

## CHAPTER IV

Bald Hills, Prince Nicholas Bolkónski's estate, lay forty miles east from Smolénsk and two miles from the main road to Moscow.

The same evening that the prince gave his instructions to Alpátych, Dessalles, having asked to see Princess Mary, told her that, as the prince was not very well and was taking no steps to secure his safety, though from Prince Andrew's letter it was evident that to remain at Bald Hills might be dangerous, he respectfully advised her to send a letter by Alpátych to the Provincial Governor at Smolénsk, asking him to let her know the state of affairs and the extent of the danger to which Bald Hills was exposed. Dessalles wrote this letter to the Governor for Princess Mary, she signed it, and it was given to Alpátych with instructions to hand it to the Governor and to come back as quickly as possible if there was danger.

Having received all his orders Alpátych, wearing a white beaver hat—a present from the prince—and carrying a stick as the prince did, went out accompanied by his family. Three well-fed roans stood ready harnessed to a small conveyance with a leather hood.

The larger bell was muffled and the little bells on the harness stuffed with paper. The prince allowed no one at Bald Hills to drive with ringing bells; but on a long journey Alpátych liked to have them. His satellites—the senior clerk, a countinghouse clerk, a scullery maid, a cook, two old women, a little pageboy, the coachman, and various domestic serfs—were seeing him off.

His daughter placed chintz-covered down cushions for him to sit on and behind his back. His old sister-in-law popped in a small bundle, and one of the coachmen helped him into the vehicle.

“There! There! Women's fuss! Women, women!” said Alpátych, puffing and speaking rapidly just as the prince did, and he climbed into the trap.

After giving the clerk orders about the work to be done, Alpátych, not trying to imitate the prince now, lifted the hat from his bald head and crossed himself three times.

“If there is anything... come back, Yákov Alpátych! For Christ's sake think of us!” cried his wife, referring to the rumors of war and the enemy.

“Women, women! Women's fuss!” muttered Alpátych to himself and started on his journey, looking round at the fields of yellow rye and the still-green, thickly growing oats, and at other quite black fields just being plowed a second time.

As he went along he looked with pleasure at the year's splendid crop of corn, scrutinized the strips of ryefield which here and there were already being reaped, made his calculations as to the sowing and the harvest, and asked himself whether he had not forgotten any of the

prince's orders.

Having baited the horses twice on the way, he arrived at the town toward evening on the fourth of August.

Alpátych kept meeting and overtaking baggage trains and troops on the road. As he approached Smolénsk he heard the sounds of distant firing, but these did not impress him. What struck him most was the sight of a splendid field of oats in which a camp had been pitched and which was being mown down by the soldiers, evidently for fodder. This fact impressed Alpátych, but in thinking about his own business he soon forgot it.

All the interests of his life for more than thirty years had been bounded by the will of the prince, and he never went beyond that limit. Everything not connected with the execution of the prince's orders did not interest and did not even exist for Alpátych.

On reaching Smolénsk on the evening of the fourth of August he put up in the Gáchina suburb across the Dnieper, at the inn kept by Ferapóntov, where he had been in the habit of putting up for the last thirty years. Some thirty years ago Ferapóntov, by Alpátych's advice, had bought a wood from the prince, had begun to trade, and now had a house, an inn, and a corn dealer's shop in that province. He was a stout, dark, red-faced peasant in the forties, with thick lips, a broad knob of a nose, similar knobs over his black frowning brows, and a round belly.

Wearing a waistcoat over his cotton shirt, Ferapóntov was standing before his shop which opened onto the street. On seeing Alpátych he went up to him.

"You're welcome, Yákov Alpátych. Folks are leaving the town, but you have come to it," said he.

"Why are they leaving the town?" asked Alpátych.

"That's what I say. Folks are foolish! Always afraid of the French."

"Women's fuss, women's fuss!" said Alpátych.

"Just what I think, Yákov Alpátych. What I say is: orders have been given not to let them in, so that must be right. And the peasants are asking three rubles for carting—it isn't Christian!"

Yákov Alpátych heard without heeding. He asked for a samovar and for hay for his horses, and when he had had his tea he went to bed.

All night long troops were moving past the inn. Next morning Alpátych donned a jacket he wore only in town and went out on business. It was a sunny morning and by eight o'clock it was already hot. "A good day for harvesting," thought Alpátych.

From beyond the town firing had been heard since early morning. At eight o'clock the booming of cannon was added to the sound of musketry. Many

people were hurrying through the streets and there were many soldiers, but cabs were still driving about, tradesmen stood at their shops, and service was being held in the churches as usual. Alpátych went to the shops, to government offices, to the post office, and to the Governor's. In the offices and shops and at the post office everyone was talking about the army and about the enemy who was already attacking the town, everybody was asking what should be done, and all were trying to calm one another.

In front of the Governor's house Alpátych found a large number of people, Cossacks, and a traveling carriage of the Governor's. At the porch he met two of the landed gentry, one of whom he knew. This man, an ex-captain of police, was saying angrily:

"It's no joke, you know! It's all very well if you're single. 'One man though undone is but one,' as the proverb says, but with thirteen in your family and all the property... They've brought us to utter ruin! What sort of governors are they to do that? They ought to be hanged—the brigands!..."

"Oh come, that's enough!" said the other.

"What do I care? Let him hear! We're not dogs," said the ex-captain of police, and looking round he noticed Alpátych.

"Oh, Yákov Alpátych! What have you come for?"

"To see the Governor by his excellency's order," answered Alpátych, lifting his head and proudly thrusting his hand into the bosom of his coat as he always did when he mentioned the prince.... "He has ordered me to inquire into the position of affairs," he added.

"Yes, go and find out!" shouted the angry gentleman. "They've brought things to such a pass that there are no carts or anything!... There it is again, do you hear?" said he, pointing in the direction whence came the sounds of firing.

"They've brought us all to ruin... the brigands!" he repeated, and descended the porch steps.

Alpátych swayed his head and went upstairs. In the waiting room were tradesmen, women, and officials, looking silently at one another. The door of the Governor's room opened and they all rose and moved forward. An official ran out, said some words to a merchant, called a stout official with a cross hanging on his neck to follow him, and vanished again, evidently wishing to avoid the inquiring looks and questions addressed to him. Alpátych moved forward and next time the official came out addressed him, one hand placed in the breast of his buttoned coat, and handed him two letters.

"To his Honor Baron Asch, from General-in-Chief Prince Bolkónski," he announced with such solemnity and significance that the official turned to him and took the letters.

A few minutes later the Governor received Alpátych and hurriedly said to him:

“Inform the prince and princess that I knew nothing: I acted on the highest instructions—here...” and he handed a paper to Alpátych. “Still, as the prince is unwell my advice is that they should go to Moscow. I am just starting myself. Inform them...”

But the Governor did not finish: a dusty perspiring officer ran into the room and began to say something in French. The Governor’s face expressed terror.

“Go,” he said, nodding his head to Alpátych, and began questioning the officer.

Eager, frightened, helpless glances were turned on Alpátych when he came out of the Governor’s room. Involuntarily listening now to the firing, which had drawn nearer and was increasing in strength, Alpátych hurried to his inn. The paper handed to him by the Governor said this:

“I assure you that the town of Smolénsk is not in the slightest danger as yet and it is unlikely that it will be threatened with any. I from the one side and Prince Bagration from the other are marching to unite our forces before Smolénsk, which junction will be effected on the 22nd instant, and both armies with their united forces will defend our compatriots of the province entrusted to your care till our efforts shall have beaten back the enemies of our Fatherland, or till the last warrior in our valiant ranks has perished. From this you will see that you have a perfect right to reassure the inhabitants of Smolénsk, for those defended by two such brave armies may feel assured of victory.” (Instructions from Barclay de Tolly to Baron Asch, the civil governor of Smolénsk, 1812.)

People were anxiously roaming about the streets.

Carts piled high with household utensils, chairs, and cupboards kept emerging from the gates of the yards and moving along the streets. Loaded carts stood at the house next to Ferapóntov’s and women were wailing and lamenting as they said good-by. A small watchdog ran round barking in front of the harnessed horses.

Alpátych entered the innyard at a quicker pace than usual and went straight to the shed where his horses and trap were. The coachman was asleep. He woke him up, told him to harness, and went into the passage. From the host’s room came the sounds of a child crying, the despairing sobs of a woman, and the hoarse angry shouting of Ferapóntov. The cook began running hither and thither in the passage like a frightened hen, just as Alpátych entered.

“He’s done her to death. Killed the mistress!... Beat her... dragged her about so!...”

“What for?” asked Alpátych.

“She kept begging to go away. She’s a woman! ‘Take me away,’ says she, ‘don’t let me perish with my little children! Folks,’ she says, ‘are all gone, so why,’ she says, ‘don’t we go?’ And he began beating and pulling her about so!”

At these words Alpátych nodded as if in approval, and not wishing to hear more went to the door of the room opposite the innkeeper’s, where he had left his purchases.

“You brute, you murderer!” screamed a thin, pale woman who, with a baby in her arms and her kerchief torn from her head, burst through the door at that moment and down the steps into the yard.

Ferapóntov came out after her, but on seeing Alpátych adjusted his waistcoat, smoothed his hair, yawned, and followed Alpátych into the opposite room.

“Going already?” said he.

Alpátych, without answering or looking at his host, sorted his packages and asked how much he owed.

“We’ll reckon up! Well, have you been to the Governor’s?” asked Ferapóntov. “What has been decided?”

Alpátych replied that the Governor had not told him anything definite.

“With our business, how can we get away?” said Ferapóntov. “We’d have to pay seven rubles a cartload to Dorogobúzh and I tell them they’re not Christians to ask it! Selivánov, now, did a good stroke last Thursday—sold flour to the army at nine rubles a sack. Will you have some tea?” he added.

While the horses were being harnessed Alpátych and Ferapóntov over their tea talked of the price of corn, the crops, and the good weather for harvesting.

“Well, it seems to be getting quieter,” remarked Ferapóntov, finishing his third cup of tea and getting up. “Ours must have got the best of it. The orders were not to let them in. So we’re in force, it seems.... They say the other day Matthew Iványch Plátov drove them into the river Mária and drowned some eighteen thousand in one day.”

Alpátych collected his parcels, handed them to the coachman who had come in, and settled up with the innkeeper. The noise of wheels, hoofs, and bells was heard from the gateway as a little trap passed out.

It was by now late in the afternoon. Half the street was in shadow, the other half brightly lit by the sun. Alpátych looked out of the window and went to the door. Suddenly the strange sound of a far-off whistling and thud was heard, followed by a boom of cannon blending into a dull roar that set the windows rattling.

He went out into the street: two men were running past toward the

bridge. From different sides came whistling sounds and the thud of cannon balls and bursting shells falling on the town. But these sounds were hardly heard in comparison with the noise of the firing outside the town and attracted little attention from the inhabitants. The town was being bombarded by a hundred and thirty guns which Napoleon had ordered up after four o'clock. The people did not at once realize the meaning of this bombardment.

At first the noise of the falling bombs and shells only aroused curiosity. Ferapóntov's wife, who till then had not ceased wailing under the shed, became quiet and with the baby in her arms went to the gate, listening to the sounds and looking in silence at the people.

The cook and a shop assistant came to the gate. With lively curiosity everyone tried to get a glimpse of the projectiles as they flew over their heads. Several people came round the corner talking eagerly.

"What force!" remarked one. "Knocked the roof and ceiling all to splinters!"

"Routed up the earth like a pig," said another.

"That's grand, it bucks one up!" laughed the first. "Lucky you jumped aside, or it would have wiped you out!"

Others joined those men and stopped and told how cannon balls had fallen on a house close to them. Meanwhile still more projectiles, now with the swift sinister whistle of a cannon ball, now with the agreeable intermittent whistle of a shell, flew over people's heads incessantly, but not one fell close by, they all flew over. Alpátych was getting into his trap. The innkeeper stood at the gate.

"What are you staring at?" he shouted to the cook, who in her red skirt, with sleeves rolled up, swinging her bare elbows, had stepped to the corner to listen to what was being said.

"What marvels!" she exclaimed, but hearing her master's voice she turned back, pulling down her tucked-up skirt.

Once more something whistled, but this time quite close, swooping downwards like a little bird; a flame flashed in the middle of the street, something exploded, and the street was shrouded in smoke.

"Scoundrel, what are you doing?" shouted the innkeeper, rushing to the cook.

At that moment the pitiful wailing of women was heard from different sides, the frightened baby began to cry, and people crowded silently with pale faces round the cook. The loudest sound in that crowd was her wailing.

"Oh-h-h! Dear souls, dear kind souls! Don't let me die! My good souls!..."

Five minutes later no one remained in the street. The cook, with her thigh broken by a shell splinter, had been carried into the kitchen. Alpátych, his coachman, Ferapóntov's wife and children and the house porter were all sitting in the cellar, listening. The roar of guns, the whistling of projectiles, and the piteous moaning of the cook, which rose above the other sounds, did not cease for a moment. The mistress rocked and hushed her baby and when anyone came into the cellar asked in a pathetic whisper what had become of her husband who had remained in the street. A shopman who entered told her that her husband had gone with others to the cathedral, whence they were fetching the wonder-working icon of Smolénsk.

Toward dusk the cannonade began to subside. Alpátych left the cellar and stopped in the doorway. The evening sky that had been so clear was clouded with smoke, through which, high up, the sickle of the new moon shone strangely. Now that the terrible din of the guns had ceased a hush seemed to reign over the town, broken only by the rustle of footsteps, the moaning, the distant cries, and the crackle of fires which seemed widespread everywhere. The cook's moans had now subsided. On two sides black curling clouds of smoke rose and spread from the fires. Through the streets soldiers in various uniforms walked or ran confusedly in different directions like ants from a ruined ant-hill. Several of them ran into Ferapóntov's yard before Alpátych's eyes. Alpátych went out to the gate. A retreating regiment, thronging and hurrying, blocked the street.

Noticing him, an officer said: "The town is being abandoned. Get away, get away!" and then, turning to the soldiers, shouted:

"I'll teach you to run into the yards!"

Alpátych went back to the house, called the coachman, and told him to set off. Ferapóntov's whole household came out too, following Alpátych and the coachman. The women, who had been silent till then, suddenly began to wail as they looked at the fires—the smoke and even the flames of which could be seen in the failing twilight—and as if in reply the same kind of lamentation was heard from other parts of the street. Inside the shed Alpátych and the coachman arranged the tangled reins and traces of their horses with trembling hands.

As Alpátych was driving out of the gate he saw some ten soldiers in Ferapóntov's open shop, talking loudly and filling their bags and knapsacks with flour and sunflower seeds. Just then Ferapóntov returned and entered his shop. On seeing the soldiers he was about to shout at them, but suddenly stopped and, clutching at his hair, burst into sobs and laughter:

"Loot everything, lads! Don't let those devils get it!" he cried, taking some bags of flour himself and throwing them into the street.

Some of the soldiers were frightened and ran away, others went on filling their bags. On seeing Alpátych, Ferapóntov turned to him:

"Russia is done for!" he cried. "Alpátych, I'll set the place on fire

myself. We're done for!..." and Ferapóntov ran into the yard.

Soldiers were passing in a constant stream along the street blocking it completely, so that Alpátych could not pass out and had to wait. Ferapóntov's wife and children were also sitting in a cart waiting till it was possible to drive out.

Night had come. There were stars in the sky and the new moon shone out amid the smoke that screened it. On the sloping descent to the Dnieper Alpátych's cart and that of the innkeeper's wife, which were slowly moving amid the rows of soldiers and of other vehicles, had to stop. In a side street near the crossroads where the vehicles had stopped, a house and some shops were on fire. This fire was already burning itself out. The flames now died down and were lost in the black smoke, now suddenly flared up again brightly, lighting up with strange distinctness the faces of the people crowding at the crossroads. Black figures flitted about before the fire, and through the incessant crackling of the flames talking and shouting could be heard. Seeing that his trap would not be able to move on for some time, Alpátych got down and turned into the side street to look at the fire. Soldiers were continually rushing backwards and forwards near it, and he saw two of them and a man in a frieze coat dragging burning beams into another yard across the street, while others carried bundles of hay.

Alpátych went up to a large crowd standing before a high barn which was blazing briskly. The walls were all on fire and the back wall had fallen in, the wooden roof was collapsing, and the rafters were alight. The crowd was evidently watching for the roof to fall in, and Alpátych watched for it too.

"Alpátych!" a familiar voice suddenly hailed the old man.

"Mercy on us! Your excellency!" answered Alpátych, immediately recognizing the voice of his young prince.

Prince Andrew in his riding cloak, mounted on a black horse, was looking at Alpátych from the back of the crowd.

"Why are you here?" he asked.

"Your... your excellency," stammered Alpátych and broke into sobs. "Are we really lost? Master!..."

"Why are you here?" Prince Andrew repeated.

At that moment the flames flared up and showed his young master's pale worn face. Alpátych told how he had been sent there and how difficult it was to get away.

"Are we really quite lost, your excellency?" he asked again.

Prince Andrew without replying took out a notebook and raising his knee began writing in pencil on a page he tore out. He wrote to his sister:

“Smolénsk is being abandoned. Bald Hills will be occupied by the enemy within a week. Set off immediately for Moscow. Let me know at once when you will start. Send by special messenger to Usvyázh.”

Having written this and given the paper to Alpátych, he told him how to arrange for departure of the prince, the princess, his son, and the boy’s tutor, and how and where to let him know immediately. Before he had had time to finish giving these instructions, a chief of staff followed by a suite galloped up to him.

“You are a colonel?” shouted the chief of staff with a German accent, in a voice familiar to Prince Andrew. “Houses are set on fire in your presence and you stand by! What does this mean? You will answer for it!” shouted Berg, who was now assistant to the chief of staff of the commander of the left flank of the infantry of the first army, a place, as Berg said, “very agreeable and well en évidence.”

Prince Andrew looked at him and without replying went on speaking to Alpátych.

“So tell them that I shall await a reply till the tenth, and if by the tenth I don’t receive news that they have all got away I shall have to throw up everything and come myself to Bald Hills.”

“Prince,” said Berg, recognizing Prince Andrew, “I only spoke because I have to obey orders, because I always do obey exactly.... You must please excuse me,” he went on apologetically.

Something cracked in the flames. The fire died down for a moment and wreaths of black smoke rolled from under the roof. There was another terrible crash and something huge collapsed.

“Ou-rou-rou!” yelled the crowd, echoing the crash of the collapsing roof of the barn, the burning grain in which diffused a cakelike aroma all around. The flames flared up again, lighting the animated, delighted, exhausted faces of the spectators.

The man in the frieze coat raised his arms and shouted:

“It’s fine, lads! Now it’s raging... It’s fine!”

“That’s the owner himself,” cried several voices.

“Well then,” continued Prince Andrew to Alpátych, “report to them as I have told you”; and not replying a word to Berg who was now mute beside him, he touched his horse and rode down the side street.