

A NORTON CRITICAL EDITION

TOLSTOY'S
SHORT FICTION



REVISED TRANSLATIONS
BACKGROUNDS AND SOURCES
CRITICISM

Second Edition

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W • W • NORTON & COMPANY • New York • London

A cold white cover of dew, which was still falling untouched by the sun, lay on everything. The east was growing imperceptibly brighter, reflecting its pale light on the vault of heaven still veiled by a covering of clouds. Not a blade of grass below, nor a leaf on the topmost branches of the trees, stirred. Only occasionally a sound of wings amid the brush, or a rustling on the ground, broke the silence of the forest. Suddenly a strange sound, foreign to Nature, resounded and died away at the outskirts of the forest. Again the sound was heard, and rhythmically repeated at the foot of the trunk of one of the motionless trees. A tree-top began to tremble in an unusual manner, its sap-filled leaves whispered something, and the robin who had been sitting in one of its branches fluttered twice from place to place with a whistle, and jerking its tail sat down on another tree.

The axe at the bottom gave off a more muffled sound, moist white chips scattered on the dewy grass and a slight creaking was heard above the sound of the blows. The tree, shuddering in its whole body, bent down and quickly rose again, vibrating with fear on its roots. For an instant all was still, but the tree bent again, a crashing sound came from its trunk, and with its branches breaking and its boughs hanging down, it fell with its crown on the damp earth.

The sounds of the axe and the footsteps were silenced. The robin whistled and flitted higher. A twig which it brushed with its wings shook a little and then with all its foliage grew still like the rest. The trees flaunted the beauty of their motionless branches still more joyously in the newly cleared space.

The first sunbeams, piercing the translucent cloud, shone through and spread over earth and sky. The mist began to quiver like waves in the hollows, the dew sparkled and played on the verdure, the transparent little clouds grew whiter, and hurriedly dispersed over the deepening azure vault of the sky. The birds stirred in the thicket and, as though bewildered, twittered joyfully about something; the sap-filled leaves whispered gladly and peacefully on the treetops, and the branches of those that were living began to rustle slowly and majestically over the dead and prostrate tree.

A Prisoner in the Caucasus†

I

An officer named Zhilin was serving in the army in the Caucasus.

One day he received a letter from home. It was from his mother, who wrote: 'I am getting old, and should like to see my dear son once

† This piece was first published in 1872.

more before I die. Come and say good-bye to me and bury me, and then, if God pleases, return to service again with my blessing. But I have found a girl for you, who is sensible and good and has some property. If you can love her, you might marry her and remain at home.'

Zhilin thought it over, It was quite true, the old lady was failing fast and he might not have another chance to see her alive. He had better go, and, if the girl was nice, why not marry her?

So he went to his Colonel, obtained a leave of absence, said good-bye to his comrades, stood the soldiers four pailfuls of vodka as a farewell treat, and got ready to go.

It was a time of war in the Caucasus. The roads were not safe by night or day. If ever a Russian ventured to ride or walk any distance away from his fort, the Tartars killed him or carried him off to the hills. So it had been arranged that twice every week a body of soldiers should march from one fortress to the next to convoy travellers from point to point.

It was summer. At daybreak the baggage-train got ready under shelter of the fortress; the soldiers marched out; and all started along the road. Zhilin was on horseback, and a cart with his things went with the baggage-train. They had sixteen miles to cover. The baggage train moved slowly; sometimes the soldiers stopped, or perhaps a wheel would come off one of the carts, or a horse would refuse to go on, and then everybody had to wait.

When by the sun it was already past noon, they had not gone half the way. It was dusty and hot, the sun was scorching, and there was no shelter anywhere: a bare plain all round—not a tree, not a bush, by the road.

Zhilin rode on in front, and stopped, waiting for the baggage to overtake him. Then he heard the signal-horn sounded behind him: the company had again stopped. So he began to think: 'Hadn't I better ride on by myself? My horse is a good one: if the Tartars do attack me, I can gallop away. Perhaps, however, it would be wiser to wait.'

As he sat considering, Kostilin, an officer carrying a gun, rode up to him and said:

'Come along, Zhilin, let's go on by ourselves. It's dreadful; I am famished and the heat is terrible. My shirt is wringing wet.'

Kostilin was a stout, heavy man, and the perspiration was running down his red face. Zhilin thought awhile, and then asked: 'Is your gun loaded?'

'Yes, it is.'

'Well, then, let's go, but on condition that we keep together.'

So they rode forward along the road across the plain, talking, but keeping a look-out on both sides. They could see afar all round. But after crossing the plain the road ran through a valley between two

hills, and Zhilin said: 'We had better climb that hill and have a look round, or the Tartars may be on us before we know it.'

But Kostilin answered: 'What's the use? Let us go on.'

Zhilin, however, would not agree.

'No,' he said; 'you can wait here if you like, but I'll go and look round.' And he turned his horse to the left, up the hill. Zhilin's horse was a hunter, and carried him up the hill-side as if it had wings. (He had bought it for a hundred rubles as a colt out of a herd, and had broken it in himself.) Hardly had he reached the top of the hill, than he saw some thirty Tartars not much more than a hundred yards ahead of him. As soon as he caught sight of them he turned round, but the Tartars had also seen him, and rushed after him at full gallop, getting their guns out as they went. Down galloped Zhilin as fast as the horse's legs could go, shouting to Kostilin: 'Get your gun ready!'

And in thought he said to his horse: 'Get me well out of this, my pet; don't stumble, for if you do it's all up. Once I reach the gun, they shan't take me prisoner.'

But instead of waiting, Kostilin, as soon as he caught sight of the Tartars, turned back towards the fortress at full speed, whipping his horse now on one side now on the other, and its switching tail was all that could be seen of him in the dust.

Zhilin saw it was a bad look-out; the gun was gone, and what could he do with nothing but his sword? He turned his horse towards the escort, thinking to escape, but there were six Tartars rushing to cut him off. His horse was a good one, but theirs were still better; and besides, they were across his path. He tried to rein in his horse and to turn another way, but it was going so fast that it could not stop, and dashed on straight towards the Tartars. He saw a red-bearded Tartar on a grey horse, with his gun raised, come at him, yelling and showing his teeth.

'Ah,' thought Zhilin, 'I know you, devils that you are. If you take me alive you'll put me in a pit and flog me. I will not be taken alive!'

Zhilin, though not a big fellow, was brave. He drew his sword and dashed at the red-bearded Tartar, thinking: 'Either I'll ride him down or disable him with my sword.'

He was still a horse's length away from him, when he was fired at from behind and his horse was hit. It fell to the ground with all its weight, pinning Zhilin to the earth.

He tried to rise, but two ill-savoured Tartars were already sitting on him and binding his hands behind his back. He made an effort and flung them off, but three others jumped from their horses and began beating his head with the butts of their guns. His eyes grew dim, and he fell back. The Tartars seized him, and, taking spare girths from their saddles, twisted his hands behind him and tied them with a Tartar knot. They knocked his cap off, pulled off his boots, searched him all over, tore his clothes, and took his money and his watch.

Zhilin looked round at his horse. There it lay on its side, poor thing, just as it had fallen; struggling, its legs in the air, unable to touch the ground. There was a hole in its head, and black blood was pouring out, turning the dust to mud for a couple of feet around.

One of the Tartars went up to the horse and began taking the saddle off; it still kicked, so he drew a dagger and cut its windpipe. A whistling sound came from its throat, the horse gave one plunge, and all was over.

The Tartars took the saddle and trappings. The red-bearded Tartar mounted his horse, and the others lifted Zhilin into the saddle behind him. To prevent his falling off they strapped him to the Tartar's girdle; and then they all rode away to the hills.

So there sat Zhilin, swaying from side to side, his head striking against the Tartar's stinking back. He could see nothing but that muscular back and sinewy neck, with its closely shaven, bluish nape. Zhilin's head was wounded: the blood had dried over his eyes, and he could neither shift his position on the saddle nor wipe the blood off. His arms were bound so tightly that his collar-bones ached.

They rode up and down hills for a long way. Then they reached a river which they forded, and came to a hard road leading across a valley.

Zhilin tried to see where they were going, but his eyelids were stuck together with blood, and he could not turn.

Twilight began to fall; they crossed another river, and rode up a stony hill-side. There was a smell of smoke here, and dogs were barking. They had reached an aoul¹. The Tartars got off their horses; Tartar children came and stood round Zhilin, shrieking with pleasure and throwing stones at him.

The Tartar drove the children away, took Zhilin off the horse, and called his man. A Nogay² with high cheek-bones, and nothing on but a shirt (and that so torn that his breast was all bare), answered the call. The Tartar gave him an order. He went and fetched shackles: two blocks of oak with iron rings attached, and a clasp and lock fixed to one of the rings.

They untied Zhilin's arms, fastened the shackles on his leg, and dragged him to a barn, where they pushed him in and locked the door.

Zhilin fell on a heap of manure. He lay still awhile, then groped about to find a soft place, and settled down.

II

That night Zhilin hardly slept at all. It was the time of the year when the nights are short, and daylight soon showed itself through

1. A Tartar village.

2. Member of a certain Tartar tribe.

a chink in the wall. He rose, scratched to make the chink bigger, and peeped out.

Through the hole he saw a road leading downhill; to the right was a Tartar hut with two trees near it, a black dog lay on the threshold, and a goat and kids were moving about wagging their tails. Then he saw a young Tartar woman in a long, loose, bright-coloured gown, with trousers and high boots showing from under it. She had a coat thrown over her head, on which she carried a large metal jug filled with water. She was leading by the hand a small, closely-shaven Tartar boy, who wore nothing but a shirt; and as she went along balancing herself, the muscles of her back quivered. This woman carried the water into the hut, and soon after the red-bearded Tartar of yesterday came out dressed in a silk tunic, with a silver-hilted dagger hanging by his side, shoes on his bare feet, and a tall black sheepskin cap set far back on his head. He came out, stretched himself, and stroked his red beard. He stood awhile, gave an order to his servant, and went away.

Then two lads rode past from watering their horses. The horses' noses were wet. Some other closely-shaven boys ran out, without any trousers, and wearing nothing but their shirts. They crowded together, came to the barn, picked up a twig, and began pushing it in at the chink. Zhilin gave a shout, and the boys shrieked and scampered off, their little bare knees gleaming as they ran.

Zhilin was very thirsty: his throat was parched, and he thought: 'If only they would come and so much as look at me!'

Then he heard some one unlocking the barn. The red-bearded Tartar entered, and with him was another, a smaller man, dark, with bright black eyes, red cheeks, and a short beard. He had a merry face and was always laughing. This man was even more richly dressed than the other. He wore a blue silk tunic trimmed with gold, a large silver dagger in his belt, red morocco slippers worked with silver, and over these a pair of thick shoes, and he had a white sheepskin cap on his head.

The red-bearded Tartar entered, muttered something as if he were annoyed, and stood leaning against the doorpost, playing with his dagger, and glaring askance at Zhilin, like a wolf. The dark one, quick and lively, and moving as if on springs, came straight up to Zhilin, squatted down in front of him, slapped him on the shoulder, and began to talk very fast in his own language. His teeth showed, and he kept winking, clicking his tongue, and repeating, 'Good Russ, good Russ.'

Zhilin could not understand a word, but said, 'Drink! give me water to drink!'

The dark man only laughed. 'Good Russ,' he said, and went on talking in his own tongue.

Zhilin made signs with lips and hands that he wanted something to drink.

The dark man understood and laughed. Then he looked out of the door, and called to some one: 'Dinal'

A little girl came running in: she was about thirteen, slight, thin, and like the dark Tartar in face. Evidently she was his daughter. She, too, had clear black eyes, and her face was good-looking. She had on a long blue gown with wide sleeves, and no girdle. The hem of her gown, the front, and the sleeves, were trimmed with red. She wore trousers and slippers, and over the slippers stouter shoes with high heels. Round her neck she had a necklace made of Russian silver coins. She was bareheaded, and her black hair was plaited with a ribbon and ornamented with gilt braid and silver coins.

Her father gave an order, and she ran away and returned with a metal jug. She handed the water to Zhilin and sat down, crouching so that her knees were as high as her head; and there she sat with wide open eyes watching Zhilin drink, as though he were a wild animal.

When Zhilin handed the empty jug back to her, she gave such a sudden jump back, like a wild goat, that it made her father laugh. He sent her away for something else. She took the jug, ran out, and brought back some unleavened bread on a round board, and once more sat down, crouching, and looking on with staring eyes.

Then the Tartars went away and again locked the door.

After a while the Nogay came and said: '*Ayda*, the master, *Ayda*!'

He, too, knew no Russian. All Zhilin could make out was that he was told to go somewhere.

Zhilin followed the Nogay, but limped, for the shackles dragged his feet so that he could hardly step at all. On getting out of the barn he saw a Tartar village of about ten houses, and a Tartar mosque with a small tower. Three horses stood saddled before one of the houses; little boys were holding them by the reins. The dark Tartar came out of this house, beckoning with his hand for Zhilin to follow him. Then he laughed, said something in his own language, and returned into the house.

Zhilin entered. The room was a good one: the walls smoothly plastered with clay. Near the front wall lay a pile of bright-coloured feather beds; the side walls were covered with rich carpets used as hangings, and on these were fastened guns, pistols, and swords, all inlaid with silver. Close to one of the walls was a small stove on a level with the earthen floor. The floor itself was as clean as a thrashing-ground. A large space in one corner was spread over with felt, on which were rugs, and on these rugs were cushions stuffed with down. And on these five cushions sat five Tartars, the dark one, the red-haired one, and three guests. They were wearing their indoor slippers, and each had a cushion behind his back. Before them were standing millet

cakes on a round board, melted butter in a bowl, and a jug of *buza*, or Tartar beer. They ate both cakes and butter with their hands.

The dark man jumped up and ordered Zhilin to be placed on one side, not on the carpet but on the bare ground, then he sat down on the carpet again, and offered millet cakes and *buza* to his guests. The servant made Zhilin sit down, after which he took off his own overshoes, put them by the door where the other shoes were standing, and sat down nearer to his masters on the felt, watching them as they ate, and licking his lips.

The Tartars ate as much as they wanted, and a woman dressed in the same way as the girl—in a long gown and trousers, with a kerchief on her head—came and took away what was left, and brought a handsome basin, and a ewer with a narrow spout. The Tartars washed their hands, folded them, went down on their knees, blew to the four quarters, and said their prayers. After they had talked for a while, one of the guests turned to Zhilin and began to speak in Russian.

'You were captured by Kazi-Mohammed,' he said, and pointed at the red-bearded Tartar. 'And Kazi-Mohammed has given you to Abdul Murad,' pointing at the dark one. 'Abdul Murad is now your master.'

Zhilin was silent. Then Abdul Murad began to talk, laughing, pointing to Zhilin, and repeating, 'Soldier Russ, good Russ.'

The interpreter said, 'He orders you to write home and tell them to send a ransom, and as soon as the money comes he will set you free.'

Zhilin thought for a moment, and said, 'How much ransom does he want?'

The Tartars talked awhile, and then the interpreter said, 'Three thousand rubles.'

'No,' said Zhilin, 'I can't pay so much.'

Abdul jumped up and, waving his arms, talked to Zhilin, thinking, as before, that he would understand. The interpreter translated: 'How much will you give?'

Zhilin considered, and said, 'Five hundred rubles.' At this the Tartars began speaking very quickly, all together. Abdul began to shout at the red-bearded one, and jabbered so fast that the spittle spurted out of his mouth. The red-bearded one only screwed up his eyes and clicked his tongue.

They quieted down after a while, and the interpreter said, 'Five hundred rubles is not enough for the master. He paid two hundred for you himself. Kazi-Mohammed was in debt to him, and he took you in payment. Three thousand rubles! Less than that won't do. If you refuse to write, you will be put into a pit and flogged with a whip!'

'Eh!' thought Zhilin, 'the more one fears them the worse it will be.'

So he sprang to his feet, and said, 'You tell that dog that if he tries to frighten me I will not write at all, and he will get nothing. I never was afraid of you dogs, and never will be!'

The interpreter translated, and again they all began to talk at once.

They jabbered for a long time, and then the dark man jumped up, came to Zhilin, and said: '*Dzhigit Russ, dzhigit Russ!*' (*Dzhigit* in their language means 'brave.') And he laughed, and said something to the interpreter, who translated: 'One thousand rubles will satisfy him.'

Zhilin stuck to it: 'I will not give more than five hundred. And if you kill me you'll get nothing at all.'

The Tartars talked awhile, then sent the servant out to fetch something, and kept looking now at Zhilin now at the door. The servant returned followed by a stout, bare-footed, tattered man, who also had his leg shackled.

Zhilin gasped with surprise: it was Kostilin. He, too, had been taken. They were put side by side, and began to tell each other what had occurred. While they talked the Tartars looked on in silence. Zhilin related what had happened to him; and Kostilin told how his horse had stopped, his gun missed fire, and this same Abdul had overtaken and captured him.

Abdul jumped up, pointed to Kostilin, and said something. The interpreter translated that they both now belonged to one master, and the one who first paid the ransom would be set free first.

'There now,' he said to Zhilin, 'you get angry, but your comrade here is gentle; he has written home, and they will send five thousand rubles. So he will be well fed and well treated.'

Zhilin replied: 'My comrade can do as he likes; maybe he is rich, I am not. It must be as I said. Kill me, if you like—you will gain nothing by it; but I will not write for more than five hundred rubles.'

They were silent. Suddenly up sprang Abdul, brought a little box, took out a pen, ink, and a bit of paper, gave them to Zhilin, slapped him on the shoulder, and made a sign that he should write. He had agreed to take five hundred rubles.

'Wait a bit!' said Zhilin to the interpreter; 'tell him that he must feed us properly, give us proper clothes and boots, and let us be together. It will be more cheerful for us. And he must have these shackles taken off our feet,' and Zhilin looked at his master and laughed.

The master also laughed, heard the interpreter, and said: 'I will give them the best of clothes: a cloak and boots fit to be married in. I will feed them like princes, and if they like they can live together in the barn. But I can't take off the shackles or they will run away. They shall be taken off, however, at night.' And he jumped up and slapped Zhilin on the shoulder, exclaiming: 'You good, I good!'

Zhilin wrote the letter, but addressed it wrongly so that it should not reach its destination, thinking to himself: 'I'll run away!'

Zhilin and Kostilin were taken back to the barn and given some maize straw, a jug of water, some bread, two old cloaks, and some worn-out military boots—evidently taken from the corpses of Russian

soldiers. At night their shackles were taken off their feet and they were locked up in the barn.

III

Zhilin and his friend lived in this way for a whole month. The master always laughed and said: 'You, Ivan, good! I, Abdul, good!' But he fed them badly, giving them nothing but unleavened bread of millet-flour baked into flat cakes, or sometimes only unbaked dough.

Kostilin wrote home a second time, and did nothing but mope and wait for the money to arrive. He would sit for days together in the barn sleeping, or counting the days till a letter could come.

Zhilin knew his letter would reach no one, and he did not write another. He thought: 'Where could my mother get enough money to ransom me? As it is she lived chiefly on what I sent her. If she had to raise five hundred rubles, she would be quite ruined. With God's help I'll manage to escape!'

So he kept on the look-out, planning how to run away.

He would walk about the aoul whistling; or would sit working, modelling dolls of clay, or weaving baskets out of twigs, for Zhilin was clever with his hands.

Once he modelled a doll with a nose and hands and feet and with a Tartar gown on, and put it up on the roof. When the Tartar women came out to fetch water, the master's daughter, Dina, saw the doll and called the women, who put down their jugs and stood looking and laughing. Zhilin took down the doll and held it out to them. They laughed, but dared not take it. He put down the doll and went into the barn, waiting to see what would happen.

Dina ran up to the doll, looked round, seized it, and ran away.

In the morning, at daybreak, he looked out. Dina came out of the house and sat down on the threshold with the doll, which she had dressed up in bits of red stuff, and she rocked it like a baby, singing a Tartar lullaby. An old woman came out and scolded her, and snatching the doll away broke it to bits, and sent Dina about her business.

But Zhilin made another doll, better than the first, and gave it to Dina. Once Dina brought a little jug, put it on the ground, sat down gazing at him, and laughed, pointing to the jug.

'What pleases her so?' wondered Zhilin. He took the jug thinking it was water, but it turned out to be milk. He drank the milk and said: 'That's good!'

How pleased Dina was! 'Good, Ivan, good!' said she, and she jumped up and clapped her hands. Then, seizing the jug, she ran away. After that, she stealthily brought him some milk every day.

The Tartars make a kind of cheese out of goat's milk which they dry on the roofs of their houses; and sometimes, on the sly, she brought

him some of this cheese. And once, when Abdul had killed a sheep, she brought Zhilin a bit of mutton in her sleeve. She would just throw the things down and run away.

One day there was a heavy storm and the rain fell in torrents for a whole hour. All the streams became turbid. At the ford the water rose till it was seven feet high, and the current was so strong that it rolled the stones about. Rivulets flowed everywhere, and the rumbling in the hills never ceased. When the storm was over, the water ran in streams down the village street. Zhilin got his master to lend him a knife, and with it he shaped a small cylinder, and cutting some little boards, he made a wheel to which he fixed two dolls, one on each side. The little girls brought him some bits of stuff and he dressed the dolls, one as a peasant, the other as a peasant woman. Then he fastened them in their places and set the wheel so that the stream should work it. The wheel began to turn and the dolls danced.

The whole village collected around. Little boys and girls, Tartar men and women, all came and clicked their tongues.

'Ah, Russ! Ah, Ivan!'

Abdul had a Russian clock which was broken. He called Zhilin and showed it to him, clicking his tongue.

'Give it me; I'll mend it for you,' said Zhilin.

He took it to pieces with the knife, sorted the pieces, and put them together again so that the clock went all right.

The master was delighted and made him a present of one of his old tunics which was all in holes. Zhilin had to accept it. He could at any rate use it as a coverlet at night.

After that Zhilin's fame spread; and Tartars came from distant villages, bringing him now the lock of a gun or of a pistol, now a watch, to mend. His master gave him some tools—pincers, gimlets, and a file.

One day a Tartar fell ill and they came to Zhilin, saying, 'Come and heal him!' Zhilin knew nothing about doctoring, but he went to look, and thought to himself, 'Perhaps he will get well anyway.'

He returned to the barn, mixed some water with sand, and then in the presence of the Tartars whispered some words over it and gave it to the sick man to drink. Luckily for him, the Tartar recovered.

Zhilin began to pick up their language a little, and some of the Tartars grew familiar with him. When they wanted him, they would call: 'Ivan! Ivan!' Others, however, still looked at him askance, as at a wild beast.

The red-bearded Tartar disliked Zhilin. Whenever he saw him he frowned and turned away or swore at him. There was also an old man there who did not live in the aoul but used to come up from the foot of the hill. Zhilin only saw him when he passed on his way to the mosque. He was short, and had a white cloth wound round his cap. His beard and moustaches were clipped, and white as snow, and his face was

wrinkled and brick-red. His nose was hooked like a hawk's, his grey eyes looked cruel, and he had no teeth except two tusks. He would pass, with his turban on his head, leaning on his staff, and glaring round him like a wolf. If he saw Zhilin he would snort with anger and turn away.

Once Zhilin descended the hill to see where the old man lived. He went down along the pathway and came to a little garden surrounded by a stone wall, and behind the wall he saw cherry and apricot trees, and a hut with a flat roof. He came closer, and saw hives made of plaited straw, and bees flying about and humming. The old man was kneeling, busy doing something with a hive. Zhilin stretched to look and his shackles rattled. The old man turned round and, giving a yell, snatched a pistol from his belt and shot at Zhilin, who just managed to shelter himself behind the stone wall.

The old man went to Zhilin's master to complain. The master called Zhilin and said with a laugh, 'Why did you go to the old man's house?'

'I did him no harm,' replied Zhilin. 'I only wanted to see how he lived.'

The master repeated what Zhilin said.

But the old man was in a rage; he hissed and jabbered, showing his tusks and shaking his fists at Zhilin.

Zhilin could not understand all, but he gathered that the old man was telling Abdul he ought not to keep Russians in the aoul, but ought to kill them. At last the old man went away.

Zhilin asked the master who the old man was.

'He is a great man!' said the master. 'He was the bravest of our fellows; he killed many Russians, and was at one time very rich. He had three wives and eight sons, and they all lived in one village. Then the Russians came and destroyed the village, and killed seven of his sons. Only one son was left, and he gave himself up to the Russians. The old man also went and gave himself up, and lived among the Russians for three months. At the end of that time he found his son, killed him with his own hands, and then escaped. After that he left off fighting and went to Mecca to pray to God; that is why he wears a turban. One who has been to Mecca is called "Hadji," and wears a turban. He does not like you fellows. He tells me to kill you. But I can't kill you. I have paid money for you and, besides, I have grown fond of you, Ivan. Far from killing you, I would not even let you go if I had not promised.' And he laughed, saying in Russian, 'You, Ivan, good; I, Abdul, good!'

IV

Zhilin lived in this way for a month. During the day he sauntered about the aoul or busied himself with some handicraft, but at night, when all was silent in the aoul, he dug at the floor of the barn. It was no easy task digging, because of the stones; but he worked away at

them with his file, and at last had made a hole under the wall large enough to get through.

'If only I could get to know the lay of the land,' thought he, 'and which way to go! But none of the Tartars will tell me.'

So he chose a day when the master was away from home, and set off after dinner to climb the hill beyond the village and look round. But before leaving home the master always gave orders to his son to watch Zhilin and not to lose sight of him. So the lad ran after Zhilin, shouting: 'Don't go! Father does not allow it. I'll call the neighbours if you won't come back.'

Zhilin tried to persuade him, and said: 'I'm not going far;—I only wanted to climb that hill. I want to find a herb—to cure sick people with. You come with me if you like. How can I run away with these shackles on? To-morrow I'll make a bow and arrows for you.'

So he persuaded the lad and they went. To look at the hill, it did not seem far to the top, but it was hard walking with shackles on his leg. Zhilin went on and on, but it was all he could do to reach the top. There he sat down and noted how the land lay. To the south, beyond the barn, was a valley in which a herd of horses was pasturing and at the bottom of the valley one could see another aoul. Beyond that was a steeper hill and another hill beyond that. Between the hills, in the blue distance, were forests, and still farther off were mountains, rising higher and higher. The highest of them were covered with snow, white as sugar; and one snowy peak towered above all the rest. To the east and to the west were other such hills, and here and there smoke rose from aouls in the ravines. 'Ah,' thought he, 'all that is Tartar country.' And he turned towards the Russian side. At his feet he saw a river, and the aoul he lived in, surrounded by little gardens. He could see women, like tiny dolls, sitting by the river rinsing clothes. Beyond the aoul was a hill, lower than the one to the south, and beyond it two other hills well wooded; and between these, a smooth bluish plain, and far, far across the plain something that looked like a cloud of smoke. Zhilin tried to remember where the sun used to rise and set when he was living in the fort, and he saw that there was no mistake: the Russian fort must be in that plain. Between those two hills he would have to make his way when he escaped.

The sun was beginning to set. The white, snowy mountains turned red, and the dark hills turned darker; mists rose from the ravine, and the valley, where he supposed the Russian fort to be, seemed on fire with the sunset glow. Zhilin looked carefully. Something seemed to be quivering in the valley like smoke from a chimney, and he felt sure the Russian fortress was there..

It had grown late. The mullah's cry was heard. The herds were being driven home, the cows were lowing, and the lad kept saying, 'Come home!' But Zhilin did not feel inclined to go away.

At last, however, they went back. 'Well,' thought Zhilin, 'now that I know the way, it is time to escape.' He thought of running away that night. The nights were dark—the moon had waned. But as ill-luck would have it, the Tartars returned home that evening. They generally came back driving cattle before them and in good spirits. But this time they had no cattle. All they brought home was the dead body of a Tartar—the red one's brother—who had been killed. They came back looking sullen, and they all gathered together for the burial. Zhilin also came out to see it.

They wrapped the body in a piece of linen without any coffin, and carried it out of the village, and laid it on the grass under some plane-trees. The mullah and the old men came. They wound cloths around their caps, took off their shoes, and squatted on their heels, side by side, near the corpse.

The mullah was in front: behind him in a row were three old men in turbans, and behind them again the other Tartars. All cast down their eyes and sat in silence. This continued a long time, until the mullah raised his head and said: 'Allah!' (which means God). He said that one word, and they all cast down their eyes again and were again silent for a long time. They sat quite still, not moving or making any sound.

Again the mullah lifted his head and said, 'Allah!' and they all repeated: 'Allah! Allah!' and were again silent.

The dead body lay immovable on the grass and they sat as still as if they too were dead. Not one of them moved. There was no sound but that of the leaves of the plane-trees stirring in the breeze. Then the mullah repeated a prayer, and they all rose. They lifted the body and carried it in their arms to a hole in the ground. It was not an ordinary hole, but was hollowed out under the ground like a vault. They took the body under the arms and by the legs, bent it, and let it gently down, pushing it under the earth in a sitting posture, with the hands folded in front.

The Nogay brought some green rushes, which they stuffed into the hole, and, quickly covering it with earth, they smoothed the ground, and set an upright stone at the head of the grave. Then they trod the earth down and again sat in a row before the grave, keeping silence for a long time.

At last they rose, said 'Allah! Allah! Allah!' and sighed.

The red-bearded Tartar gave money to the old men; then he too rose, took a whip, struck himself with it three times on the forehead, and went home.

The next morning Zhilin saw the red Tartar, followed by three others, leading a mare out of the village. When they were beyond the village the red-bearded Tartar took off his tunic and turned up his sleeves, showing his stout arms. Then he drew a dagger and sharpened it on a whet-stone. The other Tartars raised the mare's head and he cut her throat,

threw her down, and began skinning her, loosening the hide with his big hands. Women and girls came and began to wash the entrails and the inwards. The mare was cut up, the pieces taken into the hut, and the whole village collected at the red Tartar's hut for a funeral feast.

For three days they went on eating the flesh of the mare, drinking *buzza*, and praying for the dead man. All the Tartars were at home. On the fourth day at dinner-time Zhilin saw them preparing to go away. Horses were brought out, they got ready, and some ten of them (the red one among them) rode away; but Abdul stayed at home. It was new moon, and the nights were still dark.

'Ah!' thought Zhilin, 'to-night is the time to escape.' And he told Kostilin; but Kostilin's heart failed him.

'How can we escape?' he said. 'We don't even know the way.'

'I know the way,' said Zhilin.

'Even if you do,' said Kostilin, 'we can't reach the fort in one night.'

'If we can't,' said Zhilin, 'we'll sleep in the forest. See here, I have saved some cheeses. What's the good of sitting and moping here? If they send your ransom—well and good, but suppose they don't manage to collect it? The Tartars are angry now, because the Russians have killed one of their men. They are talking of killing us.'

Kostilin thought it over.

'Well, let's go,' said he.

V

Zhilin crept into the hole, widened it so that Kostilin might also get through, and then they both sat waiting till all should be quiet in the aoul.

As soon as all was quiet, Zhilin crept under the wall, got out, and whispered to Kostilin, 'Come!' Kostilin crept out, but in so doing he caught a stone with his foot and made a noise. The master had a very vicious watch-dog, a spotted one called Ulyashin. Zhilin had been careful to feed him for some time before. Ulyashin heard the noise and began to bark and jump, and the other dogs did the same. Zhilin gave a slight whistle, and threw him a bit of cheese. Ulyashin knew Zhilin, wagged his tail, and stopped barking.

But the master had heard the dog and shouted to him from his hut, 'Hayt; hayt, Ulyashin!'

Zhilin, however, scratched Ulyashin behind the ears, and the dog was quiet and rubbed against his legs, wagging his tail.

They sat hidden behind a corner for a while. All became silent again, only a sheep coughed inside a shed, and the water rippled over the stones in the hollow. It was dark, the stars were high overhead, and the new moon showed red as it set, horns upward, behind the hill. In the valleys the fog was white as milk.

Zhilin rose and said to his companion, 'Well, friend, come along!'

They started; but they had only gone a few steps when they heard the mullah crying from the roof, 'Allah, Bismillah! Irahman!' That meant that the people would be going to the mosque. So they sat down again, hiding behind a wall, and waited a long time till the people had passed. At last all was quiet again.

'Now then! May God be with us!' They crossed themselves and started once more. They passed through a yard and went down the hill-side to the river, crossed the river, and went along the valley.

The mist was thick but only near the ground, overhead the stars shone quite brightly. Zhilin directed their course by the stars. It was cool in the mist, and easy walking; only their boots were uncomfortable, being worn out and trodden down. Zhilin took his off, threw them away, and went barefoot, jumping from stone to stone and guiding his course by the stars. Kostilin began to lag behind.

'Walk slower,' he said, 'these confounded boots have quite blistered my feet.'

'Take them off!' said Zhilin. 'It will be easier walking without them.'

Kostilin went barefoot, but got on still worse. The stones cut his feet and he kept lagging behind. Zhilin said: 'If your feet get cut they'll heal again, but if the Tartars catch us and kill us, it will be worse!'

Kostilin did not reply, but went on, groaning all the time.

Their way lay through the valley for a long time. Then to the right they heard dogs barking. Zhilin stopped, looked about, and began climbing the hill, feeling with his hands.

'Ah!' said he, 'we have gone wrong and have come too far to the right. Here is another aoul, one I saw from the hill. We must turn back and go up that hill to the left. There must be a wood there.'

But Kostilin said: 'Wait a minute! Let me get breath. My feet are all cut and bleeding.'

'Never mind, friend! They'll heal again. You should spring more lightly. Like this!'

And Zhilin ran back and turned to the left up the hill towards the wood.

Kostilin still lagged behind and groaned. Zhilin only said 'Hush!' and went on and on.

They went up the hill and found a wood, as Zhilin had said. They entered the wood and forced their way through the brambles, which tore their clothes. At last they came to a path and followed it.

'Stop!' They heard the tramp of hoofs on the path, and waited, listening. It sounded like the tramping of a horse's feet, but then ceased. They moved on, and again they heard the tramping. When they paused, it also stopped. Zhilin crept nearer to it and saw something standing on the path where it was not quite so dark. It looked

like a horse, and yet not quite like one, and on it was something queer, not like a man. He heard it snorting. 'What can it be?' Zhilin gave a low whistle, and off it dashed from the path into the thicket, and the woods were filled with the noise of crackling, as if a hurricane were sweeping through breaking the branches.

Kostilin was so frightened that he sank to the ground. But Zhilin laughed and said: 'It's a stag. Don't you hear him breaking the branches with his antlers? We were afraid of him, and he is afraid of us.'

They went on. The Great Bear was already setting. It was near morning, and they did not know whether they were going the right way or not. Zhilin thought it was the way he had been brought by the Tartars, and that they were still some seven miles from the Russian fort; but he had nothing certain to go by, and at night one easily mistakes the way. After a time they came to a clearing. Kostilin sat down and said: 'Do as you like, I can go no farther! My feet won't carry me.'

Zhilin tried to persuade him.

'No, I shall never get there; I can't!'

Zhilin grew angry, and spoke roughly to him.

'Well, then, I shall go on alone. Good-bye!'

Kostilin jumped up and followed. They went another three miles. The mist in the wood had settled down still more densely; they could not see a yard before them and the stars had grown dim.

Suddenly they heard the sound of a horse's hoofs in front of them. They heard its shoes strike the stones. Zhilin lay down flat and listened with his ear to the ground.

'Yes, so it is! A horseman is coming towards us.'

They ran off the path, crouched among the bushes, and waited. Zhilin crept to the road, looked, and saw a Tartar on horseback driving a cow and humming to himself. The Tartar rode past. Zhilin returned to Kostilin.

'God has led him past us; get up and let's go on!'

Kostilin tried to rise, but fell back again.

'I can't; on my word I can't! I have no strength left.'

He was heavy and stout and had been perspiring freely. Chilled by the mist, and with his feet all bleeding, he had grown quite limp.

Zhilin tried to lift him, when suddenly Kostilin screamed out: 'Oh, how it hurts!'

Zhilin's heart sank.

'What are you shouting for? The Tartar is still near; he'll have heard you! And he thought to himself, 'He is really quite done up. What am I to do with him? It won't do to desert a comrade.'

'Well, then, get up and climb up on my back. I'll carry you if you really can't walk.'

He helped Kostilin up, and put his arms under his thighs. Then he went out on to the path, carrying him.

'Only, for the love of heaven,' said Zhilin, 'don't throttle me with your hands! Hold on to my shoulders.'

Zhilin found his load heavy; his feet, too, were bleeding, and he was tired out. Now and then he stooped to balance Kostilin better, jerking him up so that he should sit higher, and then went on again.

The Tartar must, however, really have heard Kostilin scream. Zhilin suddenly heard some one galloping behind and shouting in the Tartar tongue. He darted in among the bushes. The Tartar seized his gun and fired but did not hit them, shouted in his own language, and galloped off along the road.

'Well, now we are lost, friend!' said Zhilin. 'That dog will gather the Tartars together to hunt us down. Unless we can get a couple of miles away from here we are lost!' And he thought to himself, 'Why the devil did I saddle myself with this block? I should have got away long ago had I been alone.'

'Go on alone,' said Kostilin. 'Why should you perish because of me?'

'No, I won't go. It won't do to desert a comrade.'

Again he took Kostilin on his shoulders and staggered on. They went on in that way for another half-mile or more. They were still in the forest and could not see the end of it. But the mist was already dispersing and clouds seemed to be gathering; the stars were no longer to be seen. Zhilin was quite done in. They came to a spring walled in with stones by the side of the path. Zhilin stopped and set Kostilin down.

'Let me have a rest and a drink,' said he, 'and let us eat some of the cheese. It can't be much farther now.'

But hardly had he lain down to get a drink, than he heard the sound of horses' feet behind him. Again they darted to the right among the bushes, and lay down under a steep slope.

They heard Tartar voices. The Tartars stopped at the very spot where they had turned off the path. The Tartars talked a bit, and then seemed to be setting a dog on the scent. There was a sound of crackling twigs and a strange dog appeared from behind the bushes. It stopped, and began to bark.

Then the Tartars, also strangers, came climbing down, seized Zhilin and Kostilin, bound them, put them on horses, and rode away with them.

When they had ridden about two miles, they met Abdul, their owner, with two other Tartars following him. After talking with the strangers, he put Zhilin and Kostilin on two of his own horses and took them back to the Aoul.

Abdul did not laugh now and did not say a word to them.

They were back at the aoul by daybreak, and were set down in the street. The children came crowding round, throwing stones, shrieking, and beating them with whips.

The Tartars gathered together in a circle, and the old man from the foot of the hill was also there. They began discussing; and Zhilin heard them considering what should be done with him and Kostilin. Some said they ought to be sent farther into the mountains; but the old man said: 'They must be killed!'

Abdul disputed with him, saying: 'I gave money for them and I must get ransom for them.' But the old man said: 'They will pay you nothing, but will only bring misfortune. It is a sin to feed Russians. Kill them, and have done with it!'

They dispersed. When they had gone the master came up to Zhilin and said: 'If the money for your ransom is not sent within a fortnight, I will flog you; and if you try to run away again, I'll kill you like a dog! Write a letter and write properly!'

Paper was brought to them, and they wrote the letters. Shackles were put on their feet, and they were taken behind the mosque to a deep pit about twelve feet square, into which they were let down.

VI

Life was now very hard for them. Their shackles were never taken off, and they were not let out into the fresh air. Unbaked dough was thrown to them as if they were dogs, and water was let down in a can.

It was wet and close in the pit and there was a horrible stench. Kostilin grew quite ill, his body became swollen, and he ached all over and moaned or slept all the time. Zhilin, too, grew downcast; he saw it was a bad look-out and could think of no way of escape.

He tried to make a tunnel, but there was nowhere to put the earth. His master noticed it and threatened to kill him.

He was sitting on the floor of the pit one day, thinking of freedom and feeling very downhearted, when suddenly a cake fell into his lap, then another, and then a shower of cherries. He looked up and there was Dina. She looked at him, laughed, and ran away. And Zhilin thought: 'Might not Dina help me?'

He cleared out a little place in the pit, scraped up some clay, and began modelling toys. He made men, horses, and dogs, thinking, 'When Dina comes I'll throw them up to her.'

But Dina did not come next day. Zhilin heard the tramp of horses; some men rode past and the Tartars gathered in council near the mosque. They shouted and argued; the word 'Russians' was repeated several times. He could hear the voice of the old man. Though he could not distinguish what was said, he guessed that Russian troops were somewhere near, and that the Tartars, afraid they might come into the aoul, did not know what to do with their prisoners.

After talking awhile, they went away. Suddenly he heard a rustling overhead and saw Dina crouching at the edge of the pit her knees

higher than her head, and bending over so that the coins of her plait dangled above the pit. Her eyes gleamed like stars. She drew two cheeses out of her sleeve and threw them to him. Zhilin took them and said, 'Why did you not come before? I have made some toys for you. Here, catch!' And he began throwing the toys up, one by one.

But she shook her head and would not look at them.

'I don't want any,' she said. She sat silent for awhile and then went on, 'Ivan, they want to kill you!' And she pointed to her own throat.

'Who wants to kill me?'

'Father; the old men say he must. But I feel sorry for you!'

Zhilin answered: 'Well, if you feel sorry for me, bring me a long pole.'

She shook her head, as much as to say, 'I can't!'

He clasped his hands and prayed her: 'Dina, please do! Dear Dina, I beg of you!'

'I can't!' she said, 'they would see me bringing it. They're all at home.' And she went away.

So when evening came Zhilin still sat looking up now and then, and wondering what would happen. The stars were there, but the moon had not yet risen. The mullah's voice was heard; then all was silent. Zhilin was beginning to doze, thinking: 'The girl will be afraid to do it!'

Suddenly he felt clay falling on his head. He looked up, and saw a long pole poking into the opposite wall of the pit. It kept poking about for a time and then it came down, sliding into the pit. Zhilin was glad indeed. He took hold of it and lowered it. It was a strong pole, one that he had seen before on the roof of his master's hut.

He looked up. The stars were shining high in the sky, and just above the pit Dina's eyes gleamed in the dark like a cat's. She stooped with her face close to the edge of the pit and whispered, 'Ivan! Ivan!' waving her hand in front of her face to show that he should speak low.

'What?' said Zhilin.

'All but two have gone away.'

Then Zhilin said, 'Well, Kostilin, come; let us have one last try; I'll help you up.'

But Kostilin would not hear of it.

'No,' said he, 'It's clear I can't get away from here. How can I go when I have hardly strength to turn round?'

'Well, good-bye, then! Don't think ill of me!' and they kissed each other. Zhilin seized the pole, told Dina to hold on, and began to climb. He slipped once or twice; the shackles hindered him. Kostilin helped him and he managed to get to the top. Dina, with her little hands, pulled with all her might at his shirt, laughing.

Zhilin drew out the pole, and said, 'Put it back in its place, Dina, or they'll notice and you will be beaten.'

She dragged the pole away, and Zhilin went down the hill. When he had gone down the steep incline, he took a sharp stone and tried to wrench the lock off the shackles. But it was a strong lock and he could not manage to break it, and besides, it was difficult to get at. Then he heard some one running down the hill, springing lightly. He thought: 'Surely, that's Dina again.'

Dina came, took a stone, and said, 'Let me try.'

She knelt down and tried to wrench the lock off, but her little hands were as slender as little twigs, and she had not the strength. She threw the stone away and began to cry. Then Zhilin set to work again at the lock, and Dina squatted beside him with her hand on his shoulder.

Zhilin looked round and saw a red light to the left behind the hill. The moon was just rising. 'Ah!' he thought, 'before the moon has risen I must have passed the valley and be in the forest.' So he rose and threw away the stone. Shackles or no, he must go on.

'Good-bye, Dina dear!' he said. 'I shall never forget you!'

Dina seized hold of him and felt about with her hands for a place to put some cheeses she had brought. He took them from her.

'Thank you, my little one. Who will make dolls for you when I am gone?' And he stroked her head.

Dina burst into tears, hiding her face in her hands. Then she ran up the hill like a young goat, the coins in her plait clinking against her back.

Zhilin crossed himself, took the lock of his shackles in his hand to prevent its clattering, and went along the road, dragging his shackled leg and looking towards the place where the moon was about to rise. He now knew the way. If he went straight he would have to walk nearly six miles. If only he could reach the wood before the moon had quite risen! He crossed the river; the light behind the hill was growing whiter. Still looking at it, he went along the valley. The moon was not yet visible. The light became brighter; and one side of the valley was growing lighter and lighter, and shadows were drawing in towards the foot of the hill, creeping nearer and nearer to him.

Zhilin went on, keeping in the shade. He was hurrying, but the moon was moving still faster; the tops of the hills on the right were already lit up. As he got near the wood the white moon appeared from behind the hills, and it became light as day. One could see all the leaves on the trees. It was light on the hill, but silent, as if nothing were alive; no sound could be heard but the gurgling of the river below.

Zhilin reached the wood without meeting any one, chose a dark spot, and sat down to rest.

He rested, and ate one of the cheeses. Then he found a stone and set to work again to knock off the shackles. He knocked his hands

sore, but could not break the lock. He rose and went along the road. After walking the greater part of a mile he was quite done up and his feet were aching. He had to stop every ten steps. 'There is nothing else for it,' thought he. 'I must drag on as long as I have any strength left. If I sit down I shan't be able to rise again. I can't reach the fortress; but when day breaks I'll lie down in the forest, remain there all day, and go on again at night.'

He went on all night. Two Tartars on horseback passed him, but he heard them a long way off, and hid behind a tree.

The moon began to grow paler, and the dew to fall. It was getting near dawn and Zhilin had not reached the end of the forest. 'Well,' thought he, 'I'll walk another thirty steps, and then turn in among the trees and sit down.'

He walked another thirty steps and saw that he was at the end of the forest. He went to the edge; it was now quite light, and straight before him was the plain and the fortress. To the left, quite close at the foot of the slope, a fire was dying out, and the smoke from it spread around. There were men gathered about the fire.

He looked intently and saw guns glistening. They were soldiers—Cossacks!

Zhilin was filled with joy. He collected his remaining strength and set off down the hill, saying to himself: 'God forbid that any mounted Tartar should see me now, in the open field! Near as I am, I could not get there in time.'

Hardly had he said this when, a couple of hundred yards off, on a hillock to the left, he saw three Tartars.

They saw him also and made a rush. His heart sank. He waved his hands and shouted with all his might, 'Brothers, brothers! Help!'

The Cossacks heard him, and a party of them on horseback darted to cut across the Tartars' path. The Cossacks were far and the Tartars were near; but Zhilin, too, made a last effort. Lifting the shackles with his hand, he ran towards the Cossacks hardly knowing what he was doing, crossing himself and shouting, 'Brothers! Brothers! Brothers!'

There were some fifteen Cossacks. The Tartars were frightened, and stopped before reaching him. Zhilin staggered up to the Cossacks.

They surrounded him and began questioning him. 'Who are you? What are you? Where from?'

But Zhilin was quite beside himself and could only weep and repeat, 'Brothers! Brothers!'

Then the soldiers came running up and crowded round Zhilin—one giving him bread, another buckwheat, a third vodka: one wrapping a cloak round him, another breaking his shackles.

The officers recognized him, and rode with him to the fortress. The soldiers were glad to see him back, and his comrades all gathered round him.

Zhilin told them all that had happened to him.

'That's the way I went home and got married!' said he. 'No. It seems plain that fate was against it!'

So he went on serving in the Caucasus. A month passed before Kostilin was released, after paying five thousand rubles ransom. He was nearly dead when they brought him back.

God Sees the Truth, but Waits†

In the town of Vladimir lived a young merchant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksenov. He had two shops and a house of his own.

Aksenov was a handsome, fair-haired, curly-headed fellow, full of fun and very fond of singing. When quite a young man he had been prone to drink and was riotous when he'd had too much; but after he married he gave up drinking except now and then.

One summer Aksenov was going to the Nizhny Fair, and as he bade good-bye to his family his wife said to him, "Ivan Dmitrich, don't start out to-day; I've had a bad dream about you."

Aksenov laughed, and said, "You're afraid that when I get to the fair I'll go on a spree."

His wife replied: "I don't know what I'm afraid of; all I know is that I had a bad dream. I dreamt you returned from town, and when you took off your cap I saw that your hair was quite grey."

Aksenov laughed. "That's a lucky sign," he said. "See if I don't sell all my goods and bring you home some presents from the fair."

So he said good-bye to his family and drove away.

When he had travelled half-way, he met a merchant whom he knew, and they put up at the same inn for the night. They drank some tea together, and then went to bed in adjoining rooms.

It was not Aksenov's habit to sleep late, and, wishing to travel while it was still cool, he aroused his driver before dawn and told him to harness the horses.

Then he made his way across to the landlord of the inn (who lived in a cottage at the back), paid his bill, and continued his journey.

When he'd gone about twenty-five miles he stopped for the horses to be fed. Aksenov rested awhile in the passage of the inn, then he stepped out onto the porch and, ordering a samovar to be heated, got out his guitar and began to play.

† This piece was first published in 1872.