors’ exploits in salons, bedrooms, and taverns, which were the other facet of the life sung by Davydov. Much of The Cavalry Maiden would be mere literary cliché, if it were not for Durova’s feisty, original voice which transcends eclectic elements. One critic, in a review of the 1839 Notes, resorted to the words “free rein,” “sweep,” “expansiveness” [razgul, razmakh, razdol’] to characterize the tone of her journals.

**Durova and the Life of Her Sex**

Durova’s attitudes toward the female sex and her own sexuality can be read in and between the lines of The Cavalry Maiden. She saw women as a primary audience and urged Pushkin to buy her notes because: “Your
that the option of marrying her first admirer was foreclosed for her and not by her own wish. (For what we can guess about Durova's brief unhappy marriage, see "Truth and Fiction..." below.) When she ran away to the cavalry, Durova was acting on her father's repeated insistence that she had the qualities of a "good son"; from January 1868, she was constrained by the tsar's mandate to serve as a chevalier pur et sans reproche (chap. 3). She played the traditional role of the woman—in particular, the nun and the amazon of legend and history—who sacrifices her sexuality in order to attain honorary male status. From our modern perspective, this renunciation seems nearly tragic, but the gallantry and good faith with which Durova kept her draconian bargain are admirable.

Few women have left us written records of rebellion against the patriarchy. The Cavalry Maiden speaks for those who, throughout the world and throughout history, have chosen or been forced into a life of action beyond the limits of the stereotyped figures of "wife, mother, mistress, muse." Marina Warner's description of Joan of Arc's historical significance applies equally well to Durova:

Joan of Arc... is anomalous in our culture, a woman renowned for doing something on her own, not by birthright. She has extended the taxonomy of female types; she makes evident the dimension of women's dynamism. It is urgent that this taxonomy be expanded further and that the multifarious duties that women have historically undertaken be recognized, researched, and named.16

One finds legends, rumors, and substantiated instances of female warriors throughout the ages. The Russians took particular pride in the Amazons whose legendary homeland was the south Russian steppes. A few of the Russian epic songs [byliny] featured distant echoes of the Amazons, fierce maidens who, after challenging their men in single combat, became meek and dutiful wives.17 The legend of the "divi valka" [the maidens' war] has been preserved in Czech folklore. Camilla, the virgin warrior of the Aeneid, and the tale of Zenobia, Queen of Palmyra, testify to the Romans' fascination with women who took up arms. Maxime Hong Kingston's expressionistic portrait of Fa Mu Lan in Woman Warrior (Vintage, 1977), extends the taxonomy to the Orient. Historical women soldiers were for the most part unlettered and, until the twentieth century, their stories were preserved only in scattered eyewitness reports and a few oral memoirs.18 Joan of Arc was urged by her "voices" to save France. Durova was apparently not prepared to go so far as actually to kill (chap. 7), but her journals show a rare sense of vocation for the profession of arms. She is, moreover, already our contemporary, a product of the romantic epoch, and her rebellion against women's fate is more readily comprehensible than Joan's mystic call.
The Cavalry Maiden: The Text

Faced with this vital hybrid, critics worried uneasily whether Alexander Pushkin might not have played a more substantial role in the appearance of The Cavalry Maiden than that to which he admitted. After all, Pushkin’s Tales of Belkin (1830) featured as putative author a domestically educated, retired military officer from the provincial nobility who patterned his tales on the popular genres of the time. Vissarion Belinskij speculated that Durova herself might be another such product of Pushkin’s pen:

If this is mystification, then we admit that it is a masterful one; if these are genuine journal notes, they are diverting and absorbing to an unbelievable degree. It is only strange that in 1812 one could write in such good language, and who besides? A woman. But perhaps they have been recently corrected by the author. 19

During Durova’s years in the cavalry she covered “a great number of sheets of paper with writing” and carried them about in her valise. 20 By 1835, mired in the boredom of retirement, and perhaps egged on by her eccentric brother to put her unique experience to some monetary profit, Durova records that

I took a notion to look over and read the various fragments of my Notes which had survived my not always quiet life. This occupation, which revived my past in my memory and soul, gave me the idea of collecting these fragments, assembling them into some sort of whole, and publishing them. 21

The degree to which Durova revised The Cavalry Maiden in the 1830s will probably never be known for sure. The manuscripts were scattered and lost; her one servant in Elabuga evidently gave them away to his friends, much as Belkin’s housekeeper used his writings “for various domestic needs.” However, some educated guesses are possible about the degree to which Durova rewrote and revised the journals for publication. Some of Durova’s anecdotes show signs of polishing and artistic conflation of events, and much of the dialogue bears the stamp of literary reconstruction. She obviously edited her journals with the slapdash haste and enthusiasm that marked her approach to life in general. Were there really two commission-agents with the initial P. who told anecdotes of the “Amazon”? Durova may be exercising poetic license when she portrays herself as jotting down notes on horseback during fatiguing marches, but the passages carry the force of immediate experience. A few anachronisms have crept in of the sort that come naturally to a text assembled from loose pages after a lapse of twenty years. 22 Overall, however, Durova’s language and general culture are consistent with those of the first decade of the nineteenth century and reinforce her insistence that The Cavalry Maiden and Notes were drawn directly from the journals of her cavalry years. For example, it is only in A Year of Life in Petersburg—Durova’s one work set (and thus entirely written) in the late 1830s—that we find references to works published after 1810 (i.e., Sir Walter Scott’s The Heart of Midlothian [1818]).

The Cavalry Maiden was Durova’s first cut at selecting materials from her journals and organizing them into a coherent whole. It combines the retrospective quality of the autobiography and the immediacy of the diary. She chose passages that give The Cavalry Maiden a novelesque quality in its depiction of her adaptation over time to her new role and her development from fiery young warrior intoxicated with her freedoms to bored veteran mired (literally) in backwoods Poland and Russia. In Durova’s selection, the text abounds in ironies, both intentional (an amused account of her change in attitude toward the wagon-train between 1807 and 1812, chap. 8) and inadvertent (the deaths of her warhorse and a stray pup, chaps. 3 and 13). More pervasively, I am sure that Durova was aware of the tension she creates by relating her male persona’s adventures from her own authentic female viewpoint. I am equally sure that she was unconscious of the disjunction between the lip service she pays to paternal authority and the near-maternal indulgence she shows for her weak, spoiled father’s whims. The tight thematic organization of The Cavalry Maiden becomes more apparent when it is contrasted with the scrappy, unfocused 1839 Notes. In both works, Durova adapted some of her anecdotes to a point the twentieth-century, genre-conscious reader would label fiction, but the Notes have been more blatantly reworked. In the extended narrative “Love,” for example, Durova describes in detail scenes from which she was absent, a liberty she did not take in the earlier selection. Originally I thought of combining materials from both journals, but I found no way to amalgamate the two texts without disrupting the integrity of The Cavalry Maiden.

“Truth” and Fiction in “My Childhood Years”

Durova always insisted on the authenticity of her journals: “I assure you on my word of honor of the truth of everything I wrote, and I hope you will not believe all the gossip and condemnations made hit or miss by scandal-mongers.” 23 There is one “truth,” however, that Durova fails to tell, and this failure of candor badly mars our reading of the journals. In “My Childhood Years” Durova describes herself as running away from home at age sixteen. In reality, as the Russian Military Encyclopedia similarly noted, “the sobriquet of ‘cavalry-maiden’ does not correspond to the truth.” 24 In 1806 Nadezhda Durova was twenty-three years old. In
Durova in the 1830s. Engraving by A. Brjullov.

Durova in the 1860s. From a photograph belonging to N. I. Ushakov. Lekricheskii vestnik, 1901, 9.
“My Childhood Years”

My mother, born Aleksandrovnchcova, was one of the prettiest girls in Little Russia. At the end of her fifteenth year, throngs of suitors came to seek her hand. My mother’s heart preferred hussar Captain Durow to all the many others, but unfortunately this was not the choice of her father, a proud, arbitrary Ukrainian pan. He told my mother to put out of her head the fantastic idea of marrying a Muscovite, and a soldier at that. My grandfather ruled his family with an iron hand: any order of his was to be blindly obeyed, and there was no possibility of either placating him or changing any of his announced intentions. The consequence of this unreasonable severity was that one stormy autumn night my mother, who slept in the same room as her elder sister, stealthily rose from her bed, picked up her cloak and hood and, in stocking feet, crept with bated breath past her sister’s bed, quietly opened the door into the drawing-room, quietly closed it, dashed nimbly across the room and, opening the door into the garden, flew like an arrow down the long lane of chestnuts that led to a wicket-gate. My mother hastily unlocked this little door and threw herself into the captain’s arms. He was waiting for her with a carriage hitched to four strong horses who, like the wind then raging, rushed them down the Kiev road.

They were married in the first village and drove directly to Kiev, where Durow’s regiment was quartered. Although my mother’s act was excusable in light of her youth, love, and the virtues of my father, who was a very handsome man of gentle disposition and captivating manners, it was so contrary to the patriarchal customs of the Ukrainian land that in his first outbreak of rage my grandfather pronounced a curse on his daughter.

For two years my mother never stopped writing to her father to beg his forgiveness, but to no avail: he would hear none of it, and his rage grew in proportion to their attempts to mollify it. My parents finally gave up all hope of appeasing a man who considered obstinacy a mark of character. They ceased writing letters to her implacable father and would have resigned themselves to their lot, but my mother’s pregnancy revived her


1. Ivan Illich Aleksandrovnch (died c. 1786) was a provincial civil servant who had an estate near Pirjatin in the Poltava region. Durow’s mother, Nadezhda, was born about 1765 and died, according to her daughter’s account, in 1807. The hussar was Andrej Vasil’evich Durow, born in Ufa province to the descendants of a Polish family (originally Turowski) who were resettled there from their native Smolensk-Polotsk region after Russia hegemony began in the 1650s (Jadin, 413–14).
flagging courage. She began to hope that the birth of her child would restore her to paternal favor.

My mother passionately desired a son, and she spent her entire pregnancy indulging in the most seductive daydreams. "I will give birth to a son as handsome as a cupids," she would say, "I'll name him Modest. I will nurse him myself, bring him up, teach him, and my son, my darling Modest, will be the joy of my life. . . ." So my mother dreamed but, as her time drew near, the pangs preceding my birth came as a most disagreeable surprise to her. They had had no place in her dreams and produced on her a first unfavorable impression of me. It became necessary to send for an accoucheur, who insisted on letting blood. The idea was extremely frightening to my mother, but there was nothing she could do about it; she had to yield to necessity. Soon after the bloodletting I came into the world, the poor creature whose arrival destroyed my mother's dreams and dashed all her hopes.

"Give me my child!" said my mother, as soon as she had recovered somewhat from her pain and fear. The child was brought and placed on her lap. But alas! this was no son as handsome as a cupids. This was a daughter—and a bogatyrs of a daughter at that! I was unusually large, had thick black hair, and was bawling loudly. Mother pushed me off her lap and turned to the wall.

In a few days Mama recovered and, yielding to the advice of her friends, ladies of the regiment, decided to nurse me herself. They told her that a mother who nurses her child at the breast finds that the act alone is enough to make her begin loving it. I was brought; my mother took me from the maid's arms, put me to her breast, and gave me to suck. But I evidently sensed the lack of maternal love in that nourishment and therefore refused her every effort to make me nurse. Mama decided to exercise patience to overcome my obstinacy and went on holding me at the breast, but, bored by my continued refusal, she stopped watching me and began talking to a lady who was visiting her. At this point, evidently guided by the fate that intended me for a soldier's uniform, I suddenly gripped my mother's breast and squeezed it as hard as I could with my gums. My mother gave a piercing shriek, jerked me from her breast, threw me into the arms of her maid, and fell face down in the pillows.

"Take her away; get that worthless child out of my sight, and never show her again," said Mama, waving her hand and burying her head in a pillow.

I was four months old when the regiment in which my father was serving received orders to go to Kherson. Since this was a domestic march, Papa took his family with him. I was entrusted to the supervision and care of my mother's chambermaid, a girl of her own age. During the day the maid sat with Mama in the carriage, holding me on her lap. She fed me cow's milk from a bottle and swaddled me so tightly that my face turned blue and my eyes were bloodshot. At our night's halts I rested, because I was handed over to a peasant woman brought in from the village who unsaddled me, put me to her breast, and slept with me all night. Thus after each day's march I had a new wet nurse.

Neither the changing wetnurses nor the agonizing swaddling impaired my health. I was very robust and vigorous, but incredibly vociferous as well. One day my mother was totally out of sorts; I had kept her awake all night. The march started at daybreak and Mama settled down to sleep in the carriage, but I began crying again and, despite all my nurse's attempts to comfort me, bawled louder by the hour. Vexed beyond measure, Mama flew into a rage and, snatching me from the arms of the maid, threw me out the window! The hussars cried out in horror, jumped off their horses, and picked me up covered with blood and showing no sign of life. They would have returned me to the carriage, but Papa galloped up to them, took me from their arms and, in floods of tears, placed me on his saddle. Trembling and weeping, as pale as a corpse, he rode on without saying a word or turning his head in the direction where my mother rode. To the astonishment of everyone, I came back to life and, against all expectations, was not permanently maimed. The shock of the fall just left me bleeding from the nose and mouth. Papa raised his eyes to heaven with a joyful feeling of gratitude, and, clutching me to his breast, he went over to the carriage and said to my mother, "Give thanks to God that you are not a murderess! Our daughter is alive, but I will never return her to your power; I'll care for her myself." And with this he rode off and carried me with him until that night's halt without a word or glance toward my mother.

From that memorable day of my life my father entrusted me to God's providence and the care of flank hussar Astakhov, who was always at Papa's side in quarters as well as on the march. I was in my mother's room only at night; as soon as Papa got up and went out, I was taken away, too. My tutor Astakhov carried me around all day, taking me into the squadron stables and sitting me on the horses, giving me a pistol to play with, and brandishing his saber while I clamped my hands and laughed out loud at the sight of the scattering sparks and glittering steel. In the evening he took me to hear the musicians who played various pieces at dusk, and I listened until I fell asleep. Only slumbering could I be brought back inside. If I were not sleeping, I became numb with fear.

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2. Bogatyrs were the warrior heroes of the Russian epic songs called bylina.

3. Durova's biographer, Colonel Sak's, says that the practice of using personal orderlies as nannies to officers' children was still common in the first decade of the twentieth century (5).
and clung howling to Astakhov’s neck at the mere sight of my mother’s room. From the time of my aerial journey out the carriage window, Mama no longer interfered in any way in my life. She had another daughter to console her, this one really as handsome as a cupid and, as the saying goes, the apple of her eye.

Soon after my birth my grandfather forgave my mother and did so in the most solemn way: he went to Kiev, asked the archbishop to absolve him of his impetuous oath never to pardon his daughter, and, once he had obtained pastoral absolution, finally wrote to my mother that he forgave her and blessed her marriage and the child born of it. He asked her to come and see him both to accept the paternal blessing in person and to receive her dowry. My mother had no way of taking advantage of this invitation until Papa was forced to retire. I was four and a half when my father realized that he would have to leave the army. There were two cradles in his quarters in addition to my cot; such a family made life on the march impossible. He went to Moscow to seek a position in the civil service, and my mother took me and the other two children to live with her father until her husband’s return.4

Once she took me from Astakhov’s arms, my mother never knew a single calm or cheerful moment. Each day my strange sallies and knightly spirit angered her. I had memorized all the words of command and was wild about horses, and when my mother tried to make me knit shoeless, I wept and begged her to give me a pistol, as I said, to click. In short, I was making the best possible use of the upbringing Astakhov had given me. Every day my martial propensities grew stronger, and every day my mother liked me less. I never forgot anything that I had learned in the constant company of the hussars; I ran and galloped around the room in all directions, shouting at the top of my voice: “Squadron! To the right, face! From your places, charge—CHARGE!” My aunts laughed out loud and Mama, driven to desperation by it all, could not contain her vexation. She took me to her room, stood me in the corner, and drove me to bitter tears with abuse and threats.

My father obtained a post as mayor of a district capital and moved his entire family there.5 My mother, who had come to dislike me wholeheartedly, seemed bent on doing everything she could to intensify and confirm my already invincible passion for freedom and the military life.

4. Children continued to be born to the Durovs regularly every two years or so until the turn of the century. Only four of them survived to adulthood: Nadezhda; Kleopatra, born in 1791; Vasilij, the first and only son, 1799; and Evgenija, 1801 (Blinov, 415).
5. The city where Durova grew up was Sarapul, on the Kama river in the western foothills of the Urals.
all around the yard. I had no fear that he would carry me outside the gates, because they were still locked. On one occasion this pastime was interrupted by the arrival of the groom who, with a shriek of fear and astonishment, rushed to stop Alcides as he galloped past with me. But the steed arched his head, reared, and broke into a run around the yard, frisking and kicking. It was fortunate for me that Efim was so numb with fear that he lost the use of his voice; otherwise his shout would have alarmed the household and drawn me harsh punishment. I quieted Alcides easily, caressing him with my voice and patting and stroking him. He slowed to a walk and, when I embraced his neck and pressed my face against it, he stopped at once because this was the way I always dismounted or, more accurately, slid down off him. Now Efim approached to take him, muttering through his teeth that he would tell my mother, but I promised to give him all my pocket money if he would say nothing and permit me to lead Alcides back to the stable. At this promise Efim's face cleared; he smiled wryly, stroked his beard, and said, "Well, so be it, if that rogue obeys you better than he does me!" Triumphanty I led Alcides into the stable and, to Efim's astonishment, the savage steed followed me meekly, arching his neck and bending his head to nibble lightly at my hair or shoulder.

With each passing day I grew more bold and enterprising, afraid of nothing on earth except my mother's wrath. It seemed quite odd to me that other girls of my age were frightened of being left alone in the dark; on the contrary, I was prepared in the dead of night to go into a graveyard, a forest, a deserted house, a cave, or a dungeon. In short, there was nowhere I would not have gone as boldly at night as in the daytime. Although I, like other children, had been told tales of ghosts, corpses, wood goblins, robbers, and water nymphs who tickled people to death, and although I believed this nonsense with all my heart, none of it frightened me. On the contrary, I thirsted for dangers and longed to be surrounded by them. If I had had the least freedom, I would have gone looking for them, but my mother's vigilant eye followed my every step and impulse.

One day Mama and some ladies went for an outing into the dense pine forest on the far side of the Kama. She took me with her, as she put it, to keep me from breaking my neck alone at home. This was the very first time in my life that I had been taken out into the open where I could see dense forest and vast fields and the wide river! I could barely catch my breath for joy, and we no sooner came into the forest than I, out of my mind with rapture, immediately ran off and kept running until the voices of the company were no longer audible. Then my joy was complete and perfect: I ran, frisked, picked flowers, and climbed to the tips of tall trees to see farther. I climbed slender birches and, holding tight to the crown,

leaped off; the sapling set me down lightly on the ground. Two hours flew like two minutes! In the meantime they were searching for me and calling me in chorus. I heard them, but how could I part with such captivating freedom? At last, completely exhausted, I returned to the company. I had no trouble locating them, because the voices had never stopped calling me. I found my mother and the other ladies in a terrible state of anxiety. They cried out in joy when they caught sight of me, but Mama, who guessed from my contented face that I had not strayed, but gone off of my own volition, flew into a violent rage. She poked my back and called me a damned pest of a girl, sworn to anger her always and everywhere!

We returned home. Mama pulled me by the ear all the way from the parlor to her bedroom. She took me over to the lace pillow and ordered me to get to work without straightening up or looking around. "Just you wait, you wretch, I'll tie you on a rope and give you nothing but bread to eat!" With these words she went to tell Papa about what she called my monstrous act, and I was left to sort bobbins, set pins, and think about the glories of nature which I had just seen for the first time in all their majesty and beauty. From that day, although my mother's supervision and strictness became even more unremitting, they could no longer either frighten or restrain me.

From morning to night I sat over work which, I must confess, was the vilest imaginable because, unlike other girls, I could not, would not, and did not want to acquire the skill, but ripped, ruined, and tangled it until before me lay a canvas ball with a repulsive, snarled strip stretching across it—my bobbin-lace. I sat patiently over it all day, patiently because my plan was prepared and my intentions resolute. At nightfall, when the house quieted down, the doors were locked, and the light in Mama's room went out, I got up, dressed stealthily, sneaked out across the back porch, and ran straight to the stable. There I took Alcides, led him through the garden to the cattleyard, mounted him, and rode out down a narrow lane straight to the riverbank and Staritsev mountain. Then I dismounted again and led Alcides uphill, holding him by the halter because I didn't know how to bridle him and had no way of getting him to climb the mountain of his own volition. I led him by the halter across the precipitous slope until I reached a level spot, where I looked for a stump.

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6. ... And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more; But dipped its top and set me down again.

—Robert Frost, "Birches"
or hillock from which to remount. Then I slapped Alcides’ neck and
clucked my tongue until the good steed broke into a gallop, a run, and
even a breakneck dash.

At the first hint of dawn I returned home, put the horse in the stable,
and went to sleep without undressing. This was what led at last to the
discovery of my nocturnal excursions. The maid who took care of me
kept finding me fully clothed in bed every morning and told my mother,
who undertook to find out how and why this came about. She herself saw
me going out at midnight fully clothed and, to her inexpressible horror,
leading the wicked stallion out of the stable! She thought I must be
sleepwalking and did not dare stop me or call out for fear of alarming me.
She ordered the manservant and Efim to keep an eye on me, and she
herself went to Papa’s room, roused him, and told him what had hap-
pened. My father, astonished, got up hastily to go and see this singular
occurrence for himself. But it all ended sooner than they expected:
Alcides and I were led back in triumph, each to his proper place. The
servant whom Mother had ordered to follow me saw me trying to mount
the horse and, unlike Mama, decided that I was no sleepwalker. He came
out of ambush and asked me, “And where are you going, miss?”

After this affair my mother wanted without fail to rid herself of my
presence at any cost and decided to take me to my old grandmother
Aleksandrovichava in Little Russia. I had entered my fourteenth year by
then. I was tall, slim, and shapely, but my martial spirit was sketched on
my features and, although I had white skin, bright rosy cheeks, sparkling
eyes, and black brows, every day my mirror and Mama told me that I was
very ugly. My face was pitted from smallpox, my features irregular, and
Mother’s continual reprimand of my freedom, her strict and at times even
cruel treatment of me, had marked my countenance with an expression
of fear and sadness. Perhaps I would at last have forgotten all my hussar
mannerisms and become an ordinary girl like the rest if my mother had
not kept depicting woman’s lot in such a dismal way. In my presence she
would describe the fate of that sex in the most prejudicial terms: woman,
in her opinion, must be born, live, and die in slavery; eternal bondage,
painful dependence, and repression of every sort were her destiny from
the cradle to the grave; she was full of weaknesses, devoid of accomplish-
ments, and capable of nothing. In short, woman was the most unhappy,
worthless, and contemptible creature on earth! This description made
my head reel. I resolved, even at the cost of my life, to part company
from the sex I thought to be under God’s curse. Papa, too, often said, “If I
had a son instead of Nadezhda, I shouldn’t have to worry about my old
age; he would be my staff in the evening of my days.” I would be ready to
weep at these words from the father I loved so extravagantly. These two
contradictory emotions—love for my father and aversion to my own sex—
troubled my young soul with equal force. With a resolve and constancy
rare in one so young I set about working out a plan to escape the sphere
prescribed by nature and custom to the female sex.

Such was my frame of mind and spirit at the beginning of my four-
ten year when my mother delivered me to my grandmother in Little
Russia and left me there.7 My grandfather was no longer alive. The
family consisted of my eighty-year-old grandmother, an intelligent and
pious woman who had once been a beauty and was known for her
unusually gentle disposition; her son, my uncle, a man in his middle
years, comely, kind, sensitive, and insufferably capricious, who was
married to a young woman of rare beauty from the Lizogub family of
Chernigov; and, finally, my aunt, a spinster about forty-five years old.8
I liked my uncle’s young and lovely wife best, but I never remained
willingly in the company of my relations; they were so grand, so devout,
such implacable foes of martial propensities in a girl that in their pres-
ence I was afraid even to think about my cherished intentions. Although
my freedom was in no way restricted and I could roam wherever I wanted
from morning to night without fear of rebuke, I think they would have
condemned me to ecclesiastic penance if I had even dared to hint at
riding horseback, so unreserved was my relations’ horror at the mere idea
of such illicit and unnatural, to their mind, pursuits for women, and
particularly girls.

Under the clear sky of Little Russia my health became perceptibly
better, although at the same time I burned in the sun and turned black
and even uglier than before. Here nobody corseted me or wearied me
with bobbin-lace. With my passionate love for nature and freedom, I
spent all my days either running around the forested parcells of my uncle’s
estate or floating on the Udaj in a large boat of the type that Ukrainians
call a dub. Had they known about this latter pastime, they might not have
permitted it, but I was careful to undertake my navigation after dinner
when my young aunt’s sharp eyes were closed in sleep. My uncle busied
himself with household matters or read the newspaper while my spinster
aunt listened with great interest. There remained only my grandmother
to catch a glimpse of me, but her eyesight was already weak, and I rowed
about under her windows in complete security.

7. The direct distance between Pjartarn and Sanapul is over fifteen hundred kilometers
as the crow flies. The journey would have taken well over a month at best.
8. Durova’s maternal grandmother was Efrosin’ja Grigor’evna Aleksandrovichava,
born Ogrenovichava. The son who inherited the Pjartarn estate was Porfirij; his young
wife was Marfa Jakov’evna, born Lizogub; and his spinster sister was named Ul’jana.
In the spring, another of my aunts, Znachko-Javorskaja, who lived near the city of Lubny, came to see us. She took a liking to me and won my grandmother’s permission to take me to stay with her for the summer.9

Here both my occupations and my pleasures were completely different. My aunt was a strict woman who observed inflexible order and propriety in everything. She lived expansively; she was on good terms with the best society among the landowners of the district; she had a good cook and often gave balls. I found myself in a new sphere. I never heard the female sex abused or reproached and began making my peace with women’s lot, especially as I saw the polite and obliging attentions of men. My aunt dressed me very well and tried to rid my face of sunburn. My military dreams slowly began fading bit by bit from my mind. The position of women no longer seemed so dreadful to me, and at last I grew to like my new way of life. Acquiring a friend completed the pacification of my turbulent designs. Another niece, Ostrogradskaja, who was a year younger than I, was also living with my aunt. We two were inseparable. We spent the morning in our aunt’s room, reading, drawing, or playing; after dinner we were free to roam until teatime and went off at once to the levada (which is what they called the piece of land that usually adjoins the garden, separated from it only by a ditch). I leaped the ditch with the ease of a wild goat, my cousin followed my example, and we spent our afternoon excursion flying throughout the open space of all the neighboring levadas.

My aunt, like all Ukrainian women, was very devout and observed and followed strictly all the rites prescribed by religion. Every holy day she attended high mass, vespers, and matins, and my cousin and I had to do the same. At first I was very reluctant to get up before dawn to go to church, but in our neighborhood there lived a lady landowner named Kiriakova with her son, and they always came to church, too. While we waited for the service to begin, Kiriakova conversed with our aunt, and her son, a young man of twenty-five, would join us, or rather me, because he spoke only to me. He was very good looking, with beautiful black eyes, hair, and brows, and a youthful fresh complexion. I became quite fond of the divine service and always rose for matins even earlier than my aunt. At last my talks with young Kiriak attracted my aunt’s attention. She began observing us and questioned my cousin, who at once told her

9. In addition to the senior Nadezhda Durova and the unmarried Ul’jana, three other Aleksandrovich sisters can be traced in the pages of Vladimir Modzelewski’s Malorossijskij rodoslavnik [Ukrainian Genealogy], 4 vols. (Kiev, 1908–1914); Praskov’ja Znachko-Javorskaja, Anna Ostrogradskaja, and Evrosin’ja (or Fedosia) Butovskaja, whose son edited Durova’s The Cavalry Maiden in 1836.
that Kiriak had taken my hand and asked me to give him my ring, saying
that then he could consider himself sanctioned to speak to my aunt.
Having received this explanation from my cousin, my aunt sent for me:
"What does our neighbor's son talk to you about when we are together?" I
had no gift for dissembling and at once told her everything that had been
said to me. My aunt shook her head; she was not at all pleased. "No," she
said, "that's not the way to ask for a girl's hand. Why declare himself to
you? He should have come straight to your relations."
After that I was sent back to Grandmother. I pined for young Kiriak
long afterwards. That was my first attachment, and I think that if they
had married me to him then, I would have relinquished my martial
designs forever. But the fate that destined me for a battlefield career
decreed otherwise. Old Kiriakova asked my aunt to inquire about my
dowry and, when she found out that it consisted of a few yards of ribbon,
linen, and muslin, forbade her son to think of me.

I had entered my fifteenth year when one day my uncle received a
letter that plunged us all into sadness and perplexity. It was from Papa.
He was writing to my mother, begging her to forgive him and come
home, and swearing to give it all up. None of us could understand
anything from this letter. Where was my mother? Why was the letter
addressed to her in Little Russia? Had she parted from my father, and if
so, why? My uncle and grandmother were lost in conjecture.

Two weeks or so after the letter came, I was out boating on the Udaj
when suddenly I heard the shrill voice of Grandmother's chambermaid:
"Pannochko, pannochko! idy't do babusi!" This summons to Grand-
mother frightened me. I turned the boat around and mentally bade
farewell to my obliging dub, supposing that now they would order it
to the pilings and that my excursions on the river were finished
forever. "How did Grandmother happen to see me?" I asked, pulling up
to the shore.

"Grandmother didn't see you," replied Agafja, "but Stepan has come
for you. Your mother sent him."
Mama? For me? How can that be? Oh, beautiful land, must I really
leave you? ... I hurried to the house. There I saw the old servant who
had been with my father on all his campaigns. Gray-haired Stepan
respectfully handed me a letter. My father wrote that he and my mother
wished me to come home right away, that they were tired of living apart
from me. I found this incomprehensible. I knew that my mother disliked
me, and thus it was Papa who wanted me with him. But why on earth
had my mother agreed? No matter what I thought and how much I
deplored the necessity of leaving Little Russia, the constraints on my

10. "Missy, missy, you're to go to your grandmother!" (Ukrainian)
marriage for her, but then he took her back again, and this time my mother, in despair, decided to part forever from her unfaithful husband; she set out for her mother's house in Little Russia, but stopped in Kazan. Unaware of this, Papa wrote to Little Russia to persuade her to forgive him and return home. Just then he himself got a letter from my mother. She wrote that she was not strong enough to remain away from him; she could not bear the thought of parting forever from a husband whom she still loved beyond measure even though he had wronged her so cruelly. She implored him to think twice and return to his obligations. Papa was moved; he repented and asked my mother to return. It was then that she sent for me, supposing that the presence of his beloved daughter would make him forget entirely the unworthy object of his attachment.

Unhappy woman! She was fated to be deceived in all her expectations and to drink the cup of grief to the dregs. Papa went from one attachment to the next and never came back to my mother. She languished, wasted away, fell ill, went to Perm to be treated by the famous Oral, and died at thirty-five, more a victim of misfortune than disease.11 Alas! in vain I wash these lines with my tears. Woe to me, the first cause of all my mother's troubles! My birth, sex, traits, propensities—none of them were what my mother would have wished. My existence poisoned her life; constant vexation ruined her already naturally hot-tempered disposition and made her cruel. Even her exceptional beauty could not save her then. My father ceased loving her, and an untimely grave put an end to her love, hatred, suffering, and misfortunes.

My mother, who no longer took any pleasure in society, led a reclusive life. I took advantage of this circumstance to win permission from my father to ride horseback. Papa ordered a Cossack chekmen tailored for me and gave me his Alcides.12 From that time on I was always my father's companion on his excursions outside the city. He took pleasure in teaching me to ride handsomely, keeping a firm seat in the saddle and managing the horse skillfully. I was a quick student. Papa admired my ease, skill, and fearlessness. He said that I was the living image of him as a youth and that, had I been born a boy, I would have been the staff of his old age and an honor to his name. This set my head awhirl, and this time for good! I was no child; I had turned sixteen. The seductive pleasures of society, life in Little Russia, and Kiriak's black eyes faded from my memory like a dream; brightly colored scenes of my childhood in camp among the husars were sketched in my imagination instead. It all revived in my soul. I could not understand why I had not thought of my plan for nearly two years. My grief-stricken mother now described woman's lot in even more horrific colors. Martial ardor flared in my soul with incredible force; my mind swarmed with dreams, and I began searching actively for means to realize my previous intention: to become a warrior and a son to my father and to part company forever from the sex whose sad lot and eternal dependence had begun to terrify me.13

Before Mama went to Perm to seek treatment, a Cossack regiment arrived in our city to suppress the Tatars' incessant thievery and murder.14 Papa often invited the colonel and his officers to dinner and went for rides with them outside the town, but I took the precaution never to take part in these excursions. I had to be sure that they never saw me in the chekmen and had no idea how I looked in men's clothing. I had a flash of inspiration when the Cossacks arrived in the city. Now I saw a sure way to carry out the plan I had undertaken so long ago. I saw the possibility of waiting for the Cossacks' departure and joining them for the journey to areas where regular army regiments were stationed.15

At last the decisive time came to act according to the plan as I had worked it out. The Cossacks received the order to move out, and they left on September 15, 1866. Their first full day's halt would be some fifty verst from the city. The seventeenth was my name-day, and the day on which, through fate, coincidence of circumstance, or invincible propensitiv, it was fixed for me to quit my father's house and take up an entirely new way of life.16 On September 17, I awoke before dawn and sat by my window to await its appearance; it might well be the last I ever saw in my own land. What awaited me in the turbulent world? Would not my mother's curse and my father's grief pursue me? Would they survive? Could they await the realization of my colossal scheme? How horrible it would be if their death took from me the goal of my actions! These thoughts now clustered and now passed one after another through my head. My heart constricted and tears glistened on my lashes. Just then

11. Fedor Gral's life and benefactions are described in: Modest Kittari, "Vospominanija o doktor Gral," Permský sbornik (Moscow, 1859), bk. 1, 42-49.
12. Chekmen, a long tunic with a fitted waist.
13. During the seven years missing from this account of her years at home, Durova married Vasili Chernov, a civil servant, on October 25, 1861. The birth of their son Ivan on January 7, 1863, was registered in Sarapul. After her husband was transferred to Irib, Durova left him and returned to her father's house.
14. The Cossacks were people, mainly of Ukrainian and Russian stock, who had gradually been granted land on the frontiers and an autonomy unknown in Russia proper in exchange for service as auxiliary mounted police and cavalry.
15. By mid-1866 there was a strong probability that the Cossacks would be sent to Russia's western borders to reinforce the armies preparing to check the French in Prussia.
16. The routine on long marches was two or three days on the road, bivouacking at night, for each full day of rest in a populated settlement. Thus Durova's plan was to reach the site of the Cossacks' September 17th halt before they moved on early the following morning.
dawn broke. Its scarlet glow quickly flooded the sky, and its beautiful
light, flowing into my room, lit up the objects there: my father's saber,
hanging on the wall directly opposite the window, seemed to catch fire.
My spirits revived. I took the saber off the wall, unsheathed it, and
looked at it, deep in thought. This saber had been my toy when I was still
in swaddling-clothes, the comfort and exercise of my adolescent years;
why should it not now be my defense and glory in the military sphere? "I
will wear you with honor," I said, kissed the blade, and returned it to its
scabbard. The sun rose. That day Mama presented me with a gold chain,
and Papa, three hundred rubles; even my little brother gave me his gold
watch. As I accepted my parents' gifts, I thought sorrowfully that they
had no idea that they were outfitting me for a distant and dangerous road.

I spent the day with my girl friends. At eleven o'clock in the evening I
came to say good-night to Mama as I usually did before going to bed.
Unable to suppress my emotions, I kissed her hands several times and
clasped them to my heart, something I had never done before nor dared
to do. Although Mama didn't love me, she was moved by these extraor-
dinary effusions of childlike affection and obedience; kissing me on the
head, she said, "Go with God!" These words held a great significance for
me, who had never before heard a single affectionate word from my
mother. I took them as a blessing, kissed her hand for the last time, and
left.

My rooms were in the garden. I occupied the ground floor of our little
garden house, and Papa lived upstairs. He was in the habit of coming to
see me for half an hour every evening. He enjoyed hearing me tell him
where I had gone and what I had been doing or reading. Now, as I waited
for my father's customary visit, I laid my Cossack apparel on the bed
behind the curtain, set an armchair by the stove, and stood beside it to
wait for Papa to come to his rooms. Soon I heard the rustle of leaves
under the footsteps of someone coming down the lane. My heart leaped!
The door opened, and Papa came in. "Why are you so pale?" he asked,
sitting down in the armchair. "Are you well?"

With an effort I suppressed the sigh that threatened to rend my breast.
This was the last time that my father would come into my room with the
assurance of finding his daughter there. Tomorrow he would pass it in
grief, with a shudder. It would hold only a sepulchral void and silence!
Papa looked fixedly at me, "But what's wrong with you! You must be
ill."

I said that I was only tired and chilled.
"Why don't you have them heat your room? It's getting damp and
cold." After a short silence Papa asked, "Why don't you order Efim to run
Alcides on a lunge? There's no getting near him. You yourself haven't
ridden him for a long time, and you won't permit anyone else to do it.

He's so restive that he rears up even in his stall; you really must exercise
him."

I said that I would order it done and fell silent again.
"You seem melancholy, my friend. Goodnight; go to bed," said Papa,
getting up and kissing my forehead. He put one arm around me and
pressed me to his breast. I kissed both his hands, trying to hold back the
tears which were already flooding my eyes. The quivering of my body
betrayed the emotions in my heart. Alas! Papa ascribed it to the cold.
"You see, you're chilled through," he said. I kissed his hands once more.
"My sweet daughter!" said Papa, patting my cheek. He went out. I knelt
beside the armchair he had sat in and bowed to the ground before it,
kissing and washing with my tears the spot where his foot had rested.

Half an hour later, when my sorrow had abated somewhat, I got up to
take off my female clothing. I went over to the mirror, cut off my curls,
and put them away in a drawer. I took off my black satin dressing-gown
and began putting on my Cossack uniform. After I had tied the black sash
around my waist and put on the high cap with a crimson crown, I
spent a quarter of an hour studying my transformed appearance. My
cropped hair gave me a completely different countenance. I was certain
that nobody would ever suspect my sex. 17

A loud rustle of leaves and the snort of a horse told me that Efim was
leading Alcides into the rear yard. For the last time I stretched my arms
to the image of the Mother of God which had received my prayers for so
many years and went out. The door of my father's house finally closed
behind me, and—who knows?—perhaps it might never be open to me
again!

I ordered Efim to take Alcides by the direct road to Startsev mountain
and wait for me at the edge of the forest. I ran hastily to the bank of the
Kama and dropped my dressing-gown there, leaving it on the sand with
all the trappings of female dress. I was not so barbarous as to intend for
my father to think that I had drowned, and I was convinced he would not
do so. I only wanted to make it possible for him to answer without
confusion any embarrassing questions from our short-witted acquaint-
ances. After leaving the clothing on the bank, I took a goat track which
led directly uphill. The night was cold and clear, and the moon was
shining at its fullest. I stopped for one last look at the beautiful and
majestic view that opened out from the mountain: beyond the river, Perm
and Orenburg provinces were visible to a boundless distance. Vast, dark
forests and mirror lakes were displayed as if in a painting. The city at the
foot of the precipitous mountain slumbered in the midnight hush. The

17. Durova's service record (Nov. 6, 1807) describes her as about 5'5" tall and having
a swarthy, pock-marked face, light brown hair, and hazel eyes (Saks, 16).
moon's rays played on and were reflected from the gilt domes of the cathedral and shone on the roof of the house where I grew up. . . . What were my father's thoughts now? Did his heart tell him that tomorrow his beloved daughter would no longer come to wish him good morning?

In the nocturnal silence Efim's shout and Alcides' powerful snort came distinctly to my hearing. I ran toward them, and I was just in time: Efim was shivering with cold and cursing Alcides, whom he could not manage, and me for my delay. I took my horse from his hands, mounted, gave him the fifty rubles I had promised him, and begged him not to say anything to Papa. Then I released Alcides' reins and disappeared in a flash from the dumbfounded Efim's view.

Alcides galloped at the same rapid pace for four versts but then, since I had to cover fifty versts that night to reach the hamlet where I knew the Cossack regiment had been assigned to halt, I reined in my steed's quick gallop and went at a walk. Soon I came into a dark pine forest some thirty versts across. Wishing to conserve Alcides' strength, I kept him walking and, surrounded by the deathly hush of the forest and the dark of the autumn night, I became absorbed in my own thoughts: And so I'm at liberty. Free! Independent! I have taken the freedom that is rightfully mine—the freedom that is a precious gift from heaven, the inalienable prerogative of every human being! I have found a way to take it and guard it from all future claims against it; from now to my grave, it will be my portion and my reward!

Storm clouds covered the sky. The forest became so dark that I could not see twenty feet ahead of me, and at last a cold north wind rose, forcing me to step up my pace. Alcides broke into a full trot, and at dawn I arrived in the hamlet where the Cossack regiment had spent their day of rest.
At last the call to supper interrupted the reverend fathers' pious ruminations, the young samp's grimaces, and my consternation. We took our places. The rascal B. whispered in my ear that hospitality obliged him to seat me between his teachers so I could have the full pleasure of their conversation. I tried as quickly as I could to sit down beside him, but I failed: a huge hand gripped mine, and a voice rang out in a low roar almost at the ceiling, "Wouldn't you like to take the seat between us? I beg you humbly, here, if you please!"

That supper was a genuine ordeal for me. Since I don't speak Polish, I didn't know how to answer my terrible neighbors to the right and left. Moreover, I had another fear, that of overeating on the delicious food of Poland. I was deathly hot, I blushed incessantly, and sweat stood out in drops on my forehead. In short, I was in torment and extremely comical. But at last the chairs scraped loudly, and the huge fathers got up. Their muttered prayers floated over my head like the distant rumble of thunder. After the completion of all possible formalities, I was overjoyed to find myself outside the monastery enclosure. My first impulse on going out the gates was to put distance at a near run between me and the walls of the hospitable retreat in which it was so melancholy to live and so difficult to breathe.

The Ataman regiment is on its way to Grodno. The Cossacks are sharpening their lances and sabers. There is no approaching Alcides; he snorts, frisks, and kicks. My good steed! What lot awaits us?25

We have arrived in Grodno. The regiment will be here for only two days, and then it will go abroad. The colonel sent for me: "Now you have a good chance to enlist in any of the cavalry squadrons forming here which suits you. But take my advice. Be frank with the commander of the regiment you decide to join. That alone isn't enough to get you accepted as a cadet, but at least you will win his favorable disposition and good opinion. And, meanwhile, make haste to write your parents to send you the necessary proofs of nobility without which you can either be rejected outright or, at the very least, remain for a long time in the ranks.16

I thanked him for the advice and for the protection which he had so long extended me and at last bade him farewell. The next day the Cossacks went abroad, and I remained behind in Grodno.

5. Napoleon defeated the Prussians at Jena in October 1806. The succeeding Russian movement into Poland was met by the French with the occupation of Warsaw in November. After a series of clashes culminating in the bloody and indecisive battle of Eylau in the winter of 1806-1807, the Russians and French withdrew to prepare for a decisive spring campaign in East Prussia.

6. A cadet—the Russians used the German word "Junker"—was a nobleman who enlisted as a common soldier.

Grodno. I am alone, totally alone! I'm staying in a roadside tavern. Alcides incessantly neighs and paws the ground; he too has been left alone. From my window I can see passing throngs of uhlan's playing music and dancing. They are amicably inviting all the young men to join in their merriment. I am going to find out what is going on.

It is called the verbunok!7 God help me, if there is no other way of joining a regular regiment except through the verbunok! That would be extremely disagreeable. While I was watching this dancing expedition, the swordbelts-wearing cadet who was in charge of it (or, as they call him, the nameistnik or deputy), approached me: "How do you like our life? It's gay, isn't it?"

I replied that it was indeed and walked away from him. The next day I learned that this regiment was the Polish Horse, that it was recruiting to bring the regiment up to strength after heavy losses in battle, and that it was commanded by a captain.9 Once I had gathered this information, I searched out the quarters of the deputy who spoke to me yesterday. He told me that, if I wanted to enlist and serve in their regiment, I could address my request to their Captain Kazimirski and that there was absolutely no need for me to dance with the throng of ruffians worming its way into the regiment. I was overjoyed by the possibility of joining the army without submitting to the odious ritual of dancing in the streets, and I told the deputy so. He could not help laughing: "But it's all done voluntarily, you see, and anyone who doesn't want to take part in our bacchanalia can easily avoid it. Would you like to come with me to see

7. The verbunok was a common recruiting ritual in Hungary and Poland. Denis Davydov speaks of printers dealing unceremoniously with his poetry "the way they used to recruit (verbunov) various tramps for hussar regiments: at noisy dinners and merry feasts, amidst uproarious revelry." (Autobiography), Voenny zapiska [Moscow, 1940], 36.

8. The "swordbelt cadet" in Russian was portujej-junker, a term applied to a cadet who had been promoted to sergeant and was eligible for and awaiting an opening for commission; the Polish equivalent was nameistnik.

9. In the reign of Emperor Paul I (1796-1801) three regiments of Russian light cavalry, all lance-bearing and designated from 1806 as uhlan loregiments—the Polish Horse (Konnopoliski), Lithuanian (Litovski), and Tatar (Tatarski) regiments—were formed in the lands Russia acquired by the three partitions of Poland between 1772 and 1795. Paul wanted "to furnish a suitable occupation for the large numbers of Polish nobility" (Faddei Bulgarin, Vospominanija [St. Petersburg, 1846], part 2, 157). Durova was to end up serving in two out of three of these regiments. The light cavalry consisted of hussars and uhlan. Their functions were similar to those of the Cossacks; on campaign they made up the advance- and rear-guards, carried out reconnaissance and picket duty, and in battle covered the flanks of the infantry; in peacetime they were frequently assigned to patrol the borders. Uhlan carried sabers and a brace of pistols; the first ranks bore lances, and the best marksmen in the rear ranks had carbines (A. A. Kushnlevnik, "Armija v 1805-1814 gg.," Otechestvennaja svol' i russkoe obshchestvo, vol. 3 [Moscow, 1912], 67). That a captain instead of the usual colonel was commanding the Polish Horse is an indication of the severity of the death toll in the winter campaign.
Kazimirski? He'll be very pleased to acquire such a recruit. And, besides, I'll cheer him up for the rest of the day when I tell him about your misgivings.” So saying, the deputy burst out laughing wholeheartedly, and off we went.

From the deputy’s room we had to cross the large public room that, as I said before, is to be found in every tavern. It was full of uhlans and prospective recruits, all of them dancing and singing. I clutched the deputy’s arm and tried to get through the noisy crowd as quickly as I could, but just then one of the uhlans clamped his arm around my waist, flew with me into the circle, and with a stamp of his foot prepared to begin the mazurka in which a few couples were already capering and sliding helter-skelter. The deputy freed me from the arms of these enchanted dancers, his laughter redoubled by this unexpected incident. At last we arrived at Kazimirski’s quarters.

Cavalry Captain Kazimirski is about fifty years old, with a noble and at the same time martial appearance. All the features of his agreeable face are imbued with good nature and valor. As I came in, he evidently took me for a Cossack officer, bowed politely, and asked, “What can I do for you?”

I said that I wished to serve in the Polish Horse and, since I knew that he was in charge of bringing the regiment up to strength, I had come to ask him to let me enlist.

“You, enlist in the Polish Horse!” said the captain in astonishment. “You’re a Cossack. You belong to the Army of the Don, and you should be serving there.”

“My attire has deceived you. I am a Russian nobleman and, consequently, I can choose any form of service I wish.”

“Can you prove it?”

“No. But if you are willing to trust my word alone that I really am a Russian nobleman, I will know how to value your indulgence, and at the end of the campaign I pledge to furnish the regiment with everything necessary to confirm the truth of my words.”

“How do you come to be wearing a Cossack uniform?”

“My father did not want to enroll me in the army. I ran away in secret, joined company with a Cossack regiment, and came here with it.”

“How old are you? What’s your name?”

“I’m in my seventeenth year. My name is Durov.”

The captain turned to one of the officers of his regiment: “What do you think? Shall we take him?”

“It’s up to you. But why shouldn’t we? There’s a war on, we need men, and he promises to be a gallant lad.”

10 According to her service record, Durova enlisted under the name of Aleksandr Sokolov.

“But if he’s a Cossack and trying to escape his own folk for some reason by enlisting in a regular regiment?”

“It’s not possible, Captain! It’s written on his face that he’s not lying. At that age they haven’t learned to dissemble. Besides, if you turn him down, he will just go on to someone who won’t be so overly cautious and you’ll lose a good recruit. . . .”

This entire exchange was in Polish. The captain turned to me. “I agree to accept your word, Durov! I hope that your conduct will justify my trust.”

I would have liked to say that it would not be long before he saw for himself whether I was worthy of the honor of being accepted as one of the warriors with the enviable good fortune of serving Alexander, but I kept silent, fearing they would take this as an unseemly boast. I said only that I had a horse and would like to serve on him if I could.

“Impossible!” said the captain. “You will be given an army horse. However, you can keep him with you until you get a chance to sell him.”

“Sell him! Alcides!” I cried involuntarily. “Oh, God preserve me from that misfortune! No sir, Captain, I have money. I’ll feed my horse at my own expense, and I won’t part from him for anything on earth.”

Kazimirski was himself a cavalryman from the cradle; my attachment to the best of wartime comrades pleased him greatly. He said that my horse could have a place in his stable and feed as well, I could ride him when we went abroad, and he himself would undertake to secure permission for me to serve on him. After this he sent for one of the uhlans on duty with him and put me under his supervision, ordering him to teach me to ride in formation, wield a saber, shoot, master a lance, and to saddle, unsaddle, pack, and curry my horse. When I have learned something about all of that, he is to give me a uniform and put me on duty. The uhlans listened to the order and took me at once to the musterroom—which is what they call the cottage, sometimes merely a shed, where young soldiers are instructed in all that pertains to military service.

Every day I get up at dawn and head for the musterroom; from there we all go together to the stables. My uhlans mentor praises my quick comprehension and constant readiness to practice evolutions, if need be from morning to night. He says that I’ll be a gallant lad. I must confess, however, that brandishing the heavy lance—especially the completely worthless maneuver of swinging it over my head—makes me deathly tired, and I have already hit myself on the head several times. I am also ill-at-ease with the saber; it always seems to me that I will cut myself. I would more readily suffer a wound, however, than display the slightest timidity.

I spend all morning in training and then go to dine with Kazimirski,
potatoes onto the floor, and then, however, rushed at once to pick them up. This last action, the reason for which I could only conjecture, made me laugh.

Our platoon commander, Lieutenant Boshnjakov, has taken Wyszemirski and me into his quarters. Being well brought up, he treats us both as it becomes a gentleman to treat equals. We are living in the landowner's house. They have given us—our officer, that is—a large room separated by a hallway from the rooms of our host. Wyszemirski and I are the total masters of this chamber, because our lieutenant is almost always out and rarely sleeps at home. He spends all his time in a neighboring village at the house of an elderly landowner, a widow. She has a pretty daughter, and our lieutenant's valet tells us that he is mortally smitten with her. The wife of our landowner, a young lady of rare beauty, is very unhappy that her lodger does not stay in his own quarters. Every time she sees me or Wyszemirski she asks with a charming little burr, "What does your officer do at NN's! He is there from morning to night and night to morning!" From me she hears only one answer: "I don't know." But Wyszemirski finds it amusing to assure her that the lieutenant is afraid of losing his peace of heart and thus flees his dangerous quarters.

I have become accustomed to my fetters—that is, to my army boots—and now I run as lightly and tirelessly as before. But the heavy oak lance still nearly breaks my arm off in drill, especially when I have to swing it over my head. What a vexatious maneuver!

We are on our way abroad! Into battle! I am both happy and sad. If I am killed, what will become of my old father? He loved me.

In a few hours I shall leave Russia and be in a strange land! I am writing to my father where I am and what I have become. I write that I fall to his feet and embrace his knees, imploring him to forgive my flight, give me his blessing, and permit me to follow the path essential to my happiness. My tears fell on the paper as I wrote, and they will speak for me to my father's heart.

I had no sooner carried the letter to the post when the order was given to lead out the horses—we are moving out right away. I am being permitted to ride, serve, and go into battle on Alcides. We are on our way to Prussia, and, as far as I can tell, we are in no great hurry. Our marches are moderate, with halts as usual every third or fourth day.

On the third march Wyszemirski said that the next halt was not far from the hamlet of an uncle, with whom his sister lives and is being brought up. "I'm going to ask the captain for permission to ride over there for a day. Will you go with me, Durov?"

"If they let me, I'll be glad to go," I answered.

We went to see the captain. When he heard what we wanted, he sent us off at once, merely ordering Wyszemirski to take good care of his horse and emphasizing to us both that we had to be back in the squadron without fail on the second day. Off we went. The estate of landowner Kunat, Wyszemirski's uncle, was five miles from the village where our squadron would spend the day and, although we trotted all the way, we did not arrive until the dead of night. The silence was broken only by a monotonous knocking sound from inside the high fence that enclosed the spacious yard of the manor; it was the watchman making his rounds and hitting something against a board. The gates were not locked, and we rode unhindered into a smooth, broad yard covered with green grass. But as soon as our horses' hoofbeats were heard in the still of the night, a pack of loudly barking watchdogs instantly surrounded us. I started to dismount anyway, but when I caught sight of a new arrival running up to us, a dog nearly on a level with my horse, I got back into the saddle and resolved not to get down even if we had to wait until dawn for someone to chase away the beasts attacking us. At last the watchman came into sight carrying his clapper. He recognized Wyszemirski at once and was delighted. At his first sign the dogs retreated to their kennels. Servants appeared, brought lights, took our horses and led them off to the stables, and invited us into the overseer's house, because the masters were asleep and the doors locked tight all around.

I don't know how the news of Wyszemirski's arrival penetrated the locked doors of the house, but his sister, who was sleeping near her aunt's bedroom, heard of it and came at once to see us. She was a pretty child about thirteen years old. She curtsied solemnly before her brother, saying "Jak sie masz?" and rushed in tears to hug him. I couldn't understand the contrast. They served us supper and brought rugs, pillows, straw, and sheets to make up beds for us. Panna Wyszemirskaja rebelled against these arrangements. She said that the bedding was unnecessary, it would soon be daytime, and her brother would surely rather sit and talk to her than sleep. The overseer laughed and gave her the choice of going to her room and letting us go to sleep or staying and lying down between us to talk to her brother. The little girl said, "Wyjdź się, pane ekonomie!" and went away, after kissing her brother and bowing to me.

The next day they called us to coffee with Pan Kunat. The imposing-
looking Polish gentleman was sitting with his wife and sons in an old-fashioned parlor lined with crimson damask. The chairs and sofas were upholstered in the same fabric and decorated with a fringe which had undoubtedly once been gold but was now all tarnished and blackened. The room had a gloomy air completely at odds with the kind and good-natured appearance of its owners. They embraced their nephew, bowed politely to me, and invited us to share their breakfast.

The entire family took the greatest liking to me. They asked me my age and where I came from, and when I told them that I lived not far from Siberia, Kunat's wife shrieked in surprise and looked at me with new curiosity, as if an inhabitant of Siberia were a supernatural being. Throughout Poland people have a strange concept of Siberia. Kunat looked up on the map the city where my father lives and assured me with a chuckle that I was mistaken in calling myself a Siberian; on the contrary, I was an Asian. I saw paper and pencil on the table and asked permission to sketch something. "Oh, gladly," answered my hosts. I had not practiced this agreeable art for a long time and was so glad to have the chance to draw a picture that I sat over my voluntary task for more than two hours. When I had finished sketching Andromeda on the cliff, I was showered with praise by Kunats young and old. I thanked them for their indulgence to my mediocre talent. I would have liked to present the picture to panna Wyszemirski, but the elder lady took it from my hands, saying, "If you have no use for it, give it to me. I will tell everybody that a Polish Horse soldier, a native of Siberia, drew it!"

Kunat heard her. "Excuse me, my dear, you're wrong. Durov is an Asian. Here, see for yourself," he said, dragging the huge map over to his wife's table.

The next day we said goodbye to the Kunats. They rode with us for about ten versts in an open carriage. "Sketch a landscape of our village, Durov," said Kunat's wife. "It will remind you sometimes of people who have come to love you like a son." I said that I would never forget them even without that. At last we parted. The Kunats' carriage turned back, and we proceeded at a light gallop.

Wyszemirski was quiet and sullen. His saddlebags were filled with various provisions and loomed over the flanks of his horse in two large mounds. At last he began talking. "Let's go at a walk; Uncle's gifts have overloaded my horse's back. Why did I go to see them? Strangers are dearer to them than family! They were occupied only with you, and I might as well have not been there at all. What good are relations like that!"

Wyszemirski's pride was suffering cruelly from the clear predilection his family had shown me. I tried to placate him. "What do I care, Wyszemirski, whether your uncle and aunt were occupied with me, when your sister never once glanced at me and never said a word to me the entire time we were with them? Would you like to trade? You take your uncle and aunt's attention, and give me the caresses, tears, and kisses of your sister."

Wyszemirski sighed, smiled in a wry, melancholy way, and began telling me that his little sister complained of too strict custody and constraint. At once I remembered my life in my father's house, Mama's strictness, my cruel bondage, the endless hours bent over work; I remembered—and my face clouded with sorrow. I sighed in my turn, and the two of us traveled the rest of the way in silence.

Today our squadron rejoined the regiment. Tomorrow Captain Kazimirski must present us all for review by Major-General Kachowski, and tomorrow also we will all be assigned to other squadrons.

The review is over. Kazimirski had the courtesy not to put me in the ranks of the recruits, but presented me individually to Kachowski. He assigned me to the leib-squadron commanded by Captain Galéra.

At last my dreams have come true! I am a warrior! I am in the Polish Horse, I bear arms, and, moreover, fortune has placed me in one of the bravest regiments of our army!
May 22, 1807. Guttstadt. For the first time I have seen a battle and been in it. What a lot of absurd things they told me about the first battle, about the fear, timidity, and the last, desperate courage! What rubbish! Our regiment went on the attack several times, not all at once but taking turns by squadron. I was berated for joining the attack with each new squadron. However, this was honestly not from any excess of bravery, but simply from ignorance; I thought that was how it was done, and I was amazed when the sergeant-major of another squadron, alongside which I was racing like a whirlwind, shouted at me, "Get the hell out of here! What are you galloping here for?" I returned to my squadron, but, instead of taking my place in formation, I went on riding around nearby. The novelty of the scene absorbed all my attention: the menacing and majestic boom of cannon fire, the roar or kind of rumble of the flying balls, the mounted troops galloping by, the glittering bayonets of the infantry, the roll of drums, and the firm pace and calm look with which our infantry regiments advanced on the enemy—all this filled my soul with sensations that I have no words to express.

I came close to losing my priceless Alcides. While I was riding around, as I said before, near my squadron and looking over the curious scene of battle, I caught sight of several enemy dragoons surounding a Russian officer and knocking him off his horse with a pistol shot. He fell, and they prepared to hack at him as he lay. Instantly I rushed toward them with my lance tilted. I can only suppose that this scatterbrained audacity frightened them, because in a flash they abandoned the officer and scattered. I galloped over to the wounded man and stopped above him; for a couple of minutes I watched him in silence. He lay with his eyes closed and gave no sign of life; he obviously thought that it was the enemy who stood over him. At last he risked a glance, and I at once asked him if he wanted to get on my horse.

"Oh, be so kind, my friend!" he said in a barely audible voice. At once I dismounted from my horse and with great effort managed to raise the wounded man, but here the aid I could render him came to an end: he fell chestdown across my arm and I, barely able to keep my feet, had no idea what to do and how to get him onto Alcides, whom I was also holding by the reins with my other hand. This situation would have ended very disadvantageously for us both—that is, for the officer and for me—except that fortunately a soldier from his regiment rode over to us and helped me to seat the wounded man on my horse. I told the soldier to send the horse to Recruit Durov in the Polish Horse regiment, and the dragoon told me that the officer I had saved was Lieutenant Panin of the Finnish Dragoons and that they would return my horse immediately.

The officer was carried off to his regiment, and I set out for mine. I felt at a complete disadvantage, left on foot among charges, gunfire, and swordfights. Seeing everywhere men either flying by like lightning or quietly galloping in various directions with complete confidence in their good steeds, I exclaimed, "Alas, my Alcides! Where is he now?" I deeply repented having so rashly given up my horse—and even more when my captain, after first asking me with concern, "Did they kill your horse, Durov? Are you wounded?" shouted at me in vexation, "Get away from the front, you scamp!" when he heard how I happened to be wandering about on foot. Quickly, albeit sadly, I headed for the spot where I saw lances with the pennons of the Polish Horse. The men I passed said with compassion, "Oh, my God! Look, what a young boy has been wounded!" Nobody who saw an uhlans on foot in a uniform covered with blood could think anything else. As I mentioned, the wounded officer had lain chestdown across my arm, and I have to assume that his was a chest wound, because my sleeve was all bloody.

To my inexpressible joy, Alcides has been returned to me—not quite the way I hoped, but at least returned. I was walking pensively through the fields to my regiment, when suddenly I saw our Lieutenant Podwyszącki riding away from the enemy position on my horse. I was beside myself with joy and, without stopping to wonder how my horse had turned up under Podwyszącki, ran over to stroke and caress Alcides, who also expressed his joy by frisking and neighing loudly.

"Is this really your horse?" asked the astonished Podwyszącki.

I recounted my adventure to him. He too had no praise for my rashness. He said that he had bought my horse from Cossacks for two gold pieces. I begged him to return Alcides and take from me the money he had paid for him.

"Very well, but let me keep him today. My horse was killed, and I have nothing to ride in action!" And with this he spurred Alcides and galloped off on him. I was close to weeping as I saw my comrades-in-arms in strange hands, and I swore with all my heart never again to give up my horse as long as I live! At last this agonizing day came to an end. Podwyszącki returned Alcides to me, and our army is now pursuing the retreating enemy.

May 24. On the banks of the Passarge. What a strange affair! We made so little haste to pursue the enemy that he managed to cross this little river, on the banks of which we are now standing, and met us with
artillery, which is a most disadvantageous situation, because the insult is
taken without response—that is, no matter what happens, you must stand your ground without moving.

Even now I do not see anything frightening in battle, but I see many
men as white as sheets, I see them duck when a shell flies over as if they
could evade it. Evidently in these men, fear has more force than reason.
I have already seen a great many killed and severely wounded. It is pitiful
to watch the latter moaning and crawling over the so-called field of
honor. What can mitigate the horror of a position like that for a common
soldier? A recruit? For an educated man it is a completely different
matter: the lofty feeling of honor, heroism, devotion to the emperor, and
sacred duty to his native land compel him to face death fearlessly, endure
suffering courageously, and part with life calmly.

For the first time danger was so close to me that it could not have been
closer. A grenade landed under the belly of my horse and at once
exploded. Whistling fragments flew in all directions. Stunned and showered with dirt, I barely kept my seat on Alcides, who gave such a leap to the
side that I thought he was possessed by the devil. Poor Wyszemirski,
who screws up his eyes at every bullet, says that such a violent caper
would have thrown him. But the most astonishing thing is that not a single fragment struck either me or Alcides! This is so extraordinary that
my comrades cannot stop marveling at it. Oh, it is clear that my father’s
prayers and my old grandmother’s blessing are preserving my life amid
these terrible, bloody scenes.

It has been raining heavily ever since morning. I am shivering; nothing
I have on is dry. Rain streams unimpeded onto my helmet, across my
helmet onto my head, down my face, under my collar, over my entire
body, and into my boots. It fills them and runs in several streams onto
the ground. I am quivering like an aspen leaf in every limb. At last we have been ordered to pull back; another cavalry regiment is going to take our
place. And it is long overdue! We have been standing here almost the
entire day. We are soaked to the bones and stiff with cold, we no longer
look at all human, and, moreover, we have lost many men.

When our regiment took up a position beyond the range of enemy
bullets, I asked the captain for permission to make a quick trip into
Heilsberg, which is a verst away from us. I needed to get Alcides shod—
he has lost a shoe—and, besides, I wanted to buy something to eat. I was
so hungry that I even looked with envy at a chunk of bread one of our
officers was holding. The captain permitted me to go, merely ordering
me to return as quickly as possible, since night was falling and the
regiment might change position. Alcides and I, both of us shivering from
cold and hunger, raced like a whirlwind to Heilsberg. I put my horse into
the first wayside tavern I came across and, seeing blacksmiths there
shoeing Cossack horses, asked them to shoe mine also. I went inside. In
the parlor a large fire was burning in a kind of hearth or fireplace of
unusual construction. I sat down at once in the large leather armchair
standing beside it and barely had time to give the Jewess money to buy me
some bread before falling instantly into a deep sleep. Fatigue, cold from
my damp clothes, hunger, pain in all my limbs from long hours on
horseback, and my tender age not yet conditioned to endure so many
combined rigors—all this exhausted my strength and betrayed me defen-
selessly into the power of a sleep as untimely as it was dangerous. I was
wakened by someone shaking my shoulder with great force. I opened my
eyes and looked around dumbfounded. I couldn’t understand where I
was, what I was doing there, or even what I myself had become. Al-
though my eyes were open, sleep was still stupefying my mental faculties.
At last I came to my senses, alarmed beyond measure. It was already
the dead of night, and everything around me was cloaked in darkness. There
was barely enough fire left in the hearth to illuminate the room. By the
light of the alternately flaring and dying flame, I saw that the creature
shaking my shoulder was a soldier, a jaeger, who from my elegant
epaulets took me for an officer and kept saying, “Wake up, wake up, your
honor! The cannon fire’s getting stronger. Balls are falling on the city!”

I dashed headlong to the spot where I had left my horse. I saw that he
was still standing there and looked at his hoof—unshod! There was not a
soul in the tavern. The Jew and Jewess had run away—there was no point
even thinking of bread. I led Alcides outside and saw that it was not as
late as I thought. The sun had just set, and it was a fine evening, the rain
had stopped, and the sky was clear. I mounted my poor, hungry, unshod
Alcides. As I approached the city gates, I was horrified by the numbers of
wounded crowding around them. I was forced to a halt. There was no way
I could penetrate that throng of men on foot and horseback, women and
children. Disabled cannons and pontoons were being carried through
also, and everything was so crowded and crushed in the gates that I was
driven to complete despair. Time was flying, and I could not even begin
to stir, surrounded as I was on all sides by a throng incessantly streaming
toward me with no sign of letting up.

At last it became completely dark. The cannon fire died down, and
everything around fell silent, except for the spot where I stood. There the
groaning, whining, screeching, swearing, and shouting nearly drove me
and my steed out of our wits. Had there been any space at all, he would
have reared, but since there was not, he snorted and kicked at whomsoever
he could. God, how was I going to break out of this? Where would I find
the regiment now? The night was getting not just dark, but black. What
was I going to do?
To my great good fortune, I caught sight of some Cossacks forcing a path in some unfathomable way through that compressed mass of people, horses, and artillery. I saw them dashing adroitly through the gates and in a flash joined them and dashed through also, but only by badly bruising my knee and almost breaking my shoulder. Escaping into the open, I stroked Alcides' arched neck: *I'm sorry for you, trusty comrade, but there's nothing to be done for it; on your way at a gallop! A light touch of my foot, and the steed took off at a run. I put all my faith in Alcides' instinct. I had no way at all of ascertaining the correct route; the night was so dark that it was impossible to see objects twenty paces away. I loosed the reins. Alcides soon stopped galloping and went at a walk, continually snorting and flicking his ears. I guessed that he was seeing or smelling something dreadful, but since I could not, as the saying goes, see my nose before my face, I had no way of avoiding any misfortune that might lie before me. It was evident that the army had changed position and I was left alone to plunder through unfamiliar fields surrounded by darkness and the hush of death.

At last Alcides began to climb such an extraordinarily steep slope that I had to clutch his mane with all my might to keep from rolling off the saddle. The darkness had gotten so thick that I couldn't see anything before me. I had no idea where I was going and how this journey might end. While I went on thinking and changing my mind about what I should do, Alcides suddenly began heading downhill at the same horrible steep angle at which he had gone up. Now there was no more time for reflection. To save my neck, I leaped hastily off my horse and led him by hand, stooping close to the ground to see where to put my feet and taking all the precautions necessary during such a perilous descent.

When Alcides and I stood at last on a level spot, I saw a dreadful and at the same time lamentable sight: countless numbers of dead bodies covered the field. They were quite visible: they were either totally stripped or wore only their shirts and lay like white shadows on the black earth. At a distance a number of fires could be seen, and the highway was right beside me. Behind me was the redoubt which Alcides had clambered up and I had descended in such fear. Having found out at last where I was and taking it for granted that the fires I saw were those lit by our army, I remounted my horse and began heading down the road toward the fires directly ahead of me; but Alcides turned left and took off on his own at a gallop. The route he chose was horrifying to me: he was racing among the dead bodies, jumping over them, stepping on them, leaping aside, or stopping and bending his muzzle to sniff a corpse and snort over it. I could no longer bear it and turned him back to the road. My steed obeyed me with marked reluctance and went at a walk, continually trying, however, to head leftward.

After a few minutes I heard the hooves of many horses and men's voices and at last caught sight of a group of mounted men riding directly toward me; they were talking about something or other and kept repeating, "Your Excellency!" I was delighted, taking it for granted that His Excellency would know which were the fires of the Polish Horse or, if he didn't, would allow me to join his suite. When they came close to me, the man in front—I assume it was the general himself—asked me, "Who goes there?"

I answered, "A Polish Horse soldier!" "And where are you going?" "To the regiment!"

"But your regiment is standing over there," said the general, gesturing in the direction that my trusty Alcides had so insistently tried to take, "and you are heading toward the enemy."

The general and his suite galloped off to Heilsberg, and, after kissing my priceless Alcides' ears several times, I left him at liberty to choose the way. Finding himself free, the trusty steed reared to express his delight, neighed, and galloped directly toward the fires glimmering to the left side of the road. There were no dead bodies on my route, and, thanks to Alcides' speed, in a quarter of an hour I was at home—that is, in the regiment.

The Polish Horse soldiers were already mounted. Alcides took his place in the ranks with a sort of quiet, amicable neigh. He had no sooner settled down than the command rang out: "To the right by threes, march!" The regiment moved out. Wyszemirski and our other comrades in my unit were delighted at my return, but the sergeant-major felt obliged to scold me: "You do foolish things, Durov! You won't keep your head on your shoulders. At Guttstadt, in the heat of battle, you decided to give up your horse to some wounded man or other. Are you really too half-witted to realize that a cavalryman on foot in the midst of combat is a creature bound to perish? At the Passarge you dismounted and went to sleep in the bushes when the entire regiment was expecting orders at any minute to go and go at a trot. Whatever would have become of you if you didn't have a horse who, no offense meant, is a great deal smarter than you are? They let you go into Heilsberg for half an hour, and you settled down by the fireplace and went to sleep, at a time when even to think about sleeping was impossible—that is, impermissible. A soldier has to be more than human. In this calling there is no question of age: he has to carry out his duties the same way at seventeen and at thirty and at eighty. I advise you to die on your horse and in the ranks, or else I warn you that you will either be taken prisoner in disgrace or killed by marauders or, worst of all, considered a coward." The sergeant-major fell silent, but his last phrase stung me cruelly. Blood rushed to my face.

There are, however, limits to human endurance.... Despite our sergeant-major's philosophizing about a soldier's obligations, I was drop-
ping from lack of sleep and fatigue. My clothing was soaked. For two days I had neither slept nor eaten, I had been constantly on the march, and, even when we stopped, I was on horseback with only my uniform to wear, exposed without protection to the cold wind and rain. I could feel my strength slipping away by the hour. We were riding three abreast, but whenever we happened upon a narrow bridge or some other obstacle that we could not cross as a unit, we went two at a time or sometimes even singly. At such times the fourth platoon was forced to stand motionless for several minutes in one spot. I was in the fourth platoon, and at each beneficent stop I would dismount in a flash, lie down on the ground, and instantly fall asleep. The platoon began moving, my comrades shouted and called me and, since a frequently interrupted sleep cannot be a deep one, I awoke at once, got up, and scrambled back onto Alcides, dragging my heavy oak lance behind me. These episodes were repeated at even the briefest of halts. My sergeant was losing his patience, and my comrades were angry with me. They all told me that they would abandon me on the road if I dismounted even once more: "After all, you can see that we doze, but at least we don’t get off our horses and lie down on the ground. Do it our way."

The sergeant-major grumbled in a low voice, "Why do these whoops wriggle their way into the army? They should stay in the nest."

I spent the rest of the night on horseback, dozing, sleeping, bending to Alcides' mane, and rousing in fright, feeling as if I were falling. I seemed to be losing my mind. My eyes were open, but objects kept altering in a dreamlike way. I took uhlans for forest, and forest for uhlans. My head was burning, but the rest of me was shivering; I was very cold. Everything I had on was wet to the skin...

Dawn broke. We halted and were permitted to kindle a fire and cook kasha. Oh, thank God, now I could lie down and sleep by the fire; I could warm up and dry out.

"You can’t do that," said the sergeant-major, as he saw me sitting down by the fire and rolling grass into a clump to put under my head. "You can’t. The captain has ordered the horses fed on grass. Take the curb-bit out of your horse’s mouth and lead him to pasture."

I joined the others and walked Alcides around the fields. He grazed the dewy grass while I stood sadly beside him.

"You’re as pale as a corpse," said Wyszemirski, approaching me with his horse. "What’s wrong with you? Are you sick?"

"I’m not sick, just cruelly chilled. The rain has soaked clear through me, my blood has turned to ice, and now I have to go walking around on the damp grass!"

"It seems that the rain soaked us all equally; why are we dry then?"

"You’re all wearing greatcoats."

"And where’s yours then?"

“The Cossacks took it, along with my saddlebags and valise.”

“What miracle brought that about?”

“Have you forgotten already that I put a wounded dragoon officer on my horse and let it be used to return him to his regiment?”

“Well, yes, I remember. What about it?”

“This is what: when I found my horse again, he was already in Podwyszaćki’s hands. He bought it from Cossacks with just the saddle, and everything else had disappeared!”

“That’s bad, comrade. You’re the youngest of us all. You won’t last long during these cold nights without a greatcoat. Tell the sergeant-major; he’ll give you a coat left from those killed. They’re sending huge piles of them to the wagon-train.”

We talked for a while longer. At last the sun rose quite high, the day warmed up, my uniform dried out, and my fatigue passed. I would have been very cheerful if I could have hoped for something to eat. But there was no use even thinking of it; I had no share in the kasha that was on the fire. And so I began diligently searching the grass for berries. As the captain rode past the uhlans walking around the fields with their horses, he noticed my pursuit.

“What are you looking for, Durow?” he asked, riding up to me.

I replied that I was looking for berries. The captain must have guessed the reason, because he turned to the platoon sergeant and said to him in a low voice, “See that Durow and Wyszemirski get enough to eat.”

He rode away, and the old soldiers said to his back, “If we have enough to eat, they should too. They always think more about these whoops than about seasoned old soldiers.”

“What fools you are, seasoned old soldiers!” said the sergeant-major, approaching us. “Who should we worry about if not children? I think you can see for yourselves that both of these recruits are scarcely out of their childhood.

“Come with me, children,” said the sergeant-major jovially, taking us both by the arms. “The captain ordered us to feed you.” We were given soup, roast meat, and white bread.

Seeing the horses grazing quietly and the uhlans asleep in the meadow, I decided there was no need for me to be the only one standing vigil. It was afternoon already, and the heat had become unbearable. I climbed down to the banks of the little river which flowed by our camp and lay down in the tall grass to sleep. Alcides was roaming around not far from me. My sound sleep was broken by a shout of “Curb your horse! . . . Mount!” and the tramp of uhlans running to their horses and with their horses into the ranks. I jumped up precipitately. The sergeant-major was already on his steed and hurrying the uhlans into formation; I looked around for Alcides and, to my horror, saw him swimming across the river,
different man; he talks amicably with me and, like a courteous host, treats me to tea, coffee, and breakfast. In short, he behaves as he should have from the beginning. He says that he brought me to Vitebsk on orders from the commander-in-chief, and I am to report to him.

I am still staying with Neidhardt. We breakfast together in the morning; then he goes off to join the commander-in-chief and I stay in his quarters or go for a walk. But now it is deep autumn, and the mud is deep as well. Since I cannot find any place for a human to walk, I go to the tavern in which Neidhardt always dines. There I wait for him and we eat together. After dinner he leaves, and I stay on in the parlor of the mistress of the tavern. I always have a good time there; the tavernkeeper, a kindly, jovial woman, calls me *uhlan-panna*\(^5\) and says that if I were to let myself be corseted, she would bet her entire tavern and its income against a *złoty* that there would not be a girl in all of Vitebsk with a waist as slender and pretty as mine. With these words she goes at once to fetch her corset. This makes her daughters laugh uproariously, because there is room in that corset for all of them and me together.

Five days have passed, and I am still staying in Vitebsk. At last this evening Neidhardt told me that tomorrow I am to see the commander-in-chief; he has been ordered to take me there at ten o'clock in the morning.

On the next day Neidhardt and I went to see Count Buxhöwden. Neidhardt led me into the count's study and left at once. The commander-in-chief greeted me with a kindly smile and began by asking me, "Why were you arrested? Where's your saber?"

I said that all my weapons were taken from me in the squadron.

"I will order them all returned to you. A soldier should never be sent anywhere without weapons."

After that he asked me how old I was and then went on to say: "I've heard a great deal about your valor, and I'm very pleased that all your commanders report only the best of you. . . ." He paused for a minute and then began again. "You are not to be alarmed by what I have to tell you. I must send you to the emperor; he wishes to see you. But I repeat, don't be alarmed. Our emperor is the embodiment of grace and magnanimity; you will learn that from experience."

It did alarm me, however. "The emperor will send me home, Your Excellency, and I will die of sorrow!" I said this with such deeply felt grief that the commander-in-chief was visibly moved.

"Have no fear of that. The emperor will refuse you nothing as a reward for your fearlessness and outstanding conduct. And since I was ordered to

\(^3\) Twenty-four.

\(^4\) In late 1807 Friedrich Wilhelm Buxhöwden was the commander in charge of rebuilding the western army after the Prussian campaign. His adjutant, Aleksandr Neidhardt, was a general still on active duty when Durowa published *The Cavalry Maiden* in 1836.

\(^5\) Uhlán Miss. (Polish)
make inquiries about you, I will add my own report to the testimony of your regimental and squadron commanders, your platoon sergeant, and Captain Kazimirska. Believe me, they won't take away from you the uniform to which you have done such honor." With this, the general bowed politely to me as a sign to leave.6

Entering the anteroom, I found Neidhardt in conversation with Aide-de-camp Zass. They both came over to me, and Neidhardt said, "The commander-in-chief has ordered me to turn you over to M. Zass, His Imperial Majesty's aide-de-camp. You are to travel with him to Peterburg. And so, permit me to wish you a safe journey."

Zass took my arm. "Now you are to accompany me to my quarters. From there we'll send for your things from Neidhardt's, and very early tomorrow morning we are going back to Polotsk, because Buxhöwden has ordered your weapons returned to you without fail." The next day we left Vitebsk very early and soon arrived in Polotsk.

Polotsk. Zass went to see Kachowski and returned an hour later, saying that, to his surprise, Kachowski dined at noon and insisted that he stay, and so he had reluctantly eaten.

"Tomorrow we leave here very early, Durov. Getting up at dawn must be nothing new to you?" I said that I never got up at any time except dawn.

In the evening soldiers from my platoon came to see me and called for me to come out. I did so. What kind people! It was the platoon sergeant and my mentor, the man who had taught me everything that an uhlan needs to know on foot and horseback.

"Farewell, dear comrade," they said. "God grant you good fortune. We've heard that you're on your way to Peterburg; praise us there." "We praised you here when the general asked about you, particularly me," said my mentor, twirling his graying mustaches. "After all, it was me who Kazimirska ordered to be your nurse. The chief took me into his room and spent an hour asking me everything, down to the last detail, and I told him all about it, even how you cried and rolled on the ground when your Alcides died."

A deep sigh escaped me at this reminder. I bade farewell to my fellow soldiers, gave my instructor my year's pay, and went back inside in a most melancholy frame of mind.

At last we are on our way to Peterburg. Our open carriage barely moves; we drag along rather than ride. At each station as many as twelve horses are harnessed to it, and all together they are not worth two decent ones. They are more like calves than horses, and often, as they struggle hopelessly to pull the carriage out of the deep mud, they end up lying down in it themselves.

Something droll happens to us at almost every post-station. At one we were served bloody sugar with our tea.

"What's the meaning of this?" asked Zass, pushing away the sugar bowl.

The stationmaster was in the next room waiting to see the effect produced by the sugar. At Zass's question he put in an appearance and said on a note of triumph, "My daughter cut her hand chopping the sugar, and this is her blood!"

"Well, take away your blood, you numskull, and order them to serve us clean sugar," said Zass, turning away in revulsion. I laughed wholeheartedly at this novel way of proving hospitable zeal.

At another station Zass started shouting at the stationmaster because he was drunk, said rude things to us, and refused to give us horses. The stationmaster's wife heard the loud voices and jumped out at Zass with fists flying and, capering with fury, cried piercingly, "What sort of lawless land is this? How dare they abuse the stationmaster?" The stunned Zass could find no way to free himself from this female satan until he thought of tweaking her nose. The remedy proved successful. The megaera ran off squealing, and the stationmaster went after her.

We waited half an hour for horses, but, when we saw that none were coming, we settled down to drink tea. Zass sent me as an envoy to the stationmistress to negotiate for cream. Our enemy was happy to make peace, and I returned with a cupful. An hour later horses were brought, and we parted very amiably from the stationmaster and his wife, who, as she wished me in particular a safe journey, covered her nose with her apron.

My First Visit to the Capital

Peterburg. So this is our bright, clean, magnificent capital, a memorial to the invincible courage, great spirit, and heroic resolution of the immortal PETER!

We arrived three days ago. I am staying with Zass, and every day I go to look at the monument to Peter the Great.7 How worthy he is of the appellation! Peter would have been great no matter what station in life he was born to. His majestic appearance corresponds fully to the vast genius once governed by his great soul.

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6. Buxhöwden's report to Alexander I is included in Appendix A.

7. Etienne Falconet's famous equestrian statue, erected by Catherine the Great (1766); in Pushkin's narrative poem "The Bronze Horseman" it is a symbol of progress and imperial might.
My fate has been decided. I have been with the emperor! I saw him and spoke with him. My heart is filled with a happiness so ineffable that I have no words to describe my feelings. The greatness of my good fortune stuns and enraptures me! Oh, Emperor! From this hour my life belongs to you. . . .

When Prince V. 8 opened the door of the emperor's study for me and closed it after me, the emperor at once approached and took my hand. He led me over to his desk, rested one hand on it and, continuing to hold my hand in his other one, began questioning me in a low voice with such a gracious expression that all my timidity disappeared and hope once again revived in my soul. "I have heard," said the emperor, "that you are not a man. Is that true?"

I could not immediately pluck up the courage to say, "Yes, Your Majesty, it's true." I stood for a minute with downcast eyes and remained silent; my heart was throbbing fiercely, and my hand trembled in the tsar's. The emperor waited. At last, as I raised my eyes to him and uttered my reply, I saw that the emperor was blushing; instantly I began to blush, too. I lowered my eyes and did not raise them again until the moment when an involuntary impulse of sorrow threw me to the emperor's feet.

After he had questioned me in detail about all my reasons for joining the army, the emperor greatly praised my fearlessness. He said that this was a first example in Russia; all my commanders had only the highest praise for me and called my courage peerless; he was very pleased to verify it; and, therefore, he wished to reward me and return me with honor to my father's house, giving—

The emperor had no time to finish; at the phrase return home I cried out in horror and fell immediately to the emperor's feet. "Don't send me home, Your Majesty," I said in the voice of despair. "Don't send me back! I will die there. I will surely die! Don't make me regret that there was no bullet marked for me in this campaign. Don't take away my life, sire! I wanted to sacrifice it to you of my own free will. . . ." As I said this, I was hugging the emperor's knees and weeping.

The emperor was moved. He raised me to my feet and asked in an altered voice, "What is it you want then?"

"To be a warrior! To wear a uniform and bear arms! That is the only reward you can give me, sire! For me there is no other. I was born in an army camp. The sound of trumpets was my lullaby. From the day of my birth I have loved the military calling; by the age of ten I was devising ways to enlist; at sixteen I reached my goal—alone, without help from anyone! I held that glorious post through my courage alone, without patronage or subsidy from anyone. And now, Your Majesty, you want to send me home! If I had foreseen such an end, nothing could have prevented me from seeking a glorious death in the ranks of your warriors." I said all this with my arms crossed as if before an ikon, looking at the emperor with tear-filled eyes.

The emperor listened to me, trying in vain to conceal how moved he was. After I finished speaking, he spent a minute or two in evident indecision; at last his face brightened. "If you presume," said the emperor, "that permission to wear a uniform and bear arms is your only possible reward, you shall have it!" At these words I began to quiver with joy. The emperor went on, "And you will call yourself by my name—Aleksandrov. I have no doubt that you will make yourself worthy of this honor by the distinction of your conduct and actions. Never forget for a moment that this name must always be above reproach, and I will never forgive you for even the shadow of a spot on it. . . . Now tell me, what regiment would you like to be enrolled in? I will promote you to officer's rank."

"In this matter permit me, Your Majesty, to surrender myself to your will," I said.

"The Mariupol Hussars is one of our most valiant regiments, and the officer corps comes from the best families," the emperor told me. "I will order you enrolled there. Tomorrow you will receive from Lieven as much as you need for the journey and for your uniform. 9 When everything is ready for your departure to the regiment, I will see you again."

With these words the emperor bowed to me. At once I went over to the door and, since I didn't know how to open it, took hold of the bronze knob and began twisting it this way and that. When the emperor saw that I would not be able to leave without his aid, he came over, opened the door for me, and watched me as far as the next door, which I managed by myself.

As I entered the anteroom, I found myself instantly surrounded by pages who vied in asking me questions: "What did the emperor say to you?" "Did he promote you to an officer?"

I didn't know how to answer them, but Zass came over to me along with another aide-de-camp, and the throng of imps retreated respectfully. The aide-de-camp who approached me along with Zass asked me, "Are you fifteen?"

I replied that I was already in my eighteenth year.

"They wrote us wonders about your fearlessness," he said with a polite nod.

Zass put an end to this conversation by taking my arm. "It's time we were going, Prince," he said to his colleague, and we left the palace.

8. Saks (19) identifies "Prince V." as Court Minister Petr Volkonskij.

Chapter Three

playing today. The artist who portrayed Lesta did her best to mutilate the role. She had absolutely no understanding of the character she was playing; in the *chiton* of the rusalka she grimaced, put on airs, spoke haughtily, smiled ironically, and kept looking at the *parterre* with no concern for her Vidostan. I never spent a duller evening in my life; the play and the actress bored me to tears. When I got back into the carriage, the general’s wife asked me what I thought of the performance. I answered frankly that the play seemed to me a compound of absurdities and the leading actress completely out of character in the role. My candor was apparently not appreciated. They replied stiffly that Petersburg actresses are considered the very best.\(^{13}\)

Today a new effort was made to astonish, engage, and entertain me. Once again it failed, and all this from the strange means taken. They decided to show me *Chinese shadows*, but since I am neither a child nor a peasant woman, I stopped watching the contraption after the first scene.\(^{14}\) It must be assumed that the general’s wife gives me no credit either for good upbringing or good taste. Be that as it may, her kind intentions merit my gratitude.

I have seen the emperor again! His first words as he greeted me were, “They tell me that you saved an officer! Did you really rescue him from the enemy? Tell me what happened.”

I recounted the incident in detail and named the officer. The emperor said that his was a famous name and that my fearlessness on this one occasion did me more honor than everything else during the campaign, because it was based on the greatest of virtues—compassion! “Although your deed serves as its own reward,” the emperor went on, “justice demands that you receive that which is owed you by statute as well: the

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\(^{10}\) Mme. Zass was most likely the wife of Aleksandr Zass’s elder brother, the distinguished general Andrej Zass.

\(^{11}\) The Death of Cleopatra is by the seventeenth-century French painter Pierre Mignard. Of the paintings in the Hermitage in 1808, the ones most likely to be those of the two girls described by Durova are double portraits by Anthony Van Dyck: *Portrait of Philadelphia and Elizabeth Carey*, both girls under ten years of age, and *Portrait of Ladies of the English Queen’s Court*, Anne Kirke and Anne Dalkeith. The family resemblance that Durova fancied she sees would be that common to Van Dyck’s portraits. (Gosudarstvennyj Ermittaj, Odel Zapadneuropejskogo iskusstva, Katalog zhivopisi, t. II, [Leningrad-Moscow, 1958], 61.)

\(^{12}\) Although Durova speaks in generic terms, *Rusalka* [The Water Nymph] was a four-evening adaptation to Russian of the German operetta, *Das Donauweibchen*, which,

\(^{13}\) The actress who usually played Lesta in 1807–1808 was Sofia Samoijlova (*Letopi’s* russkogo teatra Fil’men Aprapov, ed. [St. Petersburg, 1861], 172, 184). To be fair, her debut performance as Lesta (under her maiden name of Chernikova) was reported by one theater-goer as superior to that of her competitors in Berlin and Vienna (S. P. Zhikharev, Zapiski: 1805–1807 [Moscow, 1891], 12.)

\(^{14}\) Shows featuring “Chinese shadows” were widespread throughout Europe in the late eighteenth century. They used the oriental technique of projecting “mobile paintings,” cut out of cardboard or leather and illuminated from behind, onto a linen or oiled paper screen. The shows featured miscellaneous skits and such scenes as magicians working transformations, duck hunts, thunderstorms, battles, and the classic Chinese “broken bridge.” See Charles Magnin, *Histoire des Marionnettes en Europe*: *depuis l’Antiquité jusqu’aux Jours* (Paris, 1862), 182–86; and, for a description of a similar show in the Russian provinces in the middle of the nineteenth century, M. Semevskij, “Toropets,” *Biblioteka dlja chitenija* (1863), 12:18–25.
Cross of St. George is awarded for saving the life of an officer!” With these words the emperor took a cross from his desk and with his own hands put it through the buttonhole of my uniform. I blushed bright red with joy and in my confusion seized both the emperor’s hands to kiss them, but he would not permit it.

“I hope,” said the emperor, “that this cross will remind you of me at crucial moments in your life.” There is great significance behind these words. I swear that the adored Father of Russia will not be deceived in his expectations. This cross will be my guardian angel; I will cherish to the grave the memories connected with it, I will never forget the occasion on which I received it, and I will always—always!—see the hand which touches it now.\textsuperscript{15}

I returned to Zass’s apartment where I have been living ever since my arrival in Peterburg. I had not yet taken off my cartridge-pouch when I saw an old man entering after me and asking in a quavering voice, “May I see Recruit Durov of the Polish Horse regiment? I am his uncle.” Hearing these words, I guessed that the man I saw before me was my father’s younger brother, and my first thought was to flee.\textsuperscript{16} Fortunately, I had no time to do anything so foolish. Zass responded to his question at once by pointing me out, and my uncle came over to me, embraced me, and said in a low voice, “Your mother is dead.”

The words pierced me like a sharp dagger. I trembled and turned pale. I sensed that I was about to burst into floods of tears, and, unable to utter a single word, I took my uncle by the arm and led him out of Zass’s apartment.

“Come home with me,” said my uncle once we were out on the street. I got into his sleigh and rode all the way in silence, hiding my face and eyes in my greatcoat so that passersby would not see me crying.

At home my uncle told me that when my father received my letter from Grodno and learned from it that I had enlisted in the Polish Horse, he was alarmed by the singular step I had taken. Not knowing how to remedy it or what to do, he sent the letter to Mama. The consequences of this thoughtless act were disastrous. I had been so reckless as to write that it was my mother’s excessive strictness which drove me out of my father’s house and, in the event I was killed, I begged Papa to forgive me.


\textsuperscript{16} According to Durova’s later account (“All That I Could Recollect”), her uncle Nikolaj Durov was living in Peterburg to defend himself from charges of negligence which had cost him his post as a quarantine inspector in the Crimea.

the sorrow my death would inflict on him. Mama was confined to bed, dangerously ill and very weak. When this letter was brought to her, she took it and read it through; then, after a minute of silence, she said with a sigh, “She blames me,” turned her face to the wall, and died.

I was sobbing like a five-year-old as I listened to this tale. How could I suppose that Papa would show her the letter? My uncle left me at liberty to abandon myself to my cruel grief and repentance and put off telling me the rest until the following day.

When my father got the letter back, he sent it to my uncle in Peterburg, asking him to find out whether I was still alive. My uncle showed the letter to some generals of his acquaintance and thus it reached the emperor who, they said, was moved to tears when he read it. He at once ordered inquiries made about me in the Polish Horse regiment and, if the reports proved favorable to me, my presentation to him in person. All my commanders showered praise on me beyond my merits and expectations. The result was the emperor’s unprecedented grace: permission to dedicate my life to him in the ranks of his warriors.\textsuperscript{17}

At last everything is ready for my departure. I have received a travel pass, regimental orders, and two thousand rubles for a hussar uniform and the purchase of a horse. My uncle is very angry because I won’t say where I am going. I keep telling him that I am on my way home to Papa, but he does not believe me and says that sooner or later he will find out where I am.

\textsuperscript{17} Documents relating to the search for Durova are included in Appendix A.
Chapter Five

Home Leave

Three and a half years have passed since my father last saw me. I have changed a great deal: I am taller and I've filled out, my face has changed from pale and oval to swarthy and round, and my hair, which used to be light brown, has darkened. I think that Papa won't recognize me right away. I traveled alone by hired carriage, with nothing but my saber to keep me company.

Stationmasters, taking me for a green youth, often made difficulties for me on the road. They would wait six hours before giving me horses so that I would order something—dinner, tea, or coffee; then the horses would appear. When they presented the bill, it was accompanied by words like: "With your travel allowance, here is what you still owe. . . ." This was usually quite a considerable sum, but I paid it without a word. Sometimes they refused me horses altogether in order to force me to hire private ones at double my allowance. Oh, this journey has inspired me with both dread and loathing of post-stations!

I arrived home at exactly the same time of night I quit the paternal shelter—one o'clock in the morning. The gates were locked. I took my saber and valise from the sleigh and dismissed my coachman for the return trip. Left alone in front of the locked gates of the house where my oppressed, joyless childhood was spent, I experienced none of the emotions that are so often written about. On the contrary, it was with a feeling of sadness that I walked along the palisade to the spot where I knew there were four loose stakes; through this aperture as a child I had often gone out at night to run around the square in front of the church. Now I used it to enter! How could I have ever imagined when I used to crawl through this hole in my white coarse linen frock, looking around timidly and listening closely, shivering from fear and the cold night, that someday I would come back in through this same aperture, also at night, as a hussar?

All the windows of the house were locked. I went up to those of the children's room and tried to take hold of the shutters to open them, but they were fastened somehow from the inside, and I didn't want to knock because I might frighten my little brother and sister. I went over to the building where Mama's women-servants live. Our two dogs, Mars and Mustapha, heard me crossing the yard and rushed me with loud barks which turned at once to joyful yelps. The dear, faithful beasts began twining themselves around my legs, jumping up on my chest, and racing