

# *ALL THE KING'S* **HORSES**

by

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## Chapter 1

*Walking to camp-the man at the watch-tall one-the cooking pots*

***T**here he rides: The Rider, his horse trotting along the muddy road, the iron hooves digging into the soft brown mixture below him.*

*Watching the trees sway before him - the wooden guardians of this path who stand irresolute in their vigilance - he rides as a man intent and with purpose down this path.*

*He is a stranger in this land, the birds and beasts watch him, an unknown visitor intruding upon their nature. He stares back, equally pondering and wondering. His family are not from this soil, and his fellow countrymen, through here, have come with cannon and shot, in violence and horror to take this land.*

*His father was a lawyer, a man of books rarely at his family's house, but always to his son on his short visits from Paris. His mother is a woman he shall never know, as alien to him as the milk maid he passed 50 miles back. The strains of childbirth had taken from her the fires of life, and birthed a baby whose very existence was permeated by death. The baby's cries brought her winter, and like a tree she withered up and died.*

*So he was raised mostly by his sister, who he saw less as a sibling and more a figure of reverence. She was the one who nursed and cared for him from the time he was a small infant. He still carries her visage in a locket which hangs*

*from his neck bobbing as he rides. He is deep in thought, his mind curled in on itself, but this harmony inside his mind is interrupted by an intruder.*

*“Wenn dor geht, is dat Camp vun sien Majesteit-Napoleon's-Grand Armee. "Hier kannst Du Dein Naam um Beträgen festlegen!"*

*The strange and crass tongue the man spoke was utterly unknown to The Rider, its harsh tones strange and nothing like the French he knew nor the little English his father had taught him.*

*“Excuse me, sir?”*

*The lone watchman did not understand the words The Rider spoke, but must have understood it was French. The man's silhouette, painted on the tower wall in golden lamplight, could be seen heading downstairs to hail someone. Soon after another figure emerged, a similar look to the first, both clearly of the same Germanic ilk. But when this man talked he spoke the Emperor's French though with an unmistakable Saxon accent.*

*“Are you part of the army sir?” he asked concisely.*

*“Uh, yes, I'm a cavalryman, joined in Toulouse, you are?”*

*The Rider was wanting to converse with the man, lonely nights on Prussian roads without knowledge of culture or language gave him the urge to socialise with anyone he could communicate with. The French speaking Saxon was not of this disposition, he had no wish to talk with the lone cavalryman.*

*“I'm Infantry, 2nd battalion, you can enter through the gate, camp's 3 miles down.”*

*And so The Rider entered into the camp, his horse continued to shamble along, stumbling more than trotting the weight of his long journey finally revealing themselves on their last leg.*

*Half way down the road, another man joined him. He turned his horse so that he rode abreast of him and looked jolly. A happy face, as rare here as a red rose in winter, who had clearly had that same urge to converse. Though The Rider suspected that this thought had come from a love of talking rather than a lack of it.*

*“G'day mate,” he said looking over to The Rider, “good to see a fellow cavalryman, from whence you hail?”*

*“Toulouse, I'm heading for the 4th cavalry.”*

*“Well I never, I'm 4th battalion too, and from Toulouse, it's a small world we live in lad. Well if that's so, I'm picking up some of the rations. How 'bout you come with, cooking pots are only a small detour.”*

*This seemed less of a suggestion than a passive order, so The Rider obliged. Riding through camp was short, yet revealing. Like a small city, thousands of soldiers went to and from many different places. On his left were six men, hauling a cannon onto a still cart. Further down, a captain was overseeing bayonet training: hundreds of soldiers were stabbing long sharp lances into soft sandbags and straw dummies.*

*The sound of so many men going about their lives in this city of tents made it sound like the crash of a waterfall. This tent city, by his reckoning, had at least 300,000 souls busying themselves, three times the size of Toulouse and nearly as large as Paris.*

*“Lots of folk here.”*

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*All The King's Horses is a provocative war novel set during The Napoleonic Wars and the Prussian campaign.*

*Follow the story of The Rider and his comrades, as they navigate the world of death and destruction that comes with war and he answers the question whether we really control who we become and who we once were.*