War and Peace

Leo Tolstoy

Kutuzov, accompanied by his adjutants, rode at a walk behind the carabineers

Having gone less than half a mile at the tail of the column, he stopped by a solitary, deserted house (probably a former tavern), where the road forked. Both roads went down the hill, and troops were marching along both.

The fog began to lift, and enemy troops could be dimly seen about a mile and a half away on the heights opposite. To the left below, the gunfire was growing louder. Kutuzov stopped, talking with an Austrian general. Prince Andrei, standing slightly behind him, peered at the enemy and turned to an adjutant, wishing to borrow a field glass from him.

"Look, look," said this adjutant, looking not at the distant troops, but down the hill in front of him. "It's the French!"

The two generals and the adjutants began snatching at the field glass, pulling it away from each other. All their faces suddenly changed, and on all of them horror appeared. The French were supposed to be a mile and a half from us, and they suddenly turned up right in front of us.

"Is it the enemy? . . . No! . . . Yes, look, he's . . . for certain . . . What is this?" voices said.

With his naked eye, Prince Andrei saw below, to the right, a dense column of French coming up to meet the Apsherontsy, no further than five hundred paces from where Kutuzov was standing.

"Here it is, the decisive moment has come! Now it's my turn," thought Prince Andrei, and, spurring his horse, he rode up to Kutuzov.

"The Apsherontsy must be stopped, Your Excellency!" he cried.

But at that same moment everything became covered with smoke, there was the sound of gunfire nearby, and a naively frightened voice two steps from Prince Andrei cried: "Well, brothers, that's it for us!" And it was as if this voice was a command. At this voice everyone began to run.

Confused, ever increasing crowds came running back to the place where, five minutes before, the troops had marched past the emperors. Not only was it difficult to stop this crowd, but it was impossible not to yield and move back with it. Bolkonsky tried only not to be separated from Kutuzov and looked around in perplexity, unable to understand what was happening in front of him. Nesvitsky, looking angry, red, and not like himself, shouted to Kutuzov that if he did not leave at once, he would certainly be taken prisoner. Kutuzov stood in the same place and, without responding, took out his handkerchief. Blood was flowing from his cheek. Prince Andrei forced his way to him.

"Are you wounded?" he asked, barely able to control the trembling of his lower jaw.

"The wound isn't here, it's there!" said Kutuzov, pressing the handkerchief to his wounded cheek and pointing to the fleeing men.

"Stop them!" he cried, and at the same time, probably realizing that it was impossible to stop them, spurred his horse and rode to the right.

A fresh crowd of fleeing men streamed past, caught him up, and carried him backwards.

The troops were fleeing in such a dense crowd that, once one landed in the middle of it, it was difficult to get out. Someone shouted, "Keep going, don't drag your feet!" Another, turning around, fired into the air; someone else struck the horse on which Kutuzov himself was riding. Extricating themselves with the greatest effort from the flow of the crowd to the left, Kutuzov and his suite, diminished by more than half, rode towards the sounds of nearby cannon fire. Extricating himself from the crowd of fleeing men, Prince Andrei, trying to keep up with Kutuzov, saw on the slope of the hill, amidst the smoke, a Russian battery still firing, and the French running up to it. Slightly higher stood Russian infantry, neither moving ahead to aid the battery, nor backwards in the direction of the fugitives. A general on horseback separated himself from the infantry and rode up to Kutuzov. There were only four men left in Kutuzov's suite. They were all pale and exchanged glances silently.

"Stop those villains!" Kutuzov said breathlessly to the regimental commander, pointing to the fleeing men; but at the same moment, as if in punishment for those words, bullets, like a flock of birds, flew whistling at the regiment and Kutuzov's suite.

The French had attacked the battery and, seeing Kutuzov, were shooting at him. With this volley, the regimental commander seized his leg; several soldiers fell, and an ensign holding a standard let it drop from his hands; the standard wavered and fell, stopped momentarily by the bayonets of the soldiers around it. The soldiers began firing without any orders.

"Oooh!" Kutuzov moaned with an expression of despair and looked around. "Bolkonsky," he whispered in a voice trembling with awareness of his old man's strengthlessness. "Bolkonsky," he whispered, pointing to the disordered battalion and the enemy, "what's going on?"

But before he finished saying it, Prince Andrei, feeling sobs of shame and anger rising in his throat, was already jumping off his horse and running towards the standard.

"Forward, lads!" he cried in a childishly shrill voice.

"Here it is!" thought Prince Andrei, seizing the staff of the standard and hearing with delight the whistle of bullets, evidently aimed precisely at him. Several soldiers fell.

"Hurrah!" cried Prince Andrei, barely able to hold up the heavy standard, and he ran forward with unquestioning assurance that the entire battalion would run after him.

And indeed he ran only a few steps alone. One soldier started out, another, and the whole battalion, with a shout of "Hurrah!" rushed forward and overtook him. A sergeant of the battalion ran up, took the standard that was wavering in Prince Andrei's hands because of its weight, but was killed at once. Prince Andrei again seized the standard and, dragging it by the staff, ran with the battalion. Ahead of him he saw our artillerists, some of whom were fighting, while others abandoned the cannon and came running in his direction; he also saw French infantrymen, who had seized the artillery horses and were turning the cannon. Prince Andrei and his battalion were now twenty paces from the cannon. Above him he heard the unceasing whistle of bullets, and soldiers ceaselessly gasped and fell to right and left of him. But he did not look at them; he looked fixedly only at what was happening ahead of him-at the battery. He clearly saw the figure of a red-haired gunner, his shako knocked askew, pulling a swab from one side, while a French soldier pulled it towards him from the other side. Prince Andrei saw clearly the bewildered and at the same time angry expression on the faces of the two men, who evidently did not understand what they were doing.

"What are they doing?" Prince Andrei wondered, looking at them. "Why doesn't the red-haired artillerist run away, since he has no weapon? Why doesn't the Frenchman stab him? Before he runs away, the Frenchman will remember his musket and bayonet him."

In fact, another Frenchman with his musket atilt ran up to the fighting men, and the lot of the red-haired artillerist, who still did not understand what awaited him and triumphantly pulled the swab from the French soldier's hands, was about to be decided. But Prince Andrei did not see how it ended. It seemed to him as though one of the nearest soldiers, with the full swing of a stout stick, hit him on the head. It was slightly painful and above all unpleasant, because the pain distracted him and kept him from seeing what he had been looking at.

"What is it? am I falling? are my legs giving way under me?" he thought, and fell on his back. He opened his eyes, hoping to see how the fight between the French and the artillerists ended, and wishing to know whether or not the red-haired artillerist had been killed, whether the cannon had been taken or saved. But he did not see anything. There was nothing over him now except the sky-the lofty sky, not clear, but still immeasurably lofty, with gray clouds slowly creeping across it. "How quiet, calm, and solemn, not at all like when I was running," thought Prince Andrei, "not like when we were running, shouting, and fighting; not at all like when the Frenchman and the artillerist, with angry and frightened faces, were pulling at the swab-it's quite different the way the clouds creep across this lofty, infinite sky. How is it I haven't seen this lofty sky before? And how happy I am that I've finally come to know it. Yes! everything is empty, everything is a deception, except this infinite sky. There is nothing, nothing except that. But there is not even that, there is nothing except silence, tranquillity. And thank God! . . ."