

CHAPTER II

Anna Pávlovna's presentiment was in fact fulfilled. Next day during the service at the palace church in honor of the Emperor's birthday, Prince Volkónski was called out of the church and received a dispatch from Prince Kutúzov. It was Kutúzov's report, written from Tatárinova on the day of the battle. Kutúzov wrote that the Russians had not retreated a step, that the French losses were much heavier than ours, and that he was writing in haste from the field of battle before collecting full information. It followed that there must have been a victory. And at once, without leaving the church, thanks were rendered to the Creator for His help and for the victory.

Anna Pávlovna's presentiment was justified, and all that morning a joyously festive mood reigned in the city. Everyone believed the victory to have been complete, and some even spoke of Napoleon's having been captured, of his deposition, and of the choice of a new ruler for France.

It is very difficult for events to be reflected in their real strength and completeness amid the conditions of court life and far from the scene of action. General events involuntarily group themselves around some particular incident. So now the courtiers' pleasure was based as much on the fact that the news had arrived on the Emperor's birthday as on the fact of the victory itself. It was like a successfully arranged surprise. Mention was made in Kutúzov's report of the Russian losses, among which figured the names of Túchkov, Bagration, and Kutáysov. In the Petersburg world this sad side of the affair again involuntarily centered round a single incident: Kutáysov's death. Everybody knew him, the Emperor liked him, and he was young and interesting. That day everyone met with the words:

"What a wonderful coincidence! Just during the service. But what a loss Kutáysov is! How sorry I am!"

"What did I tell about Kutúzov?" Prince Vasíli now said with a prophet's pride. "I always said he was the only man capable of defeating Napoleon."

But next day no news arrived from the army and the public mood grew anxious. The courtiers suffered because of the suffering the suspense occasioned the Emperor.

"Fancy the Emperor's position!" said they, and instead of extolling Kutúzov as they had done the day before, they condemned him as the cause of the Emperor's anxiety. That day Prince Vasíli no longer boasted of his protégé Kutúzov, but remained silent when the commander in chief was mentioned. Moreover, toward evening, as if everything conspired to make Petersburg society anxious and uneasy, a terrible piece of news was added. Countess Hélène Bezúkhova had suddenly died of that terrible malady it had been so agreeable to mention. Officially, at large gatherings, everyone said that Countess Bezúkhova had died of a terrible attack of angina pectoris, but in intimate circles details

were mentioned of how the private physician of the Queen of Spain had prescribed small doses of a certain drug to produce a certain effect; but H  l  ne, tortured by the fact that the old count suspected her and that her husband to whom she had written (that wretched, profligate Pierre) had not replied, had suddenly taken a very large dose of the drug, and had died in agony before assistance could be rendered her. It was said that Prince Vas  li and the old count had turned upon the Italian, but the latter had produced such letters from the unfortunate deceased that they had immediately let the matter drop.

Talk in general centered round three melancholy facts: the Emperor's lack of news, the loss of Kut  zov, and the death of H  l  ne.

On the third day after Kut  zov's report a country gentleman arrived from Moscow, and news of the surrender of Moscow to the French spread through the whole town. This was terrible! What a position for the Emperor to be in! Kut  zov was a traitor, and Prince Vas  li during the visits of condolence paid to him on the occasion of his daughter's death said of Kut  zov, whom he had formerly praised (it was excusable for him in his grief to forget what he had said), that it was impossible to expect anything else from a blind and depraved old man.

"I only wonder that the fate of Russia could have been entrusted to such a man."

As long as this news remained unofficial it was possible to doubt it, but the next day the following communication was received from Count Rostopch  n:

Prince Kut  zov's adjutant has brought me a letter in which he demands police officers to guide the army to the Ryaz  n road. He writes that he is regretfully abandoning Moscow. Sire! Kut  zov's action decides the fate of the capital and of your empire! Russia will shudder to learn of the abandonment of the city in which her greatness is centered and in which lie the ashes of your ancestors! I shall follow the army. I have had everything removed, and it only remains for me to weep over the fate of my fatherland.

On receiving this dispatch the Emperor sent Prince Volk  nski to Kut  zov with the following rescript:

Prince Michael Ilari  novich! Since the twenty-ninth of August I have received no communication from you, yet on the first of September I received from the commander in chief of Moscow, via Yarosl  vl, the sad news that you, with the army, have decided to abandon Moscow. You can yourself imagine the effect this news has had on me, and your silence increases my astonishment. I am sending this by Adjutant-General Prince Volk  nski, to hear from you the situation of the army and the reasons that have induced you to take this melancholy decision.