

CHAPTER XVIII

Rostóv had been ordered to look for Kutúzov and the Emperor near the village of Pratzen. But neither they nor a single commanding officer were there, only disorganized crowds of troops of various kinds. He urged on his already weary horse to get quickly past these crowds, but the farther he went the more disorganized they were. The highroad on which he had come out was thronged with calèches, carriages of all sorts, and Russian and Austrian soldiers of all arms, some wounded and some not. This whole mass droned and jostled in confusion under the dismal influence of cannon balls flying from the French batteries stationed on the Pratzen Heights.

“Where is the Emperor? Where is Kutúzov?” Rostóv kept asking everyone he could stop, but got no answer from anyone.

At last seizing a soldier by his collar he forced him to answer.

“Eh, brother! They’ve all bolted long ago!” said the soldier, laughing for some reason and shaking himself free.

Having left that soldier who was evidently drunk, Rostóv stopped the horse of a batman or groom of some important personage and began to question him. The man announced that the Tsar had been driven in a carriage at full speed about an hour before along that very road and that he was dangerously wounded.

“It can’t be!” said Rostóv. “It must have been someone else.”

“I saw him myself,” replied the man with a self-confident smile of derision. “I ought to know the Emperor by now, after the times I’ve seen him in Petersburg. I saw him just as I see you.... There he sat in the carriage as pale as anything. How they made the four black horses fly! Gracious me, they did rattle past! It’s time I knew the Imperial horses and Ilyá Iványch. I don’t think Ilyá drives anyone except the Tsar!”

Rostóv let go of the horse and was about to ride on, when a wounded officer passing by addressed him:

“Who is it you want?” he asked. “The commander in chief? He was killed by a cannon ball—struck in the breast before our regiment.”

“Not killed—wounded!” another officer corrected him.

“Who? Kutúzov?” asked Rostóv.

“Not Kutúzov, but what’s his name—well, never mind... there are not many left alive. Go that way, to that village, all the commanders are there,” said the officer, pointing to the village of Hosjeradek, and he walked on.

Rostóv rode on at a footpace not knowing why or to whom he was now

going. The Emperor was wounded, the battle lost. It was impossible to doubt it now. Rostóv rode in the direction pointed out to him, in which he saw turrets and a church. What need to hurry? What was he now to say to the Tsar or to Kutúzov, even if they were alive and unwounded?

“Take this road, your honor, that way you will be killed at once!” a soldier shouted to him. “They’d kill you there!”

“Oh, what are you talking about?” said another. “Where is he to go? That way is nearer.”

Rostóv considered, and then went in the direction where they said he would be killed.

“It’s all the same now. If the Emperor is wounded, am I to try to save myself?” he thought. He rode on to the region where the greatest number of men had perished in fleeing from Pratzen. The French had not yet occupied that region, and the Russians—the uninjured and slightly wounded—had left it long ago. All about the field, like heaps of manure on well-kept plowland, lay from ten to fifteen dead and wounded to each couple of acres. The wounded crept together in twos and threes and one could hear their distressing screams and groans, sometimes feigned—or so it seemed to Rostóv. He put his horse to a trot to avoid seeing all these suffering men, and he felt afraid—afraid not for his life, but for the courage he needed and which he knew would not stand the sight of these unfortunates.

The French, who had ceased firing at this field strewn with dead and wounded where there was no one left to fire at, on seeing an adjutant riding over it trained a gun on him and fired several shots. The sensation of those terrible whistling sounds and of the corpses around him merged in Rostóv’s mind into a single feeling of terror and pity for himself. He remembered his mother’s last letter. “What would she feel,” thought he, “if she saw me here now on this field with the cannon aimed at me?”

In the village of Hosjeradek there were Russian troops retiring from the field of battle, who though still in some confusion were less disordered. The French cannon did not reach there and the musketry fire sounded far away. Here everyone clearly saw and said that the battle was lost. No one whom Rostóv asked could tell him where the Emperor or Kutúzov was. Some said the report that the Emperor was wounded was correct, others that it was not, and explained the false rumor that had spread by the fact that the Emperor’s carriage had really galloped from the field of battle with the pale and terrified Ober-Hofmarschal Count Tolstóy, who had ridden out to the battlefield with others in the Emperor’s suite. One officer told Rostóv that he had seen someone from headquarters behind the village to the left, and thither Rostóv rode, not hoping to find anyone but merely to ease his conscience. When he had ridden about two miles and had passed the last of the Russian troops, he saw, near a kitchen garden with a ditch round it, two men on horseback facing the ditch. One with a white plume in his hat seemed familiar to Rostóv; the other on a beautiful chestnut horse (which Rostóv fancied he had seen before) rode up to the ditch, struck his

horse with his spurs, and giving it the rein leaped lightly over. Only a little earth crumbled from the bank under the horse's hind hoofs. Turning the horse sharply, he again jumped the ditch, and deferentially addressed the horseman with the white plumes, evidently suggesting that he should do the same. The rider, whose figure seemed familiar to Rostóv and involuntarily riveted his attention, made a gesture of refusal with his head and hand and by that gesture Rostóv instantly recognized his lamented and adored monarch.

"But it can't be he, alone in the midst of this empty field!" thought Rostóv. At that moment Alexander turned his head and Rostóv saw the beloved features that were so deeply engraved on his memory. The Emperor was pale, his cheeks sunken and his eyes hollow, but the charm, the mildness of his features, was all the greater. Rostóv was happy in the assurance that the rumors about the Emperor being wounded were false. He was happy to be seeing him. He knew that he might and even ought to go straight to him and give the message Dolgorúkov had ordered him to deliver.

But as a youth in love trembles, is unnerved, and dares not utter the thoughts he has dreamed of for nights, but looks around for help or a chance of delay and flight when the longed-for moment comes and he is alone with her, so Rostóv, now that he had attained what he had longed for more than anything else in the world, did not know how to approach the Emperor, and a thousand reasons occurred to him why it would be inconvenient, unseemly, and impossible to do so.

"What! It is as if I were glad of a chance to take advantage of his being alone and despondent! A strange face may seem unpleasant or painful to him at this moment of sorrow; besides, what can I say to him now, when my heart fails me and my mouth feels dry at the mere sight of him?" Not one of the innumerable speeches addressed to the Emperor that he had composed in his imagination could he now recall. Those speeches were intended for quite other conditions, they were for the most part to be spoken at a moment of victory and triumph, generally when he was dying of wounds and the sovereign had thanked him for heroic deeds, and while dying he expressed the love his actions had proved.

"Besides how can I ask the Emperor for his instructions for the right flank now that it is nearly four o'clock and the battle is lost? No, certainly I must not approach him, I must not intrude on his reflections. Better die a thousand times than risk receiving an unkind look or bad opinion from him," Rostóv decided; and sorrowfully and with a heart full despair he rode away, continually looking back at the Tsar, who still remained in the same attitude of indecision.

While Rostóv was thus arguing with himself and riding sadly away, Captain von Toll chanced to ride to the same spot, and seeing the Emperor at once rode up to him, offered his services, and assisted him to cross the ditch on foot. The Emperor, wishing to rest and feeling unwell, sat down under an apple tree and von Toll remained beside him. Rostóv from a distance saw with envy and remorse how von Toll spoke long and warmly to the Emperor and how the Emperor, evidently weeping, covered his eyes with his hand and pressed von Toll's hand.

“And I might have been in his place!” thought Rostóv, and hardly restraining his tears of pity for the Emperor, he rode on in utter despair, not knowing where to or why he was now riding.

His despair was all the greater from feeling that his own weakness was the cause of his grief.

He might... not only might but should, have gone up to the sovereign. It was a unique chance to show his devotion to the Emperor and he had not made use of it... “What have I done?” thought he. And he turned round and galloped back to the place where he had seen the Emperor, but there was no one beyond the ditch now. Only some carts and carriages were passing by. From one of the drivers he learned that Kutúzov’s staff were not far off, in the village the vehicles were going to. Rostóv followed them. In front of him walked Kutúzov’s groom leading horses in horsecloths. Then came a cart, and behind that walked an old, bandy-legged domestic serf in a peaked cap and sheepskin coat.

“Tit! I say, Tit!” said the groom.

“What?” answered the old man absent-mindedly.

“Go, Tit! Thresh a bit!”

“Oh, you fool!” said the old man, spitting angrily. Some time passed in silence, and then the same joke was repeated.

Before five in the evening the battle had been lost at all points. More than a hundred cannon were already in the hands of the French.

Przebyszéwski and his corps had laid down their arms. Other columns after losing half their men were retreating in disorderly confused masses.

The remains of Langeron’s and Dokhtúrov’s mingled forces were crowding around the dams and banks of the ponds near the village of Augesd.

After five o’clock it was only at the Augesd Dam that a hot cannonade (delivered by the French alone) was still to be heard from numerous batteries ranged on the slopes of the Prätzen Heights, directed at our retreating forces.

In the rearguard, Dokhtúrov and others rallying some battalions kept up a musketry fire at the French cavalry that was pursuing our troops. It was growing dusk. On the narrow Augesd Dam where for so many years the old miller had been accustomed to sit in his tasseled cap peacefully angling, while his grandson, with shirt sleeves rolled up, handled the floundering silvery fish in the watering can, on that dam over which for so many years Moravians in shaggy caps and blue jackets had peacefully driven their two-horse carts loaded with wheat and had returned dusty with flour whitening their carts—on that narrow dam amid the wagons

and the cannon, under the horses' hoofs and between the wagon wheels, men disfigured by fear of death now crowded together, crushing one another, dying, stepping over the dying and killing one another, only to move on a few steps and be killed themselves in the same way.

Every ten seconds a cannon ball flew compressing the air around, or a shell burst in the midst of that dense throng, killing some and splashing with blood those near them.

Dólokhov—now an officer—wounded in the arm, and on foot, with the regimental commander on horseback and some ten men of his company, represented all that was left of that whole regiment. Impelled by the crowd, they had got wedged in at the approach to the dam and, jammed in on all sides, had stopped because a horse in front had fallen under a cannon and the crowd were dragging it out. A cannon ball killed someone behind them, another fell in front and splashed Dólokhov with blood. The crowd, pushing forward desperately, squeezed together, moved a few steps, and again stopped.

“Move on a hundred yards and we are certainly saved, remain here another two minutes and it is certain death,” thought each one.

Dólokhov who was in the midst of the crowd forced his way to the edge of the dam, throwing two soldiers off their feet, and ran onto the slippery ice that covered the millpool.

“Turn this way!” he shouted, jumping over the ice which creaked under him; “turn this way!” he shouted to those with the gun. “It bears!...”

The ice bore him but it swayed and creaked, and it was plain that it would give way not only under a cannon or a crowd, but very soon even under his weight alone. The men looked at him and pressed to the bank, hesitating to step onto the ice. The general on horseback at the entrance to the dam raised his hand and opened his mouth to address Dólokhov. Suddenly a cannon ball hissed so low above the crowd that everyone ducked. It flopped into something moist, and the general fell from his horse in a pool of blood. Nobody gave him a look or thought of raising him.

“Get onto the ice, over the ice! Go on! Turn! Don't you hear? Go on!” innumerable voices suddenly shouted after the ball had struck the general, the men themselves not knowing what, or why, they were shouting.

One of the hindmost guns that was going onto the dam turned off onto the ice. Crowds of soldiers from the dam began running onto the frozen pond. The ice gave way under one of the foremost soldiers, and one leg slipped into the water. He tried to right himself but fell in up to his waist. The nearest soldiers shrank back, the gun driver stopped his horse, but from behind still came the shouts: “Onto the ice, why do you stop? Go on! Go on!” And cries of horror were heard in the crowd. The soldiers near the gun waved their arms and beat the horses to make them turn and move on. The horses moved off the bank. The ice, that had held under

those on foot, collapsed in a great mass, and some forty men who were on it dashed, some forward and some back, drowning one another.

Still the cannon balls continued regularly to whistle and flop onto the ice and into the water and oftenest of all among the crowd that covered the dam, the pond, and the bank.