CHAPTER XX

The infantry regiments that had been caught unawares in the outskirts of the wood ran out of it, the different companies getting mixed, and retreated as a disorderly crowd. One soldier, in his fear, uttered the senseless cry, “Cut off!” that is so terrible in battle, and that word infected the whole crowd with a feeling of panic.

“Surrounded! Cut off? We’re lost!” shouted the fugitives.

The moment he heard the firing and the cry from behind, the general realized that something dreadful had happened to his regiment, and the thought that he, an exemplary officer of many years’ service who had never been to blame, might be held responsible at headquarters for negligence or inefficiency so staggered him that, forgetting the recalcitrant cavalry colonel, his own dignity as a general, and above all quite forgetting the danger and all regard for self-preservation, he clutched the crupper of his saddle and, spurring his horse, galloped to the regiment under a hail of bullets which fell around, but fortunately missed him. His one desire was to know what was happening and at any cost correct, or remedy, the mistake if he had made one, so that he, an exemplary officer of twenty-two years’ service, who had never been censured, should not be held to blame.

Having galloped safely through the French, he reached a field behind the copse across which our men, regardless of orders, were running and descending the valley. That moment of moral hesitation which decides the fate of battles had arrived. Would this disorderly crowd of soldiers attend to the voice of their commander, or would they, disregarding him, continue their flight? Despite his desperate shouts that used to seem so terrible to the soldiers, despite his furious purple countenance distorted out of all likeness to his former self, and the flourishing of his saber, the soldiers all continued to run, talking, firing into the air, and disobeying orders. The moral hesitation which decided the fate of battles was evidently culminating in a panic.

The general had a fit of coughing as a result of shouting and of the powder smoke and stopped in despair. Everything seemed lost. But at that moment the French who were attacking, suddenly and without any apparent reason, ran back and disappeared from the outskirts, and Russian sharpshooters showed themselves in the copse. It was Timókhin’s company, which alone had maintained its order in the wood and, having lain in ambush in a ditch, now attacked the French unexpectedly. Timókhin, armed only with a sword, had rushed at the enemy with such a desperate cry and such mad, drunken determination that, taken by surprise, the French had thrown down their muskets and run. Dólokhov, running beside Timókhin, killed a Frenchman at close quarters and was the first to seize the surrendering French officer by his collar. Our fugitives returned, the battalions re-formed, and the French who had nearly cut our left flank in half were for the moment repulsed. Our reserve units were able to join up, and the fight was at an end. The regimental commander and Major Ekonómov had stopped beside a bridge, letting the retreating companies pass by them, when a soldier came up

and took hold of the commander's stirrup, almost leaning against him. The man was wearing a bluish coat of broadcloth, he had no knapsack or cap, his head was bandaged, and over his shoulder a French munition pouch was slung. He had an officer's sword in his hand. The soldier was pale, his blue eyes looked impudently into the commander's face, and his lips were smiling. Though the commander was occupied in giving instructions to Major Ekonómov, he could not help taking notice of the soldier.

"Your excellency, here are two trophies," said Dólokhov, pointing to the French sword and pouch. "I have taken an officer prisoner. I stopped the company." Dólokhov breathed heavily from weariness and spoke in abrupt sentences. "The whole company can bear witness. I beg you will remember this, your excellency!"

"All right, all right," replied the commander, and turned to Major Ekonómov.

But Dólokhov did not go away; he untied the handkerchief around his head, pulled it off, and showed the blood congealed on his hair.

"A bayonet wound. I remained at the front. Remember, your excellency!"

Túshin's battery had been forgotten and only at the very end of the action did Prince Bagratión, still hearing the cannonade in the center, send his orderly staff officer, and later Prince Andrew also, to order the battery to retire as quickly as possible. When the supports attached to Túshin's battery had been moved away in the middle of the action by someone's order, the battery had continued firing and was only not captured by the French because the enemy could not surmise that anyone could have the effrontery to continue firing from four quite undefended guns. On the contrary, the energetic action of that battery led the French to suppose that here—in the center—the main Russian forces were concentrated. Twice they had attempted to attack this point, but on each occasion had been driven back by grapeshot from the four isolated guns on the hillock.

Soon after Prince Bagratión had left him, Túshin had succeeded in setting fire to Schön Grabern.

"Look at them scurrying! It's burning! Just see the smoke! Fine! Grand! Look at the smoke, the smoke!" exclaimed the artillerymen, brightening up.

All the guns, without waiting for orders, were being fired in the direction of the conflagration. As if urging each other on, the soldiers cried at each shot: "Fine! That's good! Look at it... Grand!" The fire, fanned by the breeze, was rapidly spreading. The French columns that had advanced beyond the village went back; but as though in revenge for this failure, the enemy placed ten guns to the right of the village and began firing them at Túshin's battery.

In their childlike glee, aroused by the fire and their luck in successfully cannonading the French, our artillerymen only noticed this battery when two balls, and then four more, fell among our guns, one knocking over two horses and another tearing off a munition-wagon driver's leg. Their spirits once roused were, however, not diminished, but only changed character. The horses were replaced by others from a reserve gun carriage, the wounded were carried away, and the four guns were turned against the ten-gun battery. Túshin's companion officer had been killed at the beginning of the engagement and within an hour seventeen of the forty men of the guns' crews had been disabled, but the artillerymen were still as merry and lively as ever. Twice they noticed the French appearing below them, and then they fired grapeshot at them.

Little Túshin, moving feebly and awkwardly, kept telling his orderly to "refill my pipe for that one!" and then, scattering sparks from it, ran forward shading his eyes with his small hand to look at the French.

"Smack at 'em, lads!" he kept saying, seizing the guns by the wheels and working the screws himself.

Amid the smoke, deafened by the incessant reports which always made him jump, Túshin not taking his pipe from his mouth ran from gun to gun, now aiming, now counting the charges, now giving orders about replacing dead or wounded horses and harnessing fresh ones, and shouting in his feeble voice, so high pitched and irresolute. His face grew more and more animated. Only when a man was killed or wounded did he frown and turn away from the sight, shouting angrily at the men who, as is always the case, hesitated about lifting the injured or dead. The soldiers, for the most part handsome fellows and, as is always the case in an artillery company, a head and shoulders taller and twice as broad as their officer—all looked at their commander like children in an embarrassing situation, and the expression on his face was invariably reflected on theirs.

Owing to the terrible uproar and the necessity for concentration and activity, Túshin did not experience the slightest unpleasant sense of fear, and the thought that he might be killed or badly wounded never occurred to him. On the contrary, he became more and more elated. It seemed to him that it was a very long time ago, almost a day, since he had first seen the enemy and fired the first shot, and that the corner of the field he stood on was well-known and familiar ground. Though he thought of everything, considered everything, and did everything the best of officers could do in his position, he was in a state akin to feverish delirium or drunkenness.

From the deafening sounds of his own guns around him, the whistle and thud of the enemy's cannon balls, from the flushed and perspiring faces of the crew bustling round the guns, from the sight of the blood of men and horses, from the little puffs of smoke on the enemy's side (always followed by a ball flying past and striking the earth, a man, a gun, a horse), from the sight of all these things a fantastic world of his own had taken possession of his brain and at that moment afforded him pleasure. The enemy's guns were in his fancy not guns but pipes

from which occasional puffs were blown by an invisible smoker.

“There... he’s puffing again,” muttered Túshin to himself, as a small cloud rose from the hill and was borne in a streak to the left by the wind.

“Now look out for the ball... we’ll throw it back.”

“What do you want, your honor?” asked an artilleryman, standing close by, who heard him muttering.

“Nothing... only a shell...” he answered.

“Come along, our Matvévna!” he said to himself. “Matvévna” * was the name his fancy gave to the farthest gun of the battery, which was large and of an old pattern. The French swarming round their guns seemed to him like ants. In that world, the handsome drunkard Number One of the second gun’s crew was “uncle”; Túshin looked at him more often than at anyone else and took delight in his every movement. The sound of musketry at the foot of the hill, now diminishing, now increasing, seemed like someone’s breathing. He listened intently to the ebb and flow of these sounds.

* Daughter of Matthew.

“Ah! Breathing again, breathing!” he muttered to himself.

He imagined himself as an enormously tall, powerful man who was throwing cannon balls at the French with both hands.

“Now then, Matvévna, dear old lady, don’t let me down!” he was saying as he moved from the gun, when a strange, unfamiliar voice called above his head: “Captain Túshin! Captain!”

Túshin turned round in dismay. It was the staff officer who had turned him out of the booth at Grunth. He was shouting in a gasping voice:

“Are you mad? You have twice been ordered to retreat, and you...”

“Why are they down on me?” thought Túshin, looking in alarm at his superior.

“I... don’t...” he muttered, holding up two fingers to his cap. “I...”

But the staff officer did not finish what he wanted to say. A cannon ball, flying close to him, caused him to duck and bend over his horse. He paused, and just as he was about to say something more, another ball stopped him. He turned his horse and galloped off.

“Retire! All to retire!” he shouted from a distance.

The soldiers laughed. A moment later, an adjutant arrived with the same order.

It was Prince Andrew. The first thing he saw on riding up to the space where Túshin's guns were stationed was an unharnessed horse with a broken leg, that lay screaming piteously beside the harnessed horses. Blood was gushing from its leg as from a spring. Among the limbers lay several dead men. One ball after another passed over as he approached and he felt a nervous shudder run down his spine. But the mere thought of being afraid roused him again. "I cannot be afraid," thought he, and dismounted slowly among the guns. He delivered the order and did not leave the battery. He decided to have the guns removed from their positions and withdrawn in his presence. Together with Túshin, stepping across the bodies and under a terrible fire from the French, he attended to the removal of the guns.

"A staff officer was here a minute ago, but skipped off," said an artilleryman to Prince Andrew. "Not like your honor!"

Prince Andrew said nothing to Túshin. They were both so busy as to seem not to notice one another. When having limbered up the only two cannon that remained uninjured out of the four, they began moving down the hill (one shattered gun and one unicorn were left behind), Prince Andrew rode up to Túshin.

"Well, till we meet again..." he said, holding out his hand to Túshin.

"Good-by, my dear fellow," said Túshin. "Dear soul! Good-by, my dear fellow!" and for some unknown reason tears suddenly filled his eyes.