Alexander Solzhenitsyn

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Translated by Michael Glenny

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Foreword

This book comprises only the first part, or fascicle, of a work in many parts. Therefore, it makes no pretense at completeness, even in the development of its characters: except for the operations of Samsonov's army, this is only the initial presentation of a longer work.

The whole work, however, may take as long as twenty years, and probably I will not live to finish it.

Given the difficulty of retelling history, I need, as the work progresses, the cooperation of readers who still remember the period. That is why I have decided to publish in fascicles, or a series of volumes.

A. S.

Translator's Note

The translator wishes to record his gratitude for the invaluable help given to him in the form of research, editorial assistance, and specialist advice by Vera Belyavina-Dixon, Dr. M. Lewin, Susan Henderson, Leonid Vladimirov, Jacqueline Mitchell, Archpriest Sergei Hackel, and Linda Aldwinckle; as well as for the skill, support, and unfailing patience of the directors and editorial staff of my publishers in London. He is also greatly indebted to his colleagues of the Department of Russian Language and Literature and of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, University of Birmingham, without whose sympathy and cooperation this translation could not have been made. For the American edition, my publishers in New York have made minor emendations, mostly in spelling, to conform with American usage.

M.G.

Publisher's Note

In the "screen" sequences in this book, the four different margins are used to represent four sets of technical instructions for the shooting of a film. These, from left to right on the page, are sound effects, camera direction, action, dialogue. The symbol = indicates "cut to."

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[1]

They left the village on a clear morning at dawn. In the early sunlight the whole of the Caucasus range, each single indentation, could be seen, brilliantly white with deep blue hollows, apparently so close at hand that a stranger to the region might have thought it a mere two hours' drive away.

It towered so vast above petty human creation, so elemental in a man-made world, that even if all the men who had lived in all the past millennia had opened their arms as wide as they could and carried everything they had ever created or intended to create and piled it all up in massive heaps, they could never have raised a mountain ridge as fantastic as the Caucasus.

All the time, from village to village, the road kept the ridge directly in front of them, an ever-present goal with its snowy expanses, its bare crags, and its shadows hinting at ravines. But with every half hour it seemed to melt slightly at the base and detach itself from the earth, until it appeared to be no longer fixed but with its upper two-thirds hanging in the sky. It became shrouded in vapor, the gashes and ribs and mountainous features seemed blended into vast, cloud-like, white masses which were then riven into vaporous fragments indistinguishable from real clouds. After a while they too were wiped away and the range vanished altogether as if it had been a celestial mirage, leaving the travelers surrounded by a grayish sky and a pale heat haze. They had driven without changing direction for half a day and had covered more than thirty miles by mid-afternoon; now it appeared as though they were no longer faced by a gigantic mountain range but were instead hemmed in by rounded foothills: the Camel, the Bull, the bare-topped Snake, and the thickly wooded Iron Hill.

When they had set out, the road was not yet dusty, the steppe still cool and wet with dew, and they had driven on through the time of day when the steppe rang with bird song, took wing, chirped, and whistled, the grassland arustle. Now they were approaching the spa town of Mineralnye Vody, towing a lazy cloud of dust behind them, at the hour in the afternoon when everything was at its deadest and the only clear sound was the steady wooden rattle of their gig, the

noise of the horse's hoofs being almost smothered by dust. With the passing hours the delicate aromas of the grassland had come and gone, leaving only the warm smell of sun mixed with dust. Their gig, the straw on the floorboards, and they themselves smelled of it, but having lived in the steppe for as long as they could remember, they found the smell congenial and the heat not fatiguing.

Their father had not felt inclined to give them his sprung four-wheeler, to save it from wear and tear, and they had been so shaken about whenever they drove at a trot that they had come most of the way at a walk. They had driven between fields of wheat and herds of cattle, past barren salt marshes, up gently sloping hills, and across steep-sided gullies, some dry, some full of water. They did not see one real river, or any big villages, and hardly met a soul, as it was Sunday and no one was about. Isaakii, who was always easygoing but who, because of the object of this journey, was in an especially good mood today, was not wearied by the eight-hour drive and could have gone on twice as long, just holding the useless reins, hanging limply on either side of the tattered straw hat over the horse's ears.

His youngest half brother, Yevstrashka, who was to go through all the bouncing again that night on the return journey, at first slept on the straw behind Isaakii's back, then tossed about, stood up, gazed around at the steppe land, jumped down and ran off, then caught up with the gig. Perpetually active, he never stopped talking or asking questions: "If you close your eyes, Sanya, why does it feel as if you're going backward?"

Yevstrashka had just moved into the second-year class of the Pyatigorsk high school, although at first his father had only agreed to let him go, like Isaakii, to the local secondary school. The elder brothers and sisters, so the argument went, knew only about farming, cattle, and sheep, yet had managed well enough. Isaakii was sent to school a year later than necessary and after high school his father had kept him back for another year before allowing himself to be persuaded that what the boy now needed was to go to the university. But just as oxen do not move a heavy load with a quick jerk but with a long, steady pull, so Isaakii dealt with his father by patient insistence and without a head-on clash.

Isaakii loved his native village of Sablya and their farm six miles distant from it. He loved the work, and in the holidays, as now, he

never shirked his share of the scything and threshing. As for the future, he had hoped somehow to be able to combine the life he had known since childhood with the new outlook he was acquiring as a student. But with every year this ideal faded, for his learning estranged him irrevocably from his past, from the villagers, and from his family.

There were only two students in the whole village. Their ideas and their appearance provoked the villagers to amazement and laughter, and as soon as they arrived home they would quickly change into their old clothes. But one thing pleased Isaakii: for some reason village gossip drew a distinction between the other student and himself: him they teased as a *narodnik*. No one knew who had first fixed that label on him or why it had stuck, but now everyone amiably called him by this nickname. There had long since ceased to be any *narodniks* in Russia, but although Isaakii would never have dared to call himself a *narodnik* in public, he did in fact think of himself as one, as someone who had received an education to use for the benefit of the people and who would go back to the people with the book, the word, and with love.

However, even in his own family, this "return to the people" was almost impossible. The ideals which Isaakii had acquired from the teaching of Count Tolstoy demanded truthfulness and a clear conscience; yet, where his family was concerned, the opposite happened: he found himself lying. For instance, it was impossible to tell his father that a church service was a spectacle unworthy of belief in God, and with some priests actually a disgraceful scandal; that he only went to church so as not to shame his father in the village and would really much prefer not to go. Or, having become a vegetarian, he was never able to explain to his father and family and to the villagers that it was a matter of conscience; to maintain that one should not kill and therefore should not eat any living thing would cause ridicule and laughter at home and in the village. And so Isaakii would lie, saying that abstention from meat was the latest discovery of some German doctor and that since it guaranteed a long life he wanted to try it out. Although lying caused him agony, things would have been even worse if he had not lied.

But did his father's feelings matter? As the years went by, his vigorous, possessive stepmother gradually alienated him from his father and even from the home itself: his elder brothers and sisters grew up

and went away and the house was taken over by her and her children. This made Isaakii's latest decision easier, but even here he could not be completely frank, entangled as he was in so many previous lies. He was forced to pretend he had to return to the university early for "practical work," and even this invention had to be explained to his ingenuous father.

So far, the effect on their village of three weeks of war had been nothing but two manifestoes declaring war on Germany and Austria, which were read out in church and posted up in the churchyard, followed by the call-up of two contingents of reservists, while horses for remounts were delivered separately to the district town, because the men of their village did not count as Terek Cossacks but as Great Russians: they were therefore mustered into the infantry. In all other respects the war made no impact at all—newspapers never reached the village and it was too early for letters from the army in the field. In any case, there was no such thing as a "letter"; for people to "get letters" had always been considered ostentatious and snobbish in their village and Isaakii tried to avoid receiving them. None of the Lazhenitsyns had been called up for service: the oldest brother was well on in years, his son was already on active service, the middle brother had some fingers missing, Isaakii was still a student, and his stepmother's children were too young.

Nor were any signs of war noticeable on their half day's journey through the vast steppe.

They had crossed the bridge over the river Kum, driven over the stone viaduct across the baking-hot expanse of the double-tracked railway line, and were driving along the grass-grown main street of the village once known as Kumskaya, now called Mineralnye Vody. Here too they saw no signs of war. Life, stubbornly resistant to upheaval, flowed on as sluggish and unremarkable as before.

They stopped by a well in the shade of a large elm. Yevstrashka had to halt here to water the horses and cool them down before driving back home. Isaakii had a wash, sousing himself down to the waist with two bucketfuls of water. Yevstrashka poured the icy water onto Isaakii's back out of a dirty tin mug, after which he dried himself, put on a clean white shirt tied at the waist with a belt, and brushed the dust off. Leaving his belongings in the cart except for a small bundle, he set off for the station.

The station square in Mineralnye Vody was a typical village square, with hens scratching around on its edges, and charabancs and carts, followed by a trail of dust, driving up to the long, wooden station building.

The platform, by contrast, its length shaded by a light awning supported on thin painted pillars, was airy and cool, hinting, as it did this morning, at all the charms of a mountain resort. Wild vines grew up the pillars of the awning and everything had the familiar, cheerful air of a country dacha, as if here too no one had heard of such a thing as war. Ladies in light-colored coats and men in tussore suits walked along behind their porters toward the platform for trains to Kislovodsk. Ice cream, sparkling Narzan water, colored balloons, and newspapers were on sale. Isaakii had already bought several of these papers, opening some as he walked along and the rest as he sat on a bench on the dacha-style platform. His face, normally gentle, pensive, and kind, took on an expression of keen, tense absorption. In contrast to his usual deliberate manner, he did not read each news item to the end, but skipped about from column to column, unfolding a second and then a third newspaper. Marvelous news! Major Russian victory at Gumbinnen! The enemy will be forced to evacuate the whole of Prussia . . . things going well on the Austrian front too . . . and the Serbs have won a victory!

As he sat there, radiant with emotion, forgetting even to go and buy his ticket, a girl's voice called out to him excitedly and someone touched him on the shoulder It was Varya, an old friend from his schooldays in Pyatigorsk. An orphan, in those days she had worn her hair pulled back, which had made her head look narrow and smooth, but now her hair was fluffed out on the sides and she was clearly thrilled to see him.

"Sanya! You? What a coincidence! How funny, all the way from St. Petersburg I was thinking I would meet *you*, of all people! I wanted to send a telegram to your village but then I remembered you don't like . . ."

She did not turn her head, so that he could not see her profile, the curve of her rather large, hawk-like nose, and her assertive, masculine chin. Besides, it would be unkind to notice such things when someone greeted you so warmly.

Sanya was pleased to see her but at a loss for words. They sat

down side by side. "Do you remember, Sanya, how we met by pure chance in Pyatigorsk? Are you traveling, or are you meeting somebody?"

He did not look all that young, certainly not boyish; but in his clean white shirt and with his tousled, wavy, corn-colored hair, he struck her as a typical son of the steppe, tanned and healthy, as though suffused with the sunlight. Between the triangle of his clipped, russet moustache and the shaggy growth of an immature beard, his lips broke into a friendly smile, and he said: "No, I'm traveling . . ." His eyes never could express simple, uncomplicated delight; it was always mixed with inward reservation. ". . . to Moscow." He looked down and away from her, rather as if he felt guilty or was afraid of upsetting her. "I'm calling in at Rostov first. I have a friend there. You know him—Kotya, Konstantin."

"But the term doesn't start for three weeks yet! Or do you think they'll call you up . . ." Varya asked anxiously ". . . when you're still only in your fourth year? Of course they won't! Why are you going away then? Why?"

He gave an embarrassed smile.

"Well, you know . . . I'm restless at home on the farm . . ."

It was true that they had met before by accident. A pupil of the Pyatigorsk city girls' school, she had gone out one evening onto the main street secretly hoping for something to happen, when this high-school boy three years older than herself, whom she already knew slightly, had come toward her.

Whenever they met, they would have discussions. Their meetings consisted of serious, intelligent conversations which were very important to Varya. She had never, as far as she could remember, had a close friend older than herself. Even when it was dark, when they could not be seen by their teachers and it would have been all right for Sanya to have taken Varya's arm, he did not take it. Although she respected him for his seriousness, she wished he would take her arm, even if it meant respecting him slightly less.

Later on they occasionally went to school dances and other parties, but there too they spent most of their time in discussion and never danced. Sanya said that embracing during a waltz created desires

which were not founded on true emotions and that Count Tolstoy considered this a bad thing. Varya gave in to his gentle, careful reasoning and convinced herself that she did not want to dance either.

After that they kept up a correspondence for several years, during which time he wrote her sober, didactic letters. Although Varya's studies had broadened her outlook considerably and she now knew many clever people, she often thought about Sanya and wanted to see him again. However, burdened with her studies, she never left St. Petersburg in the summer, and Sanya never went there.

Three weeks ago, when Varya had read the Tsar's manifesto posted on an advertising pillar on Vasilevsky Island, where she lived, she took a tram across the Neva and there on St. Isaac's Square saw the German Embassy being sacked by patriots. Everyone was wildly excited, as though what had arrived was not a war but their own long-awaited happiness. And in that moment of violence by the brownish-black pillars of St. Isaac's Cathedral, Varya had a sudden urge to see Sanya at once, that very minute. Whenever she drove past the cathedral, in fact, she always thought of him. Disliking his own name, he used to laugh it off by saying that Peter the Great was his namesake; he too had been born on St. Isaac's day, hence the name of the cathedral, the only difference being that the Tsar had had his name changed to a better-sounding one, whereas he, a boy from the steppe, had not.

Without warning, Varya had suddenly been summoned to Pyatigorsk—her "guardian," the man who had donated money to enable her and many other orphans to study at the university, had fallen seriously ill. It was considered proper that she should go to see him, although he did not remember all his beneficiaries and the arrival of some unknown girl student with formal expressions of gratitude was hardly likely to improve his condition. And as she sat for four uncomfortable days in the train crossing the whole breadth of the empire, for some reason the thought of Sanya suddenly came into her head and she cried out, "Sanya, meet me! Sanya, meet me!" as she had once done when walking down the length of the main street of Pyatigorsk in the days of her angular head and pulled-back hair.

She felt frightened and lonely. Her life had not been a particularly full one, but at least she had had a sense of belonging, of being one drop of water in the great lake which was the life of Russia. Now it was as though the bottom of that lake had opened up and the water

was draining away forever, swirling and roaring as it went. Before it dried up completely, she had to hurry, hurry!

And another thing—she wanted to find out why everything had suddenly been turned upside down. What had happened? Only a month or three weeks ago, no thinking Russian citizen had doubted the fact that the ruler of Russia was a despicable individual, unworthy of serious mention; no one would have dreamed of quoting him except as a joke. Yet in a matter of days everything had changed. Quite voluntarily, seemingly educated, intelligent people would gather with serious faces around the advertisement pillars, and the Tsar's long string of pompous titles, simply because they were printed on these massive, cylindrical slabs, did not strike them as ridiculous at all. And people of their own accord would read out in loud, clear voices: "At the call to arms, Russia has risen up to meet the enemy, with iron in her hands and with the cross upon her heart, ready for a feat of valor . . . The Lord sees that we have taken up arms not from martial ambition or for the sake of vain earthly glory, but for a just cause—to defend the integrity and safety of our divinely protected Empire . . ."

Throughout her long journey Varya had observed the effects of war—the loading of troop trains, the farewells. Especially at small stations, the Russian leave-taking was an almost joyous affair, with the reservists dancing away to balalaika music and raising the dust on the trampled earth of the trackside. They would call out in obviously drunken voices while their relatives made the sign of the cross over them and wept as they drew away. Whenever one string of freight cars full of reservists passed another, a fraternal "Hurrah!" would go up from the two trains and would be prolonged in a crazy, desperate, senseless roar for the length of both.

And no one demonstrated against the Tsar.

Now Sanya was equally unable to answer her question: "What has happened?" He felt himself being sucked by the same whirlpool into the same bottomless pit. Had he, her faithful mentor of old, taken leave of his senses too? She was now desperate to give him back the clarity of thought and firmness of will which he had once given her, to snatch him out of the whirlpool as fast as her frail, thin arms were able. Although she had not prepared her words, the thoughts flowed spon-

taneously as she spoke . . . The decades of "civic" literature, the ideals of the intelligentsia, the students' devotion to the common people—was all this to be abandoned and cast aside in a single moment? Could they simply forget it all? . . . The ideals of Lavrov, of Mikhailovsky? . . . Hadn't he himself once said . . . ? Anyone watching them might have thought that she was the militant patriot of the two, and that it was he who was gently arguing against the war. Varya became quite heated, the underlying harshness of her looks came to the fore, that tenseness which was never entirely absent from her face and tended to spoil it. She stood up and in her desperation knocked her hat crooked. It was her cheapest and least flattering hat, chosen not for its attractiveness but to protect her from the sun.

Sanya lowered his newspapers. He was lost for words and began to justify himself with some embarrassment.

"It's not like the Japanese war. *They* attacked us. What have we done to the Germans?"

A fine thing—giving way to that reactionary sort of patriotism! It was a betrayal of all his principles! All right, so he never was a revolutionary, but he was always a pacifist.

The newspapers resting on his knees, Sanya quietly folded his arms. Unable to defend himself, he stared placidly at her and nodded his head. He felt sad.

Terrified by his silence, she guessed what was in his mind. "You aren't going to volunteer now, are you?"

Sanya nodded. He smiled diffidently. "I feel . . . sorry for Russia."

The water gurgled and roared as it drained out of the lake.

"What do you mean, sorry for Russia?" asked Varya, stung to fury. "Who are you sorry for? That fool of a Tsar? Those disgusting little shopkeepers who join the Black Hundreds and beat up the Jews? The priests in their long robes?"

Sanya did not answer—there was nothing he could say. Instead, he listened. The hail of reproaches did not make him in the least resentful: it was his invariable habit to test himself against the person he was arguing with.

"Have you really got the right temperament to fight?" Varya was snatching at anything to hand. For the first time she felt cleverer than he, more mature and more critical—yet the only result was a chilling sense of loss. "What about Tolstoy?" she said as a last resort. "What