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IN YOUR GLAD HEART TAMARA

A Novel of Imperial Russia

by

IRINA SKARIATINA



CASSELL

and Company Limited

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and Sydney*



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To
Marietta Martinez Wilmot

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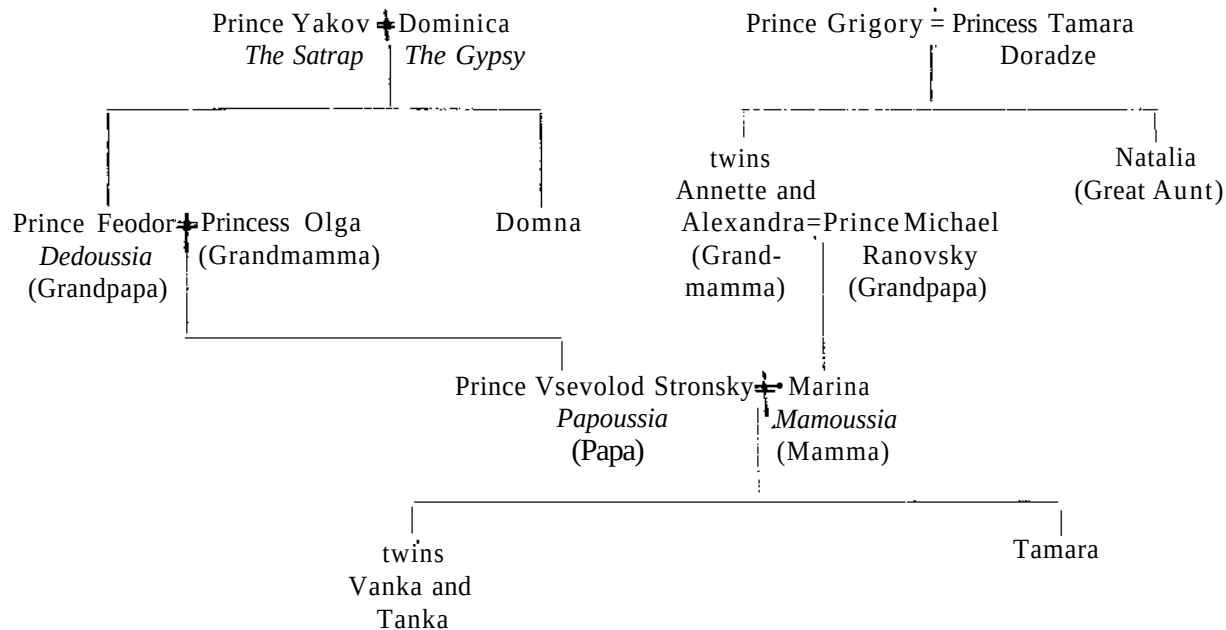
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FIRST GENERATION

CHAPTER I

THE SATRAP AND HIS GYPSY

IN the Year of Grace 1830, *in* the Government of the Eagle, in the District of the Archangel and near the Village of the Transfiguration, lived the great land and serf owner, Prince Yakov Dmitrievitch Stronsky. His contemporaries had nicknamed him "The Satrap," not only because of his large estates and vast wealth, but also on account of his imperious, domineering manner and amazingly lavish whims, which constantly surprised, shocked, angered, excited or delighted his ever inquisitive neighbours, most of whom envied him secretly, fawned upon him openly and behind his back tried, though unsuccessfully, to imitate his eccentric but aristocratic WA^S.

Of enormous stature, with a high expanding chest and wide girth of waist, he trod the earth he owned in such large quantities with a step of arrogance, his massive head thrown back and his bushy mane of thick grey hair waving in the wind. "My wind," he always called it, because for miles and miles it blew over "his" fields, bringing with it the sweet scent of wild flowers, of new-mown hay and ripening crops, or the pungent smell of damp earth, mushrooms and peat smoke, according to the season.

In all weather, accompanied by his two old bloodhounds, Sobol and Taiga, he liked to tramp long distances through the meadows and woods, or better still, to ride his glossy white stallion, Kazbek, thundering across country at a heavy gallop, then slowing down to a dignified pace as he passed through the numerous villages that surrounded his park *in* a colourful ring of clustering straw-thatched huts, green cabbage patches and bright yellow sunflower plots.

Occasionally, if in a good humour, he would stop to say a few condescending words to the "souls" he owned and cast an appraising glance at some comely girl or young married woman,

who would blush and fidget and giggle nervously, or with downcast eyes and flaming cheeks twist the corner of her apron, as she well knew what those fiery glances meant and that there was no escape for her if she had really caught the fancy of the lord of the realm. But, if his humour were bad, he would find fault with everything and everybody and roar at the top of his powerful voice, while the stallion neighed and pawed the ground and the frightened villagers stood around, silent and humble.

His meek, colourless wife, Princess Vera Semeonovna, had died long ago, presumably in childbirth ("but really of a broken heart, because of his faithlessness," people had then whispered); his numerous daughters—he had no sons—were grown up, married and scattered all over the country and no woman had steadily graced his board for many a year. True, when in his great house of Stronskoe he gave one of his famous formal banquets, to which came governors of state, bishops, generals and even high officials from St. Petersburg and Moscow, his elderly cousin, Marfa Stepanovna, sat opposite him and, in her stiff black taffeta gown, ruffled cap and heavy gold jewellery, lent the necessary dignity to the occasion. But those were the only times that she came to his table and as soon as the last guest departed she, too, would leave and disappear behind the door of the small white house situated in the far end of the park, where she lived in seclusion, solitude and complete oblivion until the day when she was sent for again.

Needless to say that she was never asked to appear at the frequent informal banquets for which Yakov Dmitrievitch was so famous and where, in the place of governors, bishops and high officials, feasted and rioted his boon companions, neighbouring landowners from all over the state, attended by beauteous village maidens, specially corralled, chosen and carefully picked by the overseers for their pulchritude and richly curved figures. Prince Yakov Dmitrievitch and his friends did not care for skinny girls, but demanded that they be pleasingly plump, "something to look at" and "an armful for a man to hold." Their temperaments, too, had to be fiery, "burning, scorching," their speeches tart and amusing and their retorts quick as lightning, for no really attractive wench, they said, should ever commit the unforgivable sin of "searching in her pocket for a word."

Two "home-made" orchestras played in turn at those feasts that lasted sometimes for days; opera, ballet and theatre groups, composed solely of serfs, performed on the huge stage built at the end of the banquet hall; the amount of rich food consumed was gargantuan and wines flowed freely from cellars that were constantly replenished with the choicest old vintages of Europe. It was then that Yakov Dmitrievitch was in his glory, and time and again his guests would drink to the health of their host, "the one and only Great Satrap of the District of the Archangel," crowning him with vine leaves and performing around him strange dances which they firmly believed were Dionysian.

But all of a sudden, after years of such high and gay living, Yakov Dmitrievitch felt tired and old for the first time in his life and, on the same day he made that shattering discovery, in a fit of fury he turned out of the house his gay companions, ordered the girls back to their villages, locked the wine cellar with his own hands, sent for his cook, Filka, and forbade him to prepare any more rich dishes.

"Milk, gruel, eggs, that's all I'll eat now," he shouted angrily, stamping his foot, though the man stood before him Li an attitude of deep respect murmuring soothingly: "I understand, your Shiningness, it shall be as you order. Do not be troubled. It's milk and gruels from now on for your little stomach, Our Benefactor, Our Lord."

And so began a new chapter in the life of Prince Yakov. He ate frugally, drank only milk, and mostly goat milk at that, prayed on his bended knees for hours, bruising his forehead against the floor, read *The Lives of the Saints* and, to the amazement of his valet, Trofimka, wore a horsehair shirt "to subdue the desires of my sinful flesh," as he explained in a burst of self-abasement to the shocked and distressed Marfa Stepanovna, who did not consider such talk fit for her spinterish ears. And to crown all his voluntary discomforts he slept on the bare floor beside the luxurious, low, wide and unbelievably soft bed that had been specially made for him by his own home carpenters out of curly maple and feathered with the down of the numerous swans that floated on the lake in front of the house.

Now, instead of wild and questionable characters, only the portly village *Pope*, Father Dorofay, would keep him company, drinking innumerable glasses of scalding, weak tea into which

from time to time he dropped heaped spoonfuls of raspberry jam, perspiring freely (for that was the customary, highly beneficial effect of hot tea with raspberry) and, in a rumbling voice that carried far out into the park, somewhat nervously exhorting his dear spiritual son to continue to progress along the straight path of righteousness which he had so wisely, nay so inspiringly, chosen. The nervousness, which Father Dorofay vainly sought to conceal, was due to the fact that one never knew what Yakov Dmitrievitch might suddenly do. He was just as apt to smite his own chest, sprinkle the ashes of his pipe on to his head and weep copiously for his sins, as to emit a loud roar of fury and smite the chest or, worse still, the teeth of his interlocutor, even though he were his spiritual adviser, naturally with the most painful and unpleasant results. So it was no wonder that Father Dorofay used all the diplomacy he was capable of and figuratively skated with a great deal of caution over the thin ice that separated him from disaster. Then, when finally the holy man was allowed to depart after many profound bows and blessings, he would joyfully and hastily ride back to the safety of his home and the soothing companionship of his faithful old *Popadia* Matrona Ivanovna who had dutifully borne him nineteen *Popsky* children without a murmur of protest.

Left alone, Yakov Dmitrievitch would stretch and yawn and then finally send for his elderly cousin, Marfa Stepanovna, and make her sit with him for hours, while she knitted and in a low sing-song voice spun endless yarns of the two Jerusalems (of Palestine and of Heaven) and of pilgrims who wandered over the face of Holy Russia in quest of religious solace. Gradually, seeing that Yakov Dmitrievitch was becoming interested, Marfa Stepanovna brought to him some of those pilgrims in person so that they could tell their own tales to their Benefactor (certainly not "the Satrap") of the District of the Archangel, with the result that soon, to the ever growing amazement of the unseen but watchful neighbours, who earnestly hoped that Yakov Dmitrievitch would presently get over his strange mood and come back to his senses, the grounds became filled with holy men and women, wanderers and pilgrims, cripples known as *Kalaikee* and *Blagtnny* or "happily foolish ones of the Lord." Among them all stalked the great figure of Yakov Dmitrievitch, now

gaunt and thin from dieting, sleeplessness and (though he didn't yet realize it) boredom, and in a subdued and humble voice spoke words of kindness, brotherly love and encouragement to his strange visitors.

At the same time the influence over him of the once insignificant Marfa Stepanovna grew stronger and stronger until people shook their heads knowingly and sadly said: "She'll get him yet, she'll catch him, the ugly old hen." And little by little the humble, the Unneeded and Forgotten One became all powerful and ruled Yakov Dmitrievitch with a rod of iron.

Then, as suddenly as it began, all this amazing holiness stopped and once more Yakov Dmitrievitch entered a new and, alas, scandalous phase of his life. It happened this way.

One fine summer morning, as he was gloomily pacing up and down his favourite acacia walk where no one else was ever supposed to tread, he perceived with a shock of surprise that a woman had entered the other end of his walk and was slowly advancing toward him with a stately, even step, calm and unhurried. At a glance Yakov Dmitrievitch saw that she was young and married, for she wore the traditional peasant kerchief twisted round her head instead of having it tied under the chin, floating in a loose triangle at the back of the neck, as was the custom for unmarried girls. At a second glance his expert eyes ascertained—and, alas, he experienced a sudden thrill of now forbidden and therefore sinful pleasure at the discovery—that she was a real beauty, not only willowy and slender, but broad-shouldered as well, with high firm breasts and pleasingly rounded hips that swayed suggestively and provocatively with every step she made. As she came down the path he took in slowly and approvingly her golden skin and glowing cheeks, the long, fan-shaped, black lashes that fringed her modestly downcast eyelids, her sweeping eyebrows—*soholiny* or sable eyebrows that kind was called—the straight, short nose with the alluring little flatness at its end and the rather wide but beautifully curved mouth. And when she calmly lifted her eyes to him and he saw that they were almond-shaped and a deep black, he clucked his tongue delightedly in the way he always did when something really pleased him and muttered under his breath: "A queen, a swan. . . . Yakov, my little brother, you're in luck." Aloud, however, he merely asked carelessly:

"And who may you be, my beauty? I've never seen you about before. Are you a newcomer?"

"I am Dominica, your Shiningness, the new wife of Akim, the head coachman," she answered quietly and her voice was velvety and low.

Undoubtedly a good singer, thought Yakov Dmitrievitch. And again he experienced a thrill of pleasure, for he dearly loved the kind of voice that could sing richly and throbbingly the melancholy Russian folk songs or the wild, lilting Gypsy melodies.

Oh, yes, she'd sing for him and learn to please him *in many ways!* And he'd dress her in bright red or yellow *sarafans* and give her large golden ear-rings that would twinkle and sway and glitter every time she moved her shapely head. Round her strong, sunburned neck he'd hang heavy, barbaric chains of gold and silver coins—or, perhaps, corals and pearls would be better? Yes, she'd look well in them—they'd match her lips, her teeth. . . .

But just as he was waxing sentimental, his happy train of thought snapped sharply. Merciful fathers! Hadn't she said that Akim was her husband? *Och*, but that was bad; that complicated matters most inconveniently. Anyone but Akim! He really was fond of Akim. Had they not been playmates ever since the time they were mere babes and small boys, and later on in life through their wild years of adolescence and youth? Even through middle age and on to this detestable period of slowing down, fasting and living virtuously, their peculiar friendship had survived and continued—peculiar because, after all, they were a strangely ill-assorted pair—he, Prince Yakov Dmitrievitch, the powerful Satrap, and Akim, his coachman and humble serf. He had completely forgotten that Akim had begged for leave of absence and gone a hundred miles away to bring back a young bride, his old wife, Pulkeria, Heaven rest her soul, having shrivelled up and passed away three winters ago.

And now here was the girl, a beauty, standing in front of him on this perfect summer morning like a picture in a becoming frame of feathery green boughs, white acacias and splashes of sunlight. What could be lovelier and more refreshing after having looked so long at the witchlike ugliness of Marfa Stepanovna and her weird protégés, "the happily foolish ones"?

But all of a sudden, with one of those revulsions of feeling for which he was so much feared, Yakov Dmitrievitch stamped his foot and like an angry bull bellowed at Dominica, who had been quietly standing with downcast eyes and shapely arms hanging lifelessly at her sides, in an attitude of complete submission.

"On your way, *devka*, girl! What have you stopped for?" he roared. "Go on, go on, begone, *babal*"

As she bowed low, perfectly unruffled at this uncalled-for display of temper, and moved away with the same calm and dignified gait, he stared after her in wonderment, for usually women ran like frightened hares whenever he raised his voice and shouted at them to be gone from his august presence.

"*Nu ee babal* Something like a woman!" he murmured admiringly and then, feeling happily virtuous at not having made any ugly advances to Akim's beautiful young bride, continued on his way, down the acacia walk and on to the stables. Crossing the immense, oval-shaped lawn and coming up to the white portico that so imposingly decorated the centre of the long, low building, he found Akim, as usual, waiting to report all that had happened in the last twenty-four hours in the world of horses that meant so much to both of them.

Yakov Dmitrievitch had missed Akim when he had gone to fetch his bride. His assistant, the second coachman, Sidor, had not been in the least satisfactory, a fool, in fact, a donkey, afraid to speak up, afraid even to look at his master. But now that Akim was back, all was well again.

Short and fat, with a round red face like a harvest moon, the head coachman, dressed in his knee-length, dark blue cloth *kaftan*, full skirted and tight bodiced, his white hair neady parted in the middle and generously doused with oil from his holy lamp—deliberately and in great detail gave Yakov Dmitrievitch the news of the day in the half respectful, half familiar manner which only he dared assume with the Satrap. But to his surprise Prince Yakov did not listen with the usual undivided attention and interest which he invariably accorded his favourite serf, but seemed absent-minded and preoccupied.

It's that old *baba-yaga*, that witch, Marfa Stepanovna, who has made him this way, thought Akim angrily and to cheer him up said with a knowing wink (for he knew he'd be pleased):

which shone more than ever since he had scrubbed it with his Sunday-best soap. Dominica, even more beautiful than in the morning, was now dressed in a red sarafan (the very thing for her, thought Yakov Dmitrievitch approvingly); her kerchief was a bright yellow and her numerous beads the colours of the rainbow. In a shimmering cascade they covered her neck and throat, tinkling softly with the rhythmical rise and fall of her full, firm bosom and flashing in the sunlight with sharp little pin points, now of silver and gold, now of purple, green and blue. In both hands she carried a wooden platter with a raised border on which were engraved the words of an old Russian saying: "Eat bread and salt and speak the truth." But instead of bread and salt on the platter lay a sweet *pirog*, a pie, surrounded by a handful of "wedding candies" wrapped in red paper.

"*Milosti prossim*, we beg you, have mercy," murmured Akim and Dominica in unison, bending as low as they possibly could. Then straightening herself to her full height, Dominica left her husband's side and advanced several steps, bowed once more and presented Yakov Dmitrievitch with the platter. For a few seconds she lifted her face, her deep black eyes gazing full into his, and once again the Satrap's blood turned to fire.

"May God save you, my little dove," he said softly so that only she could hear him.

Blushing furiously and bowing again, she stepped backward and with downcast eyes took her place next to her husband.

"Well, Akim, you've picked a fine-looking *haba*, no mistake about that! But why did you lie to me, you old rascal? Where is the ugly, unmannered wench you told me about?" shouted Yakov Dmitrievitch genially as he turned the platter over to Dvoretzky Pankraty and tapped his old coachman on the shoulder with a wink and a snort and a cluck of his tongue.

Och, the sinner, *och*, the bad old man! He's cast his evil eye on my *baba*, my beauty, my Crimean grape! thought Akim angrily. But again he bowed and smiled and tried to wink back in a respectfully jocular manner.

"Well, let me see—what bridal gifts would you like, you two?" demanded the Satrap feeling suddenly mellow and bountiful. "How about a new wolfskin coat, Akim, and a red silk shirt with a Caucasian belt trimmed with silver and turquoise? And

a fine horse all of your own to ride with a new saddle? And a hamper of wine? And what else would you like?"

"Benefactor, Yakov Dmitrievitch, your Shiningness," cried Akim, throwing himself at his master's feet to show his gratitude and enthusiasm, but at the same time biting his lips, shaking with rage and thinking: "Oh, you sinmaker, now you're bribing me! I know you and I know that look in your eyes! Ah, woe is me, unhappy man that I am!"

With a great display of innocent affection Yakov Dmitrievitch raised his old servant and embraced him thrice as though it were Easter morn.

"And Dominica, what shall she have?" he continued, turning to her. "How about a yellow silk sarafan with golden ear-rings and a necklace to match? Real gold, eh?"

"Benefactor, *Batiushka rodimy*, my little father," now it was her turn to throw herself down, her forehead touching the ground, her arms encircling his legs. "How can we thank you for all your mercy to us, Maker of Good?"

Gently the Satrap lifted her, allowing his arm to remain for a moment round her soft, pliant waist. Then with the tip of his fingers he raised her dimpled chin and kissed her full on the lips. As though turned to stone Akim stared at them *in* speechless horror. But his eyes must have betrayed him, for Yakov Dmitrievitch, frowning suddenly, turned away and abruptly said:

"You may go now and I'll see that you get the presents. Be off; I'm tired. Enough of you!"

When they had left, Marfa Stepanovna, who had been watching the scene spellbound, sighed deeply, shook her head and, gathering her knitting, started to walk toward her little white house in the park. For she, too, like Akim, knew the moods of this Satrap and realized she was no longer needed, that her brief reign had ended.

"Wise old woman," murmured Prince Yakov approvingly and decided to give her a handsome present. Presents were such a blessing, he reflected, for invariably they smoothed things over; and like golden stones they paved the way to Heaven.

Days passed but nowhere was Dominica to be seen. Akim

had locked her up in his room above the stables and forbidden her even to look out of the windows.

"You're mine and my wish is that none shall see you," he declared when they had returned from the Big House. And he was much pleased when Dominica had answered obediently: "Very well, Akim Petrovitch—just as you order; you're the master here." After that she had brought in the wooden frame for her work and started to embroider a towel which she intended to present to the church.

Meanwhile, like a love-sick youth, Yakov Dmitrievitch prowled around the woods and fields, in a most undignified manner, hoping to catch a glimpse of Dominica somewhere. But in vain. Not a trace of her anywhere, not so much as the flutter of her skirt in the distance. Finally, unable to stand it any longer, he asked Akim where he was keeping his bride.

"At home where a good wife should be, your Shiningness," was the brief answer. And then Akim had immediately changed the subject and started to tell about a peculiar sickness that had come over a number of horses. Of a sudden in one night two of the best mares had died and several of the young foals were stricken. Yakov Dmitrievitch listened attentively, stroking his beard as he always did when thinking profoundly. Then he smiled (like an old tom-cat, thought Akim, staring at him anxiously, for there certainly wasn't anything to smile about) and nodded his head several times as though well satisfied with himself.

"*Droujok*, my little friend," he finally said in a soft, persuasive voice that made Akim shudder as he well knew it foreboded some kind of mischief, "a thought has just struck me, a happy thought, indeed, that will please you greatly. Interrupt me not and I shall tell you what I have decided upon."

Akim clasped his hands on his stomach and expectantly turned a thumb.

"You, who love our horses so sincerely," went on the Satrap, "must be the one to save them from this mysterious and sudden illness which may prove fatal to them all.

"Remember Zachar The Znabar, Zacharius the All-Knowing Man, the animal doctor who belongs to Count Vassili Ivanovitch and lives in the adjoining Government of Toula?"

Akim nodded as the Satrap paused for breath.

"Well! Great is his experience and many are the beasts he saved when all other Knowing Men gave them up for lost. Remember the time of the hog cholera when the creatures were dying like flies? Did he or did he not save a number of them?"

"I do! He did," muttered Akim, sullenly answering both questions and wondering what all this was leading up to.

"And when the great herd of cows broke away and got into the field of young oats and ate so much that they began to blow up like balloons full of gas? Remember how Zachar The Znahar punctured their stomachs to let the gas escape before they burst?"

Akim nodded again and turned his other thumb.

"Why, he saved pretty nearly more than a hundred cows—half the herd. Too bad he ever had to go back to his master so far away from us! Too bad I could not buy him. But no, the old Count refused to sell him. 'Til be glad to lend him to you whenever you need him,' he wrote me in his own handwriting, 'but sell him—never; not for all the gold in the world. I'd rather sell one of my own worthless sons. . . .' Imagine!

"Well, *Akimoushka*, I want *you* to go and fetch Zachar The Znahar at once, immediately. Run, fly as fast as the fleetest horse will carry you and do not tarry on the way. 'Tis a matter of life and death," concluded the Satrap happily, his pleased expression belying the tragedy of his words.

And before the unfortunate Akim could gasp a word of protest—for he could see through this trick as clearly as one sees the sun through a diaphanous cloud—Yakov Dmitrievitch was busily ordering the grooms to saddle the strongest and fastest horse in the stable, yes, his own Kazbek, and bring him round in the twinkling of an eye for Akim Petrovitch to mount. Then rapidly he wrote a few words on a piece of paper and handed it to Akim.

"Give this note to the Count. Here's some money and off you go!" he shouted, as the grooms came running back with the horse.

"But Dominica, my wife . . . I must tell her. . . . I must bid her good-bye, until we meet again," wailed Akim in despair.

But the Satrap only snorted: "Your wife? Nonsense, shame on you, man, didn't I just say in pure Russian language that this was a matter of life and death? Who but a jackass thinks

of wives and good-byes at a time like this when the lives of perhaps five hundred horses are at stake? Be off and may your road be as smooth as a tablecloth. With God!" he shouted the customary parting formula.

"With God," muttered the hapless Akim, clambering on to Kazbek, who pawed the ground and stamped and stood up on his hind legs ready to fly as fast as an arrow out of its bow.

The grooms let go the bridle they had been hanging on to, jumping back just in time to avoid being trampled. There was a loud whinny, a snort, a rushing sound and away dashed the horse in a cloud of dust.

"Poor *Akimoushkal*! It'll take him at least three days to get there," murmured the Satrap, stroking his beard complacently and smiling once more like a cat in front of a saucer of cream. Then he turned to one of the grooms.

"Bring *Dominica* here at once," he ordered. "I shall tell her the news myself."

And when in a few minutes she came running, a bright red shawl hastily thrown over her head and shoulders, her cheeks flushed and her breast heaving rapidly, Yakov Dmitrievitch thought he had never seen so beautiful a woman in all his life. And his heart beat fast and his pulses throbbed and in his ears he heard a ringing sound like that of a thousand bells.

But aloud he only said: "I have bad news for you, *Dominica*—your husband has gone away for a few days. I sent him to the estate of Count Vassili to bring back *Zachar The Znahar*. Our horses must be saved—they are gravely ill and only *Zachar* can cure them."

Again, as once before, for a moment she lifted her eyes and gazed steadily into his. But he saw that there were no shadows of grief in those deep pools, only rippling lights of merriment and laughter.

"This evening at ten, in the summer house by the river," he murmured, and then, turning on his heel abruptly, walked away.

The summer house, small and round, consisting of a dozen columns made of natural stone topped by a bronze cupola, was situated on a high cliff overlooking the winding river and the endless expanse of rolling meadows beyond that stretched away to the very horizon.

Built by a struggling young Italian architect—whom the Satrap, during one of his peregrinations abroad, many years ago, had discovered in a Roman attic and brought back with him to Russia—the summer house was the exact replica of an ancient pagan shrine and therefore was known formally as the Temple of Venera (which is the Russian for Venus) or, informally, just "Venera," plain and simple.

It was there that the Satrap on warm summer nights would frequently spend long hours until dawn, feasting with a few chosen friends, while near by, concealed in the fragrant, flowering bushes, the orchestra played softly his favourite tunes, and young girls, clad in transparent tunics (or sometimes without them), danced lightly round the Temple in the moonlight. If there was no moon, Roman candles created an even more fantastic effect. Sometimes illuminated barges carrying singers and strummers of zithers and guitars would float up and down the river, while fireworks played incessantly on the opposite bank. Farther back in the meadows hundreds of villagers would watch the spectacle with bated breath, marvelling at its beauty, and yet with hearts full of terror.

" 'Tis but a snare of the Bad One," they'd whisper fearfully and make the sign of the cross and mutter prayers.

Then, "Look, look!" they'd cry out *in* shame as the girls shed their tunics and performed strange dances that surely had been conceived in hell.

"Oс*, can it be my Tania . . . my little Masha . . . my Vera . . . dancing in this unseemly fashion to please those sinners?" moaned the unfortunate parents. "Did we bring them into this world for such disgrace? Oh, Lord, forgive and help us!"

And they'd hope and pray earnestly for a sign, a thunderbolt perhaps from Heaven to destroy that sinful little house of Venera with the Satrap and all his friends, and deliver the girls, poor little white doves, from a fate worse than the plague.

But only once in all those years did the Lord show His wrath. It happened on a particularly hot night, when not even a breath of cool air stirred the glassy surface of the river or the tall grass in the sleeping meadows. A huge black cloud had crept, seemingly from nowhere, over the moon. Suddenly there was a blinding flash, a ripping, roaring sound—the skies had flown

open and there in a blaze of light the peasants had seen His **glory.**

" 'Tis He, our Lord! 'Tis the Judgment Day at last!" they cried, falling on their faces while the lightning played and the thunder crashed and reverberated like a thousand cannons. But it was all over in a few minutes; lightning and thunder ceased, no rain fell and the great cloud rolled away, once more revealing the sinful beauty of the moon.

Though bolts of lightning had fallen around Vencra's Temple, the revellers, drunk with wine, had laughed and mocked the elements and the feast went merrily on.

But the peasants were satisfied, for the Lord had shown His anger, the Lord was on their side.

When the stable chimes struck the half-hour after nine, Dominica, wrapped from head to foot in a big black shawl, opened the door of her room and paused to listen. She could hear all the familiar sounds of a stable at night time: the occasional sleepy, lazy stamping and snorting of the horses, the whisking of their long tails, the sudden kicks against the wooden partitions of the stalls. As she bent over the oak railing, black with the passing of many years, the usual pungent, acrid smell mounting in heady waves, struck her nostrils. In the dim light of the oil lamps, that hung at regular intervals down the long passage between the stalls, she could see the freshly made beds of golden straw, the pale green hay in the mangers, the wide gleaming backs of the well-groomed horses. Some of them were eating, munching slowly, deliberately, as though enjoying to the utmost each mouthful; some stood quietly napping, their heads bent low, while others lay on the straw fast asleep. Only Kazbek's stall was empty.

A drowsy groom dozed on a chair near the bolted entrance gate. There was no one else in sight. Gathering her shawl closely round her and making the sign of the cross, Dominica ran quickly down the rickety steps and slipped through a small side door into the dark night. There was no moon, only a multitude of stars that seemed to her unusually large and bright. Holding her breath, she slid along the long wall, stopping every now and then to peer into the darkness and strain her ears to catch the faintest sound. But all was quiet. Only in the distance

a dog barked; an owl hooted. Shivering with excitement, she kept sliding and stopping and sliding along until she finally reached the end of the building where the trees and thickets began. There in the shelter of the heavy foliage she started to run, knowing well the little narrow path that led to the acacia walk and onto the cliff where stood Venera's Temple. Her head throbbed and her heart beat fast. For the first time in her life she felt afraid as though danger were lurking behind each tree.

"What if Akim Petrovitch has not really left the place?" she thought. "What if he comes back? He'll kill me! I know he will." Then she began to laugh. "Well, and what of it!" she cried aloud defiantly. "After all one dies only once!" Her voice echoed through the still night and immediately in response a low, long-drawn whistle came from Venera's Temple, now close to her. A few more running steps and there were the tall columns gleaming between the trees. Two strong arms drew her in and the impatient voice of the Satrap exclaimed:

"At last, my beauty! Why have you been so long?"

But before she could answer that indeed she was not late, the church bells in the village rang out the hour and the voice of the night watchman came floating through the silence of the night. "*Slushai*, hear ye, the hour is ten and all is well."

The old bloodhounds, Sobol and Taiga, came up to sniff at Dominica's skirts. Then satisfied that they knew her, they lay down at the entrance and, sphinx-like, stared with unblinking eyes into space.

"Dominica, *Domnushka*, my golden one, I've waited for this a long time," whispered Yakov Dmitrievitch, putting his arm round her shoulder and drawing her to him. But with a quick, impatient gesture she shook him off and faced him with her hands on her hips.

"Oh, no, you don't! You're all alike," she cried. "Prince or serf, only one thing do you want—to make love and then pass on quickly to another. But I'm not your slave, your Shiningness, I'm free."

"What do you mean free, you devil's daughter?" roared the Satrap in sudden fury. "You may come from hell for all I know, but you're Akim's wife and he is my serf. So now you are my serf, too, and belong to me, body and soul, to do with as I please."

"Oh, no," she replied, throwing back her head and laughing provocatively. "I don't belong to you! I belong only to myself and to my people."

"Your people? What do you mean, *haba*?"

"I mean that I am a Gypsy, for my mother is a Gypsy and I was born in the Tabor* and raised there."

"A Gypsy? *Devka*, you're lying!" screamed the Satrap now beside himself. "Why you don't even look like one of those damned Ethiopians! What are you talking about? What are you babbling? Look at your skin! It isn't like theirs at all! It isn't dark—only golden from the sunshine. . . . What's the matter with you? Are you crazy? Drunk? How do you dare joke with me in this unseemly fashion?"

"My father was a Gajo, a Russian—that's why my skin is this colour," she answered quietly. "But nevertheless, father or no father, I am a Gypsy, free as the wind to go where I please and do as I please! If I like you, I'll have you. If I don't, not all your money can buy me."

Her voice rang out strong and clear and the bloodhounds stirred uneasily and growled.

"You may be a prince," she went on, her eyes flashing, "but my people are the oldest in the world. They trod the earth long before any of you were born. Nobody has ever owned us, nobody ever will! But what do you know about us except that we are dark-skinned and live in tents and wander all over the world at our own free will——"

"Yes! Telling lying fortunes, stealing all you can lay your sinful hands on and casting your evil spells on innocent Christians," interrupted Yakov Dmitrievitch, spitting angrily over his left shoulder so as to ward off any curse she might have woven around him. "A plague on you, *devkal*! Had I known you have Gypsy blood in you, I would have thrown you out of my domain, you daughter of a cursed race!"

But Dominica only laughed again. "Not so fast my little father, Falcon of my Country!" she murmured, coming closer to him. He could feel the warmth of her body, while a strange, unknown perfume enveloped him from all sides.

"Don't you dare try any of your Gypsy tricks on me!" he muttered, but already his anger had fled.

*Tabor—Gypsy tribe, community, encampment.

Damn the wench, but she is beautiful, he thought, begrudgingly admiring her in spite of himself; like a thoroughbred filly. And that fire in her eyes! . . .

At any rate this was something new, something different! Devil take her—she was full of surprises! At first modest and demure, with downcast eyes and maidenly blushes—all sugar and honey—then, without a word of warning, a spitfire, a young witch, a changeling from peasant girl to wild Gypsy! And just when he expected it the least, when he thought she'd melt in his arms, if not with joy at least with complete submission. But this was much better. Oh, merciful fathers, yes. Delightedly Yakov Dmitrievitch clucked his tongue and his blood began to race. For a long time he had not felt so stimulated.

Well, if she wants to play—all right, he thought gaily. Let her show me how she can prance. She's worth watching—may she prosper for making me feel like this! Why, I'm young again. . . . And he roared with sudden laughter and shouted:

"Dance, Gypsy, and sing for me and prove that you are not lying but worthy of your Tabor. Go on. . . ."

And he began to clap his hands slowly, rhythmically, and to hum a familiar Gypsy tune.

At the sound of it Dominica uttered a little cry and, tearing off her black shawl, ran lightly to the centre of the Temple. There for a moment she stood perfectly still, with head thrown back and closed eyes, her arms hanging at her sides. Then a quiver ran through her body. Slowly her eyelids lifted as though heavy with sleep and an inscrutable half-smile changed the whole expression of her face. Up and down went her shoulders, once, twice, again and again in unison with the rhythmical clapping of the Satrap's hands. Another moment and away she glided with barely a motion in her hips, though at the same time, from the waist up, her body quivered all over as though in a fever. The extraordinary effect was as if she were dancing simultaneously two different dances: one in which only her feet took part, gliding with a peculiar, slippery movement across the marble floor of Venera's Temple; while in the other her shoulders and breasts and outstretched arms, with palms upward, kept quivering with ever increasing rapidity as the tempo of the dance accelerated madly.

Faster and faster clapped the Satrap; faster and faster flew Dominica until all he could see were her twirling skirts and the flash of her beads and ear-rings.

"Enough," he cried, stopping suddenly and dropping on to the marble bench, exhausted as though he had been dancing himself. "It's all right, *devka*, you can dance! Now quiet down and sing."

And as with a final twirl she came to rest at his feet, her wide skirts billowing around her, he leaned over her, his eyes staring hypnotically into hers, in the manner of a Tabor song leader exhorting his dusky prima donna to pitch her first note. Then as she regained her breath, he started a famous old Gypsy song.

Instantly Dominica caught on, swaying slowly to and fro to the rhythm of the familiar words. Low and throbbing came the notes of her typical Gypsy voice and shivers of delight ran down the Satrap's spine. Excited thoughts like torrents came tumbling through his brain.

She's a Gypsy, all right—she's not lying. No one but a Gypsy can dance and sing that way. But whoever heard of a white Gypsy? It's like a white raven. Well, not quite white, perhaps; after all she's golden. But so are the peasant girls in summer-time. *Och*, but what a *baha*. . . . Where did she come from? Why has she dropped into my life? What's it all about? . . .

But Dominica had finished her song and was looking up at him inquiringly.

"Does my Lord like my singing? Does it please him?" she asked diffidently, without a trace of her former insolent manner. At that moment she seemed very young, a little girl sitting on the floor with tousled hair and shining eyes, still breathing a trifle fast from her recent exertions.

"It's good, *Domnushka*" he murmured, leaning over her again, "I liked it and you'll sing for me many times. But now come and sit here and tell me about yourself."

He took her hands and lifted her on to the bench. Again he could feel the warmth of her body and the scent of her strange perfume.

"Who are you?" he whispered, drawing closer to her. "Why did you leave your people and marry Akim, a serf, old and poor and ugly at that? Surely you could have done better in your own Tabor."

"I'll tell you God's own truth now, my Lord, for the right time has come," she answered slowly as though weighing each word.

The full moon had risen and in its light her face seemed pale, her eyes enormous and fathomless. There was no fire in them now, he noticed, only an expression of deep sadness.

"*Boje moi*, how you change," he said wonderingly. "Now you look like a Sibylla, a priestess in a pagan temple." He laughed softly. "Yes, that's just what you are, the young priestess of Venera's Temple, or"—he added with sudden anxiety—"a witch, perhaps. Who knows?" Superstitiously he made the sign of the cross.

But Dominica gravely shook her head. "No, I'm not a witch nor whatever else you just called me. I'm only a Gypsy, that's all. But now, right now, I'm entering my destiny."

"Your destiny?" he stared at her, perplexed.

"I mean that it was foretold at my birth and now it is about to take place," she replied calmly and again the Satrap felt a cold shiver run through his body. This time, however, it was decidedly not a pleasant shiver. On the contrary, it was of the kind one experiences when a goose waddles over one's future grave.

"And pray, what is it, if I may ask?" he demanded sarcastically, at the same time tliinking: The wench is priceless. It's one sensation after another. No boredom with her.

"My destiny is that I am going to marry you," she answered with dignity, "and the time for that is nearly here."

Yakov Dmitrievitch gasped and turned a dark purple. "Marry!" he shouted. "You marry me? I marry you?" In his amazement he couldn't find any other words.

Again she nodded her head and her ear-rings tinkled.

"Yes, it is written in the stars and it shall come to pass. You will marry me and I shall bear you a son and a daughter."

Angry, furious, speechless and yet amused, Yakov Dmitrievitch could only stare at her with unbelieving eyes.

"Do not interrupt me, my Lord, and I shall explain," she went on in her low, sing-song voice as though reciting. "You remember Stesha, the Gypsy singer, in the Moscow Tabor?"

"Stesha? Why, yes," exclaimed the Satrap excitedly, "of course, I knew her very well twenty years ago. No one could

sing better than Stesha. She often sang for me. What a voice she had! What beauty! And how she could dance! I've never seen anything like it, not even you, my little dove."

"Tell me some more about her," said Dominica eagerly.

"Well, there is plenty to tell. A book could be written about Stesha. Men used to go wild over her and throw gold coins at her feet! An evening with the Tabor when Stesha sang cost plenty of money, believe me! She became rich and famous and could have married counts and princes and royalty even, if she had so wanted. But no, she wouldn't have any of us. She'd only laugh and tease and slip through our fingers just when we thought she was caught at last.

"How we fought over her!" he continued, as Dominica, fascinated, gazed at him starry-eyed. "Two men even committed suicide, the poor fools—an old general and a young stripling of an officer. But there never was any scandal, for the Tabor watched over her like a flock of hawks and protected her from any danger. She was hardly ever left alone. Always there was Aliosha or someone in the background—mostly Grousha, the old grandmother of the Tabor.' Little Fathers! How we hated Grousha! She was ugly as sin, a hideous old witch, if ever there was one, and always in our way. We'd invite Stesha to supper or a sleigh ride or some kind of festivity and there would be Grousha, like an evil shadow, behind her, a veritable *babayagabcrit* and gnarled and as wrinkled as a frostbitten apple, but with piercing eyes that didn't miss a thing, eyes that one never forgot. There she'd sit in a corner, glaring like an owl, hardly ever saying a word. Only once in a while she'd mutter something to Stesha in their language, but that was enough. Whatever she said she would pull Stesha up like a bridle. Once we even tried to feed the old one a sleeping potion, but do you think it worked? It did not! She was more wide awake than ever; I tell you she was a witch."

Dominica laughed. "I remember Grousha, when I was just a little *golopouzenka*, a bare-belly of a baby. They say she was a hundred and twenty years old when she died. It was she who foretold my fate. She knew everyone's fate and whatever she predicted always came true."

"That's because she was a witch, just as we thought!" exclaimed the Satrap. "We believed that she spirited Stesha away.

One day they both disappeared and we never saw them again. Couldn't find out a thing from the Tabor, but in a roundabout way we finally heard that Stesha had run off with a young landowner from the far away provinces. Even Grousha couldn't stop her, or perhaps she didn't care. Who could fathom the 'workings of that wicked old mind? The landowner, people said, had come to Moscow for a few weeks, happened to see Stesha one evening and fell in love with her right away. Well, that wasn't anything unusual. The extraordinary part is that *she* fell in love with him and supposedly they ran away together and got married."

"That's true," said Dominica gravely. "I know, because Stesha is my mother and the young landowner, as you call him, was my father. Yes, they fell in love and ran away. And it was Grousha who helped them. She said it was their fate. They were happy, really happy, my mother says. But the Tabor was angry. They all hated him for stealing their Stesha. Anyhow, he didn't live long. In less than a year he was found dead, floating in the river. No one knew what happened, but it isn't hard to guess."

She broke off and stared into the darkness.

"Then what?" asked the Satrap, gently taking her hand.

"Then I was born and my mother came back to the Tabor. Soon she married Aliosha, the leader, and bore him many children, but she always loved me best. It was she who told me about my fate which Grousha had predicted: that I would marry a man old enough to be my grandfather, but a prince, rich and powerful."

The Satrap grinned. No longer was he angry. On the contrary there was something quite pleasing in all this. Why not? A beautiful young Gypsy who could sing and dance; someone to amuse him, someone who at last would take the place that his poor wife, Vera Semeonovna—Heaven be her abode—had left vacant long ago. Yes, why not? He'd educate the wench and polish her and travel with her abroad—then when she was ready, a "finished" product, he'd bring her to St. Petersburg and present her at Court and to society. What a scandal there'd be when they found out the truth. It might be amusing, something new, something to live for and make fife worth while and exciting again!

"But why in the world did you marry Akim?" he demanded.

"Och, that's simple," she replied seriously. "Two years ago he saw me in the Tabor when we were passing through here. I was fourteen then and he vowed he'd marry me, but my mother said I was too young. So two years later he came to get me and kept his vow. And here I am."

Still I don't see why you married him," persisted Yakov Dmitrievitch.

"Because my mother wanted me to be near you. She knew you were my fate. Akim was only the stepping stone. Poor Akim Petrovitch," she sighed.

"But how about the Tabor and your people? How did they ever let you marry him?"

"Oh, they, too, knew my destiny. There wasn't anything they could do. 'What has to be, has to be.' That's all. And my mother's word goes a long way with them. She's powerful. Besides, they say I'm not a full-blooded Gypsy and that makes a difference."

"But merciful heavens," cried the Satrap in mock alarm, for really the idea was pleasing him more and more. "Do you actually believe that I'd marry you, a Gypsy?"

"And why not, your Shiningness? When she is young and pretty and able to give you a son? We know that that is what you have wanted all your life. A son that will be strong and handsome with fire in his veins. ..."

"And Gypsy blood into the bargain! Preposterous!" shouted the Satrap. "Besides, what of Akim?"

She shrugged her shoulders and her eyes filled with tears. At the sight Yakov Dmitrievitch felt his heart soften like melted butter.

"Don't look so mournful, *galouboushka*, my little dove," he murmured, taking her into his arms and kissing her sweetly smelling hair. "Remember the saying: 'Put rough grain through the mill and soft flour will come out.' Thus it is in life: One thinks the road ahead will be hard and rough and lo, it turns out to be as smooth as a neatly spread table cloth. So shall it be with you, *kniaginioushka*, my little princess."

At that last magic word Dominica started and looked up anxiously to see if he was making fun of her. I'll slap him if he's teasing me, prince or no prince, she thought wildly. I'll

scratch and bite and maybe knife him, the bad old man! But no, merciful Fathers, no! He's serious.... He means it, he means it! Princess! Oh, my fate, my sweet little fate! With a quick revulsion of feeling she threw her arms ecstatically round Yakov Dmitrievitch's neck and kissed him full on the lips.

"There!" she whispered triumphantly. "And that's only the beginning. *Och*, I'll love you so! I'll show you how a Gypsy can love. Wait till we're married."

"We won't wait!" roared the Satrap delightedly, lifting her off her feet and speeding nimbly with her *in* his arms toward the famous marble bench covered with soft cushions, known throughout the countryside as "Procrustes' couch" (though, of course, the peasants hadn't the faintest idea what that really meant).

But at that very moment, which held such a promise of pleasures worthy of Venera herself, the dogs jumped up with shrill barks of joy and ran down the steps into the thickets as though to greet someone they knew and were glad to see. Disturbed, the Satrap and Dominica paused to listen. There was a spell of silence. Then through the stillness of the warm, fragrant night, a night of romance *if* ever there was one, came the unmistakable and most unwelcome sounds of a low voice, of dry twigs crackling underfoot, of heavy breathing. . . . The next minute on the threshold of Venera's Temple appeared Akim, his face distorted with rage, his usually sleek, oily hair dishevelled and his eyes bloodshot *in* the moonlight.

"Look who's here," remarked the Satrap calmly. "How did you get back so soon, if I may ask?"

"You devil! . . . You harlot!" panted Akim hoarsely. "I'll kill you both!" He leaped on the Satrap.

"Beast! Antichrist!" he yelled. "Pray for the forgiveness of your sins! Your hour has come at last! And I am the one to bring you to God's punishment."

But the Satrap, huge and powerful, was ready for the attack. With a shout of fury he threw his great arms round Akim and started to hug and squeeze him as an angry bear hugs and squeezes its victim. Short and fat, the unfortunate Akim wriggled frantically in a vain effort to free himself, screaming: "Death to the Antichrist! Death, death!"

But the more he wriggled and screamed the tighter grew

that primitive bear hug. Round and round Venera's Temple they lurched, rocking and swaying, and pummelling and cursing, while Dominica crouched behind Procrustes' sofa, murmuring rapidly potent words of Gypsy magic suitable to the occasion; and the bewildered dogs added to the turmoil and confusion by following the combatants, jumping up and down on them, barking excitedly and tearing their clothes. The air in and around Venera's Temple was thick with the unholy noise of stamping and panting, and yelling and shouting, and barking and growling, and ripping of good solid home-spun cloth. On, too, went the ceaseless murmur of the Romany incantation and presently it began to work. For undoubtedly Dominica's fate stepped in and ended the unseemly fracas.

It all happened with amazing rapidity, in a spectacular sequence of brief, explosive actions, quick as lightning. As the excited Sobol managed to sink his teeth into the Satrap's thigh, Yakov Dmitrievitch, with a howl of pain, for a moment released his hold. Instantly Akim whipped out his knife. . . . Dominica shrieked. And right there her fate took charge. For at that decisive moment Akim tripped over the dog and fell down the steps, dragging the Satrap along with him on to the grass. Locked in each others' arms again, fighting desperately, they began to roll down the slope toward the edge of the cliff on which stood Venera's Temple—slowly at first, then gaining momentum, faster and faster. But just as Dominica in frenzied terror thought they'd both disappear for ever, taking her fate with them, the Satrap let go of Akim and, catching hold of a tough old bush which luckily he himself had planted many years ago to prevent the ground from slipping into the water, clung to it for very life, his dangling legs waving wildly over the precipice. At the same time, the hapless Akim, whose rotundity was his undoing, kept rolling on toward the fateful brink. There was a flash of something hurtling through the air followed by the sound of a great splash down in the river. Then rippling, ever widening circles which soon reached the opposite shore.

And that is the scandalous story of how my paternal Great-Grandfather Yakov Dmitrievitch married my Gypsy great-grandmother. For, of course, both she and the handy **old** bush

managed to rescue him from Akim's dire fate and brought him back safely to firm ground.

Next day, when Akim's body was found floating down the river, the Satrap professed unmitigated astonishment and profound distress at the untimely loss of his faithful old friend. To the satisfaction of the countryside he ordered a super-magnificent funeral at which both he and Dominica were the chief mourners, swathed in black with properly rounded shoulders and streaming eyes.

"See their grief. Watch them weep," whispered the villagers with approval, at the same time trying to conceal their pleasurable anticipation of a first-class wake.

But their approval changed to shocked amazement when two months later Yakov-Dmitrievitch married Dominica with great pomp and ceremony in the village church, a special dispensation having been granted the widow by the friendly Bishop—and immediately left with her for parts of the world unknown.

It was then that many various rumours and conjectures arose concerning Akim's sudden and mysterious death. Why did Kazbek return riderless that fateful night to the stables? What had the Satrap written in that note to old Count Vassili, which Akim had carried with him? And why had Akim drowned when he was such a good swimmer? Had someone pushed him into the water? Had he been poisoned or deliberately put to death and then thrown into the river?

Many fantastic tales began to be woven around Akim's enigmatic death—tales that grew more and more bloodcurdling and hair raising as time wore on. For many round the stables remembered the covetous eyes the Satrap had cast on Dominica while she was still Akim's wife.

Strangely enough, Dominica's fate worked out exactly the way she had predicted it. She bore him a son, Feodor, my Grandfather, known as Dedoussia, and a daughter, Domna, while true to his word the Satrap took her abroad for several years and had her properly educated and "polished." Then he brought her to Petersburg and presented her to society and Court. Her dark beauty created a sensation, but no one knew that she was a Gypsy. For Prince Yakov, the old sinner and prevaricator, had somehow managed to convey the impression that she was

the daughter of an obscure little landowner from a far-off province (which, of course, was partly the truth) and that explanation apparently satisfied everyone. As time went on she reigned as one of society's queens, known as the "one and only, incomparable Princess Dominica," famous for her beauty, her wit and, of all things, her culture and political salon.

Only twenty years later, when the young Czarevitch—of all people!—fell desperately in love with Dominica's daughter, young Domna, and actually wanted to marry her secretly, was the old story of Akim and the Gypsy suddenly unearthed and brought back to life. Great was the scandal and Dominica fled with her daughter from Petersburg to Paris, the Satrap being dead then several years. It was there that Domna soon married an impecunious but obliging young Frenchman and a few months later died in childbirth. Dominica returned to Stronskoe and lived there in seclusion until her death.

I pieced together the details of my great-grandparents' stormy romance from an old diary and numerous letters of contemporary relatives and friends which I found in the family archives.

Ever since, I have wondered how much heredity, tradition and surroundings helped or handicapped me. Was I, Tamara, really free when I started down my particular road of life or was I bound to the path of predestination and fate?

SECOND GENERATION

CHAPTER II

THE VICTORIANS

MY maternal great-aunt, Princess Natalia Grigorievna, to whom The Family meant everything, was a typical *raconteuse* of the old school. Aged and frail, reclining *in* the drawing-room on her chaise-longue in front of a discreet and quiet fire (she hated crackling, roaring blazes), she'd weave by the hour, in a soft, low voice, long and beautifully told stories about the different members of her beloved clan.

And ever since I can remember I would sit at her feet on the white bearskin rug and listen, fascinated and spellbound. At first, when I was small, her stories were simple and childish, concerning only the early youth of the various relatives; then, as I grew older, her stories became more and more mature. Finally, one day—on the eve of my wedding to be exact—she gravely handed me a slender manuscript, finely written in her own, old-fashioned, clear hand.

Tamara, my child [she wrote impressively], I consider this more valuable than any gift of silver, or gold, or precious stones. For these are some of the family stories that I have told you again and again, most of which undoubtedly you know by heart. But memory is not to be relied upon so much as the written word. Therefore, I have done this for you, day by day, a little at a time, ever since I realized that you were the only one among the young generation who is really interested in our past. Family tradition, even ancestor worship—these are the fires that must always burn *in* your soul, and when I am gone, you will carry the torch that I now pass on to you. But remember, you must never idealize or condemn, for in the history of a family, as in the history of nations, it is not all one-sided. You will find the good and the bad just as you do everywhere else. Splashes of golden light and pools of utter darkness, with long grey stretches in between. And one rejoices in the light, praising

and extolling the virtues it brings forth, and mourns in the dark, praying for the forgiveness of those who have sinned. Some day, Tamara, you will tell these stories to your children and perhaps add to these written pages your own for them to read. I have watched you, my child, and I can see that you, too, love to dream and live in the past as I do. So, some day, maybe—who knows?—you'll use this record of our family.

Now, years later, it lies open on my desk, its thin, brittle sheets slightly yellowed, but still retaining the faint, ghostlike scent of the perfume she used long ago.

And this is the story that Great-Aunt Natalia wrote, in the somewhat grandiloquent style of the period, about her eldest sister, my maternal grandmother, Alexandra:

Prince Grigory, my father and your great-grandfather, Tamara, was, as you well know, one of Russia's most outstanding men, recognized as such during his lifetime. Already then the books of contemporary history devoted inspired pages to the glory he had brought his country as a military genius, comparable only to Souvorov. Still a young man in the famous campaign of 1812, he had distinguished himself above others and even contributed to Napoleon's defeat. From that day his genius and good luck never deserted him and the milestones of his life were the victories which he laid at Russia's feet—strategic victories, victories of personal bravery on the battlefields, conquests of cities, high mountains and vast territories.

The Emperor, in his gratitude—for these victories adorned greatly the glory of his reign—showered your great-grandfather with every conceivable reward: decorations, titles, jewelled swords, palaces, millions of roubles, estates and promotions, with Imperial honours accorded him wherever he appeared in public.

Truly he was a favourite of the gods, for his family life was as successful and happy as his career. When he was thirty-nine he married Princess Tamara Doradze, a young Caucasian beauty, descendant of the famous Queen Tamara of Georgia. As you know, of course, that is why you, my child, were named Tamara. Of this wedlock three daughters were born: the twins, Alexandra and Annette; then later on, I, Natalia.

Father adored Alexandra and spoiled her unbelievably, for she was as beautiful as her twin, Annette, was homely, and as imperious and domineering as the other little girl was meek and shy. Unfortunately he showed his preference openly, with the result that from early childhood Alexandra had her own way *in everything and, realizing her power, made life pretty difficult for everyone else.

"A regular handful, but warm-hearted and kind," her English nurse, Miss Harriet, wrote back home to London about her little charge.

"Une petite fille volontaire et capricieuse quoique bien belle et parfois charmante" noted Mademoiselle Jacquier, the French governess, in her diary.

And *"jolie comme un cœur, mais très difficile, insupportable même, mon cher ami"* complained your great-grandmother in a confidential letter to her husband.

Nurse, governess, mother—all were of the same opinion and yet that "insupportable child" had a good deal of charm **and** a pleasing manner when she was on her best behaviour, for despite the fact that she was in many ways a youthful terror, they loved her dearly and made much of her beauty. Personally I was too small to form any judgment then.

There was no "young ladies' school" for the twins, and their education was strictly of the home-made variety. Reading and writing in Russian, English and mosdy French (as that was the fashionable language of the day); a little arithmetic; a smattering of history and European literature and a larger amount of dancing, singing, painting and embroidering—those were the subjects and arts taught in the twins' classroom. There were also piano lessons, though not taken too seriously, and the little girls played "four hands," mostly German *Lieder* and waltzes with fingers that were sufficiently nimble, if not too accurate, in their touch. Yes, they were considered well-educated young ladies at the age of sixteen when they were officially presented at Court and had their portraits painted by the great Winterhalter in white dresses with blue ribbons and wreaths of ivy on their glossy little heads. Those portraits told the story of Alexandra's beauty and of Annette's homeliness **better** than any words **ever** could. **For** though **the** famous artist evidently tried **kindly** to bring **out** Annette's **good points**—**her** thick black

hair; her lovely shoulders and hands—he could not honestly change her large hooked nose, her small beady eyes and wide mouth. But he also managed to bring out the sweetness of character and the intelligence of that homely little face and in some mysterious fashion made it as interesting and attractive as her sister's.

Painting Alexandra's beauty had, without any doubt, been a real delight to Winterhalter and he let himself go to do full justice to her enormous black eyes, impertinent little nose and tiny mouth, the rosebud type of mouth which was so greatly admired in those days. "*Une bouche en cocur*," it was called, a heart-shaped mouth, half pouting, half smiling with an indescribable expression of mischievousness, stubbornness and gay insolence. The hair was strangely alive and the whole face gave one the impression of a young girl brimful of life and the desire to enjoy it to the limit. It was a dangerous portrait in many ways, for it held no secrets and revealed too much at first glance. But your great-grandfather considered it a perfect likeness and hung it over his huge writing-desk where he could admire it to his heart's content.

To be fair, your great-grandmother took Annette's unwanted portrait and justly placed it above her own *escritoire*, where she would gaze at it lovingly and sigh a little, murmuring, "*Ma pauvre, pauvre petite. . .*" But her motherly pity was, after all, misplaced, for it was Annette who made the better marriage—the happier one—and lived to a ripe old age surrounded by children and numerous grandchildren.

For years Alexandra refused to marry and refused one eligible suitor after the other, explaining to her distressed parents that she would only marry when she really fell in love.

"I don't care if I die an old maid," she declared again and again. "Why should I marry just for the sake of marrying?"

"But, *chérie*, look at Annette—she's happy and he is rich and clever——"

"And old and ugly," finished Alexandra naughtily. "They will have very ugly children, because they are both so——" and she would make a grimace to show exactly what she meant.

And yet she loved her twin dearly and never allowed anyone (except herself) to utter one word of disparagement in her presence. For instance, there was the disastrous occasion when

a deluded young man had had the poor taste to compare the looks of the two sisters as a compliment intended for Alexandra. Up to that point she had favoured him more than the others, and society had been nodding and whispering that a match might come of it after all, and a very suitable match, too. But at those blundering words of the tactless youth, Alexandra sprang to her feet and with blazing eyes and flaming cheeks pointed to the door and imperiously ordered him to leave her presence at once and never dare to come back again.

"The idea, the very idea, of saying a word against my darling Annette, right in front of me, too!" she cried indignantly when in alarm the coat-tails of the unfortunate suitor disappeared with great rapidity behind the white and gold door of the drawing-room. "The very idea, the rudeness, the impossible boorishness——" and she stamped her pretty little foot and stormed and finally wept, until Annette, bewildered and frightened and yet proud of her sister's violent stand on her behalf, had consoled her and wiped away the hot, angry tears.

Then a young grand duke openly made love to Alexandra—she was twenty-two then (Annette had been married four years)—and even offered to marry her, that is, morganatically, of course, for though her blood was the bluest of the blue, far bluer than his, still she was not a member of an Imperial or Royal family which made her outside the pale. And again with flashing eyes, imperious and taut, she insolently replied in French:

"A girl with my name does not marry a grand duke nor a servant," and turning her back on him, walked down the entire length of the vast ballroom with head erect and burning cheeks.

"What in the world has happened to her now?" people wondered and soon enough knew the answer. For others had heard Alexandra's outburst and the story spread like wildfire until it reached the ears of the Emperor himself. But he only laughed and told your great grandfather that he had a magnificently impertinent daughter.

And then when Alexandra was twenty-eight and already looked upon by everyone at Court as the next candidate for Resident Maid of Honour and Lady in Waiting to the Empress—a position usually conferred on young women of the aristocracy about thirty and consequently past the normal marriageable

age—suddenly, to everyone's surprise, she fell madly in love with Prince Michael Ranovsky, aide-de-camp to the Emperor.

He was still young, thirty-two at that time—tall, handsome, serious, ambitious, extremely well educated, a scholar in fact, and highly talented besides. Truly an unusual young man, for not only had he studied and received a degree at the Sorbonne—a most extraordinary procedure for a wealthy young Russian of the Court circle—and not only was he an accomplished versifier who turned out French sonnets and quatrains with elegance and ease, but he had actually translated Dante with such success that his translation had been accepted and used officially by the Académie Française as the best of its day!

It is strange that such a type of man should have appealed to the capricious, madcap Alexandra; perhaps the contrast between them fascinated her. Anyhow her love for him, her first and only love, was very real and lasted without wavering or waning until her death.

No one ever knew whether Michael also fell in love with the imperious little beauty or merely considered her the right kind of wife socially for an ambitious man to have, a man bent on making a brilliant career. For hers was a great historical name comparable only to his own, her personal fortune was impressive and the position of her parents at Court of the very highest. But whatever were his motives he proposed and was joyfully accepted. They were married with pomp and ceremony in the presence of the Emperor and Empress at the Chapel of the Imperial Palace, and the next day, after spending their wedding night in Michael's enormous Petersburg mansion, left for Italy, travelling by way of their huge, cumbersome berline or coach drawn by eight horses.

That those days in Italy were truly happy for Alexandra one can see from her enchanted letters to her parents and twin, in which she wrote glowingly and in detail of Michael's wonderful kindness to her, how he guessed and forestalled her slightest desire, hiring only the most beautiful houses for them to live in, if only for a week (as he wouldn't allow her to stay at an hotel), and showing her Italy as only a true lover of that country and a poet could.

I am indeed living in Dante's Paradise [she wrote] and I know

Michael is happy, too, for he has started to translate some of Petrarch's love sonnets, because he says that now he understands exactly what the poet meant.

Another time she enclosed an original poem that he had written especially for her and dedicated "*A tes beaux yeux*"

On and on they lingered in Italy, the Emperor having indulgently prolonged his young aide's leave of absence. But finally they returned to Petersburg where on the sixteenth of April Marina, your mother, was born.

For a few years all went well and Alexandra's letters and diaries show that she was really happy and satisfied with her life.

"*Mon cher et bien aime Michel*," she invariably called her husband, and her daughter, "*Ma petite fille adordt!*"

And then something occurred, one of those tragic, though seemingly minor events in life that have the power of changing its entire course in the span of a few minutes. It happened one late afternoon when as usual Miss Harriet, Marina's nurse, brought the child to Prince Michael's study and left her with him for their allotted hour together. Marina loved that hour, for he allowed her to play with his collection of precious and semi-precious stones, a game that was fascinating to her and one which she never forgot. He had two big glass cupboards filled with those lovely stones—rows and rows of them on trays neatly arranged in little boxes, lined with white velvet. There would be diamonds and emeralds and rubies and nuggets of gold and beautiful pieces of jade and crystal. He would bring out a tray and let Marina play with the stones as much as she wanted provided she put them back into their right boxes.

At other times he would read poetry to her, sometimes his own, sometimes the Russian poets, or the French and Italian. Or he would play the piano softly, in the gloaming when the lamps were not yet lit and the logs burned low in the deep, dark fireplace of carved oak. Or again, in a gay and happy mood, he'd start all kinds of games, their favourite being "*African Hunters*" when he would drape the tiger skin over his head and prow about, growling ferociously while Marina with a little silver gun, a real gun, inlaid with precious stones, stalked her prey round the wide marble columns of the vast shadowy study.

And then, one day, when they were peacefully sitting on the bearskin rug in front of the fire, to Marina's surprise a beautiful young lady walked in, wrapped from head to foot in a sable pelisse, her cheeks a rosy red and snowflakes on her sable bonnet.

Michael had jumped up in amazement and exclaimed: "Oh, my dear, you should not have come in here!" but at the same time he looked strangely pleased and excited and kissed her gloved hands.

And the beautiful lady had laughed and said: "It's all right, Michael, I came only for a minute. She is with the Empress; I left them together half an hour ago."

Marina wondered who "she" might be, while Michael frowned and said: "Please, my dear, not in front of the little one."

The lady laughed again and then looked at Marina intensely. "So this is who stands between us, a charming baby!" she murmured.

And Marina was more puzzled than ever, for she certainly was not standing between the lady and her father! On the contrary she was all alone by the fireplace—and besides was indignant at being called "a charming baby," she, a big girl of six.

The lady talked to Michael for a few more minutes in a low voice, then, blowing a kiss to Marina, departed leaving in her wake a trail of sweet perfume and a violet that had fallen out of the little nosegay pinned to her coat. And Michael, having seen his mysterious guest to the door, had come back to Marina strangely quiet and silent, though his eyes shone like the sapphires with which they had been playing when the Unknown One had so unexpectedly come in and interrupted their game.

"Who is she?" Marina asked timidly, for she did not know this strange, quiet mood of her father and was a little afraid of breaking into his silence.

And Michael had started and looked at her as though he had forgotten that she was still with him, and then answered slowly: "A friend of mine, Marina. But your mother does not like her, so please do not tell her about our unexpected visitor. For she was unexpected," he added more to himself and again became strangely silent.

For the first time in her short life Marina felt uncomfortable

with her father and was glad when at last Miss Harriet came to the door, saying as usual: "Time for your supper, dear," and led her away to the nursery.

Marina never mentioned that visit to anyone, not for years to come, until the time when both her parents were dead and she told me the story.

But her mother somehow found out about the mysterious visitor and stormed and raged.

"It's that woman, Michael," she cried furiously, stamping her foot. "Oh, I know everything that is going on between you. Everything! Don't think I'm deaf and blind! You fell in love with her that evening two years ago at the Court ball when she appeared for the first time in Petersburg. *La belle Grecque*! You called her when we drove home. You admired her statuesque beauty that made you think of the goddesses of the Olympus. Then you told me that she was as intelligent and as highly educated as she was beautiful. *Mais ouil* She wrote poetry, too, and would help you translate the Greek classics! That was the beginning, the first excuse to call on her frequently."

"That was true," murmured Michael, but Alexandra went on.

"Later you told me that it was my fault that you read your poems to her and not to me, because you said that I always yawned like a cat and complained that poetry bored me. '*C'est assommant*, it's killingly boring' you accused me of saying. But what if I did say that and yawned? Is that such a sin?"

"Well, it is not very encouraging, *ma petite*!" remarked Michael, but once more Alexandra brushed him aside.

"You know perfectly well that I would much rather hear you talk than recite endless poems of men dead a thousand years ago! It's different when you read your own—I have always loved that. Especially when you dedicated sonnets to me. But these new love poems you have been writing recently—don't you think I know they are for her and not for me? Why should I listen to them? To be tortured, insulted? And to crown everything you bring her into our house and allow our child to see her and even talk to her. Oh, *mon ami*, you are very guileless and innocent! She wants you and she'll have you, for she is a huntress—I could see that at first glance—bent on capturing you and destroying me!"

Michael had listened to this tirade in silence, not saying a

word in self-defence, and from that hour their relationship was completely changed.

A strangely jealous note crept into Alexandra's diary, strange because it was directed not only against her husband but against her child as well.

"Michael adores Marina and treats her absurdly as his *confidante*" came the first complaint written in her small and flowery handwriting. And a few days later: "He loves and trusts the child more than he does me. I can see it so clearly," And again: "It is hard for me to watch my own child take my place in my husband's heart." No longer does she call him "*mon cher et bien aime*" or Marina "*ma petite fille aïore'e*!"

And at the same time your great-grandmother wrote to her husband saying:

Miss Harriet has been here. She has confided to me—oh, very discreetly—that for some unknown reason Alexandra is positively jealous of Michael's adoration for the child and is beginning to take it out on her. For instance, she will look at Marina and say (but only in Michael's presence): "*Princesse, vous êtes laide*," or "how awkward you are . . . how stupid," or worse still, "leave the room, Mademoiselle, I'm tired of seeing your ugly face." Naturally Marina bursts out crying and Michael, furious, rushes away slamming the door behind him. Perhaps you, *mon cher et hon Grigoire*, had better tell Alexandra how wrong she is. She will listen to you.

Whereupon your great-grandfather promptly wrote Alexandra a long letter reproving her severely for her unnatural behaviour toward her own child.

I cannot understand you, my daughter [he wrote]; what if Michael does adore her? Does that make him love you less? You'll lose your husband, *ma bonne amie*, if you do not conceal your incomprehensible feelings. I pray that you come to your senses. Follow the example of your own parents; have I not always worshipped your *bonne et chère mère* and loved my daughters as well? You should know that—you whom I confess I have always loved more perhaps than our dear Annette and

Natalie. Several loves in a family are not only possible, they are natural. It is your behaviour these days that is unnatural. So again I beg of you, my greatly beloved Alexandra, change your attitude toward your husband and your little child and you will reap the blessings of *le Bon Dieu* and of your affectionate, though -frankly disapproving parents.

Your devoted father,
Prince Grégoire.

Whether this letter had any beneficial effect is doubtful, for Marina speaking sadly of those early days of her life, which unfortunately she remembered only too well, said that her mother grew more and more intolerant. The child's only happy hours were those spent with her father, but somehow even they were not the same, and Marina with a strange ache in her heart would notice a constant change in Michael's face—to-day a new wrinkle, to-morrow a few more grey hairs. Meanwhile Alexandra lived her life stormily, unhappily distrusting her husband and child more than ever. Twice a day Miss Harriet would dress Marina in a little white silk frock with blue ribbons tied in bows like butterflies on her shoulders and in her hair and bring her downstairs to her mother's drawing-room.

"Here is the child, princess," she'd say, curtsying on the threshold, and then retire leaving Marina alone with her mother.

"*Venez-ici, Mademoiselle,*" Alexandra would command while Marina tiptoed to her side and timidly kissed her hand. But Alexandra would laugh bitterly and exclaim: "Don't you know how to kiss a hand without touching it with your nose? Why, it's as cold as a snake! I wish you'd warm it up before touching me!"

Though evidently Alexandra never complained to her parents nor tried to justify herself in their eyes by giving the real reason for her strange behaviour, she had reached the point where she actually hated her little daughter and looked upon her as Michael's accomplice and therefore her enemy. For **had** not **the** child been present when that odious Greek woman had dared break into Alexandra's own home and follow Michael into the privacy of his study? Oh, if only Marina had **told** her about that visit! If only she had confided in her and related what had actually happened—that would have been very different indeed.

Then she would have felt that the child was to be trusted, her friend and not theirs. Otherwise what a tragic situation confronted her: a husband in love with another woman and a daughter who was on his side. In her anger and despair she seemed to forget Marina's age.

Then all of a sudden the whole unhappy problem came to a head. In a tragic letter to Alexandra (evidently he lacked the courage to tell her) Michael confessed his love for the beautiful Greek goddess.

How can you ever forgive me, *ma pauvre petite* [he wrote], you who have loved me so ardently and been so faithful and true. With all my heart I thank you for that love—a royal and beautiful gift if ever there was one. And believe me I have loved you, too, and still do, though differently perhaps, more as a brother or a tender friend. But this other love has come into my life and swept me off my feet. For more than two years I have tried to combat it, to run away from it, to forget and conquer this madness. But it is stronger than I am! It has overpowered me and I find I cannot lie to you. I never did. If you remember whenever you mentioned *her* I kept silent, but I never lied. The least I can do now is to tell you the truth and throw myself at your mercy. Whatever you decide to do, I will accept. But one thing I beg of you to remember: our little Marina must be spared your unjust anger, for she has never done anything wrong or in any way been disloyal to you. Only once did she see the other One and that through no fault of hers or mine. Oh, my dear, what can we do? How can we face life together with this other love between us?

In a brief note that Michael carried in his breast pocket till his deadi Alexandra answered with unexpected calm and dignity:

Mon Ami, love is of supreme importance, therefore let us follow the dictates of love. It will guide me in my solitude and lead you, I pray, to greater heights.

That same night she ordered her trunks to be packed in haste and before sunrise, without saying good-bye to Michael, left for Paris, taking with her Marina and Miss Harriet. They travelled

in the same coach, drawn by eight horses, in which she and Michael had journeyed on their honeymoon six years before. In two smaller coaches followed her personal maid, the chef and several other servants. Ahead of this caravan went the courier, whose business it was to choose the best inns, arrange all sleeping accommodations and order the meals that would be most acceptable. About every four hours they'd clatter into village or town to exchange their lathered teams for fresh ones that had been carefully chosen by the ubiquitous Porfiry Stepanovitch, the ever disappearing and nimble courier.

Night after night they'd stop at those wayside inns, sometimes so overcrowded that there would be only one available bed for Alexandra, while Marina and Miss Harriet slept either on sofas or on chairs tied together or even on the floor. Once in a Polish inn Marina had slept on a billiard table but only after the gentlemen had finished their evening game. That experience, which must have pleased and amused her enormously, she never forgot and in later years always enjoyed describing at length.

In Paris they stayed at the famous Hôtel de France, occupying the royal suite that cost, as Alexandra said, "the eyes of one's head."

At night, more desperately unhappy than ever and unable to sleep, she would pace up and down her bedroom, wringing her hands and sobbing loudly, while Marina in the nursery directly above, hearing those terrifying sounds, would stuff her fingers in her ears and cower, trembling, under the bedclothes. It was then that she wrote me the pitiful little letter in crooked printed capitals which I now quote:

Much honoured and beloved Aunt Natalie,

Please help us. Please come to us. Mamma is so sad. She runs about all day and cries all night. If no one helps, she will die. I know grandmamma can not leave grandpapa and Aunt Annette has the new baby. And Papa does not want us any more. Can you come to us? Please, please, dear Aunt Natalie. Help Mamma. I bow low and embrace you respectfully.

Your loving niece,

Marina.

At that time I was not yet married though betrothed to your Great-Uncle Ivan. I remember how I rushed to my parents with poor little Marina's letter and begged them to let me go to her. Of course they did. So I left in our coach accompanied by Mademoiselle Jacquier and two maids, while our old Porfiry Stepanovitch, the courier, as usual travelled a day ahead of us so as to prepare everything for the night.

I found the situation in Paris just as Marina had described it. In the daytime Alexandra, thin and haggard, would shop and ride and tear around to parties, but at night she'd pace the floor, weeping and wringing her hands. Nothing I could do or say seemed to help her. It was a desperate situation and heaven knows how it would have ended, when suddenly the news came that Michael had died in Petersburg of pneumonia.

I'll never forget the effect that news had on Alexandra. It was as though she had been released from an evil spell, a curse that tormented her soul night and day. True she was heart-broken, but in a more normal way. Gone was the estrangement, the bitterness, the humiliating feeling of having been deserted for another woman. Once more in death Michael was her husband, her lover, the only man she had ever loved. Once more she could lift her head and speak proudly of him, now she was no longer the abandoned wife, the unneeded and unwanted one, but his widow, the only woman who bore his name, the mother of his child. In death he had been completely forgiven and was her Michael for evermore.

This change in turn affected her attitude toward Marina. Again she called her "*ma petite fille adoree*" and tenderly lavished a normal motherly love on her only child.

But her heart was broken and without any doubt she deliberately sought death. About a month later—it was an Easter Sunday, a beautiful cold day but with a treacherous wind—she put on a light spring dress and went out without any coat. . . . In five days she, too, was dead of pneumonia. Her body was sent to Moscow and there she was buried next to Michael in the family vault at Novodevitchy Monastery.

I took Marina back with me to Petersburg and when I married she came to live with us. She was a lovely child, gentle and quiet, with a trace of deep underlying sadness that she carried, in her all her life. At times, however, she'd be nervous

and highstrung with occasional outbursts of temper which later* on she learned perfectly to control; only two pink spots would appear on her cheeks when she was angry, but that happened seldom. She rarely uttered a cross word and her patience was well-nigh angelic. As she grew up she became unusually beautiful and at the age of eighteen married Prince Vsevolod Stronsky, your father, Tamara, then an officer in the Imperial Guard, gay, handsome, debonair. But that is another story—one that she undoubtedly will tell you herself.

Thus wrote Great-Aunt Natalia in her old-fashioned, stilted way. But she was right. That is exactly what happened. One day, after I was married and desperately unhappy, Marina, my mother, told me the story of my birth. I believe she thought it would help me solve my own problem—which, of course, it did not, our cases being so very different, as different as the two men involved, her husband and mine. But her story told in detail, together with the discreet, edited versions of Dr. Roukovsky, and old Frossia, gave me a fair picture of how I appeared on the scene.

THIRD GENERATION

CHAPTER III

THE NINETIES

MARINA STRONSKAIA was upset, to say the least. Stretched full length across the wide and low bedstead on to which, despite her "condition," she had most imprudently flung herself nearly half an hour earlier, she now lay in a desperate state of Victorian woe. At her bedside, bending over her solicitously, were the anxious faces of Frossia, her personal maid, and Dr. Roukovsky, the family doctor. Silently they had covered Marina with her favourite fleecy blue shawl and stroked her shoulders and patted her hands and tried to straighten out the clenched fingers of her rhythmically beating little fists. But in vain. In a rare fit of temper, most unusual for her, she had pushed away the tumbler containing the soothing home-made laurel-cherry drops, which the doctor had begged her to swallow, torn off her forehead the handkerchief dipped in Eau de Cologne—Frossia's inevitable first aid remedy for all ills—and sent the crown-stoppered green glass bottle of smelling salts flying across the room where it lay in the furthest corner, having on its way smashed a slender, iridescent Venetian vase, scared into fits of twittering and fluttering Maestro, the venerable Hartz Mountain canary, and evoked the easily aroused curiosity of the black and gold, crooked-legged dachshund, Lieber Hcinrich, who sniffed the contents of the open bottle and then sneezed rapidly, indignantly rubbing his long nose against the soft nap of the silky rug.

"Princess Marina Michailovna, if only you would drink the drops you'd feel better in no time," urged the Doctor gently and persuasively, while Frossia, kneeling at the bedside, pleaded in her most wheedling voice: "I entreat you, my little dove, my little princess, do as the Gospodin, the Gentleman Doctor, asks you. You must stop crying in this unseemly fashion. It isn't right, it's dangerous. Why, look at the way it shakes your poor little stomach! If you won't pity yourself, at least pity the un-

born babe, the innocent lamb, the angel from Heaven. Or else God will be most displeased and punish you, my little mother. So, I beg of you, stop this at once."

But Marina Michailovna paid not the slightest attention to either of them and continued to sob, shaking from head to foot.

"If only we could break this spell of hers and get her to relax a little," whispered Dr. Roukovsky, his forehead puckered into a worried frown. "It's bad for her, it really is, coming on top of that nasty fall. After all, this is the eighth month; always a dangerous one, you know."

"How about bringing in the twins? She might stop crying in front of them," whispered back Frossia, winking away the tears of sympathy that kept welling up and running down the furrows of her wrinkled cheeks.

But the Doctor shook his head. No, that wouldn't do. The children had never seen their mother in such a deplorable state. It would frighten them and give them a shock that might leave a most undesirable impression for life.

"No, Frossia, if she doesn't calm down shortly, I'll give her a dose of something that will really quieten her down."

At this moment the door slowly opened and through the narrow aperture peered the fat and usually ruddy, jovial face of Prince Vsevolod, Marina's husband. Now, however, his face was anything but ruddy or jovial and bore the pathetic hangdog expression of an overgrown Saint Bernard puppy that has just been caught misbehaving and knows it's going to be chastised.

With one dismayed look at the prostrate figure on the bed, he opened the door a little wider and waved his hands in an expressive pantomime, first pointing to his left side and then up to the ceiling, so as to convey to the doctor and Frossia silently but effectively, that he was heartbroken, and called upon Heaven as his witness that he was innocent and willing to do anything to help. Then opening the door still wider, enough to let his big body pass, he paused for a second on the threshold, stretching out both arms as though balancing himself on a tight-rope, and then carefully started to tiptoe across the room, his heavy, knee-high, black leather boots creaking ominously with every step he took. Having safely negotiated the distance between the door and the bed—not an easy feat to

accomplish on account of the numerous small tables, chairs and "poufs" that cluttered up the room and stood in his way—he finally dropped to his knees, his cracking joints sounding like a sudden burst of fireworks, and cautiously kissed the tip of his wife's shiny little bronze-coloured slipper.

"Marina, *Marinoushka*, my dear one, my *tzeepa*, my small chicken, please let me explain," he murmured abjectly, his fierce-looking bushy moustache bristling incongruously over his sadly drooping mouth. "You don't understand, *tnaMarisch adorfo*," he continued, lapsing into French which they always used in moments of intimacy. "It was all a mistake, *ma chirie*. If only you'll listen to me, I'll tell you the whole story and together we'll laugh about it. Oh, how we'll laugh, my sweet one, you with your pretty little 'he-he' and I with my big 'ho-ho.' "

At the sound of his voice Marina lay rigidly still, her face buried in her arms.

"You see, it was like this," began Vsevolod nervously, clearing his throat as the Doctor and Frossia discreetly left the room. "I was in my bath tub and suddenly realized that I needed some assistance for the purpose of soaping my back. You know perfectly well that my arms are still stiff after breaking in that crazy colt. So I called Sasha and shouted and yelled, but as usual the donkey had disappeared just when I needed him—probably drinking his sixty-ninth glass of tea in the pantry. (By the way, he's the worst valet I've ever had and I'll wash his head for this firmly—you'll hear me roar at him!—then I'll fine him for at least one month of his wages and buy you a new rosebush with that money.) Well, just as I was about to give up and leave the bath with my poor dirty back unwashed, I happened to hear Lisa in the next room polishing window panes and singing that idiotic song of hers about the love-sick birds. So I called her, sternly, you know. Just like this: 'Lisa, come here this minute.' After all, she's a respectable widow, mother of a lot of nose-dripping brats. Why should I feel ashamed in front of her? I'm not ashamed when a trained nurse sees me in my bath. (Remember how pretty the last one was when I had scarlet fever?) Why worry about a simpleton like Lisa? So I shouted again, 'Come here, *doura*, and soap my back,' And of course she came running and obeyed my orders. I grant you it was stupid of her to giggle in that foolish way,

but she's only a village *baba* without any manners whatsoever. She probably giggles at funerals. As for me, my darling, you know how ticklish I am! It's enough to point a finger at me and I'll start to laugh. So how could I help roaring when she poked the bar of soap right into my ribs? Honestly, that's all there was to it. And then you came in, my little princess, and stood on the threshold looking as white as a sheet, your pretty nose all puckered up as though you had seen and smelled something nasty and disgusting, which was very childish of you, my dear one, very childish indeed. And I should scold you for that severely. Then on top of everything you start running away and slip and fall right on your dear little stomach. Now, I ask you, what kind of behaviour is that?"

As Marina continued to lie motionless Vsevolod's voice gradually became more and more assured until finally a reproving note crept into his monologue. Yes, all is going nicely, he thought, well pleased with himself. But I must chide her a little more and show her how absurd she is to behave this way over such a trifle.

Encouraged by her silence he put out his hand and gingerly stroked her long fair hair that was streaming down her back. But at his touch she suddenly came to life and sprang off the bed in a whirlwind of fleecy blue and stood towering over him like a flaming Nemesis, no longer tearful but the embodiment of indignation.

"How dare you touch me, how dare you?" she cried, stamping the little bronze-coloured slipper so furiously that its bow fell off. "And such lies! Such abominable lies—you wicked sin-maker! Just as wicked as that grandfather of yours, that old Satrap, that old satyr, whose bad blood is in your veins! Oh, why didn't someone tell me about him before I married you? At least I would have been prepared. . . ." *i*

At the mention of his grandfather, Vsevolod, still on his knees, bowed his head in proper shame and luckily managed to stifle a most unseemly chuckle.

"But I'm glad I caught you at last," went on Marina, taking a deep breath and inadvertently dropping her shawl over the dejected, kneeling figure and swathing it in fleecy blue. "Caught you *en flagrant dtlit* too. Now you'll never be able to fib and lie and tell such stories again. Never! Because I'll never believe

'anything you say—I swear!" and with a sweeping gesture she made the sign of the cross, bowing in the direction of the icons as much as to say, "May they be witnesses to my words!"

"And stop being a hypocrite and get up, get off those stupid cracking knees of yours! Even that is put on—you know how to crack them at will," she continued, turning to him again as he slipped his head out of the shawl and looked up at her imploringly hoping she'd burst out laughing at the sorry spectacle he presented. But no, not a smile, not a twinkle! Alas, he could see that the subject of his recent shocking behaviour was not yet exhausted. On the contrary, now he was being banished from the room.

"Go away, go to Lisa and to all the other creatures you've behaved with so scandalously. Everything is finished between us. Oh, I'll stay here of course, but only on account of the children. From this moment we'll live our lives separately. Do as you please, be as sinful as you please—I won't care any more. But remember you're never to open my door without knocking and don't knock at night. It will always be locked for you. And now go, go—before I call the Doctor and Frossia to push you out."

Abashed, Vsevolod scrambled to his feet and stood before her looking more than ever like a huge puppy in disgrace. Then with a deep rumbling sigh he murmured: "But a man's got to have a little harmless fun sometimes! Heaven is my witness, Marina, I've never been fundamentally untrue to you," and, turning away, forlornly ambled out of the room.

When a minute later Frossia, who had been listening at the keyhole and hadn't missed a single word, peeped to see how her princess was behaving, she uttered a cry of dismay, for crumpled up on the floor, face forward, lay Marina in a dead faint while a frightened Lieber Heinrich tugged frantically at her skirts.

"Doctor, Doctor," shrieked Frossia, "come quick, see what's happened! *Ahti*, my poor little one! Now you have done it and nobody can help you but God and our Gospodin Doctor."

Instantly the great house was in a turmoil. Hither and yon started to rush the servants, bumping into each other as they ran up and down the corridors, laden with all kinds of unusual

things: the framework of a plain, narrow iron bedstead, a hard mattress, oilskin sheets, buckets of hot water and linen, piles of fragrant linen, which the maids kept bringing in from the huge closets of the immense lavender-scented linen room.

In the furthest wing of the house the seven-year-old, red-headed twins, Vanka and Tanka, tried to play, but seeing the anxious faces of their nurse and governess, they huddled into a corner of the schoolroom and talked in low, subdued voices about robbers and ghosts and Slimy Things that slither round one's bed at night time.

"Just put your hand out in the dark and you'll touch one of them, cold and wet and nasty," Vanka gloomily assured the thoroughly frightened Tanka, who stared at him with round eyes full of terror. Finally unable to stand it any longer she uttered a blood-curdling scream whereupon Niania, the children's nurse, and Miss Burns, the English governess, promptly remembering the existence of their charges, pounced down on them and marched them off to bed protesting loudly.

"I don't want to go to bed! The Slimy Things are there," yelled Tanka desperately.

"What 'slimy things'? What's this nonsense?" demanded Niania severely and when in quavering voices they managed to explain, she gave each one a good shake and ordered them to say in unison the Russian version of: "Four corners to my bed, four angels round my head, one to watch, two to pray and one to chase Bad Things away."

As usual the soothing old words performed their duty and soon Tanka and Vanka were sound asleep.

Presently, too, the servants settled down for a long, comfortable and pleasurable exciting vigil of gossip, surmises and tea with kindly prayers occasionally sent up to Heaven requesting the Lord to help His poor suffering slave, the good Princess Marina, in her hour of travail. In appropriately lowered voices they argued: "Will the babe be born to-night? . . . Oh, I don't think so, to-morrow evening at the earliest... in two days . . . in an hour . . . still-born . . . alive . . . disfigured by the fall . . . unusually beautiful..." On and on they argued.

But on that stormy night with the wind howling round the house and the bare trees swaying and the rain coming down in sheets, the baby was born, a tiny little girl, premature and frail.

and as Frossia expressed herself, "Ready any minute to fly away back to Heaven."

But the doctor fought, all through that dark night and through many other nights and days, when everyone else had given up hope and the priest kept urging a quick christening so that the little soul could re-enter Paradise with confidence and ease.

"When the Death Angel comes for her and her own Guardian Angel explains that she has been properly christened—all will be well," he stated with authority. "But if she has not been christened, if she is still, alas, a heathen, then she will never be allowed to pass through the Golden Gates."

"But, Father Trofim, she's not going to die, she'll live!" Dr. Roukovsky had retorted and the priest finally, though most reluctantly, gave in, having extracted a solemn promise from Adam Ossipovitch (the doctor) that he himself would sprinkle the babe with blessed water in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost and endow her with the Christian name Tamara, if he saw that she was about to leave this earth.

And every day, the undertaker, dressed in his gloomy black *surtouk*, called at the back door of the great house and, secretly admitted to the cosy parlour of his old friend the butler, consumed an amazing quantity of tea sweetened with strawberry jam and in a low but hopeful voice discoursed on the various merits of dainty little coffins made of rosewood or mahogany and richly lined with quilted satin and ruffled silk.

"Of course, it's all a matter of taste," he'd remark, pensively scratching his scraggly beard, "but personally in this case I'd strongly recommend rosewood and white or perhaps pink satin. For a new-born babe of princely descent, there's something very delicate about such a combination."

At these lugubrious words a tender-hearted housemaid burst into tears and, throwing her apron over her head, ran away sobbing loudly.

Yes, those were days of sorrow and sadness, when the shadow of death lay darkly on the house, with the baby "ready to fly away"; and Marina, pale and thin and listless, recovering much too slowly; and the twins subdued and unnaturally quiet; and poor Vsevolod, choking with remorse and creeping about like a lost soul. In his anxiety to perform the right kind of penance

that would atone somewhat for all the trouble he had unwittingly brought upon his family, he gravely weighed **the** different methods of self-imposed hardships such as fasting **and** hairshirts and sleeping on bare boards. But as none of these extreme measures, so earnestly advocated by monks and saints •(and once even by his own grandfather, the Satrap), seemed to appeal to him, he finally invented an original one of his own, which consisted of giving up his daily baths.

"In a bath I erred and out of a bath I shall atone," he solemnly declared, well pleased with his ingenious invention which undoubtedly was a hardship and yet not too hard, as Sasha, secretly grumbling at this new form of unwelcome exercise, had now to rub him down vigorously in the morning and at night with generous sluicings of vinegar water and Eau de Cologne.

Slowly the days crept by and in her darkened room, in the same wide and low bed, Marina lay motionless on her back, apparently asleep and yet wide awake in a world of her own, in which her mind would wander at will through that mysterious shadow land which lies on the border of consciousness and unconsciousness, of waking and sleeping, of life and death. Again and again she would have the strange though pleasing sensation of being gently but forcibly drawn by some unknown, unseen, incomprehensible magnetic power out of her bed across the room to the open window and then on—on, in a breath-taking flight through thick white autumn mists and dark swirling clouds—higher, always higher—until finally, leaving them far below, she would reach a fantastic realm of silvery blue, comparable only to a moonlight night, floating through space, without any landscape to frame it or any earth to hold it down, a translucent night of pale sapphire, sparkling and clear.

In that realm she would feel strangely light, as though her body had no longer any weight but moved easily, ecstatically ("Floating or flying? Which is it?" she wondered), carried by a burning desire ("Of my spirit? My soul?"), a driving urge to keep going on and on through that magic world of silver blue, past the moon ("Oh, how enormous it will be—its light will surely blind me!"), past the planets ("I must be careful not to miss my planet, Venus, for I was born under her sign"), past the stars——("At last I'll see the Pleiades at close quarters, and run down the Milky Way using each star as a stepping stone.")

"It's all mine now; the whole universe is mine to play with, to live in, to fly through. Oh, what joy! Good-bye, everybody and everything down there on that cramped and stuffy little earth. I'm off into eternity on the glorious flight that never ends."

And then every time, in the flash of a split second, the same thing would happen again and again. From far, far below on the waves of the ether a thin, plaintive cry, the cry of a new-born baby, would come floating upward and that weak little sound, more powerful than the magic spell, would smash it to atoms like a shattered crystal ball and pull Marina out of her world of blue, back again to earth. Down, down she'd go like a falling star, through swirling clouds and white autumn mists, faster, faster—her body getting heavier and heavier until, with what seemed to her a terrific thud, she would find herself back in her bed, with the Doctor bending over her anxiously, holding her pulse, and Frossia trying to make her swallow a drop of medicine and Father Trofim chanting a prayer and Vsevolod on his knees again, calling piteously: "*Marinoushka*, my little one, don't leave me now!" While the new-born baby who had been crying so pitifully only a minute ago, now nestled at her side, soft and warm, with little gurgles of delight.

It was all finished. She was back with them on their tiresome old earth and everything had to be started all over again. "Oh, baby, why did you have to bring me back? Do you really need me so much? And *what* a bump that was! Qid you all see me tumble back into bed?" she'd cry out laughing—at least she thought she was crying out loud and laughing. But no one answered, for they couldn't catch her whisper and only the Doctor, looking at her closely, remarked with a sigh of relief, "Thank God, her lips are moving; in a moment she'll regain consciousness!"

Later on, when she grew a little stronger, in a low, halting voice she told Frossia about those enchanted flights. But the old woman was horrified.

"Only witches fly through the night on broomsticks. The Lord protect us, they're after you. But they will not get hold of you. I'll chase them off. Away, away, creatures of Satan, leave God's slave Marina alone and be off with you, be off, you spawns of darkness."

With prayers and incantations she sprinkled holy water over Marina, and tied a small bag of garlic around her neck just below her baptismal cross, and placed beneath her pillow a miracle-working relic, a brown and brittle finger joint of a long-departed saint. Then she begged the priest to hasten with "the Cleansing Prayer"—which according to ritual restores every new mother to the arms of the Church after the period of childbirth during which she is looked upon as "unclean"—and to administer Holy Communion. And though no one could understand what had happened to the old woman (for she did not tell anyone what Marina had told her), they all agreed—Vsevolod and the numerous relatives and friends who crowded outside the sick room (for the Doctor would not let them in)—that Communion would be the best cure for Marina. So after the Cleansing Prayer, Father Trofim administered the saintly rites and to Frossia's joy and triumph Marina did not fly that night or any other night again.

Instead vast sheets of light would rise out of the darkness, bearing on them, like huge magic-lantern slides, processions of people who had played some part in her life, of familiar scenes she had once lived through, of things she had seen and done. And she would hear voices and music, all the music she wanted, while enchanted she'd have the sensation of swimming in a warm buoyant sea of harmony.

But as she grew stronger the visions and the music became fainter and fainter until they disappeared completely. Little by little she came back to life, until those weeks after Tamará's birth were hardly anything more than the remembrance of fantastic dreams. Once again her former life reclaimed her and though in those past weeks she had lost for ever something warm and lovely in her heart for Vsevolod, her days once more became filled with the never-ceasing activities of that late Victorian period of the nineties in Petersburg.

AND UNTO THE FOURTH GENERATION

CHAPTER IV

THE LITTLE BEGGAR-BEAST

I THINK I can remember as far back as when I was three years old, but of that, of course, I am not so sure. Those vague memories and the various tales told later by loving grown-ups undoubtedly overlapped and became confused and difficult to disentangle. "Which was a memory and which was a story—who could tell?

I do remember, though, quite distinctly, marching down a long red carpet in the Palace Church and stooping to pick up a bright yellow flower that someone had dropped. Chortling and chuckling delightedly, I clutched my find only to be ordered to drop it.

"No, no!" I protested loudly but was vigorously shushed and told to march on. Frustrated and mortified, I hated leaving that lovely yellow flower which I never forgot. On my way back I looked for it, but of course it had disappeared.

Perhaps that was a symbol of what was going to happen to me so often in life when something lovely would come my way and be lying in my path within my grasp—only to be lost for ever.

I can see that picture so clearly: the immense white and gold church, the long red runner in the centre from the wide entrance door to the altar, a shaft of sunlight and the bright yellow flower waiting to be picked up. It was hard to bend down in that stiffly starched cambric frock, my tight little drawers nearly cracking open and the big bow of my sash falling over my curls in the effort. All in vain.

"Drop it and go on," said the familiar voice inexorably. And many a time in later years I have fancied that I heard that voice and those very same words, "Drop it and go on."

I remember, too, falling into the fountain in front of the terrace. I had been leaning over to watch the goldfish, lost my

balance and went in, head foremost. Again I can see it all and feel it all so vividly: the greenish marble rim, the goldfish darting around wildly, the sparkling cold water and the big brown hands of the gardener fishing me out. Then the horrid sensation of wet clothes clinging to one's small body and the sharp stinging spank under a dripping sash.

And the first snow that I actually remember when, dressed in a pink velvet pelisse and bonnet and knee-high felt boots, I stepped into a silent, muffled world of white. White skies, white ground, white trees, white bushes and the soft fall of big white snowflakes all around. They clung to my eyelashes, they tickled my cheek, they lay on my muff and my shoulders and bonnet. Delightedly I threw back my head and opened my lips to catch them, but the voice that ruled my small being said immediately: "No, baby, no. Don't do that! Shut your mouth and breathe only through your nose."

Later I learned the trick of falling on my face and filling my mouth with snow or of breaking off a little diamond icicle and hiding it inside my cheek until it had melted. Both tricks were not easy to accomplish under watchful eyes, but, oh, the joy when I had succeeded.

It is strange how sensations and sounds live on and on. To this day, if I want, I can clearly recall Niania's voice telling a *skazka*, a fairy tale, a thousand years old; or Vanka and Tanka chattering like magpies, Papoussia shouting with laughter, or Mamoussia saying gently: "Listen, childie darling, and I will tell you a story of long, long ago."

My fingers, too, remember so clearly, so accurately the touch of things gone for ever: the shape of Mamma's favourite brooch that she so often wore, her rings, the texture of certain dresses; the dancing figures on my Wedgwood blue and white mug, out of which I drank hot milk; my green and gold book of nursery rhymes; the stiff satin bow on Niania's cap; Vanka's rough tousled hair and Tanka's soft curls....

Whenever I wish to evoke them, those sensations come crowding back and with them the past lives again, if only for a few fleeting moments.

Papoussia, Mamoussia, Niania, Miss Burns—all those who surrounded me in my childhood, come back to life as though they had never left me.

Niania, a typical, old-fashioned Russian nurse, stout, calm, warm-hearted and soothing, though occasionally with a definite temper, was naturally the closest of all as she took care of me from my birth to the time of my marriage. Of good, solid peasant stock, from our village of Stronskoe, she had first been Papoussia's wet nurse immediately after his mother died in childbirth, and then his nurse until he was seven. After that a tutor took charge of him, but Niania remained in the house to supervise the making of his bed, the temperature of his bath, the brushing of his teeth—to mend his clothes, darn his socks and nurse him whenever he was ill. The minute he sickened she would take complete charge again and move into his room with all her goods and chattels, mosdy icons, books and homely medicines, until he was well again. Then back into her own room she'd go, across the corridor, always keeping her door ajar so that she could watch the comings and goings of her beloved little Vsevolod and see for herself that all was well. If she noticed anything she disapproved of, she'd come out and make a fuss.

That room of hers was our favourite in the whole house. Decorated with icons, in front of which burned blue, green, red and yellow *lampadas* that winked in the dark like little lights on a Christmas tree, it was always hot and smelled mysteriously of rose oil, incense, lavender, Eau de Cologne, tea, and candy flavoured with the juice of fragrant pears. Her deep armchair stood in the main corner beneath a shaded lamp and her Bible lay on a small table all by itself.

"Never put another book next to the Bible," she'd say gravely, "and never, never put anything on top of it, for that is a great sin."

On another large table stood many volumes of *The Lives of the Saints* and other books on religious subjects and folklore.

Vsevolod adored her and gradually she became all-powerful in poor Dedoussia's widowed household. "Niania" to the family and "Anissia Pavlovna" to everyone else, she ruled the home life of both father and son in her strong, calm, sensible way and saw that everything was done as it should be. For had she not promised poor young Princess Olga on her deathbed that she, Anissia, would take care of Vsevolod as she would her own child, so help her the Lord God? Faithfully she kept her promise and

when he married, naturally, as a matter of course, she took complete charge of his three children, Vanka, Tanka and Tamara.

An illiterate young peasant woman when she first entered the Stronskoe household, she soon learned to read and write. Eagerly she read and read everything she could lay hands on and as the years went by her knowledge of the Bible, of the lives of the saints and of innumerable old Russian fairy tales became phenomenal. She would quote at length whole passages from the Old and New Testaments, describe in the greatest detail the life history of any saint one would mention and tell by the hour endless fairy tales, *skazki*, that could easily have filled many books.

Besides she had worked out a few daily rituals that we, her charges, were obliged to carry out faithfully to the letter. If we overlooked anything or tried to cheat a little and skip, she'd chastise us and following the Bible's sound advice, generously apply the good old-fashioned rod.

First thing in the morning, before washing and dressing, we had to say our prayers—easy ones to begin with, such as: "Save and protect Papa, Mama, Dedoussia, Vanka, Tanka and Tamara." Then came longer and more difficult ones as we grew older. At seven we had to say: "Our Father," and special prayers to the Holy Ghost, to the Virgin, to our Guardian Angel and Patron Saint. The prayers were timed and had to be enunciated clearly and carefully; no gabbling was allowed. Six genuflections followed, which meant getting up each time, kneeling again and bowing to the very ground with the forehead touching the floor. If a little yellow beeswax stuck to our foreheads, she'd be particularly pleased as then she knew that our devotions had been real and full of religious fervour and zest. After that she'd sprinkle holy water on our heads and make us read a chapter of the New Testament, several paragraphs of the Old, and half a page of a little book called *A Holy Thought For Every Day*.

In the evening we had to say the same prayers to which was added an extra gloomy one about "sudden death in the night." Then we had to read half a page of *A Holy Dream For Every Night* and "examine" our consciences, trying to remember to the slightest detail all the wrong things we had done during the past 'day. Alas, as we had to examine ourselves aloud in her presence, we invariably furnished her with an appropriate subject

for a sermon in which our sinful ways were severely upbraided. But that was the end of Niania's ritual.

Then Mamma's began.

Every evening after tucking us in bed, she'd bend over and say very softly in English: "God bless you."

"God bless you," we'd reply in an equally low, whispering voice.

"God bless you," Mamma would then repeat a little louder as she started to leave the room.

"God bless you," we'd answer, lifting our voices so that she could hear us in the corridor.

"God bless you," she'd cry as she kept going down the long passage.

"God bless you," we'd cry back louder and louder.

Finally at the door leading to the staircase she'd call out as loudly as she could: "God bless you!" the words reverberating and ringing through the narrow passageway, while we'd yell back: "God bless you!" at the top of our lungs. Then we'd hear the door close and know that Mamma had begun to go downstairs.

At this point Niania, who had been standing by with pursed lips and a pained expression on her old face, would shake her head disapprovingly and mutter:

" 'Cotpleskyou, cotpleskyou!' What a heathenish way of talking about our Lord God! May He forgive His erring slave Marina and her unwittingly sinful little brood! 'Cotpleskyou!' Who ever heard of such a word?"

With that, she'd blow out the candle and the day of "the sinful little brood" would be officially over.

Satisfied with the knowledge that she had performed her Christian duty properly, Niania felt that we were safe from too severe a judgment if we happened to die suddenly that night and presented ourselves to the Almighty "decently, without any fuzz on our whiskers," or in other words, "clean, both in body and soul."

Miss Burns was a very different kind of person. Thin, angular and strait-laced, with a long, "horsy" face, which she firmly believed was "handsome in profile," she never bustled nor ran, but moved slowly with dignity and a slightly offended **look about her** big nose as though she had just smelled something un-

pleasant. Though her nose was so large, she was not at all self-conscious about it and often quoted an obscure old saying that "a fine, outstanding proboscis never spoiled a pleasing face."

She always wore a plain black silk dress with a cameo brooch at her throat and a long, heavy gold watch-chain looped twice over her meagre breast which on special occasions she padded with perfumed pocket handkerchiefs. She rarely laughed and never showed any display of affection for anyone. And yet we knew that we were "her children," "her family," and that Stronskoe was "her one and only home in the whole wide world." *td* Though she was past fifty then and had lived in Russia for a long time, having arrived from England when she was quite young, she positively refused to learn the language and looked down with contempt upon the peasants as a race of untouchable *moujiks*, dangerous, wild and next kin to wolves. That opinion of hers was, she said, fully confirmed by the lamentable, world-known episode that took place in Paris when Pasteur tried, alas too late, to cure the six Russian *moujiks*, who had been bitten by mad wolves.

"Indeed?" was her favourite expression of surprise and whenever she was startled, which was constantly the case, she'd exclaim: "Indeed?" sounding "Deed" on a long, high note of bewildered interrogation. Naturally Vanka and Tanka nicknamed her at once "Indeed Miss Burns," but among ourselves we called her just plain Deedee.

Hi, When driving in the country she always believed that the coachman would purposely tip up the carriage to one side of the grassy bank on some narrow lane just for the purpose, she said, of annoying her. And she would sit glaring at his innocent unsuspecting back, muttering to herself indignantly: "Great big brute of a *gloup*" (meaning "stupid").

Though she could not speak Russian she perpetually injected single Russian words into her English sentences, mixing them up in such a manner that no one could understand what she meant except those who knew her well. A railway carriage was called in Russian a *vagon* (from the French word *wagon*) so Miss Burns to the bewilderment of strangers would say "vagoon."

"I travelled most comfortably in a first-class vagoon," she'd declare, while startled people asked politely but anxiously: "In a *what* did you say, Miss Burns?"

"Peachka" was her variation of *pechka*, the word for stove, and she would majestically order the moujik on duty to throw some extra logs into the "peachka."

Curiously enough the servants understood her pidgin talk better than anyone else and promptly carried out her strangely worded orders.

When she wanted a poultice she'd say: "Please bring me a 'preeparka,' " using again a Russian word; or when she lost her gloves, she'd cry out: "Where are my new 'perchatkis'?"

She belonged to a religious group who believed that they would never die and would solemnly declare that when her time came "she'd meet her Saviour standing."

She detested superstition and had a long-standing feud on the subject with Niania, accusing the old woman of teaching the "ditties" (meaning the children) a lot of heathen nonsense.

To her horror and distress Vanka had picked up somewhere an abominable phrase that never failed to shock her practically into hysterics every time he sprang it.

"Bcggar-beast-bloody-old-fool-goddam-you," he'd remark nonchalantly to Tanka or me in a perfectly normal, ordinary voice which was in such direct contrast to the appalling words that it made them sound all the more startling. To his delight, whenever he uttered them in front of Miss Burns, as he loved to do, she would react exactly the same way as though she had just heard them for the first time: a gasp, a shriek, eyes popping with horror and bony hands flying up to her face to conceal her blushes.

"Vanka, oh, Vanka, shocking, shocking!" she'd wail tearfully. "You bad, wicked boy, how dare you! Such awful words and in the presence of ladies, too! Go away this minute and don't dare to speak to anyone until you've washed your dirty mouth with soap. Do you hear me? Go at once before I complain to dear Papa."

"Yes, Miss Burns," he'd say meekly and disappear behind the door where he'd stand for a few minutes. Then back he'd come with a penitent look on his face and the most humble apologies he could invent. Invariably mollified at this touching willingness to reform, she would say: "Very well, my boy, I forgive you this time, but never do it again."

"Never, Miss Burns," he'd promise, managing to look like

the picture of penitence. Then, as she'd pat him forgivingly on the back, he'd wheel around and shout. "And that means you, Tanka and Tamara, you two beggar-beasts-bloody-old-fools-goddam-you!"

Again Miss Burns would gasp and shriek in horrified surprise, again Vanka would repent, and so this idiotic thing would go on for ever. But she never carried out her threat to complain to "dear Papa" or Mamma.

Vanka even taught Niania to ask Miss Burns what "*baka-beesthloogyolfull*" meant with the result that there was nearly a fight as she firmly believed that Niania had purposely insulted her.

To everyone's secret delight she always called our parents to their face "Papa" and "Mamma." And though she could easily have been their mother, almost their grandmother, she always acted girlishly with them in the manner of a respectfully playful older daughter.

"Oh, Papa, may I go out?" she'd inquire, arching one eyebrow, or "Please, Mamma, I'd like another helping of roast beef."

*"In a little village Vanka lived,
And Vanka loved his Tanka"*

—From an old Russian folksong

Though I loved dearly all those who surrounded me during the early days of my childhood, I adored Vanka and Tanka. In my eyes they were absolutely perfect, a god and goddess (if I had known the meaning of those words) to be worshipped, admired and imitated without restraint.

"Vanka-and-Tanka have said," I'd declare solemnly, and whatever they said was law as far as I was concerned and nothing could change it. Naturally they took full advantage of my adoration, and with the incontestable superiority of age (they were seven years older than I) spent their spare time, of which luckily they had very little, making a perfect monkey out of me. They taught me nonsensical rhymes and sayings and songs, dances and charades and goodness knows what else besides with which to startle my elders, who'd throw their hands up in despair and, after exclaiming: "Tamara, never say that again,"

would chase the twins all over the place. Finally caught **and** accused of leading their poor little sister astray, they'd look innocently surprised and remark that Tamara, the silly, had completely misunderstood them.

I was their go-between, their scapegoat for practical jokes, and to their fiendish delight I would obey them to the letter.

One day they made me propose to a coy maiden lady of about fifty in the name of a deaf old gentleman of at least seventy-five. Both parties—guests in our home—had hated each other for years and my proposal came as a thunderclap. **But** first, Vanka and Tanka had taken me aside and, after a few flattering remarks with which as usual they won me over completely, coached me as to the exact words I was to use.

"You see, the old gentleman Vassili Ivanovitch is so deaf that he is afraid he won't hear the lady's happy answer, which would be most embarrassing. So he has chosen you, Tamara, as his ambassador. Now, this is a great compliment and a very serious and delicate matter," they said gravely. "Not every little girl has such an honour bestowed on her. So go along now while you still remember the exact words he wants you to use and we'll watch you from behind this column."

The lady in question was seated on the terrace, knitting placidly, when, fully realizing the importance of my mission, I slowly approached her with a firm tread, my head erect and my chest (or rather my stomach) thrown out impressively as far as it would go.

"Glafira Petrovna, I have something to tell you," I began pompously, standing on one leg like a stork.

"Yes, Tamara, my little one, what is it?" she asked kindly, looking up from her knitting and beaming at me through her spectacles. She was very fond of me and many were the games we had played together.

"It's about Vassili Ivanovitch," I went on importantly, rashly ignoring her sudden frown. "Glafira Petrovna, he loves you and begs you on bended knee to marry him."

To my amazement Glafira Petrovna, always so kind **and** good-natured, sprang from her seat and, clutching me by my shoulders, shook me till my curls fell over my face.

"The unworthy man! The Evil Doer! The Bad One! **How**

does he dare, how does he dare . . . ?" she cried and then, uttering a piercing shriek, collapsed into her wicker armchair and fainted right away. At least she closed her eyes and opened her mouth and gasped in such an alarming fashion that I screamed: "Vanka! Tanka! She's falling to pieces! 'Quick, quick!"

Out they dashed from behind the column and, thrusting a note into my hand, whispered: "It's all right. Ladies in love always act this way. Now run into the library and give Vassili Ivanovitch this note. Hurry!"

As fast as my short legs would carry me I raced into the library where the old gentleman was reading his newspaper. As he couldn't hear a word, I tugged at his sleeve, and when he mumbled in his beard absentmindedly, "What is it, child, what is it?" I thrust the note into his hand and made joyful gestures to show him that a great pleasure was coming his way.

There was an ominous pause, followed by a choking sound and a shout of fury.

"What's this!" he roared, while I backed away in haste. "Glafira glad to marry me? Who asked that old witch, pray? Who gave you this note? Where is she, the old fool? Let me lay my hands on her scraggy throat!"

He staggered to his feet, his face purple, his eyes popping, his white hair positively standing on top of his head.

"Oh, dear, what's the matter with Vassili Ivanovitch? He's having a stroke!" cried Mamoussia, running up to him in alarm. She had just come into the library in time to witness the old gentleman's fit. "Run, Tamara, quick . . . a glass of water . . . then call the Doctor immediately!" She loosened his collar and fussed over him while he gasped and choked in a shocking way. When I ran back with the water, he seemed a little better and she was reading the note.

"Did you give him this?" she demanded severely.

"Why, yes, Mamma. Vanka-and-Tanka told me to. It's a love note from Glafira Petrovna," I answered shakily, starting to back out of the room.

"So—o—o," murmured Mamma in the ominous way we all knew meant "Punishment" with a great big P. "So—o—o, another one of those idiotic tricks. Very well. Tamara, go and get Vanka and Tanka at once; do you hear me, at once!"

Off I flew, glad to get away from Vassili Ivanovitch and his

awful fit. But I couldn't find the twins anywhere. They had disappeared completely and until evening no one knew where they were. Finally, after a long search all over the place, they were discovered in bed, fast asleep. But Papoussia woke them up with a roar and, hauling them out by their hair, gave them a terrific scolding. He shouted and shouted and shouted, while in the next room, I hid under my bedclothes and stuffed my fingers into my ears, praying to "King David and all his gentle mercy" to protect me.

Next morning, both Glafira Petrovna and Vassili Ivanovitch had vanished and Vanka and Tanka were kept in their adjoining rooms on black bread and milk for three days. At least they were supposed to have nothing but bread and milk, but it didn't work that way at all. Seeing me next morning on the lawn beneath their windows, they ordered me to collect all the apples and peaches and cakes and anything else good to eat I could lay my hands on and then put the stuff into a basket and tie it to a string which Vanka would lower out of his window and then hoist up with the loot. Naturally I obeyed and managed to fill several baskets with lots of eatables and lots of drinkables, like cake, candy, biscuits, cold meat, dessert and sweet drinks—all of which I stole out of the cold storage room when the *cconotnka*, the housekeeper, had her back turned. I was very lucky, but at the end of the third day she caught me with my hands full of stolen goods and reported me to Niania. Then I was punished and locked up in my room, but Vanka and Tanka, who by that time were free from *their* imprisonment, came nobly to the rescue and paid their debt of gratitude in full by bringing me in the same way everything they could lay their hands on—mostly cake and candy. I stuffed and stuffed and to Niania's distress flatly refused to swallow any of the black bread and milk. Alarmed, she reported my "hunger strike" to Mamma, whereupon I was immediately released, though on condition that I would swallow a spoonful of castor oil and bow to the icons thirty times, three times a day and say: "Pardon me, please, pardon me, for I'm a worthless sinner."

Vanka and Tanka were made to write notes of abject apology to Vassili Ivanovitch and Glafira Petrovna and then driven over to beg their forgiveness in person.

Then there was the shocking episode of the Governor of State locked up in our schoolroom water-closet. That was a scandalous event with disastrous results for me.

These closets, discreetly named the *ritirata* by our Italian teacher, or the *votter glozetti* by the servants who thought they pronounced the English words correctly—were the very first of their kind in the whole state, a fact of which we were justly, though modestly, proud. No fanfare or bragging about it, but nevertheless there it was: the pleasing, solid craftsmanship that those modern innovations belonged to us and that we were indisputably the pioneers in that field. It was gratifying to know that our neighbours enjoyed the use of our 'comfortable votter glozetti and would perhaps call especially on us in order to spend long and profitable hours in them reading, smoking and day-dreaming, as they were pleasantly heated and agreeably perfumed with a contraption attached to the fall called an *ozonateur*. ("Ozonateur—teur—teur, straight from Paris," Vanka, Tanka and I would always sing in its honour to the tune of the popular song "I Adore You.")

The glozetti were built into various appropriate niches scattered all over the house, but for the purpose of economical plumbing, the architect had placed them like Siamese twins, two by two and side by side, with invariably a connecting window between them, situated high up under the ceiling. Most of the time these windows were left open, undoubtedly for better ventilation, and though one could not see anything, one could easily hear who was in the next booth. A familiar cough, a jingling of spurs, the rustling of silk, and the secret was out.

We children had our own twin glozetti in the corridor not far from the schoolroom and it was great fun to have them both occupied so that we could indulge in a little conversation, tell short stories or recite poetry to each other in turn. Besides all that, there was another form of recitation, alas, of an inferior and far less inspired kind. It consisted of reading aloud, round-robin fashion, a line of the following elegant legend printed on a papier mâché container, also hanging on the wall next to the *ozonateur* and entitled "Medicated Paper." According to the rule of that fantastic game, first one seated, first one to start it. Say, Tanka began:

"Medicated Paper is a perfectly pure article and sure preventive

of——" here came the name of a simple, harmless, quite common but thoroughly unpleasant ailment.

"The origin of that distressing and almost universal complaint——" I continued in a calm, doctoral voice, repeating the name of the same, simple ailment.

"... can always be traced to the use of ordinary paper,"¹ Tanka went on sententiously.

"Printers ink is also a rank poison," I'd now shout excitedly,

"... **and** a persistent use of printed paper," Tanka remarked sadly,

"... is sure eventually to induce," I warned,

"... an aggravated stage of the above disease," Tanka concluded gloomily.

Then in chorus we'd sing out the merits of "Medicated Paper," ending with jip triumphant song of the "Ozonateur from Paris."

"Splendid language," I'd think admiringly every time I entered a glozett and saw those solemn words staring at me gravely from the handsome papier mâché cover, and again and again I would recite them with never diminishing gusto.

But one day, alas, as I was headed in the direction of our own glozett I met accidentally Vanka, at least that's what I thought—accidentally. He was hurrying along as though looking for someone, with an anxious expression on his face. Seeing me, he appeared relieved and beckoned.

"Hey, Tamara, you're the very person I was looking for! Come here, I want to tell you something," he said in a low voice.

Intrigued and suspecting an interesting mystery I approached eagerly, as usual in a perfect frame of mind to receive and absorb any nonsensical idea that he had to impart.

"Listen," he went on, dropping his voice still lower, "Tanka's in there——" and he pointed at the distant glozett, a rim of light round its door showing that it was truly occupied; "now, I want to warn you. She's up to no good and is about to play a beady trick on you that you'll never forget as long as you live. Even I was shocked when I heard about it. So, just lock her in there and the joke will be on her. For once you will have fooled her."

Surprised and flattered that he'd warn me against his beloved twin, I crept up to the door and quietly slipped the outside **bolt**.

Now she was locked in and couldn't possibly get out unless someone slipped the bolt back.

Joyfully I gestured in Vanka's direction, while he bowed and noiselessly applauded with both hands. It was fun to be teamed for once with him against Tanka. Amazing, of course, but very satisfying.

Unable to contain my excitement, I disappeared into the next booth and called out: "Tanka, you begin; you're first." That was our signal for her to start declaiming whatever she chose. But no one answered and somewhat puzzled, I began: "Medicated Paper . . ."

As I paused at the end of the first line the same silence greeted my effort. On I went manfully through the whole thing, playing both parts and still not a word, not a sound from Tanka's quarters. Then doggedly I recited our next favourite:

*"Mr. Lobsky said to his ugly wife,
I'm going to the river to fish for my life,' "*

thinking that she would speak up immediately for Mrs. Lobsky and answer:

*" 'You wicked man, you know you arerit,
You know you're going to gallivarn't' "*

But no, not even a peep. At last, disgusted with her evident unwillingness to play our game, I threw my shoe through the window, hoping that it would hit her head, then stamping along with a hoppity hop due to a missing shoe, and slamming the door, departed. Whistling blithely, I went on my way, not in the least surprised to see Vanka still hovering in the offing.

"Are you sure you locked her in?" he whispered and seemed particularly pleased when I answered proudly: "Yes, of course."

I tarried with him, eager to hear the rumpus she'd make, and presently we heard her fumble with the lock. Fumble, fumble—then she started knocking. Our hands on our mouths, our laughter coming through our noses like stifled sneezes, we looked at each other and giggled. Followed another knock, another and another.

"Strong girl, Tanka," murmured Vanka approvingly. At **that**

point she began kicking the door and I couldn't imagine how she could make so much noise with her thin little legs.

Suddenly, to my dismay, I heard a shout coming from the glozett, an angry bellow that certainly did not belong to Tanka. I stared at Vanka in consternation.

"Vanka, *who's* in there? *Whom* have I locked in?" I wailed, foreseeing a horrible disaster.

"Only the Governor of our State, my child," he answered gravely. "Didn't you know that he arrived this morning for a visit? And now see what you've done! You'll have to let him out quick or else he'll put you *in* prison. A Governor can not be trifled with, you know."

"I won't let him out!" I cried desperately. "Why, if I do it, he'll see who I am and kill me. Just listen to him; he's gone wild in there!"

Louder and louder grew his frantic shouts while the kicks rained furiously on the door.

"Go on, quick, before he smothers to death. There's no air in there; he's choking."

Quaking in my solitary shoe, I approached the door that threatened any moment to crash open and gingerly slipped back the lock. I prayed that I might get away before he found out who I was, and started to run as fast as my legs would carry me, but, *das*, he emerged in a flash and with a roar of fury (he was a choleric old gentleman) rushed after me, shouting: "Bad, wicked, worthless little girl! I'll get you for this. You'll never forget me."

Down the corridor I fled *in* terror while he came galumphing behind me, past a grinning Vanka and a giggling Tanka, who had appeared from nowhere; past an amazed Dedoussia, who stopped to gape at us as we thundered by; past the gallery and on to the end of the main stairway. Down the steps I flew, followed by my irate pursuer. Suddenly, just as I reached the landing safely, I heard a tremendous crash and down came hurtling his Excellence head over heels in a mass of waving arms, legs, white whiskers and medals. With a terrific thud he landed at the foot of the stairs, still shouting: "I'll get you yet, you little devil!" Instandy he was surrounded by my dismayed family, guests and servants, everybody aghast. There he lay, shouting and groaning until the Doctor was sent for. Then an improvised

stretcher was made and away he was carried to the finest guest room, surrounded by a sympathizing crowd.

"Just wait till I lay my hands on that child," I heard Papoussia mutter, so prudently I disappeared into the garden and remained there in hiding, hoping against hope that the storm would blow over.

At last, hungry and cold, I cautiously tried to sneak back by way of the kitchen where I knew I'd be given some solid food, but the avenging hand that was remorselessly waiting caught me and dragged me screaming to my room. There I was properly shouted at, shaken, given the rod, and marched off to bed in absolute and complete distress, supperless, with only the usual dose of castor oil to cheer up my insides. However, I felt a little better when Niania, who managed to smuggle in a chicken leg and cold potato, told me confidentially that Vanka and Tanka had been punished too as "instigators of the disgraceful episode."

Next morning, shaking with fright, I was taken to the Governor's room to beg his pardon on my knees. He was sitting up in bed with bandages round his forehead and glared angrily out of a swollen eye when I appeared and bowing low, respectfully murmured: "Please, Your Excellency, I did not mean to lock you up in the votter glozett. I thought my sister, Tanka, was in there.

"Besides," I added, receiving no encouraging response except a grunt, and fired with a brilliant afterthought that did not belong to my carefully prepared speech, "what were *you* doing in my private votter glozett? You were trespassing, that's what you were doing, you naughty old man, and trespassers ..." but at this point I was violently hustled out of the gubernatorial presence and rudely returned to my room.

CHAPTER V

THE ROMANY PATTERN

I WAS nine years old when I was "kidnapped" by the Gypsies for several hours. That was an experience I thoroughly enjoyed; I only regretted that it did not last longer.

It happened at Stronskoe on a hot July afternoon when every-

body was taking a nap and Niania as usual was dozing, stretched full length on her favourite couch called "Procrustes' bed," in the summerhouse by the river known as Venera's Temple.

Wide awake and unable to stay quiet any longer, I had crept down the steps of the Temple into the thicket and was about to start a game of "Hunter-in-the-Woods." when I heard twigs crackling. The next minute two swarthy-looking men appeared, followed by a pretty young girl in a red dress, with a red handkerchief on her head and a string of bright beads round her neck. I stared at them in surprise, for they were not at all like the peasants who lived in the villages around us. Their hair was as black as mine, their skin very dark and their teeth very white. They all smiled at me in friendly fashion and the girl put her arm round my shoulders and gave me a hug.

"You're the little Princess Tamara, are you not?" she asked, taking my hand and holding it tightly.

"Yes, I'm Tamara. And who are you?" I inquired eagerly. I liked the girl at first sight and was glad that she had come my way. Perhaps, I thought, she'd stay and play with me. In the background I could hear Niania's snores and knew that she would sleep for quite some time longer.

"I am Stesha, a cousin of yours," answered the pretty girl to my surprise for I had never heard of a cousin of that name. "Would you like to go with me and see where I live?"

"Oh, yes, yes, please!" I cried delightedly, hopping with glee and then clapped my hand to my mouth in sudden terror lest I had awakened Niania and spoiled the fun. I knew perfectly well that she would never allow me to go with this new cousin of mine anywhere. But no, Niania was snoring away and for the time being I was safe.

"Let's go, quick," I whispered, "before Niania wakes up."

The girl laughed and in a low voice said something in an unknown tongue to one of the men. He turned to me and saying, "I'd better carry you. We've got quite a long way to go," lifted me in his arms and catlike started to run swiftly through the park, followed by the other man and Stesha.

Soon we crossed the low wall that separated the park from the adjoining wood and presently plunged through the thick undergrowth into a ravine which I knew ran for miles into the open country. At the bottom of the ravine stood four saddled

horses held by another dark-skinned woman. The man who had been carrying me jumped on to a big black horse and, placing me in the saddle in front of him, started off at a gallop. Stesha, the other man and the woman, who had been holding the horses, followed closely.

'Through the ravine we galloped, the wind blowing in my face, lifting my hair and stinging my eyes. Wild with joy I shouted: "Faster, faster!" and then wondered what the man meant when he yelled to the others: "She's one of us! No mistake about that!"

We galloped, we tore, we crashed and thundered along until we reached a clearing *in* front of a wall of heavy stone, facing one side of the ravine. There we stopped and dismounted. Breathless from the ride, I wiped my watering eyes and ran my fingers through my tangled hair. My cheeks were burning. This was an adventure! At last something like my story books, something to tell Vanka and Tanka—if they'd believe me.

Stesha took my hand again and we walked toward the stone wall. There, she whistled a few low, musical notes that I have remembered all my life. No sooner had her whistle died away than, to my amazement, a huge flat rock in that wall began to turn slowly, slowly until there was an opening large enough for a human being to pass. Through that opening went Stesha, still holding my hand, with the two men and the other woman following. Everything was dark except the narrow shaft of light coming through the aperture behind us. Presendy that disappeared too as the stone rolled back into place and for a moment it seemed to me that we were in complete darkness. Then the light of a torch flared up in front of us, another one and another, all round us.

"Here we are—we've brought her!" cried Stesha gaily.

Instantly we were surrounded by a crowd of people, all swarthy, all laughing and showing their very white teeth, all talking at once in that strange language that I could not understand. Curiously enough, I was not at all afraid, only thrilled as I had never been before.

"Where are we? Is this Ali Baba's cave? Is there a treasure?" I asked Stesha excitedly.

Again she laughed and, lifting me off the ground, put me on to a table.

"So this is Tamara, our own little Tamara! Just look at her and see if she is not one of us. That raven black hair, those sable eyebrows, those black eyes! Let us honour her!" they cried and instantly the crowd began to sing a traditional welcoming song of the Gypsies:

*"Tamara Vsevolodna, what a fine one she is!
She has come from town
To us at last.
With her protection we shall never be lost
And in her honour we shall sing the song.*

*"¹ Tamara, Tamara, Tamara,
Tamara, Tamara, Tamara,
Let us drink to the health of Tamara,
Our own little darling one.' "*

That was wonderful! Never had I heard such singing, never had I seen such a lot of excited people. Quickly I caught on to the easy, lilting tune and, opening my mouth as wide as it would go, sang lustily with the rest of them the song in my own honour.

Then a space was cleared round my table and Stesha began to dance, slowly at first, staring at me with her big black eyes, never taking them off my burning face. Presently she beckoned and, waving her arms invitingly, told me in pantomime that she wanted me to join her in the dance.

"Go on, Tamara, go on! Show us what you can do," they all shouted, starting to clap their hands while someone lifted me off the table and placed me in front of Stesha.

She bent forward and, running her hand over my hair which by this time was standing on end with excitement, stared into my upturned face and whispered: "Watch me and do just as I do."

For a moment she stood perfectly still—and so did I; up and down went her shoulders—up and down went mine; a quiver ran through her body—I shook from head to foot in response; she threw out her hands, palms upward, and I imitated her as well as I could. Then away she glided and off I started too. Round and round the circle we went, faster and faster as the crowd clapped and sang. We glided, we twirled, we flew. All I could think of was, "I'm flying, I'm flying, I'm flying like a real bird!"

But abruptly the singing and the clapping stopped and the dance ended. Voices shouted: "Tamara, Tamara!" Dozens of arms caught hold of me, tossing me up into the air, catching me again. I was bounced like a human ball, shrieking at the top of my voice in a frenzy of delight. Never had I had such fun. Never!

• Suddenly in the midst of the hubbub a man's voice spoke imperiously above the din. "Bring her over to me," it commanded and instantly all was quiet—so quiet one could hear a pin drop. Once more Stesha ran her fingers over my hair and, taking my hand, led me through the crowd that gave way silently as we passed to the rear of the cave. There, on a wide and large seat like a throne, covered with a golden fox-skin, sat a very old man leaning forward on a gnarled staff. His piercing black eyes seemed to go through me and for the first time that day I felt frightened.

"Who is he? Let's go away," I whispered to Stesha. But she only gave my hand a reassuring squeeze and whispered back: "It's all right, Tamara, he loves you."

At that moment he smiled gently and instantly all my fears fled. For he looked exactly like the picture in my nursery of God, sitting on a throne up in the clouds: the same mane of long white hair, same beard, same straight, beautiful features; the same flowing white robe.

Promptly I made the sign of the cross and threw myself at his feet, praying, "*Gospodi pomiloui*, Lord have mercy," for I knew that I was dead in Heaven, just the way Father Trofim had described again and again that it would be when I'd be taken to God's throne to be judged. As I knelt the Very Ancient One arose and, towering over me, put his hands on my head and murmured a few words.

"God is blessing me just like the priests do," I thought, a little surprised that they did things the same way in Heaven. Then, remembering my manners, I reached for his right hand and kissed it. As I did that he bent down and for a few moments gazed into my face and I saw that his eyes were no longer piercing and severe but sorrowful and very, very kind. He sighed deeply.

"Och, Tamara, little Tamara, it's going to be hard, my child, very hard, but you'll win in the end," he said in just such a low full voice as I had always imagined God's voice would be. "We

shall watch over you and love you, but there isn't anything we can do—it is fate, fate. . . ."

And again he sighed deeply and rested his hands on the big curl on top of my head. I knew that I had to answer something polite so I said respectfully, "*Gospodi Boje moi*, Lord God of mine," and kissed his hand twice. He smiled and suddenly* I felt that I loved him with all my heart, more than anyone in the world, which, of course, was very proper considering who he was. But right then I found out that he was not God at all but only my great-granduncle.

"No, child, I am not your Lord. I am only a very old man, but blood of your blood and flesh of your flesh, brother of your *Pra Babushka*, your great-grandmother, Dominica, may she rest in peace. I see the same fire in your eyes, the same strength, the same courage. May you always be strong and courageous, my child, no matter what happens. Remember always that in the end you will win. Now, Stesha, take her back and see that she reaches her house safely."

Once more he raised his right hand high (just like my other picture of Moses on the mountain, I thought) and then, as though exhausted, sank back slowly on to his throne, supported by several people who rushed to his side. Quickly they surrounded him and Stesha, taking my hand, led me towards the table on which I had stood before the dance. Now it was covered with bowls and platters filled with strange-looking food. One old woman brought me a cup full of a lovely drink like liquid sunshine. I tasted it—it was sweet as honey.

"It is honey," said the old woman, beaming at me and then she gave me a big gingerbread man to eat right away and filled my pockets with a lot of little gingerbread men and animals, "To eat on your journey back."

I thought of our wild ride and of how difficult it would be to eat anything when one was flying faster than the wind. But I said politely, "*Spassebo*, may God save you," while she answered the customary, "To your health," which means, "May what you are about to eat—or what you have eaten—bring you health."

Then they all sang a farewell song, a beautiful, sad song that made me want to cry—the big stone door swung open again and all five of us, Stesha, the two men, the other woman and I, climbed on to our horses and galloped away.

In less than no time we were back in the wood adjoining the park. At the bottom of the ravine we left the horses with the same woman, and the man, taking me in his arms, ran with me to the low wall. There he put me on my feet saying: "Now, from here you go alone to the summerhouse and we'll watch over you from afar till you get there." Stesha hugged me and gave me a string of her beads. I bowed to everybody and everybody bowed to me—then I ran toward Venera's Temple.

As I came to it I could hear a terrific commotion. Niania was crying loudly; Papoussia was shouting; Vanka and Tanka were screaming; the dogs were barking; and a large crowd of peasants was making an awful noise, all talking at once and beginning to call out "*Ai-ia, ai-ia, ai-ia*" as they always did at a hunt when they were chasing some animal from under cover.

I could hear my name over and over again, and bits of prayer (Father Trofim was praying) and bits of swearing (mostly Papoussia). Oh, it was a great confusion, worse than a hunt, worse than the country fair.

Then suddenly they saw me coming out of the thicket and everybody rushed at me, shouting, crying, yelling, screaming.

"There she is, there she is!" shouted Papoussia and Dedoussia.

"Thank God," cried Mamma, Niania and Miss Burns.

"Where have you been?" yelled Vanka and Tanka, while the peasants, who had prepared to "beat the woods" for me as they did for a bear or a wolf or a fox at the hunt, screamed: "Here she is! We've found her! We've found her!" which, of course, wasn't true as they hadn't found me, but on the contrary I had found *them*.

As I stood in their midst they laughed and cried and talked at once. Nobody let me say a word. At last Dedoussia raised his hand (like the Very Ancient One in the cave) and said: "Now, be quiet! I want to hear Tamara speak. Where have you been, my child? And why did you frighten us so? You should not disappear in this manner."

I don't know why I suddenly felt that I couldn't tell everybody about my new friends, especially the Ancient One, and all the lovely fun I had had with them—so I whispered into Dedoussia's ear and told him. The strangest look came over his face, a lot of looks, one might say. At first he seemed amazed, then allgry, then relieved, amused and frankly pleased—yes,

really and truly pleased. He whispered to Papoussia and *he* had all those same looks running over *his* face; and they whispered to Mamoussia, but she didn't look pleased at all—only frightened at first, then indignant and angry. But just as she was about to say something, Papa said in French: "Not now, my dear," and turning to the crowd of peasants shouted: "Children, I thank you for coming out to help us look for our little Tamara, but here she is safe and sound. She says she just ran away into the woods to play a prank on us—that's all. Now, go, and I'll have some vodka distributed among you for your trouble."

Away they went, rejoicing loudly that soon they would be happily filled with that heartening drink. I could see that they were blessing me for running away and thus providing them with an extra ration of the vodka they all loved.

As soon as the confusion quieted down, I was put to bed and given laurel-cherry drops and some physic. Then Papoussia and Dedoussia came and sat by my side and talked to me, while Mamoussia sat in silence and listened disapprovingly. It was then that they told me the story of my Great-Grandpapa Yakov Dmitrievitch, and of how when he was quite old he fell in love with a young Gypsy and married her. Dedoussia was their son and Papoussia, their grandson and Vanka, Tanka and I, their great-grandchildren.

"You are very much like your great-grandmother, Tamara," said Dedoussia, "that is why *they* wanted to see you. Particularly the Ancient One who is your own great-granduncle. Don't ever be afraid of them. They will never harm you. On the contrary, they will always help and protect you whenever they can."

Mamma shook her head and murmured: "I hope they never come near her—the very idea!" But Dedoussia and Papoussia both exclaimed. "Marina, how *can* you! Won't you ever understand?" So she tightened her lips and did not say another word.

That was the first time I had ever heard about Great-Grandmother Dominica and I was thrilled to the marrow of my bones. It was better than any fairy story I had ever read and filled me with a tremendous sense of importance, for did I not have Gypsy blood in my veins? Something that practically no one had except Dedoussia, Papoussia, Vanka, Tanka and I, which made us all creatures apart, a family unlike any other?

Later on I heard that both Dedoussia and Papa, following my

directions, rode through the ravine to the clearing and found the big, stone wall that I had described. But though they stood there for a long while, knocking on the largest stone with a hammer and shouting, "Let us in, this is Feodor and Vsevolod," no one answered. They might have thought that I had made up the whole story, if they hadn't found the secret sign, the Romany patteran—a handful of leaves and grass placed in a certain manner—which told them more clearly than any words that the Gypsies had passed there.

After that, fascinated by the discovery of a Gypsy secret sign, I started leaving my own Romany patterans all over the place: in the park, in the flower gardens, in the corridors and every room in the house through which I passed, including the bathroom. Soon the servants began to complain that I was cluttering up the rooms with bunches of leaves and dry grass; whereupon Mamma indignantly forbade me ever to do such a disgusting thing in the house again.

"You may play at that ridiculous game out of doors, if it pleases you, but certainly not in the house. Just let me catch you at it once more and you know what you'll get!"

Realizing full well what she meant, I sadly gave up my spectacular patterans, though for the benefit of the Gypsy side of the family, Dedoussia, Papoussia, Vanka and Tanka, who were very much amused, I continued to make tiny little ones out of a single leaf and one blade of grass, of which I carried an ample supply in the pockets of my pinafore. I left them in innocent places: beneath a vase of flowers, a bowl of greenery, a potted fern or palm, a doorstep or window sill—so that those who were not in the secret paid no attention to the little leaf and wisp of grass, thinking, if they gave it any thought at all, that they had either dropped out of the vase, bowl, pot of green stuff close by or else had blown in through an open door or window.

All through my life the Romany patteran has held real magic for me and I screamed with delight when for the first time I heard Kipling's famous poem, "The Gypsy Trail."

That kidnapping without any doubt was an important chapter in my life and made me Gypsy-conscious for ever after.

Once a year, at the time of the country fair in July, the caravans would, go by our house. Thanks to advance information on the subject, Mamma always locked me up in my rooms on the top

floor for that day. But at the first sound of beating hoofs and rattling wagons in the distance I'd run to the bathroom and, locking the door, would hurry to the window at the back of the house that overlooked the main highway. There, with a fast-beating heart I'd wait for the covered wagons to pass. It took them always about five minutes, five exciting minutes for me just once a year—and that was all.

Invariably they'd slow down and someone would wave a red handkerchief in the direction of my window, while I stood on the sill and waved and blew kisses with both hands. Surprisingly no one ever caught me doing that and year after year I faithfully kept my tryst.

In the distance I thought I recognized Stesha and the Ancient One and the man with whom I had ridden to the cave. But they were so far away that it was difficult to be sure of anything. I'd keep waving and waving until the last wagon had disappeared round the bend in the road, leaving behind a cloud of thick dust that did not settle for a long time. My one and only contact with Great-Grandmother's people was all over for the year and I had to wait another three hundred and sixty-five days or so to see them go by once more.

Before the kidnapping, Mamma always took me to the country fair, where we'd pass the Gypsy encampment, and see the little "bare-belly" children run after our carriage, shrieking for pennies.

In the streets of the fairgrounds we'd meet the Gypsy men and women in their colourful costumes, proud and insolent, with gay, flashing smiles and enormous dark eyes full of mystery. Some of them would be young and beautiful, others withered and old. But young and old fascinated me alike. They'd crowd round us, offering to cross our palms with silver and tell our fortunes. Some of them would touch me, swiftly stroking my hair, or patting my hand, or laughing at me in a warm and friendly manner.

"I'll tell you your future; I see it all so clearly," they'd keep repeating, following us around until Mamma, tired of their company, would order the village policeman, the *ouriadnik*, to **chase** them away.

Instinctively, I hated him for obeying with such unnecessary relish **and** gusto. I hated his big, fat, red face, his thick, bydl-like

neck and his bellowing voice. And when he yelled: "Get out of here, you black devils, and don't you dare bother their Shiningnesses any more, or I'll throw you in jail and smash your dirty snouts. ..." I'd clench my fists and wish I was tall enough to hit him in his wide, gaping, screaming mouth out of which came such hideous, bullying sounds.

But the Gypsies would laugh insolently in his face and then, shrugging their shoulders, fall back with a torrent of words in their own tongue. That would infuriate him all the more.

"It's no use trying to cast your evil spells on me, you heathens, for they won't work on a Christian," he'd scream to the accompaniment of their jeering catcalls and laughter.

Once—I must have been eight years old then—I did "cut loose" and with my clenched fist hit him right in the middle of his protruding stomach. A gasp ran through the swarthy crowd. Dark hands suddenly stretched out toward me and black eyes flashed with gay approval. The astounded *ouriadnik* for a moment, silenced by my unexpected assault, looked as though he'd gladly wring my neck, while Mamma, taking me by the hand, hurried me to the pony chaise in which we had arrived. Rapidly we drove home, where I was spanked, put to bed and given an extra dose of castor oil. Mamma was unusually angry with me, but Papoussia and Dedoussia were not. On the contrary. I couldn't understand why they seemed even pleased and amused and when Mamma wasn't looking, gave me each a big hug. But the next year I understood.

After this incident, followed by the kidnapping a year later, I was never taken to the fair again and didn't see it until after I was married.

CHAPTER VI

I AM PERPLEXED

THE great house of Stronskoe was always filled with guests. All the year round they'd arrive in carriages and sleighs, on horseback and occasionally on foot, according to the season. Following the old-time Oriental tradition a guest was considered a

But not all the ladies felt that way about his name which was truly a fine, historical one, for one day I overheard Glafira Petrovna tell him that she thought his name was beautiful, no matter what colour was attached to it.

Then there was the case of Narkiss or Narcissus Ivanovitch. He was very proud of his unusual first name and used to be greatly chagrined when people, vaguely remembering that it had something to do with a bulb, would occasionally make the mistake of calling him Hyacinth Ivanovitch, or Tulip Ivanovitch—*Tulpan*, in Russian—or some other kind of wrong bulb coupled with the right Ivanovitch. At the unwelcome sound he would turn pale and clench his fists and look daggers at the person who had dared say such a thing whether seriously or in fun. But usually he'd control himself and say politely and softly though with a dangerous light in his eyes: "The name is Narkiss, if I may be so bold as to remind you."

But once he lost his temper in a shocking manner and with Mamoussia of all people.

"Why not call me Onion Ivanovitch?" he shouted in fury when she, who was always so careful not to hurt his feelings and invariably called him by his proper name, suddenly made the regrettable mistake as she offered him another helping of roast beef.

"Pray have some, Hyacinth Ivanovitch," she had said—and that was the end. Shouting: "Why not call me Onion!" he had rushed from the table and out of the house for ever.

Letters of apology were written to him and conciliatory gifts were sent—but with no result. Narkiss Ivanovitch remained adamant and never came back again.

Between the ages of ten and twelve I developed several phobias. First on the list came the fear of drunkards, from the day I saw our cook, usually so quiet and dignified, suddenly go wild—white cap, stiff apron and all—and rush around, brandishing a rolling-pin, chasing everyone in sight and yelling: "I'll make a *blinchik*, a pancake, out of you! Just wait and see if I don't! I'll roll you as thin as a wafer!"

As I was scampering past him, he caught me by my sash and shook me, screaming: "I mean you, you nasty little offspring of a sinful brood."

Luckily my sash untied itself in his hand and I escaped feefore

he could carry out his threat and make a blinchik out of me. After that, for a long time I couldn't eat pancakes.

The next day he apologized abjectly, throwing himself on his knees and kissing the hem of my frock. But such extraordinary behaviour only scared me the more, and from that time on I had no use for drunkards and would hastily cross a street if ever I saw one lurching along toward me. Up to my marriage the only drunkards I ever saw were the peasants who usually celebrated on Saturdays and paydays to the great distress of their wives.

"He's a *pianitza*, a drunkard," they'd say mournfully, and I would pity them and sympathize with all my heart, wondering how any woman could ever live with such a man. . . .

My second phobia was in regard to mad dogs when one of our borzois bounded toward me with foaming, snapping jaws and bloodshot eyes and was shot down practically at my feet. Though that did not destroy my passion for dogs, the thought of a mad one henceforth paralysed me with terror and, of course, Vanka and Tanka's practical jokes on the subject didn't help me conquer my perennial fright. They would concoct the most blood-curdling tales about mad dogs hiding under beds, rushing out of bushes, slithering up and down the park, hiding behind trees and waiting everywhere for my legs to pass.

My third phobia had to do with epilepsy and developed after a country guest, a thin and sad-looking young man, fell down in a fit as he was playing croquet with me and I was winning. As he fell he got tangled up in a wire hoop, hit his head on a stake and broke his mallet in two, ripping his trousers from top to bottom. Petrified, I watched him, thinking at first that he was a poor loser in a pet. Then, realizing that something awful had happened to him, I started to yell for help.

"If such a thing can happen to him out of a clear sky, why couldn't it happen to any one of us?" I asked the Doctor dismally, wondering if, after all, this was a world where people who were losing games fell down breaking everything as they went, themselves included.

All those sights were, of course, severe shocks to the nervous system of a high-strung, excitable and impressionable little girl, and it took the good Doctor a lot of time and wisdom and understanding to counteract them and make me overcome my terrors.

Drunkenness could be cured, he explained; so could hydrophobia, with the Pasteur treatment administered in good time. As for epilepsy . . . here he went into a long dissertation about it, which finally calmed me down and took away completely the sting of my fear to such an extent that later on in life, following the Doctor's advice, whenever I saw an epileptic writhing and foaming, in the street or elsewhere, I would dash up and grab his tongue so that he shouldn't swallow it.

But the thought of cholera simply petrified me and that fear I never overcame. Every summer, as it would creep up toward Stronskoe from Asia and the Volga, via the Caspian Sea and Astrakhan over the travelling routes of water and rail, I would live through weeks of mental terror always imagining that we were all sickening with the dread disease. Panic-stricken I listened to Papa reading the newspaper aloud about: "First case of cholera on a Volga steamer; twenty cases in Samara; thirty in Kazan; fifty in Nijni Novgorod; a hundred in Moscow and finally three in our own state capital"—which was off the beaten road. That meant that in a few days there would be several cases in our village and Dr. Roukovsky would send for assistants and open the wooden cholera-barracks situated on the outskirts of the village and known as the pesthouse.

There were several good reasons for my terror: The first one came from hearing Mamma read aloud the lurid description of a cholera scene out of an English novel called *Anna Lombard*. Though eventually the heroine recovered, married and lived happily ever afterward, the details of her frightful illness were most gruesome and scared me out of my wits.

Then there was all the gloomy talk about eating only boiled vegetables and fruit, never anything raw—watermelon was absolutely forbidden, as well as cucumbers and radishes—and drinking boiled milk, boiled water. . . . We even had to wash our faces in boiled water so that there would be no danger of swallowing a drop of the raw and possibly infected kind. All this talk was decidedly not conducive to a pleasant frame of mind at table, nor stimulating to the appetite. As a matter of fact, after meals we would sit listening worriedly for any sign of internal rumblings which usually meant the beginning of cholera. Nervous people would begin rumbling from sheer fright and then there would be an awful to-do.

Then I saw a man taken suddenly ill with cholera in the village church one Sunday morning during Mass. He had been standing quietly, praying and behaving in a perfectly normal manner when, without any warning, he uttered a howl of pain and threw himself on the floor, doubled up and writhing in agony. His face turned a blue-black, his screams were unearthly. At the sight all the peasants rushed out, wailing loudly, and only Dr. Roukovsky and the Deacon lifted the man and carried him out to a stretcher and then to the barracks near by. That scene frightened me so—I was ten years old then—that I immediately began to retch.

"Now, she's got it, she's got it," cried Niania in despair, but Papa said severely: "Nonsense! She's only scared sick," and giving me a sound spanking, ordered me to stop acting like a little fool. The remedy worked and though I continued to shake and hiccough, no case of cholera developed.

Oh, but those were terrifying times, when day after day the church bells would toll for the dead and the keening of the peasant women would make everyone shudder and a frightened little girl's hair stand on end. And I'd pray for the summer to pass quickly and for the cold weather to return. Everybody was afraid, everybody took extraordinary precautions—some scientific and recommended by the doctors, other plain folk medicine and witchcraft supplied by the Knowing Men and Women of the village. Besides taking preventive pills and boiling everything we ate and drank, we all wore cheap copper medals (they cost one kopeck apiece) bearing embossed crosses, that were supposed to keep the cholera germs away. Though the Doctor sniffed at those medals disdainfully, saying that they had no anti-cholera value whatsoever, we invariably put them on when the first case was reported and took them off only when the scourge had vanished until the next year.

But thanks to Dr. Roukovsky, Stronskoe never had a severe epidemic. For besides the cholera barracks where all cases were isolated, he had persuaded Papa to organize soup kitchens for the peasants working in the fields, kitchens that travelled all over the countryside supplying hot food and distributing gallons and gallons of boiled water.

Later, cholera inoculations were introduced and all our peasants were given free treatment. As a matter of fact, they were

obligatory and every man, woman and child received a certificate from the Doctor testifying that he had been inoculated. At first, like all the peasants all over Russia, they distrusted and hated it, even going so far as to accuse the doctors of actually giving them the disease so as to destroy the entire peasant class. But gradually they began to understand and finally were grateful for the help. The first time I was inoculated, I, out of three hundred, was the only one who had a violent reaction and was desperately ill for twelve hours.

On Sunday, January 9, 1905, I became thoroughly mixed up in a historical event later known as Bloody Sunday. The day before, Dounia, the nursery maid, had told me confidentially that on the coming Sunday her brother, Stepka, who was working at the Poutilov factory, would march in a big parade with all the other workers. They would go to the Winter Palace to see the Emperor, she said. But it was all a secret and I wasn't to tell anyone, not even Niania.

As I knew Stepka very well, since he was a peasant from our village and often came to the house to visit Dounia, I was all agog to see him parade. Luckily it was to take place at the time of my customary walk with Niania down the Nevsky Prospect. Though bursting with excitement, I had kept my secret and not breathed a word of it to Niania, hoping and praying that there'd be no delay and that she wouldn't march me home before it happened.

But she was full of curiosity because of the unusual lot of soldiers that stood in the streets and near the Palace apparently waiting tensely for something special to happen. Suddenly we heard loud singing and the tramping of many feet. Niania pricked up her ears.

"It sounds like a regiment coming this way," she said excitedly.

"Oh, please, let's watch it go by," I begged, knowing that she loved a parade as much as I did, particularly when it was accompanied by mass singing. So we stopped at the kerb and waited for it to come into sight. In a few minutes a crowd gathered round us, gaping eagerly to watch the procession go by. As it swung round the corner there were some disappointed exclamations because it wasn't a regiment after all, but only a lot of workers led by someone who held up high a cross of gold.

Directly behind him came a group of men, carrying icons, sacred banners and pictures of the Emperor. They were singing "God Save the Czar" as they marched in orderly fashion, all dressed in their Sunday-best. Here and there among them were scattered women and children.

"That's strange," remarked a man standing next to Niania. "It's a demonstration of workers all right, but very different from any I have seen for a long time. Listen to what they are singing, and look at the icons."

"It must be a church parade," answered Niania, making the sign of the cross and bowing low as the icons went by. A policeman, who stood near us, took off his cap and also crossed himself devoutly. The head of the procession was now coming up toward the Palace Square and high above the dark sea of heads shone the golden cross. The soldiers stiffened and fixed their bayonets. "Stop or we'll fire!" shouted an officer.

Suddenly I spied Stepka carrying a banner.

"Look, Niania, look. There's our Stepka!" I cried, and before she could say or do anything to prevent me, I darted away from her and rushed toward Stepka, screaming: "Wait for me, Stepka, I'm coming!"

I could hear Niania lumbering behind me for a while, gasping: "Come back at once, you worthless little girl!" But she was old and fat and slow and soon lost sight of me completely. Running like a rabbit, I caught up with Stepka, who grinned when he saw me, and exclaimed in amazement: "Little Fathers!—and where did you come from?"

As he couldn't hear my answer because of the noise, he bent down and shouted: "We're going to see the Emperor. Hold on to me; don't get lost."

Obediently I clutched his coat pocket—always a good thing to hang on to—and started to march at his side, singing at the top of my voice. Several men round us pointed at me and laughed. On we went for a few minutes—then stopped. The singing ceased and all was very still, save for the tramping of many feet coming behind us.

"Watch now, watch!" cried Stepka excitedly. "In a minute the Emperor will come out on his balcony to greet us. When he does, I'll lift you up so that you can see him too."

All of a sudden there was a flash of something and *Bang-ta-*

ta-ta came the unmistakable, ripping sound of shooting. Again and again. Pandemonium broke loose.

"They're shooting at us, they're shooting!" cried dozens of voices round us.

"It's the police! The soldiers!"

"Run, run! We'll all be killed!"

"It's 'Amen' for us. . . ."

A stampede followed. Pushed on all sides, still clutching Stepka's pocket, I tore it off and fell flat on my face.

"Pick up that child! She'll be trampled to death," shouted someone and up I was again, this time in Stepka's arms. I had cut my forehead, my nose was bleeding, and my mouth was full of dirty slush.

"Be quiet—don't scream—you're all right," he gasped, now beginning to run as he came to a clear space where there was more room for action.

Bang-ta-ta-ta—went on the noise, ripping through the frosty air.

"Shut your eyes! Bend your head. Keep as close as you can to me," he panted, now doubling up, now springing like a hare. For a second he'd bend down to the very ground, then straighten up and jump.

Running swiftly, we finally came to a side street, where he dashed through an open gate into someone's back yard. There he put me down and, pulling off his cap, started to mop his forehead. He was breathing heavily and there was blood on his face.

"Is that my blood?" I asked anxiously.

He put up his hand and winced.

"No, it's mine," he muttered. "So they got me too! Well, I'll make them pay for that some day."

"Oh, poor Stepka, you're badly hurt," I wailed, bursting into tears.

"No, no; it's all right. Come on. We must be going," he said.

But just as we were about to leave the yard, a side door opened and a man in the uniform of a hall-porter appeared.

"You can't go into the streets now," he whispered. "They'll get you, sure as fate. You and the child come here and hide with me for a while until it gets dark and safer for you to go out."

We followed him and took off our overcoats. The man hustled round his little stove and soon we were drinking hot tea with jam.

"Who's the child?" he asked and laughed when Stepka explained.

Then they talked in low voices while I dozed and finally fell into a deep sleep. When it grew dark, Stepka woke me. Putting on our warm things, and thanking the man for his hospitality we went hand in hand into the streets. Not a light anywhere. The sidewalks were deserted except for a few soldiers who looked at us suspiciously but did not stop us. "It's because I'm with a child," Stepka said.

Only near our house we were stopped by the policeman on his customary stand near our house. He recognized Stepka at once.

"Is that the little princess with you?" he asked, peering at me in the dark. "The Lord be praised! Why, they're looking for her everywhere. You've never seen such a household. It's all upside down and everybody's crazy. Why, Niania's nearly dead, saying that you ran away just as the shooting began."

"All right, now you take charge of her," said Stepka, and turning me over to the policeman, he disappeared into the darkness.

When finally I got home with the policeman, they were so pleased that I wasn't dead that instead of spanking me they blessed and kissed and hugged me and gave me the finest supper they could. For once Vanka and Tanka did not make fun of me, but joined in the general fuss. I had a splendid time and that evening wrote in my Diary approvingly: "I have a good family after all. They were glad that I came home alive."

In that fateful year of 1905 our simple, easygoing lives went on their customary way, following closely the pattern that had been woven by our grandparents and great-grandparents in the past hundred and fifty years. A biblically patriarchal existence on a generous scale in our country homes and the usual artificial "society" town life in St. Petersburg and Moscow—those were our familiar surroundings from the time we were born until we died. It was a life that had nothing whatsoever in common with the life of the majority of our people and was as unreal to

'them as the life of forced hothouse plants is unreal to the sturdy flowers and beautiful blossoming weeds of the countryside. True, we all belonged to the same race and religion, but there the similarity ended. Our worldly goods and surroundings, our upbringing and education, were totally different as well as our outlook on life, our ambitions and aims.

It was as though in every way, spiritually, mentally and *de facto*, we were separated from the great mass of people by a yawning chasm across which lay, at rare intervals, slender bridges which swayed precariously in the wind, threatening perpetually to crash into the abyss. And though in that sinister year of 1905 there were many academic and political discussions in the Petersburg and Moscow salons and clubs, few paid serious attention to the ominous black cloud that had slowly crept up and was now hanging over us, blotting out the sun and ready any minute to burst open and belch forth thunder, lightning and destruction. It was as though we were living our ordinary lives with our backs deliberately turned on a vast drop curtain of impending storm. There, too, was the writing on the wall, but only a few saw it.

In the churches new prophets arose, crying out to high heaven, predicting the fall of "Sodom and Gomorrah" and the coming of the Judgment Day. But with the exception of one, Father Gregory Petroff, who amazingly became society's lion, they were voices howling in the wilderness, voices that went unheeded or mocked.

But as the months of 1905 went by, tragedy after tragedy rode in on the crests of those thundering tidal waves.

On January ninth, the workers were shot down on their way to the Winter Palace; in February the Grand Duke Serge was blown up by a bomb; in June came the mutiny of the Black Sea Fleet; in September a humiliating peace was signed with Japan; in October the nation was paralysed by a general strike, declared by the First Petersburg Soviet; and on the seventeenth of that same month, the Emperor gave up his rights as absolute monarch and signed the manifesto granting, but already too late, an imperial parliament, known as the Douma. At the same time the defeated army was returning from the Japanese front; there were numerous uprisings of peasants with the object of seizing the land from the landowners, followed by the burning

of many estates; while in Moscow a great revolt broke out that assumed threatening proportions.

I was perpetually excited then and, like a jack o'lantern in a dark and treacherous swamp, lived my absurd little life hopping round in the very thick of all those great historical events, which were the forerunners of the Revolution of 1917. I witnessed them from the front row, so to speak, overwhelmed with excitement, with a certain amount of terror and the thrill of the unknown. Also I was greatly bewildered.

I couldn't understand what it was all about and when I'd beg for explanations, all I was told was that there were "bad men" called socialists and revolutionists who wanted to kill the Emperor, the Grand Dukes, and all those in power so as to rule in their stead.

"Which, of course, is a frightful sin, particularly as the Emperor is the Anointed One and represents God on earth," I was told again and again, but that explanation left me none the wiser. It was too vague.

My inquisitive mind worried at this problem. Why did the bad men want to kill and destroy God's own representative, the Anointed One? Were they simply robbers like Stenka Razin and Koudiar? Or were they like Moses, just anxious to set the people free? With Father Trofim I had been studying the Bible and during one of our lessons about the captivity in Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea, he had spoken impressively of the splendour of action in helping an oppressed and captive nation. Moses had delivered his people, he said, and the way he put it made me think that he was speaking in parables.

In my small way, like everybody else during the Japanese war, I rolled bandages for the wounded, wept over the loss of our battleship *Variag* and the cruiser *Koreitz*; shed more tears over the battle of Tsushima and bewailed the fall of Port Arthur, where an uncle of mine had thoroughly bungled the situation. "Never mention Port Arthur in front of poor Uncle John who meant well but didn't quite pull it off," we were warned. No one ever did except once when at dinner I forgot and asked him something about the town. The family glares instantly reminded me of my mistake and in an agony of confusion I choked and was sent from the table.

And I heard lurid descriptions of the Grand Duke Serge's

assassination; of the mutiny in the Black Sea; of the revolt in Moscow and of the uprising of the peasants all over the country. While in Stronskoe, out of my nursery window, I saw with my own eyes the burning of our crops as they stood harvested in the fields, and the burning of our meadows and woods.

Immediately Cossacks were sent by the Governor to protect our estate from further arson and Stronskoe was literally overrun with them. Every evening in the gloaming, for an hour after supper, they'd sing and dance for us on the lawn, while at a respectful distance the village girls, dressed in their brightest sarafans, watched them admiringly and tittered behind their sunburned hands.

Tanka flirted outrageously with the young officers in charge, while I moped around dejectedly because never a Cossack glanced in my direction except to smile and nod condescendingly as though I were something too ridiculously young even to bandy words with. My feelings were perpetually ruffled and in despair I thought that I'd never grow up.

"Wait till you're twelve; then people will begin to notice you," said Tanka consolingly. But to me the age of twelve seemed far, far away, something blurred and indistinct in the very distant future.

All that summer the air was constantly smoky and the sun red and lurid from the many fires that swept over Russia. The peasants continued to burn the estates of the landowners; the workers were on strike; and young revolutionists, mostly students of the different universities, roamed the countryside, preaching to the peasants the gospel of freedom. Several of them came to Stronskoe but were immediately run out by the Cossacks. Our Doctor's village hospital was filled with the wounded returning from the Japanese front and the furthestmost wing of the house was converted into a home for the convalescents. The newspapers, read aloud at the tea table by JDedoussia, were full of startling news, such as the mutiny of the fleet, the assassinations of governors of state, the unrest of the Baltic provinces and to me, most horrifying of all, the slow but gradual spread of a particularly virulent epidemic of cholera.

Finally that terrible summer came to an end and, with deep sighs of relief, the family moved as usual to St. Petersburg—in time for the big strike and the First Revolution of 1905. As a

result of the railway strike the capital was completely cut off* from the interior and food supplies became dangerously low. Then the electricity went out all over the town, plunging Our house into darkness save for the light of a few candles, and students and workers rioted in the dark streets. As a shortage of water was predicted, our bathtubs were filled to the brim as well as every available pail, pitcher, basin and jug. Personally I filled half a dozen tea glasses with water and prudently kept them under my bed, visualizing the happy surprise of my family when, dying of thirst, they would be saved by my secret water supply.

Troops were stationed throughout the city and in our own back yard stood a detachment of soldiers under the command of an officer who made his headquarters in our house. No doubt about it, we were in the midst of a revolution, people said, and the name of Trotsky was on everyone's lips.

"But who is he?" I'd ask, desperately trying to understand, until at last Dedoussia took pity on me and explained that Trotsky was the "head bad man," a dangerous revolutionist and the leader of something mysterious called "a Soviet." It was all very puzzling for a little girl brought up in an ultra-conservative household of royalists and imperialists, who never heard the other side of the question and was completely bewildered and at sea.

On and on swept those days of Red Terror. In November there was another mutiny in the fleet, subversive propaganda swept through the army, barricades were erected in the streets, blood kept flowing and the Emperor declared that "Terror must be met by Terror."

One day I heard Papoussia tell Mamma that if this sort of thing went on, it might be wiser to take the children abroad.

But finally the government got the upper hand, many of the leaders of the revolution were arrested, while others escaped; several liberal newspapers were suspended and their editors brought to trial. "The year of nightmares," as the Empress Marie called it, came to an end and for twelve more years the defeated revolutionary forces lay in abeyance, licking their wounds, gathering strength and organizing, until in 1917 they returned with a vengeance, powerful and victorious.

Slowly public life became normal again and with its return, childlike, I soon forgot the tempestuous days of 1905.

CHAPTER VII

GENTLEMEN ARE VERY FUNNY

TIME passed and presently I found myself on the eve of my long awaited twelfth birthday. And this is what I wrote in my diary:

November 20th.

At last, at last! It's here! The Big Day has arrived. I am twelve years old since 2.25 this morning, the exact time when I was born. Oh, it's been so long coming, so dreadfully long. I thought I'd never, never reach it and Niania kept saying that many little girls died before they were twelve, but if they passed the mark, they'd live a long life. She also said that that's when our bodies changed and either turned weak and faded away into a grave, or got strong and healthy. I must have passed that mark in the night, because I feel particularly well and strong and healthy. I feel exactly like the hymn that the choir sang this morning at the Te Deum in my honour, "Rejoice, rejoice and be gay."

Oh, please everybody rejoice, please everybody be gay, for I am to live till I'm a hundred years old. To-night I'll burn the calendar with the 365 days all crossed out. My own private new year is beginning and I'll make an auto-da-fé, a good big bonfire. "In a magnificent auto-da-fé the evil heretics were burned." That's what I had to memorize yesterday at my lesson of religious history. But why were they evil? Father Trofim didn't explain clearly. I must find out.

Mamma said this morning when she gave me my presents that all my grandparents, except Dedoussia who is alive, were looking down on me from Heaven and blessing me and loving me.

"They will always watch over you," she said. "They are your guardian angels and you are a lucky little girl to have them up in Heaven where they can help you all your life. Pray to them always and they will carry your prayers straight to God. Say: 'My dear honoured grandparents, please help me, for I'm only a sinful little girl.' And they will. But, of course, you mustn't

bother them with any nonsense or with silly prayers. Because* then they won't help you, not for such things. No, only for good. Remember that—remember it all your life and follow my instructions. Now promise me faithfully that you will."

I promised and closed my eyes, because I was so anxious to * finish this business and get my presents.

And then Mamma kissed the middle of my forehead. I hate when anyone does that, because it always makes me itch so nastily on my sitting down part. A kiss on my forehead and directly I want to scratch downstairs behind, mostly on the left side. And I am not the only one who does that. A nice old lady told me that every time she hears something dreadful that upsets her, she always has to scratch just like I do.

Mamma said some more things very gravely. She said: "A twelfth birthday is the second important milestone in a little girl's life." I know the first one comes when she is seven, because then she ceases to be "mladenetz," an infant, and becomes an "otrokovitza" or a maiden.

Then Mamma spoke some more. She said: "You must go on writing your diary, Tamara, and put down everything you think and feel and hear, but never listen at doors, nor look through the keyhole. Not only is that unnecessary for a diarist but sinful and wrong. Of course you will read me the parts you will want me to hear and we'll talk things over till your wedding day."

She really is an honest mother and never sneaks in to read my diaries behind my back. At least I have never caught her, though I have laid all sorts of traps for her.

Dear Mamma! I love her, I love her. Only I am so jealous of her. I hate when she whispers to Niania or anyone else so that I can't hear, or writes little notes to Miss Burns, which she tears up after staring at me. I know they're about me. Then I get stiff all over and want to be rude and strike out and hurt her. Why doesn't she trust me? What is there I shouldn't know? If only I had some girls and boys to play with, I might find out. But no, I never am allowed to play with anybody. Only Vanka and Tanka and they're much too old. But some day I will—oh, yes I will. They say I am going to school next year. That may help.

My presents are lovely. This is what I got: I. A silver-grey parrot with pink feathers. His name is Popo. A silver dressing-

table set with "Tamara" on everything and a little crown on top—from Mamma. 2. A red leather set for my writing table—from Papoussia, with my name stamped in gold letters, but no crown. 3. A red velvet and gold New Testament—from Great-Aunt Natalie, with a bookmark in it that she made herself. She put it into the exact place where Christ says, "Suffer little children to come unto me." I suppose that was meant for me, but Auntie is old and forgot that now I am twelve and no longer that kind of little child. 4. A big silver icon—from Dedoussia. 5. A silk sash—from Miss Burns. It comes all the way from Scotland, she said, and has the colours of a clan. "The Campbells are coming, hurrah, hurrah," I sang, but she said, "Don't be silly. It's the MacTavish clan," So now I am a MacTavish, Tamara MacTavish.

Niania gave me a little silver icon of Saint Ambrosius Mediolansky, her favourite saint, and a little red glass lampada for holy oil to be burned in front of him. She blew holy water from the Jordan River into my face straight out of her mouth and sprinkled some holy ashes on my hair to protect me and keep all evil away. The ashes annoyed Miss Burns when she started to comb out the curls, and she and Niania had "a few words." Miss B. said: "Such superstitious nonsense and so messy and dirty at that! Just look at that child's hair."

And Niania said: "I'll thank you not to talk that way about saintly matters which you don't know anything about. You mind the child's lessons and I'll mind her body and soul."

And then Miss Burns said very low under her breath: "Impossible old woman!"

And Niania said: "I hear you, you heathen heretic."

Then Miss Burns shrieked and ran out of the room straight to Mamma. Niania finished combing my hair and said it only looked prettier with the few ashes scattered on it.

Then Mamma came in and shook her head and said sadly: "Aie, aie, aie, Niania, why do you let your tongue run away from you?"

And Niania said, looking her straight in the eye: "Marina Michailovna, I know what is good for a child's health and soul."

Mamoussia smiled and patted her on the back and said: "I know, I know. You've been wonderful to our little Tamara. Only one thing I beg of you not to do and that is insult Miss

Burns. You must be indulgent. She's of another faith and does not understand our religious ways."

And Niania said: "Very well, your Shiningness, I'll try." But her eyes had a wicked gleam in them like when she has Something on her mind.

Six months later, on May 18, this was the somewhat startling entry in the same diary:

I have Something Very Big and Important to write about. It happened this way: last night I went to bed as usual at eight, feeling quite well, only a little bit hot. I slept well too but dreamt that I was Bluebeard's wife and he was chasing me with a knife. This morning I woke up and cried out: "It wasn't a dream at all. He *did* try to murder me!"

So I ran down the corridor screaming: "Look, look, I'm wounded! Somebody tried to kill me when I was sleeping! I *know* it was Bluebeard."

At that, they all came running out of their rooms: Mamoussia, Niania, Miss Burns, Tanka and the maids. They took one look at me, gasped and hurried me back to bed. There I have been all day with a hot-water bottle. Mamoussia had one of those "long talks" with me, just like when she wants to say something very special and beats about the bush an awful lot. This time she explained that I had suddenly grown up, "Practically overnight," she said. But I must not say anything about it to the gentlemen, not even Papoussia and Dedoussia, "because it's a ladies' secret." So I said: "Very well." But an hour later both Papoussia and Dedoussia came into my room on tiptoe, like they do when I'm ill, and stood at the foot of my bed, whispering to Mamoussia. Then they shook their heads gloomily and said: "Tsk, ts, so young, so very young! Too young——"

Well, that wasn't anything new to exclaim about so I began to suspect that after all they had found out all about my growing up overnight. But when they said: "Too much candy and too much cake can upset a little girl's stomach," I burst out laughing, because then I knew that they didn't know anything at all. So I winked at Mamoussia and then she winked back as much as to say, "Ladies' secret—remember."

Later on I said to Mamoussia: "Gentlemen are very funny, aren't they?" and she said: "Very."

January 12th.

I still think gentlemen are funny. Papoussia goes to the Turkish baths every Monday night and always takes two oranges along with him. He says they quench his thirst after the bath better than a drink of water. He plucks them out of the fruit bowl on the dinner table and sticks them into his pocket where they bulge frightfully.

Yesterday he didn't go to the baths as usual, and there was a terrible fuss because an unknown lady telephoned in the evening and said in a queer, thick voice: "Where's my great big fruit man? I want my oranges!" They were all sitting at the tea table so I took the message. When I gave it to Papa, he got awfully red like a turkey cock and shouted: "It must be somebody crazy! I never give my oranges to anyone."

But Mamoussia got up and left the table very stiff and straight, and Vanka and Tanka giggled and everybody else started to talk at once. There's something funny about all this. I had better find out.

A little later.

The fuss is still on. Mamma is crying and Papoussia explaining. They are locked up in her bedroom, but I saw them through the keyhole. Miss Burns caught me there and took me away just as it was getting interesting. She says ladies never use keyholes for any business except keys. So I told her I wasn't a lady and she said: "I should think not."

A few days later.

Papoussia doesn't go to the Turkish baths on Mondays any more. It's Saturdays now and he never takes any oranges along. Instead he takes Sasha, his valet. Mamma has ordered him to. But there is something funny going on there again, because I heard Sasha say to Niania that while Papoussia is at the baths, he, Sasha, goes to the circus.

Friday.

A scandal! We were all at dinner when we heard screams and a **lot** of loud talking downstairs. So I jumped up to see what was going on. It was the doorman and a woman with a green feather *in* her hat, wrestling in the entrance hall.

She was screaming: "I'm going up to get him!" while the doorman was shouting: "Madame, you can't go up. You're a little bit 'so' "—meaning tipsy! Finally he hustled her out.

When I came back to the table, both Papa and Mamma had disappeared. So I ran to their keyhole. But who should be there already but Miss Burns! And she was listening too. I know it, because she was stooping down. But when I pounced on her from behind and whispered: "I've caught you! Who's no lady now?" she answered: "Don't be ridiculous, Tamara. I knew you'd come running here, you bad, inquisitive little girl, so I came to catch you." But she looked very excited as though she had heard some news and later talked *in* a whisper to Niania, who looked very excited too.

Saturday.

To-day Papoussia left for a bear hunt and won't be back for ten days.

Thursday.

Papa is back now. I heard Mamma tell the Doctor to tell him that Turkish baths are bad for his heart and to stop them, because it might crack and burst from the heat. The Doctor laughed and said: "All right, but it's really very innocent, you know."

But Mamma said: "I don't know! All I know is that it's a disgrace."

So no more baths! Instead Papa goes to the circus and takes Sasha along. They both love the fights and have little bets between themselves. Papa pays with money and Sasha pays by giving him extra shaves and rubdowns with vinegar.

Sunday.

Papoussia took me to the circus on Saturday and put me in a box alone. Then he disappeared and only came back when it

' was all over, to take me home. When I asked him: "Where have you been?" he said: "Examining the elephants—they're unusually fine this year. But, of course, you don't have to tell anybody that, because hardly anyone is interested in them."

I wish he'd taken me along. I love elephants, too, and these must have been specially good for him to spend a whole evening-seeing them.

Somehow Mamma found out that Papa left me in the box alone all evening at the circus and there's been another fuss about that.

Saturday.

Now I go walking with Papoussia in the afternoons. We often stop at Elissayeff's big grocery store, but we rarely buy anything more than a box of sweets. Then we give it to the cashier. She is frizzy and plump and always giggles when she sees Papoussia, because instead of saying "Good afternoon," he says: "And how is the slyest young lady in all St. Petersburg to-day?"

I don't think it's very nice to call anyone "sly," but she seems to like it and titters and says: "Oh, go on, you great big tease."

The other day we were late and she was about to leave the store. She had on her hat and it had a green feather, just like the hat of the tipsy lady who fought our doorman.

First week in Lent
St. Petersburg.

We've all been to Confession and are a pretty clean family just now. After the evening service we left our regular places in church and as usual went in a file toward the big green screen where the priest stood waiting to hear about our sins.

There was quite a scuffle, because the family wanted Papoussia to go first and he wouldn't do it. He got quite angry at us and screamed out loud:

"I know what you want, you inquisitive, foxy sin-leaders! You want to hear me confess, but you shan't. I'm going last."

He made such a noise that everybody in the church stopped praying and stared at us very shocked. Some people even said "Hush." So Mamma whispered quickly:

"All right, dear, all right. Just as you wish, only be quiet."

But I could see that she was disappointed and so were we. It's so easy to overhear the person ahead of one confess; especially if one stands very close to the screen. I've done that many times, and then quickly confessed to the priest that I did it. It's a real sin, he says, but not what he calls a major one. Anyhow we missed Papoussia's confession! That's such a pity. Now we'll never know about the oranges and the lady with the green feather.

CHAPTER VIII

I'M PROUD OF IT! PROUD OF IT!

THAT autumn in St. Petersburg Vanka entered the Imperial Guard Cavalry Regiment—"Tzigan," Gypsy, they nicknamed him. Tanka married Count Boris Zasayken and I began to attend a private day school known as Madame Courbat's Gymnasium for Girls, an amazing institution unlike any other in the country. Founded by Madame Courbat, an old French woman who had once been a teacher herself and had lived many years in Russia, it catered to a limited number of girls, preferably "daughters of the nobility." In other words Madame was an old snob, who knew exactly how to keep on feathering her ancient nest. She had taught many of our mothers when they were girls and continued to call them affectionately by their first names, at the same time charging them scandalous prices to educate their offspring.

Though according to the dictates of the Ministry of Education the programme of learning had to be the same as everywhere else, and the girls had to study in compliance with that plan and pass their yearly examinations publicly before a State Examining Board, the spirit of that extraordinary little school was unique.

Every morning most of the maidens would arrive in carriages, accompanied by their governesses who would leave them at the door (or rather *inside* the door to make sure that they couldn't manage to sneak away and play truant). Then when school hours were over, the same governesses and same carriages would reappear to take them home.

True, a few independent girls whose mothers had sensible "advanced" ideas on many subjects, arrived and departed alone, on foot, by way of tram-cars or in *droskys*. But those exceptions were rare and such a girl would be looked upon by her classmates with envy and awe, while the brigade of strait-laced, governesses, who seemed to believe thoroughly in the importance of their missions, sniffed disapprovingly and muttered among themselves about "too much freedom" and about some people being "too fast."

One girl in our class, Varia Verengrod, came invariably alone, nose high up in the air, self-assured, poised and utterly contemptuous of the flock of "sissies" who, like small children, had to be brought to school and then fetched by their demoiselles and Frauleins. Later on she entered medical college and became a first-rate surgeon.

Alas, much as I begged to be allowed to walk alone the half-mile from our house to the school, I never was given that opportunity, not even the year when I was about to become engaged.

Every blessed morning immediately after breakfast, Miss Burns and I would start off in Mamma's own carriage, the head coachman's third assistant and the third-best horses being assigned to the modest task of driving us back and forth. These horses, a strong, shaggy pair of chestnuts, were known as the "night horses" and the "children's horses," their main duty consisting of fetching Mamma from parties during the small hours of the morning when no one cared how horses looked, and then later on in the morning taking us to school.

The first and second-best pairs, handsome, sleek and dashing, were used only for display when our parents would drive up and down the famous Palace Quays, where everybody one knew was on parade about four o'clock in the afternoon; or when Mamma was paying official calls, or riding in style to some Court function. Then, Matvei, the head coachman, would himself drive the high-stepping trotters, who arched their necks and proudly lifted their legs and held importantly their long, thick, wavy, plumelike tails, strutting grandly as though about to be photographed.

But this elegance was not for us. Ours were the shaggy chestnuts, Smely (Bold), and Bely (White), so-named because

he had a white star on his forehead and four white leggings. Vanka, Tanka and I loved them devotedly and worried ourselves sick when we knew that Smely and Bely were out in the cold all night. Frantically we would demand that they should be covered with heavy blankets to protect them against the great frosts and that little bonfires be built round them when they had to stand for hours. But they were powerful and strong and in all those years never seemed the worse for their nightly outings. Peter, the young coachman, who always drove me to school, invariably grinned impudently and winked his left eye at me behind Miss Burns's back, while I stuck out my tongue and winked in reply. Strangely enough, Miss Burns never noticed this elegant by-play.

At the awe-inspiring portals of my unique temple of learning she would leave me, always with the same words, "Remember now, be good." Past the big, smiling doorman I'd run to the cloakroom where the girls would be taking off their *shoubas* and snowshoes and fur caps, chattering away like a lot of magpies. For a few minutes we'd be busy making ourselves presentable, smoothing, shaking and patting our uniforms consisting of dark-red wool dresses with white linen collars and cuffs and black alpaca aprons.

Then the first bell would ring, sounding like *cloppity-cloppang*, *cloppity-cloppang*, and up the stairs we'd file in pairs, curtsying to Madame Courbat as we passed her in the main hall, trying to hold our backs very straight and our heads up in the air. In the chapel we'd assemble for a brief prayer, sung by all of us together, and then the various classes would begin. Though our remarkable institution existed mostly for the benefit of "noble maidens," the lessons were as stiff as anywhere else and from the first one to the last many a noble brow would pucker up and many a drop of noble sweat drip on to the dismal pages describing those eternal and abominable problems of the wretched trains about to meet, of the seamstress sewing so many stitches in so many minutes, and of the buckets of water filled, spilled and refilled.

At noon we were given half an hour for lunch and half an hour for exercise in the old-fashioned garden attached to the school building, which had once been a private mansion. That was the only time we had for conversation, Madame Courbat

maintaining that the ceaseless chatter of young ladies was without any doubt the real root of all mischief.

In class my friends sat all around me, right, left, ahead and behind, and we formed a secret society called "The Bad Girls," with secret passwords, handshakes and other mysterious signs. Naturally, as in any other school, we had our favourite teachers' and those whom we disliked, hated and detested; we made friends and enemies, had our own cliques, our own excitements, amusements, scandals and, of course, crushes.

Our very first crush, whom we all "adored,"* was Valentina Ivanovna, our teacher of physics, though goodness knows she was neither young nor pretty. On the contrary, well past middle age, tall, gaunt, with hair drawn back severely and gold-rimmed spectacles, she looked very mannish and lectured stiffly, hardly ever unbending to smile or utter a word that had not to do with her lessons. And yet there was something in her that attracted us (probably the paucity of suitable subjects for adoration!). We followed her round, hanging on to her arms, if we dared be so bold, or timidly admired her from a distance. Then one day appeared a new French teacher, Mademoiselle Aimée, and immediately, like a flock of weathercocks we veered toward *her*, completely forgetting Valentina Ivanovna whom, from then on, we left strictly alone.

Mademoiselle Aimée was very young and very pretty, with big, baby-blue eyes, fluffy golden hair, a little up-tilted nose, a lovely mouth and a tiny waist that one could span with both hands. She taught us gaily, laughing a great deal, showing her white teeth and telling *des anecdotes* that had absolutely nothing to do with the subject but which she claimed were excellent practice in her language for *les pauvres petites*.

Her clothes were very French and stylish, her shoes and stockings dainty, her perfume entrancing, her jewellery fascinating. Especially were we interested in the miniature that she wore at her throat, which represented a handsome-looking gentleman with a long, black moustache, framed in a sunburst of seed pearls. One day she blushing confessed that he was Monsieur Jacques Couteau, her fiancé. That, to us, was the finishing romantic touch which made her perfect. Her popularity became unbounded. We pushed each other in the most unlady-like manner for the favour of walking beside her. We invented

brilliant and interesting things to tell her (at least that's what we thought they were), we brought her hideous, little home-made gifts and begged her to visit us in our homes. Laughingly she would agree to anything we suggested and for weeks was the "adored" one, our ideal, our own Mademoiselle Aimée whom all the girls were "mad about."

But despite this glowing atmosphere of affection, all was not well at Madame Courbat's. Jealousies developed. If Aimée talked longer to one girl than to another, if she patted a lucky hand or whispered into a still luckier ear—the minute she turned her back there would be glares and glassy stares, angry words and tears, slaps and even hair-pulling. Quarrels became frequent and "life-long" friendships of several weeks' standing were instantly dissolved.

At home I could talk only about Mademoiselle Aimée's beauty, her intelligence, her dresses, her perfume and her shoes. Indulgent at first, the family soon became bored, then suspicious and uneasy. Finally I overheard Mamoussia say something in a low voice about Aimée to the Doctor who retorted loudly and rather rudely, I thought: "What else can you expect at such a ridiculous school? But there's nothing to worry about. It's perfectly all right. Just a lot of silly little girls beginning to grow up and not knowing where to turn."

Then they both dropped their voices and though I tried hard, I couldn't catch another word.

Vanka, now a commissioned cavalry officer with spurs and silver braid, and Tanka, married to Count Zasayken with a funny-looking baby of her own called Vaniouha, as usual teamed up and invented all sorts of idiotic rhymes and drew still more idiotic caricatures about my wonderful Mademoiselle Aimée.

"Listen, Tamara, you simpleton," they'd say, "don't you know that your Aimée has a false behind? Made of rubber like one of those inflated rings one sits on when one has the sad ailment Medicated Paper tells about. That's probably what's the matter with her—can't sit on anything hard, so has this handy contraption sewn into her clothes. But mark my words, some day it will either slip to one side, or explode with a roar, or let out its air with a mournful whistle like this, whee-ee-ee. . . . Think what an embarrassing thing that will be!"

Or: "Watch out for her hair and her teeth! Why, they're as false as false can be. Any time her wig can fall off or her teeth drop out during a lesson. Just sing this to her and see what happens:

*"Oh, what a difference in the morning,
Oh, what a difference in the morning,
Her hair is so bright, her teeth are so white,
But they all lie on the table in the morning."⁹*

But no matter what they said, my feelings for Mademoiselle Aimée did not change and my adoration for her grew day by day.

And then the unbelievable, the shocking, the heartbreaking happened! One afternoon she came into class, ambling along the platform with a wavering gait, her pretty blue eyes blood-shot and her golden hair strangely mussed. We thought that she was ill and gasped in heartfelt sympathy. But when she leaned over the desk and, wiggling her forefinger at us, began to sing provocatively in French to the air of "The Marseillaise":

*"Salute to you, my fine suspenders,
You, who hold up my pantaloons. . . ."*

—we knew that there was something radically wrong.

At the first bar of her Rabelaisian song, up the steps of the platform flew the teacher on duty who was no other than our poor discarded Valentina Ivanovna, and, putting her arm round Aimée's shoulder, said kindly: "Come along with me, Mademoiselle. I can see that you have a high fever and are delirious."

But Aimée missed the point entirely.

"Who has high fever? Who's delirious?" she cried, skipping aside and laughing gleefully. "Why, Valentina Ivanovna, my poor old one, just look how well I feel!" And pinching her skirts between forefinger and thumb, she started a merry "can-can" to the tune:

*"C'est la danse nouvelle,
Mademoiselle."⁹*

In consternation we gaped at our cavorting goddess.

"Class dismissed!" called out Valentina Ivanovna with remarkable presence of mind, clapping her hands. But no one moved. "Go on, leave, run, disappear," she ordered frantically, waving and shooing as though we were a lot of geese, while Mademoiselle Aimée, now kicking up her shapely little feet higher than her head, shrieked: "*Oop-la!*"

But just as her fun was at its highest and our eyes popping out of our heads, the door opened and on the threshold of the classroom appeared the majestic figure of Madame Courbat. Up we all jumped. Silently, with an imperious gesture, she motioned us to leave the room. Not daring to disobey, we began to file out in pairs, curtsying respectfully as we passed her. Once outside the door we gathered in a dismayed and frightened group.

"Oh, what has happened to Mademoiselle?" we wailed.

"Perhaps she has lost her mind. ..."

"Yes, yes, that's what it is. ..."

"Oh, how awful! Poor darling Aimée. . . ."

"What can we do? ..."

Suddenly a loud voice broke through the din. It was the voice of Varia Verengrod, the independent girl, now monitor of our class.

"Your precious Aimée is rip-roaring drunk, that's what's the matter with her," she declared contemptuously. She was one of the few who had always disliked Aimée thoroughly and called her "the silly French doll."

Flabbergasted, in stunned silence we accepted the shocking news while slowly off her pedestal tumbled our goddess.

And that was the end of Aimée. That same day she disappeared out of our lives for ever and none of us found out what happened to her, where she went or whether she finally managed to marry the bewhiskered Monsieur Jacques Couteau.

But soon our fickle hearts forgot Mademoiselle Aimée as on to the scene stepped Ivan Ivanovitch, our new professor of history and the first young man ever to enter Madame Courbat's sacred portals. The reason for this unusual exception was that he happened to be the son of an old friend ("*ww vieil ami, quoi?*") of hers, highly recommended by the University of St. Petersburg for his fine record and teaching ability. Rather short, squarely built, still very young, and as rosy as a girl, he had

the alert look of an excited fox on the prowl. His pleasingly long and pleasantly pointed nose, his reddish-gold hair, his habit of running the tip of his very red tongue over his very red lips and his strong white teeth—all accentuated the amazing resemblance. "Reinecke Fox, the sly Thinker," we christened him and "Reinecke Fox" he remained to the end.

His lectures on Russian history dazzled us and, scribbling hastily, we tried to catch every word he said.

One morning, looking more alert than ever, he announced that he would "swerve from the somewhat cold subject of *impersonal* history to the warmer one of *personal* background and descent."

"In other words," he declared, ruffling his red-gold hair and looking beautifully inspired, "we shall pause briefly *in* our course and turn aside for an hour to examine the important problem of heredity and its more than probable complex influence on the life of an individual."

"Marvellous way of speaking," I thought admiringly, writing away like mad and, so far, successfully "catching" every word of his incomparable oratory.

"Don't stick your tongue out like that. You look silly," whispered my left-hand neighbour, Sonia, warningly.

Hurriedly I pulled in my tongue and shut my gaping mouth.

Meanwhile Varia Verengrod, the monitor of the class, raised her hand and stood up.

"Please, Ivan Ivanovitch," she said respectfully, her cheeks crimson, but her voice good and steady, "would you mind speaking not quite so fast? We do not want to miss a word, but we cannot keep up with you."

Visibly gratified, Ivan Ivanovitch smiled at her (the lucky, forward *devka*, I thought angrily) and bent his head in sign of complete approval.

"I appreciate your interest, mesdames," (he always called us "mesdames"!) "and will grant your intelligent request with the greatest of pleasure."

«

At this unexpected compliment we all tried to look still more intelligent. But apparently we did not succeed very well, as Madame Courbat, who was sitting on the platform behind Ivan Ivanovitch knitting and chaperoning, told us later that we looked ridiculously self-conscious and stupidly conceited.

"It might be worth while," continued Ivan Ivanovitch, speaking now very slowly with a considerate eye on our flying pencils as though measuring the limit of our speed, "it might be worth while if every day, ordinary people like ourselves tried to go back as far as possible into the life histories of their respective families and even their races. Then, armed with such useful knowledge, they could apply it to their own lives as one would a definite clue or a key to a puzzling mystery."

He paused for a moment and, straightening out my cramped fingers that had been clutching the pencil, I whispered to Sonia: "Ah, how true, how true! When I think of the mystery of *my* life..."

"What do you mean?" she whispered back excitedly. "What mystery?"

But Ivan Ivanovitch had moved a few steps to the blackboard and, chalk in hand, was speaking again.

"Now, take most of us in here," he said, looking round impressively, "the blood in our veins is a mixture of . . ." and here in bold letters he wrote on the blackboard:

*Inio-Iranian 4- Scythian + Slav -f Viking -f Tartar ==
Russian.*

"This formula, mesdames, is more or less the usual combination that makes a Russian. Of course, other bloodstreams such as the German and Anglo-Saxon later on joined this basic one, but as tributaries to a great river they are secondary and should be discussed at some other time.

"But now let us examine our formula. Learned historians agree that during one of those great nomadic movements of Asiatic tribes, which kept recurring throughout the dawn of our history in a regular rhythm . . ."

(*Boje moi*, I'm all mixed up; I'm sunk in a muddle, I thought, frantically scratching away as best I could in a quickly-improvised shorthand of my own invention.)

"... out of Asia into the land of Steppes on the European side of the Ural mountains, came a succession of invading peoples. Among these tribes were the Scythians bflndo-Iranian stock."

Here Ivan Ivanovitch pointed triumphantly to the first words on the blackboard.

"Little Fathers!" whispered Sonia. "I can't keep up with him. Can you?"

Condescendingly I bowed my head, though with my left hand I carefully shielded the paper I had been writing on. It looked a mess and would take me hours at home to figure out. The abbreviated words: "out of A into the 1 of S on the Eur s of the Ur moun," were easy to decipher compared to what I had done with the "ever recurring regular rhythm." That rippling, rolling, sonorous phrase had been so completely jumbled that next day I had to ask Ivan Ivanovitch what he had said.

"Mesdames," he cried, now smiling brightly. "I shall not go back further than that! An Indo-Iranian beginning suits me to perfection! How about you?"

"Yes, yes," we shouted in chorus, awakening Madame Courbat who had just dozed off with her nose in her knitting.

"Excellent," said Ivan Ivanovitch. "Now, let us proceed. We see that the Scythians," and he pointed to the next clue in the formula on the blackboard, "were of Indo-Iranian stock. Very well. Now briefly let us examine that ancestral tribe of ours.

"Worshippers of the Sun god and the god of Thunder, the Scythians were a hardy race that never kept still, tearing up and down the Steppes" (graphically Ivan Ivanovitch tore up and down the platform), "fighting" (he frowned) "in the valleys of the great rivers" (he made a rippling gesture over the floor) "and on the hilltops" (he gazed upward), "attacking other tribes" (he galloped a few steps to the right with lowered head), "conquering them" (he stamped victoriously) "and absorbing them" (he opened his arms) "into their own tribe."

"They were a wild race indeed, but..." (he raised a finger) "with the primitive man's love of things that glitter and shine, they came, most commendably, under the influence of Greece, especially in the matter of gold jewellery and elaborately-wrought weapons which centuries later were dug up in the Crimea by expert archaeologists and brought to the Hermitage Museum, here in our own town. Mesdames, with Madame Courbat's gracious permission," (and he bowed in her direction) "I shall arrange an expedition to the Museum where we will

examine at leisure those priceless objects and speculate whether some ancestress of ours perhaps wore, once upon a time, those very same ear-rings, that particular necklace, those rings. . . . Or, if there is anything in the theory of reincarnation, did we ourselves wear those jewels while primitively clad in a brief fur wrap or some other equally simple but appropriate garment?"

This was a joke, a splendid one indeed, and the whole class burst into a roar of appreciative laughter. Even Madame Courbat smiled indulgently.

"So much for the Scythians, mesdames. Now let us have a look at the Slavs. Their early origin seems to be shrouded in a haze of contradictory opinion. The first we hear of them is in the kingdom of the Dacians on the middle Danube."

("Da—mid—Dan," I wrote rapidly, hoping for the best later on when I reached the fateful hour of deciphering my own hieroglyphics.)

"This kingdom was destroyed by the Roman emperor Trajan and the Slavs then moved to the Carpathian mountains.

("des by Ro emp Tra—Si m to Carp moun," I dashed off in haste.)

"In the seventh and eighth centuries Byzantine historians mentioned the Slavs. Then no more of them is heard until an attack on Constantinople in the ninth century when they are already spoken of as Russians.

"But with all due respect to learned historians," went on Ivan Ivanovitch jocularly^{k<}—and you need not take notes on this—if we peer into prehistoric Russian folklore and saga we immediately discover the popular legend concerning the foundation of Russia that tells about the three brothers, Russ, Czech and Lakh, who, living on the banks of the Blue Danube (for once legend and historians come together and agree as to the locale), one fine day noticed three mighty eagles circling over their heads.

" 'Ah-ha! A good omen!' cried the observing brothers delightedly. *Let us follow those winged messengers and see where they take us!' No sooner said than done.

"Off they went, probably stumbling along as they kept their eyes skyward, fixed on their respective feathered leaders, and soon parted company as they headed in three different directions.

"Brother Russ went east and where his eagle finally alighted

he founded Russia; Brother Czech went west and in the same manner started Czechia or Bohemia; while Brother Lakh went north and settled in the land of the Lakhs or the Po-Lakhs. So says the legend concerning the three brothers and their three birds.

"Here, mesdames, undoubtedly is the proper place to pause a moment and note that the mystical number *three* appears constantly in Russian folklore over and over again. Later on, when Christianity was firmly established, the peasant explained this phenomenon by solemnly affirming that 'God loves a Trinity' and therefore all good things come in threes.

"After tearing round for centuries the hot-blooded Slavs little by little began to cool off* and presently started to 'sit down' on the land and also in their first cities, Kiev and Novgorod the Great.

"As you know, in the year 862, according to Nestor, the wise and learned monk of Kiev, they sent emissaries to the three ..." (here Ivan Ivanovitch raised three fingers high over his head and wiggled them impressively) "Scandinavian brothers, the Princes Rurik, Sineous and Trouvor, begging them most humbly to come and rule over a land that was vast and rich and plentiful, but, alas, in a shocking state of disorder. Despite that mournful picture the princes apparently agreed with alacrity and shortly afterward arrived with their host of warriors, many of whom married native girls, manfully fathering their children.

"Thus it came to pass that the Viking strain joined our bloodstream."

At this point Madame Courbat looked up at Ivan Ivanovitch anxiously and, beckoning to him, whispered into his ear. A girl behind me tittered.

"Silence," cried Madame Courbat, while Ivan Ivanovitch, flushing crimson to the roots of his hair, resumed his lecture in a subdued voice. "Four centuries later came the Mongol invasion and with it another bloodstream—Asiatic and yellow.

"However, we speak of our ancestors only as Russians. On through the centuries they pass—a long procession of all types and kinds: warriors, peasants, merchants, princes, landowners, court dignitaries, poets, writers, Freemasons, politicians, wastrels, dreamers, outstanding men and leaders. But with the exception of a few historical characters known to all, they lose their identi-

ties in the great march of years' until the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries. Then they definitely take on shape and colour. And it is here that we find most of the outstanding figures in our respective families. I suggest, mesdames, that you ask your parents to tell you about the remarkable men and women of *your* families and write me a brief résumé of what you have learned, so that together we may trace some of the ancestral characteristics that now live in you."

That evening I questioned my family closely and then with Tanka's help wrote a résumé about our great-grandfather The Satrap, and Great-Grandmother Dominica.

But for some reason Ivan Ivanovitch never read it aloud to the class, though privately he praised my "truly good bit of research work" and said that it explained many things to him.

Stronger and stronger grew Ivan Ivanovitch's fascination for us. Soon we began dressing up for him; that is, at home we'd beg for new alpaca aprons, for better shoes and daintier cotton stockings, for larger bows to hold our hair in place. As perfume was forbidden, we would use scented soap and sachets, carefully concealed in our pockets, until one morning Madame Courbat came in and, sniffing the classroom air heavily laden with the collective smell of various soaps, declared that from now on only the plainest kind, the ordinary yellow *Kazan* soap, could be used and none other. In case of disobedience the monitor was to report the girls and bad marks would follow.

After that we confined ourselves to new aprons and immaculate white linen collars and cuffs.

At home for a while no one could understand why I had become all of a sudden so very tidy and anxious to appear as neat as a pin.

"There's something in the air," remarked Vanka, staring at me suspiciously—and that was enough. I blushed furiously to the roots of my hair, while he shouted: "Aha, I knew it!" In a few minutes he had wormed my latest secret out of me.

"It's someone called Ivan Ivanovitch now," he announced to Tanka, as she came running up the steps, eager to be with him. She always seemed happier with Vanka than with her own husband and everybody thought that Boris Zasayken was jealous of Vanka. But how could he or anyone else compete

with her twin? They looked alike, thought alike and even felt alike, they said.

"Ivan Ivanovitch, and who is he?" she inquired with sparkling eyes, joyfully preparing to join Vanka in the fun. "Answer, my child, answer your elders and betters. Who is this man with the neat and simple name?"

Grumpily at first, suspecting treachery, then warming up to my exciting subject, I explained, and then they had an idea. They would invite Ivan Ivanovitch to our home for dinner and look him over.

"After all, if he is to be our brother-in-law . . ." they said, "we'd better examine him from all sides. Teeth, hair and everything, you know." And I giggled with delight.

Easily they persuaded Mamma to invite him to dinner, and the next day I handed Reinecke Fox her written invitation for the following Sunday. He accepted with apparent alacrity and that afternoon I was the envy of all my classmates who had not thought of inviting him to their homes for dinner. Precisely ten minutes before the hour, I, the only one who knew him personally, was instructed to stand near the threshold of our drawing-room a few steps ahead of Mamma so as to greet Ivan Ivanovitch and then introduce him to her and to the rest of my expectant family. By special permission I was wearing my favourite party frock, a candy-striped muslin, with a ribbon in my hair to match.

"She's so excited she's wearing a summer dress and looks like a foolish popinjay," exclaimed Vanka derisively. But Tanka, who had kindly, though most unusually, helped me to dress, frowned and made a face at him to be quiet and leave me alone. To my surprise she, who never did anything of the sort for me, had offered to be my maid that evening and amiably tied all the annoying little strings and knots that were connected with my rather complicated intimate toilette, which consisted of cambric drawers, a short white flannel petticoat and two longer ones, a pink one and a blue one. With gratitude I accepted her loving ministrations, thinking that Mamma was right when I overheard her say that marriage had softened Tanka's disposition a great deal, and made her more gentle and ladylike and certainly less of a tomboy.

Dear Tanka, my heart went out to her and I kissed her

tenderly. I should have noticed the gleam in her eye and **that** her curly hair suddenly stuck out on both sides in **the funny** way it always did when she was up to some mischief. **But I was** too excited to notice those danger signs and happily followed her into the drawing-room. There, feeling very important, I took my appointed place near the door and eagerly waited **for** the signal which would inform us that Ivan Ivanovitch was about to appear. Whenever a guest was on his way up, the hall porter downstairs would press a button that made a little bell tinkle, thus giving those upstairs a timely warning to compose themselves and wreath their faces in appropriate welcoming smiles. On this particular occasion as the bell gave out its silvery ping Tanka suddenly rushed up to me and, crying: "Wait a minute, there's something showing," busily whisked up my skirts and proceeded to fumble with some of the strings.

"There, that's better," she said, heaving a sigh of relief and patting my dress that had fluffed out too much in all directions, making me look like a striped balloon.

At that moment Ivan Ivanovitch appeared, resplendent in evening clothes with a flower in the lapel of his coat. With quiet dignity—at least that's what I hoped my demeanour was—I advanced a few steps and stretched out both hands.

"Why, Ivan Ivanovitch, what an agreeable surprise!" I exclaimed with a becoming touch of playfulness. Many times that day I had secretly rehearsed those words and the correct intonation, all suggested by Tanka, who had affirmed with incontestable authority that it was most appropriate for a hostess to cry out joyfully: "*Mais quelle surprise agrdable!*" when her guests entered the room.

"Even when they are expected?" I asked anxiously, somehow feeling that there was something not quite right there.

"Why, of course, silly, that's etiquette," she replied **and** allayed my misgivings.

As I uttered my welcoming phrase I heard both Vanka and Tanka titter in the background, while Ivan Ivanovitch looked a trifle surprised at the greeting. But he shook hands formally and very elegantly, I thought, lifting his right elbow high as my nose, as he answered somewhat incongruously: "Very agreeable indeed."

Everything was going beautifully and I was about to introduce

him to Mamma with a flourish, when suddenly, to my amazed horror, I felt something slip down my legs. . . . Then something else slipped . . . something else . . . and there I stood petrified with all my underwear on the floor wrapped round my feet: cambric drawers and all three petticoats, white, pink and blue.

With an anguished shriek of: "Don't look! I'm losing everything!" I hopped clear out of the scandalous circle and, dashing from the drawing-room, raced down the corridor to my old nursery. There I threw myself on my bed, gasping: "O', oi, *scandaal!*" in an agony of shame while Niania, who had been tidying up the room, came running to my side in great concern.

"*Ahti*, my dove, what is the matter?" she cried and then stared aghast. For there I lay minus all my clothes except the candy-striped party frock that was bunched up round my neck.

"*Och*," she choked, "*och*, it's Tanka, that little devil! Just wait till I lay my hands on her! She may be married and all that, but she's only a bad, wicked, naughty child to me. . . . A mother indeed! She doesn't deserve to have a baby. . . . To think that she'd shame her poor little sister this way . . . in front of a strange gentleman . . . the heartless, shameless girl. I'll get her. . . . She won't be able to sit down for a week, after I'm through with her!"

At that moment the door flew open and in rushed Tanka like a whirlwind.

"*Tamara, doushenka*" she cried, flinging herself on the bed next to me, "I'm so sorry, so sorry! Forgive me, *galouhoushkal* I really didn't think it would be so awful. . . . All those poor little things of yours lying there in the drawing-room . . . Oh, oh . . . I'll never forgive myself." And she burst out crying, not even noticing that Niania was advancing toward her with our old nursery birch rod that had served its purpose so many times, muttering: "Just wait, my dear one, and see what you get!"

Another second and "*Ai-ai!*" screamed Tanka, "I'll never do it again, Niania, I swear I won't! *Ai₉ ax, ail*"

In the midst of all this hubbub the door opened and in came Vanka and Boris. At the amazing sight of Niania giving Tanka the rod they doubled up with laughter, shouting: "Oc*, this is too funny, Niania! It's wonderful, marvellous. . . . You're killing us."

But Tanka, who had been taking her punishment as a matter

of course from sheer habit, with only the usual shrieks of protest thrown in for effect, now jumped off the bed and with tousled hair, flaming cheeks and streaming eyes rushed at them, screaming: "Get out of here, you idiots! Do you hear me? Get out, quick, this isn't any of your business! How dare you look!"

• When Boris, her own husband, tried to touch her, she gave him a resounding slap for "standing there grinning like an ape," but when Vanka grabbed her by the shoulders, shaking her and yelling: "Stop bawling this minute! One might think you'd never had a whacking from Niania," she suddenly threw back her head and started to laugh. The three of them shrieked and rocked in gales of laughter till Niania advanced upon them menacingly, crying: "You saw what I did to Tanka? Well, that goes for you, Vanka, you worthless boy! I'll give you a hiding that you'll never forget. . . . For days you won't be able to ride those horses of yours, my fine officer!"

But he lifted her off the floor and hugged and kissed her till she lost her cap and switch of false hair. Then I began to laugh and presently everybody was friendly again. Tanka and I washed our faces, combed our hair, Niania dressed me properly this time and we all returned to the drawing-room where Ivan Ivanovitch sat on the edge of his chair, looking as though he had been invited to a lunatic asylum. Mamoussia, Papoussia and Dedoussia were trying to make pleasant conversation, but one could see at a glance that his thoughts were wandering anxiously.

However, despite such a disastrous beginning, the dinner went off very successfully and later everybody said that "Tamara's Ivan Ivanovitch" was perfectly all right.

But as far as I was concerned, Ivan Ivanovitch might have been dead and buried for aught I cared. Once and for all I was cured of that particular crush, probably because I had cut such a sorry figure in front of him just when I had been so eager to impress him and show off. And when, a few months later, he eloped with one of the older, graduating girls, and there was a frightful to-do about it in school, I merely shrugged my shoulders and remarked disdainfully: "Who cares?"

Vanka and Tanka always claimed that they had cured me of my "idiotic infatuation" and that for ever more I should burn a perpetual candle of gratitude at the shrine of their saints for saving me from becoming Mrs. Reinecke Fox.

But far greater than my private sorrows over Ivan Ivanovitch and Mademoiselle Aimée, was my real, poignant grief at the loss of a budding "Best" friendship with Sophy Dalmachev, a girl two classes ahead of me. That friendship, which seemed to hold out such promise, was practically nipped off at the very start and left me not only hurt and disillusioned but with a scar that never quite healed. For without any doubt, those are the most vulnerable years in life, when impressions are the strongest and feelings most susceptible and acute. The sad words, "*Chagrin d'amour dure toute la vie*" can indeed be applied to that formative period when the lovely things that could so easily happen pass by at a distance like tantalizing dreams.

Soon after entering Madame Courbat's School I had noticed Sophy and thought she was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. Two years older than I, she had a peculiar kind of beauty that nowadays would be called "streamlined." Even then, she made me think of a figurehead on the prow of a ship. (I happened to know quite a lot about figureheads as Uncle Vassili, the old admiral, had a whole collection of them at his house.) The sweeping line of her rather large but perfectly shaped upturned nose, her short upper lip, her full, swanlike neck and curly hair that always gave the impression of flying in the wind—all this reminded me of one of those figureheads, which I pictured swaying gently up and down as though bowing to the dipping movement of a vessel at sea.

Not only I, but others too, remarked on the graceful way that Sophy moved, and our teacher of painting stated with authority that she was the embodiment of Botticelli's "Primavera." She was one of the most popular girls, always surrounded by an admiring crowd, always the centre of attraction. For a long time I watched her wistfully from a respectful distance, hoping that some day she might notice me. And then out of a clear sky the amazing thing—the miracle—happened! At one of our dancing classes, during recess, she suddenly came up to me, her full skirt swinging out as she glided across the slippery floor and with a friendly look in her large grey eyes, smilingly stretched out her hand.

"You're a funny little thing," she said. "I like you. Want to be friends?"

Did I want . . . ? Stunned at the unexpected honour, I

mumbled something incoherent and stuck out a cold red paw, wet with perspiration.

"Ugh, your hand is like a frog," she cried, dropping it and laughing. "But I like you anyway. You may call me Sophy, if you wish." She sat down beside me.

Bursting with pride, I was about to stammer my thanks, when a small group of giggling girls came up to us and pointedly stared at me. I couldn't understand what was the matter with them, but I could see that they were unfriendly. For some time past I had noticed that these particular girls, all older than I, would nudge each other and giggle whenever I came into a room and then whisper among themselves, staring at me so rudely that there could be no doubt about whom they were talking.

Now, evidently they were about to say something very special. As I waited perplexed and a little scared, Sophy looked up at them and frowned.

"What do you want?" she asked imperiously and for a moment they seemed taken aback. Then Nadia, the oldest girl and leader of that group, answered insolently:

"We want to ask Tamara a few questions. Get up when your elders speak to you, Stronskaia. Don't sit there like a mannerless peasant."

Obediently I got up, now thoroughly bewildered and frightened.

"Answer us truthfully," went on Nadia, looking me over from head to foot with disdain as though I were something disreputable. "Was your grandmother a Gypsy? And are you a Gypsy too? If you are, we don't want you in this school. Do you hear me?"

There was a shocked silence as the entire dancing class, attracted by the "scene," surrounded us and listened in dismay.

"Gypsy, Gypsy, she's a Gypsy," the words ran through their ranks like an ominous hiss.

Sophy jumped up and was staring at me too, though not like the others with contempt but anxiously as if eager to help.

"My great-grandmother was a Gypsy, if that's what you want to know, and I'm proud of it, proud of it, proud of it!" I heard myself scream in a strange, unusual tone that wasn't at all like mine. Then with a sudden impulse I swung out my fist and hit Nadia squarely on the jaw. It was a trick that Vanka had taught

me and that both Tanka and I had practised with him many a time. Down went Nadia with a yell of pain and instantly the other girls of her group leaped on to me, knocking me to the floor. With a cry of: "I'm with you, Tamara," Sophy rushed to my assistance, followed by several others. Instantly there was a general mêlée into which the dancing mistress hurled herself, frantically trying to unscramble the screaming, kicking, scratching, hair-pulling mass of girls.

"Mesdemoisefies, mesdemoiselles, I beg of you, I pray, cease immediately!" she cried. At the unseemly noise the other teachers came running, followed at a more dignified pace by Madame Courbat herself. Finally we were separated and brought to her for judgment. Nadia's jaw was swollen, one of my eyes was closed; our dresses were torn; our stockings hung in shreds; and our hair hung over our faces like tangled mats.

Coldly, in silence, Madame surveyed us for a few minutes. Then she motioned the other girls to come up.

"Who began this disgraceful fight?" she demanded. "Answer me, one at a time, please."

One by one the girls replied, while we, the chief culprits, stood by in silence.

"Tamara began. She hit first," testified Nadia's friends. Not a soul spoke up for me, as the others had not seen the beginning of the fight. Madame Courbat frowned and gazed at me with severity.

"So it's you, mademoiselle. *Helas*, I might have known it! But such behaviour cannot be permitted in my school and you shall have to leave at once. To-day. Immediately."

Nadia and her friends glared at me in triumph.

"Madame Courbat, may I speak?" It was Sophy's voice, calm and self-possessed.

"*Mais oui*, Sophy, *certainement*," replied Madame Courbat, turning toward her with the first glimmer of a smile. Sophy was a favourite of hers, "one of the most reliable girls in the school," she would frequently say. "'*Qu'est-ce que c'est, voyons, parlez!*'"

"Tamara struck Nadia only because Nadia insulted her," said Sophy firmly and proceeded to tell the whole story.

When she finished, Madame was silent for a minute; then she turned to Nadia.

"Is it true?" she demanded severely.

Sullenly Nadia bowed her head.

"What a shocking, what a cruel thing to do! Nadia, I am ashamed of you."

Then, raising herself majestically out of her thronelike arm-chair, she advanced toward me, her black silk train sweeping the floor.

"*Ma pauvre petite*," she said, putting her arm round my shoulders. "*Ma pauvre petite!* You did the right thing. You defended your honour and that of your highly respected *grand'maman*. Nadia, mesdemoiselles, if only you had asked me, I would have told you the romantic story of the famous Princess Dominica. True, she was of Romany birth, but what of it? Her race is one of the oldest in the world and she became a great lady, a very great lady indeed, not only by marriage, but through her intelligence and talents. Her private life was beyond reproach and her public life an adornment to society. Her salon in St. Petersburg was frequently honoured by the Emperor and others of great distinction. Many were the languages she knew; many were her accomplishments. Tamara has every reason to be proud of her and Tamara was right to defend her. Nadia, I demand a public apology at once."

Slowly Nadia advanced toward me and put out her hand.

"I'm sorry," she said in a low voice without raising her eyes.

"And I am sorry that I hit you so hard," I replied.

"*C'est ça*," exclaimed Madame Courbat, "and now let us forget it. Make yourselves presentable, mesdemoiselles, and proceed with the dance. There will be no punishment for anyone. But I shall take you home at once, Tamara, and speak to your *chère tnanan* myself. Then later, Nadia, I will speak to your dear mother too."

And so, not waiting for Miss Burns, I went home with Madame Courbat in her ancient-looking carriage.

Great was the consternation when I appeared with a closed eye, scratches all over my face and my clothes and stockings torn. After Madame Courbat had told the shocking story, Mamma wept, Papa shouted, Dedoussia sighed and shook his head, while Niania and Miss Burns were so upset that they all clucked like hens at once. Only Vanka grinned delightedly and, thumping me on the back, said with approval: "Good girl!

That's the way! Smack 'em on the jaw just like I taught you. Seems you did a good job on that Nadia, according to what your old Courbat says. For once I'm proud of you; you're a good little beggar-beast."

Later on when Tanka came in for dinner and heard about my fight, she was so pleased she took off one of her gold bangles and put it on my wrist, saying: "And that's to remind you of your victory."

Then they all argued with Mamma, who apparently was torn in two: on one side she was deeply shocked that I, her daughter, had started a public brawl; on the other, she was full of love and pity. Finally she compromised. First, frowning severely, she ordered me to bow in front of the icons thirty times a day for a week and write in my copybook five hundred times: "I'll never fight again." Then she put me to bed herself and, tucking me up, with tears and kisses, murmured: "My poor, poor Gypsy baby."

Next day in school Nadia and her friends avoided me, but not rudely, rather in a subdued sort of way, while most of the other girls surrounded me, making all kinds of little advances, showing that they were on my side.

But best of all, Sophy was there, Sophy who had stood up for me publicly and saved me from being expelled. She was my friend, my real friend, for had she not said so herself and proved it in front of the whole school? At last I was no longer the "odd" one in the world, always alone. At last there was someone who'd be my "pair," my best friend. Yes, that was it. Sophy and I would be "best friends," the very best in the world. In my exaltation I could see us going through life as intimate and friendly as Vanka and Tanka. But she should be told about it, otherwise she would not know what was in store for us.

After thinking the grave matter over for several days, trying to figure out exactly how I should express myself, I finally made up my mind and went up to Sophy during recess. My heart was thumping furiously, my hands were like ice, there was a booming noise in my ears and "dark water" in my eyes.

"What is it, Tamara?" she asked kindly. "You seem all upset. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Sophy," I gasped, taking a deep breath, "I have something to tell you. It's very important, very."

"All right," she said, putting her arm round me, "but what is it?"

"Will you be my best friend, my very best friend, for ever and ever?"

There, the words were out! I took another deep breath and, shutting my eyes tightly, waited for the answer that would make me no longer the odd one, but half of a "pair."

There was a moment of silence, then Sophy spoke in a low, kind, pitying sort of voice.

"Oh, Tamara, you poor darling! Does it mean so much to you? Oh, I am so sorry, so terribly sorry. But, listen, I cannot be your best friend, much as I'd like to, because, *doushenka*, I have one already and I cannot be disloyal to her."

With wide-open eyes now, I stared at her aghast. Every word she was saying felt like cold water dripping down my back. . . . So I was mistaken. I had offered my best friendship and it wasn't wanted. I was to be alone, the odd one, again, for ever. No pair for me. . . .

"Oh, don't look that way," cried Sophy, throwing her arms round me and hugging me. "Surely there is something I can do! Wait, I know, I've got it! You'll be my *second-best* friend—how's that?"

Second-best! Ever since I was quite small I had always hated those words and everything they stood for: second-best, second-rate, second-hand . . . Perhaps because Papoussia's favourite expression of contempt was: "Oh, he's a second-rater"; or because Niania despised second-hand clothes; or because it never was any fun to wear my second-best frock to a second-best party. Whatever was the reason, I heartily detested those two words. "Everything or nothing" was what I wanted. It was my own personal motto, my *ex libris*, that at an early age I had laboriously scratched into all my books. "Everything or nothing," never anything middling or in-between.

And now, Sophy, of all people, was offering me to be her second-best friend! When I had offered her everything!

With a stifled choke, I turned and fled straight into the kindly vatter glozetz, the only place where I knew I'd be alone. There I sat down and wept, pulling my skirts over my head to stifle **the**

noise I was making. Then, as the bell went *cloppity-doppang* for class, I went down on my knees and, flushing the bowl, alas, washed my face in the cold running water. That refreshed me considerably and wiping my face on my flannel petticoat, I went into class with my red nose high in the air.

"My heart is broken," I thought, "but I'll be a beggar-beast if I show it!"

Afterward Sophy came up and tried to talk again about the second-best friendship business. But I managed to wave it aside (loftily I hoped) and said without a sniff or a wink: "Oh, no, Sophy, I really don't care for anything second-best, thank you."

She seemed puzzled at that and a little hurt and never mentioned the subject again.

But my heart was broken—at least for a week—and I never forgot that scene.

CHAPTER IX

MY SWEET AND LOVELY MAIDEN

LUCKILY for me Lent was round the corner and my thoughts then turned to an entirely different sphere.

I loved Lent with all its rituals. In a magic way it broke the monotony of everyday life and brought with it an unusual thrill difficult to define.

During the first and seventh weeks of Lent there'd be no lessons, as we had to attend the church services in the morning and in the evening, while in between we were supposed to meditate on our sins, examine our consciences and read holy books, only holy books, all others of the worldly kind being absolutely forbidden.

Food was different those days, too, as the menus were strictly Lenten and consisted of tea with lemon or almond milk, black bread and salt, mushrooms, rice and fish—all but in Passion Week when even fish was not eaten. No meat or poultry, no eggs, no real milk or butter were allowed—God forbid!

In the morning immediately after a frugal breakfast we'd drive to the Palace Church (which was a pleasure in itself to me)

and there carefully follow the beautiful medieval rituals that led up to Confession, Communion and, eventually, Easter.

The mournful Gregorian chants were particularly soul-stirring and made me want to weep. As a matter of fact many people *did* weep and I for one would indulge in a perfect orgy of tears, enjoying every drop to the limit. It was a strange thrill, heart-breaking and yet extremely satisfying, that would start as soon as we entered the church with an ever-growing crescendo which ended in a flood of tears, followed by a state of exhaustion and completely relaxed peace, as though every ounce of unhappiness had been drained out of one's system.

I would feel that "state" coming over me, as we went up the stairs that led to the Palace Church and I saw all those sad faces round me. No one ever smiled during those devotional hours except, perhaps, for a mournful wiggle of the lips that was considered the proper substitute for the real thing. It was then that the first wave of sadness would sweep over me, as though washing away all the sinful gaiety and joy of life, leaving me in the right frame of mind to accept what was about to happen. Slowly, gravely we would proceed to our customary places and stand quietly waiting for the service to begin. At the first words, down we'd go on our knees, while I tried to follow Father Trofim's instructions.

"Sweep out of your soul all earthly matters and turn it into a pure and shining receptacle, worthy to be filled with the gift of goodness from Heaven," he would say.

Closing my eyes, I would visualize the process of cleaning my soul and getting it ready for the warm, lovely gift that would enter it drop by drop and fill it to the brim as though it were a cup of crystal containing the Heaven-made elixir of eternal life. But first I had to purify myself. It was then that I'd think of the enormity of my sins, of my utter worthlessness and of Christ's suffering for me. And it was then that the tears would fill my eyes and slowly begin to drop down my cheeks into my parted lips. Little by little this mood of mortification and sorrow would take hold of me until I'd find myself wishing that someone would beat me till my back bled, or pierce my side with a spear, or, better still, crucify me. Quietly, silently, not stormily in the least, I'd weep until I was exhausted and presently feel that the blessing of Heaven was entering my soul. I could see that

crystal cup of mine, which in imagination I placed in the region of my heart, gradually fill up and overflow. . . .

As soon as we left the church that state of mind would begin to evaporate and dissolve like a mist and usually by the time we reached home, I'd be myself again, hungry, ready for my dinner and with a lot of new little sins cropping up in my soul like mushrooms. Another hour and complete reaction would set in with a wild desire to shout and dance and play some idiotic practical joke.

But in the evening the same thing would happen again, perhaps even more so because of the mysterious, semi-darkness of the church with only the flickering lampadas and the votive candles in front of the icons, like little burning islands and chains of flaming gold. There, once more under the influence of the droning prayers and lilting chants and dots of light, that hypnotic state of religious fervour would envelop me completely and I'd stand staring at one particular lampada, candle or glittering icon, and wait for the warm tears to wash away my sins, making me "white as snow" and bringing to my soul the peace "that passeth all understanding."

But, alas, another element entered this yearly Lenten mood of mine. Invariably, and it never once failed, I fell in love with the priest, whether he was young or old, good-looking or ugly. That made no difference whatsoever. The important thing was that he had full power to condemn or forgive my sins and to intercede for me at the throne of the Almighty. He was the keeper of my soul, the holy man who stood between me and God. Thus, there was no one greater than he and before Lent was over I adored him, first as God's own private representative, then as a king among men, to whom the Emperor himself bent his knee. When I reached that stage, I no longer wept during the services or stared at a candle or at a glittering icon. Instead, I watched every movement he made and admired his face and long, Nazarene hair, his hands and even his feet, though they were encased in flat-soled boots that appeared strangely incongruous beneath his rich, Lenten vestments of black velvet and silver.

Sinfully I pictured myself conversing with him in our Stronskoe flower garden at night while millions of stars looked down upon us and a sweet breeze played round us, laden with the fragrance of jasmine, and of lilacs in full bloom.

Or, I saw myself nursing his dying wife, who on her death-bed placed my hand in his and begged me to marry him when I grew up. And eventually, years later, we'd marry and have flocks and flocks of children, just like all Russian priests had.

Or, I saved him from a fiery furnace when his house was ablaze, or in the nick of time, pulled a chicken bone out of his choking throat. Yes, I'd beg Mamma to invite him to dinner and I'd slip a treacherous little bone on to his plate, then save his life. . . .

And I thought of all the amazing things I'd tell him during confession, perhaps even making up a few extra sins so as to startle and interest him.

But, when at long last I was alone with him during confession, behind the screen, I'd forget everything except that I was in the presence of a man of God, who had the power to forgive my sins or tie them and to throw open the doors of Heaven or Hell. And humbly, with all the previous nonsense forgotten and completely washed out of my soul, I'd confess my sins (the real, not the imaginary ones) in a faltering voice, and then fall to my knees as he covered my head with his stole and pronounced the sacred words that forgave and absolved me in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Invariably I left that screen in an exalted frame of mind, which usually lasted until the next morning and Communion. Then I'd feel that I was indeed an angel, clean and pure, ready for the golden harp.

But, alas, I could not remain that way very long and in one shocking instance had a fight with Vanka an hour later and threw an inkwell at his head with distressing results as the ink spilled over his hair and his new Easter suit, dying both a rich deep blue. However, on the whole I usually managed to keep myself good for at least one full day.

Only once did a confession end in a fit of indecent giggling and that was when the priest of that particular year, an extremely nervous young man, still very new at his holy profession, compared my soul to a bed of vegetables in a kitchen garden that had to be manured every spring so as to produce a fine and profitable crop!

k "In this case you are the vegetable bed," he said solemnly, "and I am the manure."

Undoubtedly his idea was excellent, but, alas, no words could have been more unfortunately chosen. They broke through my exalted mood like a bombshell and, shattering it completely, threw me into an irrepressible fit of giggles.

"*Poof, poof,*" I went through my nose, trying to suppress it, but choking in the effort and coming out with an exceptionally loud and explosive "Ha, ha!"

Stunned, the poor young man gazed at me in amazement, murmuring: "Pray, compose yourself, my daughter. Laughter is most unseemly here," while at the same time from behind the screen came the sounds of my shocked family hissing: "Tamara, behave!"

But nothing could stop me. I giggled while he exhorted me, I giggled on my knees under his stole as hurriedly though kindly he absolved me of my sins, and I choked with giggles as I came out from behind the screen and faced the entire congregation of confessionists. The whole family was making round eyes and shocked faces at me and Papa, catching me by the hand, rushed me out of church into the hall. There, in a most unholy frame of mind, he shook me, boxed my ears twice and then ordered me to stand still and try to repent of my abominable behaviour.

'Til punish you for this," he whispered angrily; "just wait and see."

"You can't say such things when you're about to go to Confession yourself," I gasped. "Now *you* are being sinful and must beg my pardon at once."

"Oh, very well," he retorted furiously, "I beg your pardon for boxing your ears and also for what I am going to do to you when we get home." And with that promise he hurried back to church to confess.

When finally, driving home in the landau, I managed to explain to the family what had happened, Papa and Mamma relented a little and even smiled at each other, while Vanka and Tanka howled with laughter.

"Vegetable bed," they called me after that and from time to time would offer to buy the best manure on the market so that I would bring in a fine and profitable crop.

Next morning before Communion, following strict orders, I went to Confession again, to the head priest this time, and **told**

him about my latest sin. But this holy man was old and kind and very understanding. Besides, he had known me ever since I was quite small. He didn't seem shocked in the least, only quietly amused.

"The spontaneous, happy laughter of childhood is no sin," he said, smiling gently and stroking my head. "But you must learn to control it, my dear Tamara. Do not let any feeling ever overcome you, and always be able to master it no matter what happens. Then indeed you will be strong and the worthy ruler of your own soul. Now I shall forgive you again, so depart in peace, my dear spiritual daughter, Tamara, and may God be with you."

And as I knelt down, he absolved my latest sin.

I was fourteen when I attended my first Easter service and every detail stands out in my mind as if it were yesterday.

In the drawing-room of our St. Petersburg home I had tea with Mamma, an honour which she conferred on me only on such rare occasions as important holidays, birthdays, name days and "100-per-cent good-mark days," or—and that was not so pleasant—when she wanted to talk to me seriously, or in other, less elegant words, "wash my head" for some awful mis-demeanour on my part. On this particular afternoon, however, I had been invited because it was Easter Eve; everything had been extremely agreeable—positively not the slightest inkling of a head-washing—and, gorged with delicious cakes and chocolate, I sprawled luxuriously at Mamma's feet on the white bearskin rug in front of the fire.

"Now, *doushenka*, run along like a good girl and lie down for an hour or so; then you'll be rested and look nice and fresh for the midnight service," she said gently but firmly in the voice we all knew was final and had to be obeyed without discussion.

So scrambling to my feet I answered as dutifully as I could: "Very well, Mamma, I'll go at once," trying hard to sound polite and respectful, though inwardly boiling with indignation and thinking impatiently: It's always like this! "Lie down and rest," when it doesn't do any good! What's the use of tossing about in bed at this unearthly hour, listening to the clock, counting the minutes . . . and waiting, waiting, waiting to get up?

But, nevertheless, I went obediently, though somewhat slowly,

down the corridor to my room, where I knew I'd find my old Niania waiting for me with the inevitable scratchy flannel nightgown, the hot-water bottle that had such a disagreeable trick of suddenly leaking in my bed (usually in the middle of the night), and a glass of warm milk—all of which, used at the same time, were supposed to be conducive to rest and beauty-sleep. Yes, there she was, the devoted but tiresome old hen, heating over the antiquated smelly little spirit lamp that once belonged to my nursery the detestable milk which probably already had a *penka*, a skin, on top of it—another thing that I loathed. Oh, well! . . . I took in the familiar scene with a look of disgust.

"Come in, come right in, my golden rabbit," invited the old woman, waving with one hand the nightgown and, with the other, both hot-water bottle and saucepan, juggling them so dexterously that she did not spill a drop of milk. "Everything is ready for you, my dove."

But I grumbled aloud that it was stupid, ridiculous, cruel to treat me like a child, a baby. . . .

"Well, but you *are* only fourteen and after all this is your first midnight service, my lamb," she answered, adding shrewdly, "and you never know who will see you in church. Better look your prettiest. . . . Fate might be waiting for you in the guise of a handsome young man, a prince, a count, a poet, an artist. . . who knows! And young men like girls with bright eyes and pink cheeks,"

"Oh, all right, all right, all right!" I cried, secretly delighted at the thought of a young man casting his approving eye on me at last. Quickly I undressed (might as well get over with "God's punishment" as I called this procedure) and threw myself on my bed with such haste and violence that I banged the top of my head against the twisted mahogany framework, hard as a stone, and screamed with pain, excitement and a certain perverse feeling of "showing someone something, so there!"

"*Ahti*, my dove, and did you hurt your pretty little head?" inquired Niania solicitously, bending over me and literally blowing words of magic into my tousled hair.

"Pretty little head, indeed . . . idiot!" disdainfully remarked Vanka, who had just opened the door in time to witness the accident. "Aren't you silly enough without smashing your foolish head and getting still sillier, if that be possible? Or are you

quite properly living up to the great honour I paid you yesterday, when I wrote that beautiful poem about you?

" 'My sweet and lovely maiden,
Hit your head against the wall,
Then you'll suddenly remember
That you are beloved by all.'

The 'beloved' was put in only to be kind to you, of course. And don't giggle, my good girl. . . . You know I cannot stand the empty laughter of the fool."

But here Niania rushed at him, crying angrily: "Don't you dare call your little sister an idiot and a fool: God will punish you for such indecent words. So quickly make the sign of the cross and be off with you. Shoo! Shoo!" And she slammed the door in his impudent, grinning face and, turning off the lights, started to tiptoe out of the room as though I had already miraculously fallen into a deep sleep.

Left alone in the dark, save for the flickering of the lampada in front of the icons, I rubbed my head and grumbled a little more and finally stretched myself full length "as far as I could go," because someone had told me that that was the surest way to grow taller in no time. Then the clock struck eight and I began my tiresome vigil from the full hour to the quarter, to the half-past to the three quarters, and round to the full hour again. . . . Nine o'clock. . . . The minutes dragged interminably and when at long last Niania came at ten to "wake" me up, I felt I had lived a whole lifetime, a lifetime of unutterable boredom, spent *in* the dark, in bed, in a scratchy flannel nightgown, with a stomach full of hot milk, listening to the monotonous ticking of the clock with only the tinkling chimes to brighten my progress through eternity. "Rest . . . beauty-sleep . . ." my aunt! . . . Well, thank goodness, that was over. Now all I had to do was to get up, shivering miserably as one always does after lying in bed at the wrong time, then dress and drive with the family to the church of the Winter Palace, where they always attended the midnight service.

A white frock of lightweight wool with a silk thread in its weave, a big white silk ribbon that stuck out like a huge butterfly at the back of my head and was supposed to keep my hair

tied in a bunch (which it did not), a pink *shouba* or pelisse lined with kangaroo fur, and white snowshoes, also trimmed with kangaroo, to protect my new shiny black dancing pumps—and I was ready.

"Hurry, hurry, we're leaving without you," shouted Vanka and Tanka from the entrance hall and in a panic I tore down the long corridor full speed, pink pelisse puffing out behind me, snowshoes clattering, screaming at the top of my voice: "I'm coming, I'm coming. Oh, don't go without me, please ..." only to be sharply reprimanded by Miss Burns for "screeching like an owl."

I pulled myself together and managed to enter the hall sedately. Mamma looked me over carefully, sighed gently with a touch of sadness as a general reproof for past behaviour and a timely warning for the future—and off we went: Papa, Mamma; Vanka, Tanka, and I behind them; Mitrophan, the footman, bringing up the procession in the rear, with the bearskin rug over his arm.

We entered the roomy old landau that always smelled so peculiarly of a mixture of Mamma's favourite perfume, "Vera Violette," and of mice who probably slept in the upholstery at night. Then Papa said gravely: "With God!" which was the signal for the footman to slam the door and for the coachman to gather his reins and start off the big black horses that were overfed, fat, sleek, shiny and slow.

Decorously we drove through the crowded and brilliantly lighted streets, past groups of people all hurrying to church, many carrying the traditional *paskha*, and freshly baked *koolichee* in their arms, for the priests to bless. Down the Nevsky Prospect and the Morskaia we rolled along, across the vast square in front of the Winter Palace, and with a great clatter of the heavy horses' hoofs that struck sparks from the cobblestones, drew up under the porte-cochère, known as the Jordan Entrance, where we were gravely handed out of the landau by the old Swiss in his red livery covered with little black eagles.

Mitrophan then took our shoubas, joining the long line of waiting footmen, and up the stairs we went, through the empty passages, galleries and halls, until we reached the last one, where behind a green baize screen, with the family patiently waiting for me, I peeled off my warm red flannel panties and left them neatly folded on the back of a yellow velvet chair. That was the customary routine for all little girls, and every Sunday there

was a whole collection of warm woollies hidden behind the secretive and dignified old screen which had watched many generations do exactly the same thing. Even Vanka did not make fun of me except to murmur: "Take off your trousers," as it was the custom and he was used to it too.

That accomplished, we entered the big white and gold church, already nearly full, and separated, the gentlemen going to the left and joining the colourful body of glittering uniforms; while we turned to the right where the ladies, dressed in their best Easter finery, grouped themselves prettily and effectively in picturesque attitudes of prayerful devotion.

We took our usual places near the wall and immediately I touched the familiar gilded stucco flower which I had touched this very same way ever since I could remember. Only formerly the flower used to be high over my head and I had to stand on tiptoe in order to reach it, whereas now it was on a level with my waist. That alone proved that I was practically a grown-up person, which I demonstrated to Mamma with graphic signs, while she nodded and smiled and whispered: "Yes, yes."

Then I began to look round. Ahead of us stood a countess with her numerous children strung out in front of her like a live ladder, according to their sizes. Quietly she put out her hand and straightened the bow on the wide red silk sash of her eldest girl, who, thinking that her mother was giving her one of those secret "church signals" we children all knew, threw herself devoutly on her knees and in a prayerful attitude made the sign of the cross. That unexpected forward lunge of hers untied completely the bow on her sash and now it looked like a pair of red reins in the hands of the countess, who, flushing with annoyance, pulled up her daughter as she would a young colt.

The girl turned round surprised, then mortified, tears welling into her eyes, as I laughed outright while Mamma shook her head reprovingly, murmuring "Sh, sh" and looked at me with a pained and shocked expression. The countess gave me a swift glare, which I returned—and the incident was closed.

At that moment arrived my friend, Vera, and stopped right next to me. She always came to church with her father, her mother being an invalid, and invariably stood with us so as to be under Mamma's wing. We held hands for a minute, then she gave mine a little squeeze and began to pray—but really pray—

for she was devout, a "saint," I thought with admiration, and wished I could be like her. But, alas, my sinful attention soon wandered again and I continued to look for familiar faces.

In her usual corner sat Princess Galitzinc, very old, very dignified and very much unlike anyone else. She belonged to Grand-mamma's generation and wore old-fashioned stiff black taffeta gowns, a bonnet with streamers and heavy gold jewellery. To-night she was in violet satin and as I had never seen her in anything but black, I gazed at her fascinated until Mamma whispered: "Kindly stop staring at people and look straight *in* front of you. The service is about to begin,"

Obediently I shifted my gaze to the tall white and gold iconostas, which like an unfinished wall or huge screen, separated the main body of the church from the altar and kept my eyes fixed on the wide central doors of gold, known as the King's Gates. Red, blue and green lampadas and hundreds of candles burned in front of the icons, and a misty cloud of incense came drifting in from the hidden region of the altar. The low murmuring of the congregation suddenly ceased; there was a tense silence, broken only in my corner by the rustling of silks and satins; candles were lighted while behind the low railing to the left of the iconostas, the men and boys of the great choir, all dressed alike in surplices of red and gold, began to stir and then slowly file out of the enclosure toward the central aisle. A pause—and the Head Priest appeared, facing the congregation in his golden mitre and shimmering golden robes, accompanied by the enormous Deacon, swinging the incense burner, and followed by the rest of the clergy all *in* robes of silver and gold. The choir now passed in pairs, the little boys leading, then the tenors and the basses in the rear. Slowly the procession moved down the central aisle and passed on outside through the main entrance doors which were immediately closed.

Now the church was deserted by the entire clergy; only the congregation stood stiffly with lighted candles and for some reason made me think of a body without its head. I whispered that to Mamma, but she said disappointingly: "Nonsense, be quiet," and silenced me once more.

From behind the closed doors came the sound of singing as the procession moved on, in its march round the church. That was a symbol, done in memory of the Apostles who once

searched thus for the body of Christ. Panic-stricken, I thought of my red flannel woollies hanging behind the screen and wondered if the procession in their search would find them. . . . However, I wouldn't be the only one to be disgraced and that consoling thought helped to calm me.

As they went the choir sang: "*Vosskressenie Christe spasse, Angeli poyout na nebessy*," meaning "Of the Resurrection the angels are singing in Heaven."

Time passed so slowly, it gave me the fidgets. Every sound was magnified. A lady's stomach squeaked suddenly and she smothered the indecent noise with a cough—again the silks and satins rustled and shoes creaked. What if I burst out laughing—loudly—what would happen? Awful thought. Better think of something else. Oh, yes, Niania says that if one wishes something very much and prays for it with all one's heart during the interval from the time the priests leave the church until they return, that wish will come true. I prayed with closed eyes, and held my breath until I got giddy, for a handsome young man to fall in love with me—please, God, oh, please, please. . . .

Eleven-thirty, forty-five, fifty-five . . . six, seven, eight, nine . . . and *BOOM!* went the cannon from the fortress of Peter and Paul, shaking the very foundations of the fantastic city, so artificially and precariously built on top of the huge and malevolent swamp that surrounds the Neva and the Gulf of Finland. For a few seconds buildings vibrated, window panes rattled, then a strange expectant silence descended, like a heavy blanket of fog. . . . Everywhere, in streets, houses, churches—people paused, murmuring: "Hark, the cannon," and, standing rigid, waited . . . waited tensely, listening with strained ears. . . .

Then . . .

Bongngngngl went the great deep bell of St. Isaac's Cathedral, its magnificent voice thundering majestically through that still and silent midnight air, pausing significantly before striking again as though waiting for the mighty sound to roll away over the spires and domes and roofs of the city, out to the far-flung suburbs, on and on beyond swamps and forests, toward Finland and the Arctic Circle.

"*Christos Voskress*, Christ is Risen," joyously cried the Head Priest, standing on the threshold of the church, doors now thrown wide open.

"*Voistinnu Voskress*, Indeed He is Risen," answered the congregation, the word *voistinnu* sounding like the swishing of the wind in a pine forest and making me think of Waldmar Daa and his sons in Andersen's fairy tale.

The procession advanced toward the altar, the choir singing: "Christ is Risen," their voices scattering strangely as they passed in pairs, the piping trebles of the boys sounding thin and reedy, while the basses boomed away like an accompaniment played without a tune. . . .

"*Christos Voskress*," cried the Head Priest again.

And again there was the noise as of the wind swishing through the pine trees.

The next moment I was being kissed three times by Mamma, Vera and Papa, who had come over to our side, and Vanka and Tanka. I kept crying: "*Voistinnu Voskress*," and was given eggs: a gold and china one from Mamma, a silver one from Papa, a blue enamel one from Vera and a hen's egg dyed red from Vanka who whispered: "I hope it's rotten and stinks!"

Now all the church bells were ringing all over the city; the choir was singing without stopping and it sounded more like a chatter than a chant; the cannon was booming incessantly and everywhere people were embracing, crying: "He is Risen indeed," and exchanging eggs.

The first short service over, we did not wait for the long Mass that followed, but hurried home. I stopped behind the green baize screen to put on my red pants and down the stairs we went to the entrance hall where we waited for the Swiss to call our name when our carriage drew up to the door. There it was at last. . . . We drove home. Through the streets people went, carrying their lighted candles and their *koolichee* and *paskhas*, now blessed by the priests. The town was blazing with lights and the air was filled with the sounds of church bells and shouting people.

At home I attended my first Easter Night Feast. In the briUiandy lighted dining-room, an unusually long table, reaching from one end of the room to the other, was laden with flowers and rich food: various *zakuski* or hors d'oeuvres, caviare, herring, mushrooms vinaigrette, *forshmak*, *stooden* . . . baked hams, leg of veal, lamb, galantines, fish in aspic, suckling pig, chickens, goose, turkey . . . platters of gaily coloured hard-boiled eggs

with small dishes of coarse salt that had been specially baked in the oven and were always served with those eggs. Then the various kinds of wines in sparkling cut-glass decanters; and last die famous Easter baba, a tall sweet bread with almonds and frosting on top of it; the koolich, another sweet bread not so tall as the baba, made with candied fruit, raisins, almonds and lemon rind; and finally the most important of all, the crowning glory of the Easter table, the paskha, snow-white and beautiful, shaped like a pyramid with the letters X. V. meaning "Christ is Risen" on its four sides—made of cottage cheese, sour cream, eggs, sugar, butter and almonds.

My eyes ran in all directions at the sight of so many delicious things and Vanka and Tanka exclaimed gleefully and loudly at the "disgusting greedy look on Tamara's face. All she is thinking about is 'What'U I eat next?' "

They were right. . . . I tasted, I ate, I stuffed, I gorged . . . but so did they, so did everybody else. . . . I was having a glorious time.

Suddenly in the midst of my gastronomic joy I heard Mamma's voice addressing me: "Now, *doushenka*, run along like a good little girl and go to bed. It's high time. You've had quite enough," she said gendy but firmly in the voice we all knew was final and had to be obeyed without discussion.

And once again I answered as dutifully as I could. "Very well, Mamma, I'll go at once," trying hard to sound polite and respectful, though inwardly boiling with indignation and thinking impatiently: "It's always like this! Go to bed when I'm having a good time . . . go to bed . . . go to sleep and miss all the fun!"

But nevertheless I went, obediently though slowly, down the corridor to my room where I found Niania waiting for me—this time with a China Easter egg on which was painted the scene of the Resurrection.

"Christ is Risen," "Indeed He is Risen," we exclaimed as we thrice embraced and I produced my gift, a hideous egg made of pink and white sugar, which she loyally pronounced "beautiful." But I was so full of Easter food, so sleepy, I could hardly stand. Kindly Niania helped me undress, tucked me in, put out the lights and started tiptoeing away. But at the door she stopped and asked sofdy: "Did a young man gaze at you admiringly,

my rabbit?" and laughed when I answered sleepily: "No, not a single young man and I did pray as you told me to."

"Never mind, my little soul," she said soothingly, "don't let us lose hope; your prayer will be answered some day . . . some day . . . perhaps."

I didn't have very long to wait, for when I was fifteen the handsome young man materialized and I fell desperately in love with Grischa Kanussin, one of Vanka's brother officers in the Imperial Guard Regiment. That winter he often came to our house and sat for hours in Vanka's study, smoking and talking. They had become great friends in the regiment and discussed at length every conceivable subject under the sun, puffing at their pipes, while Tanka, curled up on the wide and low Turkish divan, joined in the endless debates. It was in Vanka's room one evening that I saw Grischa for the first time and instantly fell in love with him. As far as I was concerned it was love at first sight and lasted for nearly two years.

I had never seen anyone quite like him—tall, dark and slender with big, black, twinkling, humorous, intelligent eyes and a wide, ironical mouth. His teeth, though rather prominent, were magnificent, his swarthy complexion glowing with health. The only flaw in his remarkable good looks was the size of his ears which stuck out too much. Otherwise he was the handsomest man that I had ever met in all my fifteen years.

Tanka said that the minute I saw Grischa my eyes popped, my mouth fell open and altogether I looked 'fust like a country gawp." That was why she and Vanka burst out laughing and exchanged significant looks, the kind that always made me so hopping mad.

"My sister is being highly complimentary and is showing that she likes you—she always opens her mouth that way when she does," explained Vanka, grinning. But Grischa didn't laugh. Bowing and clicking his heels, he shook hands with me as though I were a grown-up young lady. That, of course, made me like him all the more and when he politely advanced a chair for me and gravely said: "Won't you join us, princess?" I was completely enthralled. Here was someone at last with real intelligence, I thought approvingly, and manners—what lovely manners!

Straight up in my chair I sat for a few minutes and listened to their conversation. Thank goodness, they were talking about something I knew—Pushkin's poem, "The Gypsies."

"Oh, I know that by heart!" I cried delightedly and, without stopping to think what I was doing, jumped up and began to recite the burning, colourful lines. Grischa looked at me in mild surprise, and Vanka yelled "Stop it, you stupid little exhibitionist!" but Tanka shook her head at him decidedly, saying: "Let her alone, let her do it." On I went, completely forgetting my audience as I thought of Great-Grandmother Dominica, The Ancient One, Stesha and the Tabor. My voice shook, my cheeks burned, my hair fell into my eyes. As I came to the last lines I heard Tanka open the piano and softly strike the first chord of an old Gypsy song.

"Go on, Tamara," she said in the low voice that we called "the voice of the Tabor." "Go on and then dance for us."

Swiftly Vanka pushed away some tables, kicked back the carpet and cleared a space for me at the end of the room. Then he caught up his guitar and, running up to me, leaned over and stared into my eyes in the fashion of a Gypsy song leader.

"Pitch it, sister, pitch it," called Tanka imperatively in that same low voice.

Shivering all over from excitement, I closed my eyes and obediently sounded the first note. Instantly Vanka struck his guitar and off we went, the three of us, Tanka at the piano, Vanka plucking the strings and I singing our favourite song:

"Karrick me nadjava. . . ."

I could hear the low, "dark" throbbing notes of my own voice, sounding just the way the real Gypsies did.

"Beautiful, Tamara; beautiful, go on, go on . . . I beg of you, I implore," breathed Vanka, coming so close that I could feel his hot breath on my face. He, too, was shaking all over and panting as though he had been running fast. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead.

As the song came to an end, Tanka, without stopping, broke into the wild tempo of the dance. Away jumped Vanka and, leaving me all alone in my free space, shouted loudly and laughingly: "Hey, Tamara, hey!"

And now Grischka started to clap his hands. Through half-closed eyes I could see that our song had "fired" him! His eyes were shining, he loved it, he was one of us and ready to join us! Gliding past him, I beckoned. Instantly he jumped to his feet and, overturning a chair, rushed toward me with outstretched hands. But quick as lightning Vanka dropped his guitar on to the sofa and, pushing Grischka aside, threw himself into the dance. With the true instinct of the Tabor he wasn't going to let any outsider take his place.

Disappointed for a second that it wasn't Grischka, I was suddenly glad that it was Vanka, and in those few minutes I realized that I possessed a new power, a power that had made two men want to fight over me. It was a milestone in my life. I was growing up.

When, breathlessly, we finished, Grischka, pale round his nose and with tears in his eyes, kissed both my hands and in a muffled voice said: "That was wonderful, little princess, I'll never forget it."

Triumphant but exhausted, I curled up next to Vanka on the divan and sat quietly without saying another word. But from under her encircling arm I kept staring and staring at Grischka until Vanka exclaimed that I looked like a foolish, fuzzy owl.

Later on we sang again, this time Vanka's favourite:

*"A pair of hay horses, harnessed since dawn,
Woeful and hungry and sad to behold"*

A miserable song that always made me want to cry. Mournfully it told the sad story of those two old horses that had once been smart trotters with dashing coachmen to drive them and a beautiful young mistress, the talk of the town.

*"A Greek from Odessa, a Jew from Warsaw,
A youthful Cornet and a grey-haired General."*

All these people would visit her and, amazingly to me, "fall asleep on her breast." This last puzzled me no end, for if she was so beautiful, so entertaining and gay, why in the world did they fall asleep and of all places on her breast? I couldn't imagine

anybody sleeping that way on either Mamma's, Niania's, Miss Burns's or any other lady's bosom in my acquaintance.

Again and again I'd argue the point and again and again Vanka would patiently explain that the aforesaid gentlemen all got drunk and there was no knowing where a drunk would fall asleep and rest his befuddled head.

"Yes, but why always on the poor woman's breast?" I'd retort, still unsatisfied with his explanation. "It must have been so uncomfortable for her, so heavy and so prickly with the old General's moustache, which of course he had like most old Generals."

But Vanka would end the argument saying loftily: "Don't ask me, my child; ask the poet what he meant." And Dedoussia would nod his head and say: "Yes, that's what's known as poetic licence," adding to himself, "perhaps in more ways than one."

Mamma didn't like the song either.

"I'd much rather Tamara did not sing it," she'd say plaintively. "She's too young. . . . It doesn't sound right."

But Vanka laughed and pooh-poohed her and invariably had his way.

Tanka hated it too and would sit staring into space, tears welling in her eyes as though she actually saw the final scene when on a grey, misty morning, down the streets of the capital ambled that same pair of ancient bays, dragging behind them the wretched coffin containing the remains of their old mistress, now forgotten by everyone except two or three beggars who followed her bier.

That song had a strange fascination for Vanka and he'd sing it over and over again in a low, mournful voice, softly strumming his guitar and, like Tanka, staring into space.

As I think of it now it's as though during those few moments he was able to lift the curtain that concealed the future.

After that first evening Grischa often came to our house and soon the family noticed in alarm that he seemed attracted to me and that I was head over heels in love.

He'd come for dinner and in Vanka's study we'd play and dance and sing, but never were we left alone.

"There is no one quite like you, Tamara," he'd say, bending

down and looking at me in the thrilling way that made me feel like the Snow Maiden, about to melt and disappear. Perhaps he'd kiss me if we were alone, I thought frantically, and wished with all my heart that my family would be more considerate and vanish for a while. But they never did and kept closer to me than ever.

In the spring as usual we went to Stronskoe. Then in the late autumn, about a year after I met Grischa for the first time, his mother came to call on Mamoussia. When she left, I saw that Mamma was upset and angry. The minute Papa came home she sent me out of the room. But knowing that they were going to talk about me, I ran round to the other door and stuck my eye to the keyhole. I saw that Mamma was crying while Papoussia looked perplexed and abashed just like a big Newfoundland that had done something wrong. Then I heard her say: "And she had the impudence to tell me that because *your* grandmother was a Gypsy . . . my poor little Tamara——" Here she burst into tears* and I lost the end of the sentence. But I could guess what they were talking about. So that was it! Grischa's mother thought I wasn't good enough for him because of Great-Grandmother Dominica!

That was a terrible blow. For a few minutes I actually felt as though someone had hit me between the eyes. I saw stars and flashes and there was a rushing noise in my ears and a sharp pain in my head. That was the first time in my life that I found out what humiliation meant.

Then a hot wave of anger swept over me and I felt like hitting back in a red-hot rage.

"So I wasn't good enough? All right! I'd show that old woman and Grischa and everybody. . . ."

When next I saw him, I was distant and very dignified. At first he seemed puzzled; then he began to investigate. It was like playing the game of "Hot and Cold," when someone is supposed to find something hidden.

"Why have you changed, Tamara?" he persisted, trying to find the hidden reason for that change. "What has happened? Are you angry? Have you fallen in love with someone? Has somebody hurt you and if so, who? Whom have you seen recently? Anyone I know?"

Suddenly a light came into his eyes. "I know," he exclaimed,

"it's Mother. Mother has been here and has said or done something to hurt you. Wait. . . . Did she say anything to anybody about Princess Dominica, your great-grandmother? Oh, she did! So that's it. Well, forget it, forget it, forget it," and lifting me off the floor, to everyone's astonishment he threw me up to the ceiling, luckily catching me as I came down. "Listen, you're the nicest little thing I've ever known and Mother will say that too when she gets to know you better. Now, smile, laugh, dance, sing! Come on, be yourself. . . ."

What could I do but weaken in my firm intention to remain distant and aloof? The important thing was that Grischa cared and nothing else mattered.

And so, everything in this extremely simple love life of mine was going along romantically and smoothly when suddenly, like a dark cloud in a blue sky, a rival appeared on my horizon. Into our home she came to live, Maria or "Bay" (short for Baby) Stronskaia, second cousin of ours, whose parents had both died the previous year in a train accident. Papa and Mamma, always impulsive and warm hearted, had decided to adopt "the poor little orphan." Her coming did not affect either Vanka or Tanka much as they were grown-up and living their own lives independently, but it certainly upset mine.

Nineteen years old at that time, "divinely tall and most divinely fair," Bay was a beautiful girl of the slow, languorous, apparently kind and easygoing type. "Apparently," because beneath that surface of gentle and sweet good humour that nothing ever seemed to ruffle, she possessed a cold, calculating will of iron.

"Just so" were her favourite two words and no matter what opinion was expressed she'd smile sweetly and murmur: "Just so," always agreeing with everybody in private, always making the person she was talking to last feel that he was absolutely right. It didn't make any difference to her that a minute later somebody else would say the exact opposite.

"Just so," she'd murmur with a wistful note of yearning in her soft voice, which conveyed more forcefully than any intelligent sentence her heartfelt admiration for the words of wisdom that she had just heard.

"An unusually clever girl," was everyone's unanimous opinion after a *tête-à-tête* with her. A *tête-à-tête* was the one

thing she demanded, undoubtedly realizing the confusing danger of uttering her famous "Just so" in public. Otherwise most of the time she was silent, though her expressive blue eyes showed her profound admiration for everybody in general.

However, if she noticed that someone was being ridiculed or slighted, she'd immediately side with the majority. Afterward she'd make up to the unfortunate one in a charming, intimate *tête-à-tête* and laughingly explain that the "gentle teasing" was merely in good fun.

"After all, one never knows," she'd tell me later confidentially. "Remember the old saying, Tamara: 'Never spit into a well—you may have to drink out of it.' "

Being three years older than I and so much more sophisticated, she seemed to take a great deal of pleasure in "opening my eyes to life," as she put it. Accustomed to the rough-and-tumble companionship of Vanka and Tanka with their teasings and pranks, I couldn't understand Bay's "smoothness" and in my heart of hearts distrusted her, though at the same time I was flattered that she treated me as a grown-up, her equal.

"Girlikins," she called me tenderly, and would obligingly offer to wash my hair with egg and camomile so as to "try and make it a little lighter"; and she would powder my shiny nose and rub little dabs of rouge into my olive skin.

"You're so dark, darling," she'd say laughingly, hugging me and at the same time glancing complacently over my head into *the* mirror at her own reflection. "Anyone can see that you're a little Gypsy, bless your heart. Really I envy you. I am tired of my fair skin and golden hair." She'd sound so sweet and kind as she said those words and yet, somehow, I'd feel that she was loving her fairness and despising my darkness. She always made me think of a beautiful marble statue of a goddess, Juno, Venus, or Diana, for her features were straight and classic and her dresses invariably "draped" to fit exactly her magnificent body. But she was at her best in the evenings when she'd wear her favourite white satin and pearls.

The very first day that she spent with us she heard someone mention Grischa and then saw me blush. Tenderly she put her arm round me and led me to one side.

"Darling, you're crimson," she whispered, "but no one noticed except me. Stand with your back to everybody and I'll

shield you while you compose yourself. Meanwhile, tell me all about this Grischa—who is he?"

She listened attentively to my glowing description of him and stroked my hand. When I finished, she dropped me a little curtsy.

"So it's going to be Princess Tamara Kanussin soon," she exclaimed playfully. "Congratulations, girlikins darling."

To my annoyance, because I felt it was unlucky, she went on to say that she would be my bridesmaid and the godmother of my first baby. After all, Grischa had not even proposed to me—what was the use of such talk? Secretly I made a little Gypsy sign with my fingers to ward off the danger of bad luck and hastily started to talk about something else. She gazed at me with an amused look, and remarked: "Superstitious? Very well, darling; we won't mention the subject again."

A few days later Grischa came to dinner. For the occasion Bay put on her trailing white satin gown ("Just an old rag, girlikins") and goddesslike, wrapped her long golden tresses round her shapely little head. Her lovely features, cool and calm in their perfection, seemed more purely classic than ever and only her blue eyes shone with hidden fire.

She came in slowly, effectively, when everyone was assembled in the drawing-room before dinner and I heard Grischa gasp: "Good Lord, who is that beauty?" We had just been talking and as usual he had bent over me and, gazing into my eyes, murmured: "You dear little thing." Now, in a second, I was forgotten. In amazement he stared at Bay as she came toward him, smiling gently.

"I have heard so much about you," she said, looking at him with unconcealed admiration, as he bowed low over her long, limp hand. For a moment they faced each other, a stunning pair; he dark and handsome and she all white and gold. In a low voice he said something to her and smilingly she replied: "Just so."

He took her in to dinner and I followed behind with Vanka.

"Don't let that dear cousin of ours make a fool out of you," he whispered, giving me a familiar little shake. "She may look like a swan to some people but she's only a flat-footed barnyard goose to me. Soft and gentle on the outside but hard as a mattress filled with nuts. I could always see right through her tricks. But

you stand up for yours. And my girl, and remember that in your own ridiculous way you are not too bad-looking yourself."

But as we passed the mirror in the foyer I could see myself, small and dark with that funny olive skin and cloudy black hair.

Just like a regular Gypsy compared to Bay's gorgeous golden beauty, I thought disconsolately and for the first time wished that Great-Grandfather Yakov Dmitrievitch had married someone else.

At dinner Bay and Grischa got on "like a house on fire" as she later told me, adding affectionately: "I am so glad he liked me, darling, because after all he is going to be my cousin soon." Though she was smiling sweetly, I hated the way she said that and again, in despair, made the secret sign to ward off bad luck.

But, alas, it was too late. From then on Grischa had no eyes for anyone but Bay, while she, in her soft, pliant manner, showed that he was the only man in the world for her, practically her lord and master. In a mysterious, indefinite way she always managed to belittle me in his presence, calling me—oh, very lovingly—"our poor little Tamara," "that innocent child" or "our Gypsy girl." I could see that he was gradually losing all interest in me and becoming more and more enslaved by her beauty and sweet, cloying charms.

A few weeks later she confessed to me, shyly with a becoming tremble in her voice, that she had fallen violently *in love* with Grischa.

"Listen, girlikins, darling," she said, rubbing her soft, fair cheek against my dark one, "we've got to talk this thing over, just you and I together. Do you really love him? Because if you do, I'll go away and he'll forget me and come back to you. Don't think about me; I'm used to sorrow"—here her lovely eyes filled with tears—"the loss of my dear parents, the sadness of being a homeless orphan, unwanted, alone" (which wasn't true as Papa and Mamma had adopted her), "the tragedy of loving someone who is not for me, whom in honour I cannot marry, even if he asked me to."

Had I been a few years older, I would have known exactly how to cope with such a situation. But being only sixteen and a very inexperienced, silly sixteen at that, I fell for her line completely. With a sinking heart I saw the tragedy of her poor, broken young life, an orphan, all alone in the world (I couldn't

say penniless as she had a quarter of a million roubles to her name), in love with a man whom she could not marry because of an insuperable barrier. And that barrier was I, Tamara, blessed with a family, a home and surrounded with loving people. And so much younger than poor Bay, already an old maid (at sixteen, nineteen or twenty seemed pretty much advanced) with a hopeless future of loneliness ahead. Poor, poor Bay! And it was in my power to make her happy.

"Love thy neighbour" and "There is no greater love than to give one's life for someone else." Father Trofim always insisted that Christ demanded it of us and Niania repeated it again and again during her early morning lessons. Well, here it was! My opportunity, my chance to do the right thing in a big way, to prove that I loved my neighbour more than myself.

Tears came rushing down my face. I choked with pity, pity for Bay, for myself, with love and the importance of self-sacrifice.

"Bay, oh, Bay," I sobbed, flinging my arms round her, "i swear I don't love him! You may have him. Marry him; be happy! You have my blessing."

At that moment I was definitely two people: one part of me participated thoroughly in this supposedly noble gesture of abnegation, while the other stood by screaming: "Don't be such a fool, Tamara; don't ruin your life for her. She's not worth it! She'll get somebody else. As Vanka said, stand up for yourself and hang on to what belongs to you."

This second half might have won after all, but I remembered how Grischa had neglected me in his newly-found admiration for Bay. That decided me once and for all.

"He doesn't really want me," I thought desperately; "he's in love with her and forgotten all about me. Let him have her!"

"Yes, Bay, I mean it; I don't love him," I cried aloud, hot and flushed and wet with tears as I threw my arms round her once more.

"No use doing this thing half-way," I admonished myself; "give everything or nothing! And it's everything right now."

At that moment I felt exalted and happy.

With surprising calmness and a peculiar smile on her curved lips, Bay gently pushed me back and, wiping my cheeks with her delicately scented pocket handkerchief, murmured: "Darling,

don't cry so. After all, if you don't love him, why get upset this way?"

Not love him? I thought wildly, staring at her in stunned silence. Was that all my great, big, beautiful sacrifice meant to her? For a second I felt like pulling those golden tresses and slapping those smooth cheeks of roses and cream. But an odd feeling of cold numbness crept over me as though I were turning to ice, "or salt like Lot's wife," I thought dejectedly, all my elation and happiness gone, shivering a little and hardly hearing Bay's cooing words about "eternal friendship and love."

After that scene I fully expected that Grischa and Bay would announce their engagement at once. But to my puzzled surprise nothing of the kind happened. True, the next evening they had a long *tête-à-tête*, during which Bay seemed unusually animated for her and talked a good deal. But whatever she said apparently did not make him particularly happy, for he sat there, looking glum and puffing away silently at his short, amber pipe. Anxiously, I watched them out of the corner of my eye from the other end of the room where Vanka and I were playing draughts. Vanka, too, seemed extraordinarily quiet and I could see that he was also watching the other pair out of the tail of his eye. Several times he muttered to himself angrily, but when I asked him what he was saying he replied: "Oh, nothing, nothing at all."

Then suddenly he burst forth: "It makes me sick to see the way that precious cousin of ours is throwing herself at Grischa's head. And he, the fool, doesn't know how to take it. As a matter of fact, he doesn't know what he wants himself, the beggar-beast-bloody-old-fool, goddam him!"

That familiar old phrase magically helped me more than anything else.

Next day Vanka and Tanka had a long talk with Mamma. It was a mysterious kind of talk, because they locked the doors and to my indignation stuffed cotton wool into the keyholes. It lasted for ages. Finally, when it was over, they both came to my room, where, dying of curiosity, I was trying to pass the time painting a green frog on my white porcelain stove. I knew they had been talking about me, because through the cotton I managed to hear them say "Tamara" several times, but I couldn't imagine what it was all about. When they came in, I dropped my brush full of green paint and rushed to them.

"What was it? What did you talk about?" I screamed, while Vanka and Tanka looked at each other in feigned amazement.

"Talk? What talk? Who talked about anything? And if they did—they didn't about you!"

"That is a most ungrammatical sentence, my dear Tanka," remarked Miss Burns, disapprovingly, from the depth of her armchair where she sat knitting. "I've noticed that you have been using very bad English lately. And if I were you, I would not tease that poor child any longer. She has been on tenter-hooks all morning. You know how inquisitive she is."

"Oh, very well," they exclaimed, "we'll take pity on your poor child. Listen, Tamara, we've got news for you—big news! Hold on to your wig and your teeth and pants or you'll lose them all from amazement."

"Please, please, please," I screamed, hopping round in a frenzy of excitement. "What is it? For pity's sake, tell me or go away!"

"Shall we?" they looked at each other in owlish interrogation.

"All right, then! Don't say anything, and get out of here before I throw my green paint all over you!"

"Don't you dare, you ungrateful little wretch, you beggar-beast . . . you . . ."

"All right, all right!" I yelled, "I won't throw anything. Only tell me before my heart bursts and I die. It's no use telling anything to my corpse."

"Very well, my good child," said Vanka gravely, "it's like this: we, your elders and betters, have decided that you are to make your *début* a year earlier than you were supposed to."

"As soon as you've graduated from Madame Courbat's, provided you manage to accomplish that feat," added Tanka sententiously; "because, of course, no graduation, no *début*, that's understood."

My *début*? So soon? In a paroxysm of ecstasy I danced round the twins.

"You did it, you did it. I know, I know! Oh, Vanka-Tanka, you doves, you angels, you little souls! But why, why?"

"Because we want you to have a good time and forget those bloody fools, Grischa and Bay, and all the other nonsense that has been cluttering up your foolish time these days," they declared. "You've been mooning round like a sick calf and we're

tired of seeing you that way. Upsets our stomachs and our nerves and all that!"

And all that! Bless their twin hearts! I couldn't believe my good luck. In a frenzy of joy I dashed out of my room into the corridor, shrieking: "Listen, everybody, listen! I am going to make my *début*, my *début*, my *début*!"

Doors flew open and amazed faces popped out. Niania, Frossia, Miss Burns, Vanka, Tanka, Bay—everybody came running after me as though I were the Pied Piper of Hamelin and the corridor became filled with excited people. Finally reaching Mamma's room, I raced into it without knocking and, twirling her round, started a wild fandango, singing at the top of my voice: "I am going to make my *début*."

CHAPTER X

MAID OF HONOUR

LUCKILY I managed to graduate. Two weeks before Christmas the "*début*" took place in Dedoussia's big house on the English Quay overlooking the Neva River. The white marble staircase, the ballroom, the three drawing-rooms, green, white and blue, the picture galleries and dining-room were all decorated with flowers, specially brought from the Riviera for the occasion.

Alkvist, the famous *tapeur* or dance-music player, sat at the piano keys, dressed in his frock coat with a gardenia in its lapel. He was an elderly man of Swedish origin, tall, blue-eyed and heavy set, who had played at all the *débuts* of our mothers and knew them "as well as his daughters," he said. Naturally he took great interest in *their* young daughters and looked upon us with affectionate amusement as his "grandchildren of the dance."

In a frothy pink dress, with a corsage of roses, and a little wreath in my hair, I stood at the head of the marble stairs with Dedoussia, Mamma and Papa. As the guests came up and were announced I curtsied formally to the ladies, shook hands with the gentlemen and plucked excitedly at the girls as they passed by.

A hundred guests • were invited and when they were all assembled, Alkvist struck up the first waltz:

"Ta—tra—tarn, ta—tra—tarn, ta—tra—tarn—tarn." It was the same waltz he had played for many years at all the other d6buts, including Mamma's and Tanka's.

"May I have the honour of opening the ball with you?" asked Vanka gravely, bowing to me as though I were a stranger. He was dressed in his white and silver uniform, his red hair was carefully brushed down for the moment at least and he smelled beautifully of Atkinson's "New Mown Hay" and tobacco.

"Thank you," I replied just as formally and placed my left hand on his right shoulder, while he put his arm round my waist. For a moment we swayed to the opening measures of the Viennese Waltz; then off we went, gliding round the ballroom, the first pair on the floor. Immediately the others followed and the ball, "my ball," began.

I had never experienced such happiness. I might have been dancing with angels in Heaven, for all I knew. I lived from dance to dance and nothing else mattered, not even my partners. Just so they had a pair of good dancing legs and rhythm, that's all that counted. Their looks made no difference to me. Handsome or ugly, tall or short, thin or fat, clever or stupid, amusing or dull—it was immaterial as long as they kept me twirling and gliding over that lovely, slippery floor that looked like golden ice, to the strain of Alkvist's waltzes.

Then came the square dances: the quadrilles, and the lancers; the stately Pas de Quatre and the Chaconne; finally the mazurka and cotillon, with their customary favours.

It was then, as at all the other balls, that huge, gilded baskets of flowers were brought into the centre of the ballroom, again those beautiful Riviera flowers that looked so incongruously lush and summerlike against the background of our cold winter waiting for us outside the tall, frost-covered windows.

From these baskets the master of ceremonies, or the *Dirigeur* as he was called, distributed bouquets of violets, jonquils, daffodils or single, long-stemmed roses to the "cavaliers" for them to present to their partners.

And there were long wreaths of lovely artificial apple blossoms or magnolias for the girls to hang round their necks, and white silk parasols on which were painted by hand clusters of pink roses tied with blue ribbons, and white kid cases for visiting cards and little silk bags and painted fans.

Last came the famous classical favours that never failed to adorn every ball: the long, wide, satin ribbons to which were attached little silver bells that tinkled with every movement of the dance. These ribbons, reaching almost to the hem of the skirt, usually bearing the colours of the house—blue and yellow, red and grey and so forth—arrived in huge clusters and again were distributed by the Dirigeur to every cavalier, who would present his ribbon to the girl he wanted to dance with. The ritual was always the same. He'd stop in front of her little gilt chair, click his heels, bow and offer her the ribbon, while she would get up as gracefully as she could, and accept the ribbon, which she'd loop over her right arm so that it would fly out like a colourful streamer as she danced.

The more popular the girl, the more ribbons she had, until they became so heavy she could hardly lift them. It was the duty of the Dirigeur to see that the less popular girls received a fair amount of ribbons too, and if he noticed a poor little wall-flower sitting with only a ribbon or two on her arm, he'd send as many young men as he could to take her at least once round the room and leave her with the benefit of extra ribbons.

After the ball we'd usually hang those ribbons on, over and round our mirrors, of the cheval glass type, and at the end of the season distribute them among the younger girls who had not yet made their débuts, our maids and the peasant girls in the country. A few special ones we'd keep as souvenirs.

Of all the favours those ribbons were undoubtedly the most appreciated and most highly prized. They were our favourites, our tokens of happiness, success and glory—if only "morning glory" at that.

Later I could not remember anything of that particular ball, except the dancing, the music, the dresses, and the way the rooms looked. I was so excited that if my life had depended on it, I could not have said truthfully whether I had chattered without stopping, been as silent as a mute or heard any word that any person said to me.

During those few hours it was as though my brain had fallen under a spell and I lived only with my senses, floating blissfully in a sea of lovely music, breathing intoxicating perfumes that surrounded me on all sides, seeing only beauty everywhere.

That again was a milestone in my life, a shining post of gold.

Soon after my ball, to the surprise of the family because I was so young, I was notified that I had been created Maid of Honour to both Empresses, the Dowager Empress Marie and the younger, reigning Empress Alexandra, and had been given the diamond insignia, or *Chiffre* as it was called. This title was always bestowed on girls of certain families who more or less knew that by right of birth, or due to the position of their parents at Court, they would be created Maids of Honour, sometimes though rarely at their débuts, but most often a couple of years later, on the birthday or name day of one of the Empresses. However, if a girl became engaged sooner, the Chiffre would be given to her at the time of her betrothal. A married woman could no longer be Maid of Honour, though all her life she kept the Chiffre and always wore it at Court functions. Besides it entitled her to ask for presentations for herself and her daughters not only at the Court of Russia, but at foreign Courts as well.

The title of Maid of Honour (*Freylina* in Russian, from the German *Fräulein*) had existed for nearly two hundred years and been conferred on generation after generation of young girls. In Grandmother's day "pin money" or a yearly income of, I believe, three thousand roubles accompanied the bestowing of the Chiffre, but in my day the Court had grown stingy and pin money was completely omitted. But even so, it must have cost a pretty penny to give every year a certain number of girls the insignia, bearing the two letters M and A (for Marie and Alexandra), topped by the Imperial crown—all made of fair-sized, good, clear diamonds. The Chiffre rested on a bow of sky-blue moiré silk ribbon that had to be worn with it. The whole thing came in a little square red leather jewel box, lined in white velvet, with the Imperial crown stamped on its lid in gold.

A messenger from the Court jeweller brought me the Chiffre just as I was bathing the dogs. Vanka saw him first and came tearing down the corridor shouting:

"Quick, beggar-beast, quick, there's a man with something for you in the hall. It's a surprise! Hurry!"

A surprise! That magic word was always enough to get me flying, and without taking the trouble to wipe my hands or smooth my hair, I raced back after Vanka, screeching at the top of my voice:

"What is it, Vanka? What is it? Tell!"

In such an unladylike manner, wet, dishevelled and shrieking, I burst into the entrance hall where stood the messenger. With perfect manners, politely ignoring my extraordinary appearance, he bowed gravely and handed me a package.

It was my diamond Chiffre. Now I was a full-fledged Maid of Honour of the Court of Russia! The messenger departed and in an ecstasy of joy I turned a somersault and stood on my head, whereupon Vanka promptly pinned the Chiffre to the seat of my white calico pants.

"Look, look, at the new Maid of Honour!" he yelled as the family rushed in to find out what all the noise was about.

Tanka shrieked with delight and the gentlemen roared with laughter, but Mamoussia indignantly unpinned the Chiffre and gave me a smart slap on the same place instead of diamonds.

That I had been created Maid of Honour at seventeen was probably done to please Dedoussia, who had been a crony of the late old Emperor and was therefore frequently accorded little privileges not often given to others.

He had reached a point when every time Court promotions were awarded, he'd expect one for himself. A week or so before "promotion day" he'd pace the floor like a caged lion and on the day itself sit and wait expectantly for the glad tidings to arrive. If he got what he wanted: a higher rank, a cross, a star, a decoration, a ribbon—he'd be as pleased as a small boy with a new toy, loudly praising the fairness of those in power who distributed the various honours. But if he had been overlooked, he'd go to bed bitterly disappointed and stay there in the dark for days, refusing to eat, his head turned to the wall.

"I am forgotten," he would say mournfully with big, pathetic, wistful "monkey" eyes. "No one wants me any more. My country does not need me. My services are no longer required. No longer am I to be encouraged by a trifling acknowledgment for my lifelong devotion and faithfulness. Imbeciles and jackasses make up the promotion lists! I might as well be dead."

We would hover round him, bathing his forehead with Eau de Cologne, brewing his favourite tea, waving fans and hugging and kissing **him**.

That was a tragedy and the whole family would be plunged into gloom.

On the other hand, if he had not been overlooked, the rejoicing would be unbounded and a festive spirit reigned in the house for days. The Emperor, who loved Dedoussia, knew this weakness of his and consequently tried to decorate him as much as possible, even though it had become a standing joke at Court. Thus, though Dedoussia was retired, he had been made Major-General, Lieutenant-General and full General and given ribbons, stars and crosses enough to make him look like a Christmas tree when he put them all on.

Undoubtedly it was for his sake that to everyone's surprise I had been created Maid of Honour at seventeen, an unusually early age.

Immediately Mamoussia, flattered and delighted, ordered my red velvet Court dress, embroidered in gold with a train three yards long, and a white satin underdress embroidered in silver. To complete the costume there was the *kakoshnik*, the traditional Russian diadem-like headdress which was worn with a long veil of white tulle.

It was all very effective and made the homeliest girl look beautiful.

My first Court ceremony took place at ten o'clock in the morning at the Winter Palace.

The previous evening at nine Mamma had ordered me to bed so as to get a good night's rest and look my very best *next* morning. Trying hard to be polite and respectful, though inwardly boiling with indignation (just as I had on my first Easter Eve three years earlier) I answered as dutifully as I could and, grumbling to myself, went to my room, knowing perfectly well that I wouldn't sleep all night from excitement.

As usual Niania was waiting for me with the same hot-water bottle that still leaked occasionally, and a glass of warm milk that she had just heated over the same antiquated and smelly little spirit lamp. The scratchy old flannel nightgowns no longer existed and had been replaced by a collection of long-sleeved cambric ones with collars and frills.

"Come in, come right in; everything is ready for you, my little dove."

The same old nurse, saying the same old words that I had heard thousands of times. Nothing ever changed where Niania was concerned. I might be grown-up, a debutante and a Maid

of Honour, but to Niania I was and always would be nothing but "that child,"

As usual she tucked me in and prayed over me, gently stroking my head. Then, though I begged her to stay and talk to me, or tell me a story, she tiptoed out of the room and left me wide awake, listening to the quarterly chimes of the white china clock, counting the minutes and the hours as they slowly crept by.

In the dim light of the lampada, burning in front of the icons, I could see the outline of my Court dress hanging on the clothes-tree specially made for it. The long train lay on the floor nearly half-way across my room and I fancied that I could see the occasional glitter of the gold lilies embroidered on the deep ruby-red velvet.

To-morrow, no to-day already, I would wear that wonderful dress and hear the great train swish behind me as I curtsied in low Court fashion, my knees nearly touching the floor. I didn't have to learn how to perform that way, since we were taught the Court curtsies at our first dancing lesson and practised them each time afterward. But it would be difficult to curtsy properly with all that length and weight of heavy velvet behind me. I only hoped that I wouldn't get tangled up in it and fall down as some girls had, right in front of the Empresses too. I had told Niania my fears and she promised to pray for me all the time that I was at the Palace.

It was still dark when she came to "wake" me up, bringing me a cup of hot cocoa which she knew I liked better than the milk. She was shocked to see me sitting up, "like a parrot," she said, and to hear that I hadn't slept a wink.

"A fine face you'll have, my rabbit, eyes all pink and swollen and nose puffed as though you had a cold. And all because you were a disobedient child and didn't try to sleep. The *Gosoudar* Emperor and the Czarinas will wonder at your looks and think 'what a very ugly little girl.' "

But despite her gloomy forebodings, my eyes weren't swollen and my nose wasn't puffed in the least. On the contrary I had never looked more awake or less "puffy." One glance in the mirror showed me that my eyes were wide open and shining with excitement and my nose perfectly thin and white.

After I bathed, the hairdresser came in. (And oh, how sleepy he looked! He smelled stuffy too, as though he hadn't washed

properly that morning.) He arranged my hair so that it would hold the kakoshnik and the veil in place. Then modestly he disappeared while the dress was put on: first the stiff white satin underdress, then the enormous red velvet train. After that he came back and fixed the kakoshnik and veil as best he could, 'grumbling under his breath at my unruly cloudy hair that wouldn't stay in place and seemed alive, he said.

When I was ready, I went into Mamma's room, where she stood in front of her long mirror while old Frossia crept round her on all fours, putting the finishing touches to her dark-green velvet train embroidered in gold and trimmed with black fox.

All the Maids of Honour had exactly the same Court dresses of red velvet. The married ladies could wear whatever colour they wished—only the cut and length of the dresses had to be absolutely according to Court regulations.

Tanka's train was of pale green, which was very effective with her red hair, while Bay's was exactly like mine as she was a Maid of Honour too.

When at last we were all ready, Papoussia, Dedoussia and Vanka joined us, resplendent in their uniforms. Then we climbed into our two landaus, Mamma, Dedoussia, Tanka and I in one and Papoussia, Vanka, Boris and Bay in the other. Off to the Winter Palace we went, drawn by the "first-best" and "second-best" pairs of horses. Smely and Bely were left at home in the stables, not being handsome enough for this gala occasion.

It seemed strange to be driving through the streets at such an early hour, all dressed up in Court finery. I sat shivering with excitement, praying that nothing awful would happen to me and that I wouldn't stumble, fall, lose my petticoat or my drawers, or worse still have a stomach ache, loud hiccoughs, or be seasick in front of the whole Court.

"Look at Tamara; she's going green," exclaimed Tanka.

"So she is," cried Mamma in alarm and immediately produced out of her silk bag a little bottle of smelling salts for me to sniff deeply, while Dedoussia, hastily opening the window in case of an accident, patted my hand and said: "It's all right, *doushenka*, nothing is going to happen to you! You'll be quite all right and have a lovely time. I, Dedoussia, tell you so."

Soon we joined the long file of carriages and then began the interminable process of going and stopping, going and stopping

until I felt I couldn't stand it any longer and would any minute jump out of the carriage and run. But at last we arrived at the Winter Palace, under the porte-cochère and were ceremoniously handed out by the old Swiss in his red livery, the same old Swiss whom I had seen every Sunday as long as I could remember. He smiled at me reassuringly and muttered in his white beard as he handed me out: "Look at her please, grown up already—a Freylina, *tsk, tsk*. That's how time flies!" Like Dedoussia he made me feel a little better too, and, shedding my pelisse, I walked up the familiar stairs with Papa and the others, while Mamma rode up in the slow elevator that arrived long after we did.

Then Bay and I were directed to the Concert Hall where the Maids of Honour were assembling under the supervision of the masters of ceremony, carrying their traditional little canes of ebony and ivory with which they poked at our cumbersome trains so that they would lie on the floor properly spread out in all their fantail glory without any wrinkles, creases or ruffles. Besides, with those same sticks, the Masters of Ceremony would rap on the floor smartly to announce that their Majesties were about to appear.

It was all extremely impressive and even frightening if one was not hilariously inclined. But if one was apt to see the funny side of things and be a born giggler besides, then it was too bad for the unfortunate maiden. Between the task of controlling herself, curtsying deeply and appearing beautifully cool, calm and collected, there was little room for fits of indecent laughter. It was neither the time nor the place for it and yet, alas, that is just what happened to me!

A few minutes before the doors were about to fly open for the majestic appearance of the Emperor and Empresses, when we were lined up for the procession, one of the Masters of Ceremony, who had been tripping round the floor from girl to girl fussily poking at their tails, suddenly caught his foot in one of the voluminous trains. Down he went flat on his face with his nose buried in folds of velvet and his hand convulsively clutching the girl's tulle veil. There was a ripping sound, a faint shriek and there stood the hapless maid with her kakoshnik awry, a hole in her veil and a Master of Ceremony prostrate on her train, struggling to get up. Luckily they were at the farther-

most end of the hall which gave her time to straighten her head-dress, while he scrambled to his feet, all his dignity gone because in the confusion he had lost his toupee.

That was enough for me. Though I managed not to make any indecent sound, I shook and shook with inside laughter until I thought I was going to burst.

I laughed as the Emperor and Empresses appeared, the last ablaze with diamonds and in beautiful trains of silver and gold cloth, at least so I was told. But for the life of me I couldn't see a thing except the tip of my white satin slippers and the floor as I kept my eyes downcast, afraid that if I lifted them, I might explode.

I laughed as in pairs we followed the Empresses to the Palace Church, while the other half of my "pair," Masha Vasslova, anxiously pinched me to make me stop.

I laughed on and off throughout the service till my sides ached, and again all the way back.

It was a typical *fou-rire*, an outlet for all my pent-up excitement, which I had been so scared would express itself in a stomach-ache, seasickness or loud hiccoughs.

But luckily no one noticed me except the scandalized Masha who vowed she'd never pair off with me again, anywhere. After church we were served a hasty luncheon of hot bouillon and sandwiches. Then the actual presentation began.

First, in the Nicholas Hall, we, the Maids of Honour, under the supervision of the Masters of Ceremony, formed a long queue, each one holding the train of the girl ahead. Moving slowly in such a snake-like formation, one by one we reached the great white and gold doorway leading into the Concert Hall where stood the Emperor and the two Empresses, flanked with grand-dukes and grand-duchesses, ready to receive us. There on the threshold the girl who was now at the head of the procession paused for a second while her train was dropped by the girl behind her and the Master of Ceremonies adjusted it quickly with his omnipresent little stick. Feeling all alone in the world and on the brink of a vast frozen sea—the shining expanse of the floor to be crossed—she'd make her first curtsy.

According to etiquette, we had to curtsy four times: first as we entered, then in the middle of the hall where stood the Emperor, and the last two times to the Empresses as we kissed

their hands. Then as one by one we curtsied and swept out of the hall, the ceremony was over. Back to our homes we went, I personally feeling extremely grown-up, for was I not now a full-fledged Maid of Honour, and had not the Emperor and Empresses themselves sanctioned my entrance into the adult world with the stamp of their approval? That, I vowed, was something I'd keep reminding my family of, if ever any of them again treated me as a child!

CHAPTER XI

HE'S NOT MY PRINCE CHARMING

St. Petersburg, January 17.

FIVE o'clock of the morning and dawn of a day that should be poetic, but won't, I fear!

Lord bless, save and help me—it's here, my Betrothal Day and the beginning of a new life for me! Seems funny to begin a new life at seventeen! After all, I'm not yet an old maid. . . . My hair was put up only a year ago and my skirts lengthened. Why in the world do I have to marry so soon and Alexei of all men? True, he has a fine figure and is really quite handsome with his wavy fair hair, blue eyes, cameolike profile and chiselled chin. But oh, how proud he is of all this beauty. Anyone can tell *that!*

Most of the girls are wild about him and think he is "beautiful and wonderful" and gush, gush, gush. . . . But Varia Verengrod who detests him and calls him "The Handsome Young Man," has made up a rhyme that supposedly he declaims himself:

"I glory in my right profile,
I glory in my left. . . .
But most of all I glory
In my chin that has a cleft."

He dances beautifully too (swinging his elegant *derrière*) "with such perfect abandon and grace" (an admiring old lady exclaimed gazing at him enchantedly through her lorgnette) that I simply had to make up another special song in his honour, or

rather in his derrière's honour. It's called "The Song of the Splendid Bot"—The only tiresome part about it is that I have to explain to every new listener that "Bot" is our old nursery abbreviation for "Bottom."

It has to be sung to the tune of the bravura "Fol-de-rol Polka"—then it sounds very good.

*"This is the way
My grand Bot turns,
Grand Bot swings,
Grand Bot floats"*

Everybody thinks it's lovely, all except Mamma, who says it's disgusting.

But with all his good looks Alexei leaves me as cold as a dog's nose—(I like ugly Piotr much, much better!) Though he can be very amusing and charming, *something* about him makes me feel uncomfortable and "bristly" all over like a porcupine. Maybe it's the way he looks at one sometimes in a strange, *heavy* sort of manner, that I cannot describe. All I know is that it hits my stomach, makes me want to shout "No!" and leave the room. He drinks too. I can smell it on his breath when I am dancing with him. Also he has a queer way of squinting down my décolletage, any girl's décolletage, and then breathing hard as though he had been running.

Such very peculiar habits—and I find them most disturbing!

And yet Mamma says there are many points in his favour. He is still fairly young—five years older than I, which isn't so bad—of good family, a prince (alas, not *my* Prince Charming), very rich and has a brilliant mind. That's what everybody says. After all he graduated with high honours at the Corps de Pages and a great future lies ahead of him (this last is Uncle Vassili's opinion and as he's an admiral I suppose it's worth something, though he's never been to sea. Funny—an admiral who's never been to sea!) That's all very fine and good, but I do wish Alexei hadn't asked for my hand! It's amazing the way I always attract the wrong people! If there's a peculiar person in the room, he'll pick me out of a crowd and stick by me as sure as fate. It must be some fearful old family curse that has been handed down to me and I wish I knew the magic word that would break it up.

But to come back to Alexei! I cannot imagine why Mamma said "Yes" so quickly and then *ordered* me (that's just what she said: "I order you, Tamara") to "thank him for the honour" and accept. Honour—my little Fathers! Why should it be an *honour*? I'm just as good as he is, "a princess in my own right" (to use a lovely, pompous, old-fashioned phrase à la Ouida), seventeen and really pretty. After writing the words "really pretty" I got up and looked into my mirror so as to report honestly the way I appear to-day. . . . Well, it's all there and everything in good order: black eyes ("like cherries," Uncle Anatole said yesterday. He's a funny old thing—the way he likes to hug me and whisper nonsense in my ear. But Mamoussia always frowns at him and says severely, "Don't be an old fool, Anatole. Leave the child alone." And he obeys her and then looks like a naughty little boy who has been scolded. Amazing how an old gentleman can really look that way!) But to go on with my looks ("always make an inventory of yourself before undertaking a serious step," says Father Trofim. Of course, as Father Confessor he means a "spiritual" inventory, but on one's betrothal day I think it should be a complete one, both spiritual and physical.)

All right! I begin again: Black eyes; black hair, with the ends a much lighter colour, so that when I twist the two pigtailed round my head they look as false as old Niania's switch, the one she puts on for church under her best Sunday bonnet; a dark, sun-tanned-looking skin; dusky red cheeks—no sweet maidenly pallor in them, ever; teeth very good, white and strong and even; mouth rather wide, but rather nice, I think, especially when I make that new sad smile, wiggling the corners first up and then down; nose—small and straight till it comes to the tip, then it turns up and looks impertinent so says Miss Burns. I'm sure she has punished me lots of times unjustly only because of my nose, which is so unfair! Anyhow it's like my Gypsy great-grandmamma's nose, they say.

Now to end the inventory: I'm the picture of health and bristling with energy, or is it life? Whatever it is, I can feel it popping out of me like a million electric needles and I'm not making this up, because if one brushes my hair in the dark, it crackles and makes sparks and if I rub my feet on the bearskin rug and then touch someone, the person jumps up and shrieks and accuses me of sticking pins into people. I hope I bristle that

way every time Alexei touches me; then perhaps he'll leave me alone.

So this is the way I look at six o'clock of the morning on the day of my betrothal. Those words sound biblical and I feel that way too, like a poor slave maiden sold to a wealthy patriarch.

I'd like to have someone else's opinion about my looks, but no one at home ever says anything definite or pleasant in that direction. Mamoussia keeps repeating that I am "as God made me"; Niania, that the important thing is to be "healthy and good"; and Miss Burns, that "virtue makes all young girls look beautiful." So there! It's most discouraging.

As for the gentlemen: Papoussia calls me "Martishka," monkey, and his "Coucoushka," the coocoo bird, while the uncles never change their silly habit of shouting "boulotchka," the bread ball, whenever they see me. Even the Court photographer said: "Mademoiselle is as mobile as a 'ouistiti' and therefore very difficult to photograph." Only Dedoussia always called me his little soul, "douschenka," and that is because he is my grandfather and sorry for me. But I did hear Mamoussia say to Papoussia last summer (I was behind the lilac bush then and they didn't see me) that "the child is growing prettier every day." If she meant my face, not my soul, then why not say so to me? Why not encourage me and give me self-assurance and confidence? I think it's wrong always to run down one's own child, especially when it's practically one's only child like I am. After all Vanka and Tanka are so much older that they don't count as children any more. Makes me feel lonely and uncertain, as though I am on one side of the fence and they all, bunched together, on the other. Perhaps that's why I accepted Alexei after all, because he said that I was "charmante" and "ravissante." It was nice to hear that, even though he looked at me very peculiarly when he delivered his compliments. I noticed, too, that the end of his nose twitched strangely and his ears suddenly looked pointed like a faun's. It gave me a queer feeling down my spine and inside my stomach—disturbing, though curiously, not unpleasant.

But time is passing and I must put down quickly everything that led up to this day. Otherwise I'll never catch up, for I haven't written in my diary since I hurt my hand.

Let me see. . . . I met Alexei exactly three weeks ago at the

Grand-Duchess's ball, or rather I sat down on his lap very suddenly without having the slightest idea who he was. It happened like this: I had been whirling round frantically in my favourite figure of the quadrille "Petit rond et voyageurs," when Ivan, the beast, let go of my hand and sent me flying across the ballroom like a bullet. The floor was so slippery I couldn't stop, and as I tore along and gasped my only thought was: "I'm going to be killed! Dear God, I'm going to be killed!" Then came a terrific bump, a pain in my left arm, and I found myself sitting on a strange man's knee, a hard knee, too, like a rock that left a bruise on my skimpy behind ("a rabbit's behind," Vanka calls it). The man had caught me just as I was going to be hurled against the marble column next to him and really saved my life, but as he grabbed me he stupidly dislocated my right hand while at the same time I cut my left arm against the gold cross of his decoration—a nasty, deep gash that spouted blood all over my new dress and over his white uniform. Such a mess! Then while I was still breathless and dizzy, like an idiot unable to get off his knee, he laughed uproariously and shouted: "Thanks for throwing yourself into my arms, *Devotchka*, little girl. I've been watching you, waiting impatiently and hoping to have the honour of being presented to you. But this is so much better than the formal way."

Well, that brought me to my senses and to my feet and, jumping up, I felt like slapping his laughing, insolent-looking face. "Little girl," indeed! But at that moment Mamoussia and the Grand-Duchess came up swiftly and, seeing my blood over everything, rushed me away to the dressing-room. There a doctor appeared like a jack-in-the-box, with iodine and bandages, and a maid with smelling salts. Altogether there was a big fuss and I felt dioroughly ashamed of myself. Besides the cut I—or rather the man—had dislocated my right hand and it had to be put back into its place again. Mamoussia took me home at once and so ended the disgraceful episode. At least that's what I thought!

But no, next day at tea time "Prince Alexei Alexandrovitch" was announced and into Mamma's drawing-room walked last evening's gendeman whose lap unfortunately had saved my life—by that I mean I would rather have been saved by somebody else's lap. But I had to thank him and pour out tea with my

bandaged hand and offer him bonbons and biscuits. And he sat and sat and sat—and talked and talked and talked, oh ever so charmingly I admit, until it was six o'clock and time for him to go away.

"You made quite an impression on the young man," Mamma remarked, looking very pleased—and that was the beginning of the end. From then on I saw him every blessed day for three weeks, all over town. Wherever I happened to be he'd pop up at my side and twitch his nose and point his ears and eagerly gaze down my neck and shoulders. He monopolized my dances and kept giving me all his share of ribbons and flowers at the cotillions until everybody teased and made fun of me and I was perfectly furious. But the worst part of it all was that Mamoussia kept beaming at him, making her "so happy" face. Then I knew I was lost. With Mamma on his side what could I do? I tried frantically to explain to him that I was in love with another man, Grischa, and couldn't care for anyone else. But he only laughed and said that he enjoyed competition and, being a huntsman, liked to stalk his quarry. A nice thing to say to a girl!

Well, anyhow, yesterday he proposed in a corner of Aunt Marie's drawing-room, while everybody was talking all round us. He had to shout to make himself understood and it was awfully funny to hear him yell: "Little Princess Tamara, I love you! Will you do me the honour of marrying me?" And it was a delight to shout back: "What are you saying? Sorry, I can't hear you! Marry me? Oh, no, no, thank you. I don't love you, but not at all."

Alas, he didn't look a bit disconcerted and, smiling his confident smile, marched off in search of Mamma. In less than ten minutes he had discovered her, explained the situation and brought her back in triumph. Then we had a scene. Mamoussia took me into Aunt Marie's bedroom and asked me if I had lost my head, refusing the most brilliant "parti" of the season.

"But, *Mamatchka*, I don't love him!" I wailed, kissing her hands and crying real, not crocodile, tears. "Please don't make me marry him!"

But she only shook her head and said: "Love will come later with marriage, darling. Mamma knows best—just trust her and all will be well. Don't you think I want your happiness more

than anything else in the world? You, the baby, the joy of my life!"

"Then why not let me marry Grischa? He hasn't married Bay and perhaps never will," I implored. "It was all a mistake! I love him and would be so happy."

"My child, Grischa is a nice boy, a very nice boy, but not at all suitable for you. Besides he hasn't asked you to marry him, has he?"

I thought of what his mother had said about my Gypsy blood and dismally shook my head.

"And besides there are quite a few things against the match." (Now Mamma was turning the tables on him!) "His father committed suicide—there was quite a scandal then; his mother is in the 'fast' Paris-Biarritz set; the size of their fortune is questionable and the name, not first-class at all."

"What do you mean, not first-class?" I interrupted indignantly. "Grischa is a prince, too, isn't he?"

"Yes, dear (by the way it was rude to interrupt Mamma), but there are princes and princes as you well know. Grischa's family is very 'nouveau* compared to Alexei's. Now Alexei belongs to one of the finest old families—no one could be more blue-blood than he is, his fortune is enormous and he has a splendid career ahead of him. I wouldn't be surprised if he'd be in the diplomatic service soon. You'd like to be an Ambassadors, wouldn't you, some day?"

But seeing that the prospect didn't impress me greatly, she went on hurriedly: "And he loves you, Tamara, darling, he is mad about you. He'll adore you and do anything to make you happy."

"But I don't love him, Mamoussia! He may be beautiful and intelligent and he does dance well and all that but he has a beastly way of breathing down one's neck and smelling of brandy. It's disgusting!"

"Oh, baby, what foolish talk! Why, my darling, all gentlemen drink a little—it's their masculine privilege and there is certainly nothing wrong about that, provided of course they don't get drunk. But would Mamma let you marry a drunkard? You, her little bird, her little rabbit?"

Then Aunt Maria came in and as soon as she knew what was going on, she took Mamma's side. I was a selfish little girl, she

exclaimed, to think only of myself and not of my dear mother. God would punish me for being so ungrateful, because he had sent great happiness my way and I, stupid, stubborn little creature, refused to take it.

"Poor, dear Marina," she then cried, throwing her arms round Mamma. "After all the sacrifices you've made—that it should come to this: a bitter disappointment, a blow from your youngest child, your Benjamin! Why, you silly, silly little thing!" (This to me) "Don't you know that any girl would jump at Alexei's offer? Just say no to him, definitely, and see what happens. He has only to lift a finger—the dear, charming boy, so gay, so debonair—and they'll all run after him like a flock of geese."

"Debonair? Oh, Aunt Marie, please," I giggled and then Mamma sadly apologized for me and my manners and the scene in her bedroom, and everything and, as usual, whisked me home.

Alas, the miserable affair was not over, for there in the drawing-room, who should be sitting and waiting for us but Alexei himself, looking the picture of innocence.

"If he proposes again, I order you to accept, if you want to make me happy and be happy yourself," whispered Mamma and then left us alone.

Of course he proposed all over again and this time I said: "Oh, all right," but added quickly, "though you must understand that I do not love you at all."

"I understand perfecdy," he replied, kissing my hand and that ended the proposal act.

Right then Mamma came in (she must have been awfully close to the door, eavesdropping, I fear), and blessed us with an icon that amazingly "happened" to be in her hand (she must have taken it off the wall in a hurry). Soon after, my fiancé (oh, dear!) left until to-morrow (or rather to-day) when he comes to ask formally for my hand.

I woke up at dawn in a fright, thinking: "Oh, what has happened?" just as I always did on examination days at school—the same sinking of the stomach, the same fright. I couldn't sleep any more and decided to put all this down in my diary. Goodness, it's already eight o'clock and I hear Niania coming up the stairs with breakfast.

Same evening.

Well, it's done! I am formally betrothed and don't know whether to laugh or cry. In a way it's all very ridiculous and yet at the same time, deep down inside myself, I am miserable. As far as appearances go the whole thing is very suitable and everything went off very well. First thing in the morning arrived an immense basket of lilies of the valley and white roses, tied up with white ribbons as wide as a sash. It was one of those enormous baskets that stand on the floor and nearly reach the ceiling. Two footmen carried it into my own little drawing-room and there it is now—a small mountain of loveliness. All the household came to look at it and exclaim and congratulate me, which made me feel rather important for the first time in my life. Papa and Dedoussia, who had both been asleep last night at the time of the famous proposal, finally gave their official consent this morning, though quite reluctantly and after a big fuss with Mamma. Both seemed to think that Alexei "wasn't good enough for our little girl," at least that's what they said and greedy annoyed Mamoussia who declared that they were a couple of old "ramolli," which is a nice French way of saying that one has softening of the brain.

"Ramolli or no ramolli, I don't like it," shouted Papoussia angrily, while Dedoussia bumbled into his beard like an echo: "I don't like it at all." Vanka and Tanka were very much against the marriage too, and protested loudly and long. The man was no good, they said, a heavy drinker, a woman chaser, "a bad type all round."

But as usual Mamma overrode their objections and made them eat out of her hand—by that I mean they finally gave in and blessed me, though very begrudgingly and full of rumblings of protest. I loved them for feeling that way, but after all what can we of the Gypsy side do against Mamoussia's will?

About noon Alexei arrived with a beautiful sapphire-and-diamond ring which he put on my engagement finger with a new kind of "so happy" smile intended to be sentimental and bridegroomish, I suppose, but that only made him look like a boiled owl. I purposely stood on Mishka, the bear rug, scratching my feet and hoping the electricity in me would prick him and make him jump. But, alas, as usual when one wants something

to happen, it never does and he put on that ring without even a single little crackle or prickle. That's strange, considering the amount of electricity in me, plus my antagonism toward him. Probably I didn't scrape my feet hard enough.

Papoussia and Dedoussia watched him put on that ring with the most disgusted expressions on their faces, as though they had just smelled something nasty. But seeing Mamma gazing at them reprovingly, they straightened themselves up, and said gravely but quite politely: "Be good to our little one, Alexei." Then they marched out of the drawing-room, arm in arm, as they always do when they want to show their displeasure. But Mamoussia paid no attention to them and pretty soon left me alone with Alexei. I was afraid he would kiss me, but thank goodness he didn't, and only twitched his nose and fished out of his pocket another present for me—this time a bracelet consisting of seventeen diamond hearts. I wondered if he'd keep pulling presents out of his pockets all afternoon like a magician with rabbits, but that was all for the day.

Alexei stayed for lunch, then at two o'clock the priest arrived and formally betrothed us in the presence of our relatives: Mamoussia, Papoussia, Dedoussia, Vanka, Tanka, Boris, Bay, all the uncles, aunts, cousins, and servants on my side and only Princess Agrippina Ivanovna, Alexei's mother—his father is dead—two fat old aunts, and one solitary uncle with a squint, on his side. Vanka and Tanka glared and openly showed their disapproval and again I loved them for it.

It's the first time I ever saw Alexei's mother and now I know whom he is like: same tall, slender figure; same kind of nose (only hers has a wart on its end—thank goodness, he didn't inherit that!); same very blue eyes and wavy hair. I couldn't see her ears or her legs and of course she didn't squint down my neck or smell of brandy. But otherwise the resemblance is complete. Oh, yes, I nearly forgot. She has a big *derrière* like a watermelon dressed in striped green satin. Everybody says she has a bad disposition, though she didn't show it to-day and was very amiable all round. She insisted that I call her "Maman" and I said: "Thank you, princess, I will," but the very thought lifts my stomach again. "Maman" indeed! But how in the world will I get round that? I must call her something! I can't just say "hey! you" to an old lady of forty-five.

After the service lots of people came in to congratulate us. I forgot to say I was all dressed up for the occasion in a new powder-blue dress, very soft and silky with a real "train" and lots of lace in front making a jabot. The buttons on the bodice and cuffs are real pearl and diamond ones, in the shape of little wheels, the biggest diamonds being in the middle, the smaller ones in the spokes and the pearls on the rims. Those buttons belonged to Grandmother and Dedoussia gave them to me this morning, a whole dozen.

I passed through a bad moment when Grischa came to congratulate us. Luckily I saw him enter the drawing-room and then stand there near the door, talking for quite a while. That gave me time to pull myself together. He probably did that on purpose so that my face would not give me away. If he had suddenly appeared in front of me, my cheeks would have gone as red as tomatoes and then everybody would have stared and made rude, gossipy remarks. Not that I really care, because I've told Mamma and Alexei how I still feel about Grischa and my conscience is perfectly clear. I'm not deceiving anybody. But when Grischa finally came up and kissed my hand, I felt like screaming: "Oh, please, please ask me to marry you right now and take me away from here! Quick, quick!" Then I'd gather up my train and run like a hare out of the house with him. How happy I'd be and what a beautiful scandal that would make! Even now I laugh inside when I picture the faces of Alexei, his mother and the priest. Lovely! Shocking, scandalous behaviour!

Oh, why don't we all give way to sudden impulses—life would be so much nicer! It's funny to feel wild and uncivilized inside and then behave outwardly with all the propriety and decorum of a "petite fille modèle" ... I wonder if really grown-up people, old people, feel that way too. Has a woman of forty any feelings left or does she live entirely in the past? I wish I knew. As far as I can see, twenty-five is the limit of youth, then begins middle-age up to forty, and old age from then on. As for fifty, sixty, seventy—up to a hundred, they must all be exactly alike. I'm thinking of the ladies, of course, because gentlemen are different. Why, only the day before yesterday old Admiral Bely tried to kiss me in the conservatory and everybody knows he is seventy-two. Then there is Uncle Anatole and his squeezings, and old Baron Shorsky. Every time he sees a pretty

young girl, he pops a monocle into his glass eye, stamps his right foot and exclaims: "Ha!" He doesn't go any further than that—just stamping and shouting—I mean, but then he's as old as the hills and would probably collapse like a crumbling mound of sand or an ant hill if he did anything more energetic.

But here I am talking about old Baron Shorsky instead of describing what happened on my Betrothal Day! Well, Alexei stayed and stayed and stayed. (It's going to be an awful bore if he keeps doing that every day.) He stayed for tea, he stayed for dinner, and then again he stayed all evening and drank red wine, glass after glass until his face shone like a lamp, his eyes got oily and his nose turned reddish. And he kept edging closer and breathing louder and twitching. At last the famous moment arrived and he kissed me . . . smack on the mouth, something no one has ever done before, because Papoussia, Mamoussia and Dedoussia kiss me on the forehead and everybody else on the cheek. This was new and most disagreeable as he kept breathing heavily, squeezing me and pushing until I backed up against the wall. There he practically pinned me to it so that I felt like a sandwich or a deflated balloon without any air inside. All I could see was that perfect nose of his which had gone very white, his closed eyes and a bead of perspiration that crawled down the middle of his forehead. Finally I gave him a good push with both hands and so ended my first läss.

I suppose it's a silly shame to admit even to my own private diary that I have lived seventeen years and never been kissed before, but how could any young man kiss me when I was never, never, never left alone with one? I hoped Ivan Ivanovitch would kiss me when I was fifteen. He was so nice and plump and fair and rosy—but was I ever alone with him? No, never! "Jamais, au grand jamais" as our French teacher used to say when she wanted to be emphatic.

And Grischa! He wanted to kiss me, I know, but there was Miss Burns sticking at my side like a wet leaf—dear, darling Grischa, how lovely it would have been, if he had kissed me! Instead, what do I get for the first time in my life? A kiss from Alexei that tasted of alcohol and smelled of perfume! It isn't fair and I know that I've been cheated out of something lovely. Even my French books, carefully marked "pour la jeune fille," always rave about "le premier baiser." And now I've missed

that for ever. No matter what happens, I'll never get a thrilling, poetic, lovely first kiss from the right man.

Seventeen, and already disillusioned! What awful luck!

Only five days since I wrote last and already everything is topsy-turvy. A new -routine has taken the place of the old one and my life is so changed that I feel like a different girl. To begin with there are no more "finishing" lessons, even the music lessons have stopped. Instead I sleep late in the mornings and then have endless fittings at dressmakers' and tailors' that last till lunch. In the afternoons the three of us, Mamma, Alexei and I, go paying visits all over Petersburg, leaving cards when we're lucky enough not to find anyone at home, or marching in and out of drawing-rooms on receiving days. It's always the same procedure: Mamoussia goes in first in her usual slow, dignified way; then I follow, trying not to bounce up and down like a sparrow, or step on her train; while Alexei closes the procession, with tinkling spurs that would sound all right if I didn't know on whose heels they were. Then Mamma embraces the hostess, I curtsy, and Alexei kisses her hand. After that we two join the group of young people round the big tea table, while the older ones sit together gracefully in little conversational groups, sipping tea and talking in low voices. It's awfully tiresome, because after saying "How do you do—and how do you do—and how do you do" again and "Thank you" for the congratulations about my dismal engagement, I have to sit with Alexei and goodness knows what a bore that is becoming.

At six o'clock we go back home, always dragging our "handsome young man" along with us. Dinner . . . and then a long evening *alone* with him! Luckily he keeps talking all the time as he drinks glass after glass of red wine. Then the squeezing begins and he bruises me and hopelessly ruffles my hair. I feel so foolish having to arrange it again like a housemaid who's been caught behind a door. This kissing business isn't quite as bad as the first time, because I have invented a game that I play while he does it. I count his kisses and hold my breath as long as I can. Then suddenly I let it go out of my lungs with a squeak. Thank goodness, that's beginning to annoy him seriously and he says that I am a cold girl with a deceptive warm exterior. Perhaps if he gets too disappointed in me, he'll back out of the

whole thing. But that is too good to be true and I don't dare hope.

St. Petersburg, March.

I haven't written for a long time because my life has been getting sillier and more uninteresting every day. If that is being betrothed and romantic—thanks for nothing at all. Really it's getting more and more discouraging: the usual enormous doses of my fiancé morning, noon and night; his burning eyes and hot hands, and his awful fits of love-making. It's all so depressing. What kind of life am I going to lead? What does it hold for me? I wish I were back in Mme. Courbat's school having fun again. I wouldn't mind even mathematics after what I've been through these past weeks. As for writing essays and compositions, I'd give my right arm to be at them again. The excitement of winning the prize, the staging of my play "Ivan the Terrible," the praise of our directress, the applause and the party in my honour! How can this business of being engaged compare to the other? And to think that it's all over! Only nine months since graduation; three months since my début and two months of betrothal. So many important things in such a short while! And how I used to think that time never moved, that I'd never grow up and that nothing would ever happen to me. Then everything comes on in a rush and sweeps me into a new kind of life. But is this life? Perhaps the old one was much more real . . . lessons, classmates, games, vacations, even the nursery with old Niania and my schoolroom at home with Miss Burns. Now I am betrothed and positively hate it. I still cannot stand Alexei, even though I am trying hard to endure him, if not love him, because, after all, he's going to be my husband whether I like it or not and it would be so much nicer, so much easier if I cared for him just a little. But how in the world does one go about changing one's feelings? Mamoussia says: "Love comes later, after marriage." But will it? And what makes it come? If only I had someone to talk to, to ask all those questions, but there isn't anyone, not a soul. People like Mamma, Miss Burns, et cetera, answer only generalities and banalities; and the young married women like Tanka act maddeningly mysterious and superior, as if they knew many important secrets that wild horses wouldn't drag out of them (though they're very intimate and

gossipy with each other and only "that way" with us unmarried girls). And what do we know? So very little, even though we pretend to know a lot. . . . Honestly, what do we know? That babies are not found under bushes? My goodness, any little girl knows that, though Mamma, poor darling, firmly believed that I thought that was where babies came from.

The other day I looked up my old diary and saw that I was fourteen when she called me to her room one evening and, looking very embarrassed and upset, told me that Tanka was "in a family way." (Of course, she knew that I wasn't blind and couldn't help noticing that something extraordinary had happened to Tanka.)

"It means," she continued, gently and impressively, "that God has placed a baby under her heart and she will carry the blessed angel until it is time for it to be born."

But when I asked her to explain how that baby got into Tanka and just how it would get out, she became awfully pink and annoyed and said that those were mysteries that one learned only after marriage.

"You can ask me anything you want to know, my child"—she had always said ever since I can remember. But when I asked her point-blank those two questions, she became really angry and exclaimed that I had a warped mind and a sinful imagination though she couldn't imagine where I had got it. Of course, that scolding shut me up and I have never asked her anything of that kind again.

As for the babies, I always knew that they grew like mushrooms inside their mothers, because I would see the young married women at our village church about to receive Communion before their children were born. They looked like balloons on legs, poor dears. Then, when I'd see them again, they'd be thin and flat and carry a baby or two in their arms.

It's funny, inexplicable how elderly people like Mamma think that we young people know nothing at all. It may have been that way in their day, but times have changed and so have we. In school, of course, we'd talk about "the mystery of life" but with all the explaining and arguing that went on, we still could not understand clearly. Books didn't help much in that direction either. Evidently experience must teach one and though I am much interested, I hate to think that Alexei will be my teacher.

Mamma said yesterday that on the eve of my marriage she'd have a "biblical talk" with me and that she'd explain the text about leaving one's father and mother and cleaving to one's husband or something like that. To "cleave" is to stick and that's what Alexei is doing, sticking away in our home morning, noon and night. I hardly need a biblical talk to explain that!

St. Petersburg, May.

Good news! We are leaving for the country next Tuesday and I'll be free again for four whole months! True, Alexei promised to visit us in September, but that'll be only for a few days and then I won't see him until our wedding in October. They—he, his mother and Mamma—have decided that October is an ideal month for a honeymoon, so October it shall be. There won't be a living soul in Petersburg at that time and I'd much rather be married in our own country church. But Alexei has to be married in his regimental church and by that time the regiment will be back from Krasnoe Selo. However, all that is very far away and I am to have four months of perfect freedom. Now we even go driving together, just Alexei and I—awful!

May 20.

Back home and loving it all! It's lovely to be in the old house again and to sleep in my own little bed in the nursery. It's grown awfully short or I've grown awfully long, but it's fun to stick out my feet between the railings. This is all so real, so natural and unlike the past winter in Petersburg. This is where I belong, where I have spent most of my life. How I wish I could stay here for ever. It's my own native soil, my air (the minute it gets into my lungs I begin to feel strong again), my everything. And to think that I have to leave it all and follow a strange man whom I don't love! But that is impossible. It's a nightmare and somehow or other I must get out of it. . . . I have four months to figure out how I can escape and escape I must. I can run away and hide somewhere, or pretend to be desperately ill, or force Papa and Dedoussia to side with me against Mamma. Something has to be done! Of course, it's a scandalous thing for a girl to break off her engagement, nearly

as bad as a divorce, and I will be practically an outcast, but I can stand the fuss and after all it will soon blow over. The only trouble is that it'll hurt Mamoussia dreadfully and I hate doing that. She has set her heart on this marriage. She told me yesterday that she had always wanted it, ever since I was a little bit of a thing. And now I've got to disappoint her!

The whole thing has to be worked out like a mathematical problem.

Luckily Dr. Roukovsky says that I am too thin and over-excited and need a long quiet rest in the country before getting married.

"Then the babies will start arriving," he laughed, winking at me, but Mamma looked very shocked and said severely: "Please, we won't talk about that."

Later she remarked apropos of nothing, that he was a dear but sometimes had very poor manners.

But manners or no manners Papoussia said exactly the same thing as the Doctor. He and Mamoussia were in the drawing-room and didn't notice that I was asleep on the bear rug in the corner. Their voices woke me up and I heard Papa say: "I still think that the Small One is far too young to marry. Why not wait another year or two? Otherwise, next year at this time, she'll be having a baby. It's preposterous!"

"It is not," Mama retorted indignantly. "Ever so many girls are married at seventeen, even earlier. Why, look at my grandmother—she was fourteen when she was betrothed. And she bore many children and was none the worse for it. And look at the peasant girls, how early they marry and have enormous families."

"Yes, and look like old women at forty," growled Papoussia. It was strange, sort of indecent to hear them talking that way—naturally, confidentially without Mamma making round eyes at him and saying her usual "Hush, dear, not now, not in front of the child." How horrified she would have been had she known that "the child" was there listening to their shocking conversation. Realizing that, I crawled away on all fours, past the sofa and the big table, into the next room. They couldn't see me as they were sitting in front of the fire with their backs turned my way, but they must have heard the swish of the silk portière, because Mamma exclaimed: "Hark, what was that?" and Papa

said: "Yes, I heard something too. It must have been the dog."

I didn't wait to hear any more revelations but flew on tiptoe down the corridor straight to my room. There I banged the door, locked it and took a good long look at myself in the big mirror. My figure seemed so small and thin, it was hard to picture it growing fat and wide as Tanka's did three years ago.

All this talk about "my baby" has given me the queerest sensation and I wish I hadn't heard it. There is something positively indecent about the whole affair. How can I face Alexei? Thank goodness, I won't see him for quite some time.

June.

Alexei writes every blessed day! Long, flowery letters, sprinkled with a lot of love business. I can just see him, Sugar Honeyvitch, getting ready to kiss and hug.

And he keeps sending me presents: a gold bracelet with a ruby clasp; a string of pearls; ear-rings—big yellow diamonds, much too heavy for my ears; and a diamond-studded tiara, shaped like a pair of spreading wings with one large round diamond in the middle to join the wings together. It's a ridiculous-looking thing, because it's exactly like the emblem of the Sleeping Car Company and I'll never wear it unless I go to a fancy dress ball as the "Spirit of the Wagon Lit." With the silly tiara came the first lines of the old popular song: "I shall weave you a diadem of fantasies and dreams and round your little throat I'll place a necklace of tears." Is that a delicate hint or a gloomy prophecy? Sweets arrive regularly and boxes of flowers that come straight from the Riviera in special refrigerator cars: violets, mimosa, roses, jonquils . . . such a stupid thing to have sent directly from Nice, when our garden is full of much lovelier flowers than those poor things that are kept artificially alive and fresh on ice.

He writes that he'll be here September 20. Oh, how can I prevent him from coming? How can I get out of this? Why did I ever say "yes"?

September 5.

Well, I've done it! I've written him a long, serious letter telling him that I positively do not care for him at all and want to

break off our engagement. I'll be counting the days and hours until he answers.

September 8.

Too early yet for an answer!

9th.

No answer!

10th.

Still no answer!

11th.

A telegram! He's arriving to-morrow. Oh, merciful Fathers, what a punishment. No letter, but the man in person. Now I'm in for a scene, heaven help me. Mamma doesn't suspect a thing and is delighted. She has ordered the best spare room to be made ready for him and all kinds of extra good things to eat and drink. And I am to wear my new summer dresses. . . . This is going to be awful.

12th, 10 A.M.

Mamma ordered me to get up at four and with Mania, my new maid, walk down the Avenue to meet Alexei. So that's what we did. (It was a lovely morning. As the sun came up the dew began to sparkle on the flowers, and on the leaves and the grass. It was like walking through a world of diamonds and I felt so well and strong and young and full of life—I could have flown. So I spread my arms like wings in the cool little morning wind and wished I had feathers on them instead of goose flesh and fuzz.) If only Prince Charming had arrived instead of Alexei, all would have been perfect.

At the end of the Avenue Mania and I sat on a log and waited. Presently we heard the sound of running horses, and of smoothly jingling bells. There was a cloud of dust—and round the bend came the open calèche bearing Simpser-and-Smiles in person. Seeing us, Ivan instantly drew up the galloping troika so that there was a terrible confusion and noise of jerking, jarring, angry bells, scraping hoofs, creaking wheels and panting horses flecked with foam and practically sitting on their tails. From this bedlam emerged Alexei, looking very pleased that I had come to meet him. He was covered with dust and his face was swollen and sleepy. Alas, his breath smelled of vodka. At his invitation

Mania and I climbed into the carriage and we tore down **the** Avenue at a furious pace, Ivan wanting evidently to show **off**.

"I've come to answer your letter in person, Little Girl," whispered Alexei, taking my hand and bathing me in one of those burning baths of hot looks while Mania, sitting on the little seat opposite us, turned her head discreedly and gazed the other way.

"Please, Alexei, don't," I said impatiently, pulling my hand away. But he only laughed and said: "What a darling you are!"

He didn't seem a bit discouraged and my heart sank into my shoes. Apparently my letter had made no impression on him. Oh, well, I'll talk to him and make him understand.

With a terrific clatter and cascade of bells we dashed up to the house. There in the middle of the front entrance stood Mamma, looking so sweet and fresh in her white linen dress and beaming delightedly with outstretched hands. (Papoussia was not there.)

"My dear boy, such a lovely surprise! How kind of you to visit us a litde sooner than you had promised. We are all enchanted," she cried, depositing a butterfly kiss on Alexei's dusty forehead while he dutifully kissed her hands. Then we had breakfast on the terrace and soon afterward he went off to bed. He says he'll sleep till dinner. Thank goodness for that!

Nearly midnight—

How can I write, how can I put it down in my diary. It's so terrible. So terrible. I wish I were dead. If only I could tell someone, if only I knew what to do. I feel so sick and I am still shaking all over. I can hardly hold the pencil. Why did I ever write that letter? Now he has given me his answer. Oh, what am I to do? The shame of it all. My mind is in such a whirl—I must do something, otherwise I'll go wild. Perhaps it'll help if I put it all down on paper.

Alexei slept till dinner. He ate and ate and drank and drank, and drank, and afterward asked me to show him the gardens.

"I'll take good care of her, Princess Marina," he told Mamma, smiling as usual, and she beamed and said: "Of course, my dear boy, I know you will."

So what could I do but lead the way and show him the flower beds and the sunken gardens and terraces. He kept admiring

everything, though I'm sure he didn't care a fig. Then he said: "I want to see the park. I hear it's one of the most beautiful in the country."

I said: "Yes, but it's too dark now. Better to-morrow morning."

But he said: "No. To-morrow morning I have to go back to Krasnoe Selo Camp. I have only three days' leave in all, so I haven't much time for sight-seeing."

I thought thank goodness, that's a blessing and was so pleased at the good news that I said: "All right. I'll show you the park and we can talk there."

"Yes," he said in a queer sort of muffled voice, "I'll answer your letter there." Which presently he did, declaring it was all nonsense on my part and we'd get married anyhow.

So we went down the slope, across the big lawn to the main Avenue. It was already quite dark there and I said: "You see, I was right. You won't be able to see a thing."

But he said: "Oh, I can see like a cat in the dark. Come on, let's keep going."

So we walked for another ten minutes till we came to the old summerhouse, Venera's Temple.

It was there that all of a sudden a dreadful thing happened: Alexei went mad—but completely, completely mad. I've never seen anyone in such a state, except poor old Sharik when he had rabies. He caught me by the shoulders and started to hug me, whispering: "So you won't marry me . . . very well . . . we'll see . . . we'll see." He kept repeating those words over and over again, breathing his wine breath into my face and hugging me till my bones cracked and I screamed: "Leave me alone!" and pushed him away.

Then he went still madder and, pushing me back, actually knocked me down, pinning me to the ground with all his weight and hurting me, hurting me horribly. I thought he was going to kill me. I was terribly frightened. I kicked and scratched and fought, but he was too strong for me. I kept screaming and he put his hand over my mouth and I began to choke. That was awful. I must have nearly choked to death, because there was a ringing noise in my ears and everything went black. When I came back from being dead, or in a faint, or whatever it was, he was holding me in his arms quietly, no longer like a madman, but crying, actually crying.

"I've hurt my little girl, I've hurt my little girl, but she's going to marry me, she's going to marry me," he kept saying in such a queer way that I felt sick.

I was so frightened I had only one thought—to get away from him as quickly as possible before he went mad again. After his awful fit he seemed quite quiet and gentle and I got out of those arms of his and started to run. I heard him following me for a while, but soon he gave up, because, of course, I know every inch of the way while he didn't know where he was going. So he lost me. How he'll get back to the house I don't know and I don't care. I hope I never see him again. Certainly Mamma would never let me marry a man who has such fits and goes round trying to kill people.

I ran and ran and tore my new dress still more and completely ruined my stockings. At last I came to the river and, pulling off my clothes, went right into the water. That seemed to help a little. I was so burning hot and yet my teeth were chattering. I stayed there for a long time, floating on my back. Presently I began to ache much less and even ceased to shiver and shake. Then I dressed and crept home, stopping now and then to hide behind trees and bushes so as to be sure that *he* was not lurking round somewhere. But, no, he wasn't and I got back safely without anyone seeing me. As I crept by the lighted drawing-room I saw Mamma embroidering and Papa reading. They looked so peaceful and happy. But no Alexei. I hope he is lost or, better still, has fallen into the gravel pit and broken all his bones.

From the sunken garden I made a dash on to the veranda and up the stairs to my room. There I quickly got out of my ruined clothes and into my nightgown. Everything round me looked the same as usual: the furniture, all the familiar things, the books, my old toys, the candlelight, the moon in my window. And yet everything is different. It must be because I feel so ill, so terrified. Now that I have written, I feel sick again—so sick.

Three o'clock.

I've been sick, terribly sick, and at last I rang for Mania. When she saw my bruised face, she cried: "Boje moi" and ran for Mamma. Mamma came running and I told her I had fallen

off the swing and hurt myself and torn my new dress. When I said "hurt," she immediately sent for the Doctor. Oh, I was so glad to see him. He is so kind and gentle and *safe*. He gave me laurel-cherry drops and a small glass of sherry and put me to bed with hot-water bottles and lots of blankets. Besides the fall off the swing, they all think I caught cold, getting up so early this morning. Of course, I didn't tell about bathing in the river. Oh, if only I could talk to the Doctor, he'd understand and help! But I can't, I can't.

They all left me when they thought I was asleep. And now I'm up, writing again. It's the only thing that helps. It's like talking to someone and my mind is racing so. . . .

September 13.

A. left this morning and I didn't see him. I was asleep and Niania forbade anyone to wake me up. Mamma sat up with him last night and told me that he was charming—so much in love with me and so concerned about my fall off the swing. He wrote me a letter, a little letter that says: "Darling Little Girl, I love you so much that I am crying. Don't worry about anything. Soon, soon now we'll be married—in less than six weeks—and I'll make you the happiest little bride in the world. Please forgive me if I frightened and hurt you last night, but I love you so and you drove me crazy when you said you wouldn't marry me. Besides I must have had too much wine at dinner. I'll be counting the days and hours now till our wedding. If you need me, send for me and I'll come at once."

Mamma read his letter, of course. She was please⁴ with ki⁵ love phrases but seemed perplexed and puzzled about his words, "Forgive me if I frightened and hurt you last night . . . you drove me crazy when you said you wouldn't marry me."

"I don't understand. What does he mean, baby? 'Frightened, hurt, not marry.' What did you say to him? Did you upset the poor boy?" she asked anxiously. But as I didn't answer she tiptoed out of the room, tliinking that I had fallen asleep again. Later a telegram came and flowers. Nothing has changed—it's only worse than ever.

I have recovered from my horrible fright and my cold and am up and about again. It's all so hopeless unless I run away.

But where can I go? I have no money, I don't know how to work and if I go visiting relatives and friends, I'll have to come back after a while. If only I could tell about Alexei to Mamoussia, or even Papoussia—someone, anyone—but I can't bring the words out, my tongue won't turn in my mouth to describe how horribly he behaved. It's so humiliating.

September 20.

Dr. Roukovsky keeps watching me out of the corner of his eye. Just the way he always does when I am sickening for something: scarlet fever, chicken pox, measles. I know that look so well. He pretends not to be anxious, but he is.

Yesterday, while I was rocking in the old swing, he came along and sat down next to me. Then, without looking at me and staring right in front of him, he said gravely: "Tamara, you don't have to marry Alexei, if you don't want to. No one can force you. And remember your old Doctor is always there to help and protect you."

I felt like throwing my arms round his neck and telling him everything just as I used to when I was little. But somehow the words stuck in my throat and all I managed to say was: "Yes, I know."

"Well, remember what I said—I am always there," he repeated, getting off the swing that he hates because it always makes him giddy, and ruffling his white hair like he always does when he's perturbed. Then he slowly walked away, thoughtfully kicking along a little white stone as he went. I wanted to call: "Doctor! Doctor! Come back quick! Help me—I can't marry Alexei—he's crazy—he has fits."

But again I couldn't go through with it and everything is as hopeless as ever.

September 22.

Well, at last I managed to tell Mamma what happened that night. But somehow my words fell flat and sounded very stupid and tame.

I began by telling her about my letter, asking Alexei to break off our engagement. She was terribly shocked and just as I expected, gave me a tremendous "dressing down." She said I was "underhanded, deceitful, naughty, ungrateful, ignorant" and

everything of that kind. Well, that lecture paralysed me and when I came to what happened in Venera's Temple—it sounded all wrong.

I said he had been drinking too much, but she said that he was certainly not drunk, because she would have noticed it and forbidden any walk in the park (as though she ever notices when the cook is tipsy and presents her the evening menu with a face as red as a tomato and a boiled look that anyone knows means vodka).

Then I said that Alexei answered my letter by catching hold of me ever so roughly, hugging me and muttering in a frightening way: "You will marry me, you will," He hugged me so hard that I screamed and pushed him, whereupon he pushed me and I fell down and he fell down and we had a regular fight. When I scratched and screamed, he nearly choked me to death.

Then I "got it," good and proper. It's no use even putting down what Mamma thought of me. I was not only naughty and deceitful again, but a disgraceful, most unladylike little girl who had actually started a fight.

"You know perfectly well that no gentleman would ever do such a thing. You say you pushed him and screamed and scratched and fought! No wonder he treated you so roughly. It's surprising he didn't spank you; after all, he's your future husband. Oh, darling, darling, how awful! It's a miracle he forgave you and wrote the kind letter he did. It just shows how much he loves you."

Not a word of condemnation for him! All my fault! Didn't I say it was hopeless? There must be something the matter with me: either I'm such an idiot I can't explain things properly or else Mamma simply won't see anything wrong in Alexei. She forbade me to tell a word to Papoussia, or the Doctor or anyone and made me give my word of honour.

CHAPTER XII

IN GLORY AND HONOUR I CROWN THEE

IT was decided that on the first of October we would leave Stronskoe so as to spend a week in St. Petersburg before my **wedding.**

Ahead of time I began to say good-bye to the woods and fields, meadows and villages round us, visiting them on horse-back, methodically in sections; then to the park, orchards and flower gardens and finally to the house itself.

Mournfully I wandered from room to room, bidding farewell to the place I loved best in the world and gravely following a ritual that had worked itself out for the occasion. It went this way: I'd enter a room, bowing and murmuring: "Good-bye, dear everything in here. When I see you again, I'll be a different person with different eyes—a married woman. Tamara, the maiden, is going away for ever and her eyes will never see you again. So, good-bye, good-bye." Then I'd choose one piece of furniture, say a cupboard, as delegate, and solemnly deposit a kiss on it in the name of all the beds, tables, chairs and other things in that particular room. Then I'd back out, again bowing low and still whispering: "Good-bye."

As I was backing out of the room that way, Tanka, who was passing down the corridor, and had stopped in amazement to watch my extraordinary exit, suddenly came up behind me and gave me a sharp pinch on my sitting-down place.

"For pity's sake, what's the matter with you, Tamara, you idiot? Muttering to yourself and bowing into space. What's the idea now?"

When I explained, she roared with laughter but only for a moment. Then she frowned and, throwing her arms round me, burst into tears.

"Oh, you poor, poor baby," she sobbed. "I'm so sorry for you! *Tamarachka*, darling little soul, just say the word and Vanka and I will help you break this beastly thing off."

If only they had said that a month ago, I thought desperately, beginning to cry too. But it's too late now. I can't break it off. It would be such a scandal. Besides, after Alexei's visit . . .

"What are you two children crying about?" asked Mamma, coming out of her room and looking at us in surprise.

"Oh, nothing, nothing. I was only saying good-bye to everything and Tanka saw me doing it and then we both began to cry," I explained, while Tanka glared at Mamma.

"Don't you see how the child feels?" she demanded impatiently. "Really, Mamma, I don't understand you at all!"

Tamara doesn't love the man, she's unhappy—he's a beast. Let's break off this engagement right now, this very minute."

"That's enough, Tanka," said Mamma coldly. "We've been through all that before a hundred times and you know what I think about it. Alexei adores Tamara and will make her an excellent husband. After she's married, she'll learn to love him too and they'll be very happy."

"And how about his reputation?" insisted Tanka undaunted.

"As for that, I don't believe a third of it is true," retorted Mamma impatiently. "And if he did sow a few wild oats as a bachelor, he'll be all the better for it as a husband. Now, we **won't** discuss it any more. And don't put any ideas into her head, Tanka, with the wedding only ten days away now. I forbid such nonsensical talk. Forget about it and come with me. I'll show you some of the new linen that has just arrived for her trousseau."

Silently we followed Mamma to the linen-room where on the long mahogany table lay piles and piles of shining white damask cloths and napkins, embroidered with my monogram. Dozens of this and dozens of that, all tied up in white satin ribbon, as befitting a bride's trousseau. In the big old-fashioned closets hung my new dresses according to colour: different shades of blue and pink with a lot of white and a sprinkling of black and grey.

Coats, hats, gloves, furs—lovely furs—a voluminous sable pelisse, a long ermine wrap, an Alaskan seal coat and a short jacket of the same fur, a chinchilla cape, a coat of Persian lamb and all kinds of stoles, muffs and neck pieces. It was like a furrier's display. Everything was beautiful, but somehow I wasn't interested and it left me completely cold.

To please Mamma I obediently tried on a few things. But they were unfamiliar and heavy, much too heavy for me. Instead of making me look older and more matronly and dignified, they made me look like a silly little girl dressing up in Mother's finery.

It was a strange situation! There I was, seventeen years old, on the very threshold of young womanhood, healthy, full of life, with a loving family, a beautiful trousseau and everything that money could buy, about to be married to a man with a fine **name and** position, a man apparently very much in love with

me. And yet I was utterly miserable, hoping and praying that a miracle would take place and prevent the marriage or that I'd die before it happened. For the main thing was missing, the only thing that would have really made me happy—I was not in Jove. On the contrary!

"Mamma says it will come after marriage, but will it?" I thought dejectedly. "After all I've been in love several times and I know what it feels like. It's a thrill. It makes one hot and cold and shivery and excited and happy, with all kinds of ups and downs. But here I don't feel anything, except that Alexei is more than ever distasteful to me. I still don't like his long handsome face. Nor the way he talks and laughs and breathes and eats and drinks. I don't like anything about him, so how can I learn to love him? And how will marriage change all that and make him suddenly appear lovable and attractive and pleasing in every way? I wish it would. I wish I could love him and be happy. I'll try. I'll try my best. Perhaps it will come after all."

And with a faint ray of hope I would go to a clearing in the park where one could see the sky and where, when I was small, I believed that God could hear me, because the trees did not muffle my voice there. And behind a friendly old lilac bush that had witnessed many of my praying spells I prayed that I might learn to love Alexei and be a good wife to him and make him happy. Perhaps after marriage he'd make me love him.

But all this was wearing me down and I was getting thinner and paler with spells of unpleasant dizziness and nausea which Niania declared came from all this unhealthy excitement.

"The sooner the child is married the better," she said firmly. "It's no good for a 'promised' young girl to wait so long. It isn't healthy and I'll be glad when we leave for St. Petersburg."

The day of our departure dawned and for the last time I said good-bye to the old house and the servants and all my pets, including Popo who was to follow later when I was settled in my new house. Then, choking with sobs which I tried hard to keep inside me, I climbed into the landau with Papa and Mamma for our final drive to the station. Papoussia's eyes looked stern though he tried his best to joke with me and make me laugh and Mamma was pale and silent. Years later she told me that she suddenly became frightened at the thought of my marriage,

frightened that the others were right in their opinion of Alexei and that she was wrong. At that moment she was on the verge of telling me that I could break off my engagement then and there, even at that scandalous eleventh hour. If she had done so, my whole life would have been very different indeed. But she did not speak and the die was cast.

In Petersburg Alexei met us at the train with extra bridegroomish beams, a bouquet of red roses and a ruby bracelet. From then on I felt like a ball that had been pushed down an incline and couldn't stop rolling until it reached the bottom.

The days of that last week before my marriage passed like a succession of strange dreams, unreal and crowded.

Dressmakers in the mornings for final fittings; lunches with distant relatives and friends of the family, all arriving for the wedding; long drives in the afternoons with Alexei, in an open calèche, to the Islands; and dinners with him.

One afternoon, to my dismay, Alexei's mother, Princess Agrippina Ivanovna, took me for a drive *tête-à-tête* so that she might become better acquainted with me, she said. That was a frightening ordeal that turned out to be a wretched failure. As she kept silent, watching me out of the corner of her beady eye and probably thinking "Let's see what that girl can talk about," I frantically racked my brain for appropriate subjects of conversation that would be maidenly modest and yet intelligent and interesting. But all I could think of were spasmodic ejaculations of the silliest kind such as: "Lovely weather we're having, no?" "Oh, what a beautiful tree, yes?" "Did you see that bird, no?" or "Please look at that water. It's really as blue as the sky." Horrified, I listened to my voice flatly putting down those idiotic remarks, but my brain seemed to have dried up until I hadn't an idea left in it. I could see that Agrippina Ivanovna was growing more and more disgusted at my stupidity, for she pursed up her thin lips until they were nothing more than a straight, contemptuous-looking line.

At last in despair I whispered: "When do you think I'll have **a baby?**"

Majestically she turned her head my direction and, lifting her lorgnette, stared at me in shocked surprise.

"How should I know?" she replied in an icy tone and with a twist of her lips that looked suspiciously like a sneer. "Besides,

my dear, if I may say so, I do not think that is a very nice question for a young girl to ask."

So on top of everything I had put my foot into it and disgraced myself.

I was ready to cry with mortification. "After all, I'm not an idiot," I thought dismally. "It's all her fault! Why doesn't she say something and help me out a little?"

But after that unfortunate remark of mine I became speechless and silently we drove back to her house where, alas, I was to stay with her for tea. There I disgraced myself again in an even worse manner. As I sat at the tea table on the edge of my chair, wretchedly balancing my cup and wondering if I dared reach out for some of that good-looking cake, I suddenly jerked the cup and down went the hot tea all over my new dress and, what was far more disastrous, over her rose-coloured rug.

"Oh, my dear, how awkward you are!" she exclaimed, laughing as though well pleased at my unpardonable lack of social ease and *savoir-faire*. Then she rang a little jewelled bell that stood on the table beside her and ordered her grey-haired butler, Sergei, whom I disliked at first sight, to bring some towels and cold water to clean my dress and the rug too, "which is one of my best," she added for my benefit.

As he came back with all the paraphernalia, there was a weird cracking sound of breaking glass. In my agony of confusion I had inadvertently swept off the tea table a delicate little crystal dish which Sergei stepped on, crushing it into a thousand fragments.

"What's that? What did you *crack* there?" asked Agrippina Ivanovna suspiciously, her remarkable nose with the wart on its tip twitching interrogatively.

To my horror I felt a wave of giggles sweep through me.

No, no, no, not here, not now, I thought desperately, pinching my hand and biting my tongue to prevent the awful outburst. But it was beyond control.

"He—he—he, *pouf-pouf*!" I began nervously in an ascending scale and as Agrippina Ivanovna, lifting her eyebrows, stared at me in amazement, I burst into the worst fit of laughter I had had for a long time. Not since the day of my first presentation at Court had I had such an attack. I doubled up, I choked, I gasped, I couldn't stop to save my life.

Profoundly shocked, Agrippina Ivanovna raised her lorgnette and continued to stare at me for a few moments in silence. Then, turning to Sergei, in her iciest voice she ordered a glass of cold water and "the carriage to be brought round to the door at once."

Obediently I tried to swallow the water, but it only made matters worse. "*Phut*" through my nose it went flying all over her like the blowing of a whale, while indignandy she backed away, shaking the drops out of her hair and wiping her face. One drop clung to the tip of her nose right next to the wart.

"My dear, if you cannot stop laughing in this extraordinary fashion, I think you had better go home now," she said in measured tones of cold anger. "Perhaps when I see you next time you'll be able to explain what appeared to you so very funny in my house. Personally I do not see anything to laugh at, but then you probably have a very different sense of humour. Good-bye, my dear, and I hope you enjoyed your afternoon with me."

"Good-bye, Princess, thank you very much, indeed I did," I managed to stammer, kissing her hand and curtsying respectfully as I backed out of the room. Then down the stairs I flew, and into the carriage that took me home.

Great was Mamma's distress at my description of the disastrous afternoon with my future mother-in-law.

"Goodness, Tamara, why couldn't you behave properly and create a nice impression?" she asked sadly. "First you couldn't think of a sensible thing to talk about, you who always chatter like a magpie, then you have an indecent fit of giggles! And spit all over her! She'll think you are not only stupid, but bad-mannered and unable to control yourself. Oh, dear, oh, dear! That's awful. I did so want her to like you."

It was too bad, for that evening Alexei was unusually glum and reluctantly admitted that I had made a poor impression on his mother, who told him that after studying me all that afternoon, she had come to the conclusion that I needed a strong hand to guide me and plenty of teaching to develop my immature brain.

"Perhaps she'd like us to break off our engagement right now, before it is too late?" I asked hopefully, thinking: "Well, here is the solution at last."

But he immediately stopped being critical and glum and, throwing his arms round me, started his own private fit of kissing and cuddling.

Luckily for me, Great-Aunt Natalia soon unexpectedly appeared on the scene. Dressed in a stiff, old-fashioned gown of violet silk, with a ruched cap to match, wearing heavy gold jewellery and carrying an ebony cane, she had driven down from her house on the Islands specially to have a last private talk with me, she said, and to give me a present, more valuable than any gift of silver and gold.

"But let us get rid of that very obnoxious young man first," she whispered and then, turning to Alexei, unceremoniously sent him out of the room.

"I want to talk to my great-niece alone, so pray leave us," she declared, staring at him pointedly.

She thoroughly disliked Alexei and had led the family in the fight against him and our marriage. As he knew that, he cordially disliked her, too, and though invariably polite, treated her as though she were a hundred years old instead of a mere eighty. At least that was one of her major complaints.

When he left the room, to have a glass of port in Vanka's study, he said, she shook her head and sighed.

"He's had enough port without that extra glass, or two—or five, or ten!" Then she added: "It's too late for us to do anything more about this marriage of yours, but if you want to do something, Tamara, right now, it's not too late. I'll help you in any way you wish."

Silently I hugged her frail little shoulders and held her tight. She was so sweet, so kind and gentle and I loved her with all my heart. Many a time she had straightened out my "Gypsy" difficulties and with her worldly wisdom, experience and tact had advised and guided me through troubled hours, smoothing my ruffled feathers and pouring the healing ointment of kindness and understanding on the raw wounds of a frightened and bewildered little girl's soul.

She had known Great-Grandmother Dominica personally at the height of her success in St. Petersburg and later on, too, when she lived in retirement, almost forgotten. Now she spoke of her again.

"She was an unusual*woman, strong and courageous," said

Aunt Natalia gravely. "And you, Tamara, must always be proud of being her great-grandchild. You look like her; you *are* like her; far more so than Vanka, Tanka or any of the others; and her fire is in you, too. Always carry high that burning torch of hers, which she bequeathed you, and use it to shed light wherever you are, always more and more light round you in times of darkness and distress. Remember the words: 'Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works.' Remember that every day of your life and promise me that you'll try to do so, no matter what is in store."

Deeply moved, I knelt beside her and kissed her wrinkled little hands.

"I'll try, Auntie, I'll try my very best," I whispered, while she stroked my hair and murmured her usual prayer: "Save and protect this child of yours, Lord God of mine, and guide her steps up the ladder of light that leads to Heaven and life eternal."

For a few moments we were silent, then she began to laugh.

"Look what I've brought you!" she chuckled. "It's something you'll like. And I've done it all by myself, alone, for you. It's my torch, Tamara, the one I am passing on to you, too."

And, untying a white ribbon, she displayed a slender little volume, its thin sheets closely covered with her fine handwriting.

"Oh, what is it, Aunt Natalia, *douschenka*, what is it?" I cried excitedly.

"It's the record of our family, Tamara, the stories that I have told you so many times, over and over again. No one ever really cared but you, and I was afraid that you might forget them some day. So I have written them all down for you. Here they are, my little dove. And when I am gone, you will look at every word and know that each one bears a kiss and my undying love for you."

Blinded with tears, I hugged her once more and for a long time we clung to one another in silence and complete understanding.

When she left, I felt I could not see anyone, certainly not Alexei, full of port wine, so, sending him my "regrets" through Niania, I went to my room to read the little manuscript. Of all my wedding gifts, that was the finest indeed and, as Great-

Aunt Natalia had said, "far more valuable than silver, or gold, or precious stones."

While I was reading, Mamma came into my room and sat down on the sofa. She seemed very agitated and nervous, and two bright spots burned on her cheeks.

"Come to me, baby darling," she said piteously, holding out her arms. "Mamma has something very important to tell you."

Dismayed, I stared at her without moving. The minute she said those words I knew what was coming and what the talk would be about! She was going to carry out her promise of having a "biblical" conversation with me on the eve of my wedding, just as she had said she would at the time of my betrothal.

Merciful Heavens, she was going to explain the text about leaving one's father and mother and cleaving to one's husband! I could see that she was in an agony of confusion, hating the very thought of it and wishing with all her heart that the earth would suddenly open up and swallow her before she started to speak.

Miserably I looked down and stared at the tips of my old shoes. This was going to be awful for both of us! Weren't things bad enough without any "heart-to-heart" talks about subjects that had been forbidden all my life! If only we had been intimate, if only we had talked things over in the past, this would have been easy. But how could I forget the occasions when I had asked her questions and she had become very annoyed and scolded me for having "a warped and sinful mind" that could even think of such things. It was the typical situation between a mother of the Victorian era and a daughter of the twentieth century, a situation that created a chasm between us, that now, too late, she was going to try to cross.

"Please, Mamoussia, don't," I murmured wretchedly. "Why must we talk about anything special?"

"Because it is only natural and proper for a mother and daughter to do so on the eve of a young girl's marriage," she replied a little more firmly.

Then in a flat voice, without looking at me, just as I had foreseen, she quoted the text.

"And that, my child, means . . .," she began, staring over my head.

"Oh, please, please, please, Mamoussia, don't!" I shrieked,

jumping up and rushing to her. "I won't listen. I'll stick my fingers into my ears! You mustn't, you shan't, you haven't the right to. . . ."

Bewildered, she looked into my panic-stricken face.

"Why, baby, I didn't know that you knew anything that might upset you this way, you, my innocent little girl? Why; what do you know? Tell Mamma."

"Nothing, Mamoussia, nothing! And I don't want to hear anything!" I cried miserably. "Please don't torment me, please leave me alone. . . ."

Shaking her head and sighing deeply, she put her arm round me and stroked my hand.

"Very well," she said at last. "I won't say anything, only this: Obey your husband implicitly, Tamara, even though his demands may at times seem all wrong to you. Trust him and let him guide you and teach you to be a good, obedient wife. Remember, there are many things in life that we women have to bear without a murmur, for such is the will of God."

Then, making the sign of the cross over my bowed head, she got up and slowly walked out of the room, while I sat there for a long while staring in front of me with unseeing eyes.

"The will of God," she had said. But was it His will, I wondered, or was it the will of man? In my case the will of Alexei supported by Mamma?

Oh, what was the right thing to do? Run away now from it all, while there was still time, or obey and submit and allow them to shape my life according to *their* desires, not mine?

First, as a girl, I had to "honour and obey" my father and mother in all important matters and do as *they* told me; then, as a married woman, my husband had to be "honoured and obeyed."

Obey, always obey someone! But then, where was my free will? Or the will of God? How was I to find out the truth?

Confused and tired of thinking in circles, I decided to pray, and, kneeling at the side of my little, old bed, with closed eyes, began the Lord's Prayer.

"Always say the Lord's Prayer when you are in trouble or in doubt," Father Trofim had said again and again.

But as I came to the words: "Thy will be done," I felt as though an electric shock had flashed through me. Opening my eyes, I stopped praying and sat back on my haunches.

Here it is again, I thought desperately. "Thy will be done ..."
But how do I know what "Thy will" is? In this case does it express itself through my mother and must I obey her implicitly, thus obeying God? Or is it that voice, that in me keeps saying: "Run, Tamara, run, before it is too late?" Which of the two is the true voice of God?

Jumping to my feet, I began to pace the floor.

"I know what I'll do," I whispered to myself. "I'll chase away all my thoughts and leave my mind, my soul, a complete blank, like a clean sheet of paper on which a message may be written. Or perhaps a voice will speak to me so that I can really hear it. Or a firm conviction of what is right will take charge of my whole being. I'll do it now, this very moment."

Closing my eyes tight, I stood perfectly still.

"Now I am sweeping out my thoughts," I murmured, "all my thoughts, every one to the very last one. There, they're going now! All that remains is an empty space. It's quite empty now. . . . Now I see a white light! It is slowly filling that space, filling it and filling it till there's nothing else but that white light. That's where the sign will suddenly appear, the sign that will show me God's will. White light, white light, white light, don't leave me!"

I stood in the middle of the room without moving and tensely waited for the sign. As the moments passed I could see that light, not burning with a flame, but flooding everything in me with equal diffusion. Then it began to fade and as it faded my thoughts came rushing back in torrents.

It was all over! I had swept everything out of my soul, the mysterious light had filled it and I had waited for God's message, waited and waited. But nothing had happened, nothing at all.

Discouraged and beaten, I crept into bed and, pulling the covers over my head, tried to sleep.

All that night I couldn't sleep and finally, in my pink flannel robe and soft, bunny slippers, padded through the house, stopping in the different rooms to sit down a while on some favourite chair, or sofa, or rug and think and think, mostly of the past.

In Mamma's drawing-room I lay for a long time in front of the fireplace in which still smouldered a few red coals, stretched

full-length on the white bearskin rug that we called *Mishka Medved*, Michael, the bear, his great white head supporting my black one as it had done thousands of times ever since I was born. And as I lay there staring up at the ceiling on which flickered the reddish light of the dying embers of the fire, I thought of the important part that he had always played in my life.

It was on Mishka that I learned to crawl, pulling his white hair out by the fistful, when no one was looking, which accounted for the little bare patches on his skin; it was on Mishka that I listened to Mamma's fairy tales or to Great-Aunt Natalia's stories of the family, warming my toes at the fire and eating dry biscuits, dipped in hot milk.

It was on Mishka that I slept and wept and kicked up my heels and romped, and learned my lessons, lying flat on my stomach, and read my favourite books.

And it was on Mishka that I received Alexei on the day of my betrothal and, scuffing my feet on the fur, tried so hard to bring forth a spark that would make the unwelcome man jump. Alas, that was the only time that Mishka failed me.

And now I was saying good-bye to him and whispering in his baldish ear: "When next you feel me on your back, *Mishenka doushenka*, I'll be a different person, a married woman, perhaps with a baby of my own to crawl all over you as I used to. Who knows? Be good to him, Mishka, *doushka*, if I die and do not mind too much if he pulls out some more of your hair."

In Vanka's den I curled up on our favourite Turkish divan and thought of all our songs and dances, of Grischa, of Bay, of Vanka's shouts and Tanka's encircling arm and I began to cry and cry, until finally I cried myself to sleep.

It was there that Niania found me at six o'clock in the morning of my wedding day.

"*Boje moi*, and what is the meaning of this!" she exclaimed, throwing her hands up in dismay. "As usual, when you are supposed to rest and look your very best, you do everything that is wrong. Hurry up, my little soul, wash and dress, for it is time to go to early Mass."

Together we walked to the near-by church and before Mass I went to Confession. I told the priest of my experience the previous night and how I tried to receive a sign from God, but in vain.

"So how do I know what His will is?" I asked forlornly.

For a moment the priest was silent. Then he sighed.

"Yes," he said meditatively, "yes ... you tried ... you thought you were doing the right thing. But evidently you are not yet ready to receive such a favour. Very few people are, only the Saints and perhaps a few chosen ones. . . . God gave you your free will, my dear child, and it is up to you to decide what is right and what is wrong. It is up to you."

"But how am I to *know*, to understand, to be sure?" I protested. "It's a question of obeying or disobeying my own mother, that's what it is."

"In that case, without the slightest doubt, obey your mother and you shall get your reward for your obedience. Believe that firmly and carry that sustaining thought within you through life like a beacon light. Yes, sooner or later the Lord will reward you for being an obedient daughter. Go in peace and may the years be happy for you."

With that he absolved me of all my sins and with Niania I took Communion.

On our return we found the house in an uproar.

Papoussia had spilled a whole cup of coffee over my wedding-dress ! While no one was looking, cup in hand, he had left the breakfast table and sneaked into Mamma's drawing-room, where the dress lay on the sofa ready for me to put on. According to his shamefaced explanation of the disastrous incident, tears had come into his eyes at the sight of my wedding-gown and, blinded, he had tripped over Mishka's head.

"That blinkety-blank-blank old baldheaded bear! That breeder of moths!" he had shouted angrily as though it were all Mishka's fault. "Always in everybody's way, always a public nuisance. . . . I wish I could shoot him again as I did thirty years ago. But believe me, this time I wouldn't have him stuffed or made into a rug for everyone to fall over."

"Nobody has ever fallen over him but you. You can't blame Mishka when it's all your own fault, walking about with a cup of black coffee in your hand," Mamoussia had remonstrated. "Now, please go away and let us clean up the mess you've made."

Then they all started to fuss over my dress: Mamoussia, Tanka, Niania, Miss Burns, Frossia, like a lot of fluttering, clucking

hens. But the dressmaker pushed them aside and expertly took the spot out with cold water.

"When it dries, it'll be all right," she assured us, "besides the veil will cover anything that's left."

The morning hours flew by only too quickly and at noon they tried to make me swallow some bouillon and chicken. But I was too excited to eat, and choking, just as I used to when I was small, I hastily spat everything back on to my plate.

"That's an elegant behaviour for a bride!" exclaimed Vanka derisively. "If you've got to be sick, can't you excuse yourself politely and leave the table in good time? Now you've upset everybody's stomach, you disgusting little beggar-beast-bloody-old fool. Go on, get out of here, *shoo*," and he flapped his napkin at me as I gladly ran away from the table.

When the time came to dress for my wedding, Mamma and Tanka bathed me in perfumed water and scrubbed me with perfumed soap. Then, when they had dried and powdered me, Mamma slipped over my head the bride chemise of the family, the same voluminous old chemise of batiste and lace that had been worn at all their weddings by Great-Grandmother Tamara, Grandmother Alexandra, Mamma and Tanka. Now it was my turn to wear the ancient garment, which practically reached the floor and was as wide as five ordinary chemises.

"It'll hang out of my drawers," I protested dismally. But Mamma said no, it would not, because for the ceremony I'd wear the closed, tight-fitting pantaloons that matched the chemise and would not let it escape. Later on, when I dressed again to go away, I'd wear a much shorter chemise which, even though I wore the slit drawers of a married woman, could not possibly hang down and show.

All these chemises and drawers were nearly a hundred years old and according to family tradition, we, the brides, had to wear them on our wedding day. Afterward they were put away in lavender until the next wedding a generation later, while we started to wear the lingerie of our own trousseaux.

After the chemise Mamma and Tanka drew on my white silk stockings and laced me into my new white silk corset. Then came a flannel petticoat and the silk underskirt, trimmed with lace, all white and brand new.

Tanka's little boy, Vaniouha, put a gold coin into my satin

slipper for good luck and then I was ready for the wedding-dress of heavy ivory satin, that had also belonged to Great-Grandmother Tamara and been worn by all the brides of the family in succession. It was made on the lines of a Court dress and consisted of an underdress embroidered in pearls, and an immense train. To the little silver kakoshnik, now covered with a wreath of fresh orange blossoms, was attached the long lace veil of *point d'Angleterre* that reached the very end of the train. On my left shoulder I wore the insignia of Maid of Honour on its blue ribbon and at my throat a slender platinum chain bearing one large diamond drop.

When at last I was ready and about to be taken to the drawing-room to be blessed before leaving for Church, I suddenly got panic-stricken.

"I must go to the glozett," I whispered anxiously, while, horrified, Mamoussia, Tanka and all the others tried to dissuade me.

"You can't, Tamara, you're all dressed and closed up for the ceremony," they cried in chorus. "You surely can wait another hour! Besides, you went to the glozett before your bath, only half an hour ago!"

"I don't care, I've got to," I wailed, "if I don't, something awful will happen!"

"There she goes again! Something awful always has to happen to her at the most unexpected moment," stormed Mamma.

They threatened and begged and pleaded and coaxed, but in vain. It was our old glozett for me, or else . . .

At last, in despair, they gave in and a procession was formed. At the head of it, down the dark corridor I went in the desired direction, followed by the dressmaker, her two assistants, Niania and Miss Burns, all of whom crowded each other and pushed as they carried my train and veil.

Two maids were posted at both ends of the corridor so that no gentleman could emerge from his room and witness the shocking scene of a bride in full regalia occupying a votter glozett, whose door necessarily had to be left open for the train bearers.

But when we left it and started on our way back, I heard a familiar howl of laughter and there was Vanka, his head towering above the maid on guard, yelling: "Hurrah for Tamara! Always

doing the wrong thing at the wrong time! God bless her, our little beggar-beast!"

In the drawing-room my Parents of Honour, Dedoussia and Great-Aunt Natalia, were waiting for me and as I knelt in front of them—with great difficulty because of my heavy dress—they blessed me in turn with a gold icon. Then the bridegroom's best man arrived with a huge bouquet of white roses tied with wide moiré ribbons, which he presented to me as he spoke the traditional words: "The bridegroom is in church."

That was the signal for us to get into our carriages. Following an old tradition, my parents did not ride with me to church, but joined me later. So, preceded by Vaniouha, my little page, bearing the icon, I entered the landau with Dedoussia, Great-Aunt Natalia and Tanka, while Papoussia, Mamoussia, Vanka and Bay got into the other one. Niania and Miss Burns followed in a third landau, drawn by Smely and Bely, who had been clipped and polished for the occasion.

At the church I took Dedoussia's arm and in we marched, past a large crowd of people who had gathered on the pavement to gape at the wedding, past the guard of honour with extended sabres and past the guests—up the centre of the nave to where stood Alexei in full-dress uniform, looking seraphically handsome as he waited for me to take my place at his left.

In front of us, not far from the steps that led up to the altar, was the *analog* or small church table draped in silver cloth, bearing the New Testament bound in red velvet and gold, and a gold cross beside it. It was there that the marriages nearly always took place, there that the priest and deacon stood in their glittering vestments of silver and gold brocade. Behind us stood in pairs a long line of brother officers of Alexei's Imperial Guard Regiment, headed by Vanka, directly behind me. During the ceremony their duty was to hold the golden crowns over our heads and follow us, still bearing those crowns, thrice round the analog while the priest led the way. That was a difficult feat for them to accomplish since they had to be very careful not to step on the bride's train. Several times the crowns changed hands while the numerous officers took turns holding them.

As I stood by Alexei, I could see—and smell—that he had fortified himself for the coming ordeal with vodka and red wine.

"In glory and honour I crown the*." Three times the priest

pronounced the ritual words and each time I glanced out of the corner of my eye at Alexei's beautiful profile. "In glory and honour. . . ." I wondered what he was thinking.

I don't remember thinking about anything else during the service and it passed like a dream. When it was over, the traditional hymn of triumphant rejoicing rang through the Church. I was a married woman! I was Alexei's wife.

On his arm I left the church and together, alone in a small carriage, we drove to our house where the reception was held. There we were met by Papoussia and Mamoussia, bearing the traditional silver platter of welcome with black bread and salt. Then side by side we stood in front of the marble fireplace in the drawing-room, now banked with flowers, our feet on Mishka Medved, who at my earnest request had not been removed as originally planned.

"Somebody's bound to trip and fall over that worthless animal," Papoussia had grumbled, still thinking of his early morning mishap. But Mishka remained and thankfully, protected by the long folds of my wedding-gown, I kicked off my tight satin slippers and with a sigh of relief stood in my stocking feet on Mishka's kind, soft fur.

Tall glasses of champagne on great silver platters were passed round among the guests, as well as the traditional silk bags of wedding candy. Made up in the colours of the two houses, these little bags, about the size of reticules, bore the stamped initials of the bride and groom. In this case my colours were blue and gold and Alexei's red and silver.

When the reception was over and we had shaken hands with the last guest, I tried to get back into my slippers, but couldn't! My swollen feet refused to be encased once more in such a tight fit and off the rug I swept in all my bridal finery, leaving behind me on Mishka's back a pair of white satin slippers.

Between the reception and dinner I was allowed to take off my wedding-gown and veil and rest for an hour on my bed. Alexei was ordered not to disturb me and, grateful for the respite, I lay perfectly still, with closed eyes, listening to Niania's sing-song voice as, stroking my head, she told me one of my favourite old stories about a wedding that took place in the ancient days of Great-Great-Great (and forty or so more "greats") Grandfather Rurik, first prince of Russia. But just as

I was about to doze off under the soothing spell of the familiar words that I had heard all through my life over and over again, it was time to get up and dress for dinner, or the "banquet" as Niania pompously called it.

The beloved old soul was all ready for it in her new grey satin gown, trimmed with lace, and a grey bonnet to match, while Miss Burns for once wore brown silk shot with gold. These new dresses had been Mamma's presents to them for my wedding and only old Dr. Roukovsky stubbornly wore his greenish-black old frock coat, having flatly refused to put on anything new.

"In this surtoul I was at the child's christening and in this same surtoul I'll see her married," he declared firmly, even though the old frock coat that once upon a time had fitted him so well now looked ready to burst, and ominously cracked at the seams with every breath he took. Besides, the moths had got into it and left on his stomach a tell-tale pattern of little holes.

Shivering miserably, as I always did when I had been sent to bed for an hour in the daytime and then had to get up again, I washed my face and hands in cold water and stood as patiently as I could, while once more they put on my heavy wedding-gown.

When I was ready, Alexei came for me and arm in arm we went into the drawing-room to the strains of a gay march. As there were many guests, too many for the dining-room, the banquet was served in the crystal ballroom where a small string orchestra, concealed by tall flowering plants, played soft music throughout the long-drawn courses.

The table, in the shape of a horseshoe, was decorated with white flowers, and tall white candles burned slowly in eight massive silver candelabras, placed at regular intervals. In the exact middle of the table was a huge silver centrepiece that looked like a miniature bath. In fact, a baby could have bathed in it most comfortably, stretched out full length. In pure Empire style, it had been a present from Napoleon to Great-Grandfather Yakov Dmitrievitch and was used only for gala occasions such as this one. Otherwise, it spent most of its dull life in the dark silver vault of the bank.

Besides those on the table, a long chain of candles, placed round the cornice of the ballroom, shed a soft and lovely glow

There was no other light than the light of candles, and reflected in the mirrored walls (from which the ballroom got its "crystal" name) the sight was like a lovely scene from fairyland.

According to custom I sat next to Alexei at the head of the "horseshoe, facing all the guests, and from time to time some of them would cry out: "Bitter, bitter . . ." which meant that in order to sweeten the "bitterness" of whatever they were eating or drinking, we had to kiss each other then and there, right in the public eye. That was not so trying to me as Alexei's private kisses and I didn't much mind the game.

But the dinner seemed endless and though at first I was hungry, I found that as the meal progressed I couldn't eat more than a mouthful of each course.

Champagne flowed like water and Alexei's glass was filled over and over again. Presently he began to breathe heavily and squeeze my hand under the table. But when I pulled it away, he stepped on my foot with his heavy boot and kept it there firmly. Remembering Mamma's instructions to obey my husband, even when he acted in a peculiar manner, I did not protest, though I felt very uncomfortable and my foot went to sleep with pins and needles.

At last we reached the stage of the dessert, a towering castle of ice cream, enlivened with two little figures representing Alexei and me under a gold canopy in the shape of a crown.

Best of all was the traditional wedding candy, wrapped in white satin with tiny orange blossoms on top of each piece. Other platters of sweets had little silver favours instead of the orange blossoms for the guests to take home as souvenirs.

When at last the dinner was over, I rushed to change my clothes, as that very evening we were leaving for Paris and there was not too much time left.

My "going away" travelling suit was of pale blue cloth and my hat of the same colour, trimmed with a pink rose.

Before leaving, again according to custom, we all sat down for a moment in silence and breathed a small prayer. Then came the hugs and kisses and laughter and tears and off we went to the station, accompanied only by the family and the bridesmen.

As the train began to move Vanka jumped on and, hugging

me so that my bones cracked, whispered: "Remember, no matter what happens, we're yours and you belong to us. With God, *doushenka*, with God!"

Then as the train was gaining speed, he jumped off and stood waving until a bend in the railroad hid him from my sight.

"Your Shiningness, your beds are all made up," said the wagon-lit attendant, bowing and smiling in a stupid, knowing fashion that made me want to slap him.

"That's fine," exclaimed Alexei, slipping a silver rouble into the man's hand and taking my arm. "Come on, Tamara, you must be very tired. It's time for you to go to bed."

He waited in the corridor, smoking, while I entered our compartment and, with the help of Mania, my maid, slowly began to undress. It was good to see her familiar, smiling face and listen to her chatter.

"I've arranged your things just the way you like them," she said and looked at me with her big blue eyes full of affection and encouragement. "Here is your own little pillow and the elephant Slon Slonovitch."

Ever since I was small I had slept with that toy velvet elephant called Slon Slonovitch (which meant Elephant, Son of Elephant) tucked under my stomach, "to keep me from feeling empty and hungry," I had always said. Now he was here with me, dressed in his new red jacket and a new red necktie round his throat. Mania had washed him for the honeymoon and though old and shabby, he was at least clean.

When I was in bed, she tucked me in and, turning on the blue night-light, went out of the compartment. But before she left she bent down and, making the sign of the cross over my head, kissed my hair.

"Wedding night!" Whenever I hear those two words, I instantly see in my mind a typical compartment of the wagon-lit; a blue light; a white batiste nightgown on the floor, crumpled and torn; an empty bottle of red wine on the small table; a sleeping man; and Slon Slonovitch, the elephant, thrown up into the hat-rack for the first time in his life.

CHAPTER XIII

UNE JEUNE FILLE FRESHLY MARRIED

IN Paris we went to the Hôtel de France, the same old hotel in which Grandmother Alexandra once stayed with Mamma when she was small.

The rooms, upholstered in red plush, were still very old-fashioned, and I wondered if perhaps we were in Grandmother's suite. I tried to find that out, but it was too far back and the clerk, though sympathetic and interested in the bride whose grandmodier had lived in the same hotel, could not definitely tell me if my suite had once been hers. But he thought it probably was. Of course, I wanted to believe that and would walk round the rooms, picturing to myself Grandmother pacing the floor and wringing her hands and weeping at her Michael's desertion. And I could see Marina, my own mother, trembling with fright as she listened to the distressing sounds. It was then that she wrote Great-Aunt Natalia her pitiful little letter. . . . And it was in Paris that Alexandra died, perhaps in this very same bridal bed of mine. Who knows?

Never having been in Paris before, I decided to see as much of it as I could, at least in the mornings while Alexei slept. For, as we went out every night and stayed up late, sometimes until dawn, he would sleep and sleep for hours, usually till three or four o'clock in the afternoon, regularly missing his lunch.

But despite the fact that I stayed up so late too, I couldn't sleep as long as he did, and Baedeker in hand, would wander round Paris, visiting Notre Dame and the Louvre and all the other historical spots. That was the best part of my honeymoon and I'd look forward eagerly to each day of discovery.

But as soon as Alexei awoke, my education would continue, for it was with the purpose of educating me, he said, that we went out every night and visited the different places where fun and gaiety were supposed to reign.

It all began with a set of illustrated eighteenth-century books, in dilapidated brown paper covers, that he gave me a day or two after we arrived.

"They are forbidden books and cost me a little fortune," he

said impressively, as he unwrapped them. "But they'll be worth the price if they manage to teach you a few things that are very important. It's all very well for a young girl to be sweetly innocent and all that, but a young married woman must be sophisticated and learn all the little things that make her exciting and worth while. Otherwise, she's no good, a failure, and a man might as well return to an amusing mistress."

When he opened one of those books, I nearly died of shame and threw it into the fire. But Alexei was so angry with me that I didn't dare do that again.

"Didn't I tell you what they cost?" he stormed. "You little idiot! If that's the way you are going to behave, I'll punish you. . . ."

Thoroughly frightened, because I knew what the punishment would be, I promised never to hurt one of his precious and abominable books and graciously that time I was forgiven.

Though I hated it and revolted, my education had definitely begun and as I had unconsciously foreseen when I bade everything good-bye in Stronskoe before my marriage, my eyes were no longer the eyes of the "maiden, Tamara," but those of a married woman who had seen forbidden sights.

The cabarets and night spots that Alexei loved so much were not as bad as his books and as soon as I began to understand the Parisian argot and the innuendoes and jokes, I became amused and even looked forward to the shows. Maxime's, the Moulin Rouge, the Chat Noir and many others we frequented in turn.

The first time that we came to a little box of a theatre called "La Boite à Fursy" we were late and the show had begun. To my utter confusion, as we entered, the show stopped and an actor, pointing at us, sang: "Let us wait till this gentleman and this lady are seated! May they be welcome to the Boite à Fursy!"

I did not know then that it was a customary joke of the place to stop the show for a late-comer and to the great amusement of the audience, with crimson cheeks I sank into my chair and covered my face with my hands. Everybody began to laugh and the actor, turning to Alexei, asked him:

"Where did you find such an innocent little child, tell me, if you please?"

That put Alexei, who had been frowning, into excellent humour and he called back loudly:

"There is nothing like *une jeune fille* freshly married, *heû?*"

And the audience roared back: "Nothing!"

A month passed, officially the honeymoon was over, and I could see that Alexei was beginning to get tired of *his jeune jille* and that the novelty of being a married man was wearing off. I remembered what his mother had told me:

"Alexei always wants what he does not have; then when he gets it, he doesn't want it any more."

Evidently that was happening now, and his attention was beginning to wander.

One evening, during one of our rare dinners at the hotel, he noticed a handsome young American woman, who, with her little son, sat at a table facing Alexei. She was tall and rather buxom, with lovely fair hair, a beautiful complexion and blue eyes. Her nose was slightly uptilted, her mouth full and red. She must have been about twenty-eight and dressed very smartly, usually in black and white.

"*La belle dame blanche et noire*," Alexei named her, and after that evening he would often suggest that we have "a quiet little dinner" at the hotel.

Pretty soon I saw that she noticed his admiring stares and began to smile at him encouragingly, her gay blue eyes dancing with laughter and crinkling up at the corners. There was not the slightest doubt, they were vastly attracted to each other and when he said: "Now *that* young woman knows a thing or two about having fun," I realized that here was someone who evidently felt and thought the way he did and who spoke his language.

"After dinner go up and get acquainted with her in the salon," he said. "Then when you two are talking, as if by chance I'll come in and you'll introduce me."

Boiling over with suppressed indignation, I nodded my head silently and, when dinner was over, went into the salon. There, standing by the fireplace, I wondered how I was to go about this business. I hadn't ever spoken to strangers this way and I couldn't very well rush up to her and say: "Let's be acquainted! I am so and so, who are you?"

But while I stood there deliberating with myself (I could see Alexei impatiently hovering near the door like a chorus girl in the wings), she suddenly came up to me with a beaming smile.

"I am Mrs. Goodman, Flora Goodman," she said in a rather high but pleasant voice. "And I know who *you* are! Everybody in this hotel knows that. You're the most talked-about and romantic couple here, that goes without saying."

Politely enough—though inwardly I was longing to slap her face—I shook hands with her and at her invitation sat down on the love seat by her side.

"I have admired you so much," she went on, smiling and looking me over from head to foot. "If you'll pardon my saying so, you remind me of that lovely portrait *La Gitane*, I believe it is called. Of course, you know the one I mean."

But before I could say that I did *not*, Alexei came toward us.

"My husband," I murmured, presenting him as he stood expectantly in front of her, with slightly bowed head.

"Charmed," she exclaimed gaily. "Why, I have just been talking to your little wife and telling her that she reminds me of a famous portrait..."

"You are very kind," interrupted Alexei absentmindedly, looking her over from head to foot, just as she had looked me over. "And very, very beautiful, too," he added, smiling and beginning to squint at her décolletage.

Seeing the familiar old symptoms, I stared at him in amazement with unbelieving eyes. Already? So soon? Just like that? One, two, three? . . .

Suddenly he turned to me.

"Tamara, if you want to get those letters off, you'd better do it now, right away. I'll wait for you here, if Mrs. Goodman kindly permits."

"Charmed," murmured Mrs. Goodman again, as he took my place on the love seat beside her.

I went into the writing-room and tried to write Mamma a letter. But all I could do was sit there, staring angrily at a piece of white paper on which presently I began to draw little sofas with two apes sitting on them.

That night we went out *à trois*, taking Mrs. Goodman along with us. Though she drank a good deal of champagne, she

never seemed to be in the least intoxicated. Alexei was in the best of humours and they had a splendid time together, laughing and talking and even singing the familiar tunes that the orchestra played, while I sat like a chaperone, silent and completely *de jrop*. In the huge mirror across from us I could see the contrast between us: she—fair, buxom, with flashing teeth and sparkling eyes; and I—small and dark, with the black eyes of Great-Grandmother, smouldering and heavy.

Later that night in our room Alexei made a speech.

"You are very disappointing, Tamara," he said gloomily. "Very! I expected you to be all fire and fun. But you're nothing of the kind. To tell you the truth you were much more exciting to me before our marriage. At least then I thought you were full of hidden passion. You used to dance and sing and chatter and look wild. Now you are silent most of the time and haven't danced or sung at all. What has happened to you? At the best, you are obedient, that's all I can say. And who wants an obedient wife? Personally, I want a girl who amuses and stimulates me and plays the games I like."

"But I told you over and over again that I wasn't in love with you when you asked me to marry you," I replied dejectedly. "I suppose that's why I am this way now. I'm sorry that I don't like your games or your books or your drinks, but I don't. And you don't care for anything that interests me. . . ."

"Cathedrals and museums? Thank you very much! Indeed, I do not. You should have married that fellow Baedeker; then you would have had a fine time together making up Hsts of pictures and churches and dilapidated old houses. Mrs. Baedeker, that's what I'm going to call you! You're a guide, not a man's companion on his honeymoon."

And he finished his bottle of wine, muttering to himself angrily: "Mrs. Baedeker!"

On top of everything I wasn't feeling any too well and had frequent spells of dismal nausea, which I supposed was due to the rich French food.

During our last week in Paris, Mrs. Goodman went everywhere with us, and Alexei began to spend money on her: flowers every day, perfume, gloves, champagne and, according to a bill from Carrier's that he carelessly left lying on the desk, a gold bracelet with a diamond clasp.

One evening as we were about to go to Maxime's for dinner, she turned to me with her usual glittering smile.

"Do you mind very much, if I bring a friend along?" she asked. "His name is John Waring, and I think you'll like him. He is a charming man and a foursome is always so much more, fun than three."

So that was it! I was to have a gentleman to occupy me, while she had Alexei all to herself!

Apparently she had taken my answer for granted, for a few minutes later Mr. Waring appeared in evening clothes, ready to go out with us. Luckily for me, I liked him at once. Although he was no older than Alexei, he seemed much older, perhaps because he was quiet, and kindly, with observing eyes and a humorous smile. I think he took in the situation immediately and soon made up his mind about all three of us. I could see that he disliked Alexei and was tolerantly amused at Mrs. Goodman's antics, in a slightly contemptuous way. Toward me, as the evening wore on, he adopted a sort of protective manner and saw that I had everything I wanted. When I confessed to him that I did not like champagne because it made me giddy and sick, he said he felt the same way and ordered for us two glasses of milk.

Out of the corner of his eye, he watched Alexei and Mrs. Goodman, and the more intimate and confidential they became, the nicer he was to me. He put himself out to be charming! He told me stories and made me laugh and bought me violets and candy.

When it was time to go to another night place and we were waiting outside for the cabs, Mrs. Goodman said:

"John, you take the princess and I'll go with Prince Alexei. We'll all meet at the restaurant and the pair that arrives first will find the reserved table."

"Is that so?" murmured Mr. Waring, narrowing his eyes and looking at her ironically. "Well, I hope you get there safely without any accident."

"Don't be ridiculous, John; of course, we'll get there all right. Ahead of you two, I bet."

"What do you want to bet?" he asked with a grin, while she shrugged her shoulders and said impatiently:

"Please, John, don't be a bore." •

Then she and Alexei got into a cab and we followed them. But in the traffic we lost each other and when finally we arrived at the cabaret, they had not yet come. So we went to our table and waited. Half an hour passed, an hour, an hour and a half. We had danced several times and watched the show and eaten, * but still they didn't come.

At last, Mr. Waring took out his watch.

"It's five o'clock," he remarked. "Do you want to stay on a little longer or would you like to go to your hotel now?"

"I'd like to go home, please," I said, and my voice must have sounded miserable, for he patted my hand and agreed.

"All right, litde princess, let's go. Something must have happened to their cab. They are pretty rickety in Paris, you know. Most unreliable. . . ."

We drove back to the hotel and to my shame I was suddenly and violently sick in the cab.

"That's all right," John Waring said soothingly, handing me his handkerchief to wipe my streaming eyes, for I was weeping with mortification and wretchedness, "that can happen to anyone. As a matter of fact, only a few days ago, it happened to someone else I was with—someone much older than you. The trouble with you, you're tired. Such late hours are not good for little girls."

At the door as he said good-bye, he suddenly bent down and kissed my hand.

"Good night, little princess, sleep well, and to-morrow, if you like, we'll go to the circus and the zoo."

"I'd like that very much," I managed to answer, still overwhelmed with confusion at my unseemly behaviour. Then I went upstairs.

With Mania's help I undressed and lay down, staring up at the ceiling. I hated Alexei and the Goodman woman more than I had ever hated anybody or anything in all my life. Slowly a feeling of fury began to mount in me. Who was I to be insulted publicly this way? What had I done to deserve it? I could see John Waring's pitying eyes and hear his kind voice that seemed to be warning me.

All right, I thought, getting more and more indignant. I'll show them yet, the beasts! If that's the way Alexei feels about me, why did he marry, me? I could have waited for years

without marrying and still be a young bride when the time came! There are many years between seventeen and twenty-five, when officially a girl becomes an old maid. What had all the haste and hurry been about anyhow? "Marry in haste, repent at leisure!" Well, here it was, the gospel truth.

Slowly the minutes passed. At last I heard Alexei's key turn in the lock. Cautiously opening the door, he tiptoed in toward his bed. In the dim light of the night lamp I could see that for once he was not too drunk. All the worse then, all the more insulting. A wave of fury swept over me and, jumping out of my bed, I rushed into the bathroom and, lifting a heavy jugful of water, rushed back and poured the contents all over Alexei. The unexpected assault caught him unawares. Staggering, choking, coughing, he stood near his bed in his evening clothes, dripping wet.

"You little devil, you vixen," he finally sputtered. "How do you dare . . ."

"How do *you* dare! Coming in at this hour and on your honeymoon, too!" I cried. "I'll leave you for ever and tell everybody that the reason was that Goodman woman. Right now, I'll go—at once. I don't mind the scandal! Let there be one! The worse, the better."

Throwing on my coat, I ran to the door, but he caught me.

"Don't, Tamara," he said, suddenly losing his anger. "Go to bed and I'll explain. . . ."

"You have nothing to explain!" I retorted; "Nothing! First, you practically force me to marry you; then on your honeymoon you humiliate and insult me publicly. What sort of a man are you? If you had been decent and good and kind to me, I might have learned to like you and perhaps even love you later on. But no! How have you treated me——Oh, I hate you, I hate you so!"

"And I love you when you are this way! I love your fury and your shining eyes and everything about you now. Oh, if only you were always like this, my little Gypsy. . . ."

And taking me in his arms he carried me back to bed.

Next morning we left Paris. I was sorry that I didn't go to the circus and the zoo with John Waring and that I had no

chance to thank him properly for his kindness. In my heart I hoped that some day soon I would see him again.

Our return journey was uneventful save for the fact that Alexei lost all his pocket money (of which he had plenty when he left Paris) playing cards on the train with three unknown 'gentlemen, and had to borrow from me and even from Mania.

Then in Berlin, where, at my thoughtless request, we stopped overnight to hear Caruso in *Aida*, Alexei disappeared during the second act under the pretext of going out to have a drink to help him through the "unspeakable boredom" of the opera, and I did not see him again until eight o'clock the next morning. After waiting for him at the Opera House till there was no one left but me, I went back to the hotel alone, wondering what in the world had happened to him now.

But when finally he appeared, he was so beautifully drunk that he couldn't remember where he had been nor what he had done. He hadn't a cent left on him and had even lost, or given away, or been robbed of his gold cigarette case and his pearl cuff-links and studs.

I was ashamed to have Mania see him in such a condition, in his soiled evening clothes, battered top hat and gaping stiff shirt that showed the fur on his chest, but she was in the room when he arrived and it couldn't be helped. As a matter of fact it was just as well that she happened to be there, as I couldn't have handled him alone. So together we undressed him and put him to bed.

"Don't you dare tell anyone at home about this!" I told her severely. "Promise me and make the sign of the cross in front of the icons that you won't."

"Very well, your Shiningness, I won't. May my eyes burst if I do," she replied, crossing herself and bowing in the direction of the icons, that naturally always travelled with me. But her eyes filled with tears and, throwing her apron over her head, she ran out of the room.

That night we left Berlin and the rest of *the* journey passed without further incident.

In Petersburg we settled down in Princess Agrippina Ivanovna's former house, which she had given Alexei as a wedding present.

She herself preferred living abroad, mostly in Paris and on the Italian Riviera, and for many months at a time the house stood empty with only Sergei, her trusted buder, in charge.

Situated on a residential street, conveniently near Alexei's regiment, it was a narrow, three-storied building, typical of old St. Petersburg, with its high pointed roof and colouring of pale yellow and white.

Most of the furniture belonged to the house and only my rooms were arranged according to my taste.

Though Agrippina Ivanovna had taken all her best things to her two houses, in Paris and in Rapallo, there still was enough left to make the rooms look handsome in a heavily rich way which personally I found hideous, but that undoubtedly would have made an antique dealer jump with joy.

The entrance hall had six high-backed, carved, black walnut chairs that would have looked very well in a bishop's parlour; there was a large table to match, bearing a silver platter for visiting cards; a huge mirror in an elaborate gilt frame above the table, and a deep red carpet in which one's feet sank as in butter. The heavy silk hangings were of the same colour as the rug; the chandelier was of heavy bronze.

Alexei's enormous study with its four windows had a magnificent beige Beloujistan carpet that covered the entire floor. It had been a present from one of the Emirs to his father and was greedy prized in the family.

Bookcases lined the walls, the furniture was massive and consisted of ornately carved sofas and chairs, Turkish divans covered with oriental rugs and numerous tables with tops of marble, onyx and lapis. Oil paintings, mosdy old family portraits, in big gilt frames hung above the bookcases and on one wall over a Turkish divan there was a collection (supposedly one of the best) of antique weapons, encrusted with precious stones.

The dining-room was of heavy mahogany with two large cupboards filled with old china and a sideboard that must have groaned dismally beneath its load of Victorian silver.

Only the furnishings of my three rooms, given to me as a wedding present by Mamoussia, were entirely different and must have appeared very incongruous as compared to the rest of the house.

My drawing-room had pale powder-blue **and** gold brocade

hangings; the carpet was an Aubusson; the furniture Louis Seize, graceful and light with its framework of old gold, upholstered in the pastel shades of that period. On the walls were several French paintings: among them a little Watteau, one of Great-Aunt Natalia's prized possessions that she had given me as a second wedding present.

My bedroom was typically English with white lacquer furniture, plenty of mirrors, and hangings of a gay cretonne with large pink roses on a white background. The rug was of pale green Japanese straw and always smelled of hay after it had been washed.

But best of all was my own little parlour (the "boo-doo-arrrr" Mania called it, rolling the r with great relish) where I spent most of my time. There, too, as in the bedroom, the furniture was painted white and covered with cretonne; the carpet was a soft green; and a small crystal chandelier, in the shape of a lantern, cast an amusing pattern of sparkling spots, intermingled with little shadows, that danced every time the house shook as a heavy truck went by. On the walls hung old coloured engravings, the central figure being "The Apotheosis of a Beautiful Female," one of Alexei's gifts. On top of the two white bookcases, filled with my own books, paraded a collection of Copenhagen china animals that I had been assembling for years, ever since I could remember. It was a brave display of dogs and cats and monkeys and all kinds of other beasties, each one being, without discrimination, greatly beloved and treasured. True, the earlier ones, due to juvenile mishandling, had lost their tails or their paws or some other important part of their anatomy, but the later ones, acquired when already I knew how to treat them properly, were in fine condition.

Between the two windows stood a large dressing-table with a glass top that covered a runner of green silk moiré of the same colour as the rug. On the table, placed in symmetrical order round a gold basin and jug, were the twenty-five pieces of the crystal and gold French *toilette* set that had once belonged to Great-Grandmother Tamara, and were marked with the letter T and a princess's crown. An oval mirror in a gold frame, representing a princess's ermine mantle topped by a crown, hung over the dressing-table.

On the floor over the green carpet were scattered several

small white fur rugs. I had hoped that the family would give me Mishka, the bear, but Mamma didn't want to part with him, though she faithfully promised to leave him to me, if I outlived her. Popo's big gilt cage stood near the window.

A writing-desk and a comfortable armchair, at the back of which stood a tall reading-lamp with a white shade on which were painted pink roses, completed the furnishing of my "boodooarr." It was gay and liveable and in it I stayed for hours at a time, avoiding as much as possible the "regular" rooms of the house. I didn't even much care for my own powder-blue drawing-room, as it was too formal and too much of a "salon" to be comfortable. But the little room was mine and save for the elaborate gold set, that looked ridiculous there and should have been in a museum, it was very much like my own room at home.

Soon after we returned from our honeymoon I found out positively that I was with child. The Professor who examined me was a friend of Agrippina Ivanovna. She had insisted that he, instead of our dear Doctor, should be in charge of my case, and probably for that reason I disliked him the minute I met him for the first time. Besides, he was big and fat and oily, with a red face, loose lips that he kept smacking, and a way of laughing and joking about things that to me then were terribly shocking. Our first session ended lamentably as no one had taken the trouble of explaining the procedure to me and indignantly I had boxed the Professor's ears. But he didn't seem to mind in the least and, roaring with laughter, declared that he enjoyed "young spitfires."

When Alexei heard that I was pregnant, he pursed up his lips and whistled.

"Whew! That's too bad, my girl," he declared, "and much too soon if you ask me. Why, you'll be a fright and I hate ugly women! Can't sympathize with sickness either! Well, that's the charm of married life, I suppose. Can't be helped, can it?"

My family was none too pleased either, because they said I was so very young and Papoussia exclaimed indignantly: "I told you so!"

A few days after our return, Alexei's life and mine settled down into two definite patterns.

In the morning, immediately after breakfast, he would leave for the Regiment where he remained until late in the afternoon.

He hardly ever came home for lunch and from the Regiment went directly to his Club. There he'd play cards, always gambling heavily, until dinner time at half-past seven. At first he came home for dinner fairly often, but then, as the months passed and I became more shapeless and homely, he'd telephone from the Club and leave word with Sergei that he would remain there for dinner. The procedure was always the same and soon I became used to it. Down the corridor at five minutes to seven I'd hear Sergei's footsteps, followed by a knock on the door and his voice, in the impersonal tones of a well-trained butler, would announce: "His Shiningness has just telephoned that he will not be in for dinner."

At first I was hurt; then for a while indignant; then it became a habit, and at last a matter of complete indifference.

He would play cards all through the night, returning very late, usually drunk. Sometimes if he was too drunk, Sergei and his valet put him to bed on the couch in his dressing-room. Little by little that became a regular habit too, and toward the end of the winter he was sleeping there all the time.

My life was of a very different kind. After breakfast I would read the morning paper and then discuss with the cook his menus for the day, which seemed such a futile thing to do as I didn't care what I ate and Alexei hardly ever had his meals at home. Then I'd go for a walk, stopping at our house to see Mamoussia and Papoussia and everybody else. Occasionally I would stay on for lunch with them and then accompany Mamma on her dignified drives up and down the Quays or to the Islands. Or we'd pay calls. One call ended scandalously, when, upon entering a drawing-room, I was suddenly, unexpectedly, taken violently ill then and there in the middle of the room, just as our hostess had risen to greet us. Luckily there was no one else present and Mamma, hastily whispering into her ear, "*Enceinte*," saved the day.

At tea time I was at home and frequently callers would drop in between four and six. At exactly four o'clock, whether there were any guests or not, Sergei would roll into the drawing-room the little tea-cart with its pretty silver set and trays of sandwiches, biscuits and home-made cakes, and gravely I'd pour out the tea for my friends just as Mamma and Tanka and all the other ladies did for theirs. It was then that I felt really grown up, especially

when I began to wear the loose flowing tea-gowns that had been made for my trousseau. There were seven of them, one for every afternoon of the week, but my two favourites were a heavy pink silk, trimmed with sable, and a powder-blue velvet with silver lace. Both were extremely wide with a Watteau pleat in the back, short sleeves and a long train.

As I had quite a few jewels I wore them in turn to match the tea-gowns: one day the diamond brooch, bracelet and pendant; the next day the rubies, and so on through the week.

Before the callers arrived Sergei always went through the house, pouring perfume on to a special little red-hot burner on which the drops sizzled and jumped, leaving a delicious scent behind that clung to the rooms for a long time afterward.

My visitors were mostly the girls whom I had known all my life and their brothers, cousins and beaux, now officers of the different guard regiments. It was not only perfectly all right but it was "quite the thing" for single or married men to call on the young married women of the same set, and no eyebrows were ever raised if on entering a young hostess's drawing-room at tea time, one found several ex-beaux of hers sipping tea and chatting. Her husband might be present, or he in turn might be calling on some old friend of theirs and it was quite natural to hear a guest remark: "Oh, Tanka,"—or Tamara, or Sophy, or whatever the name of the hostess was—"I just saw your husband in So-and-So's drawing-room." Thus among the young married set, small, intimate coteries were formed and with them friendships that lasted a lifetime.

As soon as the last caller had left, I used to get ready for Alexei and change for dinner. But as he rarely came home I stopped dressing for him and instead of sitting all alone, in solitary grandeur in the gloomy old dining-room, I would have Sergei bring a tray into my "boodooarr."

I read till bedtime and then again in bed until late if the book interested me. Strangely enough my family never looked in on me in the evenings, because I was still a bride, they said, and did not want to disturb us "love birds." If only they had known that I was nearly always alone, how horrified they would have been! But they never even guessed and I kept my humiliating solitude a dead secret.

One evening, feeling particularly lonely and restless, I decided

to look over my "big" jewels, the kind that were worn only on special occasions.

These jewels were not kept in the same place as the smaller, everyday ones; they had a cleverly camouflaged cache of their own in the shape of a big square white lacquer table that stood in my bedroom and differed from other ordinary tables only in the peculiar way that its top slanted downward. A secret key opened the lock and then the wooden top could be removed, revealing beneath it a large square of glass, the same size as the table. Under that glass on a red velvet lining lay the jewels in groups, according to the stones. On the left was strung out full length the larger necklace of "blue" diamonds; then a second necklace of smaller white diamonds; then a yellow diamond sunburst; several pendants; a pair of solitaire ear-rings; a tiara consisting of three parts representing roses in full bloom; and last but not least the hideous diadem that Agrippina Ivanovna had given me as an engagement present and that looked exactly like the symbol of the Wagon-lit. In the next section came the pearls: first a large string; then hoops of seed pearls; several brooches; and a pair of pearl and diamond ear-rings. In the third row was a necklace of rubies with the other jewels to match and finally two large square emerald brooches that ended the display.

They were all family jewels, given to me at the time of my marriage but due to my "interesting condition," which prevented my going to balls and parties, I had never worn them once, except the pearls.

It was a lovely sight to see the big pieces sparkle on their red velvet background and at first I used to play with them quite often. But then for a long while I had neglected them. Poor things, I thought, how dull for them to be hidden there for weeks and weeks where no one could see them day after day and night after night, they who loved the bright lights!

"You and I together," I remarked sadly as one by one I lifted them and carried them to the bed, preparing to clean them. "We're all in the same boat! I love the light, too, and gaiety and fun—and look at me! Fat and funny-looking at eighteen and all alone day after day and night after night just like you, with no one to talk to but myself."

But as I examined them it seemed to me that the diamonds in

both necklaces and ear-rings did not sparkle as usual. Curious, I turned on all the lights and even played the small table lamp right on them, but without any result. In both necklaces and ear-rings the stones were flat and dull and only the roses in the diadem and those in the Wagon-lit insignia sparkled and danced as usual.

"That's funny! That's more than funny—that's strange," I thought, examining them still more closely from all sides. "Perhaps they need a bath and a polish." So I dipped them in Eau de Cologne and rubbed them with a chamois cloth, but again with no better result. Every stone in the necklaces seemed dead and lay there strangely flat and white without the slightest depth or sparkle of life. Suddenly I remembered the book I had been reading that evening. It was about precious stones that lived on certain people and died on others. Turquoises, for instance, on some people turned green if they wore them; pearls either became very much alive or grew dull-looking on others; sapphires changed colour from sparkling blue to black. . . .

Alarmed, I looked at the diamonds. Something awful had happened to them, no doubt about that! But what? Had they died because of being so long in the dark? But that was impossible. They had always lived inside that table when they had belonged to Mamma and had never changed this way. No, it was something else! But what?

Frantically I racked my brain, but couldn't think of anything. At last I decided to consult Mamma and, calling her on the telephone, told her what had happened.

"That's very strange," she said. "Are you sure you are not imagining things? In your condition one does sometimes. . . ."

"No, of course, I am not imagining. Please, come at once and see for yourself."

"All right, darling, I will, if Alexei doesn't mind an old mother-in-law descending on him at this romantic hour."

"Alexei is not at home," I replied shortly, without elaborating on the subject.

"Not at home? But why? Where is he?"

She sounded so alarmed that to calm her I said that he had gone out on some regimental business.

"Why, you poor little bride! All alone and not telling Mamma about it! Listen, lovie, if ever you are left alone again,

you must let me know and I'll be with you at once. I'm coming this minute."

I hung up the receiver, thinking ruefully of the evenings and evenings that I had spent alone since my marriage less than six months ago. If only Mamoussia knew the truth of how unattractive I was to Alexei, how shocked she'd be!

When she arrived, a little anxious and breathless, I showed her the diamonds and immediately she agreed that there was something radically wrong. Together we went through the same procedure of washing and polishing them and turning on all the lights. But in vain. There they were—two long strings of ugly flat stones, lifeless and cold.

"I cannot imagine what is the matter with them!" exclaimed Mamma, shaking her head. "They don't look real. They look like glass."

As she said those words we suddenly realized that she had accidentally come upon the truth. Glass! That's what they were. Glass! Someone had robbed me and, taking out the real stones, had substituted plain glass.

"That wouldn't be such a hard thing to do," cried Mamma excitedly. "And it's someone who knows where you keep them and that you have had no occasion to wear any of those jewels for the past six months. We'll have to send for the police. At once. Could it possibly be Mania?"

"Oh, no, no, no!" I cried indignandy. "Not Mania! How can you even say such a thing! She loves me and has known me all my life and is faithful and devoted. ..."

"Well, then it is Sergei or some of the new servants. The only thing to do is to send for the police immediately."

Suddenly I felt that that was the wrong thing to do. Not the police, at least not to-night. Finally I persuaded her and, after staying with me for a while, she tucked me up in my bed, as in the good old days, and calling out our usual "God bless you," left the room.

But as I lay there in the dark I began to feel uneasy. Why hadn't I heard the front door slam? Was Mamoussia still there, quietly conducting an investigation of her own? Maybe questioning Mania and making her cry?

At the thought, I sprang out of bed and, throwing on a robe, ran through the rooms. They were all dark and only in Alexei's

study a reading lamp was burning. As I entered the room I saw Mamma sitting in his armchair with a book. But I could see that she wasn't reading. Her face was pale and set, her eyes stern.

"Mamma," I cried, "what are you doing here? Why didn't you go home?"

Startled at my unexpected appearance, she dropped the book and gazed at me in silence. Then she sighed.

"I wanted to spare you a scene, child. That's why I didn't tell you that I was staying on here. But I must see Alexei. I must find out why he stays out so late every night. Sergei has told me that this is not the first time. . . ."

So Sergei had been talking! I knew he couldn't be trusted; I knew it the first time I ever saw him that afternoon at Agrippina Ivanovna's. A wave of indignation swept over me. So, I was still being treated as a child! I, who was doing my best to conceal the real state of affairs from Mamma so as not to hurt her. Because I knew that if she ever found out, she'd be heart-broken and accuse herself of having been instrumental in making her own child unhappy. And what was the use of that? It was too late anyhow and there could be no remedy. . . .

And now she and my servant had gone behind my back to trap my husband! Bad as he was, he was still my husband, "for better or for worse." Well, in this case it was for worse, but after all, who cared? Not I. By this time I was becoming hardened as though a coat of ice was gradually forming all round me.

For a few moments I stood there shaking with anger, but I managed to control myself.

"Please, Mamoussia, go away!" I finally begged, my voice trembling. "You have no right to come between husband and wife! This is my affair."

"And mine too," she interrupted. "You are my child and married or not, eighteen or eighty, I am still your mother with a mother's authority and rights. If I wish to remain, I shall and you cannot change my decision."

"Very well then, *doushenka*, you are forcing me to do this terrible thing."

I pressed a button and almost instantly Sergei appeared. He, too, looked pale and distraught.

"The princess desires her carriage to be brought round immediately. Assist her to the door," I heard myself say firmly.

A look of anguish came into her eyes.

"Do you realize what you are doing? You are ordering your own mother out of your house," she whispered in English. "May God forgive you, my child; I don't think I ever will."

And with her head raised high she swept out of the room followed by Sergei, while I, blinded with tears, rushed back to my room and, throwing myself on my bed, sobbed and sobbed all through the night.

What had I done, oh, what had I done? Sent my mother out of my house, my mother, who adored me, in order to protect my husband, who did not care a fig for me! But the Bible had said that one should leave one's father and mother and follow one's husband. . . . Oh, what was the right thing to do? What did one's free will recommend in such a case? Should I obey my mother or protect the man I had married?

At dawn I heard Alexei return. Jumping out of bed, I ran to him, perhaps unconsciously looking for consolation and help. But as usual he was drunk and stared at my tear-stained, swollen face with bloodshot, angry eyes.

"What are you doing up at this hour? Spying on me? A fine beauty I married!" he furiously shouted, pushing me aside and lurching toward his dressing-room. "Go away, I don't even want to look at you. I need pretty women round me, not women with swollen bodies and puffy, red faces. Go on, be off . . ."

"But, Alexei," I cried. "I have so much to tell you! First of all I've been robbed—my diamond necklaces, my ear-rings...."

A starded look came into his face and for a moment he was silent. Then he cleared his throat.

"So you have found that out at last," he muttered. "I wondered how long it would take you."

"But what happened? I don't understand," I stammered, completely at a loss. Was it possible that he knew who the thief was? And if so, why hadn't he told me?

"This is what happened, Tamara," he said huskily, steadying himself at the table and staring at me with eyes which, though still bloodshot, were becoming less befuddled. "It's really all very simple, if only you'll be reasonable about it."

"What is it?" I asked breathlessly, as he paused and smiled in a sickly, mirthless sort of way.

"Well, some time ago I lost a good deal of money at the club. Really quite a lot. And the man who won it all demanded that I should pay at once. I couldn't raise the necessary sum at a moment's notice and I hated to ask my mother—you know what scenes she makes. . . . So I pawned your diamonds. But they're quite safe and I have the ticket, somewhere. . . ."

He fumbled in his pockets.

"Pawned the diamonds? Why in the world didn't you tell me instead of letting me think that someone stole them? Goodness, didn't you know that I'd give them to you if you needed them? And why the paste? Such a beady trick!"

"Oh, I didn't want to bother you in your condition and I knew you wouldn't be wearing any diamond necklaces for quite some time. Besides, I thought you wouldn't notice the paste and then I'd be able to put the diamonds back again before you found out."

Tricks and lies! . . . Suddenly I felt just the way I had at Madame Courbat's when Nadia had insulted me and, swinging out my fist, I hit Alexei squarely on the jaw. With a roar of pain he lurched toward me, but luckily he was too drunk to move quickly and, before he could do anything, I turned and fled into my room, locking the door and pushing against it all the furniture I could. Alexei pounded on the door, trying to break it down, but Sergei and his valet, attracted by the noise, came rushing and soon I heard them carrying him off to bed.

Hopelessly I cried for hours. A fine person I turned out to be, ordering my mother out of my house and then hitting my husband in the face when he was drunk and helpless! . . .

That morning when Mania came into the room, I was unable to get up and lay shaking all over. Terrified, she called up Mamma who came as fast as she could, accompanied by Tanka, Niania, Miss Burns and Dr. Roukovsky. A few minutes later Papoussia and Dedoussia followed. With all of them round my bed I felt better, and safe again.

The Doctor, according to the ethics of his profession, could no longer treat me and in post-haste he summoned the Professor. This disagreeable gentleman ordered me to remain flat on my back without moving: "Otherwise," he said, "good-bye to your

baby, or *babies*, I should say, as you, my little princess Spitfire, are having twins to keep up the tradition of your family,"

So, I was to have twins! Excitedly the family buzzed round me, and Mamoussia congratulated me with tears of joy in her eyes, for upholding the honour of her clan. Loving and tender as usual, the unhappy incident of the past night forgiven, Mamma was at my bedside all the time, never leaving me, sleeping and eating in the same room.

But when I recovered and was up and about again, she had one of her long talks with me.

"Please, darling, don't be angry and naughty with Mamma again," she said gravely, "but living in your house as I have in the past weeks, I cannot help but see what is going on. Night after night Alexei comes home intoxicated. No, don't interrupt me, child, I am going to have my way this time and forbid you to say a word. Just listen to me quietly, then you can say all you please afterward. Yes, he stays out until goodness knows when and then returns in a shocking condition. And not only that, there's the dancer, too—Lydia Petrova. Everybody knows it; the whole town is talking. And the story of your diamonds has somehow or other got out.

"All this breaks my heart, because I arranged your marriage—I forced you into it! Papa, Dedoussia, Aunt Natalia, Vanka, Tanka—they were all against it and they were right. I was wrong! Utterly, completely, hopelessly wrong. It's as though I had been struck blind and deaf and had deliberately ruined my child's life. The more I realize it, the more terrible it is for me. It'll kill me, if it goes on this way. But, Tamara, there is always a way out of everything! Come home with me now*, have your babies quietly with us and then we'll arrange for a divorce. Dedoussia will talk to the Emperor and we'll even get you your own name back again. You'll be Tamara Stronskaia once more. Please listen to me, dear. I've been so wrong, so terribly wrong before, but this time I know I am right. So, please, I beg and entreat you, come home to us."

Bursting into tears, she knelt down in front of me and put her head on to my lap.

Stunned, I stared down at her and for the first time noticed
* how grey her hair had become. In these past few months, too.
.. . And as she lifted her face and I saw the look of anguish in

her blue eyes and all the new little wrinkles round them, my heart went out to her and, throwing my arms round her, I, too, burst into tears. For a few minutes we rocked in each other's arms, but as I began to sob violently, she suddenly stopped.

"This is bad for you, Tamara," she said, getting up and wiping her eyes. "Very bad. I didn't mean to upset you so. All I wanted was to tell you that you could come home any time you pleased. And we'll make up for all this misery and love and protect you. You'll have your old rooms and Niania and our Doctor and everybody else round you. Then in time you'll forget this terrible mistake and meet the right man and be happy. Come, darling, let's go now. Vanka and Tanka beg you, too. They'd speak to you, only they are afraid of upsetting you as I did," she added with a watery smile.

"So lie down for a while and think things over quietly. Then tell me that you'll come home with me at once."

Leading me to my bed, she covered me with the pink satin "honeymoon" quilt and, drawing the curtains, left me alone in the dark.

At first I felt too shaken and confused to think, but little by little, as the warmth of the quilt crept over me and I gradually quieted down and stopped trembling, my thoughts became calmer and Mamma's words, that had stunned me, began to take on a purposeful meaning.

Yes, of course, she was right! There was no use for me to stay on here where I was not loved or even wanted. I was the one who was suffering, only I, so why prolong it unnecessarily? Alexei wouldn't care. On the contrary, he'd probably be glad to get rid of a homely-looking little Gypsy wife that had no attraction for him. Then he'd marry his dancer. . . . Yes, I'd pack at once and go home! This very evening I'd sleep in my own bed and Niania would undress me and Mamma would tuck me up and call out "God bless you" all down the corridor. And Vanka and Tanka would tease me again and make me laugh and cry. . . . And there'd be Papoussia and Dedoussia and everybody else. . . . And the Doctor, the dear, darling old Doctor! He'd help me have the babies instead of that horrible old Professor.

But at the thought of the babies I broke off abruptly. The babies with Alexei's name born not "in glory and honour" in

their own home, but shamefully in their mother's, as though illegitimate and unwanted! And round their cradles, instead of soft lullabies, there'd be ugly whispers of divorce and those whispers would grow louder and louder until they'd be the talk, the shout, of the town. It would be a scandal that would cling to them for years—all their lives perhaps! And when they grew up, they'd hate me. Hate me for having given up so soon, so easily, and for running away like a coward. How could I have forgotten my babies for even a minute? Poor little unborn creatures that depended on me entirely, not only for their very existence, but for their future, too. *They* came first, not I!

Suddenly I felt strong again. My mind was made up. Springing out of bed, I ran into the "boodooarr" where Mamma was sitting in the armchair with closed eyes as though exhausted.

"Mamoussia, it's no use," I cried, throwing my arms round her again. "I love you, love you, love you, for wanting me back home, but I can't come! My babies, think of them! What a shame it would be! No, they must be born right here in Alexei's house. And perhaps after their birth, he will change and love them and me, too. Who knows? And then, maybe I'll love him and all will be well. Miracles have happened before!"

In my exalted stupidity I could see Alexei becoming a faithful, loving, devoted husband and myself more and more attractive to him, even seductive, and loving him, too.

As I spoke, Mamma turned very pale. For a moment she was perfectly still, then she said¹ quietly: "Very well, Tamara, it shall be as you please. You are the one to decide. Maybe you are right and it should be this way for the sake of the blessed babies, if not for the miracle that you suddenly seem to believe in. But remember, any time you want to come home we are all there waiting for you with open arms."

After that we never mentioned the subject again and, following the dictates of that same peculiar, exalted feeling, which seemed to tell me that something really good was about to happen, I began to visit daily a small church where was enshrined the famous icon of the miraculous Madonna, popularly called "The Quick Listener." Numerous were the miracles attributed to her and hundreds of votive candles burned in front of her shrine throughout the day, shedding their soft light on her great,

dark, pitying eyes and gentle, sorrowful smile. Her golden robes were covered with precious stones, all votive offerings of supplication and gratitude, and round her people knelt, praying and weeping or staring up at her with eyes full of mystic fervour. A priest always read in a low voice the endless lists of names of those who were being prayed for, or he would chant the special hymn to Our Lady, while in the flickering light of the candles all those upturned faces would bear the stamp of the joy, or the sorrow, or the anxiety that had brought them there.

It was difficult for me to kneel, but with Mania's help I would manage to get down on my knees and lean on a chair that she always placed in front of me, and pray for "something good" to happen.

I loved that little church filled with prayer, and the clouds of incense seemed to carry all those prayers in swirling eddies from the hearts of the people to the heart of the Blessed Virgin.

And I would kneel there, aching all over but praying ecstatically and gazing at the Madonna with pleading eyes, until Mania would get worried and in a sibilant whisper beg me to go home. She would help me to my feet and off we would go, arm in arm, back to the carriage that was patiently waiting for us.

Twice a day I went to the little church, begging for my miracle. And lo and behold at the end of the second week I believed it had actually happened!

One evening, as I was in bed reading, Alexei unexpectedly returned and came into my room, not very drunk and grave. For a moment he gazed at me in silence—then suddenly he threw himself down on his knees by my bed and kissed my hand.

"Tamara, *doushenka*, poor little girl," he said in a tone of voice that I had not heard him use since the evening in Venera's Temple. "Forgive me for being such a worthless rotter. I've been a brute and the worst husband in the world. Don't think for a minute that I don't know it. I don't see why you didn't leave me long ago, in Paris, on your poor little honeymoon."

Helplessly I stared at him, unable to move, unable to believe my ears. Was this really Alexei? Was this his voice? Was I dreaming? Or was this the miracle that the "Quick Listening" Virgin had performed? I had to pinch myself to find out.

To save my life I couldn't understand this sudden change of heart in him. Of course, a miracle had taken place, no doubt

about that, but this was even more than a miracle—it was super-miraculous, unbelievable, frightening even.

After his amazing outburst, he offered to read to me and produced a book that he had brought specially for that purpose, a collection of Gorki's short stories.

As I lay back on my pillows my mind was in such a turmoil that I couldn't hear a word he was reading and kept wondering what would happen next. Suddenly I pulled myself up with a jerk. Merciful Fathers! I was the sinner now, not he!—a bad, wicked, ungrateful sinner. Here, I had been granted a miracle and how did I receive it? Suspiciously, with all kinds of second-rate, dusty thoughts. True, Alexei had sinned, but he had also repented and were we not expected to forgive not seven times, but seventy times seven? . . . And I couldn't even forgive my own husband once! Ashamed, I hung my head. After all, this was a new life beginning, my real marriage perhaps.

"You look very tired and it's time for you to go to sleep," remarked Alexei, closing the book. "To-morrow I'll come home straight from the Regiment and read you the next chapter. And, of course, I'll have dinner at home."

Still dumbfounded, unable to say a single word, I nodded and let him arrange my pillows and cover me up. Then he put out the light and tiptoed out of the room. A few minutes later, however, the front door slammed with a terrific bang—he had gone again, probably to the club for the night.

But I couldn't get to sleep! I was too excited and my thoughts too confused. Somehow I had to straighten all this out in my mind or I'd go crazy. I twisted and tossed and finally, turning on the light, sat up in bed. On the table next to me lay the book. Absentmindedly I picked it up, wondering what it was about. After all I hadn't heard a word. It might be a good idea to read the first chapters and catch up with Alexei. I could see that the book was not a new one; the paper cover was spotted and even torn in places. Where did it come from? It certainly did not belong to our library. . . . Perhaps it came from Watkins' English Library in town. I turned to the fly-leaf; my eyes nearly jumped out of their sockets! For there in "characters clear," unmistakable and for the whole world to see, stood the name of Lydia Petrova. . . . So Alexei had brought me one of *her* books! Of all the cynical, abominable things to do. Furiously I threw

it across the room. He hadn't even taken the trouble to see that her name wasn't on the fly-leaf, or to erase it. Did he think I was blind, or an idiot who wouldn't guess? In a rage I clambered out of bed and paced the floor.

Now what was I to do? He probably was at Lydia's. Should I go and confront them with the book in my hand? Yes, that's exactly what I'd do, at once. But as I feverishly started to dress, I remembered my "condition." A scene of that kind might frighten the poor babies out of their wits, so that they would refuse to stay in me any longer.

"Too upsetting a house to live in," they would declare and leave me too soon for their own good.

No! As their "boarding house" I should stay at home and in bed for their sakes. But I must think of some way of seeing Lydia and talking with her. Back to bed I crept and all night devised ways and means. About four o'clock I heard Alexei return and quietly go to his room. Apparently he wasn't drunk. Now, why was that? Why had he changed all of a sudden, in one day? Had Lydia something to do with it? She must have had. I decided to see her the very next afternoon and with that decision finally fell asleep.

In the morning I could hardly keep still. The hours and minutes seemed to crawl along as I watched the clock with impatient eyes. But at last the lunch hour came and went and at two-thirty I dressed carefully in my most becoming tea-gown and big, floppy hat and ordered the carriage.

When I gave the footman the address, his eyelids flickered but his face remained as impassive as ever.

"I shall obey your S^rnningsness," he replied in the customary words, as he helped me into the carriage, and off we drove to the Millionaia Street, where lived the famous dancer, Lydia Petrova.

As we stopped in front of her house I got out of the carriage.

"Yes, the *barinia*, the lady, was at home," the butler said and inquired whom my Excellency commanded to announce.

But before the footman could reply, I said: "It is not necessary, I'll go right in."

And without further ado I walked through her entrance hall into her drawing-room.

It was a large, airy room, filled with flowers in numerous gilt **baskets** and crystal vases. A great lilac bush in full bloom stood

near a pink satin chaise-longue on which reclined a young woman with very fair hair. Instantly, from her photographs and from seeing her at the theatre, I recognized the dancer. Startled at my unexpected appearance, she sat up and stared at me with wide-open blue eyes, the colour of cornflowers. In a distant mirror I could see my own unprepossessing reflection, as usual small, dark and now, alas, shapeless.

"Who are you and how did you come in unannounced?" she asked, getting off her couch and smoothing her hair that stood out like a golden halo. Her face, with pretty, small features, was ageless like the face of most dancers. She might have been twenty-five or ten years older, and was dressed in a tight-fitting white satin tea-gown that fitted her lovely figure like a perfect glove.

As I stood staring rudely at her, she advanced toward me with good-humoured curiosity.

"I still haven't the slightest idea who you are. Won't you please tell me?"

Her voice was low and not unpleasant, though rather husky.

"I am Princess Vorozova," I replied as firmly as I could, though inside I was quaking with fright. What if she'd throw me out? Or if suddenly Alexei walked in? What would I do? "Stand up for yourself," somebody unseen seemed to whisper in my ear. I thought of Grandmother Dominica. Instantly I stopped quaking and with decided steps went up to the dancer.

A look of amazement came over her face when she heard my name, but beyond that she didn't show any other sign of recognition or of losing her self-control.

"Very pleasant indeed," she said politely and motioned me to the armchair of pink and gold brocade that stood near the couch. "Please take this chair. And may I offer you a cigarette or some tea?"

She sat down on her chaise-longue and rang a silver bell.

"Bring in the tea, please," she ordered, when a manservant appeared. Then turning to me, she smiled gaily. "Don't look so serious, princess. I'm glad that you've come to see me. It's much better this way. I always prefer bringing everything out into the open. I hate mysteries. And you'll find that I'm not a bad person really. Now, what can I do for you? Do you object

to my friendship with your husband? Is that it? Have you come to ask me never to see him again?"

Silently I shook my head and lighted the cigarette that she held out for me. I wasn't much of a smoker, but it would be better than twiddling my thumbs, or making my fingers crack—more sophisticated, I thought.

"No," I said at last, as she sat looking at me inquiringly. "No, I just wanted to see you ... to understand. ..."

She smiled again, but not so gaily this time.

"You are very, very young, princess, and many things in life must be puzzling to you yet. Later on, when you grow older, you'll get accustomed to them and find that they're not so devastating as you think. But I know the sheltered way you have been brought up and naturally ..." she broke off as though unwilling to express her thought.

"Yes, I see what you mean," I replied seriously. Somehow I felt no anger, only a desire to get to the bottom of all this. "That's why I want to understand. As you say, there is so much that I don't know yet."

"Poor little thing," she whispered, taking my hand into hers. For a minute she was silent, then suddenly, impulsively she sprang up. "*Boje moi* let's talk it all over, now, immediately. It isn't good for you to be worrying or upset. Let's get to the point. Your husband is a friend of mine and often comes to see me, every day in fact. Yes, he's been in love with me for a long time—on and off." She paused.

"Are you in love with him?" I asked.

She shook her head. "No, I'm not and never was, to tell you the truth. But he's fun to be with and generous, too, very generous."

"You see," she went on gravely, "I have known him for several years, six years to be exact, long before you did. And he was in love with me then. He even asked me to marry him several times, but I always refused. I knew I wouldn't be received by your set if I married him. It would have been an unbearable situation and I much preferred being free. An artist must be free, otherwise she's no good. That's why I refused him again and again, but we continued to be good friends, yes, lovers. . . . Then he met you and lost his head. He really did! I never saw a man so much in love as he was with you. He told me that he

was bewitched, on fire. And his mother, that awful woman, did all she could to keep that fire burning, because she was afraid he'd marry me. She told him that she'd disinherit him if he did and you know, of course, that the money is hers. And so he married you instead. Then something happened and everything went wrong. You were too cold, probably because you didn't love him, too much of an innocent little girl, he said. And—forgive me—he soon got tired of you. I know him so well. He wants plenty of fun and gaiety and laughter, yes, and plenty of wine and expert love-making, too. You couldn't or wouldn't give him all that, so he came back to me! And that's the story, God's own truth."

At this point her servant brought in the tea tray and we were both silent for a few minutes. There wasn't anything left to say. But at least I knew the truth.

"What I can't understand is why he has changed suddenly toward me," I said. That was something that still puzzled me.

"Because I asked him to," she answered in a low voice. "I knew that he was coming home late every night, drunk and undoubtedly rude, as he always is when he drinks too much. And I knew about your condition, so I begged him ..."

"You begged my husband to be good to me?" I cried indignantly, my cheeks beginning to burn with sudden anger. I could feel the old urge of "swinging out" as I had with Nadia and Alexei. Suddenly I wanted to slap that lovely, doll-like face, now, immediately. But as though she guessed my thoughts, Lydia sprang up and caught me by both hands.

"Now I can see why he was so madly in love with you!" she cried. "There it is, the Gypsy fire. Oh, you can be a princess a hundred times over, but first and foremost you are a Gypsy! Have you been to the Tabor here? Have you heard Masha sing? Why, she could be your sister. ..."

A Gypsy! The word rang through my brain! A Gypsy—of course I was a Gypsy! A throwback! Maybe Grandmother Dominica come back to life, if one believed in reincarnation. And she had been strong and proud, no one had dared insult her! Let them have their love affair, my husband and this woman. I wouldn't ever let it hurt me again! Now at last I knew and understood. But I certainly didn't want her pity. Impatiently I pulled my hands away.

"Yes, I am a Gypsy, first and foremost, as you say," I cried. "And I can sing and dance *our* way as well as you do yours!"

Goodness only knew why I was boasting and trying to pose as an artist, but I suppose I didn't want Lydia to have all the advantages over me in every way. I must have sounded very foolish, for she laughed again.

"Oh, but you're so very young, nothing but a little girl," she repeated, still laughing, though her eyes looked kind and friendly and my anger died down. "What do you want me to do?" she continued. "Tell me and I'll do it. I wouldn't hurt you for anything in the world."

"Nothing," I replied, "absolutely nothing. Let everything be just as it was, only don't tell my husband that I was here, that's all."

"I won't, I promise!" she cried. "But before you go—we'll probably never speak to each other again—let me give you just a little advice. I am so much older than you. I know Alex . . . Prince Alexei, I mean, so well, better than you do, because of all these past years. If he is trying to make up for having been rude and drunk and unkind, let him do it. You may have no illusions left, but don't let him realize that. Your life will be so much easier then. I know from experience. If you oppose him, he'll be ugly again. But he can also be quite decent and even kindly if he wishes, which is not very often, I admit. He hasn't a bad nature really, but his mother's influence and drink have spoiled and warped it. Too much money, too much drink, too many easy conquests, and a mother who has always scolded and nagged him, often unjustly, and then filled his pockets with gold. It's a strange situation. . . ."

"Very strange," I said gravely. "And now good-bye. I'm glad I came and glad we had this talk."

"Good-bye, princess," she said and her blue eyes seemed misty. "Please remember that I'm not your enemy, but your friend, even though we never meet again. And anything you ever ask me to do, I will. Anything."

"I believe you. Thank you," I replied, and on that we parted.

We never met again, but occasionally at the Imperial Marinsky Theatre I watched her dance in a ballet and was even able in an impersonal sort of way to admire her tall, lissome beauty.

That evening Alexei read to me again and I listened to him

and heard every word he read. My mind was no longer in a turmoil but perfectly calm and composed. Now I knew without the slightest doubt that there was no hope for us and that our marriage was only an empty shell. There wasn't anything I could do! Let the babies be born and fate take care of the rest.

CHAPTER XIV

LET THE BABIES BE BORN

AT the end of May we moved to our house at Krasnoe Selo, the summer camp, situated about twenty-five miles out of Petersburg. It was there that the Guard regiments spent the summers, there that the grand manoeuvres took place, as well as the famous races and the Emperor's review of the troops.

I liked the house and I liked the life in Krasnoe. It was different from anything I had ever seen before and it amused me immensely. Somehow in Petersburg I never felt that I was a "regimental lady," but here I did, definitely.

Our Regiment had its own encampment that was an integral part of the entire Camp of Krasnoe Selo and was located on a flat stretch of land near the railway station. The soldiers lived in wooden barracks and tents, but the officers' quarters were mostly in the houses of the peasants that stood on both sides of the one and only street which was also the main thoroughfare to Petersburg. These wooden houses, much larger and better built than the usual peasant huts, were occupied summer after summer by the same officers and their families. Some of them owned the houses outright, but many rented them year after year.

Ours, belonging to a rich peasant by the name of Oustinov, had been rented by Alexei for that particular summer. Wooden, of course, with its two stories painted a soft yellow, it stood half-way up the main street and had a high fence of planks all round it. Inside the fence, facing the street, was the "garden" that consisted of two little silver birches, a narrow, circular pathway and a bed of red geraniums that blossomed bravely all through the summer. On the right side of the house was an enclosed, glass porch; on the left, attached to the building, was

the barn that could be used as a stable, a carriage house or garage; while to the back was the kitchen garden that led to a little stream.

Inside, though rather peculiar in the disposition of its rooms, the house was comfortable and even attractive, all the interior decorating having been done by the summer tenants to the great satisfaction of the owners. The more elaborate the arrangement inside, the better they were pleased. Plumbing, heating, painting, papering, furniture, rugs, china, glass and kitchenware—all was ours of course.

As the regiments moved into Camp, so would come our possessions on big, heavy, horse-drawn carts that brought them piled up high all the way from Petersburg to Krasnoe Selo. It was like the great migration of peoples—our own Gypsies—or the escape of refugees, running away with their household goods from the advance of a conquering army.

Often on top of these trucks travelled the various pets: dogs, cats, canaries, parrots—and the noise would be terrific. Popo, the parrot, came that way and the driver said that he swore steadily throughout his journey.

To begin with, our house had a small, dark hall that led amazingly into the kitchen, on to the pantry, past the primitive "glozett" and from there straight into the parlour. But I changed that by adding the enclosed glass porch which opened directly into the living-room and thus became the new official entrance to the house. That was a great improvement, as at first bewildered guests would wander through the kitchen and pantry and, instead of finding themselves in the drawing-room, would by mistake open the opposite door into the gloomy little "glozett"—the "pouf" or "powder" glozett it was called as it was flushed with earth instead of water.

The parlour was a long, rather dark room that was always cool and pleasantly shaded by some creeping vines which covered the window-panes. It was a little like living at the bottom of the sea, with that soft, green, translucent light pervading the room and accordingly I had the furniture covered with an aquamarine cretonne which blended with the colour of that light. From our Petersburg house (on one of those famous antediluvian trucks), I brought a large table inlaid with mother-of-pearl that stood in the centre of the room and held a crystal bowl which I kept filled

with flowers. The carpet was a soft coral and on the sofas and chaise-longue I had pillows of the same hue. The effect was lovely and it was in this room that I settled down to wait for the arrival of my babies.

If I wanted sunshine, all I had to do was to move into the glass porch that was like a gay conservatory with its miniature trees and bushes and flowering plants. There I had wicker furniture with a cretonne of poppies and wheat, and a long table on which all our meals were served as there was no dining-room in the house.

My bedroom was on the other side of the parlour and had been arranged in such a fashion that at a moment's notice it could be transformed into a modern operating room. It had white enamel walls and a ceiling and floor to match. There were no corners that could accumulate dust, as they had been eliminated by superimposing extra walls that were known as *vagonka*. It was all very scientific and shiningly clean, for in that room the babies were to be born.

Next to my bedroom was Alexei's smaller one with an army cot. Then came the bathroom with a white enamel tub that took the place of the old tin horror which we found there, in which our landlord kept his potatoes in winter.

Upstairs were the nurseries, all blue and white, and on the other side of the landing, the servants' quarters.

The life of the Regiment became part of mine, beginning in the early morning and until late at night.

At dawn came the shepherd's flute, then a little later the "General March," the martial tune which a few soldiers who were part of the regimental band played on their instruments as they went up and down the street. This was done to awaken the officers and warn them that it was time to get up, mount their horses and fall in with the Regiment which was about to go out for early morning drill before the sun became too hot. The first words of the tune (which sounded very much like "*growl-growl*" as the soldier blew on his tuba) were: "*Little riders, friends, assemble for your march.*"

I loved that tune! It did something to me and at the first notes, when I'd hear the soldiers start down the street, stopping for a few seconds in front of each officer's house, I would get out of bed and run to the window to watch them pass.

"Growl-growl," they'd blow near my fence and for some unknown reason I'd tremble all over and my heart would suddenly go out to Alexei.

The soldiers had stopped to call "my man" to arms and as millions of women before me, I, too, responded to that call. Never had I been closer to loving him than in those few minutes every morning at dawn. There I'd stand by the window in a melting mood all soft and even proud of him—but it never went further than that.

I'd hear him get up and splash in the tub and then rattle his cup of coffee that Sergei always brought him. Then there'd be the sound of hoofs, which meant that his horse was being led out of the stable by his orderly. A moment later and Alexei would run down the wooden steps and mount. The horse would dance round, full of life and spirits, eager for exercise after a long night's rest, while Alexei spoke soothingly and with a firm hand—for he was an excellent rider—guided the beautiful creature to the main street.

From all sides rode out the officers to join the Regiment which was falling-in near the barracks and tents. A few more minutes and I could hear their orders as they took charge of the squadrons. Then the band would strike up a lively tune and off the Regiment would go, proudly as though on parade, led by its commander, who rode his high-stepping horse a little ahead of his men.

It was a stirring sight: hundreds of strong young men on strong young horses, all possessing the beauty and fire of youth.

As they approached our house and passed it in a splendid "defile" my throat would be all choked up and tears would fill my eyes. Why, exactly, I never knew. Was it sheer patriotism, or a peculiar form of emotionalism that had much more to do with the senses than anything else? Much as I debated that problem with myself, I never solved it.

As the Regiment went by I'd hasten into my garden and, leaning over the gate, watch them disappear in a cloud of dust. After that I'd go back to bed and sleep until later in the morning when I heard them returning.

On their way back, instead of the band, the regimental singers took charge and one could hear their voices from a great distance, growing louder and louder, as they headed for the Camp.

And again I'd run into the street to watch them go by once more. But now they presented a very different sight. Men and horses were no longer trim and shiny, as though on parade, as they had been in the early morning, but covered with dust and sweat, while instead of the orderly strains of the band, came the disorderly singing from hundreds of lusty young throats. Each squadron might be singing a different song and, as they rode past, the effect was amazing. It had something primitive in it and purely masculine, as primitive and as masculine as their loud voices and the heavy smell of sweat.

It was all over for the day! In a few minutes Alexei would be back home, his face black with sunburn and dust, his clothes reeking of "horse." Another bath, another breakfast, a nap, a fresh uniform with a snow-white tunic—and off he'd go to the Regiment for a different kind of work this time. No more riding, no more exercise. The heat of the day was on.

But all through the hours, from morning until night, I could hear in the distance the typical sounds of camp life. There on the hill across from us was the Preobrajensky Regiment, the oldest in Russia, founded by Peter the Great. And there was the Semeonovsky and all the others. . . .

From all sides I could hear laughter and singing and the neighing of horses. Krasnoe was alive with thousands of lives, all strong, all healthy, all lusty.

Never had I felt so much of a *female* as I had in that Camp and my distorted, swollen body only seemed to accentuate that peculiar, primitive state.

At noon, as regularly as the early strains of the General March, came the deep, throaty call of the fishmonger down our street. He was a very old man, short and bent, with a long white beard, and as he pushed along his little cart that always dripped and smelled to high heaven, he'd rumble in a voice like distant thunder: "*Soudakee dourakee*" which meant "carps—the fools," a feeble rhyming joke that he had probably concocted years and years ago. But there it was, the same silly old call day after day and out would run the cooks from all the houses to examine his wares and bargain over his Soudakee dourakee.

Another fishmonger, who passed half an hour later, called out in a high, thin but very musical voice: "Herrings from Holland!" Why "from Holland" was a mystery that we never solved as

that particular fish was the most ordinary and commonplace throughout the country.

Then came the greengrocer, ringing a little hand bell; and the fruit man, who in a singsong voice recited the names and the quality of his fruit.

The parade ended with the ice-cream wagon, which also carried an assortment of cold drinks, among which cranberry and pear water were the most popular.

I loved those cries nearly as much as I did the General March and would listen eagerly for them to come down the street.

I felt particularly well those days and would take long walks with Anna Semeonovna, the midwife, who, ever since we came to Krasnoe Selo, lived with us and never let me out of her sight, "for fear of an accident." She was young and pretty, very much in love with her husband, whom she had just married. She was dying to get back to him. Every morning she would inquire anxiously: "Don't you feel *anything*, princess? Is it possible that another day will go by without *something* happening?"

And I'd always have to laugh at her disappointed face when she heard me answer cheerfully that I never felt better in all my life and would love to go for a nice, long walk.

The Professor, too, was very anxious for me to get this thing over, as it was time for him to leave for the health resort in the Caucasus where his summer practice was waiting for him. True, he was being handsomely paid for every wasted day by his old friend Agrippina Ivanovna, but nevertheless he was as impatient as Anna Semeonovna for me to be "delivered of my load."

But the days passed and nothing happened. Mamoussia, Papoussia and Dedoussia, instead of going as usual to Stronskoe, had taken a house near by so as to be close at hand; and with them came Niania and Miss Burns, as well as the old servants.

Tanka lived a little way up the street in a house of her own with her husband and little Vanioha, while Vanka was in his bachelor cottage, just round the corner.

Thus, all my family was near me and with the exception of Vanka, who was busy all day at the Regiment, they would come to see me in the afternoons and in a mighty gathering we'd drink **tea** together on the porch.

In the evenings I'd go for a drive in the open carriage, sometimes with Alexei, sometimes with Mamoussia or Tanka. Occa-

sionally Vanka went along and would tease me because, he'd say, I'd be "pregnant for ever" unless *he* took charge of the situation.

At night Anna Semeonovna would bathe me and then put me to bed, saying hopefully: "Well, perhaps *now* it will begin!"

But still nothing happened! Then one evening I laughed myself into the desired and impatiently awaited delivery. That night about eleven someone (and I never found out who it was, though I strongly suspected Vanka finally "took charge of the situation") telephoned the Professor in St. Petersburg that my labour had begun and that he was to arrive as fast as he could.

"You'll just be able to catch the last train," the mysterious man's voice had said and offdashed the excited Professor with his host of assistants.

So while I was peacefully sitting in my bath, without the slightest twinge of pain, gaily chattering with Anna Semeonovna, the doorbell suddenly rang and the next minute, to our amazement, a gloomy-looking procession filed into my bedroom. First came the Professor, very dignified and pompous, then his two assistants, another midwife to help mine and two hospital attendants who carried some weird-looking parcels. They all were extremely solemn and as Anna Semeonovna went up to them in surprise, the Professor remarked:

"Ah, so she's in the bath? Very good, Anna Semeonovna, very good. That's the right thing to do when labour begins. Nothing better than a good warm bath; softens the tissues and all that."

"And all that . . ." murmured the astounded Anna Semeonovna, while the Professor in a businesslike manner started to order his followers round.

"Sec that the big bed is carried out at once and have the small one brought in, with a hard mattress. And plenty of hot water and towels. . . . And, oh, yes!"—this to the two hospital attendants—"Wipe the walls and the ceiling and floor with the disinfectant. Immediately. Can't be too careful in a private home, especially in one of these peasant huts."

And he looked round superciliously as much as to say: "*Pfui*."

Still sitting in my bath, I peered at the extraordinary scene in wonder. What in the world was going on? Could the famous Professor by any chance be drunk?

Suddenly he turned to me.

"Well, little Princess Spitfire, and how do you feel? Pains not too bad, eh? That's good."

"What's good?" I demanded at last, finding my tongue. "What's going on? Why are you here in the middle of the night? Bustling about as though you had something to do!"

"I'm here, my dear one, because your labour has begun and you need me now," he answered in a soothing voice, as though addressing a child, or an irresponsible being.

"Whose labour has begun?" I shouted indignantly, but he only said: "There, there; don't get excited. Just trust me and all will be well. Anna Semeonovna," turning to my midwife, "take our little patient out of her bath and place her for a second on the operating table."

But that was too much for me.

"Listen, Professor," I said in measured tones, which I hoped were dignified though I spoke while still submerged in a bath of water that had now grown unpleasantly cold. "I don't know what you are talking about, nor why you are here with all these people. But I have no pains, no pains whatsoever. I feel fine, do you understand—fine. Never felt better in my life! I want to eat, to walk, to dance."

"But your labour? The telephone call said that it had begun."

Now *he* was the one to be puzzled and, frowning ferociously, glared at everybody in the room.

"Who telephoned me?" he demanded angrily. "Anna Semeonovna, what have you to say? Did you ask someone to call me up?"

"Indeed I did not," she replied nervously, knowing his reputation for losing his temper and making the most awful scenes. "There has been no sign of any labour, none at all."

"Well, I'll be damned!" shouted the Professor, now purple with rage. "Apparently someone has played an idiotic joke on me and I believed it like a five-year-old child! But let me find out who put through that call from Krasnoe Selo and I'll wring his neck, gladly—do you hear me, gladly!"

"Yes, Professor," cried everybody in chorus. But I could see **that** most of them were ready to burst out laughing at the thought that such a trick had been played on the almighty Professor.

"Po*,'" I went, exploding in the tub. "*Pouf*" went Anna Semeonovna, bending low over me as though helping me to get

out. "He-he," snickered someone in the background. **That** made the Professor see red.

"There's nothing to laugh about, nothing at all," he **roared**. "I'm going back to Petersburg at once! Come on, all of you, hurry."

"You may still catch the milk train," suggested Alexei, who had appeared on the scene and looked as bewildered as everybody else. "Allow me to drive you to the station."

And off they all went, following the Professor, who stamped out in a fine rage.

As soon as they left I began to laugh. It was one of my old fits of laughter, suddenly come back to Ufe in full force. I laughed, I shrieked, I screamed, I roared. To save my Ufe I couldn't stop and was still at it when Alexei returned.

"Well, they got on all right," he said, mopping his forehead. "But was the Professor furious. . . . *Whew!* Luckily he caught that train. It's the last to-night until dawn! Wonder who played that trick though. Could it be your precious brother?"

That was exactly what I suspected, but knowing how little Vanka and Alexei cared for each other, I refrained from saying what I thought.

I was still giggling when all of a sudden a fierce pain shot through my body. . . . Another one and another. I stopped laughing and bit my lip.

"What is it?" cried Anna Semeonovna eagerly. "Did something hurt you then?"

"Oh, no, no, it's nothing; I laughed too much, that's all," I replied somewhat cautiously, as she began to tuck me up in bed.

"It may be so," she remarked dubiously, "but it looks to me like... *r*

"*Ouch*," I cried, sitting up and throwing back the covers, while the perspiration broke out on my forehead.

"Ah ha, I thought so," cried Anna Semeonovna. "Well, we'll wait a little longer and then send for the Professor. . . ." She stopped abruptly and stared at me aghast. *B^*it where was the Professor? Still travelling on that train back to Petersburg.

"Little Fathers," she moaned, "what a confusion, what a muddle! And it's your laughter that did it—shook the babies so that now they want to get out when there's no doctor here.

Oh, dear, oh, dear! You would start all this at the wrong time."

She looked so distressed that I began to giggle again and laughed until the next pain hit me.

"No more doubt about it now," ~~she~~ declared firmly. "It has begun and we must get the Professor back immediately."

After consulting Alexei, it was decided that as there were no more trains, he would take the car and drive to Petersburg, bringing back with him the Professor and all his staff, while Anna Semeonovna got me ready for the ordeal.

"On your way home, stop for the princess's mother," she called out after Alexei, as he was about to leave. "But don't let her come now. I have too much to do and would rather be alone."

As soon as he left, she made me go into the living-room, while she rapidly transformed my bedroom into a regular operating room. With the help of Sergei and the other servants, out went my big bed with all the rest of the furniture and in came the small bed with its hard mattress. Then the walls were thoroughly scrubbed with the disinfectant and two new tables with enamel tops were carried *in*. On one of them she laid out a horrifying array of instruments and a sterilizer in which to cook them.

From time to time, between pains, I'd come *in* to see what she was doing and take an active part in the new arrangement of my bedroom.

"That's right," said Anna Semeonovna. "Move about as much as possible. The more active you are now, the easier it will be later."

So we busied about together until a new sharp pain would run through me and cause me to stop and catch my breath.

"There's one thing that I forbid though," she declared. "You cannot go to the 'pouf glozett' alone. It's a dangerous place and I won't have you drop the babies in there."

The first pain had begun at eleven-thirty. Now dawn was breaking and in *the* distance I heard the shepherd play on his flute and the first notes of the General March.

"Oh, my babies are going to be soldiers," I cried. "Listen, it's the General March calling them already."

"Or shepherds," murmured Anna Semeonovna sarcastically, "if you believe in such signs."

"Growl-growl," came the deep voice of the tuba near our fence. But for once Alexei was not there to answer the call: he was still on the road bringing back the Professor and his multitude. I wondered how they'd all manage to get into that car.

At last they arrived, a disgruntled, sleepy lot except the Professor, who seemed to have forgotten about the practical joke and was now the picture of efficiency. He seemed very pleased at Anna Semeonovna's preparations and praised her highly.

"Best midwife in town," he said approvingly. "A jewel. Only I wish she hadn't got married so soon. Now I'll be delivering *her* of twins," and he laughed good-humouredly, while she blushed and ran out of the room.

Presently Mamoussia and Tanka arrived, followed by Papoussia, Dedoussia and everybody else.

Then Niania took me aside and, quietly sprinkling some holy water on to my hair and face, hung round my neck a little silver medal that would help me through the coming hours of darkness and pain.

"Your grandmother and your mother wore it," she said gravely. "Now it's your turn, my little dove. God be with you and may your Guardian Angel never leave your side until you are safe again."

When the doctors weren't looking, Papoussia slipped under the flat, hard pillow on my new bed a miracle-working cross containing the relics of a saint.

Then Miss Burns came up with *her* remedy: a small green bottle of smelling salts that I was to sniff if ever I felt faint.

Every one of them had brought something. Dedoussia made several signs of the cross with holy rose oil on my forehead, cheeks, chest, hands, stomach—all the way down. . . . Tanka brought me a lovely new bed-jacket and Vanka gave me a little whistle that I was to blow if I needed his help to fight the doctors.

"I'll be in the next room," he said encouragingly, "and the minute I hear that whistle, I'll be there."

The house was now filled to overflowing, what with my family, the servants and all the new medical people. Tea was served on the glass porch and between pains I managed to preside for a little while at the head of the long table and even to pour out a few cups of tea. But the last pain was so violent

that I dropped the cup and spilled the tea all over the rug. After that Anna Semeonovna took me by one arm, Tanka by the other and together we three paced the floor, stopping from time to time to let me bend over and gasp. Then off we'd go again, up and down, up and down, until our legs ached so we felt that we had walked for miles.

Time was passing. I had watched the sunrise and the Regiment go by; I had heard the flute of the shepherd, marshalling his flocks into the fields; and the *Growl* of the General March. Litde by little Krasnoe had come to life and another day had begun.

Presently the Regiment came back, singing one of my favourite songs. Then the old fishmonger appeared, shouting "Soudakee dourakee," followed closely by the cry of "Herrings from Holland."

By now there was hardly any interval between pains, but though the Professor suggested that I should lie down, I still preferred to totter round, clinging desperately to Anna Semeonovna and Tanka.

"If I get on to that bed, I'm lost," I kept saying. "But if I stand on my feet, I may be able to run away from it all," which, Vanka assured me, was pure animal instinct.

Pain seemed to be in waves all round me. I was living in a world of pain. It was everywhere and in everything. Every sound I heard produced it, every breath I took seemed to bring it on with greater fury. Even Vanka couldn't make me laugh any more.

There it was now, beating against my body, now tearing it with its claws—great, big, sharp, pitiless claws. Agonized, I thought of Prometheus and his eagle and of the Spartan boy with his fox. Oh, surely their pain was nothing compared to this. Why hadn't anyone warned me what it would be like?

"Oh, oh, I can't stand it any longer," I cried, clinging to Tanka and digging my fingers into her arm. "Somebody, please, please, help me, please, for the sake of Christ! Look, I'm begging like a beggar. ..."

"That's just what you are," shouted Vanka with apparent lack of feeling, though tears ran down his face. "A beggar-beast, begging away as usual. Buck up, you bloody-old-fool, it can't be as **bad** as all that, goddam you!"

"Vanka, your language!" wailed Miss Burns, surprised and shocked as usual.

For a fleeting second the silly old formula helped, but only for a second.

"It's time now," said the Professor, rising from the table, where he had been drinking cup after cup of tea. His voice to me sounded like the crack of doom. There it was! No escape possible any more. I gave myself up for lost.

"Come on, child, hold on to me; you'll soon be all right," and together with Anna Semeonovna he led me into the bedroom and helped me on to the bed. It was hard as a board and so narrow that I nearly fell over the side.

"Here now, take your places," he ordered in a sharp, imperious voice as his staff closed in round me on all sides. Desperately I looked up into their cold, impersonal faces. I could see that none of them cared a button what was happening to me. It was just routine work as far as they were concerned, while I was being quartered on the rack. As I stared up at them in terror, I suddenly remembered Vanka's whistle, still clutched in my fist. Quickly I stuck it into my mouth and blew it wildly.

"I'm coming!" yelled Vanka, rushing into the room, but Papoussia and Dedoussia caught him on the threshold and, throwing themselves on him, dragged him back.

"For heaven's sake! Can't we have a little peace and quiet?" demanded the Professor. "What's the matter? What's going on? Believe me, this is the last time I'll ever deliver in such a place! It's like an Oriental bazaar. Now everybody that's unnecessary get out of here! Do you hear me? . . . Hold her now," he then ordered, turning back to his staff.

Immediately they closed in on me: two people pinned down my shoulders, two held my hands and two more gripped my legs. Now on all sides they were holding me down and pressing me with all their might.

"Only the patient's mother can stand near her, too," said the Professor, as Mamoussia came up and, sobbing bitterly, put her hand on my shoulder. There seemed to be no air in the little room and, gasping, I threw back my head.

"Oh, don't do that!" cried Mamma, pushing my head down. "You'll spoil the line of your neck."

"I must ask you not to interfere," retorted the Professor

severely. "This is not the proper time to think of beauty! If she needs more air, she's got to have it her way, that's all. Let **her** lie flat, take the pillow away!"

But as they took it, they discovered Papoussia's miracle-working cross.

"Little Fathers, what's that doing here!" they cried. "Take it away, too, it probably hasn't even been washed!"

But Papoussia, who was standing near the door watching anxiously, protested loudly.

"No, no, don't you dare touch it!" he exclaimed indignantly. "Leave it alone."

"Oh, all right, all right," grumbled one of the assistants, "only it'll have to be wrapped in a clean towel."

And on that they compromised.

At that moment there was a whirring sound of wings and into the room flew Popo, the parrot, screeching at the top of his voice.

"Catch that bird, get him out of here," shouted the Professor furiously.

"*Shoo, shoo*" helplessly cried the people all round me, but they couldn't leave my side on that narrow table....

Sergei dashed in with a broom and waved it at Popo, who flapped his wings angrily and screamed all the more. But no one could handle Popo but me.

"Go away, Popo," I managed to gasp between my teeth, but the old bird, hearing my voice, uttered a cry of joy and promptly alighted on the iron rail at the head of my bed. There he began muttering to me affectionately and, leaning over, pecked lovingly at my cheek.

"That's the limit," shouted the Professor in a rage. "First that dirty bird and now the filthy broom! Are you all crazy here? Take that parrot out at once."

But no one dared touch him as his beak was enormous, and every time anyone came near him he'd open it ferociously and **flap** his wings. At last a wet towel, dipped in disinfectant, was thrown over him and, swearing indignantly, he finally calmed down, though still clutching to the rail.

Now the pains had closed in on me, steadily without a second of respite. It was a sea, a world, a universe of pain. I was pain **and there** was nothing else beneath the sun.

"Aie," I'd hear my voice shriek and "Aie" echoed Popo in exactly the same tone.

"One cannot tell which is which! I've never assisted at such a birth in all my life," roared the Professor, beside himself. "Will someone take that damnable bird away?"

But Popo had got rid of his wet towel and, thoroughly disinfected, was now sitting firmly on my head, refusing to budge. "His claws are in her hair. If we touch him, he'll pull it all out," moaned Mamoussia.

"All right, all right! Forget about him now. It's coming! Give her the reins."

Into my icy, trembling hands someone put two towels tied to the foot of the bed.

"Pretend you are driving a pair of runaway horses, pull them back with all your strength," cried the Professor, "and bear down, bear down!"

I obeyed and a new, terrific pain shot through my body. This time it was as though a knife had ripped me wide open.

"It's all right. It'll be over in a minute. Give her the chloroform now," ordered the Professor, and someone lifted to my nostrils a pad of cotton soaked with the sickening stuff.

For a moment I was dazed—and so was Popo, they told me later, as he, too, must have breathed in a whiff and went limp in my hair. But as we both regained consciousness—my first baby was born.

"It's a little girl," I heard Mamma cry joyfully, "a lovely, lovely little girl. ..."

I drew a deep sigh of relief—the pain had suddenly vanished. But soon it reappeared again.

"Never mind, it won't be so bad now," I heard voices all round me say encouragingly.

The tension had snapped and everyone seemed human again. For some reason I thought of the Regiment going out to practice, trim and proud, and then returning, noisy, dirty and relaxed. This was the same thing, in its own way.

At three o'clock in the afternoon my second baby arrived, another little girl.

Though the babies were twins they didn't look alike in the least and from the very start were as different as could be.

The first one had a funny little tuft of black hair on top of

her head, dark eyelashes and eyebrows, and a skin that was dark as compared to her sister's which was pink and white and blended neatly with the light, chickenlike fuzz that spread evenly all over her head.

At first sight the looks of each baby told more clearly than any words the story of her background. There could be no doubt about it: the elder was a throwback again on my side of the family—Dominica's great-great-grandchild; while the other was typical of the fairness of Alexei's. Anxiously I looked at her nose to see if it had a wart on it. Then I heaved a sigh of relief. For not only did it not have Agrippina Ivanovna's awful wart on its tip, but it was, thank goodness, short and upturned.

Both babies were beautiful, to me the most beautiful I had ever seen! And I loved them immediately with a complete, all-absorbing, overpowering and adoring love. They were mine, my very own, that I had fabricated with my flesh and blood—the most wonderful babies in the whole world.

But the moment I saw them for the first time and felt them nestle up against me, one on my right side, the other on my left, I realized that I loved them already with two different kinds of love. For the little "Dark One" a fierce, protective feeling swept over me.

"You are just like me," I whispered into her ear, "and I'll never let anyone hurt you as I have been hurt. I'll protect you and you'll be happy as long as you live."

And my heart went out to her yearningly and overflowed with a soft, aching pity. Yes, I knew life well now, even though I was only eighteen, and with my experience and understanding would be able to shield her from the things that might hurt her, as they had hurt me.

That settled, I turned to my "Fair One."

"You may have their fairness," I whispered into her ear, "but you will be beautiful and good and kind, like a dancing golden ray of sunshine, spreading light and joy and happiness wherever you go."

And as I talked to them I felt like a fairy godmother bestowing gifts at the babies' birth and prayed with all my heart that these wishes of mine were not merely products of my imagination but real gifts that would come true.

But as I had foreseen, almost immediately both families "took sides."

Dedoussia, Papoussia, Vanka and Tanka—the Gypsy clan—shouted with glee when they saw the "Dark One."

"Why, she's one of us!" they cried delightedly. "Good for you, Tamara!" while Dedoussia gently and expertly lifted her out of her cradle and, placing his hand on her head, murmured a few words that I could not understand. His face was exalted, his eyes shone, and with his white hair and beard he reminded me more than ever of the Ancient One, the patriarch, whom once I had taken for the Lord God of Sabaoth.

I wondered what Dedoussia was murmuring to the baby. Could it be some old Gypsy incantation, something to ward off all evil and bring blessings instead? But when I asked him, he only smiled his soft, mysterious smile and did not explain.

Agrippina Ivanovna, after one quick disapproving look at the "Dark" baby, crowed with satisfaction over the "Fair One" and said that she was the image of her father.

"Just like he was when he was born," she said approvingly, "and very much like me. Only her nose is not like mine"—for which information I sent up a silent prayer of gratitude and praise.

As for Alexei, he gazed at the babies with an expression of tolerant amusement mingled with disgust and finally declared that they both, equally, looked "too awful for words."

"I hope they don't grow up like that! I'd be ashamed of such ugly daughters," he said gloomily and wrinkled his long nose in profound distaste.

But everyone assured him that they would be beautiful and after a couple of drinks he said a little more hopefully: "Perhaps."

When it was time to choose their names, there was a row. Alexei's mother declared that she wanted the Fair One called Agrippina and that no other name would do, while I said that I didn't like that name as it always made me think of the cruel Agrippina, Nero's mother.

Agrippina Ivanovna stormed and Alexei scolded and threatened, but to no avail. I was stubbornly decided that no daughter of mine would ever bear that name. Never!

At last Alexei chased everyone out of the room and, sitting on my bed, changed his tactics.

"Listen to this, Tamara," he said persuasively, when we were alone. "If you call the child Agrippina, mother will place a large sum of money to her name in the bank and start her dowry right now."

"Yes, and give you a big sum, too, as a present," I retorted. "I heard her tell you that."

"Well, and what of it? Is there anything wrong about that? After all, I am the child's father."

"And where does the other one come in?" I demanded. "You seem to have forgotten that you have twins. Isn't she going to have her little dowry started, too? It seems awfully stupid to be talking about such things now when they're only just born, but you brought it up and what goes for one, goes for the other. I won't have any favourite and that's definite."

Already they were playing favourites and trying to hurt my little Dark One! Well, I wouldn't allow it.

"Now, you listen," I said firmly, "if you call this baby Agrippina, a hideous name if ever there was one, I'll call the other Dominica and see to it that my family gives her exactly the same present as the other one."

Alexei threw his hands up in dismay. Dominica! In honour of a Gypsy? A child of his, bearing his family name? Impossible! Only over his dead body.

Angrily, he called in Agrippina Ivanovna and again they stormed and threatened. To my surprise, Mamoussia took their part.

"Why give the blessed little Dark One that name?" she said gently. "It will only hurt and handicap her for life. You surely would be the last to do such a thing to her. But how about poor old Mamma's name: Marina? Won't that do as well?"

And she looked so wistful that I agreed at once. But if I couldn't have Dominica, I wouldn't have Agrippina. On that my temperature went up and Anna Semeonovna asked everyone to leave the room.

Finally we compromised on Marina ("Mara") for the Dark One and Alexandra for the Fair One, to be always called Aleka for short, in honour of Alexei.

And so they were christened Marina and Alexandra and everyone calmed down.

The christening took place in my "bottom of the sea" aqua-marine-and-coral drawing-room, while, according to custom which did not allow the parents to be present, Alexei and I remained together on the porch—I on the sofa, dressed in a new lace tea-gown and he on a chair by my side, both of us probably looking like an old-fashioned photograph.

But through the glass door we could see and hear everything. For the occasion the furniture had been removed from the centre of the room, and instead a large silver font stood there in front of a small table that took the place of an altar, bearing a gold icon, a cross of gold, and a Gospel bound in silver gilt with enamel medallions on its four corners and a larger one in the centre.

As the priest and deacon of the Regimental church, clad in glittering vestments, took their places at the little altar and font, and the "spiritual parents" of the babies, the all-important god-fathers and godmothers (in this case two pairs), advanced—the twins were ceremoniously brought in. First came Mania, dignified and solemn, in her best grey silk gown, carrying the sleeping Marina on a large, flat satin pillow, smothered in lace, followed by old Frossia who bore Alexandra in the same style. Up to the godparents they went and bowed low. Then the ceremony began.

In the corner of the room stood the Regimental choir, subduing its volume of sound as it softly sang the words of the traditional hymn: "In the name of Christ be christened," while three times the priest plunged each baby into the warm water of the font, deftly covering their tiny faces with the palm of his hand, at the same time closing their mouths, pinching their noses and sticking his thumb and little finger into their ears so that no water could get in anywhere. And three times two lusty little voices shrieked indignantly to show what they thought of the procedure.

When the ceremony was over, the new little Christians were brought to me to be kissed and blessed and then carried back to their nurseries, while champagne was passed round to the guests, who, glasses in hand, came up to congratulate us, the parents. Cakes and candy were offered in profusion and everyone merrily stuffed.

I received many presents for the christening, presents that

later I would pass on to the babies when they grew up. But until that time they were mine and I was supposed to wear them.

Papoussia and Mamoussia gave me a necklace of large square aquamarines, framed in small diamonds—to match my room, they said; while Alexei and his mother completed the set with a diadem and ear-rings of aquamarines as well as a large square brooch. As I thanked Alexei, I couldn't help wondering if one day he'd pawn those jewels too; then, ashamed of the thought, kissed him more warmly than usual.

CHAPTER XV

GO AWAY BEFORE IT IS TOO LATE

THE babies thrived and so did I. Never had I felt better or stronger than after their birth, and soon I was up and about again, eager for my life that suddenly promised to become so full.

Though I was not allowed to nurse Mara and Aleka, as each one had her own, big, healthy, peasant wet nurse ("You can not spoil your figure feeding those babies," I had been told), I spent all my time watching the head nurse take care of them, wishing that I could do it myself. But, oh, dear, no, I was not to interfere lest she be offended. Besides, wasn't she, a woman of fifty, certainly more experienced and more capable than I, at eighteen, abysmally ignorant of how to care for a baby?

"But I can learn; other mothers do," I protested, only to be told again that it "simply wasn't done."

So I would sit for hours between the two cradles, as a spectator, not daring to say anything for fear of offending the imposing-looking, starched and disagreeable creature who ruled the nursery with a rod of iron.

If I began to sing to the babies, she would say disapprovingly:

"Oh, please, your Shiningness, don't do that. They'll get used to singing and that's a very bad habit indeed."

Or:

"I beg of you not to rock the cradles . . . not to dance round them . . . not to stand that way, as it will make them cross-

eyed . . . and certainly do not dangle any bracelets in front of their eyes."

Nothing I did was right and soon I began to dread and even hate the woman. She had been highly recommended by Agripina Ivanovna, who had demanded that we should have her and now backed her up in everything she did. Desperately I wanted to get rid of her and replace her with my own old Niania and a young nursery maid to help. But Alexei wouldn't hear of it, for fear of annoying his mother. At that time he was deeply in debt again, having gambled not too successfully, and more than ever needed her goodwill which invariably produced such pleasing and satisfactory monetary results.

Soon after the babies were born, he began to drink heavily again and rarely came home early any more. Lydia was living not far away, I was told, as she was now dancing at the Imperial Summer Theatre of Krasnoe Selo.

Thwarted in every direction and depressed, yet full of health and spirits, I walked long distances in the country and, to everyone's shocked amazement, learned to drive the car. And I'd go to the various parties, eager for companionship and a little fun. Inevitably I met Grischa again and soon everywhere I went he appeared too.

"Look out, beggar-beast; people are beginning to talk," Vanka cautioned me, but I didn't care. Let them talk! I wasn't doing anything wrong! Why shouldn't I go about with an old friend? Alexei was away; I wasn't needed in the nursery; what else was I to do? True, I had thought seriously of taking up my studies again and becoming a student at the Higher Women's Courses in Petersburg, but I had to wait for winter to do that and besides I knew I'd never be allowed to join, never.

And so into the social life of Krasnoe I threw myself wholeheartedly, going to the famous races, to the theatre where I calmly watched Lydia dance, and to all the dinners and parties of the regimental set.

But one afternoon as I was in the nursery, Grischa was announced. At his name I saw the nurse and her assistant exchange quick, knowing glances as much as to say, "*Ah ha!*" Furious, I wanted to cry out: "Well, and what of it, you evil-minded idiots!" but I restrained myself and, without saying a word, ran down to receive my guest.

At a glance, I could see that he was greatly perturbed.

"What is it, Grischa, what's the matter?" I asked anxiously. After all, he was my best friend, the best I ever had.

"Tamara, I've got to tell you something," he said in a low voice, "and it's very important. I know what your life has been since your marriage—everybody knows it—and I can't stand it any longer."

"You can't stand it?" I giggled hysterically.

"Please don't," he said gravely, "you know what I mean. I love you, Tamara, as I have never loved you before! I beg of you, come away with me, now, at once!"

I stared at him in amazement.

"What do you mean, go away with you? How can I? How about Alexei and the babies. . . ."

"Leave Alexei, leave him for good. Get a divorce, that's what I mean, and then marry me."

"But my babies," I repeated, still staring at him, unable to take my eyes off his perturbed face.

"Bring them along, of course. I'll adopt them. They'll be ours. . . . It won't be hard to prove that Alexei doesn't care for them and that he isn't fit to be their father. Everyone knows he drinks; everyone knows about Lydia."

Suddenly I felt myself stiffen all over and my hands and feet went cold. *Boje moi*, here was a crisis in my life, a major crisis on which depended all my future and that of the babies. . . . What was I to do? I still loved Grischa, but not in the old way. Somehow it was more like my love for Vanka; yes, very much more like it, than the former "in love" that had once meant so much to me. That had passed for ever and sadly I thought of Pushkin's words: "I loved you and that love perhaps in my soul is not extinguished yet. . . . I loved you so truly and so tenderly God grant you someone else may love you thus again."

"Well, Tamara, what have you to say? What are you thinking about?" asked Grischa, gently taking my hand and looking into my eyes in the way that used to make me feel like the Snow Maiden about to melt. But now I felt differently. Was it because I was grown up, a married woman now and a mother? Things were not the same any more. And yet I wanted to throw my arms round him and cry out: "Yes, yes, yes, Grischa! Take

us away, me and die babies, and give me a new life, a happy one.

But instead of that I stiffened still more and answered in a voice that didn't sound like mine.

"I can't do it, Grisha, I can't. It's the babies. . . . Why, they are only just born. . . ."

I felt just as I had once before when Mamma had asked me to leave Alexei and come home to her and have my babies there. Again, I couldn't do it. It wasn't fear of a scandal either; I didn't care a rap about that! No, it was rather because of a forlorn hope that if I did the right thing, something good and happy would come to me—like a childish reward on earth and in heaven.

"Is that final?" he asked after a while, when we both sat silently, not even looking at each other.

"Yes," I whispered.

"Irrevocable?"

I nodded.

"Well, then it's good-bye," said Grisha and, getting up, he took my hand, kissed it and held it between his own. "It's very cold," he muttered, "as cold as you are now."

"Oh, I'm not cold," I cried, "but why didn't you ask me to marry you two years ago?"

A look of pain came over his face.

"Yes, why?" he repeated. "Why do we do so often the wrong things and come to the wrong decisions? . . . It's too late to talk about the past, that's gone for ever—but the future is ours."

"No, it isn't anything of the kind," I said. "It's Kismet, what has to be, has to be . . . not what we want!"

"Ah, but that's nonsense, it can be ours if we make it so."

"The old free will?" I asked sadly. "And what is it in this case? Does it tell me to stay with the man I married or go with you?"

"It says go with me," he answered, laughing a little.

But I couldn't continue this much longer. I wanted to go with Grisha, the temptation was great and yet once more, perhaps for the **last** time, I was going to do what I thought was right.

"Good-bye, Grisha," I whispered, tears beginning to drop.

"Good-bye, Tamara, *doushenka*." And for the first time since

he came into my life he caught me in his arms and kissed me. The next minute he was gone.

But as I sat there alone, crying quietly, I heard one of the portières rustle and then saw a starched apron whisk by. So the nurse had been eavesdropping. . . . Undoubtedly Agrippina Ivanovna would hear about this to-night. Well, and why not? After all I had done the right thing!

The next day I heard that Grischa had obtained leave of absence and a week later his engagement to my cousin Bay was announced.

Every Sunday the nurse had half a day off and on this particular one she went to Petersburg.

Agrippina Ivanovna, though about to leave for her country place, was still in town and I felt sure that the nurse was going to report what she had seen and perhaps heard.

I was right, for that evening the woman returned with a peculiar, satisfied look on her smug face and a demeanour that toward me was a shade more respectfully insolent than usual. She was wearing a gold watch chain that I hadn't seen before and when I admired it and asked her where it came from, she replied with a toss of her head that her Shiningness, Princess Agrippina Ivanovna, had kindly and most generously given it to her to-day, when she had stopped at her home for a moment to pay her respects.

A day later Agrippina Ivanovna telephoned Alexei to come to town for dinner and off he went, without even suggesting that I should go along. I was asleep when he returned, but he woke me up and, standing by my bed, glared down at me. As usual he was pretty drunk.

"What's this I hear?" he demanded angrily. "It appears that all Krasnoe is talking about the way you and Grischa Kanussin are flirting—or are you having an affair?"

I sat up in bed and pushed the hair out of my eyes.

"Did you wake me up just to insult me?" I asked indignantly. "And did your mother tell you that?"

"Leave mother out of this, please. I won't tell you where I heard it, but it's all over camp and, of course, I am the last to know about it! But believe me, my girl, I won't stand for it. I'm not going to be made the laughing-stock of the Regiment. . . . a deceived husband, a 'husband with horns,' a *cocu*. . . ."

Trembling with rage, I got out of bed and, throwing on my robe, confronted him.

"Listen, Alexei," I said, trying to control my voice and my words ("Turn ten times your tongue inside your mouth before speaking when you are angry," says the wise old Russian saying). "There is nothing, nothing whatsoever between Grischa and me! Do you hear me? On my word of honour," and, turning toward the icons, I made the sign of the cross to show that I was indeed speaking the gospel truth. "True, we are old friends and I used to be in love with him long ago, but that's all over now. And, of course, he's been good and kind to me when you've left me alone day after day. But what is there so wrong about seeing him openly at parties and everywhere else in public?"

"He kissed you, people saw him do it," said Alexei gloomily. (People! That damnable nurse! I thought furiously. All right, I'll fix her! She'll never forget me.)

"Yes, he kissed me to say good-bye in this very house, in my drawing-room, before getting engaged to my own cousin Bay. Is there anything criminal in that?" I demanded, still holding back my anger and measuring each word.

"Engaged to Bay? When? I didn't hear about that." He seemed surprised and relieved and, ceasing to glare at me, put out his hand as though to take mine.

"I don't see how you didn't hear about that," I retorted, putting my hands behind my back. "Everyone knows it. If you stayed at home more or went about with me to parties, you would have heard it, too."

For a minute he stood silent, then suddenly he grinned in a sheepish way.

"Forgive me, Tamara, I've been a fool," he said, now in perfect good humour. "But I've been upset. . . . That gossip, you know . . . and then a lot of wine."

"All right," I said impatiently, anxious to get to the source of all this trouble, the woman upstairs. "Go to bed and we'll talk about it to-morrow."

"We will *not* talk about it any more," he cried gaily. "I was wrong and I'll make up for it, I promise you."

"That's a bargain," I exclaimed. "Will you grant me the very first request I make to-morrow morning?"

"Of course, I will, on my word," he replied, kissing my hand and, well satisfied, I saw him lurch off to his room and to bed.

A few minutes later, hearing him snore, I knew that I was safe. Quickly I ran upstairs.

The nursery was plunged in darkness, save for the flickering lampada in front of the icons. The nurse was lying on her back, snoring, too.

"You poor darlings, having to listen to this beastly noise," I whispered, bending over the two little cradles. "But wait, your *Mamachka* will arrange everything, just watch her,"

Swiftly I went up to the nurse's bed and shook her.

"Eh, what, what? What's the matter?" she muttered stupidly. still half asleep.

"I'll tell you what's the matter!" I whispered fiercely. "You get out of that bed and out of my house this minute, do you hear me? And go quietly or I'll have you thrown out!"

Wide awake now, she looked at me insolently.

"I'll do nothing of the kind," she hissed back. "Leave me alone, I am in charge here."

"You mean you *were* in charge," I retorted, "but you are no longer. Go on, get up and dress and leave at once. I'll send your things on to-morrow, but out you go now, do you hear me?"

"But why, why?" she spluttered furiously.

"You know why, as well as I do. You know what you did, I don't have to tell you."

"Ah, so the little princess doesn't like to be caught kissing," she began sneeringly, but before she could say another word, I slapped her leering face and, pulling her out of bed, threw at her the clothes that were neatly folded on a chair near by. Middle-aged, fat and soft, she was no match for me in my eighteen-year-old, perfectly fit condition, and undoubtedly realizing that, she began to dress rapidly, cursing under her breath. Another moment and she was throwing a few things into a suitcase.

"Here's some money and I'll send you a cheque for an extra month's wages. Now, off you go," and, taking her by the shoulders, I pushed her to the stairs, following her closely and restraining a wild desire to kick her fat behind at every step. In such a fashion we reached the front door, where, pointing to an

icon hanging in a corner, I said the traditional words: "Here's God and there's the threshold," which was an old Russian way of throwing people out of one's house. And out she went into the darkness of the late summer night.

As I locked the door and put on the chain again, I sighed a deep sigh of relief. Then bounding up the steps two at a time, I ran into the nursery, where the babies were still sleeping quietly.

"Now, you're mine, my little angels, my little souls! And no strange woman is going to come between us," I whispered joyfully, dancing round their cradles on tiptoe. "It's going to be your own mother from now on, with Niania and your two fat 'milk cows'! But nobody else, nobody."

At last, tired out with all the excitement of that night, I settled down on the sofa where, at dawn, the two wet-nurses found me curled up, fast asleep.

"Where's the nurse?" they asked in surprise, as they prepared to feed the now screaming babies. And when I answered, "Gone for ever," they both beamed and in their sturdy peasant voices exclaimed *in unison*: "That's good!"

Next morning when Alexei started to fuss over the nurse's sudden exit, I reminded him of his promise. Grumbling that I had tricked him when he wasn't sober, he finally gave in and departed saying: "Settle this with mother."

And settle it I did, when in the afternoon Agrippina Ivanovna descended on me in a towering rage. Once and for all we "had it out" in a fine row, with the result that she left the house in high dudgeon, threatening that I'd pay for my "cruel stupidity" some day, while I triumphantly returned to the nursery and, taking my rightful place there, sent for Niania to arrive in post-haste to help me take care of my children.

And so a new regime started and, happier than I had ever been since my marriage, I forgot about the social life of Krasnoe Selo and, moving my bed upstairs, led the life of my babies, round the clock.

Several months passed. In the autumn we moved back to Petersburg. There every day I proudly wheeled down our greet the low-slung English baby carriage, in which, facing each other, now sat my two fat babies, nodding and cooing way in a fashion that they both seemed to understand. The

picture of health, they attracted everybody and people would look at them and smile because they were so different and yet somehow, in some mysterious way, definitely twins.

"The golden children," Dedoussia called them and every day I would push their carriage all the way to my old home. There a special room had been arranged for them where they could sleep and crawl round and play with their toys. During that hour they belonged to my family and one by one the different members would come and worship at their shrine.

Life was much sweeter now. The only cloud was Alexci's steady and heavy drinking that was becoming worse and worse all the time. At last at Dr. Roukovsky's suggestion I went to see a famous psychiatrist who was known for his marvellous cures.

The great man, huge and shaggy like a lion, listened to my story attentively without interrupting. When I finished, he nodded slowly and his tawny hair fell over his eyes. From behind that shelter he peered at me for a few minutes in silence.

"Hum, yes, I see . . . I understand," he said at last and his deep voice, though professionally impersonal, sounded kind.

"The case you have described is very far advanced on the road of alcoholism, practically verging on delirium tremens at times, and the individual in question has reached the stage where he may no longer be responsible for his actions. And yet, as far as the law is concerned, he is perfectly normal. A very dangerous situation, very."

He paused for a moment and looked at me reflectively.

"Do you think you, as his wife, could help him?" His eyes seemed to pierce me through and through from between two staggering locks.

"Yes, I think I could; at least I'll try," I said dubiously, wondering what he'd tell me to do and thinking of how little influence I had with Alexei.

"Well," he went on, "it's like this. If possible, take him to Strasbourg and ask Professor Wertheim if he can do anything for him by way of hypnotism. Wertheim has accomplished very much in that line, more than anyone else, and his treatment might be the very thing that would cure your husband, provided he wants to be cured."

"That's just the point," I said doubtfully. "I don't know if

he wants to be cured. He says he loves being drunk and is happier then."

"In that case, there isn't much that can be done," he said. "It's the willingness of the individual to co-operate that counts. Otherwise we are more or less helpless. But you might try Wertheim and see how it works. That's all I can say."

And with these words he bade me good-bye and good luck.

On my way home I pondered over the problem. How in the world would I be able to persuade Alexei to get leave of absence and go to Strasbourg, of all places, to consult a psychiatrist? Why, he'd never do it, never.

And then suddenly, unexpectedly, fate played into my hand in a two-fold manner.

One afternoon, shortly after this talk, Alexei fell down in a dead faint at the Regiment and was brought home in an ambulance. The regimental doctor, who accompanied him, said gravely that he had been drinking too heavily and had better look out if he didn't want to run the risk of a stroke.

"At my age?" asked Alexei incredulously.

"Yes, at your age, with your habits and the kind of life you are leading," answered the doctor severely, while Alexei looked shocked and frightened.

It was then that I saw my opportunity and, taking the doctor to one side as he left the sick room, I told him about my conversation with the famous psychiatrist.

"That's the very solution," he exclaimed heartily. "I'll help your husband get leave of absence for the good of his health. That wouldn't be difficult. I may as well tell you that the Commander is very worried about his condition. All the officers drink, of course, but this is becoming abnormal. Do you know what Alexei Alexandrovitch did the other day?"

Puzzled, I shook my head. "No, what?"

"He ordered twenty-five aeroplanes from abroad for the Regiment! Can you imagine that—twenty-five aeroplanes for a cavalry regiment! Why, there was such a scandal about it that he nearly got a court martial! Goodness knows how he wriggled his way out," and the doctor threw back his head and laughed at the recollection of the scandalous to-do.

But I hated to have him laugh that way and, noticing the expression on my face, he became grave again.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," he said kindly. "I'll speak to Alexei Alexandrovitch to-morrow and persuade him to take this trip to Strasbourg. Better that it should come from me than from you. I think I can persuade him."

Gratefully I wrung his hand and he promised to do his best

It was then that fate played into my hand once more and made the journey not only feasible but imperative. For that same evening came a long letter from Agrippina Ivanovna in Paris with the startling news that she had accepted the proposal of an elderly French general and expected the wedding to take place there in a month. Naturally she wanted her beloved Alexei to be present, as well as "dear Tamara." She seemed so happy that even Tamara had become her "dear."

Meanwhile the doctor had his two private conversations with Alexei and the Regimental Commander and four weeks later, leaving the babies with Mamma, we left for Strasbourg via Paris.

I hated leaving the babies, though I knew that they were safe in Mamma's care with Niania and Miss Burns to look after them. But even so, I worried and made Mamma promise to telegraph me once a day if all was well and twice or twenty times a day if anything went wrong. But nothing did and every day I got the same message:

**TWINS CHEERFUL AND WELL. SEND LOVE AND KISSES TO
THEIR DEAR MAMACHKA.**

Besides came daily letters, mostly from Mamoussia, describing how many hours they had slept, what they had eaten (they were weaned now), and everything else imaginable pertaining to their lives. Two large framed pictures of the babies accompanied me everywhere and in a locket that I never took off all the time I was away, I wore two little strands of their hair—light and dark, and closely entwined. In Paris and Strasbourg I shopped for them and bought all the toys I thought they'd like and pretty baby clothes, too.

Alexei made fun, though not unkindly, of my "primitive" maternal instinct and hoped that when we returned the "homely little creatures" would be better looking.

We arrived in Paris, bearing gifts for the bride. Among them was a small icon of Christ, covered with precious stones and

framed in pearls. With this icon Alexei and I, as parents of honour, were to bless the bride before she left for church. It struck me as screamingly funny to have Alexei, her own son, and me, her daughter-in-law, play the part of father and mother of honour. But that was what she wanted, and of course, though somewhat sheepishly, we both agreed.

As soon as we arrived she showed us her elaborate trousseau that had been made in Paris.

To me at nineteen it seemed ridiculous and even pathetic for a woman of forty-seven to order such a very young trousseau with a lot of little ribbons and girlish frills. But she seemed so pleased about it that I didn't have the heart to grin. Piles of lovely underwear, beautiful tea-gowns, dresses for every occasion, as well as hats, shoes, furs, and jewels, and I thought how sad it was for an elderly person to buy all this for herself and for the first time felt more kindly disposed toward Agrippina Ivanovna than ever before.

The prospective bridegroom, Baron de Mouteau, distinguished, grey-haired, tall and lean, with a typical military bearing, had alas an unfortunate tendency to a certain ailment that made him sit on a tyrelike rubber ring which he carried everywhere with him and inflated whenever he intended to sit down for a long time. Instantly I thought of our old votter glozett in Stronskoe and wished I could, without offending, send him a generous supply of Medicated Paper which was such "a sure preventive of the distressing and universal complaint" that he so evidently suffered from. I restrained my good intentions, but imprudently wrote Tanka about them, whereupon she telegraphed London and ordered an immense package, made up as a wedding gift and dripping with white satin ribbons, to be delivered at the general's home. Amazed, he confided in Alexei, who immediately suspected and then accused *me* of playing such an "unfeeling, heartless, cruel joke."

The two weddings, Orthodox and Protestant, took place in their respective churches. Dressed in a long dark-blue silk wedding gown, with an ermine stole and a silver-spangled, fly-away hat decorated with plumes, the bride was first blessed and then given away by her son. As she entered the church on his arm, she looked triumphantly complacent, while the wart on **her** nose glowed with emotion. Alexei seemed deeply

affected, too, and blew his long nose several times loudly with a trumpetlike sound that reverberated throughout the church. And he glared at me fiercely when, standing by his side, I choked and stifled two unseemly fits of laughter. The first time was when the bridegroom endowed the bride with all his goods which everyone knew did not exist, as the old *garçon* was making a splendid and profitable marriage which would feather his ancient nest well.

"Worldly goods, indeed," whispered someone behind us, "when all he has is that rubber ring he sits on and a pair of galoshes. Even his wedding clothes were bought by his bride,"

I nearly exploded the second time when the Russian priest, who had just arrived from our country and knew very little French, tried to deliver a little homily in that language, using words that had nothing to do with the case. But I managed to control myself and except for these two little dangerous interludes stood still and quiet, with the dignity of a real "Mother of Honour."

After the wedding there was a reception at Agrippina Ivanovna's town house and then the happy pair left for Florence where she had hired an ancient palazzo for the honeymoon.

As we saw them off in the train, an elderly Frenchwoman, dressed in simple but smart-looking clothes, and with a tired face that had once undoubtedly been very pretty, approached the Baron and with the easy familiarity of a friendship of long standing, talked to him in low undertones. She, too, was carrying a small suitcase and seemed about to board the same train.

"Who is she?" asked Agrippina Ivanovna indifferently when the unknown one had moved away out of earshot.

"*Ma chère amie*," said the Baron gravely, "that is my dear old housekeeper, Madame Julie, the best friend I have in the world—after you," he added gallantly, though with evident afterthought.

"But why didn't you bring her up to me? And where is she going?" persisted Agrippina Ivanovna, apparently a trifle annoyed at the interruption.

"To Florence with us, my dear," said the Baron still more gravely, adjusting his monocle.

"To Florence! But why? We'll have an Italian housekeeper there—a marvel, they say—and your personal valet is going____"

She seemed thoroughly upset now and not wishing to appear too inquisitive, I moved away a little, though still within hearing distance.

"Madame Julie goes where I go, *ma chère amie*" repeated the Baron, while Agrippina Ivanovna snorted: "Indeed!" **And** looked down her nose on which the wart had suddenly turned red, as it always did when she was angry.

Later I found out that the gentle-looking Madame Julie had been the Baron's "*bonne amie*" for years and that his marriage to the rich Russian widow never altered a thing in their sweet relationship. Wherever he went, Madame Julie went, too, and as far as the Baron was concerned, Agrippina Ivanovna might not have bought the intimate part of her marvellous trousseau, for despite her second marriage she continued to remain, unwillingly perhaps, the faithful widow of Alexeys father. Undoubtedly that had something to do with the ultimate outcome of her second matrimonial venture. In less than two years she divorced the Baron on grounds of "intimate neglect" and, pensioning him off handsomely, never saw him again.

Our nuptial mission in Paris accomplished, we moved on to Strasbourg and immediately on arriving I looked up Professor Wertheim.

I soon found him, a gentle little old man, warm-hearted and kind, who at once became deeply interested in my case.

"Bring *le pauvre cher gargon* to see me to-morrow," he said in his fatherly way, and the next morning I managed to persuade the protesting Alexei, who had been enjoying himself all night with some new friends he had picked up in a café, to call on the Professor for a brief talk.

Hopefully I left them together and went for a short walk. But when I returned to the Professor's office, I found him alone in deep thought.

"Where is my husband?" I asked anxiously.

He sighed and took my hand.

"My dear little child, *mon petit enfant!*" he said gravely, "I may as well tell you that this is a difficult case, very difficult indeed. First," and he bent back his forefinger, "the boy does not want to stop drinking—he said so himself—which handicaps me from the very start. Secondly," and he bent back his next finger,

"he's very far gone already and only patience and full co-operation on his part can accomplish the necessary miracle. But," he added, seeing my downcast face, "we'll try. He has promised to return for a seance to-morrow morning and I'll see then what I can do. So, do not lose hope, my child, we may succeed after all."

But that evening Alexei went out again with his new friends and returned early in the morning, too groggy for any seance.

Only on the third day, and on a late afternoon at that, was I able to persuade him to visit Professor Wertheim. The seance lasted half an hour, during which the old man, perched on a small chair in front of a dozing Alexei, kept repeating in a low, sing-song voice that sounded like a monotonous chant:

"From now on you will hate all wines and alcohol in any form. You'll never want to touch another drop. It'll make you sick, very sick, and you will loathe it, loathe it, loathe it for ever!"

Meanwhile Alexei, completely relaxed, reclined in a big, comfortable armchair, with closed eyes, and apparently slept the innocent sleep of the just.

But the moment the seance was over and we got into the street, he drew a deep sigh of relief and, shouting: "I need a good, stiff drink after that bore," rushed off in search of the first bar that he could find.

This went on for three weeks and the more the Professor hypnotized, the more Alexei drank.

At last the old gentleman sent for me and sorrowfully declared that it was hopeless.

"It has gone too far and he refuses to co-operate. There is nothing more that I can do. Where in ninety-nine other cases I have succeeded, in this one I have failed. You have done your duty and the best you could," he went on, patting my hand, "but allow an old man, who could be your grandfather, to speak frankly, without taking offence. My child," he continued solemnly, "this is my professional advice to you: Since you cannot help your poor dear husband to get rid of this fatal habit of his, which will eventually undermine and ruin both his health and his morale—go away while there is still time and before he has ruined your life, too. You are very young and you have children. Take them away before it is too late and rebuild a new life for yourself and for them. There is no use sacrificing

three other lives, no use at all. Ah, yes, and one more tiling," he added as I got up to leave. "Watch those precious babies of yours, watch them closely. Remember that on one side they are the children of an alcoholic and that there is such a thing as inherited tendency that may express itself in various ways. If ever you notice in one of them the slightest tendency toward alcoholism, nip it in the bud. For that purpose have them supervised by a reliable doctor; protect them from that danger and don't ever give them any wine at table when they grow older. Naturally I mean all this as a precaution only—for their father's lamentable tendency may never even brush them with its dangerous wings. Remember, too, that you are their mother and that your side may counterbalance the other and win."

Horror-stricken at the thought of such a danger threatening my babies I left the Professor's office.

But before we left Strasbourg, I received a long letter from him in which was enclosed a medical certificate "To whom it may concern," which stated that his patient Prince Alexei Vorozov suffered from a chronic condition of alcoholism which often became acute and that had very little chance of being cured, *unless he himself so desired*.

Some day you may need this, my dear child [wrote the Professor in his letter], and I had better give it to you now. For I am a very old man, and should you need this certificate, say two or three years from now, I might not be on earth to give it to you. But whatever has happened in the past, in your short but tragic married life and whatever happens in the future, never forget that the answer is: alcoholism. It is not the man himself, nor his normal human tendencies for good and bad that you are dealing with and that are involved in this case. No, the key to the situation is, I repeat, only alcoholism, and in it lies the answer to all your problems: the strange character of the unfortunate young man, the seemingly inexplicable changes in his conduct, his unreliable ups-and-downs, his alternate fits of kindness and cruelty, of faithfulness and deceit, of good-humour and anger. An individual in such a condition should not be at large, for he is a menace to society. But the laws of that same society protect him and as long as he does not overstep them too blatantly, nothing can be done.

So, once more, my dear little girl, I beg of you—go away before it is too late and with the knowledge that you have tried your best, turn your back resolutely on your old life and begin a new one. It's never too late to start and you are far too young to give up in despair. But if you stay on—through, perhaps, a sense of duty that may sometimes be carried too far—not only will you not help him in any way but you will endanger your own life and the lives of your children for whom you are now solely responsible. Good-bye and may le Bon Dieu be with you.

"Go away," he said, "before it is too late. . . ." That was easy to say. But go away and leave a sick man? I would have to think about that. After all, I was no longer the child Tamara, ready to slap and stamp and run away.

But alas, the Professor was right. When we returned to Petersburg, one disastrous thing after another began to happen until I felt that all props were being pulled out from under everything and that even the sky was about to fall on my head.

One evening, shortly after our arrival, as I was sitting in my boudoir reading, Sergei knocked on the door and announced that a certain *Gospodin* Ivanov was in the entrance hall and respectfully demanded to see me.

"Demanded?" I asked in surprise. I couldn't imagine who the man was.

"Yes, your Shiningness, that is exactly the way he expressed himself," replied Sergei. "He says it's very important and that if you do not receive him, you'll be very sorry later."

Though Sergei's face was as inscrutable and impassive as ever, I could see from the look in his eyes that he knew, or at least suspected, what this was all about.

A tremor, like an electric shock, ran through me. Instinctively I realized that this was something bad, and also something I had to face.

"Very well, show him in," I said.

The next moment Sergei announced: "*Gospodin* Ivanov," and, standing to one side, let the man in. Then he closed the door and left me alone with the unknown individual, who had "demanded" to see me at this late hour.

I looked at him curiously. Short, fat and middle-aged, his suit was loud, his necktie pink with a gold horseshoe stuck into

it, and a large diamond flashed on his tobacco-stained forefinger.

"The Princess Vorozova, I presume," he said, clicking his heels and bowing.

I nodded and we stood facing each other for a few seconds in silence. I did not ask him to sit down.

"I am Ivanov, the money-lender, your Shiningness, and with your permission I'll state my business immediately, without further ado. Here it is," and out of the inner pocket of his awful suit he pulled a carefully-folded slip of paper.

"What is it?" I asked calmly enough, though my heart began to thump furiously.

"It's this little matter of twenty-five thousand roubles that you borrowed from me," he replied, bowing elegantly from the waist.

I stared at him in silent amazement. Never had I seen the man before, never had I borrowed twenty-five thousand roubles, either from him or from anyone else! But something prompted me to keep quiet and not say a word. The man must have expected me to deny his statement loudly and vehemently, for at my silence a look of surprise came over his face and, unfolding the paper, he stuck it under my nose.

Immediately I realized what it was, though I had never seen such a thing before. It was a promissory note stating that Alexei and I had borrowed from him, Akaky Ivanov, twenty-five thousand roubles at an unbelievable interest, to be repaid within six months. At the bottom, beneath Alexei's name, stood mine. Without any difficulty I recognized Alexei's handwriting which he had scarcely troubled to disguise.

"Well, and what do you want me to do?" I asked. My heart was no longer thumping, instead I felt cold as ice all over.

"I would like my money back; see, the time is up," said the man, coming closer. I could smell his sickening cheap perfume and dully noticed the heavy lines round his eyes and mouth. "Or," he continued, "if you cannot repay me now, you might sign once more here, below your first signature, and I'll let it go for another six months. How about it—which suits you best?"

Horror-stricken, I didn't know what to say. The only thing that I did know was that Alexei had forged my name. . . . My

throat grew tight and for a second I felt sick, then it passed away and I stood there motionless and silent.

"Listen," said the man, coming still closer and lowering his voice confidentially, "I know as well as you do that you never signed this note. And we both know who did it. . . . Why, he signed it twice in my presence, in front of two witnesses. One word from you and his Highness may be on the road that leads to Siberia. But if you countersign, not only will I be content, as your credit is excellent, but I'll let you have some extra money if you wish."

It was all like a horrible nightmare and as in a dream I heard myself say in a low, monotonous voice: "I don't know what you're talking about. Of course, I signed that note too and you know i did."

"But you did not!" he cried excitedly. "I tell you, we both know who did it and now I can get him for this! I have begged and begged him to pay me back, at least some of it, and he has not only refused, but ordered to have me thrown out. Twice he did it, twice I was kicked out into the street. That's why I have come to you. . . ."

Twenty-five thousand roubles! Dedoussia had put exactly that sum into the bank for me at the time of my wedding. Suddenly I made up my mind.

"Meet me to-morrow morning at ten," I said, naming the bank, "and I'll pay you in full."

Dumbfounded, he stared at me, then whistled.

"Whew, either you love him very much, or else . . ."

"Please go away now," I said, still able to manage my voice and pointing to the door. At my words, as if by magic, it flew open and I knew then that Sergei had, of course, been at the keyhole.

Sick at heart, I paced the floor for hours, thinking of what Professor Wertheim had told me: "It's not the man himself that you are dealing with, child, nor his normal human tendencies for good and bad that are involved in his case. No, the key to the mystery is alcoholism—and in it lies the answer to all your problems."

Yes, that's just what it was and the important thing for me now was not to lose my head, not to get angry, not to make any scene.

When Alexei returned, I told him as quietly as I could what had happened. I fully expected him to be angry and somehow or other "turn the tables" on me and shout furiously, but, to my surprise, he threw his arms round me and held me close.

"Tamara, Tamara, everything has happened to-night," he groaned.

"Oh, dear, *Boje moi*, what else?" I asked miserably.

"I have been requested to resign from the Regiment and the club. Things have come up against me. I'll tell you all about it. There's nothing for me to do now but shoot myself and end it all. That's the only way out."

"Come to my room and we'll talk it over," I said, beginning to cry bitterly. He looked so hopeless, so desperate and yet, suddenly, so very young and pitiful.

For the first time for many a month we sat side by side and talked till dawn.

Sober and, to use the old Russian expression, "killed with grief," his face haggard, his voice breaking with misery, little by little he unfolded the wretched story and related what had happened that fateful afternoon: how the Regimental Commander had sent for him and, accusing him of drinking far too much with disgraceful results, of gambling too heavily and of dealing with shady characters (Ivanov, I thought miserably)—all of which was incompatible with his status as an officer of that particularly proud regiment—had requested that he should resign immediately in order "to protect the honour of his uniform."

Then, as though pre-arranged, that evening the club asked him to resign for the very same reasons.

"And now," he went on wretchedly, "when I come home, I find that that worthless wrongdoer, Ivanov, has been here trying to blackmail you! Imagine coming to you that way and at such an hour, too! The impudence of that man! Of course, he thought you'd be frightened and sign. But, thank God, you didn't. You see, the only reason I put your name under mine was that he insisted on it, saying that my credit was none too good, but that yours was. And you being my wife and not yet of age, I really didn't think it was wrong to sign your name, too. Besides, I meant to tell you all about it then, what with one thing and another, I forgot—I swear I did."

He seemed so earnest and anxious to persuade me that with all my heart I tried to believe him. I knew that that past year his memory had been pretty poor, so indeed he might be telling the truth. Besides, how could the nasty little Ivanov episode compare to the real disasters that had befallen Alexei now? For to be requested to resign from both Regiment and club were two major catastrophes that would undoubtedly hurt his reputation for ever, even though they were kept a dead secret by all parties concerned. Such things were bound to come out, somehow or other, and people would talk, if only in scandalized whispers. Men had shot themselves for less than that! And Alexei might easily do it in a moment of despair, especially if he was drunk.

"*Boje moi, Boje moi,*" I prayed silently, twisting my fingers till the bones cracked. "What are we to do? Show us the way, I beg and entreat, *Boje moi*, please. . . ."

At that moment a ray of early sunlight peeped through a chink in the curtain and, dancing across the green rug, came to rest on a fat, flowering rosebush that stood near my desk on the floor. Red roses and sunshine . . . roses . . . rosebushes just like those in Stronskoe—Stronskoe! Oh, my little fathers, how hadn't I thought of that at once? Why, here was the solution!

"Alexei," I cried excitedly, "listen, I've got a wonderful idea! Let's go away now, immediately, to-morrow—you and I and the babies."

"Go a vay? Where to?" he asked dully without lifting his eyes. "I don't want to go abroad like an exile."

"No, no, not abroad! Home—to Stronskoe," I shouted, jumping up and plucking at his coat. "It'll soon be summer there and the roses will come out and it will be beautiful, more beautiful than any other place in the world."

But he shook his head.

"No, not Stronskoe," he said gloomily. "I wouldn't think of going there. Why, I'd feel that I was one of those awful perpetual guests of your parents who stay on for ever. No, thank you, I haven't fallen as low as that yet."

"Then how about your own place Vorozovo on the Volga?" I persisted. "I've never been there and you have told me over **and** over again how beautiful it is. Let's go there!"

Suddenly he lifted his head and his eyes brightened.

"Yes, why not," he exclaimed and his voice sounded stronger and a little more hopeful. "Goodness, Tamara, I think you've found something, I really do. Yes, to Vorozovo well go as soon as possible and wait there till all this blows over,"

He stood up and put his hands on my shoulders.

"You're a good little girl, Tamara," he said warmly. "You're standing by me when I really need you. Believe me, *doushenka*, I won't forget it. And don't worry about that man Ivanov. To-morrow I'll telegraph Mother about him and she'll help me out. I'll tell her that it's the very last time that I ask her for such a large sum of money. From now on I'm a reformed character. On my word of honour, just wait and see."

When finally we went to bed, it was decided that we would close the house immediately and, leaving Petersburg for a year or two, go to Vorozovo to live.

CHAPTER XVI

THE VOLGA NIGHT

THREE days later we entered Vorozovo in state. At the station we were met by the German overseer, Kurt Schmidt, a red-headed, good-looking, foxy man with shifty blue eyes, a nervous laugh that showed his perfect, strong white teeth, and an unpleasantly obsequious manner that impressed me most disagreeably. He had brought with him his whole family which consisted of three grown-up sons and two daughters of high-school age. Owing to ill-health his wife was unable to come to the station, he said, but would greet us on the doorstep of the house. After his official welcome, Alexei and I got into the calèche and for twenty miles we drove through a rather bleak and desolate country, sometimes coming up close to the river, sometimes passing through dark forests or along sandy stretches of barren land.

The twins, in a half-open landau, were well ahead of us, so that we could keep an eye on their progress, while the overseer's family drove directly behind us, politely swallowing our dust.

The man himself rode a prancing horse at the side of our

calèche and kept up a rapid fire of conversation with Alexei. Right away I could see that they were old friends, intimate and congenial, despite the difference in their ages. "Kurt Kurto-vitch," as the peasants called him, agreed with everything Alexei said, laughing uproariously at all his jokes and peppering his sentences with a constant refrain, "You're right as usual, your Shiningness." Or he would shout: "Oh, but that is clever—that is funny!"

And when Alexei, winking gaily, asked him for a drink, he pulled out of his saddle-pocket a large flask and, handing it over the edge of the carriage while his horse snorted and danced, shouted heartily: "It's your favourite brand and I have plenty more here with me. So drink to your health!"

And drink Alexei did, while Kurt Schmidt gulped out of another bottle, throwing back his head and taking large and generous swallows that nearly choked him and made him cough and splutter. By the time we arrived both men were red as beets, with shining eyes and loud voices that were none too steady. The more boisterous they became, the lower fell my spirits.

"So we've jumped from the frying pan into the fire," I thought dejectedly. "There in Petersburg it was one thing—here evidently it is this man Kurt. Oh, dear, oh, dear, isn't there any escape from such influences anywhere?"

But my gloomy thoughts were diverted as, at a bend in the road, the house came suddenly into sight. From a distance it looked like a French château, as it stood on a hill with lights gleaming in every window and turrets etched in bold relief against the blue green sky of early spring at twilight.

As we came closer I could see that several fountains were playing on a large terrace in front of the house, while Roman candles all round them shed fantastic lights on the falling sprays. Then simultaneously in all directions fireworks began and as we drove up to the main entrance a shower of sparks fell over us like a rain of gold. It was a pretty welcome, effective and well planned, and the delighted babies crowed with glee.

At the door we were met by Kurt Schmidt's wife, a frail and elderly person, apparently much older than her husband. Her thin shoulders were rounded and her homely face bore the unmistakable imprint of unhappiness and perennial discouragement.

ment and fatigue. But I liked her much better than her bouncing, noisy, flattering, drinking husband and was able to thank her sincerely for her weak-voiced, sad-eyed greeting.

"She's impossible," whispered Alexei to me in English, "so old and ugly . . . but Kurt knows how to have a good time on the quiet, never fear,"

I didn't fear, and gladly escaped into the house when, having dismounted, the gentleman in question blustered up to my side.

"A pretty little Gypsy girl," I heard him say to Alexei in a loud whisper and, quickly glancing over my shoulder, saw that he was pointing at my back. Disgustedly I spat, to ward off his evil eye, and following the pleasant-looking old housekeeper who was dressed in black satin with a black lace cap, went up the wide oak stairs to the nursery where the babies were being undressed, while Niania bustled about warming their milk and cereal.

Next to their room came mine, with old-fashioned furniture and chintz, and an enormous balcony that overlooked the fountains. A little staircase led directly from the balcony down to the terrace.

Alexei's rooms were on the other side of the wide corridor through which easily could have passed four horses abreast. Then came numerous guest rooms and Agrippina Ivanovna's suite, modernistic and hideous, occupying a whole wing. Downstairs were the three drawing-rooms, a large hall and a dining-room. The house was fairly attractive, but in my mind could not compare with the beauty of Stronskoe.

The next morning Kurt took charge of Alexei and all the time I was there he never relinquished his hold. Together they rode for hours, or went fishing in the Volga five miles away, or tramped through the fields with their dogs. It might have been a healthy and pleasant life for Alexei if they had not drunk so much, but as the days passed they drank more and more until they were drunk most of the time.

The only difference between here and Petersburg was that there Alexei drank champagne, while here it was mostly vodka; there he gambled for high stakes at the club, while here he played at low stakes with Kurt and the postmaster and the village doctor and veterinary, to be sure, paying his losses and never letting them pay theirs, but nevertheless gambling wildly; and finally,

there it was Lydia with all her elegance, while here it was a tall, young schoolmistress with a wide, flat, Mongolian face, who had attracted his fancy almost instantly.

One evening when the men had gone fishing with the intention of staying out all night, sleeping in haystacks, I suddenly decided to join them just for a little change and also with the hope of getting some fresh air, for the night was hot and sultry and I knew it would be much cooler on the bank of the great river.

So about ten o'clock I ordered my horse to be saddled and, accompanied by an old groom, rode off in search of Alexei and his fishing party.

When, at last, we reached their encampment, it was dark and apparently they were all asleep. Cautiously, so as not to awaken anyone, I walked toward the largest and most roomy-looking haystack, knowing that Alexei would, of course, be given the very best. I knew, too, that they had a way of digging in the hay so as to make a little house that protected them and gave them a little more shelter and privacy.

As I passed haystack after haystack I could hear snores on all sides. At first I passed the peasant women, all sleeping together in long rows; next morning at dawn they would wade up to their waists in the water, casting and pulling the nets and singing for hours. I wondered how they could stand it without catching cold, but undoubtedly the generous supply of vodka that they were fed from time to time helped them keep warm.

As I passed the sleeping doctor and the postmaster and veterinarian—all the local aristocracy who accompanied Alexei wherever he went—I thought of the times when he would get particularly drunk and, looking at them benignly, exclaim: "You are my vassals, gendemen, and I am your feudal lord," while they would cry in unison: "Long live our lord and master!" It was a disgusting little ritual that I hated and that always shocked me anew though I had heard it many times.

In their little dugouts the poor humble vassals seemed very comfortable, and their peaceful snores joined those of the women.

In the distance I could hear another chorus, far mightier and lovelier—the chorus of the crickets and cicadas that sang for miles and miles **their** night song spreading all over rural Russia.

At last I reached the main haystack which stood close to the river's edge. In front of it still glowed the dying embers of a bonfire smelling of burned potatoes and fish. Then came a narrow, sandy bar, while beyond it lay the great Mother Volga, now still as glass without the slightest breeze to ruffle her waters. Occasionally a big fish would jump up into the air and then flop back again with a slapping sound. The moon had risen over the horizon and in its reddish light I could vaguely discern the outline of the dark forests on the other side of the river.

It was beautiful indeed and with a sigh of pleasure I turned to the haystack which I knew was Alexei's. It would be nice to sleep like this in the open, for now a soft wind had risen, bringing with it the fragrance of fields and flowers and the cool smell of the water.

"I should come oftener," I thought as I started to tiptoe round the big haystack, looking for a place to dig a little room for myself.

Suddenly I stopped. For there, in a fine big dugout, on a white blanket, with practically no clothes on, lay Alexei fast asleep, his arm round the young village schoolmistress, while close by lay Kurt with her older sister in his arms. Shocked, disgusted and ashamed, I started to tiptoe away, but the temptation to wake them up and frighten them out of their wits suddenly overpowered me. Bending down, I clapped my hands softly so as not to disturb the others in the camp.

Instantly they woke up and looked at me with startled eyes.

"*Boje moi*, the princess!" cried the schoolmistress, leaping up and rushing away, closely followed by her sister, while Kurt hastily covered himself with hay and Alexei, staring at me as though I were a ghost, muttered angrily: "For heaven's sake, Tamara, what are you doing here?"

"I thought I'd like to join you and sleep where it was cool," I retorted in a whisper and then, turning away, ran back to my horse.

The old groom was asleep, but I managed to saddle without his help and, giving the horse full rein, galloped back home.

Then I woke Niania up and breathlessly told her what had happened.

"That's the end, the very end," I said furiously. "I can't stand

it any more. There is no use staying. To-morrow we leave for Stronskoe."

"But, Tamara, my little dove," cried Niania anxiously, "something has happened. Agrippina Ivanovna is arriving to-morrow morning; there is her telegram. It came soon after you left."

"I don't care if a hundred Agrippina Ivanovna's arrive, I won't stay," I cried, stamping my foot. "Come on, Niania, let's begin to pack."

"Oh, no, you won't, my golden rabbit, you'll stay right where you are and face the music," she declared firmly. "It's no use running away. That won't solve anything—on the contrary, you'll get yourself into a fine mess. Now you take my advice and to-morrow morning tell that husband of yours," (and here she spat), "and Agrippina Ivanovna that you refuse to stay any longer to be insulted this way. And tell them, in a dignified way, that you have stood all you can and are now going home to your own Papoussia and Mamoussia in Stronskoe, with the children, of course. Then, you will be doing the right thing. But run away in the middle of the night, as though you had done something wrong—never. I won't allow it."

And she put me to bed and, tucking me up, stayed by my side, murmuring endless prayers to the Lord and the Virgin and all the saints until I fell asleep.

CHAPTER XVII

THE DARK ONE AND THE FAIR ONE

NEXT morning Agrippina Ivanovna arrived. As soon as Alexei had finished his breakfast, I came into the dining-room and announced that I wanted to talk to him.

"Oh, all right," he said sullenly, following me into the library. "I know what you are going to say. You're going to make a scene about last night and probably be nasty about that very nice girl who has done you no harm."

"Done me no harm? What do you mean?" I asked indignantly. "How do you dare twist things round this way? Am I or am I not your wife, at least in name, and are you not sup-

posed to treat that name of yours with some respect, in public if not in private?"

"There you go; I knew we'd have a scene," remarked Alexei, lifting his eyes to the ceiling with an air of martyrdom. Then, sitting down in a big, comfortable armchair, he lighted a cigarette and heaved a deep sigh. "But we may as well get it over with, so say what you want and I'll listen."

"Yes, of course, you'll listen! Once and for all I'm sick and tired of being hurt and humiliated and insulted and am leaving you now, to-day, for good."

"Do you mean you are going to divorce me?" he asked, sincerely surprised.

"I mean exactly that. We've been married now nearly three years and it has been a miserable failure right through, all but the babies, of course. They are wonderful and I'm truly grateful to you for them. But, Alexei, I cannot stay any longer. There is no reason for me to do so. You don't love me; you never did. It was all physical on your part and nothing else. When that passed, everything went overboard, too, as far as you were concerned in your relationship toward me. Already on our honeymoon you began to humiliate me. There was Mrs. Goodman—no, don't interrupt me, please, I'll have my say, then you can answer me as much as you wish. It'll be my turn to listen; then there was Lydia, and now the schoolmistress. Heaven knows who came between those women—what passing fancies, I mean. And it's not only the women! The drinking has made my life a nightmare and ruined yours. If I could do something to help you, I'd stay, honestly I would. But there is nothing I can do and so I am going away. After all, I must think of the children and of myself, too. Why should I face a long, lonely life of misery, unwanted and unloved? No, there must be something for me ahead, like there is for anybody else. So why not start a new life while there is still time?' I paused for breath. Alexei was now hunched up in his armchair, his elbows on his knees, his head in his hands.

"Look," I said, a sudden feeling of pity coming over me, "let us shake hands and say good-bye in a friendly way. Let us be friends, real friends, I mean, and see each other from time to time, if only for the sake of our children. I promise you that you'll be able to see them whenever you wish and that I'll

teach them to love and respect you. So how about it? Shall we shake hands now and wish each other good luck?"

Alexei had listened to me quietly without taking his eyes off my face. As I spoke I could see he was becoming less and less angry and when I finished, he sprang to his feet.

"You're right, Tamara!" he exclaimed, coming up to me with outstretched hands. "A thousand times right. I'm not the marrying type and I never should have married you or anyone else. It isn't just you—all women tire me sooner or later. I love pretty women. But I love to change them too. The reason why Lydia and I have got on so well all these years is that she is like me. She can never get tied down to one man either—that's why she understands me. So we each go our way for a while, being as unfaithful as the devil, then we get together again and no questions are asked. She is gay and has a good sense of humour, too."

"Then why didn't you marry her?" I asked. "You could have built your life on that foundation of mutual understanding."

"My dear little one, I just explained to you that we are both not the marrying type. She loves men, I love women and we both get all we can out of life. But beneath that we are friends, Lydia and I, real friends who understand each other and that tie is very strong indeed. When I fell in love with you and begged you to marry me, she warned me, not for my sake but for yours. 'Don't marry that child,' she said, 'you're not worth her little finger and you'll only make her miserably unhappy.' She knew me better than I knew myself then, because, and please don't be hurt, you were just a passing fancy, too, a damn attractive and unusual little fancy, like a will o' the wisp to me—but it passed like everything else does in my love life."

"Then, don't you agree that I should go away and be free to try at least to find happiness somewhere else?" I asked.

Silently he bowed his head and, lifting my hand, kissed it.

"Thank you for everything, Tamara, and forgive me if you can. Keep the babies, *douschenka*, and may you find real happiness in life."

Tears welled up in his eyes and abruptly he turned away and left the room.

A warm feeling stole over me. "I have tried to do my best," I thought, "and even though I have failed miserably, we are at

least parting as friends. That's good." And gravely I made the sign of the cross and bowed to the icons.' Yes, we had parted for ever, but with kindly feelings and, above all, dignity. At least that was something to remember.

But, alas, we counted without Agrippina Ivanovna, for when after lunch we told her about our decision, she narrowed her eyes and looked at us with cold irony.

"So you are parting like two cooing doves, noble and forgiving and all that," she remarked. "Very well, that's your business. But how about the children? I don't see why Tamara should have them all the time. After all, Alexei, they are your children, too, and I should think that you'd want to have them at least part of the year."

"As far as I'm concerned Tamara may have them," replied Alexei lazily, smiling at me with good humour. "If I am worthless as a husband, I'll certainly be no better as a father."

"I don't doubt it," retorted Agrippina Ivanovna acidly, "but remember, I am their grandmother and I want them part of the year with me and with you in my house. They bear your name, don't forget that."

"Oh, very well, mother," exclaimed Alexei, shrugging his shoulders, "if you want them, that's different. But I'll have nothing to do with it—you and Tamara settle that between yourselves."

And off he went, eager to get away from the tiresome subject.

Agrippina Ivanovna turned to me and suddenly I realized that here was an enemy.

"You realize, of course, Tamara, that the money is mine and not Alexei's. He hasn't anything, any more than his father had, except the monthly allowance that I give him and those eternal debts which I have to pay. Where would he be without me? In prison? Or in Siberia?"

"But I don't understand," I said, perplexed. "It isn't a question of money, I have enough of my own to take care of the children. I don't need his money or yours."

"Maybe you don't, but Alexei does! If I cut him off, he won't have a kopeck! And I'll certainly cut him off if he does not stand up for his rights as a father. You see, I want those babies and the least you can do is to let me have them six months a year."

Six months a year! I gazed at her horror-stricken. My babies in Agrippina Ivanovna's care for half a year? Never, never, never, I thought furiously; but aloud I said as calmly as I could:

"Agrippina Ivanovna, my children mean everything to me. Look at me. I have no husband and my married life has been a failure. All I have are the babies. Would you take them away from me for months and months at a time? You couldn't do a thing like that. Why, you are married again, you have a husband"—(she sniffed)—"and a son"—(she shrugged her shoulders)—"and friends and plenty of money. Why would you want to take the only thing I have and that is really mine? Alexei may marry again and have twenty children . . . but don't take mine away."

Suddenly tears began to choke me and started to drip down my face. But the more agitated I became, the calmer and colder became Agrippina Ivanovna.

At that moment Sergei appeared at the door, bearing a small silver tray on which lay the unmistakable envelope of a telegram.

"For her Shiningness, the young princess," he said, advancing toward me, while Agrippina Ivanovna cried angrily:

"Haven't I told you a thousand times that there is no young or old princess here? There is the Princess Tamara Vsevolodovna and myself. Do you understand?"

And as he murmured: "Forgive me, you Shiningness, I'll try and remember," I tore open the telegram.

It read:

COME IMMEDIATELY. DEDOUSSIA HAD A STROKE AND IS DYING.
MAMMA.

"What is it?" asked Agrippina Ivanovna curiously. I had dropped the slip of paper and was probably looking wild-eyed, for she added a trifle more considerately: "No bad news, I hope?"

"Of course, it's bad news! There's nothing but bad news on all sides for me," I cried and, bursting into tears, sat down and covering my face, rocked to and fro.

Dedoussia, dear, darling, good, kind, loving Dedoussia. Oh, I must go to him at once!

Meanwhile Agrippina Ivanovna had picked up the telegram and read it.

"You must go immediately," she said quite kindly. "I'll order the horses and you can easily catch the late afternoon train."

"But the children . . . ?"

"Don't worry about them, I'll take care of them until you come back. They are better off here with Niania than with you at a time like this in Stronskoc."

Of course Niania would care for them. It was Dedoussia and the family who needed me now.

Feverishly I prepared for my departure. There was very little time and, throwing a few things into a bag, I hugged the babies and, exhorting the weeping Niania, who adored Dedoussia, to mind them like the apple of her eye, rushed downstairs and into the carriage that was waiting to take me to the station.

The twelve hours on that train were like a hideous nightmare. All I could think of was: Will I be in time to find Dedoussia still alive and receive his blessing?

"Faster, faster, faster," I kept urging the train. "Oh, please go faster!" I couldn't sleep, I couldn't eat, I couldn't read, and like a caged animal, paced the corridor all night.

But at last I was in the old Stronskoe station. Mamoussia had come to the train to meet me and the minute I saw her swollen, red eyes, I knew I was too late and that Dedoussia had died without waiting for me. That was the first time he had ever failed me, dear, darling Dedoussia! But even so, he had not forgotten me, Mamoussia said, and had sent me his blessing and the little silver medal that he had always worn round his neck all his life. Shortly before he died he had asked her in a whisper to "be sure and give it to Tamara" with his love and blessing. Weeping bitterly, I hung it round my neck. That was the first death in our family and its shadow lay heavily on everybody and everything in Stronskoe.

Dedoussia, more like the Ancient One than ever, was lying in state in the ballroom, surrounded with palms and flowers and candles, burning in tall silver candlesticks, while in a low, monotonous voice a black-robed nun read without stopping from the Psalms. From time to time a member of the family would relieve her and read on for half an hour or so. As soon as I thought that I could control myself, I took my turn and tried to read in the impartial, monotonous voice that was part of the ritual, but I couldn't do it and, breaking down, had to

turn the Book over to Vanka. He had just arrived from Krasnoe Selo with Tanka and her husband.

From all over the state came pouring in friends of Dedoussia: the governor, the bishop, neighbouring landowners, overseers, peasants and many others who had known and loved Dedoussia dearly. It was a never-ceasing procession before his bier and rich and poor alike paid obeisance to him and reverently kissed his waxen hands.

In the candlelight his white beard and flowing white hair shone like spun silver and a gentle smile rested on his lips, giving his fine old face a look of contentment and peace.

On and on the people passed and in the silence one could hear the shuffling of their feet and their deep sighs and low murmurs.

Flowers kept pouring in and, stacked high on all sides, they made Dedoussia appear as though he were lying in the midst of a garden of fantastic beauty.

"It's like Heaven," someone murmured next to me, as I went up again to kiss his forehead and softly stroke his silver mane.

But as I bent over him—I started. For there, right on the blanket of gold brocade that covered his feet, lay a little bunch of twigs and leaves—the Romany patteran. A cold thrill ran through my body. So *they* had been here, too! Unseen, unnoticed in the crowd of peasants, *they* had come to pay their last respects to one of their clan. Oh, I loved them, I loved them just as he had—the strange, dark, faithful people whose blood was his and mine!

I must find them and see them and tell them how much I love them and that they were mine as I was theirs. Nothing, nothing in the world could ever break that tie! On the contrary, as time went by it would get stronger and stronger until on my deathbed I'd lie there like Dedoussia with a patteran at my feet.

Leaving Dedoussia's side, I started to search for them, but though I ran all over the place and then watched at the bier for hours in the hope of seeing one of them pass again, I couldn't find anyone. They had come and gone as mysteriously as ever and no one but Papoussia, Vanka, Tanka and I ever knew that a Gypsy had passed in the crowd.

Dedoussia was buried in the family vault beneath a mountain

of flowers. Later on a marble monument would take their place, a monument representing a shaggy, sleeping lion.

When it was all over and the last mourner had left, I drove home with the family in the roomy old landau that always smelled of mice. On the way back I told them of my decision to leave Alexei and return to Stronskoe with the babies for good. At the news their tear-stained faces brightened and loving arms encircled me from all sides.

"At last, Tamara!" they cried, while Mamoussia, wiping her streaming eyes, whispered: "Thank God!"

Though heartbroken over Dedoussia's death, we were all reunited again.

But when we arrived at the house a telegram was handed to me. Thinking that it was about the babies, I tore it open, while all the family stood by watching.

"Good news, I trust," I heard Tanka say.

But as my eyes ran over the words, I couldn't believe what I was reading:

ALEXEI AND I HAVE LEFT WITH THE CHILDREN FOR PARIS.
INTEND KEEPING THEM UNTIL EVERYTHING IS LEGALLY SETTLED,
NLANIA RETURNING TO STRONSKOE AT ONCE. WLLL GIVE YOU ALL
DETAILS. BARONESS AGRIPPINA DE MOUTEAU.

With a cry of horror, I thrust the telegram into Mamoussia's hands.

"Tamara, *Tamarachka* . . . oh, poor little soul. . . how terrible . . . it's a crime. . . I'll kill that woman. . . Oh, you should never have left them with her," from all sides over me I heard those words, while above the din Papoussia's voice roared: "Didn't I tell you that that woman is a devil?"

"Dr. Roukovsky, oh where is the Doctor?" they cried, and the next moment he was beside me, holding me tightly in his arms, rocking me as he spoke in his soothing voice.

"Everything will be all right, Tamara *douschenka*, but take yourself in hand, immediately. Don't give way like this. You have too many important things to do. You've got to follow them to Paris at once, as soon as Niania has returned to tell us what has happened."

To Paris—at once! Yes, yes, of course that's what I should do. At once—^immediately—this very minute. . . .

"I'll go with you," sobbed Mamoussia.

"And I," shouted Papoussia.

"And I," "And I," cried Vanka and Tanka in one voice.

"We'll all take care of you and see that you get your babies back," they reassured me. "People don't steal children like that in broad daylight in this day and age. There must be a law against it."

But when we all calmed down a little, it was decided that only Mamoussia and Papoussia would go, as Vanka had to return to his regiment and Tanka and Boris to little Vaniouha.

Late in the afternoon Niania arrived, haggard and wild, her grey hair straggling all over her swollen, tear-stained face.

"Oh, Niania, Niania, what happened? Tell me quick," I cried, rushing to her.

And, sobbing bitterly, she told her tragic story.

"As soon as you left," she said, "Agrippina Ivanovna, your husband and Kurt Schmidt had a long conference behind closed doors. Then a telegram was sent in haste, but I didn't know to whom. All I knew was that a stable boy was sent to the telegraph station with a secret message. Later on I found out that the telegram was sent to the former nurse, the one you threw out of your house in Krasnoe Selo one night. The next day she arrived and I was ordered to pack at once. When I refused, they threatened me with the police and even sent for the village ouriadvnik who stood by while I packed. Then I was driven to the train and given a ticket to Stronskoe. And that's all I know."

She didn't even know that as soon as she went, they all left for Paris—no one had told her anything about that.

"*Boje moi*, what a woman, that Agrippina," moaned Mamoussia, while Papoussia stamped and shouted in fury and said that no one could do such a thing to his daughter. He'd have all the lawyers of the country after her and Alexei, if it cost him all his fortune and Stronskoe as well!

That same evening we all left for Petersburg, from where, as soon as we possibly could, Mamoussia, Papoussia and I would leave for Paris. There was still much to do in regard to passports and visas. But at last all was in order and we boarded the Nord Express, while Vanka and Tanka saw us off at the station.

When the train pulled out, they ran beside it, blowing kisses,

making little signs of the cross in the air to protect us and calling out: "God bless you."

As soon as we came to Paris, straight from the station, we drove to Agrippina Invanovna's house. As the cab stopped at the front door, Papoussia got out and rang the bell. The next moment a manservant answered it.

"The young Princess Vorozova is here and desires to see the prince at once, or if he is not at home, then his mother," said Papoussia firmly.

"Very good," replied the man politely, but evidently he was prepared for this and had received his orders, for he did not ask us to come in but, closing the door in Papoussia's face, left him standing on the steps.

A few minutes passed that seemed to me like a hundred years. Then the door opened again and the same manservant came out.

"Monsieur le Prince is not at home and Madame la Baronne is very sorry that she cannot see Madame la Princesse at this moment, for she is with the doctor in conference right now," he said, again politely. "But if you will kindly leave the name of your hotel, the baronne will get in touch with you as soon as possible."

Then, when Papoussia gave him the address, he closed the door and there was nothing else for us to do but go to the hotel and wait.

A day passed and nothing happened, while I paced the floor throughout that day and most of the night, waiting, waiting. . . .

At last, at eleven o'clock the next morning Maitre Gundermann was announced. Middle-aged and suave, he looked just the way a typical society lawyer was supposed to look and, after a few polite preliminaries, declared that he was representing le Prince Vorozov and la Baronne de Mouteau.

"What do you mean?" I asked bewildered.

"I mean that as you, Madame la Princesse, have expressed the desire to divorce Monsieur your husband, he has requested me to take charge of his side of this *affaire*. From now on I shall represent his interests, as undoubtedly some distinguished colleague of mine will represent yours."

"But there isn't any *affaire*," I remonstrated. "It's true that my husband and I agreed to separate, but we were in complete

accord on that subject and no complications or discussions were expected on either side."

The lawyer coughed discreetly behind his elegantly gloved hand and gently cleared his throat.

"That is not the point, Madame la Princesse," he said, gazing at the tips of his shining boots. "The point is that there may be some—er—argument concerning the children."

"But why?" I exclaimed frantically. "My husband told me I could have them and I told him that he could see them as much as he pleased and whenever he wished to."

"But, Madame, one is permitted to think matters over and change one's mind. In this case the prince has decided that he wants his children at least six months of the year, if not eight."

Aghast, I couldn't say a word. That was Agrippina Ivanovna's wish, not his! But what had she to do with this? After all, it was between Alexei and me—the children were ours, not hers! Then suddenly I remembered our last conversation on the terrace.

"The money is mine, not Alexei's," she had said, "and if I wish to, I can cut him off without a kopeck. Where would he be without me? In prison? In Siberia? With all his debts?"

So that was it! He didn't care a fig for the babies, but after all he was their father and she had told him that if he gave them over to me completely, she'd cut off his allowance. And money, meaning so much to him, he had, of course, chosen what she desired. Oh, God, dear God . . . but I'd fight for my babies, I'd fight for my rights.

The lawyer, evidently mistaking my silence for acceptance, spoke again.

"The prince will be happy to settle a fine, a very fine allowance on you, Madame la Princesse, plus the generous custody of your children for six months a year, the other six months being his."

"You mean his mother's?" I demanded.

The lawyer bowed slightly.

"If you wish to put it that way, Madame, yes. Legally, the prince will exercise his rights as father of the children and legally they will be his for six months, just as legally they will be yours for the other half of the year. However, if he desires that, during the period when the children are in his custody,

they be cared for by a capable older woman, say his mother, he has the perfect right to do so, just as you would, if you desired to leave the children in your mother's care, during the period that they are yours."

Oh, they had thought of everything. . . .

Suddenly Mamma spoke.

"I think, Monsieur, that we shall have our lawyer speak to you on those subjects from now on. . . ."

"But the babies," I interrupted, "I want to see them to-day, at once!"

Maitre Gundermann bowed again.

"It will be a pleasure indeed for me to arrange such a very desirable and normal meeting," he said suavely. "As a matter of fact, the prince suggested that you should come this very afternoon at two o'clock precisely, if it suits you."

"Oh, yes, yes!" I cried, jumping up, "of course, I'll be there. But," turning to Papoussia and Mamma pleadingly, "I must buy some toys, some presents for them; I can't go empty-handed."

Feverishly I began to collect my hat and gloves.

"In that case, Madame, I believe I shall withdraw now," said the lawyer. "And I shall tell Monsieur le Prince and Madame la Baronne that you will be there at two o'clock to embrace your children."

"Yes, yes," I cried impatiently, while Papoussia added gravely: "Accompanied by her mother and myself, of course."

When Gundermann left, I rushed out to buy the babies presents and returned laden with all I could find. Staggering beneath the parcels, stacked high in our arms, we left the hotel at ten minutes before two—I, in a fever of excitement, Mamoussia, nervous and frightened, and Papoussia, very grave and self-possessed.

This time the door was wide open and the same manservant, now bowing low, said: "*Entrez, s'il vous plait, Madame la Princesse.*" Then closing the door behind us and, to my surprise, locking it, he led the way upstairs to Agrippina Ivanovna's drawing-room, the same room where not so long ago Alexei and I had blessed her with an icon before her wedding. I wondered what Monsieur de Mouteau, her husband, thought of all this and whether I'd see him again.

But as I entered the drawing-room, I stopped short at the

amazing sight that greeted my eyes. For there, surrounded by at least ten servants Who stood in a semicircle, were my babies in the nurse's arms. With a look of insolent triumph, she came up toward me and said in a voice that was ominously smooth:

"Here is your dear *mamachka*, children. Kiss her and be good."

With little cries of joy the chuckling babies put out their fat, little arms and the next minute I was hugging and smothering them with kisses.

"My babies, my golden ones!" I cried, forgetting about the nurse and all the silent servants who surrounded us.

"Where are the presents, the toys?" I said excitedly, turning back to Mamoussia and Papoussia, but their faces were very grave.

"Restrain yourself, Tamara; don't show these people how you feel," whispered Mamma in English, while Papoussia looked sternly at the nurse and at the crowd of servants behind her. Under his fixed, heavy gaze the woman began to look uncomfortable and presendy with flaming cheeks and downcast eyes stepped to one side, leaving me alone with the babies in the centre of the floor, while I started to produce my presents and the twins shouted with joy.

Suddenly a bell rang and a rustle ran through the line of servants. Then the nurse spoke up. She had lost her insolent, triumphant look and her voice was restrained and low.

"I'm sorry, your Shiningness," she said, without looking at me, "but that bell means that the children have to go upstairs now."

Bewildered, I turned to Mamoussia and Papoussia.

"Can't I go too?" I whispered, but they shook their heads.

"No, Tamara, not to-day. We must return to the hotel at once.

Two bright spots burned on Mamoussia's cheeks and Papoussia, grave and impassive as ever, took me by the hand.

Frantically, forgetting about all those people watching me, I hugged the babies until they cried out and pushed me away with their fat, litde hands. The next moment the nurse had taken them in her arms and walked out of the room, followed by the entire bodyguard.

Blinded with tears and stumbling along, I clung to Papoussia's hand as he gendy guided me out of that room and down the

stairs to the waiting cab. The waiting cab! So they had known that I wouldn't be long with my children and had not dismissed it!

For two days we did not hear from Agrippina Ivanovna and though I tried to see the babies, nothing came of it. Always the answer was the same: Monsieur le Prince and Madame la Baronne were out and had left no instructions for the young princesses to receive anyone—no, not even Madame la Princesse, their mother.

Meanwhile Mamoussia had retained a lawyer, Maitre Boudinot, for me, and the legal *pourparler* began.

Every morning I'd go out and try to catch a glimpse of my babies somewhere, but they didn't leave Agrippina Ivanovna's house and evidently took their airing in her garden which was situated in a small inner court and consisted of a few trees and bushes and a little lawn with a fountain in its middle. At last, in despair, I felt like making a scene on the doorstep, but Maitre Boudinot begged me to "restrain my maternal impulse" and "wisely bide my time."

"In this case we must proceed with great tact and caution," he said, "and in no way must you furnish them with anything that they might construe falsely and then use against you in court."

He was greatly perturbed when he heard that I had walked up and down in front of Agrippina Ivanovna's house for hours and then sat in a park and conversed with an unknown young man who was sitting on the same bench.

"How do you know that you are not being watched?" he exclaimed anxiously. Then lowering his voice, he continued: "And if they know that you have been talking in friendly fashion to a young man—why, they'll accuse you of heaven knows what and declare that you are unfit to take care of your little daughters. Ah, Madame, I beg of you, be discreet and as cautious as you can if you wish to win with flying colours."

So, obeying him, from then on I stuck by Mamoussia and Papoussia.

A few more days went by and I had the weird sensation that time had stopped. It had become a dark cloud, hanging ominously over us.

Then the lightning struck.

It must have been about one o'clock in the morning and I was tossing round as usual trying to sleep, when the telephone rang sharply and long. Jumping up, I rushed to it and picked up the receiver. Alexei's voice answered my anxious "Allo."

"Tamara," he said, and he sounded unusually grave, "we want you to come over to the house at once, as soon as you possibly can."

"But why? What's happened? The babies?" I gasped.

"Little Marina is ill, very ill."

"But why didn't you let me know? What is it?"

My knees were shaking so, I could hardly stand.

"It's diphtheria. She was taken ill the day before yesterday, but the doctor thought it was only a bad cold and kept her in bed. To-night she suddenly became much worse and now he knows what it is. He has done all that is necessary and we must hope for the best. We have separated her from Aleka who is all right so far. Come at once and bring some things; I want you to stay here."

Without hearing another word I dropped the receiver and rushed to dress.

"Diphtheria, it's diphtheria, Papoussia," I managed to gasp as he came into the room, while Mamoussia silently helped me dress.

A few minutes later the three of us were in a cab tearing along as fast as it could go on our way to Agrippina Ivanovna's house. All the windows were lighted and the front door wide open when we arrived. Without waiting a second to speak to anyone I rushed up the steps two at a time and raced down the corridor to the nursery, which I knew was next to the room I had occupied at the time of Agrippina Ivanovna's wedding.

As I swiftly opened the door I saw the two little white beds with soft white netting on their sides to prevent the babies from falling out. Between the cots on a table burned a blue night lamp. In its dim light I could discern several figures bending over one of the beds. In it lay my Dark One, Mara—the other bed was empty. There was no other sound in the room than that of a small child breathing heavily.

"What have you done to her?" I whispered fiercely.

The figures moved and gave way as I reached the cot and leaned over it.

Was this my beautiful, lovely one—oh, what had they done to her? What had they done? •

Her face was swollen, her eyes looked upward with a fixed glassy stare, there were spots like bruises on her body and that dreadful sound came raspingly out of her throat.

But as I bent over her, she looked at me and smiled. Her hand feebly pushed itself toward me. Then in that strange voice, the voice of diphtheria, she rasped: "*Mamachka*"

"*Douschenka*, my little soul, my little dove!" Desperately I tore down the barrier of soft net and kneeling, put my cheek against hers. She gurgled as she always used to when I did that. Then the hoarse little voice whispered: "Popo."

She was thinking of the old parrot, the same old parrot that had "helped*" bring her into this world in his own way!

"He's all right, darling. He sends you his love and kisses and tells you to get well at once. He's flying here all the way from home, and will sit down right on your bed," I managed to answer.

She chuckled and for a second a ghost of a smile flashed through her eyes.

"Popo," she gasped.

I knew what she wanted. She wanted me to sing the silly jingle, a favourite of hers, that I had invented about Popo.

With a desperate effort I cleared my throat and began the first words:

*"Once upon a time there ivas an old Popo,
Who loved to drink the nice white milk
Of the nut of a Coco. . . ."*

Suddenly she began to choke.

"Air, she needs air. Help her quick," I cried frantically to the man in a white gown and cap who evidently was the doctor.

He was bending over another table covered with medicine bottles and objects that glinted in the dim blue light. A trained French hospital nurse stood beside him.

All of a sudden I felt violently ill and, clinging to Papoussia, managed to reach the little bathroom at the end of the corridor. There, while I retched and retched, he held my quivering,

racked body tight in his arms. At last the ghastly spell passed and I was able to return to the nursery.

I opened the door and went back to the little bed.

A change had come over my baby. She was sleeping now and I heard the doctor whisper to Papoussia: "This may be the turning point."

In the background I could see Mamma and Alexei and Agripina Ivanovna and several of the servants, all motionless as though turned to stone.

The baby's breathing was much easier now and I could hear the ticking of the clock, the same clock that I had bought in Petersburg for the nursery in Krasnoe Selo. *Tick-tock, tick-tock*, the minutes passed, then an hour and two and three.

I knelt by the bed, watching every move of the feverish little body that seemed to be resting now.

All of a sudden a spasm of agony came into her face and opening her eyes wide, she thrust out her thin arms, that only a few days ago had been so plump, and caught me round the neck.

But as I bent over her, she fluttered in my arms like a bird in hand. Once she fluttered, twice, then she straightened out stiffly and her head fell back. . . .

"It's finished," somebody whispered.

"Finished? What is finished?" I cried.

But at that instant Papoussia caught me in his strong, kind arms and carried me out of the room. Then I knew what they meant.

On to a strange bed he laid me and gave me something to swallow. "Lie quietly, and this will help you."

But I couldn't lie still. "Only movement will help," I thought dully and, going into the corridor, started to walk up and down, Papoussia holding me as I crept along unsteadily hour after hour. It made me think of the night my babies were born in Krasnoe Selo. We had walked miles then. Now one of them was dead and I was walking miles again.

From time to time another terrible fit of empty retching would sweep over me and Papoussia would hold me tight, his arms never loosening their grip. Up and down, up and down we went—and though my body ached all over, it was far better to keep moving this way than to lie on that bed, facing the still dark horror of the past hours.

Night passed and morning came. Then the same lightning struck once more. Now the other baby was taken with diphtheria and at her bedside I relived minute by minute the same anguish all over again.

Though the serum and oxygen were administered in better time and her throat was operated on, her heart did not hold out. At the end of the third day both babies lay side by side in their little white coffins.

The doctor must have deliberately "knocked me out" then with some powerful medicine, for I do not remember anything more for a long, long while.

At first, Mamoussia told me later, I was unconscious; then mercifully diphtheria struck me, too, and for weeks I lay in a Paris hospital between life and death.

When gradually I regained consciousness and realized what had happened, I was too weak to suffer as acutely as I had during those days of horror. On a stretcher I left Paris and on a stretcher returned to Petersburg.

CHAPTER XVIII

DROP IT AND GO ON

THOUGH my old room was unoccupied and there were plenty of spare bedrooms in the house, Mamma, for some reason of her own, put me into her drawing-room. There, in my old bedstead that looked most incongruous against such a background, I lay in state, surrounded with Louis Seize furniture of pink and gold brocade, glass cupboards filled with Dresden china and bibelots and all sorts of antiques all over the place. Across the room, stretched out on the hearth, full-length, was Mishka Medved the bear, his glassy eyes fixed on me with an unwinking, loving stare.

Popo's open cage stood near my bed and most of the time he sat on the railing at my feet or somewhere near my head. Once in a while he'd get into my hair or walk all over me, picking off me affectionately invisible little things that only he could see and that seemed to bother him.

"*Psht—woo*," he'd mutter anxiously, turning his head sideways so as to get a better view of those mysterious particles of apparently nothing—and "*Psht—woo*," he'd shout triumphantly after he had pounced on one of them, and pecked and swallowed it.

When he was not asleep on a perch all day long he'd travel up and down me, exclaiming "*Psht—woo*" and pouncing and pecking. He knew perfectly well that I was ill and miserable, and would perform all kinds of tricks to amuse me. Sometimes he'd dance, shifting from one grey, ice-cold, beclawed leg to another; sometimes he'd bob up and down from head to tail or sing in a loud, raucous voice. But if I was dozing, he'd croon softly or murmur to himself a string of incomprehensible words. If he saw me tossing and crying, he'd put his head against mine and gently peck at my cheek, or pull a pink feather out of his tail, which he would gravely offer me as a consolation for my sorrow. In his poor old parrot way he brought me all the comfort he could possibly think of.

Several months passed and at last my divorce was granted—once more I was free. Then without any warning, out of a clear sky, a radical change came over me and I went absolutely wild. Maybe because Mamoussia kept saying: "*Douschenka*, pull yourself together and try to think of something else. Go out, see your friends, amuse yourself, have fun. . . ."

Or because I happened to run into Alexei in the street and seeing me dressed in deep mourning, he had exclaimed: "My goodness, Tamara, you look like a black crow! Haven't you forgotten those babies yet?"

Or maybe I reverted to type and Dominica's strain at last got the upper hand.

Whatever it was, I became a different person.

It happened one evening when Mamma came into my little drawing-room where I sat staring into the fire.

"Please, child, please," she murmured, sitting down next to me and putting her arm round my shoulders, "won't you do me a favour and go out this evening? Your old friend Sophy has just telephoned and begs you to go to her house right away. No party, of course; just a few friends, that's all."

For a moment I looked at Mamma in despair: this sort of thing had been going on for days and days! "Please, child, go out and

have some fun. . . . Please see your old friends. . . . Please begin living a new life—Forget the old one, forget everything about it, wipe it out completely—start all over again."

A peculiar mixture of anger and recklessness swept over me. I felt myself tighten up as though all my feelings had been rolled into a ball, while a succession of thoughts, quick as lightning, flashed through my mind. All right! They don't understand or respect my grief! They think I have lost hold of myself. . . . They think I am weak and soft and sentimental . . . down for ever. Very well, I'll show them! If they want me to be strong and hard and gay, I'll be all of that!

In that instant I felt as though I were plunging from a hot, sun-baked platform into icy water. A deep breath, a shock and off I went swimming away like mad in a new direction.

"You're right, Mamma, I'm going," I cried, jumping up and running to my room. "What dress shall I wear? The red or the yellow?"

Surprised, Mamma followed me.

"Red? Yellow?" she exclaimed in amazement. "Oh, no, darling, certainly not. I should think the pretty white one or the lavender. "

But I was busy tearing off my black frock and ordering Mania round. A bath, a perfumed bath, at once, and my red dress by all means! It would go well with the sable *shouba*.

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Mania look inquiringly at Mamoussia, who nodded her head and bit her lip. I could see that she was dumbfounded at my unexpected reaction and did not know whether to be glad or sorry about it. Well, I was doing what she and everybody else wanted me to do: I was going back into the world to try and forget the past three years of misery and begin all over again. Oh, yes, I knew perfectly well that I was about to swing to the other extreme, but what of it? Who cared? Not I. I had obeyed orders once before and what had happened? My girlhood, my married life, my motherhood—everything had been swept away and trampled on and soiled and spoiled and ruined. So why should I care what happened now? Why not try to forget? Champagne might help, as well as the admiration of men. Critically I gazed at my reflection in the long mirror. Yes, there I was—small and thin and dark-skinned, with big black eyes and cloudy black hair and

a mouth as red as my dress. Not bad, not bad at all. As a matter of fact, I'll do very well, thank you.

Whirling round, I caught Mamoussia in my arms and hugged her.

"Behold, the past has disappeared," I cried, striking an attitude. Then as I saw a sad, puzzled look come into her eyes, I rushed out of the room and down the steps to the car before I could change my mind again.

Oh, yes, yes, yes, I was off to a new start! I'd forget Alexei and Agrippina and everything, everything—even my babies, I thought fiercely as the car sped along the deserted quays. What was the use of living the so-called "right way"? I had tried to do my best—I had tried to be a good wife and a good mother and look what had happened! Everything had been taken away from me and I was "spoiled goods," soiled and torn and worthless at twenty! *Second-hand*, one might say.

My misery and despair had turned to anger, a cold, glittering, hard anger that seemed to cover me like a coat of steel. I ran up the steps of Sophy's house and into her drawing-room. A small crowd of old friends and playmates had already assembled near the fire. As I came in, they all turned and stared at me. I think they fully expected me to be tragic, silent and tearful, swathed in black *crêpe* and veils.

For a moment they appeared as surprised as Mania and Mamoussia. Then their amazement changed to evident relief. Tamara wasn't going to be a spoil-sport—a gloom—a damper after all. What luck! In a second they were all round me, hugging me, kissing me, patting my hair and shoulders and catching my fingers.

"Well, here I am! What do we do? Where do we go?" I demanded hurriedly, afraid they might say something pitying or kind that would break through this new, hard, glittering, angry armour of mine and make me soft and want to cry again.

Instinctively they understood my mood, for they answered gaily in chorus:

"Let's go to Cubat's for dinner, and the Villa Rhodé and the Gypsies—how about it?"

"Yes, yes," I cried and off we went.

"Lajeunesse dorte va s'amuser" shouted one of the **men**. His

name was Piotr Obrensky, an old friend and classmate of Vanka, whom I had known for years.

Into several cars our crowd piled itself, shouting and laughing, and drove off, first to Cubat's restaurant for dinner, then to the famous Villa Rhodé with its risqué show that made me think of my honeymoon in Paris—and then on to the Gypsies.

I had never been there as Alexei had flatly refused to take me.

"How can I take you there, when you are a Gypsy yourself? Td be ashamed of you," he had said and I had never asked to go again.

Now I was in a fever of excitement. At last I was going to the Gypsies; at last I'd hear them sing and see them dance!

I, who hardly ever drank anything at all, had now swallowed two glasses of champagne. A funny little tingly feeling spread like a network over my cheeks, my brain began to swim round—quite pleasantly, I thought—and my knees and the calves of my legs quivered a trifle as though I were on skates. Alexei, Agrippina, yes, even the babies were beginning to float away from me, while a new sensation of freedom seemed to take possession of my whole being.

"I *am* forgetting . . . the pain is going away from here," I whispered to Piotr, clutching my throat. "Is it the champagne? If it is, give me some more, lots more."

"As much as you want, *Tamarotchka*" he whispered back, bending over me and looking into my eyes just like Grischa used to do once upon a time.

We were all in a large private dining-room, or *cabinet particulier* it was called, waiting for the Gypsies to come in.

Piotr took my hand and held it tight.

"You'll love them, because you're a Gypsy yourself," he murmured in a way that was so different from Alexei's rude "I can't take you there; I'd be ashamed of being seen with you."

We were now sitting at a long table facing the entrance door. Cold shivers kept racing up and down my spine. I couldn't take my eyes off that door.

"They're my people, my people. Oh, *Boje*, dear sweet *Boje*, make them come quick," I prayed, twisting my fingers. "Quick before my heart stops and I die!"

At that moment the door flew open and into the room they

trooped—swarthy, colourful, with a jingling of bracelets and beads and flashes of "white, white teeth. Instantly I thought of my kidnapping and of Stesha and the Ancient One. *Boje moi, Boje moi*, here they were again, not the very same people, perhaps, but just like them.

I sprang to my feet and at the same moment they turned toward me and, bowing low with outstretched hands, began to sing their famous "honouring song":

*"Tamara Vsevolodna, what a fine young one she is!
She has come from town
To visit us at last.
With her protection we shall never be lost
And in her honour we shall sing the song.*

*'Tamara, Tamara, Tamara,
Tamara, Tamara, Tamara,
Let us drink to the health of Tamara,
Our own little darling one.' "*

They were singing to me ... for me! They actually knew me! They were honouring me. Blinded with tears, I stood facing them as their song swept on toward me and swirling round seemed to submerge me in its waves.

Never had I known anything like this before! This was happiness, this was joy—the kind of joy that conquered sorrow and destroyed it for ever.

As though sensing my thoughts, they swung into their next song:

*"Away grief and sorrow,
May the joyful future teach us to live
And have faith again and love."*

And as the tears now rolled down my cheeks they broke into their third song. The leader with his guitar had stopped in front of a young girl with blazing eyes and the same kind of cloudy hair as mine. Her dress was a bright yellow and long gold earrings half covered her face. As he plucked his first chords she nodded and stood up.

"A Gypsy, believe me, does not seek any beauty" she began in a low velvety voice;

"Only give her a heart that is too hot to hold." Then with a disdainful lift of her shoulder she went on:

*"And to him who has beauty but a soul that is cold
I shall say—'May the devil take you.' "*

Every stanza of this insolent song ended with the same refrain, "May the devil take you,"

"Don't forget me, that's all I implore," the girl now pleaded, her voice heavy with love and entreaty;

"For to you I am giving my life," she stressed the word "giving," then paused,

"But if you have ceased to love and adore"— She hissed these words through her teeth and lifted her right hand as though carrying an invisible dagger, ready to stab, then unexpectedly she threw back her head and burst into a peal of jeering laughter——

*" Then I'll wave my hand and say,
'May the devil take you J "*

The last words she pronounced with such contempt that for a moment no one moved. Then a storm of applause broke out.

"She's wonderful! She's their best except Pasha. Just wait till she begins," cried Piotr, clapping his hands frantically. "Pasha—we want Pasha!"

A haggard woman in a red shawl, who had apparently been dozing in a corner, now stood up and lazily stretched herself and yawned. She was ugly as sin. Her drooping eyelids concealed her eyes. What could she do, I wondered, and leaned forward anxiously. Oh, I wanted them all to be good—all, even this one.

The leader was now standing in front of her, strumming his guitar softly and rhythmically, repeating the same refrain over and over again, each time a little louder. Its beat like the beat of an African tom-tom made me think of jungles and wild beasts and primitive people. On and on it went, louder and louder, until I felt I couldn't stand it any longer. Would this

beating in my temple never cease? I looked round at Sophy and Piotr and all my companions. Their faces were white with strain.

Suddenly the woman lifted her drooping eyelids and gazed at us with enormous eyes like burning coals. Then she began to sing in a strange husky voice, now dropping it low, now shrieking, her body swaying to the rhythm and her shoulders lifting and falling like heavy wings.

She sang in their own language, in words we could not understand, but their meaning was clear as crystal. For every word she had a facial expression or a twist of her body or a flutter of her hands, a moan or a cry that explained everything. And as she sang, an unbelievable transformation came over her: years rolled off her, her eyes blazed, her teeth flashed—and there she stood in the middle of the room under the bright white light of the chandelier like a burning red flame of passion.

Not only we, the guests, but all the Gypsies listened to her spellbound. The sweat poured down the leader's face and gradually, as the song wore on, he became old-looking and haggard and drawn. It was as though she had drained him of all his vitality and taken his youth in exchange for her singing.

When she finished, she slowly left the room without looking in our direction or paying the slightest attention to our wild applause.

Till dawn the Gypsies sang and danced for us and when at last we left them, the sun had risen and Petersburg was coming to life.

Piotr drove me home alone. He kissed me in the car and I promised to meet him the next day. Why not? If this was the way to forget, I'd go the whole of that way.

When I woke up after a heavy sleep, it was lunch time. Everyone stared at me for a second as I came into the dining-room and then quickly looked away. Mamma seemed nervous and preoccupied, with the two red spots on her face that always came out when she was upset; Papoussia kept puffing out his cheeks and moustache like an angry walrus; Vanka and Tanka were frankly curious; Miss Burns round-eyed and scandalized.

I looked them all over defiantly and took my place at the table.

"What's the matter? Why are you speechless and funny-

looking?" I demanded, shaking out my napkin with a smart flip and reaching for a glass of water. "I suppose you are shocked because I came home at sunrise, chock-full of champagne! Well, that's what you all wanted me to do, wasn't it? Go out and amuse myself and have some fun and forget everything else? Now I've done it, why the sniffy noses and the gloom?"

Mamoussia sighed and her eyes filled with tears; Papoussia puffed out his cheeks again and Vanka and Tanka burst out laughing.

"We wanted you to partake of a little genteel and refined amusement, my child—not run round the town all night long, goodness knows where, and come home absolutely stinking," remarked Tanka sententiously. "Why, Mamma says she sniffed your breath while you were sleeping and it was awful, simply awful."

Papoussia suddenly grinned and put his hand over mine.

"Shocking," exclaimed Miss Burns reprovingly. "Shocking *indeed*] I never heard of anything like it in my life."

"What do you want?" I cried indignantly, pushing back my chair and jumping up. "First you make my life miserable because I stay at home and refuse to go out; then when you drive me to distraction with your advice and beggings and pleadings and even orders—yes, orders, Mamma—to go out and have some fun, and I finally give in and do it, the next day you all sit with long faces like a lot of judges ready to tear me to pieces." And throwing down my napkin, I stormed out of the dining-room, followed by a family chorus of: "Tamara, behave!"

I locked myself up in my bedroom and indignantly started to pace the floor. Really, this was the limit of injustice! To pull me deliberately away from my fireplace, when I had been sitting there quietly, not disturbing anyone, and force me to go out with a lot of wild people! Why, everybody in town knew what a wild set that was. . . . Then accuse me of coming home at the crack of dawn smelling—"stinking," Tanka had said—to high heaven of champagne! Well, they had known perfectly well what crowd I had gone out with and knew what to expect, so why the fuss?

"Life is a beast to me!" I cried, stamping my foot, while the angry tears poured down into my open mouth. "A beast, a

beast, a beast! Nothing I ever do is right. Just let me do something and it'll always be wrong, wrong, wrong. Why was I ever born?"

At that moment there was a knock on my door and the handle rattled violently.

"Who is it? I won't see anybody. Go away!" I shouted furiously.

"It's only I, your old Papoussia." The familiar voice sounded strangely muffled and unreal. "Let me in, Tamara, for the sake of Jesus Christ Our Lord, let me in."

Well, when anyone asks anything in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord, one does not refuse, and muttering "Amen," I slowly, suspiciously, unlocked the door.

Papoussia, his cheeks violently red and his fierce moustache drenched with tears that were dripping off the tips, rushed in and before I realized what he was doing threw himself on his knees in front of me.

"Slap my stupid, old grey head," he wept; "slap it good and hard! *Tamarotchka*, forgive me. I brought you into this sinful world in a moment of selfish pleasure. I allowed you to marry that worthless brute. I didn't save your poor little innocent babies! And now I'm about to see you turn into a lost woman! And all on account of your sinful, wicked old father who did not protect you properly throughout your poor little life. Hit me, Tamara, hit me right on that stupid, selfish head of mine. Go on, hit, slap, bang!"

And catching my hand that was curled up into a tight fist from nervous alarm at this extraordinary scene, he hit himself on the head with it again and again. Stunned at his amazing behaviour—Papoussia, who had been such a rock of strength all through my days of trouble, I screamed frantically: "Help, help! Somebody take Papoussia away. Look what he's doing, quick, quick! He's making me beat him."

At that they all came rushing into my room and started to pull Papoussia to his feet. But he was too heavy for them and still kneeling, kept shouting: "Hit my head," while I screamed: "For God's sake, take him away or I'll really smack him hard for behaving this way!"

Then they all started to scream and the pandemonium became **terrific**.

At last they managed to release Papoussia's grip on my **hand**, lifted him to his feet and led him out of the room.

Horror-stricken at the scene, I could still feel his **short**, cropped, stubby hair prick the soft part of my hand. I began to sob violently.

"If this isn't something *à la* Dostoievsky, I'll eat my new **hat**," remarked Vanka, lifting me and depositing me, quite gendy **for** him, on my bed. "Come on, beggar-beast, stop bawling and finish your lunch. A drunk must eat, you know, otherwise his stomach will burst open."

But that unfortunate remark finished me completely and I lay there sobbing and hiccupping from crying until Dr. Roukovsky, who was anxiously shuttling between Papoussia's room and mine, gave me some of his famous laurel knock-out drops, saying: "Bless my soul, now maybe the two of them will sleep," meaning, of course, Papoussia and myself

And so ended my family's reaction to my official *d6but* in the world of scandal. After that one, uproarious, collective outburst everybody calmed down and I was allowed to do as I pleased. True, Mamoussia kept looking sad and Papoussia would stare at me like a mournful old St. Bernard with a drooping moustache, but at least they didn't say anything and when the next day Piotr called for me and I went out with him, no one protested and I sailed out in my red velvet shouba and sable cap, defiant and determined to see to the finish what this new life had to offer.

Soon enough I found out. It offered an endless round of excitement and pleasure. There'd be roller-skating on the great rink on the Champ de Mars, near the British Embassy, tea-parties, dinner-parties, theatre-parties, and after-theatre parties that often lasted till dawn. Plenty of money was spent, for all that cost a lot, and there were Paris clothes and furs and jewels besides.

Petersburg was divided into various small groups or sets that formed independent little units within the one big group called Society.

Our own little crowd was the wildest of all and the names of Elena, Irina, Sophy, Tamara, Natasha and others brought angry frowns from the grave, imposing dowagers who eyed us with immeasurable disapproval and sniffed and made great big

double chins to show exactly what they thought of us. We were "fast," undisciplined, wild and bad! "Naughty," the kinder ones said, but the sterner ones said: "Bad, just bad," and, forgetting their own youth, really meant it.

Everywhere that I went Piotr was at my side. Occasionally Vanka came along to see what the beggar-beast was doing, but not often. At that time he was in love with a young ballerina and spent most of his evenings' watching her pirouette in her gauzy *tutu* at the Imperial Ballet. But Piotr was always with me and soon people began to talk: "Are they in love? Will they marry? Or is it just a little affair that will pass with the season? ..."

But it was not an affair, at least not for weeks and weeks. We danced together and skated and went to the Gypsies, and he held my hand and made love to me and told me that I meant more to him than anyone else in the world. Would I marry him, he'd ask again and again and always I'd answer the same thing: "No, thank you; no more marriage for me."

Then finally one evening with a pale, drawn face and angry eyes, he told me that either I would have to marry him or he would go away.

And I laughed at him in that hard, new way that had taken hold of me so completely and answered in what I considered a supremely sophisticated manner: "But why marry, darling? I'm perfectly willing to have an affair with you, if that's what you want."

He looked at me *in* amazement and I could see so many different feelings run over his face. He was shocked and angry, and pleased and relieved, all at the same time.

And so late one afternoon I went to my first *rendezvous* at a house on the Morskaia where, over an expensive furniture shop, a discreet old lady rented rooms to the gentlemen of her fashionable clientèle.

Following Piotr's instructions, I left my car and walked down the street. On the way I met Sophy and when she asked me where I was going, I replied: "To a *rendezvous*, of course," which she didn't believe. It was then that the brilliant conviction was born in my head that it was always better and safer to tell the truth, no matter how startling it was, because then no **one** would believe it.

At last I came to the house and, passing through the open entrance door, walked up the oak staircase' and down a narrow corridor to the fourth door on my right. There I knocked and Piotr opened the door, dressed as usual in his uniform. He was flushed and nervous.

I looked quickly round the room of sin and my heart sank. It was hideous! Cheap white lace curtains over the window; ugly old mahogany furniture upholstered in a sickly green plush; on the walls horrible pictures of fat naked women in heavy gilt frames. In the corner, behind a black Chinese screen with pink flamingoes walking all over it, stood a low and wide bronze bedstead and an old-fashioned brown marble washstand with a night pot and a pail at its side.

The droopy lampshades were pink and gold; there were artificial flowers in the vases and a spittoon in every corner. And, to make the dreary scene complete, someone in the next room began to play "Humoresque" on a scrappy violin with an uncertain hand.

As my heart sank lower and lower, my stomach began to move up higher and higher and to my horror I felt I was going to be sick. Out of the tail of my left eye I could see the night pot grow out of all proportion and the gleaming spittoon in a faraway corner, while next door the unknown and uncertain player laboured with his faltering fingers again and again over the first bars of "Humoresque." And in those dismal surroundings Piotr's changed, distorted face appeared frightening and unreal.

Hurriedly I turned and fled. In the corridor I met a frowsy old woman in a black silk dress with heavy chains and bracelets and pins all over her vast person. "My landlady," I thought wildly as I rushed past her with my collar turned up again and my fur cap pulled over my eyes. But not so fast that she didn't have time to give me a quick glance and a smile that bared her long yellow teeth.

The next day I said firmly to a miserable Piotr: "I'm awfully sorry, but I couldn't, Piotr." That same evening he left for his country place near Kiev.

The next time I tried sinning was with my fourth cousin, Christopher, or Cristo for short. He was a great, big, heavy blond with near-sighted blue-blue eyes, a short nose and curving

lips. Beautiful as a Nordic god he calmly realized it without ever getting conceited. Perhaps he was too lazy, or too blasé or something too superior for that.

When we started seeing a good deal of each other, our mothers were enchanted and eagerly looked forward to our betrothal and marriage. But again, though Cristo very decently proposed to me in the best manner, I refused, explaining to him that I was too frightened at the thought of another marriage.

"No, let's try the other way," I said, wondering if I had shocked him as I had Piotr. But no, he didn't take it at all like Piotr. He merely narrowed his near-sighted eyes, crinkled his marvellous nose and laughed.

"All right, Tamara," he said, "let's try."

And so we did.

This time the rendezvous took place in the great Hôtel d'Europe in a sumptuous suite where everything was handsome and well appointed. No spittoons graced the corners, no pots; no wretched, halting violinist played in the offing. There was only one picture and a good one at that, and flowers, live flowers, everywhere. The deep red curtains were drawn; there was a fire burning gaily in the grate. A little tea table stood near the sofa. On it hummed a small silver samovar and there were plates of sandwiches and cakes and sweets of all kinds. One plate had a red velvet jewel box on it.

"A present for you, Tamara," said Cristo, pointing to the jewel case. "Look and see if you like it."

Curiously I opened the soft, velvety box and then cried out in delight. For there on a white satin background lay a single large ruby like a drop of blood.

"Every time you look at it, Tamara, you'll know that my heart is yours and when you wear it, you'll be wearing a drop of my blood."

For a long time we remained there in front of the fire. Then it began to flicker and fade and die away. And as it sputtered and finally sank into a burning heap that gradually grew greyer and greyer until it turned to ashes, the old miserable feeling of frustration and loneliness came over me again.

"It's no use, *Christoushka*" I whispered, "no use at all. You are dear to me and kind and understanding and everything here is lovely, but I cannot stay. I've got to go and I will not come

back. It's not your fault. There must be something the matter with me. . . ."

"Perhaps you've been through too much, *doushenka*, and the shocks have hurt you too deeply. Perhaps you are trying to force the old wounds to heal when you should let time do that, but I'll wait for you, Tamara, and when you feel differently and send for me, I'll come to you anywhere, always. Meanwhile, promise me you'll wear my heart's blood, won't you?"

Mournfully I shook my head.

"No, I can't do that either, Cristo. I can't have anything that will hold me back. I've got to be free—free to work out my own destiny in my own way. How that will happen, I don't know. But some day it will come, perhaps."

"Well, remember always that I'm still on earth," said Cristo.

Then it was all over and I was walking down the Nevsky Prospect, gazing mechanically into the lighted shops with unseeing eyes. I had failed again. First as a wife and mother, now twice with Piotr and Cristo, who both apparently loved me.

CHAPTER XIX

THE ROMANY ROAD

THAT summer, to the indignation of my family, I flatly refused to go to Stronskoe and took a small house, a *datcha*, in Tsarskoe Selo, situated not far from the Big Palace.

To pacify Mamoussia and Papoussia, who exclaimed in despair that it was not only wrong, but positively indecent for me to be living all alone like that at my age, I took Miss Burns along as a chaperone, knowing that she wouldn't be as fussy or as tiresome as Niania with her eagle eye and spanking proclivities! For Miss Burns, as she grew older, slept a great deal and that was one of the main reasons why I chose her. If suspicious or annoyed, she'd only say: "Indeed? Tamara, shocking!" and that was not hard to cope with. Leaving her at the *datcha* to keep house and rule the servants—two tilings she adored—I'd rush round in my car, driving it myself and going from Tsarskoe

to Gatchina to Pavlovsk and Krasnoe Selo, sometimes all in one day.

In Krasnoe our old datcha, where my babies were born, was now occupied by a newly-married couple, and passing the place, I wondered if the young bride felt and thought as I had when she listened to the shepherd's flute and the first strains of the "General March" and to the voices of the old fishmongers and hawksters.

At the summer theatre several times I saw Lydia dance and once she recognized me and sent me a perfumed note saying: "Forget everything, little princess, and find some real happiness in life."

Grischa and Bay were in Krasnoe that summer and I stayed with them when their first child was born.

And, of course, nearly every day I saw Vanka and Tanka and spent many hours with them. But mainly I danced and flirted and shocked the older people again, who repeated that I was fast and wild and wondered why in the world dear Marina, my mother, was allowing me to live in Tsarskoe alone.

And then suddenly out of a clear sky came hurding like a thunderbolt the fatal news from Sarajevo, which marked the beginning of the great historical upheaval throughout the world and changed our lives once and for ever. It came on the day of the famous Officers' Races at Krasnoe, in which Vanka was to ride in the presence of the Emperor.

A huge crowd was waiting for the arrival of the French president, M. Poincaré. Instandy the news of Sarajevo spread like wildfire.

"War," whispered someone behind me, "that means war."

Panic-stricken I jumped up and rushed off to look for Vanka. For if it was war, Vanka's regiment would be one of the first to go. I found him absentmindedly watching the saddling of his Horse. His eyes were shining, his cheeks flushed.

"Heard the news, beggar-beast?" he cried excitedly as I came running and then shook me impatiently when I threw my arms round his waist and burst into tears wailing: "Vanka, oh, Vanka."

"Wait a minute, wait! I'm not dead yet. Stop bawling like an idiot!" he shouted and the next minute was gone to take part in the race.

From apparently nowhere Tanka appeared at my side and there we stood holding hands and "bawling."

"If anything happens to Vanka, I'll die," she whispered, her face as white as a sheet, her fingers digging into my flesh.

All that day there was an undercurrent of rumours and excitement, but after the first shock of the news people began to calm down and once again M. Poincaré became the centre of attraction and the celebration in his honour continued.

On the twenty-second of July there was a grand review of the troops at Krasnoe Selo and, seated next to Tanka, I watched the spectacular scene, the last of its kind for ever. Everything, as I look back, was the "last of its kind," and though we did not realize it, we were witnessing the grand finale of Imperial Russia as curtain after curtain fell after each act. For some obscure reason, maybe prompted by a vague presentiment, I wrote down my impressions of that late afternoon in Krasnoe where, as the sun began to set, bathing everything in its soft, golden glow, a tremendous "Hurrah!" burst over the field, regimental colours were dipped in salute and thousands of swords flashed in the dying sunlight.

The Emperor, on horseback, passed the grandstand so closely that I could see every detail of his sunburned face. Behind him, in the Imperial landau with its four white horses, *à la* Daumont, came the Empress and M. Poincaré. As the cortège passed we curtsied and bowed, whereupon my great, big cart-wheel of a white straw hat with its heavy wreath of roses, fell off my head, pulling along the entire edifice of my pompadour.

Luckily Tanka managed to grab my hat and clapped it back on to my head, and I forgot my confusion for almost at once the cannon boomed, announcing the official setting of the sun. Immediately, as one man, the soldiers fell to their knees and the Lord's Prayer swept over the field, coming from thousands and thousands of throats. As the magnificent waves of sound ended in a tremendous crescendo, I could see that not only we, the Russians, but even the foreigners were impressed by the grandeur of the whole scene.

At the big reception in Peterhof it was strange to hear the Marseillaise played in honour of Poincaré in the presence of the Emperor and the Grand Dukes, who politely stood at attention. All the more so as there were strikes everywhere again and **the**

workers were singing the Marseillaise, not as a polite gesture toward Poincaré, but because they were angry and defiant and in a revolutionary mood again.

On the morning of the twenty-third of July the French President sailed away on the cruiser, *La France*, and that same evening the Austrian minister to Belgrade served the ultimatum that was the beginning of the end. From then on it was like the breaking of a great dam, and historical events (though we did not realize their importance then) came hurtling down with unbelievable rapidity and before we knew it—we were at war.

Papoussia and Mamoussia arrived post-haste on the second of August from Stronskoe just in time for the Te Deum at the Winter Palace. I went with them and Tanka and in the Nicholas Hall, where once I had taken part in the ceremonies as Maid of Honour, in the presence of the Emperor and Empresses the Te Deum was sung.

Mamoussia cried quietly all through it, Tanka stared at one spot without moving a muscle of her strained, white face, Papoussia twisted his moustache and I kept swallowing and swallowing the salty tears that seemed to be running down inside my nose and throat. All round us were heartbroken faces and red eyes. . . .

After the Te Deum the Declaration of War was read. Then the Emperor and Empresses went on to the balcony to show themselves to the huge throng of people outside. The minute they appeared the multitude fell to its knees and broke into the strains of "God Save the Czar."

Again and again the Emperor had to show himself to the people who literally jammed the great square of the Winter Palace (the same square where I was nearly trampled to death on Bloody Sunday in 1905), and again and again they sang the national anthem and shouted deliriously: "Hurrah!"

But exactly three years later the same crowd was singing the Marseillaise and revolutionary songs, while the ex-Emperor, deposed and under arrest, was on his way to Siberia and death.

Vanka's regiment was to leave on the fourth and all through that night we sat together—for the last time. At dawn I fell asleep on the old Turkish divan in Vanka's study and was awakened by Niania, shaking me violently.

"Quick, child, quick!" she cried; "hurry, if you want to see our Vanka off."

Wildly I jumped and rushed to dress. The others had already left and forgotten all about me. Only Niania had remembered. Grabbing her by the hand, I pulled her downstairs into the street where we caught a passing cab. The driver, full of sympathy for our predicament, whipped his horse and away we rattled over the cobblestones.

When we reached the barracks where the Regiment was forming, we found it standing ready for the command to move. And as it stood there, trim and shining, I thought of Krasnoe Selo and of the many, many times when I had watched that very same Regiment go down my street and past my house for early morning practice.

There was the same band with the men who had played at dawn the "General March"; the same commander riding the same horse; Tanka's husband heading the third squadron and all the familiar faces, of the officers and soldiers.

At the fourth squadron we found Vanka, and tearing myself away from Niania, who came lumbering behind, I rushed up to him. Tanka was standing by his horse, crying bitterly into its mane. Suddenly she lifted her streaming eyes.

"If anything should happen to you, Vanka, I won't live!" she cried fiercely. "Remember, if you go, so do I, at once. Nothing has ever separated us and certainly death won't, not for five minutes."

Vanka didn't answer, but laid his hand softly on her head.

"I know, *Taniousha*, I know," he whispered, and, bending down, kissed her hot wet face.

As he straightened up, he caught sight of me and grinned.

"Look, Tanka, look who's arrived. If it isn't our beggar-beast-bloody-old-fool, goddam her. Came to say good-bye to her only brother, after all! Another minute would have been too late."

"A fine thing to sneak away like that and not wake me up," I shouted indignantly, but at that moment the command rang out and as one body the Regiment stiffened and stood at attention.

"Tanka, Tamara, take yourselves away, quick," muttered **Vanka** out of the corner of his mouth, while Tanka and I obediently jumped to one side.

Another order rang out and the squadrons began to move, the horses arching their necks and stepping proudly as though on parade.

Papoussia, Mamoussia, Niania, Tanka and I ran alongside for a few moments, then, as Vanka's squadron began to move faster and pull away, we rushed to the cabs that were still waiting.

"To the station, hurry!" we cried and off we went again, rattling and clattering wildly over the cobblestones to the station where the Regiment was to entrain for the front.

Taking a roundabout way, as the streets were jammed with crowds wildly cheering the Regiment as it went by, we arrived ahead of it and stood on the platform when Vanka appeared. He waved and grinned at us and we waved and grinned back, but we couldn't go near him as he immediately began to direct the loading of his men in the railroad cars. From time to time the horses would be led, blindfolded, up the narrow gangplank to the freight cars and a laugh broke out on the platform when the trumpeter's white horse appeared, painted from head to foot in khaki colour. On and on went the long, slow job of entraining the squadrons of the cavalry regiment, but at last it was done.

Another order rang out for the last time and the trumpeter sounded "departure." The engine blew a long and mournful whistle like a cry of pain, doors were slammed, windows opened and strong, young, smiling faces appeared at them.

We clustered beneath Vanka's window and tried to touch him, perhaps for the last time too. Suddenly the train jerked, recoiled and jerked again, groaning heavily. For a moment the wheels clanged and scraped as though refusing to turn; then a shout rang from the platform, rippling down it like a wave.

"With God!" cried hundreds of voices.

**With God!" answered the men on the train, crossing themselves and waving.

And as the big, red cars, one by one, began to pull out and roll past us, Papoussia stood stiffly at attention and saluted his only son.

During the days that followed we clung together, waiting, always waiting, for news from Vanka and Boris, and keeping

in touch with their movements as best we could. Then suddenly we heard that the Regiment had reached East Prussia.

In turn we read and re-read the letter that Vanka had written to all of us collectively in which he told us that soon, very soon, the Regiment was going into action.

Tanka had closed her town house and with her little son Vaniouha was living with us now. Most of the time, her pitiful face white and drawn, she sat next to Papoussia, holding his hand. In those few days he had aged unbelievably and with anxious bloodshot eyes would keep an endless vigil not far from the door, staring at it and waiting, always waiting. Mamoussia, though haggard and worn, seemed calmer; Miss Burns was frightened and trembling, and Niania as usual a tower of strength.

And then it happened. The telegram we half expected and dreaded, arrived. Vanka had been killed at the battle of Kaushin, that terrible battle where more than half the Regiment was wiped out.

It was late in the evening and as usual we were all gathered in Vanka's study when the telegram came. Niania brought it in on a little, round silver platter that shook in her hands, which for the first time were trembling.

"Maybe it's good news," she said wistfully. "Maybe God is merciful to us and has heard our prayers."

The instant she saw her, Tanka sprang off the old Turkish divan where she had been curled up in her favourite corner and, snatching the envelope, tore it open. Quickly she glanced at the message, then raising her eyes, the eyes of a hunted, stricken animal, gazed at us in turn.

"Vanka," she whispered. "It's *Vanka*"

As the slip of paper fluttered to the floor she straightened her shoulders, threw back her head and without another word walked out of the room. The next minute, as in a dream, I heard the familiar sound of the heavy front door being closed.

Without even glancing at the telegram, Papoussia caught Mamoussia in his arms, while I leaned against the wall, too stunned to move. Near the door, where she still stood holding the little silver platter, Niania kept repeating over and over again in the sing-song voice used in the prayers for the dead: "May the Lord rest the soul of his slave, our own Vanka."

A few minutes later Tanka shot herself.

Into the solitude of her big, dark, empty house, which only a little while ago she had closed to live with us, she now returned to die. That's where I found her, when, after the first shock that had stunned me, I suddenly realized that Tanka had left us and rushed out to follow her. But even though so little time had elapsed—I was too late.

Stretched full-length across her bed, she had shot herself through a red curl on her temple with the little gun that Vanka had once given her. On her dressing-table lay a scarcely legible note evidently written in great haste and addressed: "To my dear ones:"

Forgive me, my little souls [she wrote], as I pray God will forgive me. But I cannot live without Vanka. You know that. I leave Vaniouha in your care. Be good to Boris. Your loving Tanka.

From that hour I never ceased to reproach myself bitterly that I let Tanka leave our house alone. If only I, or *someone*, had been with her during those first few minutes following the shock of Vanka's death, she might still be living.

Two and a half years passed, years in which somehow or other we adapted ourselves to the new tempo of life. Papoussia, grown old and grey and bent, spent his days at the War Ministry, imagining he was doing important work that at least kept him busy; Mamoussia rolled endless bandages in one of the Empress's Red Cross units; I worked in a Petersburg hospital as a war nurse. Much as I wanted, I could not go to the Front as I couldn't possibly leave my family for any length of time; more and more they came to depend on me, more and more they seemed to need me.

But though the life of the Front was not for me, in the life of my hospital as in a drop of clear water I saw reflected the mood of Russia—an angry, defiant mood, dangerous and threatening, that made me think of Bloody Sunday 1905, when unwittingly I was caught in the maelstrom of the first revolution.

Sullenly the wounded soldiers spoke of their defeats; sullenly they blamed those in power and though they did not dare

express themselves too openly, through the underground of their half-spoken mutterings we on the side lines saw and understood the danger of their mood.

Men from all over Russia were smouldering with resentment, whispering the word "betrayal" and speaking of a new hope, a new life, soon to come and take the place of the old one.

Gone was the patriotic fervour that we had witnessed at the outbreak of the war, when thousands upon thousands had knelt in the great Square of the Winter Palace and, singing "God Save the Czar," had acclaimed the Emperor as the anointed one of the Lord and their leader.

Now from all sides came the low thunder of threatening voices that gradually grew louder and louder until it reached its inevitable climax and the great Revolution broke out.

Like a tornado it swept away in its wake everything we possessed, leaving us penniless, and hunted.

For though the six of us—Mamoussia, Papoussia, Vaniouha, Niania, Miss Burns and I—were allowed to live in three small rooms of our own house (the other rooms had been given to entire strangers of all walks of life, from a famous professor to a street cleaner, and nearly all the furniture taken away), we were constantly subjected to night raids carried out by the revolutionary soldiers and workers until there wasn't anything more to take away from us except our beds, a few tables and chairs and the necessary clothes that the raiders themselves conceded we had to keep "for the sake of decency."

The only place that had never been looked into properly was Niania's little icebox which hung out of the window. True, the soldiers had opened it again and again and taken out of it all our meagre eatables, but they never broke the thick crust of ice that covered the floor of the box, in which Niania throughout the winter had cleverly concealed the few pieces of jewellery and the coins that we still possessed.

The first night raid was terrifying, but little by little we became accustomed to them and, save for the moments of fierce anxiety concerning the fate of the icebox, we all remained indifferent to the perpetual pulling apart of our bed clothes, mattresses, chairs, tables and floors. At last even the soldiers got tired of tearing to pieces our wretched possessions and finally left us alone.

We also suffered from the cold, as there was no wood and no coal to heat our three rooms, and with frostbitten hands and feet we would gather round the tiny stove, not bigger than Vaniouha's little drum, and warm the tips of our fingers at the microscopic fires made of splinters which we'd pick up in the streets.

Soon the great famine set in and as I saw the thin, pale faces of my loved ones getting thinner and paler every day, I knew that somehow or other I *had* to take them out of Russia to some country where I'd be able to earn at least enough to keep them properly fed.

One afternoon as I was wondering for the millionth time how in the world we could get across the closed and patrolled border, Niania, the ghost of her former plump self but still full of energy, came into my room and whispered mysteriously:

"Someone to see you, my little dove—it's one of *them*."⁹

"Of *them*? Who do you mean?" I asked impatiently. "And what are you whispering about? There isn't anyone here. We're all alone."

"Sh—sh, who knows? Walls have ears these days. . . . But there's a man who wants to speak to you at once. He is one of the people of your late *Pra Babushka*, Princess Dominica (may the Lord rest her soul!)—one of her own people."

"Where? Where is he?" I cried excitedly. "Bring him in quick, Niania, quick. . . ."

"Not so fast, my little darling, and pray do not speak so loudly. He is in my room, my dove—better see him in there."

Pushing her aside, I flew into the room that she shared with Miss Burns. There, seated politely on the edge of a chair, in Niania's place of honour beneath the wooden icons (the silver ones had been stolen long ago) was a man whom I recognized at once. It was Mitka. Many a time had I seen him in the Petersburg Tabor; many a time had I heard him sing and even spoken to him. Now it was like seeing again the face of an old friend.

I ran up to him with outstretched hands and caught both of his in mine.

"Oh, I'm so glad to see you, Mitka, so glad!" I cried. "Sit down, please. What can I do for you?"

He smiled and shook his head.

"No, little princess, there isn't anything you can do for me,

or for any of us, except 'love and pity us.' But we thought that perhaps we could do something for *you*".

"Do something? What do you mean? How?" I asked, unable to take my eyes off his dark, friendly face. *Boje tnoi, Boje moi*, maybe here was the answer to all our prayers, maybe he could really help us.

"So that you can trust me, see what I've brought you," he continued, fishing out of his pocket a crumpled little shp of paper with a few words written on it. As he handed it to me I read quickly:

Tamara, *douschenka*, you can believe everything he says. Trust him as you would your own father. He is one of us, as you are, and loves you too. Do as he says and all will be well.

STESHA.

Stesha! I couldn't believe my own eyes.

From somewhere across Russia, from Stronskoe perhaps, came a ray of hope, maybe a helping hand!

"Where is Stesha?" I whispered. But again he shook his head.

"That I cannot tell you," he said. "Who knows where any of us are, except those in the town Tabors like ours? That's why she sent me the note. She knows that I am here close to you."

"But what can you do for us?" I insisted, impatiently plucking his sleeve.

"We want to get you out of the country—you and your *Papasha* and *Mamasha* and your sister's little boy. You'll all die if you stay here much longer. Any day you may be arrested, imprisoned, put to death even. Who knows—these are dangerous and evil times."

Quickly he looked round the room and lowered his voice again. Niania stood on guard at the door.

"But the borders are closed. Besides they are too far to get to! We can't go by train, or by cart, or on foot, or any way. No matter how we go we'd be arrested and either shot for escaping or sent back probably to prison. I can't run any risks with four old people and a child. If I were alone, I might take a chance. . . ."

"There wouldn't be much danger the way we'd take you,"

he interrupted. "Listen to me carefully and if you do as I say, you'll be safely across, the Finnish border in no time. Only you must trust me and obey me implicitly. How many of you are there?"

¹ "My *Papasha* and *Mamasha*, Vaniouha, Niania, the *Angli-chanka*—the English One—and I. Six in all."

"That won't be difficult," he murmured, half-closing his eyes and evidently thinking hard, "no, not difficult at all. I have brought you some of our own clothes and then I'll take you one by one to the Tabor."

"Oh, but that's impossible—we can't be separated!" I cried. "We've got to keep together no matter what happens."

"And run the risk of being arrested and shot?" he said reprovingly. "No, little princess, you must do as I tell you. One by one you'll join the Tabor and, when that's done, we'll get you across."

From behind his chair he pulled a sack, one of those old burlap sacks that in those days every man and woman seemed to be carrying on their backs. Usually they were filled with potatoes or beets or apples.

Out of the sack he pulled some old clothes, typical Gypsy clothes: a wide, deep-red skirt; a coarse homespun blouse; a warm, padded jacket of a nondescript dark colour, a kerchief; worn-out leather boots and beads, lots of beads.

"These are for one of the older women, whomever they fit," he said, "but not for you. Yours are different, because you're young."

And again he pulled out of his sack another set of clothes similar to the first, only gayer and brighter in colour.

"You'll look fine in them, just like one of us," he said chuckling and even shouted with glee when I threw on the kerchief and coat.

On and on he went, pulling out more and more clothes until Niania's room looked like the den of a typical revolutionary bagman, or profiteer.

"If there's a raid between to-day and to-morrow, tell them they are your old clothes. They can't get you for that," he advised and then went on to explain his plan. One by one, or in pairs if I insisted, we'd start slipping out of the house, preferably after sunset when it grew dark.

"First of all I'd send Niania and the Anglichanka. But tell the English One not to say a word and leave all the talking to Niania. Bandage up her cheek as though she had a bad toothache, then she won't have to answer if spoken to. I'll meet them at the corner and take them along with me. Next, a couple of hours later, your Papasha and Mamasha should go out as though for a stroll—sort of quietly, you know, arm in arm like two elderly people who want some fresh air. Again I'll be there to guide them. If I notice that they are being followed or watched, I'll turn them back home and we'll wait till a more favourable time, but if all goes well and they get through safely, I want you and the little boy to join us. I won't be waiting for you near the house—that would be too dangerous, three times running. But I'll meet you near the bridge, the one you have to cross to go to the Tabor. You two can walk there easily. But be sure to tell Vaniouha carefully that from now on he is a Gypsy and has got to act the part. That shouldn't be difficult. I've seen him."

When all was settled, I naturally had to tell Papoussia and Mamoussia about it and quaked in my shoes that they might suddenly oppose the whole scheme and refuse to go. But they didn't. On the contrary, for the first time since Vanka's and Tanka's deaths they seemed interested and excited and even a trifle amused.

"Do as you please, wise little daughter," they said. "If you want us to go, we'll go. Though if it's God's will that we stay here and die, His will be done."

"But it isn't His will!" I cried eagerly. "His will is that we leave, otherwise He wouldn't have sent Mitka the Gypsy. Don't you see the hand of God in that?"

"Leading us out of the wilderness? Well, perhaps. . . . We'll do as you say," they replied docilely.

And so our departure was settled.

Even though we were practically homeless and about as poor as Job with nearly all our worldly goods confiscated, there were still many things for us to do before we left.

First we had to break up our few remaining jewels, which, thanks to Niania's icebox, we had managed to hide and save from the constant searches and raids. Stone by stone we sewed them into our voluminous Gypsy clothes, as inconspicuously as

possible. Several single diamonds and other precious stones were transferred into buttons, stoutly buttressed with cloth, while a small necklace of pearls was first dipped in wax and then painted a bright red to look like a string of cheap beads.

All the gold coins that the six of us collectively possessed (including poor little Vaniouha's solitary five-rouble piece) were concealed in a knobby old cane which Papoussia was to carry, leaning on it as heavily as he could in the usual fashion of elderly peasants. Mitka had whittled that cane inside until he made it partially hollow and of the exact size that would hold the largest piece of gold. The smaller coins were all wrapped in bits of silk so that they wouldn't jingle or rattle. When it was finished, the cane looked exactly like the kind of biblical staff which the pilgrims, bound for the Holy Land, carried round on their endless wanderings throughout the country.

Luckily, on the advice of one of the French diplomats, an old friend of the family, at the outbreak of the Revolution a large trunk of Papoussia's had been filled with some of the more important family papers, documents, and valuables such as miniatures, laces, silver and gold bibelots, and even a couple of the smaller oil paintings that had been taken out of their heavy gilt frames and rolled up tightly for their journey.

If only we had listened to our friend's good advice then, we would have sent several trunks to Paris, under the protection of his diplomatic immunity. But none of us had believed that the Revolution would last long, and the one and only trunk that was packed and sent had been merely a concession on our part to what we thought was an entirely too pessimistic point of view on the part of our old friend.

Now we tried frantically to remember everything that had been packed into that lone trunk and wondered whether we would be able to sell our strangely-assorted possessions and live (how long?) on the profits of the sales.

At the last moment, because there was an empty corner that needed stuffing, I had stuck into the trunk Great-Aunt Natalia's slender little volume and several twisted sheets of my diaries, torn out at random.

At last all our preparations were made, and after sunset, two by two, we slipped out of the house, first Niania and Miss Burns, then Papoussia and Mamoussia and finally Vaniouha and I.

We had to walk quite a distance and Vaniouha was wild with excitement. This was an adventure, the most wonderful he had ever dreamed of, and proudly, deliberately, he played his part of a little Gypsy boy. He even wanted us to stop and tell fortunes when occasionally we'd meet some belated passer-by hurrying along the dark, deserted streets. Vaniouha's excitement made me think of my own Gypsy adventure in Stronskoe years ago. That had been my great moment; now this one was his.

At last we safely reached the Tabor where we were received with open arms and cries of joy. All preparations had been made for our departure and the typical Gypsy wagons stood harnessed, ready to leave at a moment's notice. All of the Tabor—except six, whose papers we were to use if questioned—were going along and we were to be dispersed among them. I was to ride with Vaniouha in the second wagon, Papoussia in the third, Mamoussia in the fourth, Niania in the fifth and Miss Burns in the seventh. Her face was heavily bandaged and in her hand she kept a large pebble which, if necessary, she'd pop into her mouth to make it bulge. Thus there'd be no danger of her talking and displaying her English accent. With that thing in her cheek she couldn't even say: "Indeed!"

Niania with only a little dark grease on her face looked her part, while Papoussia, Vaniouha and I did not need any make-up at all. In the Gypsy clothes we were Gypsies and no one would bother to question us. Only Mamma looked very different. Though her face and hands had been darkened, her blue eyes and greying fair hair simply screamed to the whole world that she wasn't a Gypsy. Even her clothes, shabby as they were, looked smart on her. But the women of the Tabor worked on her and worked, until with plenty of dark grease, a false switch of black hair and a red bandage over one eye she was at last made to look a little more like the real thing.

Shordy after midnight the heavy horses strained and pulled, and slowly the caravan started on its way. The wagons creaked and rumbled as they rolled down the deserted streets. Twice we were stopped, twice soldiers peered in, searched and examined all papers but finding nothing suspicious at all, let us pass.

Soon we came to the outskirts of Petersburg and lumbered into the open country. It was springtime and the roads were

still heavy and wet with the melted snow of early spring. Several times the wagons got stuck in the mud, but always the men managed to pull them out.

Slowly we plodded on, skirting Lake Ladoga, stopping frequently to let the steaming horses rest. Our primitive meals were cooked in the open over bonfires and for the first time for ever so long we had enough to eat. There was sufficient food for all and though crude fare it tasted better than anything we had eaten for a long, long while.

Vaniouha, still wild with excitement, enjoyed himself with such complete abandon that the whole Tabor took him to its warm heart and adopted him as its very own.

Papoussia and Mamoussia seemed to be resting most of the time; Niania took it all in her usual, sturdy stride and Miss Burns, though the picture of misery, accepted the situation with the stoicism of a true Anglichanka.

Days passed . . . and then one evening Mitka, our leader, told me that the wagons would go no farther.

"This is our last encampment," he said. "From now on I will guide you to the border. Even though we are not far away as distance goes, this is going to be the most difficult part of all. We'll have to walk all through the night until we reach our last shelter. It's from there that I'll get you across. Though the days are growing longer, luckily there is no moon and we'll have plenty of darkness to cover us."

That evening we bade good-bye to the Tabor and started out on foot on the last span of our journey.

The encampment seemed particularly still and later, as I turned to look back at it, I could see only one fire burning low. There was no singing, no loud talking—the Tabor seemed to be sound asleep.

"With luck, shortly before dawn, we'll reach the shelter—a cave—where we can hide throughout the day. Then, when night falls again, I'll start taking you across," said Mitka.

Over the rough stony ground we went, stumbling along, tearing our clothes on the low, thorny bushes and hiding behind the great granite boulders whenever Mitka thought he saw or heard danger in the shape of a human being, a patrolling soldier, no doubt. He seemed to hear sounds that our ears did not catch and see things in the dark that we couldn't see.

At last, completely exhausted and with bruised and bleeding feet, we reached the cave. Formed of huge granite boulders, it had one small opening through which we crawled on all fours. But inside it was fairly large so that we could even stand up. On the ground there was litter of last year's straw. A heavy iron cauldron hung from a crudely-made tripod. In one corner was stowed away some food: dried fish, dried bread, dried mushrooms, nuts and berries. Mitka had thought of everything.

All through the day we slept. Then when night came, Mitka, who had been silent and preoccupied, stood up and looked at us significantly. In the dim, flickering light of the dying fire he suddenly seemed so much like the Ancient One that it took my breath away. Was I really living through all this, I wondered—or was I once more a little girl kidnapped by the Gypsies, dreaming? But as Mitka spoke the dream vanished and mingled with the smoke of the dying embers.

"First Vaniouha and Niania must go," he declared, "for Vaniouha is a child with all his life before him. He must be given the first chance. If they cross safely, Niania will always know how to take care of him, even though the rest of you don't get through."

We all agreed on that. Yes, Vaniouha was to get the first chance.

"Then your Papasha and Mamasha go. If by any chance death should be their fate, they surely would rather die together as they lived."

They both nodded their heads. Since Vanka and Tanka had left us, death meant only a release to them.

"But why not take us last?" they said in one breath. "Tamara should go next. She is young and has a whole life ahead of her too."

But I wouldn't hear of that and after a heated discussion that drove Mitka nearly crazy with impatience, they finally gave in. I was to go last with Miss Burns. That was final and nothing in the world could make me change my mind. After all, I was young and strong and could stand a great deal more than they could. If anything went wrong, I'd be able to run and hide so much better.

Soon after the first star came out, Mitka beckoned to Vaniouha

and Niania. Silently we kissed and hugged and blessed them. Then Mitka crawled out of the cave on all fours, followed by Vaniouha and Niania who nearly stuck in the narrow opening and had to be pushed from behind. For a few moments we could hear their footsteps outside—then all was quiet. In the semi-darkness we sat for what seemed to us an eternity, waiting, waiting for the sound of Mitka's returning footsteps.

At last he came. His clothes were torn and caked with mud, his face and hands were bleeding, but he was triumphant.

"They're safe! They've crossed! And no one saw them," he cried, while in chorus we breathed: "Thank God."

"But there's no time to lose," he went on quickly, and turning toward Papoussia and Mamoussia, motioned them to follow him.

"With God," they whispered, embracing me. "And may the blessing of your parents remain with you to-day, to-morrow and for eternity."

Then making the sign of the cross over me, each one in turn touched my forehead, my chest and my shoulders with the three bent fingers of the right hand. Parental blessing, of such tremendous importance in Russian life, was now mine for ever and nothing in the world could take it away from me.

Left alone in the dark, Miss Burns and I huddled together and clung to each other. For the first time since we had started on our perilous journey I felt frightened and began to cry. And, as in the days of my childhood, Miss Burns, with one of her rare displays of affection, held me tight *in* her arms, and rocking me gendy, kept repeating: "There, Tamara, there. Indeed, everything will be all right. Don't cry, my child."

And so we sat and rocked till presently I stopped crying. Leaning my head against her shoulder, I began to think and my thoughts, hazy and confused at first, gradually became clearer and clearer.

I thought of Great-Grandmother Dominica and of her Gypsy blood that seemed to Uve in me so strongly; and of Ivan Ivanovitch and his school formula that said: "Indo-Iranian+Scythian+Slav+Viking+Tartar== Russian"—those strains lived in me, too; and again of the Gypsies that had played such an important part throughout my life. How strong that blood was! If all went well and we safely crossed the border, we would go

into the world thanks to the Gypsies—once, more the Romany claiming its own. Boundaries and borders did not exist for Gypsies—the whole world was theirs—*ours*—and somewhere we would find shelter and food and a new life for all. London? . . . Paris, where the old trunk was waiting for us? Yes, Paris! Why not? Perhaps I'd be able to teach dancing there, the thing I knew how to do best.

And as I sat in that dark cave I felt my past life merge into the future.

Suddenly we heard footsteps and Mitka was back with us again.

Now he was exhausted and spent, but as he struck a match I could see his eyes shining.

"All is well. They're safe too. But hurry, little princess, and you, Anglichanka, it's your turn now. We mustn't waste another minute. Soon it will be dawn."

Following him on all fours we started to crawl into the open. It was still dark, but already the stars were beginning to wane and a faint light shone on the horizon. Another hour and the sun would be up. Crouching and creeping and crawling in turn, we kept to the ground as close as we could. On and on we kept going and going until at last Mitka pointed to a dense clump of trees in the distance.

"There it is," he muttered. "There's the border. Beyond those trees you are safe."

But no sooner had he uttered those words than he flung himself on the ground, pulling us after him. And as we lay there without moving, our faces in the mud, our hearts beating wildly, we heard the unmistakable sound of footsteps. Tramp, tramp, tramp they went. . . . Undoubtedly several men were passing somewhere near us on the border. Then one of them spoke and his voice in the still night air carried clearly.

"You see, you're just imagining things. There's no one here. I'm cold. Let's go back and get warm."

"All right," said another voice, "but I was sure I heard something, an animal perhaps."

"Or a hare crying out in the night," laughed a third and for good measure fired a shot at random. On they went, their voices and footsteps dying away in the distance.

For fully ten minutes Mitka kept us lying flat on our faces.

Then cautiously he crawled into the darkness alone. Presently he was back again.

"They're gone," he whispered. "Now is your chance. Run! But don't straighten up. Bend as low as you possibly can. Run straight for those trees and bushes. Your people are waiting for you there. Quick! Good luck till we meet again."

And before I could say a word he had turned and vanished into the darkness.

Crouching low, we began to run toward the clump of trees. I could hear Miss Burns's breath coming in short wheezes. Could she do it? I thought, panick-stricken. But despite her age she was running as fast as I was.

A few more moments that seemed like centuries and we were across the border!

Though pitifully shabby in our torn and muddy Gypsy clothes and practically penniless, save for the few jewels and coins we had concealed on us—somehow or other I knew we'd manage to reach our promised land.

And as Papoussia, Mamoussia, Vaniouha and Niania rushed toward us, I shouted:

"We're safe, we're through, we've done it! It's to *Paris* that we'll go, my little souls—to Paris where we'll build a new life for ourselves and be happy, and where nothing will ever hurt us again!"

