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ONE WOMAN'S STORY

MARY BRITNIEVA, 1914

[*Frontispiece*

# ONE WOMAN'S STORY

BY

MARY BRITNIEVA

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*To my Husband*

# CONTENTS

## PART ONE—1914–1918



## PART TWO—1918–1923



## PART THREE—1924–1928



## PART FOUR—1928–1930

# PART ONE 1914–1918

## CHAPTER I

### THE START

THE date fixed for our hospital's departure for the front was the 29th of September, 1914. The days immediately preceding this were very hectic and full of excitement for us young war-nurses. We had only just completed our course of training and had been appointed to one of the best of our Sisterhood's units, which was under the patronage and bore the name of The Council of State ; the individual members of this august body—which corresponds to the House of Lords—defrayed its entire cost.

There was a *moleben* or Te Deum service in the beautiful little church of our Sisterhood during which we were presented with our Red Cross insignia—a large badge to be worn on the chest and a brassard on the left arm—and we were now full-fledged Sisters of Mercy. The simple service was very beautiful. The rows of young nurses looked so fresh and neat in their severe black uniforms relieved by the snowy whiteness of the headdresses and cuffs, and their eager young faces, uplifted in earnest prayer, reflected feelings of devotion and of a willingness to sacrifice all thoughts of self in serving the cause to which their country had pledged itself with the Allies. The lighted candles and the magnificent singing accentuated the solemnity

of the service ; tears of emotion dimmed the eyes of the Sisters and their relations and parents alike. I am quite certain that not one of us young women had ever before experienced such profound feelings of reverence, patriotism and enthusiasm, all in perfect harmony, as were evoked in us by this memorable service.

The following day, which was the eve of our departure, was to be full of exciting happenings: in the morning we were to be presented at the Elagine Palace to Her Majesty the Dowager Empress Marie Feodorovna, the sister of Queen Alexandra, and in the afternoon the Senators and the other members of the Council of State had arranged a tea and a reception in our honour in the Marinsky Palace.

Our hospital staff was fairly large. It consisted of three doctors, seven sisters, a dispenser, a housekeeper and about twenty orderlies. The head doctor was a well-known surgeon and a brilliant organizer. He had had a great deal of experience, having served through the Russo-Japanese War and the Balkan War of 1912, and was further reputed to be as strict a disciplinarian as he was known to be charming as a man. His was a really remarkable personality, for to his deep sense of duty and boundless devotion were added a great love of justice and a sense of humour which, blended with his natural kindness, quickly endeared him to all hearts, patients and staff alike.

His skill in operating and the brilliance of his surgery were the pride of the whole staff. The two junior doctors were also excellent surgeons. One of them was of Bulgarian origin, he was very gruff and abrupt and at first we were all rather frightened of him, but we soon discovered that beneath his rough exterior he had a very kind nature. Of the seven sisters only

two were professionals. We, the five war-time sisters, were all of different nationalities, only one being pure Russian ; the others were a Baltic Province girl, an Italian, an English girl, and finally myself, an Anglo-Russian. As the Italian knew little Russian, we all spoke English among ourselves and soon became firm friends. This friendship has lasted to this day ; even though we are all scattered now, from India to the Balkans and England, we manage to keep in touch. The Italian soon became a general favourite—she had a great deal of personality and was most vivacious—we nicknamed her "The Queen". Nelly, the English sister, was typically English: she was fair, with blue eyes, a soft voice and a charming smile ; she had a delightful sense of humour and was strong and very capable. The other three were nicknamed "The Monkey", "Timashenka" and "The Mouse"—the last being myself.

On arrival at the Elagine Palace, we were conducted to the beautiful semi-circular drawing-room where the Baroness Uxkull, patroness of our Sisterhood, was waiting and she lined us up facing large double doors. Presently the doors opened to admit the Empress—a slight, graceful figure in a trailing black dress. Baroness Uxkull presented each sister in turn, mentioning her name and nationality, and we kissed the Empress's hand. The Empress was most gracious and chatted to each of us for a few minutes, in her simple and charming way. She presented each of us with a small silver ikon of Our Lady of Kazan. I was the smallest and was the last in the line, and as the Empress handed me the ikon she said: "You look so delicate, my child, will you be able to bear all the hardships that await you? How old are you?"—"I am twenty, Your Majesty," I replied, and added eagerly, "I am very strong really—much stronger

than I look." The Empress smiled kindly at this outburst, and presently she bid us good-bye and retired.

In the afternoon we went to the Marinsky Palace. The reception was preceded by a short service in the beautiful chapel. We were unspeakably thrilled to be among so many eminent and illustrious statesmen and senators. They eulogized us in their speeches and were most wonderfully courteous and gallant. Senator Koni, one of the most distinguished members of the Council of State, made a brilliant and moving speech in which he told us that a woman's calling in life was sometimes to heal, often to alleviate and always to comfort.

The following day was our last and it passed like a dream. I went with my mother to the Kazan Cathedral, where we had a service before the miraculous ikon of Our Lady of Kazan. I prayed fervently, asking God to help me in my work and I felt full of hope and enthusiasm. As we were leaving the cathedral a young woman came up to me. "Are you leaving for the front shortly, *Sestritza*?" she asked. "Yes, to-night," I answered. She clasped my hand. "Do you know where you are being sent to?" she asked agitatedly. I told her that the rumour was that we were being sent to the East Prussian front, and at this her face lit up: "Oh, that is where my husband's regiment is stationed," she exclaimed. "I am so terribly anxious and worried about him. I have had no news for weeks and I am so afraid that our letters to each other are being lost. When I saw you just now, something prompted me to speak to you. Would you be so good and so kind as to take a letter with you, in case you come across his regiment?" I agreed willingly and she thanked me repeatedly and kissed me with tears in her eyes. I gave her our address and

later in the day she brought the letter herself. It was rather remarkable that among our first wounded—very soon after this—there were several soldiers from her husband's regiment, and through them I found out the position occupied by the regiment and was thus able to deliver the letter at a very early opportunity.

Late that night we were all assembled on one of the platforms of the gloomy Warsaw railway station in St. Petersburg. Our friends and relations thronged the platform and inspected with interest our equipment—the horses, ambulances, trucks and the rest of the countless paraphernalia that goes to make up a hospital unit. We sisters could hardly suppress our excitement, though we tried hard to appear calm and dignified as befitted old campaigners. We hurried through our farewells and then the last bell sounded, the engine shrieked, and slowly the train steamed out bearing us towards the unknown. . . . Our campaign life had begun.

## CHAPTER II

### MY FIRST WOUNDED

I THINK that every nurse who went to the War will always remember her first wounded.

The first place our hospital was stationed at was a small railway junction called Pilvishki, quite near the German frontier. The foundation and a heap of bricks was all that remained of the station—the building had been utterly destroyed by shells, but three small wooden houses that had belonged to the railway officials still stood along the lines, so it was decided to make use of them, with tents put up in between them. This was our hospital, though it looked far more like a gipsy camp than a medical institution.

It took us several days to get everything straight and to put up the hospital. We worked hard scrubbing floors and windows in the little houses, one of which was to be our operating-theatre and dressing-room, while the other two were destined to be wards. Then for a week we were idle, till the cannonade started, and soon the wounded began to arrive. They were brought in simple carts, straight from the front, along the terrible muddy roads, in the drizzle and rain of the raw October weather. Usually they came in the night—we could hear the carts creaking a long way off as they crawled along the road, and when they approached one heard the poor mutilated men moaning at every jerk. Then the unloading would begin —always a terrible business: our orderlies were in-

experienced, and in lifting the severely wounded they could not help causing them more pain, which made them moan and often even cry out in agony. After sorting them and putting them in hospital clothes, the nurse on duty would go to call the doctors—and then the real work would begin.

I had been given a small ward in one of the little houses: greatly to my disappointment, as I had hoped to work in a tent (I thought it so much more war-like. . . .) But I soon grew to love my little ward and would not have exchanged it for any other in the hospital. It had four beds and was destined to be used only for operated cases.

How excited I was when my first patient was brought! He was a German prisoner called Koppe and had peritonitis, being very seriously wounded in the stomach. Our head doctor had operated on him, extracting several bullets from his liver, which was (he found) practically in pieces. Koppe was hardly expected to live, his condition being almost hopeless, but thanks to his wonderful patience and amazing stoicism, he pulled through. For nine days after his operation he was not allowed to drink—only having his tongue moistened now and again with a drop of water. Yet he never complained, never even asked for more. "Danke bestens, Schwesterchen," he would say, looking at me gratefully with his serious brown eyes. He was pleased he could speak German with me and used to tell me sometimes about his home and family. The doctors marvelled at his unusual patience—never had they seen such a peritonitis case. One day I asked him how he managed to bear the pain and the thirst without even complaining. "You see, Schwesterchen," he answered pathetically, "I *must* get well again, I *must* live—I have a wife and seven children who depend on me. So I try to help the doctors as

much as I can." And this determination together with his extraordinary patience and endurance undoubtedly saved him.

Koppe's bed stood separately, near the door ; along one side were two others, while the fourth stood opposite. Two days after Koppe's arrival, my second patient was brought. I put him in one of the beds along the wall. His name was Chadlidze—a swarthy Caucasian with flashing black eyes and magnificent teeth. There was something very primitive and childish about him, and his smile was so broad and good-natured in contrast to his fierce expression.

He was very badly wounded in the leg and had just had a "high amputation". He used to moan and groan so piteously complaining of the pain in the toes of his amputated leg (this is the usual complaint of amputated patients). Then, as he grew better, he began to talk more, often chattering so much that I had to stop him—he used to grow so excited, waving his arms about and nearly jumping out of bed.

"Ah, little Sister," he would say, with his funny eastern accent, "if you only knew what a dancer I was! Why, I was the best Lezginka dancer in the whole regiment! 'Now, Chadlidze,' the commander would say, 'dance us the Lezginka!' and I would start. Ah, how I danced! 'Bravo Chadlidze!' they would all shout, 'Molodetz Chadlidze!' That's how I used to dance, Sestritza," he would finish up proudly, his black eyes flashing triumphantly. Then suddenly he would burst out weeping, "Never again will I dance the Lezginka, Sestritza, never again!" He sobbed and great tears would roll down his cheeks. I would try to comfort him as well as I could—he was like a child and it was easy to turn his thoughts to other things. I remember telling him once about the wonderful artificial legs that were being made now—his face lit up

with a delighted smile and he shouted with joy when I told him that he would also have one. "Promise me, Sestritza, promise me that I shall really have one of these new legs," he kept saying, "thank you, thank you for telling me!" and he suddenly threw his arms round my neck and gave me a resounding kiss. From that day the poor fellow talked of nothing else.

One day I was talking to Koppe when Chadlidze called me to his bedside. "What language were you speaking with that man?" he asked. When I told him it was German he nearly jumped out of his bed. "Give me my bayonet!" he yelled, rolling his black eyes fiercely. "Why didn't you tell me he was a German? If I had known there was one in my room I'd have stabbed him long ago! Give me my bayonet at once!" He was so excited that it took me some time to pacify him and to explain how badly wounded poor Koppe was and how he too had been sent to fight just as Chadlidze himself had been. After that he got reconciled at having a German so near him and soon became quite friendly with poor harmless Koppe.

A few days after this incident my third patient, Vassili, was brought in. He was terribly wounded in both legs and had septic poisoning. Our doctors tried to save him by an immediate amputation. The operation was successful and we hoped that the poisoning had been stopped. But soon his temperature rose and showed all the symptoms of sepsis again. Never, as long as I live, will I forget this man. He fought so frantically with death, he so ardently wanted to live. "Oh, how I want to live, Sestritza," he kept saying. "I have a young wife and three small children, you know, oh, if only the Lord would spare me! Please do your best, dear Sister, and ask the doctors to save me. I agree to everything, they can do whatever they

like, only let them save me." His suffering was almost intolerable, but he bore it with amazing patience, trying even to suppress his groans. But soon he realized that he was dying. And from that moment an utter change came over him. Never have I seen such humility, such meekness, such resignation. "I am dying, Sestritza," he kept saying, "it's no good struggling, such is the will of God." Then he asked me to bring some paper and a pencil and to write a letter to his wife. He dictated it to me whilst I sat writing it, unable to keep back my tears. First came all the greetings to each member of his family separately and to the most important villagers. Then in simple, heartbreaking words he bade good-bye to his wife, asking her to take care of the children. "I tried hard to live," he dictated, "but the Lord is not willing to let me." When the letter was finished he asked for a priest, and I fetched our Father Iona who confessed him and gave him the Holy Sacrament. Vassili lay back on his pillows, his face radiant with joy. But soon his agony commenced. He became terribly restless as all septic patients do, tossing about from side to side, his twitching fingers clutching at the sheets and pillows, now praying aloud, now talking deliriously. "Put me down on the floor, Sestritza," he kept imploring me, "we are sinners and we must die on the ground." Greater and greater grew his agony. I had never seen anyone dying before and the feeling of my utter helplessness was terrible. I was in despair ; streaming with tears I implored the doctors and the head nurse to do something to save him. But nothing could be done.

Suddenly he raised himself: "Hold me, Sestritza," he said in a frightened voice, "hold me tight, it is coming!" I put my arms round him holding him up with all my strength. "Now kiss me, Sestritza," he

said. I kissed him. Then slowly he made the sign of the cross, and in a few moments he was dead.

For days I could not get over Vassili's death and walked about the hospital with streaming eyes and a red nose. The nurses were all very kind to me and so was our dispenser—a funny little bald-headed man who was very sentimental and whom we had nicknamed "Romeo". He was a typical old bachelor (the orderlies called him "the old maid"), very fussy and pedantic, and very bad-tempered as well. He was always quarrelling with the nurses about the medicine bottles not being returned, or badly washed, and used to complain and nag and sulk for days on end ; but I was a great favourite of his whom he never found fault with, and was therefore always teased by the other nurses. The doctors also used to get rather annoyed with him because he liked to give them advice on matters he knew nothing about, and poor "Romeo" used to be snubbed by them occasionally, much to the nurses' delight.

One evening, soon after Vassili's death, one of our nurses ("The Monkey") overheard a conversation between "Romeo" and the head doctor. "How tender-hearted is the little Sister B.," said "Romeo" sentimentally, "Look! she cannot get over her first death-case. That is just how a nurse should be!" But our head doctor, usually so kind, was not at all sympathetic. "Just what she should not be, you mean," he said gruffly, "why, if we don't look out, the place will soon be flooded with her tears. This sort of thing must be stopped straight away. If all the nurses are going to weep like this over every death-case, we shall all be drowned. Once they have come to the War they must learn to control their emotions. Otherwise they can't work." Poor "Romeo" had not expected to be so snubbed and

turned away looking very hurt, muttering something about the heartlessness of all doctors.

But in spite of this episode, when, two years later, I became engaged to the heartless head doctor, he told me, to my great surprise, that he had actually begun to love me from the time of the flood—in Pilvishki.

## CHAPTER III

### VISIT TO BATTLEFIELD

THE next place our hospital was stationed at was Verjbolovo (Wirballen) on the actual frontier.

It was while we were there that some young doctors from a neighbouring field-hospital whom we had got to know, offered to take us nurses to see a battlefield.

There was no work at the time, so those among us who wanted to go were given permission. The doctors assured us that there would be no gruesome sights as the field had been cleared some time before and this expedition was merely to give us some idea of the trenches. Our party set out gaily in two military carts for the eight-mile drive.

When we arrived we were very disappointed—it was not at all what we had expected: the trenches were so primitive and looked more like haphazard, disconnected ditches than organized lines of defence. The field was littered with empty tins and broken bottles, and quantities of soiled papers blew about in the cold autumn wind. It was a frosty day and we decided to walk across the field to warm ourselves before driving back. We set out briskly. Suddenly on passing a small mound, we saw something lying on the ground in the distance—there were several "somethings" and we guessed only too well what they were. . . . As we approached, our hearts beating quickly, we saw to our horror that they were Russians.

There were five frozen bodies, they lay in their trench-coats, but the boots had been stolen by marauders. They were all in different crouching positions and it looked as if they had all crawled to one place. They were terrible to behold. Field-mice had made a nest in the head of one and they scuttled away under our feet. One of the bodies was intact. It was frozen to stone. As we bent over it, we saw a paper lying beside the body, and, on looking closer, found it was a postcard. One of our nurses picked it up and we discovered that it was addressed to an officer of the N. regiment and was from his wife in Moscow. With tears streaming from our eyes we read the message. Agony, despair, dark foreboding could be felt in every line. She was in terrible suspense as she wrote: she had not heard from him for weeks and begged and implored him to find some means of communicating with her—only just a word, let it be bad news (she wrote)—anything was better than this agony, this intolerable suspense of not knowing.

Anxiously we bent over the body in the hope of finding some marks that might identify it as the owner of the postcard and we found that the initials on his shirt corresponded with those on the postcard.

The next day, we returned to the battlefield with four orderlies carrying spades and pickaxes. Our priest came with us. It took us several hours to dig two graves, the earth was so frozen. We buried the identified officer's body apart from the other four and placed a small cross with his name on it at the head of the grave.

That same day, one of our nurses who had an aunt in Moscow, sent her the postcard and begged her to try and find the unfortunate writer and to tell her that her husband had been discovered and that he was now buried near Wirballen.

Several weeks later we learnt that the aunt had discovered the poor widow. The authorities had reported her husband as "missing".

Some months later, when we had been transferred to the Polish front, we got a touching letter from the unfortunate woman in which she told us that thanks to us she had been able to find her husband's body and brought it back to Moscow, where it was now buried in their family vault.

# CHAPTER IV

## TERESINO

IN December the battles in East Prussia almost ceased and we had less and less work. Our head doctor began therefore negotiating through the Red Cross Administration to have our hospital transferred to the Warsaw Front where the heavy fighting seemed now to be concentrated. He also feared that the Germans might suddenly advance into East Prussia again and occupy Wirballen and the territory they had abandoned. The prospect of our hospital staff being taken prisoners was not a pleasant one, and our head doctor, who was very far-seeing, was anxious for us to leave East Prussia as soon as possible. It was, however, no easy matter to deal with the Red Cross, who resented being pressed by the medical staff: considering always that they knew best. It cost our head doctor a lot of time and energy to get his own way. At last, however, about the middle of December, the order for our hospital's transfer to Warsaw came, and we left Verjbolovo. We were only just in time ; two days later the Germans broke through the lines and occupied all the territory they had abandoned, together with Wirballen. The French unit that was working there next to ours had not listened to our doctor's advice ; it was captured and had to work for the Germans for many months, till it was exchanged for a German hospital unit and could return to the Russian Army.

The journey to Warsaw occupied several days and we travelled in the same train that had brought us from Petrograd. It was by now almost a home since the staff of our hospital had used it as living quarters both in Pilvishki and at Wirballen.

Warsaw had been saved from capture only a short time previously in an epic battle in which the gallant Siberian troops had played the most prominent role: they had rushed into battle immediately on alighting from their trains, and their arrival in the nick of time and their wonderful bravery had covered them with glory—and saved the city. The Germans had been driven back beyond the Bzoura and Sohochev—spasmodic and local fighting was still going on; a big general offensive was expected from day to day.

The beautiful city was in a state of feverish excitement when we got there. The atmosphere was tense and one became infected by the general feeling of war. The streets were thronged with military uniforms—there did not seem to be any civilians at all, and the officers and soldiers who crowded the pavements converted the streets into an ever-moving khaki-coloured sea. The thronged places of amusement echoed with the chatter and laughter of those who had come through an ordeal where death had been staring them in the face for uncountable periods of time. They were now taking full advantage of the opportunity to distract their minds for a little while before returning to the horrors that they all knew so well, horrors that were inevitably awaiting them, just a few days or a few hours ahead.

We were expecting orders as to our next position, and these did not come through till the evening of the third day; we learned that we were to go to Teresino, some thirty versts from Warsaw, in the direction of Sohochev, the latter being the actual front. Our train

was in movement during the whole of the night and our disappointment is easier imagined than described when, on waking up the following morning, we found ourselves still in Warsaw and realized that all the movement and jolting had resulted from our unit's being shunted from point to point and line to line. This was owing to the enormous amount of war material that was being rushed through Warsaw to the front in preparation for the offensive and for which a clear passage had to be made at all costs. The railway officials were overwhelmed with work, for the amount of traffic was simply fantastic and all of it urgent. They continued shunting us about during the rest of that morning, but finally, in the late afternoon, we really did leave Warsaw to our great relief.

We plied our head doctor with questions regarding our new quarters and were more than delighted to learn that we were to occupy Teresino Palace itself. This was the country seat of Prince Droutzky-Loubetzky, and was in perfect condition and large enough to accommodate the staff as well as patients, so that we looked forward with no little pleasure to the moment when we would bid farewell to the railway carriages that had been our home for the last three months. The doctor added a thrill to our excitement by telling us that the place was reputed to be haunted and he reminded us of a case that had made a great sensation just prior to the outbreak of the War, when Prince Droutzky-Loubetzky had been murdered in the park quite near the château—it appeared that his ghost was still supposed to roam around the property at night!

We arrived at Teresino at nightfall and it was decided that we would continue occupying the train until the palace had been properly transformed to its new purpose. Teresino was a small station standing

amidst snow-covered fields, with a forest in the distance. We were so excited that in spite of the darkness and the late hour, we begged the head doctor to allow us to visit the château and examine our new hospital. He teased us for a long while, but finally gave way, told us to get into our snow-boots, and said that he would take us along himself. It was a beautifully clear moonlit night and the frost had formed a soft crust on the snow's surface which crunched pleasantly under our feet as we crossed the field and entered the wood. This was a short cut, and our head doctor and a couple of orderlies led the way to a small gate that gave access to the enormous park and the private grounds of the château. Our excitement reached its culminating point at the magic sight that met our eyes when we reached a clearing in the park. A real fairy palace with turrets and galleries, gleaming white and dazzling in the moonlight, stood before us. It appeared huge but was beautifulily proportioned and seemed unreal in its sheer beauty amidst the perfect stillness and calm of the night. We stood spellbound and the "Queen" and I, who were standing close to each other, clasped hands unable to utter a word. We knocked at the huge doors and presently the caretaker, a funny little man called Stasek, came out with a lantern and, with a great deal of bowing in the Polish fashion, ushered us into the château. The change from the bright moonlight outside made the place look rather dismal. The rooms were enormous and very lofty ; some of them were hung with tapestry, while others were panelled ; they had beautiful parquet flooring but they all looked gloomy in the uncertain light that the lanterns afforded, and thoughts of the ghost and of what an ideal setting the great deserted rooms presented for his roamings, crept into our minds: we cut our visit as short as possible in order

to get out into the moonlight and fresh air, and none of us was sorry to return to our snug old train that night.

The work of putting the château in order began on the following morning. The place had to be thoroughly cleaned, and such of the furniture as remained was stored in sheds and outhouses. Our own equipment—beds, stretchers, operating tables, linen and endless other stores in cases—was brought up in our Red Cross carts and had to be unpacked and sorted. We converted the big conservatory into a magnificent glass-encased operating theatre and dressing room which became the pride of the staff. We worked feverishly as we had been warned that we might expect cases to start pouring in at any moment on account of the imminent general offensive. Each night as we returned to our train through the woods, we could hear the thunder of cannon in the distance and we knew that this was the artillery preparation for the advance. On the third day, which was Christmas Eve, our first batch of wounded arrived in a huge motor lorry (an innovation in itself after Pilvishki where they used to be brought in carts, and after Wirballen where they arrived in trains). This was owing to the fact that the Grand Duchess Marie Nikolaevna's motor ambulance detachment had been told off for duty in co-operation with our own unit. Soon there was a steady stream of these ambulances pouring wounded men into our château, and we were up to our necks in work. The wounded had to be sorted, and one of the wards (our largest) was soon filled. Several urgent operations were performed; others were scheduled for the following day. The arrivals ceased at night; we knew, however, that there would be plenty more on the following day. We were still living in the train, but I remained at the hospital that night with two orderlies,

as it was my turn for night duty. The others left the château late and I remember feeling rather frightened when I was saying good night to them in the great dismal hall. "Cheer up, Mouse," whispered Nelly as she kissed me; "it's Christmas Eve, you know," but this only added to my sense of loneliness because it took my thoughts back to all those other Christmas Eves at home—and this surely was the strangest one imaginable and certainly the saddest that I had experienced. I sat at my table thinking of home and wondering what they were all doing. My attention was not required by any of the patients and my mind reconstructed the pictures of my home and my people as they had always been at this jolly time of the year. Suddenly the stillness was broken by quick steps, and looking up I saw our head doctor coming towards me. He was carrying a packet and placed this on my table, saying cheerfully, "Here is a surprise for you, Sestritza—letters and parcels from home; I found they had been delivered at the train so I brought them over to you right away to cheer you up as I am afraid this is going to be a somewhat dismal night for you." I thanked him profusely for his thoughtfulness and, after giving me some final instructions, he went back to the train. There was very little to do and the night dragged on and seemed endless. When the day-sister came to relieve me at last, I thankfully scuttled off to the train, to rest and sleep. We had many more wounded brought to us during the whole of the day. That evening at tea-time, we lit a small Christmas tree that the orderlies had presented to us and I produced a beautiful plum pudding that my mother had sent with the other things that the head doctor had brought over to me on the previous night. Nelly and I, after a little trouble, managed to light it, much to the surprise and amusement of the Russian doctors

who had never seen or tasted a plum pudding. During the whole of the week that followed we were overwhelmed with work. Ambulance after ambulance discharged a never-ending stream of wounded into the hospital ; we were at our posts night and day. There was a most disturbing feature about the wounded that we were receiving and that was the enormously high mortality amongst them owing to the shocking state in which they arrived—a great number were gangrenous and died almost immediately after admission. Our doctors were indignant as there was every reason to assume that there was gross mismanagement somewhere at the front, since many of the wounded had obviously been subjected to more than just first-aid treatment prior to being sent to us, and this, since we were so near to the front, was quite improper. The field hospitals or rather first-aid posts were not equipped for major operations, and the wounded were shipped to us in a weakened state that made their survival after the rough trip more than problematical. With our own beautifully equipped base hospital and the services of first-class surgeons that it offered situated only a few miles away, it was perfectly absurd to do more than merely render first-aid at the field posts before rushing the wounded men to us. Our Bulgarian doctor's indignation expressed itself in characteristic if somewhat gruesome form: "They think that we are a cemetery instead of a hospital," he growled. Our head doctor, with his accustomed energy, soon got to the root of the trouble and had the arrangements altered and new orders issued, so that thereafter we received our wounded in a condition that allowed us to treat them in the correct way at the outset. The unusual mortality ceased at once. The battles on the Bzoura were in progress at the time and we had an enormous amount of work.

It was while at Teresino that we were able to watch our head doctor perform some of the remarkable operations for which he very soon earned a name. His skill and confident daring were extraordinary and he was also very lucky. Among the patients he had the reputation of possessing "a light hand", and those about to be operated upon invariably begged that he should perform the operation. He specialized in trepanning, using his own method most successfully, and soon all "head" cases were directed to us, with the best results.

The volume of work would sometimes slacken off a little, but we were always pretty full. The winter passed and an early spring set in. The enormous park became more beautiful than ever when the wild flowers started blossoming. There was a great quantity of these, and after night duty, Nelly and I, unlike the other nurses who always went to bed immediately they were relieved, used to go for long walks. We explored neighbouring villages and adjoining estates in that lovely part of Poland. It was a glorious spring and I have never seen such enormous quantities of flowers and of flowering trees and bushes. We used to return from these walks with our arms laden with poppies and lupins for our own quarters and the wards. Our hospital soon became a sort of a show-place, while the lovely operating theatre and the fame of our head surgeon resulted in our receiving frequent visits from well-known professors who were attached to Red Cross units stationed in the vicinity. Some changes in the staff took place, and three of our sisters left us—the "Monkey" was recalled home to nurse her father who had become ill and then our dear "Queen" and Timashenka left us. Italy, at last, had declared war and the "Queen", proud and delighted, left us for her native land to continue the same work in the

Italian Army. We were very sorry to lose her as she had endeared herself to all our hearts by her generous nature, her charm, her vivacity and, above all, by her unfailing good humour. Thus Nelly and I were the only two left of the original nurses appointed when our unit was formed. Three new sisters soon arrived; they were Sisters Tania and Genia, and one who acted as housekeeper and whom we called Aunt Masha. They were delightful and fitted in beautifully and we were soon great friends.

One day that spring, among a batch of wounded belonging to the 21st Siberian Rifle Regiment, there arrived a young officer who was very severely wounded. The boy (for he seemed nothing more) was unconscious and seemed to be dying. He was placed in Nelly's ward and it was decided to operate at once, although his condition was such that he was not expected to recover. His name was Ivanoff. With him, though unwounded, came his man Driomin —a typical Russian *denshtchik* (orderly), quite a special type that has often been described in Russian literature: blindly devoted to his master, ready for any sacrifice, indeed willing to give his life for him if necessary. Driomin's devotion was dog-like. He would stand by his master's bed and look down at him with profound pity in his eyes, ready to fulfil the slightest whim or wish. He used to beg us sisters to allow him to remain near his master right through the night: "Sestritza, I'll lie on the floor near his bed" . . . and there was no way of refusing him.

I was on night duty when Ivanoff was brought to the hospital, and in spite of the fact that he was not expected to recover, he managed to pull through, thanks to the operation. He remained very weak for a long time of course, but, little by little, he began to

improve. He looked so pathetically young, and soon became a great favourite with all of us. He was of Tartar origin and had a very dark complexion. We used to tease him by telling him that lying amidst all the white sheets and pillows, with just his head showing, he looked exactly like a small fly in a large jug of milk. Soon the weather became so warm that it was possible to move him into the open, and Driomin would help us to carry his bed out into the gardens where he lay all day under the beautiful shady trees. He was apparently equally a favourite with his regiment, for he was constantly visited by his brother officers of the 21st Siberian, who were in positions not far distant from Teresino. They were splendid men, bronzed and stalwart, and the pride of the Russian Army. They were unfailingly courteous and charming to us nurses, and as there was a lull in the fighting at that time, they used to take us over the trenches and show us the batteries whenever we were off duty. One day they arranged a lovely tea for the hospital staff—it was served in the wood and their band played to us while our hosts were unceasing in their attentions and hospitality. We made great friends with that Regiment.

When Ivanoff was strong enough to be moved, he was evacuated to Warsaw and we missed him and Driomin very much. We generally took advantage of the day off that we got after night duty, to visit him. He lay in a most luxurious hospital that was more like a private clinic and ever so much more pretentious than Teresino, but both Driomin and his master never failed to assure us eagerly that they preferred our hospital and that they were convinced that there could not be a better one anywhere.

We had been at Teresino nearly six months and it was now mid-summer. There was a magnificent

orchard in the grounds that yielded cherries and apricots in profusion, and with the strawberries and the lovely roses that now came out, the place became more attractive than ever. There was not so much work either and we had more leisure to admire the beauty of the country. But the news from the front was grave and there were persistent rumours that Poland was to be evacuated completely in the event of a German advance. The position of our hospital at Teresino was becoming dangerous and one day we received orders to move and to find a place nearer to Warsaw. Our head doctor, after some searching, found a suitable place at Ojaroff—about half-way to Warsaw from Teresino—and at the end of June we left our lovely château and settled down in our new quarters.

Before we left Teresino our dear friends of the 21st Regiment came to bid us good-bye. We were all of us very sad at the prospect of parting, for they, too, were leaving Teresino, having been ordered to a new sector of the front and they were full of evil forebodings regarding this change. We tried in vain to cheer them up, but seemed unable to dispel their presentiments. "It is a rotten sector," they told us, "and, you will see, no good will come of it." Little did we or they know how soon, alas! and how true this prophecy would be fulfilled. We had barely had time to settle down at Ojaroff and had not as yet received any fresh wounded, when rumours reached us of a terrible gas attack that had been launched by the enemy on a hitherto unheard-of scale. It was whispered that a whole regiment had been completely wiped out, but we could not learn which one. Nelly had told me, however, about a terrible dream, it was more of a nightmare, that she had dreamed the previous night concerning the 21st Regiment, and her

recital of it disquieted me as much as the dream itself had frightened her. As soon as we heard of the gas attack we had a dreadful premonition that some dark disaster had overcome our friends. We both decided to get to Teresino somehow, to make enquiries. Under the pretext of one of our usual long walks, we knew that we could easily get there and back without our absence being noticed, provided we could find some means of conveyance. In this, luck favoured us, for while we were at the railway station wondering whether we could board one of the trains, we spoke to an engine driver, who, after a little persuasion, agreed to let us ride to Teresino on the footplate of the locomotive. It was while travelling thus that our worst fears were confirmed. The engineer told us that it was precisely the 21st Siberian Regiment that had suffered in the gas attack, and that such survivors as there were had been brought to Teresino and were laid out near the station waiting for trains to move them. As we neared the familiar station, a terrible sight met our eyes—the surrounding fields were strewn with men, lying motionless in orderly rows as far as the eye could reach. Several small tents had been erected, and these sheltered emergency dressing-stations. Horrified, Nelly and I jumped off the locomotive and proceeded straight to the fields. The ghastliness of what we saw is beyond description, the memory of it making me shudder to this day. They lay on their backs mostly, their upturned faces terribly swollen and livid—some almost blue—choking and coughing, their bloodshot eyes protruding, unable to utter a word, yet fully conscious, only their eyes and their occasional spasmodic feeble movements proclaiming the supreme agony that they were enduring. Some were even coughing up pieces of their lungs that the cruel gas had disintegrated in their living bodies.

Not the least terrible part of this monstrous weapon of warfare is the realization, by those whose duty lies in the alleviation of the sufferings of the wounded and in the rendering of first aid to them, of the utter futility of all their efforts. We felt utterly helpless, there was no remedy, we were powerless—inhalators afforded some measure of purely temporary relief, but there were only three or four of them, for it must be remembered that this was a makeshift post, and that even if it had not been, it is doubtful whether the equipment would have included sufficient inhalators for gas poisoning on such a scale. It was especially awful when in the ghastly disfigured face of some poor victim, we would suddenly recognize the features of a man whom we had known and who was hale and hearty and full of the joy of life when we had last seen him. The realization of our helplessness was almost unbearable ; a wound can be dressed and the flow of blood from a hæmorrhage can be stanched, but this fiendish weapon had got science and surgery beaten.

As we went round we learnt that in spite of the fact that practically the whole of the regiment had been gassed, the enemy had not penetrated through the lines, thanks to the heroism of three of the officers, who, although gassed themselves, had staggered from machine-gun to machine-gun and steadily kept up fire and saved the position. We entered a tent where one of these heroic officers lay. He was terribly excited and restless and insisted on talking distractedly about the battle. Presently one of the doctors came along and we left. We never saw him again, but some time later we heard that he had been awarded the British Military Cross and also the Order and Sword of St. George. Nelly and I waited till the Red Cross train arrived to remove the men, and then, feeling terribly sick and too depressed even to speak to each

other, we returned to Ojaroff. We evacuated Ojaroff very soon after this, as the great retreat commenced.

Some time later, during the Revolution, my husband heard that little Ivanoff, who also was evacuated just before the retreat, had recovered from his wounds and that he had escaped to the White Army when the Revolution and Bolshevism made the lives of officers more dangerous than even the front line trenches ever had done. We heard that he had been wounded again and that he had died in hospital.

Years passed, and then one day in 1929, I received a letter from my sister who was the surgical sister in the Franco-Russian Hospital in Paris, saying that she was enclosing a letter which had been addressed to her, but was evidently intended for me. The following is a translation of the letter:

"Dear Sestritza B.,

"A few days ago I heard your name mentioned, and when, on making further enquiries, I found that you were working in Paris, I could not refrain from writing to you. Do you remember the little dark officer in Teresino whom you nursed so tenderly and who to this day considers that he owes his life to the wonderful care and skill with which he was treated at your hospital? It is a long time ago now—and I have been wounded several times since then and have been in many hospitals, but nowhere did I receive such attention, such kindness and such wonderful care as you provided in your beautiful hospital at Teresino.

"To this day, the memory of my two months' stay there and of the kindness of the whole staff and the cheerfulness of the atmosphere, remains the happiest and the most beautiful one of my life. Often and often have I thought of you all, and I

cannot tell you how happy I was to hear your name mentioned the other day. Please write me a few lines and tell me about yourself and about the other members of your staff. Where is the head doctor? Can you tell me anything about Sister Nelly? I am thinking of moving to Paris shortly and shall be delighted to come and see you.

"Yours sincerely,

"G. IVANOFF."

I was immensely glad to get this letter. My husband happened to be in England at the time, and together we wrote in reply, telling Ivanoff about ourselves and giving him such news as we had about the other members of the hospital.

In 1930 when my little son Tsapik fell ill with appendicitis, I took him over to Paris to be operated by the French surgeon Cresson, who was a friend of my husband. I wrote to Ivanoff; and the very next day he came to see me. He had altered a lot in those sixteen years and looked very delicate and told me that he still suffered from a periodic hæmorrhage of the lungs caused by his wounds. In answer to his eager questions I gave him such news as I myself had of all our mutual friends at the hospital—it was not all joyful: The head doctor, my husband, was under arrest and in prison in Leningrad, and I myself was going out there to try to help him, as soon as my little boy recovered; poor Aunt Masha had died in Kazan during the famine of 1919; our dear Tania also had died of typhus during the epidemic; Nelly had married an English army surgeon and was with him in India; Sister Genia had remained in Russia—and the "Queen" was happily married to an Italian Duke and, when I visited her, she was living in a very beautiful castello near Rome.

Ivanoff came to see me very frequently during the six weeks that I spent in Paris and was always most attentive and gallant both to me and to my little boy.

Ivanoff and Driomin had been through extraordinary experiences and had had the most marvellous escapes. Ivanoff was very modest—he did not tell me but I found out later from others—that he was the President of the Chevaliers of the Order of St. George.

# CHAPTER V

## THE RETREAT

IN July, 1915, began the great retreat from Warsaw. Our hospital was among the last to leave, we were right in the rear of the army, retreating with the rear-guard: behind us came the Battalion of Sappers whose job was to blow up the bridges.

For days and days we retreated in campaign order, we nurses in our two-wheeled Red Cross carts, the doctors on horseback. Through the beautiful country of Poland we went; passing deserted villages and magnificent estates where proud ancestral houses stood silent and empty, as if awaiting their doom. All the inhabitants had fled leaving their homes and all they possessed to the mercy of the enemy. Sometimes we nurses would get down from our carts and run into the orchards laden with fruit, and after a good feast we would do a little exploring in the lovely grounds; but somehow we never dared enter the houses—they looked so sad, so dismal and forbidding, that we only ventured to peep in at the windows. It was a beautiful sunny summer with an unchanging blue sky overhead and soft breezes moderating the heat; the fields were full of flowers, the dark forests cool and refreshing. On and on we went through the lovely smiling country, and when the time came for a halt a bonfire would be lit and our cooking would commence. How delicious were those meals in the open air! How we enjoyed every minute of our "campaign" retreat,

often forgetting its tragic meaning. . . . We generally spent the night in some deserted village, choosing one that possessed a well on account of the horses, and putting up our camp-beds in the empty cottages, which was rather uncanny. Once, I remember, we slept in a school, another time in the village hall. The enemy was not far behind and sometimes, when the horses were too tired to go on and we had to stop in unforeseen places, we used to wonder whether the Germans would not overtake us while we slept and we should wake up the next morning to find ourselves prisoners. However, this did not happen, luckily, and we went steadily on, passing through the great Bielovej Forest till we at last reached Minsk, which was our destination.

One day as we were journeying along a country road in the region of Warsaw, we came to the entrance-drive of a beautiful estate. It was rather a hot afternoon and we begged our Sister-Housekeeper (who was also our Head Nurse) to allow us to have a rest here—the grounds were so cool and inviting and we were dying to have some tea. . . . "You mean: dying to rob the orchard," she said, looking at us severely. "Well, I don't think you ought to—it isn't right." But we went on wheedling, knowing well that Aunt Masha's bark was worse than her bite. We all loved her dearly because in spite of her fiery temper she had the warmest heart in the world. But this time she obstinately refused to grant our request. We were just turning away to get back into our carts, when our head doctor rode up to ask what it was all about, and seeing our beseeching faces he smilingly ordered a halt. Delighted, we rushed into the grounds, laughing and chasing each other across the lovely lawns, when suddenly we found ourselves in front of a beautiful one-story house. The windows and doors

were open, somebody was sitting on the veranda. We stopped in amazement, scarcely believing our eyes—the house was actually inhabited! Feeling very uncomfortable and ashamed of our trespassing, we turned to go back, when a neatly dressed parlourmaid came out of the house, crossing the lawn towards us. She respectfully told us that the Princess wished to speak to the Sisters and asked us to follow her. Feeling very awed we walked up to the house. A grey-haired old lady with a proud aristocratic face was sitting in an armchair on the veranda. She welcomed us graciously in French, asking the name of our hospital and the number of nurses and doctors. When we had answered her questions she begged us to find the rest of our staff as she hoped we would give her the pleasure of dining with her. Two of us went off to find the others while the remaining ones stayed to talk to our hostess. She told us she was Princess C. (naming a very famous Polish family) and begged us to make ourselves at home, her maid would take us upstairs where we could wash and rest and do whatever we felt inclined. Just then the doctors and Aunt Masha appeared and were also graciously received by the Princess. Leaving our seniors with her, we went upstairs. It was a lovely, luxurious house, beautifully furnished; it seemed so strange to walk on carpets again, to be in cultured surroundings once more after our free unconventional active-service life. After a good wash and clean-up we went out into the garden, which was one of the loveliest I had ever seen and absolutely smothered with flowers. We roamed about the rose-garden, the orchard laden with fruit, thinking we were in fairyland. Then the gong sounded and we trooped in to dinner. How strange it was to be sitting on chairs at a table again after days of squatting round a bonfire for our meals! The snow-white

cloth, the magnificent silver, the soft light of the candles—it was all like a dream. . . . After dinner coffee was served on the veranda, and then our doctors went to get the horses ready and the Princess told us young nurses to go and pick as many flowers as we wanted. We needed no second bidding and ran off while Aunt Masha remained talking to our hostess. "I wonder how they will get on—you know Aunt Masha hates Poles," whispered Sister Tania to me. "Did you notice she was really not at all pleased to accept the old lady's hospitality." We ran off to the flower-garden where we found the gardener busy making up huge bouquets for us—by the Princess's orders.

The sun was setting and the sky a glorious red when we returned to the house, laden with the most beautiful flowers. Seeing us in the distance Aunt Masha called out to us sharply to hurry up. "She sounds furious, I'm sure something's happened," I whispered to Nelly as we hurried across the lawn. When we reached the veranda we found the Princess calm and serene as before, Aunt Masha, on the contrary, very ruffled and quite purple in the face—a sure sign of extreme annoyance. "Farewell, Mesdemoiselles," said the Princess addressing us graciously, "I was delighted to make your acquaintance and regret so much that your visit has been so short. I should like to offer to put you up for the night——" "Oh, no thank you," interrupted Aunt Masha frigidly, "that is quite out of the question. Come along, Sisters, say good-bye, it is time to go. Adieu, Madame la Princess," and off she stalked. We thanked our charming hostess for her kindness and followed Aunt Masha dying to know what had taken place in our absence, but rather afraid to approach her on the subject—she looked so furious. At last I

mustered up courage. "Do tell me, Aunt Masha, what happened when you remained with her, why are you so cross?" I asked her. "Cross? I should think I am cross," she thundered. "Those wretched Poles with all their false smiles and polite manners. Pretending they don't understand Russian! I hate them! I loathe them! I shall never forgive myself for having accepted that old witch's hospitality. Never. Never as long as I live. And it's all your fault. Rushing about like mad creatures. It's disgraceful." On and on she went, there was no stopping her. "But what happened? What did she say?" I asked again feeling very mystified. Aunt Masha stopped and faced me squarely. "This is what happened," she said grimly. "When you had gone I told her how surprised I was that she had stayed on in spite of the retreat, and asked if she wasn't afraid of the Germans. Upon which she actually answered with a charming smile: 'Oh, non, Madame, pas les Allemands! Nous ne craignons que les Cosaques Russes.'"

## CHAPTER VI

### SISTER VERA'S STORY

IT was in 1916 that the Russian Red Cross applied for permission from the German Authorities to send a mission consisting of a small medical staff to visit the prisoners of war camps in Germany and Austria. Sister Vera M., one of the outstanding nurses of our sisterhood, was chosen to accompany the Mission.

They could not have made a better choice: Sister Vera was not only one of our best nurses—she had a wonderful personality which made itself felt the moment one saw her. Tall and stately, she had a beautiful and typically Russian face which seemed to radiate kindness and sympathy, her manner was charming and simple, and she had a special way of speaking to the soldiers which at once endeared her to them—it was so obvious that she knew, understood and loved them with all her great heart. To me she always seemed to personify Russia itself—her looks, her manner, her speech were so typical of our country.

The consent of the German authorities having been obtained, the members of the Mission left via Sweden and Denmark and were away for several months.

When I next saw Sister Vera she had many interesting and moving stories to tell me, but one especially remained in my memory as an example of quite outstanding idealism and devotion. I will try to write it down as I heard it from her.

It happened in Galicia, in one of the small concentration camps visited by the Mission. The prisoners—about fifty of them—were working in the fields, and Sister Vera went out to them. There was a fallen tree lying by the side of the field, and here they all collected around her, eager to see and hear the "Sestritza" who had brought them tidings from their far-away homes. First she said a few words to them, words of comfort and hope, and then they asked her individual questions and handed her letters or asked her to carry out various commissions. Afterwards, they sang Russian folk-songs and finally they all prayed aloud and chanted parts of the beautiful Orthodox Church service. It was evening, the sun was setting and its glowing rays bathed the quiet field, adding to the sense of peace and of beauty that prayers and singing had evoked in the hearts of these poor outcasts. The time came for Vera to return to headquarters and, one by one, the men filed past to shake hands and to wish her godspeed. One of the men stretched out a hand that was terribly mutilated —all the fingers were missing and only part of the thumb remained. "How did that happen," asked Vera horrified, "was it a shell?" The man flushed and drew back shyly, hiding his hand behind his back. "No, it didn't happen at the front," he muttered and turned away. But Vera's interest was aroused and she repeated her question. The man hung his head and stood silent—but here his companions broke in ". . . go on, tell the Sister, Petruha, there's nothing to be ashamed of, tell her how it happened".

Vera had a good look at him. What she saw was a simple, homely and good-natured peasant face with a reddish beard and kind, child-like grey eyes. She drew him gently towards her, and sitting down on the tree trunk, said encouragingly:

"Sit down next to me, Petruha, and tell me how it happened—I want you to tell me yourself." Petruha smiled shyly and began his tale:

"You see, Sestritza, I was taken prisoner in East Prussia with several others and we were all put to work in a factory. I was made a stoker. All day long I shovelled coal into a furnace with never a thought in my head: I was unaccustomed to the work and my back and arms ached, but after a few days, when I had got more used to things, my mind began to work again, and suddenly I realized that I was doing wrong: 'Oh, God'—I thought in terror—'here am I actually helping to make shells and bullets for the enemy! —Shells and bullets destined to kill my own brothers, to kill our brave allies whom we have promised to help. No, I must not do it. I must not! I cannot be a traitor to them all—let them punish me, let them do what they like to me, but I cannot lose my very soul.' And this thought, constantly in mind, I had no peace that night, and the next morning, when we were led down to the factory, I refused to work. I was led away and they suspended me from a beam by my wrists, my toes just touching the ground. I hung like that for twelve hours and it was terribly painful. When they took me down, they put me in hospital, and I remained there for three weeks. At the end of that time I was pronounced well enough to resume work and they sent me back to the same factory. Once again they put me down to stoke the boilers and again I refused to work, it was the only way in which I could save myself from being a foul traitor, for now I realized more clearly than ever that every shovelful of coal put on by me helped to make that which meant death, yes, Sestritza, *death*, to my brothers. And I couldn't kill my own blood and flesh. They led me away and suspended me as before, but this time I

hung for twenty-four hours. The blood rushed through my head, my ears felt as if they would burst and I bled by the nose—it was painful agony. . . . They took me to hospital again and I lay there for three months. But I recovered and I was taken back to the same factory. As I was being marched along the road, my soul was full of anguish and I prayed and prayed to the Lord to give me strength so that I should not give in, for I knew that if I did, my soul would perish—I would have sold it to the devil. But as we neared the gate, a terrible fear came over me—I knew too well what would happen when I refused to work: again they would hang me up by my wrists and probably add other punishments this time and I feared that I might not be able to bear it all, so I prayed to the Lord for help and that He might in His mercy show me some way out.

"When we entered the gate and were being marched across the yard, I suddenly saw something that shone brightly lying on a tree-stump that stood in the middle of the yard ; after a few paces I saw that it was an axe, a beautiful new axe. There it lay reflecting the sunshine almost as a mirror would and, as this thought occurred to me, I suddenly seemed to feel that a voice inside of me had spoken to me pointing out the way. It was the answer to my prayer. God had had that axe put there to help me. I broke away from the line of prisoners and ran swiftly to the tree-stump, I made the sign of the cross and saying to myself: 'For Faith, Tsar and Country,' I seized the axe in one hand, and placing the other on the stump, with one blow I chopped off my fingers."

## CHAPTER VII

### CHISTOPOL

IN the early spring of 1916, I came home on leave from the front to spend Easter with my family. I had some news to tell them—the head doctor and I had just become engaged. After a week at home I fell ill with a severe attack of tonsilitis which left me so weakened, that it was impossible to think of returning to the front for some time. This was terribly annoying as I was longing to be back in Vileika where our hospital was then stationed and where a big offensive was shortly expected. The doctors, however, ordered a complete rest and change, and being a nurse, I had to submit.

It was the end of April and my mother was going on her annual visit to her estate in the Government of Kazan, so I resolved to go with her. My brother Freddy who had been fighting in the British Army (The Royal Engineers) had fallen ill with enteritis in the Dardanelles and had got two months' leave to come home to Russia. He arrived in St. Petersburg just before our departure for Chistopol and it was decided that he would join us.

Chistopol (Clear fields) was a tiny provincial town in the Government of Kazan, some 250 versts from Kazan, in the vicinity of which was my grandmother's estate. When the old house had been burnt down some years before the War, grandmother moved to Chistopol to her little house near the Convent,

where she had lived till her death in 1911. Every year one of us used to accompany our mother on her visit to grandmamma. We adored staying in Chistopol, the beautiful Kama, the limitless fields and woods of the estate, all the life there was so peculiar and so delightful, so different from St. Petersburg and Tsarskoye Selo where we usually spent the summer.

After grandmamma's death we used to go there every spring for the day of her death—the 2nd of May. A memorial service always took place in the Convent Cathedral and a panihida (requiem) at her grave.

I had not been to Chistopol for two years—since the War began—and was longing to be there once more. My brother's presence made it still more agreeable, and best of all, my fiancé had promised to try and get leave in the middle of May and join us there for a couple of weeks.

We left St. Petersburg at the end of April, travelling two days by rail to Kazan, from where we took the steamer to Chistopol. How well I remember that last visit to Kazan—our dear, quaint old Tartar city, the long, endless drive across the bare steppe from the town to the landing-stage, the thrill of delight and excitement at the first glimpse and smell of our beloved Volga, and the feeling of joy as we boarded the Volgo-Kama steamer! It seemed too wonderful to be back here again, too good to be true. How vast, how limitless the Volga seemed, the overflow that spring was enormous, and the breadth stretched for many versts across. We sailed in the early evening. There was a fresh breeze rippling the water, the sky was clear and beautiful, the air fragrant with spring, and the sunset promised to be magnificent. I stood on deck drinking in the beauty, the endless space, the glorious air, feeling that I could never have

enough of it, never be satisfied. We reached the little town of Bogorodsk where the two rivers meet, and bidding farewell to the Volga, we turned into our own Kama. The same immense vastness and space, the same elusive beauty, only somewhat wilder, but great and eloquent. It was evening now, the sky was slowly fading after a sunset of indescribable beauty ; and one by one the stars were appearing. As we passed a forest we could hear the nightingales singing. Here and there in the crevices and hollows were white patches—the last remains of the winter's snow. A feeling of peace reigned everywhere. The War seemed something unreal, remote, untrue. It seemed unbelievable that somewhere men were fighting and killing one another, when the world was so unspeakably lovely.

We reached Chistopol the next morning. How exciting it was to see "Danaourovka"—grandmamma's estate—with the "Bolshaya Gora" (the big hill) appearing first and then the domes of the Convent Church and the Chistopol Cathedral shining in the sunshine after the bend in the river. Then came the dear old primitive landing-stage, the Tartar faces, and the coloured shawls of the peasant women. There followed the short drive on the rickety izvoztchik through the broad, grass-covered streets of our homely Chistopol to the only hotel—the famous "Evropeiskye Nomera"—a two-storied wooden house where one could get furnished rooms and as many steaming samovars as one wanted at any time, day or night!

We always stayed here after grandmamma's death, her little house was empty and it seemed so sad to be there without her.

The "European Numbers" (European only in name, I am afraid) was a wonderful place and we dearly loved staying there. The rooms were clean

and bright, and hung with the most appalling wall-paper, and from the windows one could see the lovely, glittering Kama.

The servant Masha, barefoot and with a bright shawl on her head, met us joyfully, announcing that we were, of course, to have our "own" rooms, and Kuzma, "the idiot", smirked and carried up our trunks, patiently enduring Masha's abuse, as usual. A steaming samovar was instantly brought in and Masha ran out to fetch some fresh "boulka" (white bread).

We unpacked our things and after tea and a wash (there were no baths in the "Evropeiskye Nomera"), we set out for the Convent—to order to-morrow's mass and give instructions about the memorial dinner. My mother always made a point of giving the nuns a good feast (in the old Russian custom) and there used to be a special table laid for the beggars of the town.

The Chistopol Convent was on the outskirts of the little town. It stood high on the riverside, overlooking the Kama. Many acres of land belonged to it, consisting of fields, meadows and woods. The nuns lived in the different houses belonging to the Convent, which was surrounded by a tall white wall. A beautiful garden, or rather orchard, sloped right down to the Kama, where the great "ambari" or granaries stood. The orchard always seemed the loveliest place in the world to me, especially in the spring when all the cherry trees were in blossom and one could see the blue Kama glistening through the branches.

The nuns all flocked out to greet us, bowing low, and looking with awe at my brother who was in his English uniform. They surrounded us, plying me with questions about the War—had I seen any Germans? Were there many cannons and were they very

big? Was I frightened of them? Did the shooting make much noise? And had I seen any aeroplanes and the people who fly in them? I had barely time to answer all those questions and then they started telling me about themselves, complaining and wailing about all the misfortunes: "Oh, times were so bad, and the merchants were so wicked, putting up their prices, and the Kama was so angry this year—she had carried away so much wood—beautiful birch-logs that they had stored for the winter! And the wood was getting so dear!" On and on they chattered, sighing and complaining till at last my brother and I escaped from them to the orchard, while my mother went to see the Mother Superior about to-morrow's rituals.

Mother Magdalena, the gardener, met us joyfully, her kind wrinkled face beaming, and took me all over the garden showing me her new plants and bulbs and flowers. The weather had been rather cold, she told us, the cherry trees weren't out yet, but when we came to the little summer-house I found a small apple tree, growing in a sheltered corner, that had quietly started to blossom. I could hardly tear myself away from my beloved orchard and stayed gazing at the river till a nun came running to tell us that the Batioushka had arrived and the panihida (requiem) at grandmamma's grave was about to start. The priest and the nuns were standing round the grave when my brother and I entered the little Convent cemetery. The sun was setting and its last golden rays were reflected on the Kama. One by one the stars were appearing in the evening sky, the air was scented with cheriomoucha (bird-cherry), and a feeling of peace reigned over everything. We lit our candles and the beautiful service began. The low sweet voices of the nuns seemed to float away to the stars, and their dark figures and

lighted candles, the incense and the singing all seemed to blend into one whole and it was all infinitely sad and beautiful.

At eight o'clock the next morning we were in the cool spacious Convent Church and the memorial mass began. It was a long and beautiful service, magnificently sung by the choir of nuns. Then followed a short requiem at the grave, and after that we entered the great dining-hall where the memorial dinner was to take place. Several long narrow tables stood there, covered with snow-white cloths. We all took our places and after the priest had said grace, we sat down. There was a big separate table, which stood in the corner, for the beggars and "wanderers".

The food was excellently prepared and consisted chiefly of sterlet (the famous fish of the Kama) prepared in various wonderful ways. Fresh caviare and other local delicacies were also plentiful. The nuns were wonderful cooks and every dish was a *chef-d'œuvre*.

At last, towards the end, two enormous samovars were brought in with a variety of jams, and the tea-drinking began. It all lasted for over three hours and my brother Freddy and I were more than glad when we could escape into the orchard and breathe the fresh, fragrant air of the Kama after the unbearably stuffy dining-hall. The next few days passed in glorious laziness—every morning a bowing and smiling nun brought us a bottle of cream and a napkin full of deliciously fresh prosvirki (small loaves baked in the Convent) for our breakfast, and when we were ready my brother and I would take our books and saunter to the Convent spending the whole day in the garden. We were neither of us very strong yet and the perfect peace together with the bracing air of the Kama were a wonderful tonic after all the turmoil and

strain of life at the front. The days were warm and flooded with sunshine, the cherry and apple trees were breaking into blossom and the orchard was becoming a dream of loveliness. I wrote to my fiancé begging him to come quicker and after a few days received a telegram saying that he would be with us the following week. I was longing for him to come, it was going to be such a joy to show him all the places I loved so dearly—the estate, the Convent, and above everything, our beautiful Kama. The Volga, I knew, he had explored from beginning to end, when, as a young student, he had sailed right down the great river in a little rowing boat with his peasant friend Vasska Zvonok. We nurses loved to listen to the head doctor's stories about his wanderings throughout Russia.

His knowledge of and love for his country were genuine and profound, he had travelled extensively in it, and he had a wonderful talent for relating about all he had seen, the places he had visited and lived in. But though he had seen hundreds of similar untidy little towns with sprawling, grass-covered streets, where cocks and hens and pigs ran about fearlessly, he had never been to Chistopol, and I was dying to show him our magnificent town!

My brother and I planned to take Sasha for long drives in grandmamma's old tarantass (a special vehicle used in the country) and thought out all the places we were going to show him.

I remember it was a glorious sunny morning when Sasha drove up to the "European Numbers" looking so bronzed and handsome in his uniform, as full of life and as gay as ever. How joyfully we met! Having introduced the famous Masha and Kuzma to him, I carried him off to my Convent orchard which I had so often described to him. He was going to see it

in its loveliest aspect too. All the trees were in full blossom, the sky a deep and glorious blue and the sun lit up Kama which was glittering like a diamond in the distance. Mother Magdalena gave "the doctor" a warm welcome and showered good wishes and blessings on us. That afternoon she invited us to have tea with her in the garden outside the little summer-house. The fortnight my fiancé stayed with us in Chistopol passed like a dream. Every day we went for long drives—always choosing new places, my brother acting as coachman, and we two behind. The evenings we generally spent in a boat on the river.

I shall never forget the fragrance and beauty of the forests and our cries of delight at the sight that met our eyes—the ground was covered with lilies of the valley, myriads of them, making it look like an enchanted forest. We picked armfuls of them, filling our tarantass till they fell out from all sides, but still I went on and on—I just could not stop.

Another day we would drive through the estate to the Kama and watch the fishermen drawing in their nets full of priceless sterlets. Then the good-natured bearded fellows would cook us some delicious "oucha" (sterlet soup) in an iron pot hanging over a bonfire, and giving us each a wooden spoon they would watch us devouring it, beaming with delight at our enjoyment.

We also loved visiting the old forester who lived in the depth of one of grandmamma's great forests. He was an old man with shaggy eyebrows, a great beard and intelligent dreamy eyes, and he lived like a hermit. His lonely little log-house stood in an opening in the wood and was surrounded by beehives. He was most hospitable and always gave us the warmest welcome. As soon as we entered his clean little "izba", before we had time to think, the table would be

covered with a bright red tablecloth and the samovar brought in and we would sit down to tea with delicious scented honey.

The days passed all too quickly and soon it was time for Sasha to return to the front.

Some friends of ours whose estate was in another district of the Kazan Government, about sixty miles from Chistopol and half-way up to Kazan, had invited us (my brother and myself) to stay with them, and we decided to leave Chistopol together with Sasha, taking the same steamer down the Kama to Laïsheff, the queer little "town" of the district, where we were usually met by horses sent by our hosts. (It was a twenty-five mile drive to the estate.)

We left our dear Chistopol with many regrets—it had been such a lovely visit, and we had all been so happy there. To this very day the memory of that spring—the last one I spent on the Kama—is one of the happiest of my life.

The Kama steamer crawled slowly down the great river and we sat on deck bathing in the sunshine, enjoying every minute of it. It was hot and sultry and threatening clouds darkened the horizon, promising a serious downpour. In four hours' time our steamer stopped alongside the rickety Laïsheff landing-stage. We said good-bye to Sasha and watched waving till the boat disappeared in the distance. Then we turned to find our carriage, but to our dismay there was no sign of it. Our telegram had probably not been delivered in time. There were two rickety old vehicles standing near the landing-stage, the driver of one looked about a hundred, whereas the other was a little boy of twelve. We hired them both—putting our luggage in the old man's cart, and driving ourselves with the boy—Feodor Zmeikin was his name, I remember. There was thunder in the air, the sky

was completely overclouded, and kept lighting up every few minutes by great flashes of summer lightning. We had barely driven a couple of versts and were in the open fields when we felt great heavy drops of rain descending. These were followed by a sudden torrent of rain—a real cloudburst. Luckily we had an umbrella and burberries, so we had some protection but our feet were almost ankle deep in water! and our poor drivers were completely drenched.

The old man strongly advised us to turn back and wait till the next morning—on the landing-stage! "It's a long drive, you know," he said, "and the roads are bad enough when it is dry! And we have to cross the Miosha on the ferry—however shall we manage in the storm! The overflow is great this year, she is ever so wide!"

But all these warnings only attracted us the more instead of putting us off and we decided to continue our journey.

Two or three hours passed and it had grown quite dark when we at last reached the ferry. It was still raining a little but a wind had arisen and seemed to be driving away the clouds.

The Miosha was indeed broader than I had ever seen her—quite a mile across—and to our dismay there was no sign of the ferry-boat! Peering into the darkness we saw that it was fastened near the little hut on the opposite bank.

The ferry-men had evidently decided that no one would want to cross on a night like this and were taking refuge from the storm in the hut and were probably fast asleep! But there was a faint light in the window, so we decided to try and shout till they would hear us.

My brother and the boy (whose name, we discovered, was also Feodor) started to shout, the old

man and myself trying to help them—but it was of no use! The wind carried away our voices and there was no answer. An hour passed. The rain had stopped and the clouds were dispersing and a beautiful moon was shining. The air was soft and fragrant after the rain, the wind had gone down. There seemed nothing to do but to return to Laïsheff and reluctantly we decided to do so.

Before going, we decided to give a last shout, and we went right down to the water, leaving the old man with the horses, hoping that our voices would now perhaps carry across to the hut. We waited a few moments, and were just going to turn back, when suddenly, from the distance we heard a welcome hail: "O-he! O-he! who is it?"

"Come along, bring the raft, it's an officer," yelled the boy.

Soon we heard the welcome splash and the big raft slowly appeared. The horses and carriages were led down on to it and in a few minutes we were gliding across the Miosha, and landed safely on the other bank.

There remained but five miles to Tangachi now, and off we went past the village Rojdestveno with its white church glistening in the moonlight, through the endless fields till the big white house appeared fantastically reflected in the huge pond before it and the dogs started barking furiously as we drove up the drive. Despite the late hour—it was midnight—our hostesses met us at the door, waiting for us—and explained that the telegram had arrived too late to send the horses. We were led into the great drawing-and-dining-room with the huge old-fashioned sofas and beautiful mahogany furniture, where the welcome samovar was awaiting us. After having had tea we took our candles and retired to bed.

I woke up early the next morning—the birds were singing gaily, the garden was one mass of lilac, it was a perfect day outside.

All the morning Marina, Freddy and I roamed about visiting our favourite haunts and after lunch the troika was harnessed and we drove off to Panovo, an estate about ten miles away which belonged to our distant relations. They had invited us to spend the day with them. It was a lovely drive through fields and meadows, in the direction of the Kama.

The horses flew along briskly and soon we drove up to the old-fashioned two-storied house with columns —so typical of the Oneguin period and so dear to Russian hearts. Our hosts were a delightful old couple—a real Darby and Joan, extremely hospitable and kind, and never so happy as when entertaining their guests, or rather pressing them to eat and drink, insisting on their tasting every dish on the crowded table!

The house was as charming inside as it looked from the outside, with lovely old furniture, old portraits on the walls, and shining waxed floors. An enormous wild garden full of lilies of the valley, violets, and lilac stretched right down to the Miosha. A wonderful tea awaited us on the veranda, the table groaning under all the home-made cakes and loaves and jams—every one of which we were obliged to taste!

After tea we went down to the Miosha to watch the fishermen and when we returned, the table was laid again and we were pressed to "refresh ourselves" with delicious home-made "kvass" and "mead".

Our dear old hosts were most anxious to hear all about the War, about the life at the front and the work in the hospitals and listened eagerly to everything we told them. Then they begged me to play on their old

clavichord. The keys were yellow and faded, but the tone was soft and pleasant and I played on and on until it was time to go.

The following days passed in long drives and picnics, sometimes to the forest of the Volga, which was literally covered with lilies of the valley, at other times to the Kama meadows, or in visits to the neighbouring estates of our friends. I also loved visiting the Tartar villages situated not far from Tangachi and made friends with the Tartar women, who used always to gravely return my "call" the very next day.

Time was flying and my brother and I were soon due back at the front. We decided to go back right up the Volga to Rybinsk and there take the train to Petersburg.

It was almost summer, the lilies of the valley were gradually disappearing in the woods, and wild strawberries were replacing them, the corn was getting taller and taller and the meadows were a profusion of flowers.

The Sunday before we left was Whitsun—we drove to church at Rojdestveno.

Never shall I forget that service—the church floor strewn with rushes and polin (sweet-scented grass), the bright-coloured shawls of the peasant women, bunches of wild flowers in their hands and the grave bearded faces of the moujiks in their best Sunday clothes and boots and the choir of rather shrill peasant voices.

A few days before we left, the news came that the Miraculous Ikon of the Neopalimaya Koupina (Unburnable Lady of Koupina) had been brought to Simbirsk, and as our hostesses were anxious to worship it (the Ikon had saved their house from fire a year ago) we all decided to go to Simbirsk together, from

where my brother and I could take a Volga steamer to Rybinsk.

We spent two days in Simbirsk staying with some friends, and had a lovely time. Simbirsk is famous for having been the home of Goncharoff and it is here that he wrote his great novel *The Precipice*. We visited the beautiful estate described by him, the sloping garden, the little summer-house. . . .

Then after celebrating a Te Deum service before the Miraculous Ikon we left Simbirsk by steamer to Rybinsk, sailing five or six days up the Volga. It was June now, the beautiful spring had given place to a glorious summer, and the Volga was at her best—it seemed to me that I had never seen her more lovely.

The trip was one unending delight, the Volga steamers were noted for their comfort and excellent food, and my brother and I enjoyed every minute of it.

Our steamer sailed slowly up the great river and we sat for hours on deck watching the beautiful panorama of the Volga scenery unwinding itself: the dark forests, the vast flower-covered meadows and limitless cornfields varied with solitary monasteries and picturesque villages nestling here and there along the shore. I loved the wooden landing-stages, crowded with barefooted peasant children, their sunburnt faces framed in bright kerchiefs offering the passengers baskets of wild strawberries or fresh eggs and milk in quaint earthenware jugs.

Sometimes the steamer would stop for an hour or two to pick up cargo at a little landing-stage, and my brother and I would scramble up the bank into the village, or have a good run in the meadows. We generally stopped for an hour or two at the towns.

First came dear old Kazan with its minarets and churches, then came the beautiful Nijni-Novgorod, magnificently situated at the junction of the Oka into the Volga, the wonderful Kremlin towering above the two mighty rivers—one of the most marvellous sights of the Volga. The next big town after Nijni is Yaroslavl—a dream of loveliness, as it dominates the high river bank, the domes of its famous churches glittering in the sunshine.

Higher up the river on the opposite lower bank is Kostroma—a gleaming apparition of monasteries and churches of rare beauty. After that miles and miles again of birch forests, fields and meadows, monasteries and villages.

Evening would draw near, and with it a glorious sunset. At this hour the Tartars would bring out their little carpets on deck and kneeling down (regardless of any curious spectators) offer their evening prayers to Allah.

As we sailed past a monastery the sound of the church bells would reach us across the water and, as the sky slowly faded, the crew would sing the evening prayer.

Gradually night would descend and lights appear on the Volga—a great raft would come floating past us, the men seated round a bonfire, cooking their evening meal, or a dazzlingly lit steamer would suddenly appear in the distance, greeting us with a long, echoing whistle. When it passed all would become quiet again, and often as we passed a forest we would hear the nightingales singing.

One by one the great stars would appear. The nights were beautifully warm and the crew together with the third-class passengers would gather in the stern of the boat, and soon the songs of the Volga would ring out across the water far into the night—

"Stenka Rasin" and "Ay ouchnem" ; all the lovely melodies we knew and loved so well.

How wonderful it was, how infinitely beautiful was our country and how little we guessed the dark terrible tragedy that was to befall her in a year's time.

# PART TWO

## 1918–1923

# CHAPTER I

## THE RAID ON THE BRITISH EMBASSY

I WAS married in the beginning of 1918, almost a year after the abdication of the Tsar and several months after the Bolsheviks had seized power. Times were bad and food was getting scarcer every day, but as my mother had in some mysterious way managed to store up large quantities of foodstuffs, the cellar in my parents' house was well stocked, and there was no lack of either food or champagne at the wedding breakfast.

It was a lovely winter day, there was a sharp frost, the sky was blue overhead, the sun shone brilliantly and there was a feeling of spring in the air.

We were married in the church that stood opposite my parents' house and it was all so simple and homelike as to be more like a country wedding than one taking place in the capital. When the time came for me to go to the church, I merely threw a warm shawl over my shoulders and ran across the street. Earlier in the morning the servants had taken a large carpet from our drawing-room to be spread in the church and also palms and plants so that the dear little church that I had known for so long looked perfectly lovely. The singing during the service was especially good as my husband had succeeded in obtaining a part of the choir of the Imperial Chapel which, strangely enough, had not yet been disbanded, and they surpassed themselves. After the ceremony we all crossed the street

and re-entered my parents' house. Our dearest friends were present of course and, among them, several of the sisters and doctors of our war-hospital. It was sad, however, that apart from my parents, only my two youngest sisters were there out of all our numerous family. My brother, who was with the British Naval Armoured Car Division that had been fighting on the Russian front, had been obliged to leave for Moscow on duty just two days previously and his wife accompanied him, both my other brothers were with their regiments in France, and my third sister was with the Volunteer Army somewhere in the South of Russia.

Considering the difficulties of obtaining any kind of food, it was quite miraculous how my mother had succeeded in providing all the wonderful delicacies that were served at the ensuing dinner and, under the influence of the good things to eat and the excellent champagne, the anxieties and the uncertainty that hung like a dark cloud over each and every one of those present—for we all belonged to the class that was being subjected to the most persistent persecution by Russia's new rulers—were forgotten and it was quite like old times to see everybody so gay.

My husband and I left early because it was really dangerous to be out late in the streets, and only two days previously, one of my sister's friends and her husband had been held up by bandits, as they were returning from their wedding, and robbed of everything, so we were not taking any risks and drove off in our sleigh while the reception was still in full swing. Naturally, owing to the prevailing conditions, there could be no question of a honeymoon and we drove straight to our new home. My husband was at the time surgeon to the old Palace hospital and we had a delightful flat in the hospital building, which was situated in the most central part of the city. Our flat

was old-fashioned and roomy and very comfortable, but it was a difficult time to start housekeeping: every scrap of food was strictly rationed but even so it was extremely difficult to find even the most ordinary necessities as the market-places were deserted.

The political outlook was very black, and it was becoming more and more obvious that, contrary to the first expectations of all reasoning people, these new-fangled persons who called themselves Bolsheviks had come to stay for some time in spite of that complete chaos in every single branch of life which was the only visible consequence of their advent to power. Nobody knew what was happening as the only newspaper that was being published contained nothing but news that was favourable to the Bolsheviks and no one paid the slightest attention to it. The result was that the wildest rumours were being whispered, there were perfectly inexplicable wholesale arrests—complete trams were being stopped suddenly and all the passengers would be marched off like sheep to Che-Ka headquarters, to be sorted, like sheep again, and, as inexplicably released a few days later, unless they were detained, in which case they were never heard of again. The Bolsheviks were nervous, the shameful Brest-Litovsk Peace Treaty had not yet been ratified and the Germans threatened to march on St. Petersburg. There was a split in the ranks of the Bolsheviks—Trotsky and Radek, after having gained the support of the irresponsible elements in the Army by promising peace and the immediate return to their villages to the soldiers, were now hysterically clamouring for war because it was patent that their real masters—the Germans—were not going to be content with a peace that did not include the annexation of considerable territory and the payment of a huge indemnity. Lenin and his followers, more deliberate

and cool, realized that to re-mobilize the population so soon after having broken up the Army, would mean an admission that the proletarian Utopia that he had been promising was unattainable, an admission that would lead him and his disciples to the gallows, so they were, naturally enough, out for the unconditional surrender that the German terms virtually demanded. The atmosphere was tense and the seat of Government was suddenly moved to Moscow—a piece of bluff in case the Germans advanced on St. Petersburg. There was complete panic, the last vestige of civic administration of the great city disappearing completely. Provisions could not be obtained, the supply of water and of electricity became more and more spasmodic and those who could do so, moved out into the country. Fortunately summer lay ahead, a fact that made the outlook appear less black than it really was. The inhabitants were left to their own devices and the only Government department that functioned was the Che-Ka, who were anything but idle. About the middle of March, the news came through that the Peace Treaty had been ratified in Moscow, and shortly after this the diplomatic corps of the Allied nations left Russia—German officers in uniform appeared in the streets and the German flag was hoisted over the old Embassy building in St. Isaac Square. The position was indeed extraordinary. I had, of course, become a Russian subject through marrying a Russian, but the British colony—among whom were my people—were left without any diplomatic representative, although the Consul remained; *his* position was not clear to anyone and least of all to himself. Several British officers also remained, among them the ex-Naval Attaché, Captain Cromie. My brother George, who had remained in Russia to liquidate the affairs of the Naval Armoured Car Division, returned

from Moscow at this time and was attached to Captain Cromie's staff. With the ratification of the Peace Treaty, the rumours of war with the Germans ceased, but actual, if somewhat desultory, warfare with England commenced in the far North, where the British had occupied Murmansk in order to prevent the Bolsheviks from handing over to the Germans the huge stocks of war material which the Allies had been pouring into Russia for months and which had accumulated at that port. The summer wore on and my people remained in town that year. Prompted and fostered by the Germans, skilful anti-Allied and particularly anti-British propaganda was being disseminated and the position of British subjects became graver daily. Business was at a standstill and all banks had been closed for months. Anybody with ready cash could buy the most wonderful jewels and other valuable small articles at tremendously advantageous prices as these were being surreptitiously sold by practically everybody belonging to the upper classes who was not in prison. The position became more acute for the British as autumn approached and as the Bolsheviks became bolder in the denunciations after the abandonment of the British Army of Occupation's advance towards Petrograd from Archangel. The British Consulate moved into the Embassy building on the Palace Quay, since it was still British property and could claim exterritoriality. My brother and his wife were living in the Hotel Medved, which was the only remaining hotel-de-luxe that had not been "nationalized" and converted into barracks or a proletarian lodging-house, but there could be no doubt that this immunity was only temporary and that the fate of the others also awaited the Hotel Medved. My brother had orders to be very careful not to provoke any incidents in his dealings with the authorities

and he was anxious to avoid making himself conspicuous in any way, but this was not easy to do since he had lived in the hotel for a considerable time while still wearing uniform, so he was known to be a British officer and it was the easiest thing in the world for some *agent-provocateur* or spy, of which there were countless numbers, to create a situation which might entail embarrassing consequences, so my brother decided to leave the hotel, but here another difficulty arose since it was necessary to obtain an authority in order to move into an apartment. It follows that anyone applying for such an authority or permit would immediately have his activities questioned and closely looked into, and a Britisher occupying an official position would probably be subjected to a great deal of petty annoyance and to constant surveillance, while his slightest action or movement might be misconstrued. So my brother asked us whether we could put him up since his comings and goings would not be noticeable if he used the hospital doors for coming and going. Naturally, we agreed and the following day he and his wife moved out of the Hotel Medved. They stayed with us for some three weeks, and then, one Saturday, my brother told me at breakfast that he would be away for the week-end as they were both going down to Peterhof till Tuesday morning where he was responsible for the upkeep of some motor-boats belonging to the Embassy.

I must here digress from the general subject for a moment in order to recount how a perfectly inexplicable foreboding of my sister-in-law's undoubtedly saved my brother's life in the subsequent events of that afternoon. My brother was in the habit of carrying two automatic pistols (he was acting on instructions) —one a large one that he carried in his hip-pocket and the other a small Browning that fitted into the

waistcoat pocket—the idea being that if he were arrested in the streets or held-up (in those days it was not possible to distinguish between official arrests and ordinary bandits masquerading as officials), and had not time to use his big pistol before it was found, he could always fall back on the small one, which would probably not have been noticed, once the large one in the hip-pocket had been discovered. The usual mode of procedure was to make a man put his hands up, and then to slap his larger pockets in order to see if he was armed, and the argument was that having found a large gun, they would hardly continue searching for further arms. That particular morning, my sister-in-law was most insistent to accompany my brother to the Embassy, but he told her that as it was Saturday, and as they were going to Peterhof in the early afternoon, she had better wait for him at the hospital, as he would only be away for an hour or so. But my sister-in-law begged him not to take his revolvers with him, pointing out that since he would not be out in the evening, he might as well leave them at home. She was very emphatic about this, and to humour her, my brother good-naturedly shrugged his shoulders and, with a wink at me, agreed.

They both left us at about ten o'clock, and I promised to have luncheon ready for them by 12.30. At one o'clock my brother telephoned to me and said that he would be detained and that they had to postpone their trip to Peterhof. He spoke very guardedly and I had the impression that all was not well, but all he would answer to my questions was that "there had been some happenings" and that he and his wife would be back about five. When dinner was served at seven o'clock, they were still absent, so I tried to telephone through to the Embassy, but, to my amazement, I could not get any reply. I then telephoned to my

parents' house, and the conversation that ensued only served to mystify and disquieten me. My mother said that she thought I had better come over as she wanted to show me something, but she would not be more explicit over the telephone. Very much perturbed, I immediately left home and dashed over to my parents' house. There everything seemed as usual at first, but when I was alone with my mother, she told me rapidly that there had been grave happenings. It appeared that my father was going to call at the Embassy where he had deposited a very considerable sum of money and valuables worth over fifty thousand pounds, he intended withdrawing some money for current expenses (it must be remembered that all banks were closed) and had just reached the Palace Quay, where the Embassy was situated, when he noticed an unusual amount of activity outside the building. Several cars were lined up in front of it and there were a number of soldiers and armed civilians standing about. Suddenly my father recognized my brother's car and his chauffeur standing motionless next to it. The chauffeur had seen my father and as he caught his eye, he made an almost imperceptible motion with his head, but which was full of meaning and undoubtedly was intended as a warning, so instead of crossing over the road, my father calmly walked straight on and, looking back after reaching the Troitsky bridge, he was in time to see a number of armed men coming out of the doors. This could mean only one thing, and however unbelievable it seemed to him, it was obvious that His Britannic Majesty's Embassy had been raided, in violation of all the rules of international usage! My father hurried home and after a brief consultation with my mother, it was decided that whatever happened, he was not to stay at home that night since it was more than probable

that the Che-Ka would pay a routine visit to the homes of all British residents in Petrograd, so he had gone to spend the night with a friend, who was a Finnish subject and owned a factory. There was no news about the happenings at the Embassy, and feeling very anxious and perturbed, I returned to my own home. My parents' house was raided that night and thoroughly searched, and all papers, letters and documents were taken away. The raid was very thorough, but the searchers failed to discover a small ante-room leading out of my father's study by a door that was fitted into the panelling. There was a Chatwood safe in this room which contained various family papers and important personal documents. My father had the key of this safe with him. Had the Bolsheviks discovered the ante-room, their visit would have been a very prolonged one, as they would certainly not have left till they had succeeded in forcing it open.

In the evening of the following day, my sister-in-law suddenly appeared at my home, she was exhausted and clamoured for a bath, after which she told us of the previous day's happenings. It appeared that on arriving at the Embassy in the morning my brother had asked her to wait while he ascertained whether he would need the car further. He came down in about twenty minutes and taking the wheel drove with all speed to Smolny where Bolshevik Headquarters were situated. On the way, he told her that things were obviously coming to a head:— Two officers had disappeared on the previous night, one of whom, Commander Le Page, was on Captain Cromie's staff. They had been playing bridge at the flat of another officer and had left at midnight to return to the Embassy which was only five minutes' walk away, but they had not arrived and the only two

conclusions were that either they had been arrested or else they had been attacked by bandits, in which case they might have been robbed and killed and their bodies thrown into the Neva. Apart from the Che-Ka there was no institution, such as police or a gendarmerie to whom application in such cases is generally made in countries, and the Che-Ka people were not helpful on the telephone, so my brother was now proceeding direct to the Bolshevik headquarters to try to ascertain whether the two officers were safe. He had once rendered a service to a man who was now a very powerful Commissar and who, out of gratitude, had on several occasions assisted my brother in minor matters. My brother intended to request this Commissar to make enquiries regarding the two Englishmen. He was away only a few minutes and when he rejoined my sister-in-law he was more worried than ever. It appeared that, as he was on his way to the Commissar's room after obtaining the necessary permit to enter and submitting to the usual search, he had met the Commissar himself coming down the stairs accompanied by three or four other men. The Commissar had deliberately avoided my brother and had shaken his head as a signal that my brother was not to speak to him, so my brother continued mounting and on reaching the Commissar's room and enquiring after him, the secretary told him that the Commissar had left on urgent business and would not be back that day. They returned to the Embassy and my sister-in-law decided to wait there. She waited in the building itself and at about half-past three she went into the room of the young lady who acted as a reception clerk and which was situated on the street level. She had been there for a few minutes when suddenly she heard a commotion outside and, immediately after, there came the sound of several shots fired in quick suc-

cession. My sister-in-law ran out into the hallway and, as she emerged, she saw Captain Cromie running down the steps two at a time straight towards her, and behind him, at the top of the stairs, there stood a man who was deliberately firing at the Captain. Several bullets whizzed by her head and crashed through the glass of the entrance doors behind. Her horror seemed to root her to the spot and suddenly, just as Captain Cromie had reached the last stair, he pitched forward as though he had stumbled, staggered a little and then crashed down backwards, with his head on the bottom step. My sister-in-law ran to him and lifted his head. He was moving his eyelids and she felt something warm trickling on to the fingers of her right hand, with which she was holding up his head from underneath. Suddenly a terrific blow made her drop Captain Cromie's head and sent her spinning against the right-hand wall. Before she could recover, two iron hands gripped her by the elbows and pinned her against the wall. Looking up, she saw an unshaven face and a pair of close-set eyes that gazed down at her with a sort of fury. She said the first thing that occurred to her, which was "It's hurting me" at which the man still clasping her elbows, shook her fiercely till she thought that her head would come off, while he muttered through clenched teeth, "Speaks Russian, eh?—A Russian . . . what? . . . Paying a friendly visit? . . ." This continued for some minutes, when suddenly he spun her around, seized both her hands behind her back and gave her a violent blow between the shoulders ; this made her pitch forward and the man still holding her hands in one of his, ran her up the stairs hitting her violently from time to time and accompanying each blow with the most terrific oaths. When they reached the top of the stairs he pushed her to the left and into the

Chancery. As soon as she entered, she saw all the members of the Embassy and the Consulate, standing with hands raised above their heads while facing them there stood civilians pointing revolvers. She was placed with her back to one of the walls and was immediately covered with a pistol held by one of the Jews.—It struck her rather forcibly that every single one of the armed civilians in the room was a Jew. Suddenly she saw my brother and Mr. Boyce standing by a filing cabinet with uplifted arms with a man holding a pistol facing them. They made no sign to each other. Suddenly a man backed in through the door, he was firing like a madman through the open door and suddenly, when he was well in the room, he gave a shout and dropping his revolver, he sank to his knees and clasped his waist. He rolled about the floor shouting "Comrades, comrades I've got a bullet in my stomach" (*Polutchil polyu v jivot*). One or two of the "Comrades" without turning round, said sternly "Silence, comrade, silence," and presently he lay still. In a few minutes a group of men entered and among them, carrying a brief-case and looking rather shamefaced, was the Commissar whom my brother had tried to see that morning. They removed the dead or unconscious man, and then one of them, in answer to a request made by one of the staff, said that they might all lower their hands on to their heads ; he demonstrated what he meant, clasping his fingers and letting the hands rest on his head. He then said a few words to the Commissar, and selecting a table, they both sat down. Turning to the man who appeared to be the second in command, he said: "Have they all been searched for arms?" This man gave a brief order and one or two of the men pocketed their pistols and went around slapping the staff's pockets. There was not a single revolver or pistol among the

whole staff. When this was seen, the man at the table said that they might all lower their hands altogether. He then asked everybody to line up in a queue and to approach the table one by one. He asked the first man to hand over his papers and placed these in an envelope on which he wrote the owner's name. They were quite polite about this, leaving it to the person himself to hand over the contents of his pockets, they took only wallets and any papers, leaving cigarettes, watches and such articles. When this was over, they were all marched out of the room and down the stairs. Captain Cromie's body had been moved and lay by the wall where the overcoats were hanging. The lower hall was full of soldiers in uniform. When everyone had got his coat on, they were all led out into the street, and formed into rows of five—there were about twenty-five people in all, some of whom were complete strangers and had apparently been passing the building at the moment of the raid. My brother managed to get near to his wife and as they were marched off surrounded by armed soldiers, he whispered to her to try and work into the middle of the crowd. It was drizzling rain and, when they came to the Champ-de-Mars, she saw my brother rapidly tearing up the leaves of a notebook and stamping them into the mud of the huge parade ground. She did her best to cover this by removing her fur from her neck and holding it on her arm. They were led to the Che-Ka headquarters on the Gorokhovaya, and after waiting for nearly an hour in one of the large apartments, they were called by name one at a time, into another room. She and my brother were called in together. On entering this room, they were asked to sit down by a man who had a mass of files before him on a desk. He asked them their duties and a lot of personal questions. After a

few minutes, they were led out by another door and here they were separated by armed soldiers. This was the last she had seen of my brother. She herself was led along endless corridors and numerous flights of stairs, and finally a door was opened and she was told to enter the room. The atmosphere was awful, and there was very little light as it had to filter in through a window that was in one wall and was very dirty. The room had three or four beds in it and these were completely taken up by a number of women who sat on them and also on the floor. There were about forty women there and two sentries with rifles and fixed bayonets sat on chairs by the door. My sister-in-law found out that the women were all either the mothers or the wives of men who were detained in another part of the Che-Ka. They were all very hungry, as there did not seem to be any arrangement about food. Some of the women had been there for weeks and they subsisted by sharing food that friends brought in from outside. At about midnight my sister-in-law had been called out and interrogated at great length. Towards six o'clock on the following evening she was called out and led to another room, where a man told her that she was free. She asked after the men, but the official abruptly told her that it was none of her business and gave her back her handbag. She had come straight to me and now wanted to go to the Netherlands Legation, who, as I was able to tell her, had taken charge of British interests. The days that followed were like a nightmare. Ouritsky, the Chief of the Che-Ka, had been killed by a young Jewish student called Kannigesser (my sister-in-law had been with all of his female relations in the Che-Ka ; even his grandmother, over eighty, was arrested and had been subjected to hours of cross-examination and unspeakable mental torture), and the

town was placarded with posters that shrieked blood at you: "RED TERROR—the answer to White Terror." Searches, wholesale arrests, and the confiscation of what there remained of private property began in real earnest: the gaols and prisons were so jammed that whole barge-loads of prisoners used to be sent out to Kronstadt—the island fortress in the Gulf of Finland. There were terrible stories of these latter deportations—it was said that most of them never reached Kronstadt at all, the prisoners being simply thrown overboard when out of sight of land, and the fact that one never heard of them again lent credence to these rumours.

There followed days, no, weeks, of anxiety. Fear and anxiety were the only two emotions that the population of the city experienced. They were present everywhere and on every face. The foreign women organized kitchens in their apartments and all food was pooled and cooked and parcels were made up to be sent to the Peter-and-Paul Fortress whither the Bolsheviks had transferred the arrested foreigners. My parents' house, being very large, became one of the centres for these activities. After a very few days, we were amazed to receive a note from my brother from the Fortress. It was brought at night by a peasant, who, it transpired, was a sort of employee in the Fortress. My brother wrote to his wife asking her to send him money in small denominations, and to pay the peasant very well and to treat her as they would royalty. He said the peasant could be trusted with the money if it was well enclosed in a small packet. Naturally, we entertained her royally, and after this we were able to keep up regular communication. This person was one of several people employed at the Fortress, and even though the services that it rendered those in prison were paid for

very highly and were performed purely on that account, they were, nevertheless, incalculably valuable to all, so that, although I could write a great deal about this person's association with us, I must not do so, for obvious reasons, there is every possibility of tracing her, and in that case. . . . I still possess some of the "chits"—odd scraps of paper from various members of the Consulate asking us to give messages to certain people or to send certain articles such as soap and warm socks. On the urgent representations of the Netherlands Ambassador, M. Oudendyk, who was then in charge of British interests, and of M. de Seavenus, the Danish Ambassador, who was looking after the French subjects, for they also had all been arrested a few days after the raid on the British Embassy, the Bolsheviks allowed parcels of food to be brought in to those in the Fortress on two days a week. These were, of course, searched very thoroughly, but we found one way of getting notes and money through that was never discovered: my sister-in-law managed to buy a large stock of Amieux Frères sardines. The tins have a double top, and a metal sardine with a pronged tail, which, presumably, can be used as a fork, is clamped to the tin itself. These "sardines" can easily be detached and replaced and we used to insert notes and money between the tin itself and the detachable lid, and although the Bolsheviks cut through all bread, meat and even fruit and cheese! they never bothered about a firmly closed sardine tin imported from France many years before. Our prisoners were kept in awful conditions in the Troubetskoy Bastion of the Fortress, where they were packed twenty to a one-man cell; their fate was more than problematical. After thirteen weeks they were released one late afternoon and were notified that they had to leave the country within

forty-eight hours. I shall never forget that evening. Most of the men had sent their families to England months before and their homes were either abandoned (most of them lived in the Embassy building) or else had been sealed up after their arrest, so, as my parents' house was still functioning, my brother brought a whole crowd along to the house, including the Consul, Mr. Woodhouse (he and Commander Le Page, it appeared, had been suddenly arrested in the street on the night when they did not turn up at the Embassy, and subsequently sent to join the others in the Fortress), Mr. Mackie, the Vice-Consul, Commander Le Page, and many others. They were unkempt and unshaven and clamoured for baths. During the raid on our house, the Bolsheviks had not discovered all of the wine as my mother had had time to set some of the servants at the task of burying a few cases and some of the plate in the garden as soon as the news of the Embassy raid reached her.

She worked another miracle and produced an excellent dinner. My father, who had not slept at home since the raid, was present, and we had plenty of toasts. Everyone was in good spirits, forgetting for the time being all the unpleasantnesses of the past and the uncertainties that lay ahead. The gaol-birds pretended to have forgotten the purpose served by chairs and insisted on eating their food sitting on the floor, they also wanted to sleep on the floors later on and swore that my mother would find their beds undisturbed the following morning. I did not get an opportunity of talking to my brother alone until the next day (his last day in Russia). He was, naturally, terribly upset about Captain Cromie's murder, for, like everybody else who knew Captain Cromie and had worked with him, my brother was full of admiration for this very gallant officer who had succeeded in

bringing the British submarines into the Baltic from the North Sea through the narrow straits of Kattegat and Skagerack in spite of the vigilance of the whole of the German Fleet that had its base a short distance down the coast where the Kiel Canal joins the two seas, only to meet his death at the hands of an unknown gangster. My brother told me that after his return to the Embassy from Smolny, he had been engaged on a report that Captain Cromie was preparing for the Admiralty on the events of the previous night and of that morning. There was also the usual routine work. At a few minutes before four o'clock, he was alone with Captain Cromie in the Naval Room. The telephone rang and a clerk told my brother that a letter had been brought to him and was in the Chancery. The Chancery was situated on the same floor and to reach it one had to traverse the large landing at the top of the first flight of the grand staircase. My brother got his letter and came out again into the corridor. He had not quite reached the landing and had stopped to read the letter just beyond a dark recess which was on his right and where a couple of telephone boxes were installed. He had the letter in one hand and the penknife that was attached to his watch-chain in the other when he sensed rather than saw something in front of him, he looked up and there in front of him stood a man in a dark slouch hat who pointed an automatic pistol at him and immediately yelled "hands up!" At that moment a number of shots rang out and the man dodged off behind my brother. A second later another man came up from behind my brother's back and held a pistol a few inches from his face. My brother said this fellow was very agitated and his finger was almost twitching on the trigger, so that he felt sure it would go off at any moment. Simultaneously something cold was pressed

against my brother's neck, just behind his right ear, and he guessed that it was a pistol held by a second man. My brother's hands, in one of which he still held the letter while from the other his chain and watch dangled, were raised above his head. The man behind him shouted "This is one that has been shooting." Suddenly my brother remembered the incident at breakfast that morning, and he quickly said "You can convince yourselves at once that I have no arms at all." This created a diversion which probably saved my brother's life as the fellow in front of him was so obviously nervous that my brother is sure that in another instant that finger of his would have twitched him into eternity. As it was, he lowered his own gun and telling the man behind to keep my brother covered he bent forward and rapidly searched my brother's hip pockets. Finding nothing, he looked around and noticed the dark recess where the telephone boxes stood. "*Oospel otbrosit*" (he's had time to throw it aside) he muttered and went over to look in the dark corner. Even in the daytime the electric light used to be switched on when one used these telephones, but the man hadn't found the switch and my brother could hear him striking matches. Of course my brother couldn't move as the man behind him still kept the "something cold" pressed up against his neck. From where my brother stood he could see straight in front of him the big landing and beyond it the broad corridor that led to the Ambassador's quarters and the Naval and Military rooms, he could also see about half-way down the stairs to the right ; and suddenly he espied a man holding a revolver coming up the stairs and at the same moment Captain Cromie cautiously coming along the corridor towards the landing. My brother realized to his horror that Cromie was going to meet the man at the angle just as he

reached the stairs. Captain Cromie was certainly not carrying a revolver or pistol. My brother fluttered the paper that he was holding in his hand in an attempt to catch Captain Cromie's eye to warn him to go back, but Cromie never looked up and in a second he had run right into the man. They looked at each other for a moment and then Cromie thrust the man aside and started running down the stairs. At that instant my brother was swung around and pushed through the door that led to the Chancery. He heard a great deal of shooting as he crossed the threshold: presumably these were the shots that the man was firing at Captain Cromie. Everyone in the Chancery was standing with hands in the air, and my brother was placed next to Mr. Boyce against a filing cabinet that stood to the right immediately inside the door. He first learned of Captain Cromie's death when he had to reach over his body in order to take down his overcoat in the hall downstairs. . . . Captain Cromie lay on his back, he was very pale, his eyes were closed and a fly was walking on his left cheek. There was no sign of any pistol lying about.

My father came out of hiding the next day, and the Consul managed to arrange that he should leave Russia with the Consular party and with my youngest sister who was only thirteen, while my mother and my other sister remained in Russia to liquidate the house, and arrange about the horses and the rest of the property. I was at the Finland railway station when they left and shortly afterwards I accompanied my mother and sister from the same station as far as the frontier at Beloostrov and bid them good-bye, little realizing as I did so that two long years were to elapse before I heard a word from them, and a further two years before I saw them again.

## CHAPTER II

### LIPETZK

ALMOST immediately after my parents had left Russia, the food shortage, which had long been grave, became a catastrophe. Famine was now staring us in the face. This famine was driving the people of Petersburg by hundreds of thousands into the countryside to search for bread. During the War the population of the capital had swollen to about three millions. Famine cut down these numbers to six hundred thousand. The first danger signal had been the gradual closing of the shops ; now not a single one was left open and the only places where food was available were the markets. "Food" is not an accurate description of the foul, poisonous stuff sold in these days. Suspicious-looking people stood in the markets offering evil-smelling "lepioshki" (biscuits) actually made from manure, rancid horse flesh, and cakes of which the ingredients were coffee dregs and potato peel ; these were the only things one saw.

Bread-cards were issued but the bread we got was practically uneatable: it was made from pea-flour and sand with bits of wood and straw in it, and was as heavy as lead. It often happened that even this bread-substitute was not available and then the authorities would distribute oats or wheat, a quarter of a pound to each person. In normal times a handful of ordinary oats or wheat would be of small use in anyone's kitchen, but in those days of famine we became

inventive. We roasted them, ground them in the coffee-mill adding roasted acorns, and made a drinkable liquid which we called coffee. These appalling conditions of life rapidly mirrored themselves in the faces of the people. In the streets stood decently clad men and women with grey, hollowed cheeks and great burning eyes. With hands always outstretched they implored a crust of bread. Fainting in the streets was a usual occurrence. Cats and dogs disappeared: they were slaughtered and sold on the markets.

The few horses that remained lost every ounce of flesh and were pitiful to behold. Often they fell dead in the streets, and almost immediately a man with an axe would appear as if from nowhere, and in a short time the wretched creatures had been hacked to pieces and shared among the ravenous passers-by. I remember once, as I was on my way to my parents' house, seeing a horse fall down dead as I passed the Summer Gardens. When I returned three hours later all four legs had disappeared. Actually my husband and I had been luckier than many others. My mother had been a genius as housewife and, despite the food shortage, her cupboard was never completely empty. She had left behind for us a small supply of flour, cereals and sugar, but these were now almost exhausted and we, like the rest, were beginning to lead a half-starving existence. The result was that my health began to fail. I had grown as thin as a shadow and my strength was diminishing daily ; sometimes I used to get spasms of unbearable pain after taking any food whatever. I remember once fainting in the street. When I revived I found myself looking up into a ring of anxious faces and heard murmurs of: "Look at her, it is the famine! And she is well dressed too!"

I grew weaker every day and my husband was

almost at his wits' end when unexpectedly fate helped us.

One day Sasha suddenly came home with the news that he had been mobilized for the Red Army and had been ordered to form the First Red Army Surgical Hospital and take it to the front. It was Civil War. White Troops were invading the South and East of Russia and sweeping the Bolsheviks before them. The Hospital was destined to go to the Government of Tamboff, which was still untouched by the famine. It was one of Russia's most fertile provinces and here, my husband felt, I would be able to build up my strength again.

He set to work energetically to organize the hospital, overcoming his repugnance to accepting an administrative post under the Reds. The view he took was that, as a doctor, it was his duty to alleviate suffering wherever he found it ; moreover, he felt that my days were numbered unless we escaped from Petersburg.

At first the authorities demanded that he should transform a syphilitic hospital into a surgical one! When he had convinced them after great difficulty that this could not be done, he began tracing the doctors and orderlies who had worked with him during the Great War in the Red Cross to have them again in his new hospital, knowing that he could trust and depend on them.

By December 15th a hospital train, composed of goods-wagons, with one third-class carriage into which the staff of thirty were packed, had been assembled, and it duly set off for Tamboff. Sasha, being the head doctor, together with me, our servant Polia and his own orderly Semion, left ten days later, leaving our home in charge of Verochka, my mother's little hunchbacked servant.

Travelling in those days was amazingly complicated and difficult. Thanks to the utter disorganization of transport, there were very few trains and these apparently moved about as the whim and fancy of their drivers and crew dictated. On the other hand, everyone who possibly could, was trying to escape from the famine-stricken towns to the provinces, where the peasants still had food. The railway stations were literally packed with crowds of people—refugees from the cities, hag-ridden by hunger, who waited day after day, huddled together on the waiting-room floor and sustained by mirages of Lands of Plenty in the Provinces. The appearance of a train would whip these miserable creatures into frenzied activity. In dense masses they would storm the carriages, fighting tooth and nail, and smashing windows as they climbed in. They scarcely cared in what direction they were to be carried. All had the same thought—to escape from the barren streets of the cities out into the wide spaces of Russia where the miracle of harvest still came to save men from death.

But for the disastrous disorganization of transport, some at least of the terrors of that famine might have been averted. There was food in many of the villages, but there were no trains to rush it to the centres of dense population.

I have seen trains steam away with men, women and even children hanging on to footboards and buffers and sitting and lying on the roofs of the coaches.

Needless to say, accidents were usual and passed almost unnoticed. Often their strength giving out, the unfortunate creatures released their hold and fell to death at the sides of the track. During winter the intense cold would lighten those tragic trains of their human freight.

Of all the figures in this dark drama the most desperate were the "Bezprizorniye", the waifs of Great War, Civil War, Famine and Class Struggle. In droves they moved over the face of Russia, following the sun and the rumours of food. They slept in the streets and the fields. Their clothes, when they had any, were nightmares of tatters ; their food, when they had any, was either stolen or hardly to be spared by the one who gave it. Precocious vice and the mischances of their reckless journeys made their lives brief, and death itself was perhaps the happiest of their misfortunes.

It was through such a world that my husband and I travelled to the Government of Tamboff. We stayed in Moscow, by then the capital, for ten days, during which my husband did administrative work with the Sanitation authorities. This interlude was refreshing to us all because Moscow, even then, abounded in vitality. We lived at the railway station in a saloon carriage that belonged to the Sanitary Inspector who was a friend of my husband's, and this was a great luxury. Food was also easier to obtain and Polia managed to cook quite eatable meals on the primus. I roamed the teeming streets and passed hour after hour in the Tretiakoff Gallery, to me the most beautiful collection of art in the world. A dear friend of my childhood, the "Golliwog", suddenly turned up with his wife. We had not seen each other since Teresino and this was a most joyful meeting—though we had grown so thin and old that we hardly recognized each other.

When the New Year of 1919 was two days old my husband and I, with Polia and Semion, resumed our journey. The fight to get aboard our train was terrifyingly fierce. At last, however, we somehow managed to get in. It was bitterly cold and my husband

had tied his "bashlik" (the Russian equivalent of the Balaclava) over his cap. This was suddenly pulled down over his eyes as he was helping me into the carriage, and in a moment, a pickpocket had secured his purse and papers.

It was an unusually severe winter with tremendous falls of snow blocking up the rails and detaining trains for hours and days. One night out of Moscow the snow held up our train and the passengers, armed with spades, helped to clear the track. A few hours later at the station of N., we had to change and this time we found we were to continue our journey in the most dilapidated of "teploushkas", or cattle trucks. Great cracks in the walls let in the chill wind and when the stoves failed, the cold became intolerable.

The trucks contained shelves near the roofs and on these we made our beds. Of course it was not possible to undress ; we had even to sleep in our fur coats. My husband told me afterwards how, during those nights, he would listen anxiously for my breathing to make sure I still lived. For six days and nights we underwent the ordeal of travel by "teploushkas". Then came Lipetzk, our destination in the Government of Tamboff.

We found our hospital train, still unloaded, standing in a siding. The unfortunate doctors and staff had spent three weeks on this journey which had taken us six days. They had been snowed up for days on end and finally provisions became so scarce that they killed an ambulance horse for food.

We now moved into the staff carriage already packed to the doors, and I soon regretted parting with the "teploushka", which at least was roomy. We found the citizens of the town very hostile, for they believed us to be fervent Bolsheviks. Trotzky himself had ordered us to occupy the High School which

was the biggest building in the town and transform it into a hospital. The local authorities opposed us in every way possible, but my husband, who had an innate hatred of drastic methods, finally reached a compromise by exercising infinite tact.

Part of the school was cleared for our use and in five days we moved out of the train and into the building. It was modern, spacious and airy, but we had to share one room with the junior doctor and his wife. We had authority to demand quarters in any private house we chose, but rather than inflict ourselves upon the inhabitants, we decided to make the best of the school quarters until we should be able to rent a house.

We had not been more than an hour or two in the school when the building was surrounded by peasants with sleighs loaded with jugs of milk, sacks of psheno (millet), meat and bottles of sunflower oil. Here indeed was a land flowing with milk and honey! The peasants wanted not money but salt. If salt was not available then business could be done with lengths of cloth, old dresses and almost any manufactured goods. Salt, however, was the first desire of these peasants—the Government of Tamboff, a vast granary in our starving country, lacked this common commodity, and there was a real craving for it.

My first impression of Lipetzk was enchanting. This pretty little town, founded by Peter the Great and famous for its springs of mineral waters, was situated on several hills ; the streets were wide, many of them planted with trees, and all the houses (picturesque wooden ones) seemed to have enormous gardens or rather orchards attached to them.

I had never lived in the Central-Russian Provinces, of which the Government of Tamboff is one of the largest ; but my husband, who adored Central Russia,

had often told me of its delightful climate—the marvellous sunny winters with cloudless blue skies and dry bracing frost which so resembled the Siberian ones, the glorious summers, so rich with fruit, the limitless fields of corn and golden sunflowers (it is here that almost all the sunflower oil, which is so much used by the Russian peasants, comes from), and the vast beautiful country.

I remember it was a bright frosty day of 20° Réaumur* when my husband and I, wrapped in my shouba (fur coat), set out for the five-mile walk from the railway station to the town. Snow-covered fields stretched on either side of the road, the trees were covered with frost and glittering like diamonds in the brilliant sunshine, the sky was a deep and cloudless blue.

When we approached Lipetzk I gasped with delight—it looked like a real fairy city—with the frost-covered trees and the golden domes of the churches shining in the dazzling sunshine.

Though living in a room once more was a welcome change after the terrible third-class carriage, it was not very pleasant to share it with the other couple, and while my husband was busy in the hospital, Polia and I roamed about Lipetzk trying to discover lodgings or a small house. But four weeks passed before we found one. A smiling old lady with a shawl on her head called to see me one day and said that, having heard that I was looking for a house, she had come to offer us a little "datcha" (wooden house) that stood in her garden. Polia and I rushed off at once to the "Kolodeznaya oulitza" (Well street), but when we entered the snow-drifted garden—we could not see anything but snow! My surprise was great when suddenly Polia shouted: "Look, Maria Carlovna,

* Below zero. About 45° of frost by Fahrenheit Scale.

there it is! There's the chimney and a bit of the roof! Gospodi! it is all snowed up!'' Sure enough there they were, sticking out of the snow!

Delighted and thrilled at the prospect of digging out my new home from under the snow, I rushed back to the hospital to tell my husband the good news and begged him to let me have a couple of orderlies to help us. He laughingly agreed, and the next morning the orderlies and Polia set to work, in a short time the dearest little log-house emerged from under the snow! It was tiny inside, consisting of one room divided by a light wooden partition. One side would be the kitchen where Polia would sleep, and the other our bed- and sitting-room. The next few days passed in heating and drying and papering our tiny house and at last the great day came when we moved in. I managed to make it delightfully cosy and we settled down happily—it was such a joy to have a little home again after four weeks of life in a room with strangers.

Every morning Tania, a buxom red-cheeked peasant girl dressed in the picturesque Tamboff peasant costume and a sheepskin jacket, brought us a huge earthenwaren krinka (jug) of the loveliest milk, also eggs and butter. Later on peasants would drive up in their sleighs with meat and flour and ''psheno'' that they readily exchanged for any bit of material or a handful of salt (our hospital had brought a large supply of salt and we received rations and these we exchanged). Thanks to the good food, we all quickly regained our strength and health ; to my husband's joy, in a few weeks I had quite recovered and was feeling remarkably well.

When we were ordered from Petersburg we had been told to prepare ourselves for the treatment of battle-casualties, but at Lipetzk the majority of

patients were the local peasants. Occasionally a "Green Army" soldier was brought to the hospital. The "Greens" were opposed equally to the Red and the White factions and were composed of peasants who lived as outlaws in the woods (escaping the recruitment for the Red Army) and preyed upon stray travellers. They had a special hatred of the Communists.

The winter passed quickly, the frosty weather continuing right through. "Butter-week" (Carnival) came—always a great feasting-time in the provinces, and my husband and I received numerous invitations "Na blini" (to eat pancakes). I remember a visit we paid to some peasants in their village—twenty-five miles away. Our host came to fetch us in his sleigh and we simply flew across the white plains till we reached the snowed-up village. I could hardly believe my eyes when we had to drive *over the top* of the very high gate, and actually drove into the village street over the roof of one of the "izbas"!

Lent began and with it came the first feeling of spring. Every day the sun got brighter and warmer and the shadows on the snow longer and bluer ; soon it began to melt gradually and the welcome, joyful dripping from the roofs—the first sound of spring in Russia—began. Then, as the days grew warmer still, the real thaw set in, causing the snow and ice in the crevices and ditches to disappear, and torrents of running water to dash merrily along, down the hilly streets of Lipetzk, filling the whole town with a joyful, rippling sound. It was marvellous how quickly the great quantitites of snow vanished. When Easter came only white patches of it remained in the great "balkas" (ravines) and crevices.

Easter brought with it radiant weather, and in a few days the whole town suddenly burst into blossom,

so that Lipetzk seemed drowned in a sea of blossoming orchards.

Then came the summer, bringing with it innumerable riches—a perfect profusion of strawberries (both wild and cultivated), cherries and every other fruit. The Central Governments have always been the great orchards and fruit-gardens of Russia and it was from here that they supplied all the fruit-markets of Petersburg and the northern towns.

The summer passed only too quickly. August was drawing near and things were becoming unsettled. There were no newspapers whatever, but in spite of this all sorts of news circulated. In August the dark rumour of the terrible assassination of the Imperial Family was whispered—but somehow we could not bring ourselves to believe this dreadful news.

White Forces were advancing, and detachments of Cossacks were capturing towns like Tamboff, Voronej, Orel, only to lose them again in the seesaw of guerilla warfare.

Reports reached us that we were soon to evacuate Lipetzk, and this news greatly disturbed my husband.

I was now expecting my first baby and my husband was alarmed at the prospect of our having to make indefinitely long journeys in cattle-trucks once again.

About the middle of August Tamboff was again taken by Machno and his Cossacks, and orders came from Moscow for our immediate evacuation. It was, however, some days before my husband managed to secure a train of goods-wagons into which our hospital was now loaded, and we left our dear Lipetzk with many regrets. Our destination was unknown—we just rolled on vaguely in the direction of Moscow. . . .

My husband, being the head doctor, was entitled to a separte "teploushka" and in this, once again,

we made our home. A camp-bed was put in it for me and my husband used to rope me to it when I slept because of the terrible jolting. I was feeling wonderfully fit and well and thoroughly enjoyed the strange wandering throughout Russia in spite of the rough surroundings and conditions we travelled in. Week after week passed and we rolled on from one town to another, sometimes making sudden stops which lasted several days, in the open fields or at a tiny junction—either all the lines were blocked or our engine suddenly lacked fuel. Sometimes the news would come that the next town we were bound for had just been taken by the "Whites" and we would have to turn back hurriedly. Several times we only just escaped being captured. When we reached Eletz (Government of Orel) we found the town in a state of frantic excitement—a detachment of Cossacks had been seen but a few miles away and was expected any minute. Our hospital only just managed to escape—Eletz was taken precisely fifteen minutes after our departure.

We stayed in turns at Voronej, Tamboff, Tula, Orel. I loved seeing those typical towns of Central Russia, the country of Tolstoy and Turgenev—that I had read so much about and always wanted to see. Once we were held up for ten days in the Government of Tula in the charming little town of Belev. Life in this sleepy little place seemed almost untouched either by war or revolution, provisions were plentiful, the market full of vegetables, meat and fruit—it seemed quite unbelievable. But this was almost the only place where we were able to get real food. We lived mostly on "antonovkas" the favourite Russian apples, juicy and scented. There was a tremendous harvest that year and no export, so the peasants practically gave them away. Our orderlies used to

bring enormous sacks full of them and my "teploushka" was a regular store, scented right through with the lovely fruit.

Often in our wanderings we used to meet enormous trains of Bolshevik troops. These vestiges of the Red Army were indeed a sorry sight. Barefooted, ragged, hungry, unfortunate men driven about like cattle from one end of the country to the other. They used to slink along the lines picking up any remains of food that had been thrown away, filling their iron pots with herring heads and potato peels of which they made soup. Sometimes when their train stopped near a village, they would swarm out like locusts into the fields to dig up the peasants' potatoes.

We had jolted about for almost six weeks now and at last received the order to settle down in Riazan. It was the end of September and I was expecting my baby within the next few weeks. My husband was getting terribly anxious about me, but I was feeling extraordinarily well and was blissfully unconscious of the danger I was in.

Soon after we arrived in Riazan the news reached us that the Allies were at last coming to the rescue—together with General Yudenitch, who was leading a great army to liberate St. Petersburg. Of course all our thoughts turned there at once—I had only one hope, one wish—to get back home before St. Petersburg was cut off.

Riazan was only a night's journey from Moscow and several days after our arrival my husband, Polia and I boarded a train to get there. On the way we heard that Yudenitch's army was rapidly approaching St. Petersburg and there were even rumours that Tsarskoye Selo was occupied. This news whipped us up to terrible excitement—everything seemed to be concentrated in one wish—to reach home in time.

When we arrived at Moscow, however, we were met with the startling news that Tsarskoye Selo and Pavlovsk were taken and St. Petersburg entirely cut off. I remember I burst into tears on hearing this. The suspense had been so great, salvation had seemed so near—and we had just missed it! Seeing my distress, my husband resolved to try and risk getting there and in spite of the warning that the last train bound for St. Petersburg would probably not get there, we boarded it and dashed off, hoping for the best. All that night our train rushed along, now and again stopping abruptly. The next morning we were slowly nearing Kolpino (a small station about fifteen miles away from St. Petersburg) when suddenly our train came to a standstill—shells were bursting right and left! A battle was actually raging, and from our carriage windows we could see the Red Cross Ambulances and the Dressing Station, and wounded being brought in on the stretchers.

For four hours our train stood there waiting in suspense—were we going to slip through or would we have to return to Moscow? I sat praying fervently. The strain of these few hours was terrible. At last our train gave a move—forward! We were saved! In about half an hour it steamed into the Nikolaevsky Station. All seemed perfectly calm and quiet—we listened in vain for the sound of shooting, nothing was heard. St. Petersburg looked empty and dilapidated as my husband and I walked slowly down the Nevsky to our flat in the former Court Hospital, Polia following behind with the man who was pushing a truck with our luggage.

# CHAPTER III

## TSAPIK

MY little boy "Tsapik" was born in 1919—that terrible year of famine and Civil War.

It was the middle of November, the weather was raw and drizzly, and, owing to the almost complete lack of fuel, the houses also were cheerless and cold; for the same reason, most of the streets of St. Petersburg (as it then still was) were in complete darkness and there was no vehicular traffic whatever—the electric power stations could not function, and the streets presented a curious sight with nothing but pedestrians, shuffling along in the peculiar stillness; and gloom and depression hung everywhere.

At home we had a small oil lamp which we carried about from room to room as it was the only means of illumination that we possessed in the entire apartment.

I had not been feeling well all day, but did not attach any particular importance to the fact. When, however, on sitting down to our evening meal, I felt a deadly faintness come over me, my husband noticed it and became very alarmed. Without any more ado, he said I was to get ready at once and go to the nursing home.

I started getting my things together listlessly—just a sponge-bag and a dressing-gown and some slippers, while my husband, nervous and impatient at my slowness, kept urging me to hurry. I was blissfully unconscious of the situation and hardly seemed to

realize what was about to happen, so I dawdled on and it was dusk outside before I was ready. Since there was no means of transporting even a person in my condition, and we had to walk, my husband had asked one of the hospital's under-nurses to accompany us, and she held my arm whilst my husband led the way. The pavements were in a frightful condition. Whole paving stones were missing and there were deep ruts and slimy mud-holes every few yards; scarcely any of the street lamps were lit and therefore walking was positively dangerous. We had barely walked a few hundred yards, when I felt the first terrific spasm of pain shoot through me and was compelled to stop. A little further on I had another spasm and had to stop again. This went on, with the spasms increasing in frequency so that I had to stop at every few yards, while my husband, almost frantic with anxiety, implored me to try and hurry. "Please, madam, do try to walk a little faster," urged the nurse; "why, only the other day one of our women was walking to the Home and her baby was born in the street!" This startled me into a full realization of the position for the first time, and grimly I determined to hurry in spite of the pains and our progress became a little more rapid. It was a long way and to me it seemed interminable. Owing to the impossibility of heating them, all the big clinics had been closed and there were only three or four small ones left open in the whole town. There had been several cases of new-born children being frozen.

Finally, after over an hour's walk, we reached the Municipal Maternity Home and entered the dark, badly kept yard. It took us some time to find the back door (all front door entrances were kept barred and closed in those days) and we stumbled about in the darkness with difficulty so that I was quite

exhausted when we finally entered the Home. It was the most dismal of places—dark and dreary, and how bitterly cold! There was no electric light, just tiny night-lights here and there and they seemed only to intensify the cold while I waited in the dim corridor for my examination by a midwife. Presently she came and bustled me into a small room. Having examined me, she brightly announced that the event would not occur until the next day! "Plenty of time," she added. On hearing this I at once made up my mind that I would not stay that night in the Home—I would go back home and return again the following morning. Yes, in spite of the walk, in spite of the pains, in spite of everything! Anything was better than a night in this dreadful, dismal hole! But of course my husband and the midwife would not hear of this mad idea and finally persuaded me to give it up. My husband returned to our apartment for my pillow and some blankets and also for a bundle of wood for the stove in my private ward as I was to be one of the very lucky ones: none of the wards were heated and they were so terribly cold that most of the unfortunate women lay in bed in their fur coats!

As I stood in the corridor awaiting my husband's return I felt wretched and unhappy. Someone was moaning in a ward near by and I could hear the whimpering of a baby. Oh, if I only had somebody of my own people with me! If only my mother were here! Why did I never ask her how it all happened? Would it be a little girl? I hoped it would. I did so want a little baby girl! As I stood there with these thoughts passing through my mind, an old woman approached along the corridor. She wore a white cap and an apron and was evidently one of the under-nurses or "nannies". She was quite grey-haired and although her face was wrinkled and old, she had

piercing dark eyes that seemed to look right through me. "You are going to have a son, little *Barinia*," she said, looking at me intently. I started. "How do you know that? How can you tell?" I asked her almost defiantly. She smiled slyly. "I have been here for forty-two years, little lady," she said, "and have never yet made a mistake. You will see to-morrow—it will be a boy." And with that she disappeared, while I wondered whether she was a witch in disguise. Very soon the pains became more acute and the midwife led me away to the operating-room. It was terribly cold in there and I remember shivering as I paced the room between the attacks of pain. Finally I had to lie down altogether and I felt the cold more than ever. The hours passed and the pains grew worse. My husband returned with pillows and blankets and the bundle of logs for when the baby would arrive. I lay on the operating table and from time to time I would implore my husband to give me a little anæsthetic—"Surely you can get some, Sasha, you are a doctor—surely they will let you!" "Impossible, my darling, there is none to be had. Be brave as you always are, it will be over ever so soon." The night dragged on. Dawn was breaking and the pains were almost unbearable, also the cold. From time to time, as I opened my eyes between the spasms, I would catch sight of my poor husband doing vigorous Swedish exercises in a corner in order to keep up his blood circulation, and I could not help smiling. The midwife came in and fussed around me. "Go and fetch the Professor now, doctor," she said; "by the time he is dressed and gets here, it may be time." My husband rushed off. When he returned with the Professor an hour later, our little son Tsapik was there to greet them! I lay there smiling—all the pains had stopped instantly and I felt extraordinarily happy

and proud. While I was waiting to be carried into my private room, the old nannie suddenly appeared in the doorway. She walked into the room and bending over me she said triumphantly: "There, what did I tell you, little lady? You see I was right, it is a boy!" and she turned away muttering to herself and left the room. My conviction that she was a witch was stronger than ever and remains to this day.

When I was carried to my private room, the birch logs that my husband had brought were crackling merrily in the stove. My little boy had been taken into the bathroom where all new-born babies were kept as this was the only room that the authorities could afford to heat. I felt very nervous lest he get mixed up with the other babies, to the great amusement of the midwife. She assured me that this could not possibly happen, and when a few minutes later, my baby was brought to me and I saw his little face, I knew at once that I would recognize it anywhere. It was such a "special" one and I knew that he could never possibly get mixed up with any other baby. Two weeks passed. Every day my husband brought a bundle of logs on his back and so my room was nice and warm. But the food was scanty and very poor and I was recovering very slowly and still felt very weak. I knew I would feel much better and happier at home, but the question was how to get me there. I was far too feeble to walk and, as I have already said, there were no other means of communication. My husband was puzzling his head over the problem, and then, one day, it was solved in the strangest manner. He was on his way to visit me, when one of the old regime's carriages-of-state, pulled by two splendid horses in their magnificent harness, drove by slowly. Even the coachman perched high on his box still wore the Imperial scarlet livery with the yellow border and

Romanoff crests although it was faded and tattered almost beyond recognition. All the court carriages and horses had been seized by the State and were now used by only the most important Commissars. But even so they were a rare sight in the streets of the dreary capital. Suddenly, as he passed my husband, the coachman drew up and, leaning from his box, exclaimed joyfully, "How are you, doctor?" My husband looked up and recognized one of his patients whom he had operated on some time previously. The carriage was empty and the man explained that he had just taken one of the "new masters" (as he ironically called them) somewhere and was to fetch him again presently. A sudden idea occurred to my husband: "Look here, Ivan," he asked, "would you do something for me?"—"Surely I will, your honour, I'll do anything for you, you ought to know that," said Ivan. And then my husband told him about me and the baby and explained his dilemma. "Why, of course I'll come with the carriage and take the *Barinia* home to-morrow," said the good man jovially, "she will pass as the Commissar's wife! I'll get my chief to write out an order for the carriage. Besides, he knows you also, doctor, you operated on his wife last year. He'll do it for you all right." And sure enough, on the following morning the gorgeous court carriage stood outside the back-yard entrance of the dingy Municipal Maternity Home. My husband held the precious little bundle while I was carefully helped into the carriage by the "old witch" and another nurse, and as we drove off I felt far more like Cinderella going to the ball in the fairy coach than the wife of an omnipotent Commissar!

## CHAPTER IV

### TSAPIK'S CHRISTENING

FOR us the next important event of that year was my little boy's christening. We decided to have it at Christmas—on the 27th of December. Usually, in the old days, a christening was the occasion for a great feast, but not in 1919! One could buy nothing in those days. All shops were closed, the markets were empty and it was possible to get flour or cereals only in the villages, where the peasants were willing to exchange these necessities for clothing or goods. I had managed to exchange an old coat of my husband's for a sack of rye flour and had also got some buckwheat for an old pair of boots. Butter and sugar were practically unobtainable, they were luxuries that we had not seen for months and we missed them most. But I had a little box of saccharine and my servant had got me some cranberries from her village, so I decided to make what was known as a "Soviet cake". It was a mixture of squashed cranberries, rye flour, saccharine and cinnamon! I remember mixing it tremulously and putting it in the oven to bake, having previously, as was the usual custom, greased the tin with the stump of a tallow candle—there was no other grease! I also made some rye-flour biscuits, the ingredients this time consisting of rye flour, carraway seeds, water and salt. And this was to be the "feast" for my poor little Tsapik's christening. But in spite of this poor spread, I had a great surprise in store for

my guests: two bottles of real champagne—no less! My mother's old servant Vera had managed to save them from the cellar when my parents' house had been looted and great was my delight when she proudly presented them to me on the morning of the christening. I could hardly believe my eyes! Champagne! And how absurd the bottles looked next to the "Soviet cake" and the miserable biscuits. But what a surprise for my guests. Among them was to be a very honoured one—our dear old friend Professor Koni, the famous jurist and writer, contemporary and friend of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Turgenev. He was to be my Tsapik's godfather, and in spite of his great age, he was then well over seventy, he was wonderfully active and was going to attend personally. He was one of the most brilliant talkers I have ever met and it was a perfect joy to listen to him—one forgot everything else in one's absorption.

We tidied up our combination bed-sitting, drawing-and-dining-room, in one corner of which, under the ikon, stood a small Christmas tree, a present brought from the country. I had discovered some old candle holders in a box; but, alas, there were no candles. Then on Christmas Eve, while in church, a bright idea had struck me so I bought some wax tapers and brought them home where I cut them in three parts and these made lovely Christmas tree candles. The room was well heated, everything looked cheerful and bright, it was a lovely frosty winter day outside and the sun's rays lit up the room gaily. We completed the arrangements for the ceremony and warmed the water for the font which had been fetched from the church (in the Orthodox religion the child is completely immersed in the water). Tsapik's godmother, my dear friend and war-time companion Sister Genia, had come up from the country that morning and was

helping me, while dear faithful Varvara Ivanovna and Verochka bustled about preparing things.

The old priest who had married us arrived at four o'clock and a few minutes later Koni came in. It was getting dusk so we drew the curtains and lit the lights and the ceremony began. Tsapik behaved beautifully and never uttered a sound till he was dipped into the font, and even then he was heroic and only gave a tiny gasp. He was given the beautiful name of Vladimir in honour of the great Russian Saint which was also the name of his paternal grandfather. After the ceremony, the champagne corks popped merrily and we all drank to the little hero's health and future. Then the steaming samovar was brought in and we all sat down at the banqueting table adorned by the "Soviet cake" and the rye biscuits. . . . These proved to be very good and were really a great success and I cannot remember ever having presided over a happier meal. To this day Tsapy's christening day remains a bright and lovely memory. It was all so *gemütlich*—the lighted Christmas tree standing in the corner—the church tapers looked so lovely—and the dear, beloved faces round our table.

Koni was in one of his best moods and we sat there spellbound listening to his marvellous reminiscences. He told us of Tolstoy and of how he used to visit him at Yasnaya Poliana ; also of the interesting cases in his practice—many of which, we learnt, were used as their subject in the works of some of the world's greatest writers. It was thus that I learnt that Koni gave Tolstoy the subject for "Resurrection" (it had been one of Koni's most interesting cases). It appeared that he had also provided the subject for Tolstoy's "Living Corpse". The characters seemed to take on life as he talked and he transported one by his eloquence to the very scenes and places which he

was describing. He talked now of Tchekhoff, now of Gorbunoff, both of whom he had known well, telling us some funny anecdote of the one or some intimate adventure that had befallen the other, and the time flew by unnoticed as, oblivious, we listened to the great savant: three samovars had been emptied before the party broke up. As Koni took tender leave of his little godson, he told us that it was the loveliest and happiest christening that he had *ever* attended. I am sure that he spoke the truth.

# CHAPTER V

## POLIA

SOON after Tsapik's christening, my husband was mobilized by the Red Army and had to leave for the front as consulting surgeon. It was for war with Poland. I remained in Petersburg with my little two months' old son, living in the one room of our flat for which we could manage to get fuel—and that not always. My faithful servant Polia, who had been with my mother before I was married, was with me and it was really thanks to her that we managed to exist through that difficult winter. She was a peasant girl from one of the northern governments, sturdy and energetic, she could cope with any of the Bolsheviks and always managed to get what she wanted, however hopeless the situation. When there was no fuel to be had and we had come to our last log, Polia would wait till it got dark, then putting on her sheepskin jacket and tying a warm shawl over her head (she lived in her valenki or snow-boots—so did not need to put them on) and pulling out the big wooden sleigh which was one of her most treasured private belongings, she would set out with a grim face on one of her "expeditions". "Where are you going, Polia?" I would ask her timidly. "Never you mind, Maria Carlovna, it's all right, don't you worry, I'll be back soon. I'll show these dogs something! I'm not going to see my mistress and little master frozen."—"Oh, Polia, please be careful, I'm sure they will catch you and put you in

prison—think how terrible that will be! Really, really I would rather you didn't go—it's too risky." But no one could ever stop Polia if once she had made up her mind. "It's our wood," she would reply stubbornly; "the old *Barinia* got it for you and I'll be hanged if I'm going to let those scoundrels burn it when we haven't a log in the house, and if they won't give it to us I'm going to steal it." And off she would march. She was going to my parents' house situated on the other side of the Neva where there was a large store of wood—enough to last several winters—that my mother had bought before she had gone away to England, intending me to have it. The house and the wood had been confiscated by the Bolsheviks, and Polia, who knew every corner of the old place and was on friendly terms with the old dvornik (yardman), would set out when it got dark and usually return with a sleigh full of lovely birch-logs that used to last baby and me for quite a long time. But on one occasion she was less fortunate.

It was a bitterly cold night in February. We had come to our last log the night before. Polia had been out all day trying to find some wood to buy—but had returned with an empty sleigh—there was none to be had anywhere. The temperature in our room was getting lower and lower. I had heaped all the warmest things I could find on my Tsapik and was afraid he would be suffocated. In spite of my fur coat and valenki I was quite numb with the cold myself and was sitting huddled up miserably on the sofa, waiting for it to grow dark enough for Polia to set out—I was not going to stop her this time! We had also run out of charcoal, so we could not even light the samovar in order to warm ourselves at least with some hot tea. At last Polia set out. Two hours passed. Colder and colder grew the room, but Tsapik was warm in his

little cradle, covered right up to his little nose. The hours dragged on ; it was almost nine o'clock, but no signs of Polia. Anxiously I listened to every sound—hoping to hear the welcome footsteps—but everything was silent. I grew very hungry ; luckily there was some black bread so I munched that longing for Polia to appear. I pictured to myself how she would light the stove and how, when the birch-logs had crackled for a little time, she would rake out some glowing charcoal to light the samovar and make some welcome tea. When the stove had been heated, we would rake aside the embers and put our pot of kasha to cook. How lovely and warm it would be! What a mercy it was that baby was sleeping so long: God grant that he sleep on till the room was heated. I comforted myself with these thoughts whilst the time dragged on. Suddenly the clock struck eleven. I started—something must have happened to Polia! Why she had been away for five hours now. They must have arrested her. Poor Polia! But one can trust her to get out of it all safely. But what is going to happen to Tsapik and me? If the room is not heated to-night, he will be frozen in the morning. And what can I do? I can't leave him alone and go out in search of wood at this time of the night, besides there is nowhere to go. Terrified, I tried to think of something but my brain refused to work. Then suddenly I heard Polia's footsteps. I rushed to the door excitedly to help her carry in the logs. There she stood, her face dark and sullen, her arms empty. "You haven't brought any?" I asked in dismay. "They caught me just as I was off with the sleigh full—and they took the whole lot, the devils!" she said. " It is by mere chance that I got away, they wanted to drag me to the militia—but I gave them the slip."

This disappointment after all the suspense and cold

was too much and here I suddenly burst into tears. "But what are we going to do, Polia?" I sobbed; "what's going to happen to Tsapinka—look at the thermometer—it is only three degrees—he will be frozen in the morning." "Don't cry, Maria Carlovna. I'll get you some—you'll see—even if I swing for it," said Polia resolutely and she dashed off. In about ten minutes she returned with an armful of logs—damp soaking ones—but it was wood. Quickly we put them in the stove—but alas they would not burn in spite of all our efforts. Polia disappeared again and suddenly I heard a dreadful noise in the kitchen—rushing there I found her chopping up the kitchen table with an axe. "This will burn," she exclaimed cheerfully; "you'll see what a roaring fire we'll have in a minute." True enough, the kitchen table made a glorious blaze and our room got warmer and warmer. Waking up Tsapinka I gave him his well-deserved meal, whilst Polia raked out some glowing charcoals and lit the samovar. Soon we were both enjoying our hot tea whilst the soup and kasha were cooking in the stove.

The kitchen table lasted us for two days and by then Polia had been able to get a load of logs from the country. But where would we have been without my brave faithful Polia that winter?

# CHAPTER VI

## KONI

DURING the difficult years of revolution, famine and civil war one of my chief joys was to visit Koni.

This wonderful old man, one of the outstanding figures in Russian Law and literature, famous both as an orator and as a man of letters, had also held some of the highest official posts under the Old Regime, being Senator and Member of the Council of State. This fact exposed him to all the dangers of senseless persecution that the Bolsheviks directed against the higher Intelligentsia and ruling classes. Nevertheless Koni did not follow the example of the greater part of his colleagues, who had fled abroad but, on the contrary he refused to leave his country during the terrible calamity that had befallen her. He considered that at this moment of supreme chaos when all traditions, ideals, principles and moral standards were being ruthlessly destroyed and trampled upon, his duty was to stay because it was now that his country needed him most and that he would be betraying Russia if he left her to seek his own safety and welfare.

"It is my duty to stay," he used to say, "to remain with the unfortunate younger generation which is growing up in this chaos without ideals or traditions, without anyone to guide them through this dark, stormy sea of destruction and hatred, to help them by showing them all that was beautiful and great and

eternal in our past. I must acquaint them with the treasures of our literature and with the noble characters of our history ; with the wonderful personalities of our immortal writers. If I left Russia at this moment I would feel like a traitor."

So he stayed on, right through those terrible years of hardship and privation, working harder than he had ever done before, reading numerous lectures at various institutions and schools, writing his memoirs and the biographies of famous authors, and re-editing his works. (From 1918 till 1927—the year of his death—Koni had read over a thousand lectures.) He established a course of "Ethics of Common Life", lectured on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, telling his young and eager audience, in his marvellously simple way, about his great contemporaries and friends, making the distant though well-known names into living, lovable people. He taught them patiently and affectionately, keeping alive within them the great ideals of truth, honour, and duty.

In spite of his failing health and growing infirmity (he was very lame), Koni gave away most of his hours of rest and recreation to them. Daily one could meet the small bent figure, a stick in each hand ("on all my fours" as he used to say jokingly) hurrying along the Nevsky to his various lectures, walking because there were no other means of transport.

The devotion of his youthful audience was really quite remarkable and found expression in the most touching offerings which, however humble or even ridiculous they may appear in present times, were comparable to that of the widow's mite in the sacrifice which their presentation often entailed to the donors. Thus his work-table would generally bear mysterious and anonymous small packets containing sugar, cigarettes or even that rarest of luxuries—white flour.

Sometimes on returning home, he would find a load of birch-logs that some admiring member of his audience had secretly deposited on his doorstep. So, in spite of the famine, the lack of transport, of light and fuel, this grand old man heroically continued his work, lecturing in cold and draughty halls (it was in this way that he caught the cold that developed into the pneumonia from which he died): faithful to the end to the ideals and principles that he had set himself.

Few were the men evoking such admiration, love and respect as were those surrounding Koni in Russia ; the mere mention of his name aroused general interest.

He leapt into fame in 1879 when he was the Presiding Judge in the trial of a *cause célèbre*, that of Vera Zassoulitch. It was a political case, and as such was given prominence, but the great sensation was the speech made by the President thanks to which the accused was acquitted! This was unprecedented in those days of absolutism and autocracy. The wrath of those in power was thoroughly roused and Koni's disdain for compromise and love of truth and justice cost him his career—this was no small thing as he was about to be appointed Minister of Justice. It was after this that he took to literature, and in later years he always used to say that he was glad of what had happened, and it was in truth a remarkable example of good coming out of evil, because before the outbreak of the Revolution Koni had already attained the highest honours that his country could bestow on him and was a Senator and a Member of the Council of State in addition to being honorary member of countless Russian and foreign learned societies.

Koni lived in a charming old-fashioned and roomy apartment in the Nadejdinskaya—a street leading off the upper end of the famous Nevsky Prospect.

His apartment was full of light and sunshine and was beautifully kept by his faithful old housekeeper, Shousha. One felt the delightful atmosphere of the place and something of the personality of the owner the moment one crossed the threshold, for it was all so restful and in such good taste ; every object seemed to have some significance and a tale to tell. The loveliest room was his study. The walls were lined half-way up with bookcases and above them were autographed portraits of Russia's greatest writers. There was a big writing-table, a broad divan, and cosy armchairs stood by the big open fireplace. One usually found him seated at his table, deep in his writing or absorbed in some book. Koni had a wonderful way of welcoming his visitors. His face would light up with the brightest and kindest of smiles, and the unaffected warmth and sincerity of his greeting immediately put one at ease.

He had known me from the days of my youth and also greatly loved and trusted my husband, who was his doctor and friend, and we had the great privilege of coming in to see him whenever we wanted to, even without being announced. Koni was the most perfect, the most pleasant of hosts. Without being the least fussy, he was wonderfully thoughtful and attentive and, born of his great sympathy, his intuition was almost uncanny: he seemed to divine the object of his caller's visit and would draw him out with exquisite tact. Many came to seek his advice, and some to unburden themselves ; others just for the joy of listening to him talk. I have never heard anyone who was so interesting. As one listened to him one had only one desire—and that was he should not cease talking. His characters and his subject took life and colour thanks to his wonderful powers of description, and his rich and varied vocabulary and his profound know-

ledge of Russia and of Russian life, history and literature was astounding. Owing to his great sense of humour he could give a discourse on the most remote and abstract subjects without boring his audience for an instant, and he had the reputation of being one of the wittiest debaters of his time. His utter charm is well illustrated by a little confession that he once made to me: he told me that he had set himself a rule never to allow a person to leave his house without having caused him to smile ; and he had an endless store of really funny stories and anecdotes wherewith to ensure the keeping of this truly golden rule.

After he became Tsapinka's godfather he considered us, in the Russian way, as relations and used to tease me calling me his "koumoushka"—which is the peasant term for the new relationship. "Ah, here comes my koumoushka—the sunshine of my life," he would exclaim merrily when I would rush in for a moment to see him, and then at once would follow a whole series of questions about his little godson of whom he was very fond. When Tsapik got bigger I used to bring him with me, drawing him in his sleigh, and then what excitement in the Koni household! Shousha would rush down and help me to carry up the sleigh with Tsapik proudly seated in it, then I would "unpack" him, and he would dash straight into his godfather's study, where "Uncle Stick" as he disrespectfully called him (because Koni always walked with a stick) would welcome the little rascal with outstretched arms. Then my naughty little scamp would start walking around, opening all the drawers and asking: "What is this or that?", till I would at last hand him over to Shousha, who adored him and who always managed to absorb his attention with a lump of sugar, for lack of sweets.

Koni loved his little godson and used laughingly to

call him "Lord Palmerston"—assuring me that he strikingly resembled the great English statesman. "Look at his forehead, Koumoushka, it's exactly like Palmerston's, I assure you it is!" he would say, "You'll see, he's going to be a great man some day, remember what I say!"

Koni's lifelong, faithful friend Elena Vassilievna Ponomareva, one of the most charming and noble-minded women I have ever met (she always seemed to me to be the very personification of the Turgenev type), was often worried about Anatoli Feodorovitch's failing health, and the privations he suffered, and sometimes she would try to persuade him to give up his idea of staying on in Russia, begging him to go abroad till the worst was over, and come back again in a few years, when things were more settled. But Koni would not hear of such a thing.

I remember one day, finding him sitting in his unheated library and looking so pale and thin that a sudden fear came over me and I said impulsively: "Dear Anatoli Feodorovitch—why won't you go abroad? These conditions of life are killing you—you mustn't risk your health and life by staying on here. Russia needs you, you are too precious for us Russians to lose—why, you are almost the only living link with the noblest and greatest period of Russian life and history. You have yet so much to say, so much to write about, and it is so important for Russia that you should say it, that you should finish your memoirs. Living abroad in normal conditions you will be able to work peacefully at your books, whereas here you have very little time to give to them always being dragged about from lecture to lecture. Your books are far more important than lecturing to those youngsters. Do go abroad, dear Anatoli Feodorovitch, you owe it to Russia." Koni listened to me

patiently, and when I had finished he looked at me gravely and said: "When one's mother is agonizing on her death-bed, one does not leave her. Our country is our Mother and she is at present in agony. It is impossible to run away. There is yet another reason why I cannot go. Here, read this letter and after that tell me—have I the right to go and live abroad or not." I took the letter he held out to me and started reading it. It was from one of the students who regularly came to his lectures. In the most touching and pathetic words the young girl thanked him for having remained in Russia "with us", for not having left "like everybody else". She thanked him for his wonderful lectures, for telling them about the great writers he had known so well, for showing them, this poor younger generation, that life could be, had actually been, beautiful and full of meaning.

Tears came to my eyes as I read the letter—it was so pathetic, so simple and sincere. "Yes, Anatoli Feodorovitch," I said as I gave it back to him, "you are right, you must not, you cannot leave as long as you get such letters." He smiled pensively, "It is a great thing to feel that they need me," he said, "I could not have a greater reward than this letter, could I?"

One evening in 1920 I came in to see him for evening tea and found an unusual scene in the dining-room. A huge piece of butter stood on the table and a still bigger piece of smoked lard—luxuries that cost a fortune and that we, inhabitants of starving Petrograd, had not seen for ages. Elena Vassilievna and Shousha were radiant that at last their dear Anatoli Feodorovitch was going to have some proper nourishment, and hastened to tell me where the wonderful delicacies came from.

That morning there had been a ring at the kitchen

door and when Shousha opened it a strange man came in. Handing her a big and rather heavy parcel he asked her to kindly give it to Professor Koni. "Who are you?" asked Shousha. "Oh, my name doesn't matter, the Professor doesn't know me ; just give him the parcel, please," he said.

Shousha took the parcel in to Anatoli Feodorovitch. Opening it they found, to their great astonishment, several pounds of butter and of smoked Ukrainian lard. "But this is a priceless gift, I cannot possibly accept it!" exclaimed Anatoli Feodorovitch, "ask the man to come here, I want to speak to him." But when Shousha returned to the kitchen to fetch him, she found that the mysterious visitor had gone. Running out into the street she brought him back. The stranger, a tall middle-aged man, entered the study timidly, looking shy and uncomfortable. "Can you please tell me who this parcel is from?" asked Anatoli Feodorovitch. "It is from me," answered the man simply. "It is very kind of you, but I cannot possibly accept such a valuable present," said Anatoli Feodorovitch ; "why, I don't even know you." "That is true, but *I* know *you*," said the man quietly. He then told them that he was a conductor on one of the Siberian trains. During the long journeys he had been reading Koni's books *Along Life's Road*, *Doctor Haas*, and others, and had been so enchanted with them that he resolved to bring the author some token of his gratitude and admiration. There was no famine in Siberia, and provisions were still plentiful, though expensive. So he had put aside his salary and been able to get the butter and lard. "Eat it, and may it bring you health," he said bowing low to Anatoli Feodorovitch, "and thank you a thousand times for your wonderful books, they are a joy and a comfort to all those who read them."

Anatoli Feodorovitch was profoundly touched and asked the man to stay. They had a long conversation and A.F. was delighted with his intelligence, his eagerness to learn and his lively interest. After that he often used to come to the Nadejdinskaya—every time he was back in Petrograd ; I met him several times and was also much impressed by his unusual personality.

In 1927 at Koni's funeral many brilliant and moving speeches were delivered at his grave by the most eminent members of the Academy of Science. When they had finished, a modest figure stepped forward and asked permission to say a few words. Looking at him I recognized the conductor of 1920. He spoke quietly and simply but with real feeling and talent—the man was a born orator.

He told us how, some years ago, he had first read Koni's books and what a wonderful impression they had made on him. How he had afterwards got to know Anatoli Feodorovitch and what a great difference this had made in his life and on his whole outlook. He related with touching gratitude how he had sometimes come to Koni for advice and encouragement (in difficult moments of his life), how kind and sympathetic and full of understanding A.F. had always been, how courteously he treated everybody—making no difference between the great of this world and the lowly ones, because in every one he saw only the Human Being. He ended up by saying that his greatest treasure was three letters that Koni had written to him. "When I die—I have asked my wife to bury me with those letters under my head. The earth will surely seem the lighter for them," were his last words and they brought the tears to the eyes of many of those who stood round the grave.

Some day, perhaps, a biographer, worthy of so

great a task, will undertake the writing of the varied and interesting career of this wonderful old man, and will succeed in making his unusual personality stand out clearly in all its greatness and beauty, especially against the dark background of the last ten years of his life.

But those of us who had the great good fortune to know Koni personally, who lost in him a friend, will for ever feel the gap his death has made in our lives, and will always cherish the dear remembrance of him in our grateful memory.

# CHAPTER VII

## STANLEY

ON a dark November evening in 1921 I was hurrying along one of the dingy little streets leading to the Ekateringofsky Prospect where our old family dentist lived. He had kindly agreed to attend to me at that late hour knowing that I could not leave the house and the babies till my husband came back from the hospital—usually about seven o'clock. At that time the tramcars were running again in Petersburg, but they were few and far between, and generally so overcrowded that it was both safer and quicker to walk, whatever the distance. So I set out bravely for my long walk, and was now nearing my destination. As I hurried along the dimly lighted and deserted street I suddenly heard distant voices that grew louder as I approached, and presently I saw a group of men coming towards me. A sudden fright seized me—a friend of ours had been "undressed" only a day or two previously (it was a usual occurence in those days, small gangs of hooligans known as "undressers" roamed the side-streets and held up people to rob them of their coats). I wrapped my fur coat tighter round me . . . what a fool I had been to put it on! And to take my favourite big muff—they'd surely rob me of those, first thing. . . . But it was no use turning back now, as they were bound to have seen me just as I had seen them, and so, after a moment's hesitation, I resolved to go on. The voices were getting louder,

and to my amazement, though I could not distinguish the actual words, the intonation did not sound Russian to me. I strained my ears—why, it was English! Could I be dreaming? How could this be? I knew for certain that there were no foreigners in Petersburg. I had not heard a word of English for three years! Surely I must be dreaming. . . . I walked on, feeling terribly excited. Here they come—yes, sure enough, they *were* speaking English, and *real* English, not Russian-English but such as they speak in London!

As they approached, I could discern in the uncertain light cast by the wretched street-lamp, a group of six or seven men. Something about their clothes struck me as peculiar: that while one wore a Finnish cap made of fur and with fur ear-flaps, another wore a most foreign-looking soft felt, while a third wore a typical English cap. Their coats also varied from a short sheepskin jacket to a Burberry raincoat, and they all seemed to have mufflers. They had passed me before I had gained sufficient control over my senses and voice to call out to them, and even then, all I could manage was to gasp out feebly and quite foolishly, "I say, are you English?" As one man they stopped dead. The next moment I was surrounded and trying hard to answer the questions they hurled at me: "Who was I? Was I English? How did I come to be in this hell?" and so on. Briefly I told them that I was British born, and was now a Russian subject, having married a Russian—which evoked a chorus of vehement and sympathetic, "Oh, bad lucks". Had I any children was the next question, and when I told them that I had two, they all exclaimed, "But then you must be in need of grub!" "Is there anyone who isn't?" I replied. "Well, *we* aren't and have plenty we can spare you," was the

incredible reply. They then explained to me that they were part of the crew of the first steamer to bring a cargo of coal to Petersburg since the Revolution, and that their ship was docked in the New Port. They themselves had come ashore to explore the town, but having not found anything worth looking at, they were now wending their way back to the Port. Eagerly they pressed me to accompany them so that I could take some food from their ship home with me, and it took me some time to make them understand that this was quite impossible as I would never be allowed to bring anything past the guards. One of the group, a tall young man in a raincoat, politely asked me for my name and address, which he wrote down very carefully under the dim light of the street-lamp ; he promised to bring me some food the next day. I thanked them heartily and then they all shook hands with me wishing me good luck. Feeling thrilled and excited I rushed on to my dentist. Suddenly I heard rapid footsteps behind me and felt something being thrust into my muff. Turning round I saw the funny little man with the ear-flaps. "For the kiddies," he whispered and hurried back to his companions before I could say a word. I pulled the packet out of my muff and discovered to my delight two slabs of chocolate—a luxury I had not tasted or even seen for at least three years.

From the dentist's I simply flew home where my husband was anxiously awaiting me: it was none too safe to be out for long in those days. When I told him about my amazing encounter he was as delighted and as excited as I was. The next day came and I waited anxiously, but no one arrived. "They will never be able to find me," I said pessimistically, "or else the Port guards have confiscated the food." But my husband was not a bit worried: "They'll turn up

all right, you'll see," he kept assuring me; "if an Englishman makes a promise, he always keeps it." And even when the second day passed and no one appeared, his faith remained unshaken.

It was in the afternoon of the third day after my encounter that the Bolshevik equivalent of my maid-of-all-work (who had taken my faithful Polia's place) rushed excitedly into my bedroom which was, owing to the fuel shortage, the only room in the flat that we used, and shrieked out: "Oh, Maria Carlovna, foreigners! Foreigners have come to see you! And how beautiful they are!" I followed her into my icy drawing-room and there stood two tall young men—one of whom I recognized as the young man who had taken my address three days before. He presented his companion who, it appeared, was his assistant wireless operator and he explained in great distress that the sack of food they had been bringing me had been confiscated at the Port three days ago and had not yet been returned, but that they were determined to get it by hook or by crook and would bring it on the following day. I thanked them and begged them not to risk getting into trouble, but they were terribly indignant at what had occurred and were determined to succeed.

The following day my little daughter's christening was to take place. This is always a great event in Russia.

I looked sadly at my empty larder the next morning: all I would be able to offer my guests and our dear old priest would be some rye biscuits that I had made myself. True, there would be real tea and this was a very rare treat and a tremendous luxury—my husband had been presented with a quarter of a pound by a grateful patient some weeks previously and I had carefully kept it for the great occasion, but that would

be all! However, tea is the main thing in Russia in these days especially, I comforted myself. My servant, who guessed my thoughts, offered to go to the market to try to get some butter in exchange for one of my old skirts and I readily agreed. She had barely left when my husband came in hurriedly looking very excited, and handing me something wrapped in a newspaper, he said: "Look darling, what wonderful luck! My appendicitis patient has just paid me for his operation—you'll never guess what it is!" I tore open the parcel and, to my unspeakable delight, I saw a lovely fat chicken. . . . This was indeed a royal fee! What a feast we would have, why, it was at least three years since we had tasted one! And my poor little two-year-old boy had never even tasted chicken broth—well, he was going to have his first chicken at his sister's christening at least! I rapidly plucked and dressed the chicken, and, lighting my primus stove, I put it on to boil. Chicken soup and boiled chicken, what a feast we were going to have! Wouldn't our dear old Batioushka be amazed! Mentally blessing the patient and his appendix I started feverishly to prepare our room for the ceremony. Suddenly the front door bell rang. I ran to open it and, to my utter amazement, there stood my young Englishman. His face beamed as he held out to me a huge sack. "Here you are," he said triumphantly, "I made them give it all back to me, every scrap of it!" I shall never forget the wonder of the sight that met our hungry delighted eyes as we unpacked the sack! Here were packets of oatmeal, sugar, butter, tinned meat and milk and even a jar of jam! We gazed in rapture at the beautiful tins and neat boxes—it was a joy just to handle them. My little boy Tsapik, danced gleefully round and round, fingering now this one now that one of the pretty packets. At that

moment my maid came in—she had been unable to obtain any butter and was on the point of tears when, suddenly, she caught sight of all the tins and boxes. She was rendered completely dumb and her face depicted such astonishment that we all burst out laughing. As for my husband, when he got back from the hospital and found us all flushed and happy and getting in each other's way as we rushed about opening cans and laying the table, he eagerly joined in the general fun and excitement, increasing the confusion, and, for once, I willingly acquiesced to the triumphant "I told you so's" with which he greeted every new surprise as it emerged from the magic sack.

Our kind young friend—whose name was Stanley—could not stay as he had to get back to his duties aboard his ship, but he promised to come the next day.

Needless to say, little Mary's christening was a huge success and her godparents and our Batioushka could hardly believe their eyes when we sat down to the table.

Our kind benefactor Stanley came the following afternoon and after that we saw him daily during the three weeks that his ship remained in Petersburg. He was a charming fellow, always ready to help, now taking my little boy out for a walk or pulling him along in his sleigh (instead of a pram), now helping my famous Fenia to chop wood for our stove and carrying it upstairs for her. She, poor thing, was completely overcome by him and whenever he was mentioned, she would roll her eyes and sigh so pathetically that it was quite impossible to look at her without bursting into laughter. But the person whose heart Stanley had completely conquered was my pretty little seventeen-year-old sister-in-law, Irene. She had come up

from Tsarskoye to stay with us for a few days and was terribly thrilled to meet the "famous" young Englishman. They became firm friends at once. In spite of the fact that she spoke no English and that he knew no other language, they used to carry on long conversations and they assured me that they could understand each other perfectly. . . . She took him to theatres and museums and they had a very good time, Irene was of course delighted to be going out with a "real foreigner", and the fact that he was so beautifully dressed—in a "*real* English coat" (his raincoat)—added considerably to her pleasure since it made him very conspicuous ". . . and makes everybody look at me with envy," the child assured me proudly. Before Stanley left he took two snapshots of "The Scamp" (as he had christened Tsapik) and of baby Mary whom he adored. He managed to smuggle these past the G.P.U. officials at the Port (the taking of photographs was a serious offence in those days) and got them through to England where he handed them to my parents when he visited them in London, and they were able to see at last what their little grandchildren looked like. They were the first photographs that the children had ever had taken of themselves, and little Tsapik was very interested in the proceedings. Stanley was able to tell my parents all about our life in Russia and his arrival was very welcome since it was the first direct news that they had of us for over three years. When, two years later, I came to England with the children, among the first to welcome us was Stanley. He was as ever eager to help and offered his services in anything he could be useful in. Unfortunately I have lost sight of him since, but I shall never forget the kind, charming and courteous young Englishman who came so unexpectedly to my

aid in those dark and rather joyless days and whose appearance brought so much pleasure and brightness into our lives. And it is with a feeling of warm gratitude and sincere affection that I always think of him.

# CHAPTER VIII

## THE TURKEY

DURING the years immediately succeeding the Revolution, money had completely lost its value —one could buy nothing—and the only way one could get food at all was by barter.

This fact soon created a new profession: that of "*meshetchniki*"—bag carriers (a coined word derived from *meshok*, a sack). These individuals used to collect various materials, clothing and household articles which they would transport to outlying villages where the peasants, who were in dire need of all such articles, would gladly exchange them for flour, cereals, meat and eggs. The peasants would even bring their food products to Petersburg and barter them in the market-places, but this was illegal and the old market-places would frequently be raided, all goods confiscated and their possessors arrested: a chain of militia would suddenly surround the place and cause an immediate panic, bearers of food and seekers alike would throw their bundles aside and a mad scramble to escape would ensue.

Some of my friends were extraordinarily lucky in their exchanges and used to obtain what we then considered wonderful bargains for their unwanted clothes and domestic articles, but I never seemed to have any luck. Whenever I entrusted anything to a *meshetchnik*, he was sure to turn up a few days later with a woeful tale of how it had been confiscated, or lost

or stolen from him. More often than not, he did not return at all and on the few occasions that I did see him again he would hand me only a fraction of what he had promised to bring. My servant Polia, who was back with me at this time, used to get terribly angry and would scold me like a child: "It is all your own fault," she would say, "you don't know how to treat these brutes or how to talk to them—they see at once that it is the easiest thing in the world to cheat you and swindle you."

One day in 1922 I met a friend who spoke most enthusiastically about a *meshetchnik* whom she had just discovered. He was a conductor on one of the Siberian trains, and, as there was no famine in Siberia, he was able to obtain truly wonderful bargains—she spoke of geese and ducks and chickens and butter till my mouth watered, and I begged her to send him to my home. She promised to do this and that evening Polia and I went over the remainder of my "exchangeable" articles. There was not much, alas! but we came across some twelve yards of beautiful English rep material that my mother had left me for curtains—it was fairly wide and of a deep rose colour that was sure to appeal to the peasants. I was for giving the whole piece, but Polia would not hear of such a thing. "You're sure to be cheated again, Maria Carlovna," she said, "you are always willing to believe everybody. Wait till he brings us something, then we will see whether he is to be trusted." So she cut off six yards and hid the remainder.

The *meshetchnik* appeared on the following day. He was a typical old regime *provodnik* or conductor, tall and imposing and looked thoroughly reliable and trustworthy. He handled the material with a knowing air and seemed greatly impressed with this "foreign" stuff; he tried its weight and scrutinized the

pattern and finally assured me that it would undoubtedly fetch lots of wonderful things, but I especially asked for two nice fat chickens and five pounds of butter, for that was what the children needed most. He promised this readily and said we could expect him back in about three weeks. A month passed but there was no sign of him and although I didn't lose hope, Polia was most pessimistic and grew grumpier every day assuring me that I had been "done" again. If I had to go out, my first words to Polia on returning home were invariably "Has he been?" and as invariably Polia's sole answer would be a vigorous shake of her head and a contemptuous snort at my credulity. But one day, on bringing Tsapik home from his afternoon walk, I found Polia in a furious temper and before I could ask the eternal question, she snapped "He has been" at me. "Well and what has he brought?" I asked eagerly. "He shoved a great big basket at me, said 'Here you are' and was off again before I could say a word." "Well, but haven't you opened it? Are the chickens good and has he brought all that he promised?" I asked anxiously. "Go and see for yourself," said Polia grimly without moving. I rushed into the kitchen. In the centre of the floor stood a large basket and in it, looking around benignly, there sat—a live turkey! It was alive, but only just. Never had I seen such a thin, scraggly, miserable-looking bird! The dismay I felt must have been visible on my face and Polia who had followed me into the kitchen, burst out into a torrent of abuse directed at my *provodnik*. "There, look what the scoundrel has brought you, just *look* at it! Oh, how I wish I could have him here so that I could lay my hands on him!" Then, her tone changing from anger to triumph, she turned to me and said: "Didn't I say all along that he would cheat you?"

"But I never asked him for a turkey," I said helplessly, "whatever are we going to do with it?"—"That's what I would like to know," growled Polia and added disgustedly, "just look—it's nothing but skin and bone, there's not a scrap of flesh on it and certainly nothing to eat, unless you imagine that the feathers will make a nice *ragout*! You see, you won't listen to good advice, you're always so eager to trust people—fancy giving away six yards of that lovely material for this miserable sack of bones! and if I hadn't stopped you by force you'd have given him the whole piece! It's simply terrible!" She railed and scolded till I was ready to cry. I had been looking forward so much to the chickens and the butter that their wretched substitute was a really severe blow.

"But how on earth can we get rid of it? Do you think anyone will take it from us?" I said miserably. Seeing my distress, Polia softened immediately, "Don't you worry like that, Maria Carlovna," she said, suddenly becoming cheerful, "we aren't going to give it away to anyone. We're going to feed it and fatten it and by Easter it will be fine and fat, and ready to be eaten." "But what shall we feed it with, Polia? Do you think it will eat potato peelings?" I asked doubtfully. "I'll feed it all right—you see if I don't," Polia assured me confidently. So the turkey remained and soon became quite tame, it stalked about the kitchen in the daytime and slept in a sort of box-room from which a skylight led to the attic and which was just beyond the kitchen. To Tsapik it was merely an addition to the collection of weird pets that he already possessed, of which a hedgehog that followed him around like a puppy was the favourite. This was a sweet, good-natured little fellow who didn't mind a bit being poked about with a spoon or acting as the ball when that young man felt like a little game of foot-

ball. Tsapy, the hedgehog and the turkey soon became firm friends ; the last made a marvellous gee-gee if you held on to its tail, and the hedgehog, close at Tsapik's heels and docilely following them round and round the room, made an ideal passenger in the make-believe carriage. My husband and I and our friends used to roar with laughter at their games and really enjoyed them just as much as Tsapy did.

Several times a week, my husband used to be on night-duty and I spent the night alone in the flat. On one of these occasions, I had just finished putting the children to bed and was preparing to go to bed myself. Polia had finished washing-up and was in her own room, when suddenly the turkey started cackling furiously and persistently. Polia finally decided to see what the matter was. On opening the door of our lodger's bedroom, she beheld a pair of legs in high Russian boots apparently dangling from space and stepping into the room she saw that they belonged to a man who was hanging by his hands through the sky-light which had been forced open. "Who are you and what are you doing there?" shouted Polia. On hearing her voice the man let go of his hold and dropped to the floor. "I'm the plumber," he said plausibly, but seeing Polia's determined look, he pushed her aside and made a sudden dash for the door. Fearlessly Polia went after him and caught him at my bedroom door. She made a grab at his coat, but he swung round nimbly and made for the other door that led to the hall ; here he opened the front door and with Polia at his heels, he tore down the stairs and out into the street. Polia by this time had succeeded in rousing the neighbourhood but the man had escaped. The militia came running up and on being told what had happened, they came up to search the attic. Here they discovered two more men hiding and promptly

arrested them. They confessed that they belonged to a gang that had planned to rob our apartment that night. The first man was to have descended into the flat and waited till we were asleep and was then to have handed up the loot to the others through the skylight. Leningrad was full of bandits who worked in gangs in those days, and murders and burglaries occurred nightly.

Naturally there could be no question of eating the turkey after this and it lived on with us until well into the summer when we exchanged it for butter, eggs and milk. It had become so enormous and so fat that we really couldn't keep it any longer especially as the weather was getting hot. We almost shook hands with it when it was leaving us, for, as my husband reflected, if the glory of saving their city fell to Roman geese, that of delivering a happy little home in Russia several centuries later certainly fell to a Russian turkey.

# CHAPTER IX

## WE LEAVE FOR ENGLAND

IN 1922 my health broke down and was causing my husband considerable anxiety.

In spite of the food parcels that my parents used to send to us from England, and which did occasionally reach us, the children were underfed and owing to the absolute impossibility of obtaining fresh fruit and vegetables, they were both developing rickets. In my own case, all the doctors who examined me were of the unanimous opinion that unless I left Russia and lived in normal conditions I could not last very long. The only solution was for us to obtain permission to leave Russia for a stay with my parents in England, but this was far from easy. Those of our friends who were abroad had managed to get there by slipping across the frontiers surreptitiously and in many cases we would suddenly lose sight of some friend and only after a month or two would learn they were safe in Germany or England or France and that they had been planning their escape for weeks but had been afraid of telling even their closest friends of their plan for fear that this might lead them into trouble should they be traced once the escape had been discovered. It was in precisely this manner that Nelly had got away to the Caucasus and the "Monkey" had slipped across the frozen Gulf of Finland in an ice-boat. We had heard that the Bolsheviks had started issuing "foreign" passports in certain cases, but it was also known that

these were terribly difficult to obtain without influence in the higher communistic circles—and this we did not have. However, with his usual energy, my husband set about the formalities. These were simply frightful. As I was applying for permission on medical grounds, I had to be examined by a commission of doctors and this commission, it appeared, was presided over by a Commissar, who, although a layman, had the power to veto any recommendations made by the medical board although it consisted of well-known professors, and, without his signature, their findings carried no weight with the Powers that granted visas for abroad. I remember well the day that my husband brought me for examination. The commission consisted of several doctors and after a very thorough examination I was declared to be 80 per cent invalid. The various papers were taken to the Commissar and, after a while, I was ushered into his room. He was a short, thick-set man; the expression on his face showed neither culture nor intelligence. He kept his cap on his head and his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He stared at me for some moments without uttering a word and then picked up the papers relating to my case whereon the doctors' diagnosis was written in Latin, of which he understood nothing. He immediately assumed an air of great importance and kept up the farce of being undecided as to whether the doctors were right for some little time. It was comical to watch him, finally he showed that he had made up his mind and, taking up a pen, he sprawled his signature on the papers. It was over! But this was only the first step—it meant that I was allowed to apply for a "foreign" passport. . . .

From this day we started the negotiations to obtain the passport itself, and these negotiations lasted—five solid months! . . . There were endless papers to sign

and examinations as to motives to attend; twice my husband went to Moscow and I had quite given up hope when Providence intervened once again. My husband was called to attend professionally a certain Communist who was a prominent Commissar. My husband performed a minor operation and the Commissar, like all my husband's patients, took a great liking to him. Hearing about my difficulty with the passport, he immediately volunteered to help, he even guaranteed that I would come back to Russia, i.e. that it was only a temporary visit and this was of the greatest importance, and very soon after I got the document that was the most coveted thing in Russia in those days. My husband had to go to Moscow to receive the treasure and while he was away, both the children fell ill and this again delayed our departure. As soon as they recovered, we set the date for leaving and the last few days were spent in feverish packing and sorting out of our things. About a week before we left, we were unexpectedly visited by some "comrades" who described themselves as a "Sanitary Commission". Never shall I forget the look of consternation on their faces when they beheld our drawing-room. I must explain that after the incident with the turkey, I had got bold and started a regular poultry farm in the flat. An obliging "meshetchnik" had brought me some live hens and a rooster and soon, to my great delight, the hens started laying and I had fresh eggs daily for the children. This had been going on for some months. At that time the Communists were trying hard to get us evicted from our comfortable quarters. My husband was the only one of the hospital's former doctors to retain his post and the new regime were doing all in their power to get the last of the "bourgeoisie" doctors discharged, especially as his wife was of British origin. Now

someone had apparently reported my poultry farm to the authorities and they had leapt at the opportunity of getting a black mark against us. My venture was bordering on vandalism, considering the state to which the parquet floor and some of the furniture had been reduced, but then it must be borne in mind that we had all reached the stage where nothing mattered except the question of getting enough to eat. I could not sleep through worrying about this and I used to lie in bed and rack my brains to think of some means of procuring food on the following day for my dear ones. The mental strain was terrible and I was as ill morally as I was physically. I had lost my strength and my nerves were in a dreadful state. To come back to the "Sanitary Commission", the limit was reached when Tsapik's playmate, the little hedgehog, suddenly darted out from beneath some furniture and scuttled across the room. The "commission" leapt in the air and to assuage this affront to their dignity, they fined me pretty heavily and muttered things about the proverbial madness of the English.

In spite of the thrill and excitement that the thought of seeing my people after all these years gave me and of leaving behind the life of worry and need and want that had been mine for so long, I found it terribly hard to make up my mind to go. I could not bear the thought of leaving behind my husband and the home where, in spite of the unbelievably hard and terrible times, we had been so radiantly happy. Then also I felt that even though none of my relations remained in Russia, the dear friends with whom we had shared the misery and hardships of the past years were nearer to me, meant more to me than my own blood-relations. I had a premonition—I even felt a certainty that I would be a stranger amongst my own people. It was impossible for those who had not gone through what

we had gone through and had not lived our life to understand. I could feel that even with all their love and sympathy it would be impossible—and I was right. We had learnt to do without so many things and had lost so much, that our ideas and our outlook on life had entirely changed ; most things had lost their value—all that we set store by was our lives and safety and our daily bread.

The mere thought of parting hurt beyond anything I had ever experienced. I had a conviction that never again would I be so happy—in my *own* home, alone with my husband and my children. It was such a bright, happy, beautiful home in spite of all the difficulties, the lack of fuel and food, and the life in one room.

The last evening was quite heartbreaking and I begged my husband to let me change my mind and remain. . . . But then he told me the plain truth—if my little girl stayed on in Russia she could not possibly live, and he also told me that apart from this, my diagnosis had shown that I had the beginning of tuberculosis and that my general state of health was so poor that the doctors gave me only three months more to live if I stayed on as it was impossible to regain my strength under the existing conditions. So I realized that it was my duty to go. . . .

We were to leave the following afternoon and were to travel through Finland as my sister Aggie had come over from England and was going to meet me on the other side of the frontier ; on the morning of that day I suddenly had an inspiration: I decided that we were all to go and have our photograph taken together, we had not got one of the whole of our small family. My husband and Verochka thought that I had gone completely mad to be worrying about such things at such a time, but I insisted and had my way. That photograph proved to be a source of great comfort to

my husband while we were away and it was the only one we ever had taken of us all together.

My husband accompanied us in the train as far as Beloostrov, the station on the Russian side of the Finnish frontier. We were to be searched here and we had to say our farewells to my husband first as one is not allowed to speak to anyone who accompanies one after the searching is over. I carried Mary in my arms and Tsapik walked beside me. We entered a wooden hut on the platform, it was dirty beyond description. A rough-looking woman came up to me and told me curtly to undress the children, I did so most reluctantly; the place was so dirty. Tsapik stoutly refused to take off his new shoes—he adored them and was afraid that they were going to be taken away from him—it took me a long time to persuade him. The woman insisted on my undressing him completely and only allowed me to dress him again after she had convinced herself that nothing was concealed on him. Poor little Mary was whimpering as I undressed her, the wretched woman insisted on going through all her clothes and I remember how indignant I got when she began feeling the baby's toes. My husband had warned me not to remonstrate with the person who searched us, but I could not refrain from asking her what she thought I could have hidden between the toes of a twelve-months old baby! My own turn came after she had finished with the children. I had to strip completely and then she removed my hairpins and, letting down my hair, repeatedly passed her hand through it. Next my jewellery was taken to be valued as one was only allowed to take out an amount that did not exceed a small sum in value, and after this we were led to where the Finnish train stood. We had a last look out of the window of our carriage, we could not even stretch out

a hand, and then the heavy train lumbered off, leaving my husband standing alone on the rapidly receding platform. I sat back listlessly with little Mary in my arms while Tsapik stood on the seat next to me and peered out of the window—whenever the train stopped, he would jump down excitedly and would ask: "Mummy, have we arrived? Is this England? Is this London?" Soon we reached Rayayoki, the first station on the Finnish side. I rose and looked out of the window. Somebody was running down the platform and waving frantically . . . and in a few moments my sister and my brother were lifting us out of the carriage. It was like a dream: the dear, familiar faces, that bright and spotlessly clean little Finnish station and the people standing around actually smiling! My brother led us into a room on the platform and there a wonderful sight met our eyes. It was the refreshment room and the buffet groaned under heaps of sandwiches—made with white bread, ye gods!—piles of buns and great trays of cakes. We sat down at a beautifully laid table and my sister ordered tea. Tsapik was terribly excited, he kept repeating, "Look, mummy, white bread, do look, mummy," as though he could not believe his eyes. We had half an hour before our train started. The first stop was to be at a quarantine camp specially erected by the Finnish authorities for Soviet citizens on account of the epidemics which at that time were raging in Russia, and where one had to remain for a period of three weeks. I was terrified at the prospect, but when the doctor and a nurse came along I handed the doctor a letter from my husband, and on learning that I was the wife of a colleague, he very kindly allowed us to proceed direct to Helsingfors. As soon as the train had left the quarantine station, poor Baby Mary became very sick. She grew worse and finally

became so ill that we decided to leave the train at Viborg and spend the night there. My sister and I nursed the baby right through the night as we were afraid to call in a Finnish doctor for fear he might order us back to the quarantine camp that we had succeeded in avoiding. She was better in the morning, and that evening we took the train to Helsingfors.

When we had installed ourselves, I sat in a daze, hardly understanding anything and not daring to shape my thoughts or analyse my feelings. I only realized that every minute the train was taking me further away from my husband, from my home, from my country, from everything that I loved. It was as if my very heart was being torn away from the rest of me. What was this thing I had done? How could I have left him?—It was monstrous of me. But could I go back? Had I the right to go back? I looked at the children—Baby Mary lay on her tiny mattress sleeping peacefully—she looked so pale, so delicate. Tsapik in his sailor coat was sitting quietly for once with a pathetic look on his intelligent little face. As I looked at them, my husband's pale resolute face rose before me—he was sacrificing everything for us—his home, his comfort, the family life that he adored—all in order that we should be in safety and that we should get strong and well again; it was all for us. It would be cowardly for me to go back now after all the months of hard work that it had taken to obtain permission for us to get this far. But my heart was full of anguish and I sat in silence quite unable to stop the tears from streaming down my face. All of a sudden my Tsapik, who had been sitting so quietly by the window, burst into tears and threw his arms around me. "Mummy, mummy," he sobbed, "let us go back home to papa. I don't want to go to Eng'and, I don't want to go to London!" The child was actually speaking out aloud

the thoughts and feelings that were in my soul. I clasped him to my heart and we sat there crying together. My brother and sister tried in vain to comfort us, but at last my poor little boy fell asleep in my arms and I then managed to pull myself together and resolved to face the thing bravely. Next morning we arrived in Helsingfors, where we were to stay for a few days till the ship for Hull sailed.

I remember the look of dismay on my brother's face when in answer to his request for my passport I handed him the precious document that we had had such tremendous difficulty in obtaining, and I was greatly distressed when he said, "But have you nothing else?" "Of course not," I replied, "what else should I require? this is a perfectly genuine 'foreign' passport, good for travelling anywhere.—It took us months to get it," I added with a touch of pride at my cleverness in having succeeded. "The trouble is that you won't be allowed to go anywhere with it," said my brother gently to my utter astonishment. We who had automatically become Soviet citizens did not realize at all what our position was in the world! The same day my brother took me to the British Passport Office and explained matters to them and I was given a paper stating that I was British-born. "Show them that paper when you get to England and hide your precious passport as far away as you can," said my brother smiling at my look of incredulity. I was soon able to convince myself of the truth of his remark, for people jumped away from me as soon as they knew I was a Soviet subject.

Before leaving Helsingfors I consulted a doctor regarding Mary. He was horrified when I told him that she was thirteen months old, she was more like a baby of seven or eight months and weighed only twelve pounds. He shook his head and said he did not

want to frighten me, but thought it only right to tell me (as I was the wife of a doctor) that the child might not be able to stand the journey. But I had made up my mind and we sailed for Hull hoping for the best.

Before we left Helsingfors my sister made me get into some new clothes that she had brought over from England, as all I had were some dreadful things dating from 1917.

To my hungry eyes the enormous quantities of food on the boat were amazing, but I did not dare take as much as the other passengers and just tasted little bits here and there, much to my sister's distress. Poor little Tsapy was the same way and, strange to say, for months afterwards in England I had absolutely no appetite—the mere sight of food was sufficient, or perhaps it was because it was so easy to obtain food.

We arrived in Hull on the fifth day and I took care to obey my brother's injunctions and showed only my paper from Helsingfors instead of my famous Soviet "foreign" passport.

At King's Cross we were met by the whole of my family, and the sight of poor Little Mary made my mother cry. She was such a pathetic little thing.

At once her grandmother took her in hand, devoting herself entirely to the child, feeding her by teaspoonfuls every half-hour and giving her cod-liver oil, meat-juice and bacon fat, which were ordered by Dr. Still. Gradually Mary began to develop normally and, thanks to her grandmother's wonderful care and devotion and the proper food, she became unrecognizable in quite a short time.

She is now a strong-limbed muscular little dancer, a pupil of Madame Karsavina, and no one could recognize in her the unfortunate, rickety little being who hardly seemed to have the vitality to live for more than a month when she first arrived in England.

# PART THREE

1924–1928

# CHAPTER I

## MY FIRST RETURN TO RUSSIA (1924)

I HAD been in England for two years before I went back to Russia for the first time. My husband had been trying to get the post of doctor on one of the Soviet ships (Sovtorgflot) engaged on the Leningrad-London run. This would enable him to be in London for a few days every three weeks. We were very keen on this plan as it would allow the children to remain in normal conditions in London and to get the nourishment they needed so badly. I had recovered my health and was feeling somewhat different from the unfortunate creature that had arrived in London two years previously. The position my husband sought was most difficult to obtain, especially as I myself was living abroad, but my husband wrote that he was moving heaven and earth to succeed, and it took him several months, but at last I received the longed-for news that everything had been successfully managed and he had been appointed to the s.s. *Soviet* sailing in three days' time and would be with us six days later. I went to meet the ship at Hay's Wharf, but to my dismay and horror my husband was not on board. I rushed to the captain and he told me that my husband had been arrested on the day before the ship sailed and another doctor—a young Communist—had been appointed in his place.

The reason for my husband's arrest was not known,

but it was rumoured that his eagerness to get the post had aroused suspicion and he was accused of being a spy. The fact that my husband was doctor to the British Consul in Leningrad and was a friend of his family served to strengthen this suspicion. I resolved to go back to Russia at once with the same boat, leaving the children with my parents in England, and to try to clear things up, as evidently my prolonged visit to England was also causing the Bolsheviks suspicion.

My parents were very much against my going because it was more than likely that I would be arrested myself and unable to do anything. But the captain, who was a rough and ready, but very kind-hearted man, was on my side and proved to be a real friend, helped by his encouragement, and even succeeded in persuading my parents that I was doing the right thing. "In cases of arrest—nobody but a wife can do anything," he said. "Wives are wonderful people. I have been arrested twice, and it was only thanks to my wife that I was released both times. I know of many similar cases. Who else but a wife will stand for hours waiting to be admitted to some official and will go on doggedly in spite of every obstacle till she gets what she is intent on? A wife has a right to insist and is more likely to be able to do something than anybody else. So instead of discouraging and dissuading your daughter, give her your blessing and tell her to go hopefully—she is doing the right thing, believe me." "But she may be arrested straight away," remonstrated my mother. "She may and she may not," answered my kind new friend. "I personally think that her walking straight into the lion's den will show that she is not guilty of anything herself and that she is certain her husband is equally innocent—she would keep away otherwise. Her return to Russia at such a moment will impress them and speak for itself." But

my parents would not see it and I left greatly against their wishes.

I remember how grateful I felt to this kind-hearted man who was so understanding, so sympathetic, and whose words were a great moral support at such a time. It was so encouraging that there was at least somebody who believed in my being able to do something and it gave me no end of hope.

It was terrible to leave the children behind—I had never been parted from them, and the feeling that I was going for quite an indefinite time, that in fact I might never return, was almost unbearable. But the captain's words gave me faith—faith that I would succeed and come back safe and sound.

It was a dismally cold October day when we sailed from London Bridge. My people had all come to see me off. Mary clung to me crying bitterly, but Tsapik stood manfully keeping back his tears. I blessed them and with a last hug tore myself away. The crew was assembled on deck and watching us curiously—there was something hostile and mocking in their attitude: "This is the tragic leavestaking of the bourgeois when they go to the Soviets," they seemed to be thinking. The gangway was very steep and as I climbed it with difficulty and reached the top I found I could not step on board without help from someone. But though the crew was all on deck, no one attempted to give me a hand. There I stood, trying vainly to step over —until my father ran up the gangway behind me and helped me on board.

The voyage was ghastly, the weather was very stormy and our ship was empty and seemed like a nutshell on the billows. There were only two other passengers besides myself, the food was very bad and the accommodation most primitive. The service was appalling—there were several stewardesses who wore

bright red shawls on their heads to show they were Communists—but they never came near us, lying in the saloon during the bad weather. The captain was my only comfort, but, being the wife of an alleged spy, I did not dare go up to see him too often for fear of compromising him. We were twenty-four hours late owing to the bad weather and arrived at St. Petersburg—now Leningrad—on the seventh day. As we passed Kronstadt our passports were taken from us and a steam launch with G.P.U. officials came alongside. A feeling of terror seemed to penetrate the whole ship, not only we passengers, but even the crew appeared to be scared. One felt oneself absolutely in the hands of these people, entirely at their mercy, and one felt somehow that a great heavy door had closed behind us—we were utterly helpless and there was no getting away again now—we depended wholly and solely on the G.P.U. When we reached Leningrad Port, some more G.P.U. officials came on board and proceeded to seal up all our luggage, while the passengers were locked up in the saloon. About an hour passed during which we were questioned regarding our destinations, and so on. Then a G.P.U. steam-launch came alongside into which we were led, and we were taken up the Neva to the Nicolas Quay Bridge where the Customs inspection takes place. As we alighted on the landing-stage two figures came quickly forward towards me and I recognized my mother-in-law and Verochka and suddenly I felt quite faint and would have collapsed had they not supported me. We sat down on a bench until I felt better and then we went into the Custom House. As we entered the big dismal room a man—one of the Custom House porters—came towards me with a glass of water: "Here is some water for you, citizen," he said kindly, and added: "Do not worry—it has been boiled." He had

evidently seen the meeting with my mother-in-law and my collapse from the window, and had got me the water of his own accord. I was so touched by this kind gesture, a feeling of joy and gratitude rushed over me —there were kind people left in our Russia then, they were not all turned to stone. I drank the water and thanked the man gratefully. My two fellow passengers had been inspected and were leaving, but I still sat waiting to be called. What could this delay mean? Why was my passport not returned to me? Could it mean that I was to be arrested? Suddenly a voice rang out: "Citizen Britnieva." I got up quickly and approached the table. "Where are your children?" demanded the man holding my passport in his hand. For a second I was taken aback—then I answered quickly: "They are being brought by a friend as soon as they are well. I left in a hurry and they were ill and could not travel." "So you say they will be brought?" he queried, and to my relief he handed me my passport.

Then my luggage was opened and carefully inspected; the men (old Customs officials) were kind and polite. At last everything was finished and we could go. What a joy it was, in spite of everything, to be back in one's native land! The air, the ground we walked on—how wonderful, how unspeakably dear it was—how unlike any other in the whole world.

As we walked along my mother-in-law told me all she knew, how they had come to our flat in the early morning the day before the ship sailed and arrested my husband, and that now the flat was sealed, so that I would not be able to live there but would have to stay at my father-in-law's. We took the train to Tsarskoye Selo where they lived and the next day I started the inevitable round that has to be followed by the relations of any person under arrest in Soviet Russia.

Every day of the week had its own programme and schedule. Food parcels were allowed only once a week —on Tuesdays, a tremulous, agitated day for the poor relations of the prisoners—always the terrible suspense: would the parcel that had been so carefully thought out, so lovingly packed, be accepted by the prison officials, or would it be refused? Monday was usually spent in obtaining and cooking the provisions and sewing the bags, preparing the change of linen and packing the parcel. All this I usually did at my dear friend Varvara Ivanovna's, who lived quite near the prison ; she always helped me together with my faithful friend the "Golliwog" and we used to sit up late preparing the parcel—such a joy it was. I would spend the night at her flat, then early the next morning whilst it was still dark, we would go towards the prison carrying the bag between us. In spite of the early hour, there would already be a long queue waiting along the street—every person bearing a bag like ours. Although the prison gates were not supposed to be open before ten o'clock—the poor women would start queueing up as early as seven o'clock. There they stood hour after hour in the cold October and November weather, waiting, waiting, hoping, silently praying for the dear ones shut behind those terrible grim-looking walls. Very soon the faces in the queue became familiar, and we used to meet like friends—we were all like sisters—all in the same position, hoping the same hope, and filled with the same fears. We all shared our joys and sorrows: if someone's parcel was refused, one felt almost as if it had been one's own, and if it was accepted one felt equally happy.

At last at ten o'clock, sometimes not till half-past, the gates would open and we would file in, one after another into the side entrance, up a rickety flight of steps into a small, badly-aired and stuffy little room

where there were several guichets that we had to approach in turn. We would queue up again and another weary hour or two would pass whilst we went through all the formalities of delivering our parcel: first one approached a window and asked trembling if Number So-and-so was allowed a parcel to-day. What suspense whilst waiting for the curt, rude answer! What joy if it was granted! What a feeling of despair if it was refused! Then one moved on to the next window to get our paper signed, and at last the third—to give in the precious parcel. Here again one trembled—because much depended on the mood of the official—if something in the parcel didn't please him, he would fling it back refusing to take anything at all. This would happen often with the poorer classes, who, often illiterate, used to put in things that were not on the list of articles permitted. I remember once a poor old woman who had brought some cheese for her son. Cheese had been allowed for some time, then suddenly it had been forbidden. The poor woman had not thought of reading through the list of forbidden articles and had brought her usual lot of things, which included some cheese. The man started looking through her bag, and when he came to the cheese, he flung it away, yelling out that he would take none of the other things now. The poor woman burst into tears, imploring him to forgive her and take the rest—but he would not give in. Some of us came up and tried to remonstrate with him but he only shouted at us, threatening to punish us in the same way, so that we retreated, terrified lest our parcels too should be refused. Another time it was a young engineer who had brought his wife some grapes—this was a "bourgeoise luxury" and a terrible offence. The official stormed and yelled at him and only after a terrible noise did he condescend to take the other

provisions ; the grapes were confiscated. After you gave in your parcel the man would hand you back last week's bag, with the prisoner's dirty linen and the receipt for the previous week's things signed by the prisoner. How precious were those things and slips of paper—how tremblingly we clutched them, reading the signature with tear-dimmed eyes? My husband always added a few loving words of thanks—once or twice they were torn off by a cruel hand, but more often than not, I used to get them—and what joy, what comfort they brought me.

Wednesday was the day when the petition for an interview with the prisoner was to be presented.

This was as long a business as the handing over of the food—a lengthy queue waiting ouside the G.P.U. building, then at a certain hour we were let in and queued up again before the windows. Handing in our petition, we waited for the answer to the one given in the week before. This was usually a refusal. But in spite of this, every Wednesday we patiently presented our petition, silently hoping and praying to get the longed for permission. During the three months my husband was in prison, I saw only four of these petitions granted: with joyful, tear-streamed faces the poor women turned away, clasping the precious paper that was going to enable them to see their dear one. We all crowded around them, congratulating them, happy for them. It was wonderful how we felt for one another, how we shared the joy and the sorrow though we were all strangers. Truly, common suffering unites more than joy does.

The remaining two days of the week were spent at the G.P.U. and the office of the *Procurature*: trying to get admission to the chief in order to find out something about the case of the prisoner one was concerned with. This was usually quite a hopeless job—one

waited for hours—just to be told to come back again next week. But strange to say I had extraordinary luck—and generally managed to penetrate into the sanctum of the G.P.U. chiefs. It seemed as if my having come from abroad impressed them and they wished to show that they too were Europeans. The first question they usually asked me was: "You have come from England, have you not!" And then they would proceed to assure me that my husband was a spy, that he was in the pay of the British Government, and so on. I indignantly denied all this, but of course this made no impression on them.

And in this difficult time of my despair my surest comforter was Koni to whom I used to run for advice and for the moral support that he invariably gave me by his calm wisdom and reasoning.

It was obvious to me that some enemy of my husband's had denounced him as an English spy out of personal revenge, and I even had my suspicion as to who it was. From various conversations and indirect inquiries, I had ascertained that it was more than probable that the fate of my husband would be a sentence to lengthy if not perpetual exile to some remote part of Siberia and as all my efforts seemed unavailing and his banishment inevitable, I started making preparations to follow him (wives were allowed to go for certain periods of time) to wherever he would be exiled ; however, I resolved to leave no stone unturned and set to grope about, but though I got everywhere—nothing helped. I was losing hope, when at last, at the end of the second month, fate was suddenly kind to me. My husband's best friend, Doctor G., was called to attend the wife of one of the chiefs of the G.P.U. She had been his patient once before and he had treated her successfully—and she had wished to have him again. He lost no time in getting her to

influence her husband to receive me unofficially and listen to what I had to say. I had two interviews with him—he was an uncultured man, hardly literate, a former orderly from one of our big clinics—this I think made him feel sympathetic towards the medical profession, but he had a keen brain. He told me at once that things were looking very grave for my husband unless some light could be thrown on the subject. I told him all my suppositions of the denouncement and also what reason I had to suspect the man. He was very interested and promised to look into the matter most carefully. My next interview with him was a week later and he told me that he had done all he could, that the matter was somewhat cleared, but that nevertheless he feared that my husband would not be allowed to live in any of the big towns of European Russia, for some years. This, he said, depended on the Moscow G.P.U. I resolved to go to Moscow on the following Monday and see what I could do there. The next day was Sunday and I decided to stay in bed all day to rest and collect my strength for Moscow. About five o'clock in the afternoon I heard the kitchen doorbell ring and my mother-in-law go to open it. I waited for her to return or to hear voices but nobody appeared and there was a dead silence in the house. Suddenly my heart began to beat furiously—I jumped out of bed and ran barefoot across the flat to the kitchen. In the doorway stood my husband clasping his mother in his arms.

It was so unexpected that I uttered a cry and suddenly collapsed on the floor. When I came to my senses I was lying on my bed, my husband kneeling beside it.

He told me that till the last moment they had also led him to believe that he was to be deported, giving him a paper to sign—as he thought—to that effect.

But what was his surprise on reading the paper before signing it, to find that the paper said that he was being liberated because there was no proof of his guilt. The official then calmly informed him that his arrest had been a mistake but that he considered it was a very good thing that the Government had now made his acquaintance!

A few days after, the G.P.U. officials came and took the seals off our apartment and we moved in. It was a new flat that my husband had taken during my absence, as the new Hospital Communists had insisted on our leaving the old one in the Court Hospital.

St. Petersburg, which since Lenin's recent death had become Leningrad, was a different place from the town I left in 1922. It was the time of the "NEP" —shops were open and one had no more need to resort too *"meshetchniki"* for the first necessities of life. People were looking better (there were not so many starved faces in the streets) and more cheerful. Nature was taking its own line—it seemed that the Bolsheviks couldn't suppress social life entirely. But although food was now easily obtained, clothing was still very difficult to find and one still met drawing-room curtains walking about the streets!

My women friends all flocked to see my dresses—"what is being worn abroad", and my very modest wardrobe was marvelled at and I was actually considered to be the leading lady of fashion!—a fact which I scarcely dared tell anyone in England.

I stayed in Russia for nine months. My mother wrote frequently about the children, but she was unwell and feeling the responsibility too much and begged me to return to England for the summer as she was unable to take the children away to the seaside herself. We started our "démarches" for my foreign passport—it was the same procedure all over again.

I had to add a paper stating the motive of my wishing to leave Russia. It seemed obvious that I had to return to my children. I gave in the petition and was told to come for the answer in three weeks' time. I did so—but was told to return in another fortnight. When I did so, I was staggered when I was told that my petition had been refused—I could not leave the country! I remember I was lunching at the British Consulate when my husband telephoned to say that the passport had been refused. I could not believe it —how, on what ground could they, what right had they to refuse to let me go to my children—I exclaimed angrily. The Consul laughed: "You forget where you are," he said ; "*nobody has any* right here except the G.P.U." But I was furious and resolved to go at once to demand on what grounds I had been refused. Mr. Preston was very much amused at my resolved determination—"You will only be told that it does not concern you," he said. Sure enough when I entered the foreign passport section and asked the gloomy face at the counter to explain the reason, saying that I was sure there was some misunderstanding, since it was incredible not to let a mother visit her children, he curtly answered: "No misunderstandings occur here, take your paper and go home."

Dismayed and boiling with rage I snatched my paper and turned to go—what was to happen now! Would I never see the children again? The refusal was evidently due to the reason that I had seen and heard too much during my husband's imprisonment—at the prison itself and at the G.P.U. ; they were afraid I could tell too much about what was going on in Russia, when I got out of the country.

We waited for a month and then we put in another petition. A month passed during which every bit of influence that we had in Communist circles was

brought to bear on the authorities. Also the British Consul had a few words with the Commissar of Foreign Affairs. At last when the day came, trembling with excitement I went to the Passport Office—and to my great joy and relief a passport was handed to me!

I left the following week via Finland, my husband accompanied me to the frontier. We parted hoping that soon he would get the job of doctor on board one of the ships and would be able to come to England.

From Helsingfors I sailed in the beautiful new ship *Oberon* that had just been built, and landed in Hull in five days' time. The children met me at King's Cross. They had grown so much that I hardly recognized them! I had not seen them for a whole year!

## CHAPTER II

### MY SECOND RETURN TO RUSSIA

I WENT back home to Russia again at the beginning of 1927. In spite of all his efforts, my husband had been unable to get the post of doctor on one of the Sovtorgflot steamers ; the Bolshevist authorities were evidently afraid that on finding himself abroad with his family, he would remain there instead of coming back to Russia.

So every application of my husband's for that post was refused. This was a terrible disappointment to us—I had so longed to show him the children, we were looking forward to seeing him with such joyous excitement and expectation and all in vain. There was nothing to be done—the G.P.U. was all-powerful and refused to allow my husband to leave the country. So I resolved to go back home myself, leaving the children in England with my parents, as on the previous visit.

This time I travelled by the Finland route, crossing from Hull to Helsingfors in the *Oberon* once again. It was winter—the end of January—and parts of the Baltic were frozen, so that we had to have an ice-breaker. It was such a joy to see and feel our real northern winter again after wet, foggy London.

On arrival at Helsingfors I found a letter from my mother telling me that Tsapik had fallen ill with influenza. This news caused me to break my journey and stay on in Helsingfors with my dear friends the

British Consul's family, till I should hear that he was well again. The feeling that as long as I was in Finland I was free to go back at any moment should it be necessary, was a comfort and a relief and made all the difference—once in Soviet Russia there was no getting out again, whatever the emergency, if the G.P.U. did not think it necessary. After the heavy door closed behind one at Beloostrof, the frontier, one felt immediately that it was impossible to escape.

It was only when I received a letter from my mother to say that Tsapik had recovered and was back at his beloved Challoner School again, that I left Helsingfors for Leningrad, stopping for twenty-four hours at Wiborg to visit some dear friends of my childhood.

I remember so well how striking the difference between the Finnish and Soviet frontiers was, the involuntary, almost subconscious feeling of dread that came over one as the train slowly crossed the tiny border river. "Just like diving headlong into a dark, fathomless abyss," was the thought that passed through my brain, as the train drew slowly into the Beloostrof station. Several G.P.U. officials, arrayed in long military coats, entered our carriage. The passengers were ordered to open their luggage and the search began. They set to work drastically, turning out the contents of my trunk on the floor of the compartment and making no attempt to put anything back, fingering everything, turning out the linings of all my clothes. I had brought a small English tea-cosy with me and this seemed to baffle the men, they could not imagine what it was for! It was most amusing to watch the way they kept turning and twisting it and feeling right through it, their faces serious and solemn, and I could not help smiling as I watched; this, of course, roused their suspicion still more. It was only after they had cut it open with a pair of

scissors, that they calmed down and "passed" my poor innocent tea-cosy, leaving me to repack my entire trunk. I began throwing the things in frantically—there was so little time—and had barely finished when the train drew up at the Finland Station in Leningrad. My husband stood on the platform, eagerly watching the carriage windows, and in a second I was in his arms. What a joy it was to drive off along the snow-covered streets in a sleigh with his arm around me, answering his eager questions about the children, whilst my luggage came on behind in another sleigh. How wonderful it was for me to be back home again, in my beloved Petersburg, to see the dear familiar streets and houses, to breathe the glorious frosty air, and for us to be together again. How my heart throbbed when the sleigh drove up to our house and I stepped over the threshold of my own home.

At last, at last I was back where I belonged, for, in spite of everything, this was my place. How strongly I felt and realized this. The thought and the hope of coming back to it had helped and sustained me all the time I had lived abroad, but now I realized more strongly than ever the necessity of having some such anchorage in life, especially when one has children, a family. And my home needed me just as much as I needed it, I felt that too.

As all these thoughts and feelings came over me I suddenly understood that it was impossible to go on living like we were doing when we had a home and children and loved one another and were so happy together. It was senseless, useless, absurd.

"Oh, Sasha," I said, turning to my husband, "can't the children come back, can't we live again as before—live our own life—I am so sick of living other people's lives—and that is what I do when I am away from you and home. Living with one's parents when

one is married and has had a home of one's own is terribly trying, one automatically falls back into the position of a child and one is treated as such. Why even the children seem scarcely my own—their grandmother has taken full possession of them—she feeds and clothes them, they have a nurse paid by her and I have no say in the matter. Isn't it possible, can't we take the children back now, and live our own life again, just our own family, in our own home, however poor and modest it may be. Surely the worst is over, things are settling down, the terror has subsided, arrests and searches are less frequent, the food question is also normal at last, the shops are open, private trade is allowed (NEP), and food can be bought for money, anywhere, everywhere. Life in Soviet Russia is quite different now. Do let us try, surely we'll manage—others do. I simply can't bear the thought of going abroad again and leaving you here to carry on by yourself, it is too hard on you, it is useless, absurd, and cowardly. This is our country and our life lies here. I am sure the children are strong enough now ; as to the climate—after all they were born here so it is *their* climate. Do let us bring them back to live in their own home."

But my husband shook his head sadly. "Not yet my darling," he said, "we must wait a little longer for the children's sake. Believe me, in a few days you will see and understand yourself that it is impossible, it would be madness to bring the children back to this country now—it would be breaking their lives, destroying them morally and physically, think of it.

"They are used to a healthy, normal, child-life in England in healthy normal conditions ; such conditions are entirely out of the question here, you have no idea what the schools are like. No, this is the last country in the world where one should bring a child. It would

ruin a child both physically and morally. It is true the food question is better now thanks to the 'NEP'—but how long will it last? It may be done away with any moment—there are rumours already that all private trade is about to cease—and what then? You remember what it was like when there were only State Co-operatives? And then the epidemics: all the time they are raging and carrying off thousands of children.

"As to the terror having subsided—that too is only on the surface, life only *seems* more settled and normal and peaceful. Underneath, the terror is still going on as relentlessly as before. The Che-Ka has changed its name to the G.P.U.—it is working just as before—hundreds of people are still arrested daily, on the least suspicion ; only, one does not hear of it as much. And every one of us—of the Old Intelligentsia Class—is *always* in danger ; it can arrive at any moment. You have just left a civilized country—and of course you cannot realize all this yet. Only when you have lived amongst us for a little time will you understand and feel it all—not before. So, my darling, be brave, and bear it a little longer ; the time will come, I feel certain, when we shall be happy in our own home together—but now we must make this sacrifice for the children. They are too precious to us both, we would never forgive ourselves if we ruined their lives. I am longing to see them and I am still hoping to get that post on board one of the steamers bound for London. Perhaps whilst you are here, it will be possible to get it, so I will have another try in the spring."

After only a few days in Leningrad I understood what my husband had meant, and fully realized how difficult it would be for the children to settle down in U.S.S.R. after living for so long in England in almost ideal conditions. But I still cherished the hope that the day was not far off when not only they, but my

whole family would be able to return to Russia, and then, I imagined, our little home that we had managed to preserve in spite of all the destruction would be a haven of refuge for those who had lost theirs. It could not be, I thought, that we had lived and stuck it in vain all through those terrible years of Revolution, Famine and Terror: it must have been for some purpose. No, Russia would surely revive again and all those poor exiles would flow back eagerly to their country and would have somewhere to go ; homes like ours who had struggled through it all would welcome them back and be a shelter to the roofless ones. And together we would start rebuilding our poor mutilated country. Such homes were destined to be like lighthouses for those who would return to rebuild their country. This was my foolish dream. I did not understand then how cruel the Revolution is—how, in the end, it destroys all those who do not belong to it, understand it, sympathize with it, and how it has no mercy for those whom it considers as its enemies, and is relentless, unjust, and blind in its hatred.

In the meanwhile I settled down happily to my home duties, though as usual, I felt rather lost and bewildered at first: everything—life, interests and even conversation—was in U.S.S.R. so totally different from what it was anywhere else. The principal topic of conversation now was not food (as it had been all those years when we poor housewives could talk of nothing else) but housing.

This seemed now to be the chief problem in Soviet Russia, especially in the big towns like Moscow and Leningrad. Owing to the neglect of the streets, houses, and drains, many of the houses were in terribly bad condition and some of them quite uninhabitable. At the same time, the population in Leningrad had greatly increased during the last few years. When I

left in 1922 it had dwindled down to 600,000 and now it was well over a million. During the years of famine hundreds and thousands of people had left Leningrad for the more fertile provinces, where food was still to be obtained. Now, when the famine was over, and Lenin's New Economic Policy (the "NEP") had come into force making life easier, people flowed back to Leningrad ; and in addition to the former "rooted inhabitants" many newcomers arrived from the borders. As the houses were in such bad condition this made things very complicated. The authorities were not competent to cope with the situation and the result was that new and absurd decrees about housing and rentals were being constantly issued (the prices meanwhile going up terribly), limiting the space allotted per inhabitant, new rules, new laws, shortly a terrible muddle which reduced the wretched citizens to a state of hopeless panic and speculation as to what was coming next.

In Moscow things were far worse, and the most astounding news came from there about the awful living conditions. Rumours of several families living together not only in one flat but in one room and so on reached us, and the poor Leningradites were terrified lest the same should begin there. Compulsory "packing" was also beginning to be extensively indulged in and everyone lived in dread that this should happen to them. All depended on the housing committee known as the "JACT", so one had to be on good terms with them, which was very difficult, as they were almost always chosen from the Communists, who were hostile to the few remaining bourgeois. My husband, being a doctor and a "scientific worker", had a right to an extra room, so we were privileged in this respect, but most of our friends lived in constant dread as to what the next decree would bring. After all, our

homes were really the only thing that was left to us, and we clung to them, fearing that we would soon be deprived of them like the unfortunate inhabitants of Moscow. Rumours spread like wildfire, and the eternal theme of all conversation was, "Have you heard that next week there is to be a new decree . . ."

Another standing feature was the hostile attitude to England and the British. In the newspapers they were alluded to only as the "Tverdolobiye" or "Hardheaded Ones", and abuse was showered on them. It was childish and absurd and of course it aroused only laughter. All my friends used to tease me, calling me "the hardheaded one", because I was partly English. During my previous stay in 1924 Lord Curzon had been the object of hatred and abuse, his effigy had been carried through the streets, and burnt at every festival, and the famous placard "LORDAM PO MORDAM" (bash the lords on the jaw) had been the favourite catch phrase. This time it was Sir Austen Chamberlain who was the victim. His effigy, complete in silk hat and monocle, was always the subject of caricature, and it now took the place of Lord Curzon's in all the street demonstrations and organized processions.

A very funny thing happened just a few days after my arrival. I was walking along our Konnushenny Pereoulok when I saw two draymen having a tremendous argument, they were abusing each other "à la Russe" as they say, directing the most elaborate profanities at each other. Finally one made some super-offensive allusion to the other, whereupon his opponent, with scathing contempt, shouted back what to him was the only rejoinder to the insult: "Oh, you damned Chamberlain, you!" and this apparently gave him the victory since it certainly silenced the other man.

My husband was immensely amused when I came home with this story, as were all my friends ; no one had hitherto heard "Chamberlain" used as a term of personal abuse. They teased me, saying that it was for my especial benefit that the G.P.U. had staged the whole scene, so that I might write to and tell Sir Austen in England how popular he was among the "Conscientious working masses" of Soviet Russia.

## CHAPTER III

### KAPITOLINA

ONE of the first problems upon my arrival had been to get a servant. To my surprise everyone told me that this was quite easy, as there were many unemployed, but nobody could get a job unless he or she belonged to a trade union. On the other hand they could not get into a union unless they had a job! So it was a vicious circle. This was one of the many absurd features of Soviet life, and another favourite topic of conversation. So there only remained going into domestic service, which qualified them to join that Union ; having become a member of this, they could seek any more congenial job that took their fancy.

Thanks to all this, though actually *getting* a servant was not difficult, one had to be very careful in choosing one, as domestic service was regarded as a means to an end—that of entering the Communist Party. All my friends warned me about this and begged me to be careful in my choice. A number of servants belonging to the Communist Party were in the employ of the G.P.U. and acted as informers. The fact that I had come from abroad would surely attract these, and it was also very undesirable as denunciations and arrests were the sure outcome.

When I had last been in Leningrad, I had heard that my faithful Polia was associated with a Communist and under his influence was about to enter the Party. She was said to hate the Bourgeoisie now,

just as she had hated the Bolsheviks at the beginning. Yet this, somehow, I could never believe ; but in spite of my efforts I had not been able to get hold of her to verify these rumours for myself. I heard now that she had left the factory where she was working and had gone back to her native village in the Vologda Government, but intended to return to Leningrad and to work in the hospital again.

The very satisfactory servant Nina Arsentievna, a real old regime one, that I had had during my previous stay in Russia, had a job, but agreed to come and work for me by the hour until I would find a servant. She also promised to help me to find one.

One day she appeared looking rather glum and told me that her niece had just arrived from her village which was in the Government of Yaroslavl and wanted to become a servant in Leningrad. "Well, bring her here," I said, "perhaps she will do for me." Nina Arsentievna looked at me in horror: "Oh, no, Maria Carlovna, she won't do for *you*. She's a regular country bumpkin—scarcely knows her right hand from her left. I really don't know what I'm going to do with her, she ought to be in the fields with the cows, not in the capital!" "But why are you so down on the poor creature—what's the matter with her!" I remonstrated. "Do bring her to see me. I like peasant girls—she really might do for me." But Nina shook her head and waved her hand hopelessly: "No, no, Maria Carlovna, Kapitolina won't do. You'll understand that as soon as you see her. She's a great big clumsy lump who doesn't even know how to walk. If you like I'll bring her round to-morrow, you'll see for yourself." "Yes, do," I answered, for the ridiculous name of Kapitolina had fascinated me, also the description of her walk—so I was now dying to see her.

Next morning Nina Arsentievna appeared and told me that she had brought the famous Kapitolina and that the latter was waiting for me in the kitchen. I told her to show her into the dining-room. A tall buxom figure in a sheepskin jacket, valenki and a huge shawl on her head slowly entered the room behind Nina and stood still, gazing around her in bewilderment. She was a strong lumping girl of about nineteen, with a round pleasant, typically Russian face, cheeks like apples, a turned-up nose and a broad good-natured smile. I liked her face straight away. She certainly looked a lump, but a very pleasant one.

"There she is," said her aunt disdainfully, "she's just dying to come to you, but I really don't know if I ought to let you take her. Of course I'll come round and teach her things whenever I can. She vows that she is going to try her utmost to please you. Well, Kapitolina, stop staring and speak to the *Barinia*."

Kapitolina's face broke into a broad good-natured grin, but the only thing she said was "What?" with a delightful broad Central-Russian accent. "Do you want to work for me?" I asked her. "Take me, I'll do my best," she replied with another grin that conquered me at once, and I decided to have her.

Nina said she would stay to show her everything that day and began bustling about at once, ordered her to take off her things and to follow her into the kitchen to learn. Just as Kapitolina was leaving the room my husband came in from the hospital and stared with surprise at the new figure. "What is this?" he asked me, smiling. "This is the famous niece from the village—Kapitolina—my new servant," I replied proudly. My husband burst into peals of laughter. "You don't mean to say that you are seriously thinking of taking that lump?" he said. "But, darling, you don't know what you are doing. It is impossible!

You can't have such a servant! Why it'll be the case of the bull in the china shop! You see, she'll smash everything to smithereens! I know those peasant servants—you've never had one, so you don't know!"

"Well, I'm going to have one now, so I *shall* know soon!" I answered laughing. My husband tried to dissuade me—saying I had no idea what I was in for, but it was useless—Kapitolina had completely won my heart and I was bent on having her. All that day Nina stayed instructing her in all her duties. I heard her jostling the poor thing about, calling her "Doubina" (lump) and "doura" at every minute and Kapitolina now whimpering, now groaning or suddenly bursting into peals of the merriest laughter. I went out to do some shopping and when I came back I found Kapitolina in tears and Nina raging at her. "What's happened?" I asked. "There, look at that cow—look what she's done straight away," stormed Nina and showed me two broken electric light bulbs. "Knocked up against them with her wooden head! Why, she barges into everything! I've had such a morning with her! Stop your blubbering and come and learn how to lay the table now," she called out to the unfortunate Kapitolina who presently appeared, sniffing and blowing her nose violently in the corner of her apron.

She watched her aunt laying the table with a rather bewildered face, but it took her weeks before she learned how to do it. She never could remember where to place the things—though it seemed simple enough—laying just for my husband and myself! Every day she used to try something different. Either I would find all the knives and forks piled together in a heap, and just two plates standing next to each other, or another time the plates would stand at either end of the table with just a spoon on them, the salt

cellar quite out of reach, the soup ladle in the middle of the table. She used to think of the most extraordinary combinations—but never hit on the right one. I used to get quite excited as to how I would find the table laid this time, and truly there was always something new! The first days I used to come home and find her hot and dishevelled laying and re-laying the things with an expression of despair on her round good-natured face. "For the life of me I can't remember where that belongs!" she would exclaim hopelessly; "here have I been changing it over and over—and still it does not look like Aunt Nina's way! I've been crying, crying—and I can't do it—all the same!"

I would show her everything again and she would watch me as she heaved great sighs, propping up her head, in the typical peasant pose.

It was the same with other things—making the beds, for instance—after making them with me several times when I left her to do them by herself, I found to my amusement that she had put all the blankets underneath and covered the beds with the sheets! (The peasants do not use sheets in the villages.) But in spite of all this and the amount of crockery she managed to break every day, I decided to keep her, hoping she would get used to it all and become quite a good servant in time. Some things she learned quite quickly—she had quite a capacity for cooking and learned to make all her aunt's dishes (Nina Arsentievna was a great expert) in no time. Terribly heavy and clumsy in her movements and gait—she could not cross a room without knocking something over—she could sew and mend beautifully, and even embroider with great skill. On the other hand she could hardly touch anything without breaking it. My husband and all my friends were terribly amused at my having such a rustic "beauty" for a servant, especially after coming from

London! It was the standing joke and all my friends used to drop in to have a look at my "monster" as they called her and to watch me "training" her, which they considered to be a hopeless job. "Well, what has your favourite smashed to-day?" was my husband's first smiling question when he came back from work, and I would silently point to the door-handle (she used to manage to wrench them all off) or to the samovar she had crushed or a window pane she had cracked. Every day there was surely something.

But though she seemed the very spirit of destruction in some things, yet she was, with all this, so good-natured, so cheerful and so amusing that I could not think of parting from her. Her speech and manners were very funny, she said "thou" to me and would come up and nudge me suddenly if she wanted to draw my attention to anything. She also had her own ideas of doing things which often did not at all correspond with mine! One of her tricks was to hide all the dust she had swept from the floors behind the drawing-room stove. She was too lazy to take it away to the dust-bin, so she just hid it in a corner. In spite of all my remonstrations she did this whenever I wasn't looking. What she loved most was cleaning our boots and shoes. I had brought a few tins of "Nugget" boot polish with me, and Kapitolina adored the sight and smell of it. I shall never forget the look of rapture on her face when she would open a fresh tin. "Isn't it just beautiful?" she would say, smelling it blissfully, "Oh, Maria Carlovna, I would just like to eat it!" and she could sit on the floor for hours polishing and re-polishing away at our shoes, admiring them when they shone, perfectly happy and contented, till I would tell her at last that they were quite shiny enough and that it was time for her to do something else!

The private shops being open I generally used to go

shopping by myself, but Kapa used to beg me to take her with me to carry the basket, and once or twice I gave in. I have never seen anyone walk as she did—swinging her arms, jostling and pushing, banging into everyone. I was off the pavement in a minute—and had to continue walking in the road—Kapa occupying the entire very broad pavement! She was like a hurricane—brandishing her basket, talking and laughing so loud that all the passers-by stared at us in amazement. One day she began begging me to take her to the Sennoy Market—everything was much better and cheaper there, so Aunt Nina said, she assured me. When we got there it appeared that almost all the greengrocers were her "zemliaki" (kinsmen) from the Yaroslav Government where she came from herself, and many were her fellow-villagers. The greetings and cries and smiles and shouts of delight were endless, and Kapa bargained and wrangled about every copek with her dear kinsmen so that I was ashamed to be with her, but it was no use trying to stop her—she took no notice of me. "Leave me alone, Maria Carlovna—I'll get it for less than half they ask—you see!" she whispered to me triumphantly, and at last I fled leaving her my purse. She returned bringing loads of vegetables and twice as much change as I had expected! After that she always went alone!

In spite of her being so simple and childish, she was quite intelligent and very thrifty and shrewd and even cunning—as most peasants are.

It was extraordinary that in spite of the Revolution and ten years of Bolshevism this type of Russian peasant had remained in existence. She was very religious and every evening she would kneel in her kitchen before the big ikon in the corner, repeating prayers, crossing herself and bowing down to the

ground endless times. "I always thank the Lord that I am serving a real *Barinia* who has ikons and eats off a tablecloth," she used to say. "What would I do if I was waiting on one of the new 'gospoda' (masters)." To my surprise she could also read and write, though like a child only, spelling out the words with difficulty, but she could manage to write a letter in a sprawling childish hand. In a few months she got quite used to her work, though she never became a real servant. An amazing feature was her love of sleeping—she could sleep at any time and anywhere. Often Kapa would suddenly disappear in the afternoon and I would find her snoring away on her bed and it would take me some time to shake her awake. She was also extraordinarily fond of music and would stand spell-bound whenever I played the piano. "It's just like heaven," she used to say—when I stopped. She loved Chopin and would beg me to play one waltz over and over again whilst she listened, her eyes full of tears.

Though on the whole Kapitolina had become less destructive, she still sometimes had relapses into her "breaking" fits. One day I came home and found her in the kitchen, eating "schi" (Russian cabbage soup) with her wooden spoon and crying loudly and bitterly. In front of her on the kitchen table stood three hideous cups and saucers—one with cocks and hens, the other two with dreadful faces and flowers. "Whatever's the matter, Kapa?" I asked her, "what has happened to you?" "I've broken three more of your best English china cups," she sobbed; "the white and gold ones, oh, dear, oh, dear." "But I told you never to wash the tea-cups, that I would attend to them myself! Now why will you always insist on fingering them!" I said, feeling very annoyed—she had broken about five of them already—and now there were only four

left! "And where do those come from?" I asked, indicating the horrors that stood on the table. "I bought them for you in place of the others," she sobbed again and began crying still louder. I felt very sorry for her. "You shouldn't have done that, Kapa," I said. "Why spend your money? I never meant you to do that; thank you very much, they are very nice, but do stop crying now, it is all over. Where did you get those wonderful cups?" I asked her trying to distract her attention. But to my surprise, at this she started crying still louder. "But whatever is the matter with you, Kapa, why are you crying now?" I asked her feeling quite alarmed. "How can I stop crying," she bellowed, "when I broke a lot more whilst I was there." "Where?" I asked in horror. "Why, in the shop of course," she howled, "and they made me pay for them all, the scoundrels! Oh, dear, oh, dear," and she wept bitterly, rocking herself from side to side. It was so ridiculous that I could not help laughing—"But how did you manage to do that," I asked her. "Well, I only waved my arms when I turned round," she answered, between her sobs.

In the spring my husband at last got the job he had been trying to get all those years—he was appointed Doctor on board the s.s. *Rudsutak* that sailed from Leningrad Port to London Bridge every three or four weeks. We were both delighted that he would at last be able to see the children. The fact of my being in Russia was a guarantee that he would not remain abroad, I suppose. The job was not a difficult one and it was such a relief that he could rest a little after all those years of strenuous, appallingly badly paid work. The salary was slightly higher.

He used to be back about every three weeks for a few days before leaving for the next trip. I remained

in Leningrad with my famous Kapitolina, giving English lessons, as I always did when I was back in Russia. I had quite a number of pupils—both young and old—and was quite busy. Kapitolina had her own ideas about foreign languages and my teaching—she firmly believed that neither I myself nor any of my pupils understood a word of what we were saying to one another, and nothing would induce her to alter her views.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SEARCH

IN May, 1927, the headquarters of Arcos, the Bolshevist Trade Delegation in London, was raided by the British Police.

The reaction that this produced in Leningrad was a great demonstration of protest before the British Consulate, and, as usual, numerous searches and arrests were made amongst all those who were known to visit the British Consulate, or who had any general contact with England (correspondence, relatives, etc.). For some reason my husband and I had forgotten that we too belonged to this category and we were far from expecting any unpleasant visits. And then one night, about three o'clock, I heard the front door bell ringing persistently. Kapa went to open and a few minutes later she was at our door saying that there was someone asking for my husband. Thinking that it might be a professional call to some patient, I hastily slipped on a dressing-gown and ran out to the ante-room while my husband was getting dressed. To my amazement I was met by an armed soldier and two civilians. Without any preliminaries one of the civilians handed me a paper and said gruffly: "Order for search and, if necessary, for arrest." I looked at the paper . . . it bore the letter heading of the G.P.U. . . ! I ran back to my bedroom and told my husband the news. He didn't wait

to complete dressing, but putting on a dressing-gown, went out to receive our unwelcome guests.

The G.P.U. officials were accompanied by my arch-enemy, the President of the House Committee; this was in accordance with the regulations. They all trooped into our bedroom and started the search. They turned out every drawer and took possession of all papers including letters and any scrap that had writing on it. I had a lot of letters from England, they were mostly from my mother and from the children and all these were stacked up on one of the chairs. When they had finished with the bedroom, they started to turn out the drawing-room and the dining-room. I was amused to find that Kapa, who generally made up her bed on the couch in the drawing-room, and whose slumbers our visitors had disturbed, had drawn up two chairs in the kitchen on which she was now snoring away peacefully as though nothing unusual had happened. The search continued for about three hours. The men were quite polite and perfectly civil, while the youthful G.P.U. official was trying to make himself appear particularly important—he was the actual "investigator" (*sledovatel*). When they had finished, they sat down at the dining-room table to draw up the protocol. I wandered back into our bedroom and stood looking at the heap of papers and letters that were lying on the chair. Being very near-sighted, I knelt down in front of the chair, when suddenly to my horror I recognized, sticking out of the heap, a paper on which I had copied some counter-revolutionary verses that I had seen somewhere. I had completely forgotten about this paper, and I realized like a flash that if discovered, it might doom us—especially my husband. Quickly I snatched it from the other papers and slipped it into my dressing-gown pocket. At that very moment I heard my hus-

band calling out "Mary, come here," from the next room. There seemed a note of warning in his voice. Instinctively, as I was rising from my knees, I looked up, and to my horror, I saw, standing in the doorway and watching me, my arch-enemy, the President of the House Committee! Had he seen me extracting the paper or not? It was more than probable that he had, and in that case he would certainly denounce me when the moment suited him. My husband looked at me anxiously when I entered the drawing-room (he afterwards told me that he had seen the man moving towards the door and had called out to me on purpose to warn me in case I might be touching the papers). The paper was burning a hole in my pocket, but how could I get rid of it? Suddenly I had an inspiration: "May I leave the room or must I be present here?" I asked without addressing anyone in particular. My husband turned to the *sledovatel* and politely asked his permission for me to leave the room and he, very grandly, gave his consent. I dashed to the bathroom and quickly threw the wretched paper down the drain.

Feeling greatly relieved and even triumphant, I returned to the others just as our visitors were preparing to leave, their portfolios and brief-cases bulging with our letters and papers. By the look that my "arch-enemy" gave me as he passed, I understood that although he had not said anything, he had seen me extracting the incriminating paper, and this proved him to be a very human and kind "arch-enemy" after all.

## CHAPTER V

### THE KITCHEN RANGE

DURING my husband's absence on one of his trips I had a particularly exasperating encounter with the petty tyrants of the House Committee. Late in the evening Kapitolina, looking very scared, came into my room to say that the President of the Committee, her chief enemy, and two other men, had come to demolish my kitchen range.

"But what on earth for," I asked. "I'm not going to let them do it."

"They have started already," said Kapa. "You listen."

True enough, I could hear the ring of hammers coming from the kitchen. I dashed into the room to find three men energetically pulling my range to pieces whilst the President looked on. It was built of brick, on the usual Russian plan, and they were making rapid progress.

"What are you doing," I demanded angrily. "How dare you touch my stove."

"Order from the House Committee, citizen," said the President with a leer. "You are in the Soviet now, not England, and so you will have to submit."

I could not believe my ears. It seemed so stupid. How could the Revolution benefit by knocking a housewife's kitchen range to bits? Finally the President vouchsafed an explanation.

"This room is too big for a kitchen," said he. "We must find another place for the range."

Then I understood. The House Committee could not charge rent for space used for kitchen, bathrooms and corridors. When my husband had taken our flat there had been no kitchen in it and so he made one in a large back room. This annoyed the "lords" of the House Committee who lost something in rent, and they were now taking their revenge.

"But where do you intend to put the range?" I inquired. "There is no other place for it."

"Oh, we'll find a place, don't you worry," answered the President, hugely enjoying my helpless anger. "It can go there in the passage—or in the lavatory!"

I could only gasp with astonishment. It was useless to argue with these people. If they had announced that the ceiling was to come down, as they were quite capable of doing, I could have done nothing about it. I left them to their work.

Next morning I rushed off to see some friends and inquire whether I could usefully lodge a complaint with some authority. My friends explained that I should have refused to admit the house-breakers to my home. I had that right, but, once inside, the House Committee men had the right to command.

When I returned to my flat I was met by an agitated Kapitolina who told me that the men had actually carried away the bath (our bathroom was a bathroom and lavatory combined) and had put the kitchen range in its place! The House Committee had enjoyed a complete triumph.

"It's all happened because of that devil the *oupravdoma* (president)," exclaimed Kapitolina, who described to me the battle of words she had with the wreckers while I was out. Apparently it went something like this :—

OUPRAVDOMA: "Now your mistress will have to

forget about her English ways and get used to ours. She'll have to stop worrying about baths."

KAPITOLINA: "Ugh, you horse-thief. My mistress isn't going to eat meals cooked in a lavatory. To you, perhaps, they would taste all the better. We'll get our own back and you will be fined for trespassing."

Poor Kapitolina. She suffered much at this triumph of "proletarian culture", for she loathed the House Committee manager with all her heart. He was certainly as unprepossessing as he was unkind. A gipsy, his face always wore an expression of low cunning, and the loss of an eye had not improved his appearance.

However, there was no redress. I complained to the sanitation authorities that it was not wise to put a cooking stove in a lavatory. I complained to the fire authorities that it increased the danger of fire. It was all of no avail, I could not get my stove replaced in its old position nor could I get the House Committee fined.

At last, tired of doing all my cooking on a primus stove, I called in a workman without saying a word to the Committee and had my range rebuilt in its proper place. Inevitably it came to the ears of the President and after a few months the House Committee took action against me in the courts. By this time I was safely away in England, but I heard the result of the law-suit. I was duly sentenced to pay a fine for illegally removing my kitchen range from the lavatory to the kitchen! The ways of Soviet justice are indeed very odd.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE PARTY

WITH the coming of NEP (that New Economic Policy which permitted private trading) life in Russia gradually became more normal. There was food to be had and even sometimes clothes, and conditions generally became easier. The social life and intercourse that had been repressed for so long by famine and terror became more evident, people began to entertain once more and to seek the usual forms of amusement. We citizens of Leningrad who through the preceding years had scarcely dared to venture outside our houses after dark for fear of being robbed of everything, including our clothes, now began to go out to cinemas, theatres and especially to parties. It was the ambition and the delight of everyone to entertain their friends. The natural inborn sense of hospitality of the Russian that had been stifled during all those long years, now took on a new lease of life and people showered invitations on their friends and vied with each other in giving enormous feasts.

The Russian is never so happy as when he has a table groaning with provisions surrounded by as many guests as he can squeeze into his apartment. Very often half a month's salary would be spent on a single evening's entertainment, but no one minded that, even though it did mean living on practically a potato diet till the next pay day. We were all infected with this spirit and my husband and I were like the rest. The fact that I had only recently returned from

abroad made people particularly anxious to visit us, and we saw a great deal of all our friends and acquaintances.

We in Russia had learnt to live from day to day. As a Russian poet said "The mere fact of being alive to-day is a sufficient mercy in itself," and this aptly describes our outlook and attitude before the establishment of the all-too-short days of NEP. Although most of the guests were in constant danger of arrest, the shadow of the prison house did not seem to damp their spirits. The parties were gay and happy in spite of the ever-present cloud that hung over us all. It seemed, somehow, even to increase the gaiety and to unite us all with a bond of sympathy and understanding. No one talked of this unity but all were heartened by its existence.

Much depended on the temperament of the guests. The more nervous would from time to time peep surreptitiously out of the windows and front door to see that all was well. Bolder souls would play practical jokes on the timid. Although food and drink played an important role at these parties, there was generally also plenty of entertainment—music, dancing and tzigane songs were much appreciated by these vestiges of the old bourgeoisie that included representatives of all forms of culture and art, and I do not remember ever having been dull at any of these parties.

My husband and I knew many interesting people from the world of literature and the theatre, and now we revived old friendships and made a number of new ones.

We occupied a flat in a fairly large mansion and very soon found that all the tenants who belonged to the old bourgeoisie were accustomed to help one another in any difficulties that arose.

Thus, if the collector came to cut off the electric light and one had not a single copek in the house—one ran to a neighbour and was certain of borrowing enough money for the bill. Or again, if the bath did not function (and this was our especial cause of appeal for help), one was always welcome to use the bath in another flat, so long as one provided fuel, the price of which was prohibitive. In this way we shared our joys and fears.

Housewives were particularly helpful to one another. During the years of famine we had all learned tricks of cooking by which we could substitute most unlikely ingredients for articles which, in a normal country, would be regarded as essential to any modest kitchen. This meant that a great variety of recipes could be exchanged when preparations were in hand for receiving guests.

In the flat above us there lived a charming family—husband, wife and daughter—who had moved in when we did. The girl was just finishing school, and the father, a barrister under the old regime, now worked for a Soviet institution. He was as gay and witty as a host, as his wife was wonderful as a cook. We became fast friends and I taught the girl, who was a serious student of languages, to speak English. My husband was their doctor and they adored him, begging him to consider their home his whenever I was away in England.

Eventually the wife, Olga Petrovna, and I evolved a special method of signalling by knocks on the wall if we wanted to see each other. Thus if she wished me to taste some dish which had turned out especially successful she would knock three times, if I was called to the telephone—twice ; and so on.

The spring brought an occasion on which Olga Petrovna mustered all her culinary talents. It was

her daughter's coming of age, the sixteenth birthday in Russia, and a grand party was prepared. The entertainment, I remember, included fox-trots and two-steps to the music of "No, No, Nanette", which had just reached Russia from abroad, and the menu for the supper had been discussed weeks in advance.

When the great day arrived, I, or rather my maid Kapitolina, was the cause of the party's sudden end. This happening was another of the many incidents which, although comically absurd in themselves, served to show the nervous tension under which we all lived at that crazy period.

My husband's ship had not returned to Leningrad in time as we had hoped, so I went to the party alone. Hour after hour it went merrily on with music and dancing, and at midnight, as was the Russian custom, we went in to supper. The table was wonderful to behold. Every one of the remarkable dishes being the work of our hostess herself.

As we sat down to the table a belated guest arrived, explaining that he had mistaken the number of the flat and had knocked at many doors before finding the right one. We were about to start the second course when steady knocking was heard. Conversation ceased. We all sat listening, puzzled by the ominous noise. Suddenly I realized that the knocks were coming from my flat.

"Why, it's Kapitolina," I said, rising from the table. "Perhaps it's a wire from my husband, I will go and see."

"Don't go, Maria Carlovna," said my hostess, "I will send Lydka. Perhaps it is the doctor himself, and she will ask him to come straight up and join us."

Lydka was their servant, a peasant girl of the Kapitolina type, who had, however, been much better trained by Olga Petrovna than all my energy and

attempts at inculcating the most elementary rules of domestic service into my own Kapitolina's head had seemed to produce. Lydka departed and the conversation revived, when suddenly the knocking began again. This time we were seriously alarmed.

"Why, Lydka has not returned," suddenly realized our hostess turning pale; "what does it mean?" . . . We all stopped talking. The same thought had crossed everybody's mind. It must be a raid by the G.P.U. We knew a favourite trick of theirs was to attract attention to a flat and wait in ambush, taking off to prison everyone who showed a "suspicious" interest in the proceedings by coming to the door.

At once all the lights in my hostess's home were switched off. We crept to the windows and looked out to see if there were any signs of a visitation by the G.P.U. The dreaded G.P.U. lorry was nowhere to be seen, the street was empty and quiet. "They must have left the lorry round the corner," whispered our host. "Quickly, we must destroy all evidence of the party," said someone; "or else they will think it is a counter-revolutionary assembly."

In the twinkling of an eye the table was cleared, everyone moving swiftly and silently.

In the meanwhile the knocking was going on steadily. I rose to go, knowing that if the G.P.U. had come for me they would stay there till I returned. My hostess embraced me, tears in her eyes: "God protect you, my dear," she said, making the sign of the cross over me. The other ladies did the same, all full of anxiety and sympathy.

Several of the men wished to go with me, but I would not hear of it as it would only complicate matters—they were sure to be arrested with me. One of them, however, insisted on seeing me downstairs at least and we set off together, but when we had

reached my entrance he refused to turn back. We climbed on tip-toe up the stairs and put the key in the front door. The chain was across and I rattled the door and began to call for Kapa. Someone, sobbing loudly, came down the passage. Opening the door as wide as the chain would allow, I saw Kapitolina and Lydka slowly advancing, their arms round each other, both crying bitterly.

"Whatever is the matter?" I said impatiently. "Open the door!" When eventually they let me in they wailed: "Oh, Gospodi, Gospodi, here you are at last. Maria Carlovna, how could you keep us waiting so long? Why, we were almost murdered. What a terrible fright we had." It took a long time to subdue the sobs and to get some kind of coherent story out of the panic-stricken pair. At last Kapa began to tell me that a murderer had come knocking on the door, demanding admittance and threatening to kill her. There had been several men on the stairs, she said, but only one had come to the door. "I screamed, go away 'Chort' (Devil), go away, and at last he went," said Kapa. "I was almost unconscious from fright, but when I came to I began knocking for you, you never came, but Lydka did and stayed to comfort me, and we began knocking together."

I was completely bewildered by this mysterious story and together with the man who had accompanied me I made a thorough search of my flat. All was in order and there was no sign either of Lucifer himself or one of his human minions.

Leaving Lydka to console her friend, my companion and I returned to reassure our poor hosts. We found them in darkness, and more panic-stricken than ever. The fact that my companion had also not returned was another proof that it really was an ambush. They greeted us with cries of "Thank God" and we

started telling them the mysterious story. "My monster Kapitolina must have had a nightmare," I said apologetically, when suddenly the young man who had lost his way earlier in the evening exclaimed: "I know what happened! When I was trying to find your flat I knocked at several doors. One person would not open and kept yelling, 'Go away, go away, Chort.' I thought it must be a madwoman and departed as rapidly as I could."

Of course this "madwoman" was my imaginative and cowardly Kapitolina, mistaking an ordinary person who happened to knock on the door late at night, for the Devil himself. It was a funny enough explanation of the fantastic affair, but I am afraid my poor hosts were far from being amused. Their party had been broken up and although we tried to resume, the gaiety had fled. When we looked for the claret cup that we hoped would revive us, we found to our dismay, that it had disappeared. An obliging but panicky guest had hastened to empty it into the sink!

The guests soon departed and I don't think my hostess ever forgave Kapitolina.

## CHAPTER VII

### A STRANGE VISIT

IT was during my second return to Russia, as I was one day walking along the familiar streets of the Peterbugskaya Storona, where my parents' house was situated, that I suddenly resolved to try and get inside my old home. After my parents had gone to England the house had been occupied by several government institutions in succession; when I last heard of it, it had been a Home for Defective Children. Walking down our street I soon arrived at the garden paling, then came the house—a two-storied one, built in the English fashion. Peeping in through the windows, I saw, to my great surprise, that the old curtains and brise-bises were actually still hanging there! It gave me quite a shock to see them—for one brief moment it seemed as if nothing had ever happened. . . .

The gate leading to the front door was closed so I went on to the back gate. It was wide open and there was nobody in sight, so I stepped inside, walking quickly through the yard, past the stables and carriage-house, straight into the garden. It had run quite wild and was almost unrecognizable; the lilac-bushes had spread out, hiding the dining-room windows and completely concealing the little "wash-house"—a favourite haunt of our childhood. The lilac was in full bloom, masses of it, its fragrance and beauty making up for the decay and neglect that

stared at me from all sides. I stood there, looking at the dear old place, hardly daring to go further ; then suddenly I noticed a woman sitting on a window-ledge. She was eating sun-flower seeds and watching me curiously. I came up to her. "Can you tell me if there is anybody living in this house?" I asked. She stared at me, and continuing to spit out the shells, answered lazily: "No. They're moving. It used to be a 'Home'." "Do you know if there is any of the old furniture left?" I went on, in spite of her off-handed manner. "Yes, there is furniture." "Do you think I could look over the house?" was my last question. "You'd better ask the manageress about that," was her answer ; "she'll be coming out in a minute, or I can send the child to ask her. Here, Mashka," she called out to a little girl who was playing in the yard, "run and tell the manageress that there is a citizen here who has come to see the house." The child departed and was back in a few moments saying that the manageress was coming.

A dark sharp-featured woman appeared in the doorway. "You have come to inspect the house, Comrade?" she asked. "Yes, if I may," I answered. "You have come from the 'Kujd' (Commissariat of Children's Welfare)?" I hesitated a moment: if I affirmed this, I would undoubtedly be allowed inside, but she might ask for my permit—and then where would I be? I decided not to risk it. "No, I do not work there," I answered. She looked at me suspiciously: "What do you want to look over the house for then?" she asked sharply. "It is just a fancy of mine. You see, many years ago I lived here, and I thought I'd like to go over it—if you would allow me," I answered.

"Are you related to the former owners?"

"Yes."

"The daughter?"

"Yes."

"Maria Carlovna?"

"Yes. But how do you know my name?"

"Oh, we know there were several daughters, and that one of them married a Russian doctor and remained here when the family left for England. So you are the one? And you want to see your old home? Well, come along. We are moving, you know. You are lucky to have come to-day."

We entered the big kitchen. How dismal, untidy and dirty it looked! So unlike the warm cheery place we children used to love. Everything seemed different. It was unrecognizable. Through the pantry we passed into the dining-room. My heart was beating fast—the dear familiar dining-room, so full of memories! Our big noisy family gathered round the huge table, the steaming samovar singing away, Miss Fanny, our old English governess fussing with the tea-cups, the laughter, the merriment. . . . It all came back.

But alas—not a single familiar object remained in the room—all had been taken, and some strange clumsy looking sideboards and chairs stood in their places. . . . Then suddenly, looking up, I saw the lamp—the dear old lamp with the same yellow silk lampshade—still hanging over the table! I could scarcely believe my eyes. How it brought back the past to look at it! The dear happy past, childhood and youth, the wonderful care-free life of those pre-War days. I stood there gazing at it, memories crowding around me. . . .

"You seem to recognize the lamp?" said my companion pleasantly.

"Yes, I am so glad to see it. It is like meeting a dear old friend."

She smiled quite kindly and said: "If you only knew what a lot of comfort and joy this lamp has given all our poor children in the long winter evenings! I am sure you would not grudge it to them."

We passed on into the other rooms. The house was a wilderness. . . . Dirty, stripped bare of everything, it made me think of a deserted, neglected cemetery. . . . I walked sadly from room to room—the nursery, classroom, bedrooms, all were a sorrowful sight. My companion was chattering away all the time asking me questions about my people and, to my great surprise, naming the different members of our family!

"But how is it that you know so much about us all? I have never seen you before. Do tell me," I begged her.

She smiled mysteriously. "Very well, I will tell you the secret," she said. "In the drawer of one of the writing-tables we found a whole lot of letters, photographs, and even a diary. We were very interested and read them all, and after that it seemed as if we knew you all quite well. . . . We used often to talk about you and wonder how and where you were living now. We have even kept the letters and photographs in case we should come across you some day. I will give them to you presently. The diary I was obliged to burn. . . ." She said this very significantly —I understood at once that it must have contained something political. But whose could it have been? None of us, as far as I knew, ever kept one. I racked my brains in vain. The woman seemed to guess my thoughts. "The diary belonged to your brother's wife—Nathalia Ivanovna," she said. "I am afraid she was not very discreet. . . . Your brother, I think, was in the British Army, was he not?"

Now I understood. Natasha had evidently kept a

diary during the time my brother had been imprisoned in the Peter-and-Paul Fortress, and had probably given vent to her feelings in it. . . . It was very decent of this woman to have destroyed it, since a document like that might have easily caused serious trouble for any one of our family still in Russia.

We now entered my parents' bedroom, and here I gasped with surprise, the big room was full of our furniture, mostly wardrobes and cupboards that were full of all sorts of things. These were being sorted and packed by several young women—the staff of the "Home". I recognized many old familiar objects—there was a trunk full of curtains and hangings from the different rooms, another full of blankets and rugs. . . .

My companion introduced me: "This is the daughter of the former owners of the house."

I was looked at curiously by the teachers, most of whom were quite young women. "We've often wondered what you were like," said one of them to me suddenly. "There are quite a lot of photographs, but we didn't know which was you. We did enjoy reading about you all, though! But we must give them to you now that you are here. I will fetch them for you, I know where they are." She left the room, returning with a bundle of papers and photographs that she put down on the table before me. I started looking through them, the young women all crowding round me.

"Oh, do tell us who is who, we know all the names. This is Ninochka, isn't it? She was the baby. And is this your country house? or is it your grandmother's estate?" On and on they chattered, plying me with questions, all very friendly and good-natured.

There was one young woman amongst them who had a specially nice, intelligent face. She looked so

sympathetic and understanding. "If you only knew how often, living in this house, I have thought and wondered about you all," she suddenly said to me. "What a nice, big, friendly family yours must have been. What a delightful, cosy home you had. Why, even now, though stripped of everything, the house still seems to retain its happy, home-like atmosphere. Do you know that even our poor children seemed to feel it. They were so happy here, they loved this house and were so sad to leave it. Often and often have we made up tales about you all and wondered how you were getting on in your far-away strange land."

She said this so kindly, her manner was so sympathetic and sincere, that it brought the tears to my eyes. Her words about the poor children having felt so happy in our old home seemed somehow to make up for the destruction and decay of all that surrounded me, and to take the bitterness out of my sadness.

Gathering together my bundle of letters and photographs, I bade them good-bye, thanking them for their kindness in having kept them for me, and casting a last glance at the dear familiar walls, I sadly left my old home.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE LOST BAG

ONE winter afternoon I was hurrying along the Nevsky Prospect on my way towards Nadejdinskaya Street to visit Koni who was ill with pneumonia. I had just finished giving one lesson and had about one hour and a half's time before my next pupil came. It was not much but I reckoned that I could just do it —if I did not stay too long. The trams being overcrowded as usual, it was quicker to walk, so I rushed along at full speed. Coming to the corner of Sadovaya Street I saw a woman selling oranges and stopped to get a couple of them for him. However, she asked such a price for them that I had only enough money to buy one—oranges were, and still are, a great luxury in Leningrad. Putting my bag and the orange into my muff I hurried on towards Nadejdinskaya Street. It was only when I presented Anatoli Feodorovitch with the orange that I found out to my dismay that my bag was missing, it had evidently slipped out of my muff, or I must have dropped it as I was walking. I was very distressed about this, because although my purse was almost empty, the bag contained my favourite little tortoise-shell lorgnon and a pair of pearl ear-rings that I had brought from London for a friend—the fashion for artificial pearls had also reached Leningrad and it was the ambition of every woman to possess some, but they were very expensive and very few could afford them. Thinking I might have dropped the bag when I was buying the

oranges and hoping vaguely that the woman had picked it up and would return it to me, I rushed back to the place—but alas! there was no sign of either oranges or woman.

Feeling very upset I walked on musing on what I should do, for to lose something in Soviet Russia was fatal. But surely there must be *some* honest people, and there must be a Lost Property Office somewhere. I came up to a militia officer and asked him if such an institution existed. He grinned and said "Yes". "What have you lost?" he then asked in a sympathizing tone. When I told him it was my bag his smile grew still broader and he shook his head doubtfully without answering my question. "But where is the place?" I insisted. "Don't you think I might find it there?" "Try if you like," he answered, shrugging his shoulders and looking at me as if I was a lunatic and he was humouring me by giving me the address. I suddenly realized where I was—of course it was quite useless going there. Feeling very dejected I returned home. I would never be able to get another lorgnon. My husband was back from the hospital and was very sympathetic about my loss, but was just as amused as the militia officer had been when I told him how I had hoped to find it and had enquired about the Lost Property Office. "You forget, darling, you are not in London—if you lose anything here, it's gone for good," he said. "Especially an *objet de luxe* such as a lady's handbag. I am sure many quite decent women would be almost ready to commit a crime to possess one! And after all—when people live deprived of everything it is quite natural!"

The next day dear old Amalchen came to see me. She was my friend Xenia's German governess, who had known me since I was quite young and still lived in the same family. I had brought some real

coffee from England—an almost unobtainable luxury in Leningrad. Amalchen adored coffee and it was was one of her chief joys to come and have a cup with me, when I was back in Leningrad, now and again. I hadn't seen her for quite a long time. We were chatting cosily over our cups when suddenly she said: "By the way, Märiehen, I wanted to ask you, has your bag been returned to you?" I looked at her in surprise. "But how do you know I lost it? I haven't told anyone about it." "Oh," said Amalchen, "I quite forgot to tell you: yesterday someone rang up Olga's office (Olga was the 'Gollywog's' wife) and asked if there was anyone whose Christian name was 'Olga' in the office. Olga answered that it was her own name. Then the person told her that she had just picked up a lady's handbag in the street and in it she had found a small red calendar with just 'Olga' and a telephone number scribbled in it. She described the bag and Olga at once identified it as being yours and gave her your name and address. When she had rung off she suddenly realized that she had not asked for the stranger's name—but it was too late. So you will probably get your bag to-day or to-morrow," said Amalchen. I was greatly delighted at the news and waited impatiently all that day, but no one appeared either that day or the next. "She must have telephoned before she had discovered the ear-rings," said my husband, "but after that the temptation was too great—you cannot expect a woman in Soviet Russia to give back a pair of ear-rings." I was beginning to think the same, when on the third day, I received the following postcard: "Citizen, I picked up your handbag on the Nevsky Prospect three days ago. If you want it please come to Vladimirskaya Street." (Then followed the address in full and name.)

I flew off there the same afternoon at the appointed time. It was a big house of communal flats. I found the one indicated and was told that the person I wanted occupied the third room along the corridor. I knocked at the door—a quiet voice said: "Come in," and a tall young girl in spectacles came forward to meet me.

"You have come for your bag," she said, smiling shyly; "here it is," and she handed it to me. I thanked her warmly and asked her where she had picked it up. "Almost at the corner of the Sadovaya," she answered, "I saw it lying in the road as if someone had kicked it off the pavement." She had evidently been walking just behind me, because it was but a few yards further than where the orange-woman had stood. "I pitied you when I looked through your glasses," she said, "you are as short-sighted as I am —so I knew how you must be feeling about them, and also about such a lovely bag—it must come from abroad—we don't have such beautiful things here. Have you really come from abroad?" I told her I had come from England only a few months ago, and she was very interested and asked me quite a lot of questions. She then told me that she was studying at the Foreign Languages Institute and had taken up French and Spanish. I knew the French and Spanish Professor there and told her so. Hearing this she grew very excited: "Oh, he is so handsome!" she exclaimed. "But we are all rather afraid of him, he is very strict. In a few days we are having an examination. Next term I am going in for English." We chatted away for quite a long time—she was charming and naïve, so eager to hear about England and other foreign countries. Before leaving I took the pearl ear-rings out of my bag and putting them on the table I begged her to accept them from me as a

small souvenir of the incident. But to my utter dismay and confusion she flushed to the roots of her hair, pushed them back proudly, and said: "You seem to think there are no more honest people in Russia? No, thank you very much, I don't want your earrings."

Feeling terribly embarrassed, I quickly put them back in my bag, explaining that I never dreamed of thinking anything of the sort, or of hurting her feelings, and begged her to forgive me for having involuntarily done so. Thereupon seeing my confusion she readily forgave me. I invited her to come and see me, telling her I had some English magazines and journals she might like to see. She thanked me and promised to come. Saying good-bye, I smilingly asked her if she would like me to say a few words to Professor X., so that he would not be too strict at the examination. She flushed a bright red and exclaimed eagerly: "Oh, thank you! thank you! if only you would." I promised to do so and left her looking very pleased.

That same evening I rang up Professor X. and told him all about my new friend, asking him to be very kind to her at the forthcoming examination. He promised me to let her off as easily as possible. When I saw him a week later he told me that she had passed successfully, and that the last question he had asked her was: "Can you tell me why a bag is called *un ridicule* in French?"

## CHAPTER IX

### TSAPIK'S RETURN HOME

ALL through that summer my husband continued his trips to London, bringing me news of the children and my parents. Every time he went he took back some Russian "gostintzi" (sweetmeats) with him—water-melons, pastila or jam made by Kapitolina and myself—we both exerted ourselves in preparing those dainties under the direction of our kind expert, Olga Petrovna.

I had quite a number of pupils and was busy giving lessons and I also spent a lot of my time with Koni who, since the early spring, was laid up with a slowly progressing pneumonia. He got better at times, but then again there would be a relapse. We all understood that it was a hopeless case, that at his great age and with his feeble constitution weakened by years of privation it was impossible to recover. But his power of resistance was wonderful, and though worn to a shadow, he dragged on and on ; the strength of his spirit in his frail body was truly marvellous. He retained all his mental faculties till the end, amusing his nurses and doctors by his wonderful stories and his never failing sense of humour. They used to listen spellbound to him, forgetting to stop him, though the orders were that he was to talk as little as possible. "Though he ought not to talk," the doctor once confessed to me, "yet when he begins I try to stop him and then I can't help listening—it is so extraordinarily interesting."

My friend Sister Genia was helping Elena Vassilievna to nurse him, and I used to come in daily to relieve them both whenever I had an hour or two to spare. These hours spent at Anatoli Feodorovitch's bedside will always remain in my memory. He seemed always to have some treasure to give one from his wonderful house of memory, some beautiful and wonderful things to say to one, some interesting episode to relate. Or he would lie reciting some unpublished poem by an obscure and forgotten poet. There were days when he only spoke about Poushkin, his favourite writer—he knew the whole of his works by heart and would recite his great poems, one after another, as only Koni alone could recite.

Poor Anatoli Feodorovitch hardly expected to get well again, and yet, at times, there seemed to be a gleam of hope in his eyes. "Do you think it is possible that I shall be able to do a little more work again, Merichka?" he would ask pathetically. "You know, I still have a great task before me. I intend to write the 'Prognosis of the Russian Revolution': all my materials are collected and ready; I have only to write it. I feel that it is a work that I *ought* to do, that I owe to Russia, as the materials I have are really precious and extraordinarily interesting. Think only —I have lived in the reigns of five monarchs—Nicholas I, Alexander II, Alexander III, Nicholas II and—Lenin! If Providence will make me a present of another two or three years—I will be able to finish it!"

But Fate was not kind and Anatoli Feodorvitch was never able to start his great work, which surely with his colossal erudition, his clear sighted judgment and his brilliant pen, would have been a most valuable contribution to Russian history and literature. I remember on one occasion during the first period of

his illness, I was surprised to find him not in bed but in his study. Wrapped up in his warm dressing-gown, he was sitting at his writing-table—the drawers were open and he was sorting them out. "I felt much better to-day, so I insisted on being brought here," he explained to me. "It was a regular battle with my 'keepers' but I came out victorious in the end! You see, I have a very long journey in front of me—so I am preparing for it," he added with his humorous smile. "I had the first warning some time ago, you remember" (meaning that he had had a severe heart attack), "so I must get ready."

His table was strewn with papers, letters, menu cards and programmes, in fact with all the rubbish that accumulates in years around us all. He sat there handling them, gravely looking at them, reading some, throwing away others, or piling them up in tidy heaps.

"Do you know, Merichka," he said, "that when I look back at my long life, bringing to memory different stages and episodes—I can see so clearly and plainly that nothing, not one single incident in life, occurs without there being some reason, and the least incident has its own significance. Life is a chain, the links of which are composed of these incidents and their consequences, and often events, that at the moment appear to be not only cruel, but senseless will in time prove to be essential in leading up to some event of prime importance in our life. Believe me, my child, I am not theorizing, but speaking from long experience and careful observation. Let this be a consolation to you.

"It seems to me that the most terrible, the most tragic thing that can befall one in life is to be *too late*. 'Pozdno' (too late), what a cruel, what a relentless word! In its finality it is far more terrible than *Death*

itself, and, being irrevocable, far, far worse than *Never*.

"To understand too late, to love too late, to forgive too late, to appreciate too late, to save too late, to regret too late—think of it—can anything be more tragic, more terrible? Nothing, I am sure of it." He grew silent and sad—and I felt he was speaking again from experience.

Little did I think, as I listened to him that morning, that before three years would pass, I would myself know all the bitterness, all the terrible tragedy and meaning that those two ruthless words contained.

That was the last time I saw Anatoli Feodorovitch in his beloved study, in his accustomed place at the writing-table. But a few days before his death he asked to be carried in there again—and lay there in silence for more than an hour, looking around fondly, as if bidding farewell to the room that he loved so well, the room had really been part of his life.

My husband used to come and see Anatoli Feodorovitch every time he was back in Leningrad and his characteristic energy and cheerfulness used to act as a tonic on the old man. He admired and loved my husband for his vitality, his strength, his courage and his readiness to cope with anything: "Oh, if only our country had more men like your Sasha," he used to say to me. "Usually, if we Russians have either brains or talent, we utterly lack backbone and courage—whereas he has both. And with his great talent he is so distinterested, so human. Do you know, Mary, that I am positive that if it were not for those disorderly times, he would make a very great name for himself.

"However, if it is not he—it is our Tsapinka who will cover us with glory," he added, smiling at me. "How I would like to have another glimpse of him!

But no, we must thank God that he is in safety and health and in a free and noble country where they know how to make fine men! Who knows, perhaps he will one day be a doctor like his father and his grandfather before him."

Koni had a special admiration for medical men. Himself the son of a doctor, he had hesitated between the choice of law or medicine as a profession. He considered the Russian doctors to be the finest in the world because the practice of medicine in Russia was a calling, not a profession.

"Nowhere on earth can you find such men as our doctors, so disinterested, so ready to sacrifice themselves for their fellow creatures," Koni would say.

"What they do for others, without thought of reward and out of pure compassion and love, I do not think you will find equalled in any other country. The work they are carrying on now since the Revolution is truly heroic. Think of it, without medicine, without instruments, dealing with uncultured, uncivilized patients, and amid the wildest confusion and disorder, they are working miracles.

"If indeed there are people willing to give their lives for their friends you will find them among the doctors of Russia."

It was after one of my talks with Koni about Tsapy that I first had the idea of my husband's bringing him over to stay with me for a while. I missed the children so terribly and I was longing to see them. Mary was out of the question—she was too small. But Tsapik was almost eight. When I approached my husband about this he smiled and said, "It is strange, but I have been thinking about it myself. I wanted to give you a great surprise—and now you have guessed it yourself! Why, I nearly brought him this

last time—only his grandmother wouldn't hear of it. But this next trip I hope to persuade her to let our young man come to visit his native land. I am just longing to bring him and to have him all to myself on the boat. I am sure he will love it, and that all will be well." To tell the truth it was rather a reckless plan to bring the child—he would have to be smuggled in and out of the country without any papers—because if it were done officially he might never be allowed to go back to England again. However, we resolved to risk it, and I have never regretted it and am to this day glad and thankful that my little son came home with his father—and will grow up with at least some recollection of his home and his country.

It was the beginning of September. The day before my husband sailed, his father—old Doctor Britneff of Tsarskoye Selo—died quite suddenly from heart failure. He was a wonderful personality, one of the grand old men of his generation, a skilled and talented physician beloved and known by the whole of Tsarskoye Selo, where he had lived and practised for over forty years. His death was a great blow to my husband and upon learning it he at once applied to the G.P.U. for permission to miss the trip to London, in order that he might stay with his mother and be present at his father's funeral. But the answer was a characteristic one: "If you are not on board the steamer to-morrow when it sails, you will find yourself in the G.P.U." So there was nothing to do but to sail.

My father-in-law's funeral was a most impressive sight. Hundreds of people—almost all his patients—flocked to conduct their beloved doctor to his last resting-place, and the speeches delivered at his grave were moving and full of love and gratitude. He had died at his post: faithful to the end to his ideals and

principles. Though the Revolution had robbed him of everything—(he had occupied a high post in the old regime, being physician to the late Tsar)—he continued working with the same love and zeal, ministering to the poor as to the rich, never refusing to go to a patient however tired he was, or whatever the time —night or day.

I was so terribly sorry that my husband had not brought Tsapik over—his grandfather was so fond of him—his little namesake—and had so longed to see him again. But it was not to be. I only hoped and prayed as I listened to the moving speeches at Vladimir Alexandrovitch's grave that his little grandson, the bearer of his name, would follow in his footsteps and be as beloved and respected as had been his grandfather.

Towards the end of September my husband's boat *The Soviet* steamed up to the Nicolas Bridge. I stood on the quay, eagerly scanning the deck—and there, sure enough, next to my husband stood a little figure in sailor clothes and long trousers joyfully waving his cap to me!

How he had grown in those long months! And how tanned and healthy he looked after his sea voyage. How different he was from the pale little boy who had left Russia in 1922! And what a fine manly, little fellow he was now! With the same merry mischievous smile that won all hearts. I felt so proud of him, so overwhelmed with joy as I hugged him to my heart. Quickly we hailed an "izvoztchik" and drove off home to the Konoushenny Pereoulok, whilst my husband stayed on to finish his duties on board.

As we drove through the streets Tsapy told me all about the voyage, how they had stopped in France, and how papa had taken him to Paris to see his Aunt Nadia, how he had loved the sea voyage and the

sailors and the captain. He kept scrutinizing the streets—full of interest at the novelty of everything, and now and then he would suddenly ask me in a whisper: "Mummy—is that a Bolshevik?" pointing at some strangely dressed individual—of whom alas, there were many! He thought that Bolsheviks were quite special-looking people!

At home we were met by Verochka who had come up especially to see her Tsapik. Kapitolina stood gaping at him—then, her face broke into a broad smile and she clasped her hands in delight: "Oh, my beautiful 'pareniok' (little lad)," she exclaimed. Tsapik took a great fancy to her straight away though he was very shocked at her manners. "Mummy, she blows her nose in her apron," he announced to me with a disgusted expression on his face.

He was both delighted and a little bewildered with the idea that he was at last *at home*, in his *very own* home. He ran through the rooms—amazed at their size (in Russia, space being unlimited, everything is on a larger scale), looking and fingering everything: "Mummy, is this *ours*?" he kept asking me and bringing me different things—"really, *really only* ours?" and such a look of satisfaction came on his little face when I would say "yes". The poor child was so used to always being told: "Don't touch this or that—it does not belong to us" (my parents lived in a furnished house) or "it belongs to grandpapa, or the owner, and so on." He was so thoroughly happy to be in his *own* home, with his parents—"like other children," as he said so pathetically. And how happy we were to have him with us! If only we could have had our little Marykins too—what a joy it would have been. She had begged my husband to take her too—but he was afraid, because she was a very bad sailor—and then it was difficult to smuggle in two

children. *The Soviet* left again in a few days and my husband sailed, leaving Tsapy in Leningrad with me. All my friends came to see him, loading him with presents. I used to take him out every day and his little erect figure, striding along beside me in his English sailor clothes from Rowe's and his sailor cap with "H.M.S. *Tiger*" on it used to attract everybody's attention. People used to come up and ask me if his clothes were "foreign" and when I used to say "yes" they would scrutinize him still closer and say with awe: "Yes, one can see that at once." His whole appearance and his free and easy manner, and gay intelligent little face were so different from the poor little badly dressed, gloomy Soviet children one met in the streets that he created quite a sensation when he passed. He took in everything he saw, and being very observant, as children are, he noticed things one would never have thought he would. "Why do they have that ugly face stuck everywhere, mummy," he asked one day, pointing at one of Lenin's numerous portraits that one saw at every step, with an expression of disgust on his little face. "Hush, don't point and make faces, that is Lenin, darling," I said, hurriedly leading him away, for fear of being overheard and denounced! Another thing that amazed him was the number of drunken men in the streets. Vodka, thanks to the "NEP", now flowed freely again (not less so than in the old days of the "Kazenka" which had been so criticized), and the number of drunken men one saw in the streets far surpassed that of pre-War holidays. Tsapy, coming from London had never seen anyone drunk before in his life and he used to get terribly excited whenever we met one. "Look, mummy, look at that man!" he would exclaim, staring at him quite fascinated, "look how funnily he is walking, what is the matter with him? Why is he singing so loud?" He

very soon began copying them at home and would reel and stagger about the house to Kapa's unbounded and noisy delight, and, as he was a born actor, his rendering of the part was disturbingly realistic. . . . He thoroughly enjoyed his stay and hated the thought of going back.

Soon after his arrival I took him to see his godfather. Poor Anatoli Feodorovitch had had a bad relapse and was very weak, his memory was beginning to fail him and at times his mind would wander. I let Tsapik into his room without saying anything. Anatoli Feodorovitch opened his eyes: "Who is that?" he asked with surprise. "Why, can it be Tsapinka? Yes, surely it is Tsapinka! Let him come nearer, I want to see and speak to him." Tsapy approached his bed gravely, such a serious and sad expression on his little face. "How are you?" he asked politely in English; "I hope you are better!"

Anatoli Feodorovitch looked at him lovingly. "The same sensitive intelligent little face," he said tenderly. Then he said a few loving words to the little godson that he hoped he would grow up a good and strong man like his father, and kissing him bade him good-bye.

Five days later Anatoli Feodorovitch passed away. Tsapy had been only just in time to see his godfather. I spent many hours with Elena Vassilievna sorting out his letters and papers and cataloguing his library. According to his wishes all was to be given to the Academy of Science and the Poushkin Museum. What treasures I handled! Letters from Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekoff, Goncharoff, Apouchtin and many others, priceless first editions, and manuscripts of memoirs.

With what love and veneration we sorted and looked through them, and how sad it was to take them away

from their home in the great deep drawers of their owner's writing-table.

Tsapy stayed with me till November, when my husband took him back to London. He begged us to let him stay, but though it was a terrible temptation I was firm and sent him back.

It proved to be more difficult to smuggle him out than into the country. When the G.P.U. inspection went over the ship (as they usually do) before it sailed and found the doctor's little son sleeping in his cabin —they ordered him to be taken off the ship. However, my husband persuaded them to let him take him (they thought he was just accompanying his father on the trip there and back), and they good-naturedly agreed. It was a narrow escape and great luck that the officials chanced to be what they were. He had a wonderful trip back, being a general favourite with the crew, who gave him a great time. He returned to London full of marvellous tales about Russia and the "Bolshies".

Winter now set in and as the Gulf of Finland was frozen and the trips were now between London and Reval, my husband resigned his post as doctor on board and returned to his old work at the Sovtorgflot Hospital and the factory he had attended for a number of years. I continued giving my lessons. The aspect of things was changing rapidly, and "NEP" was being done away with. One after another private shops were closed and confiscated, and when I left Russia, there was scarcely a private shop left in Leningrad.

I went back to England in the summer of 1928, travelling again through Finland. The price for a foreign passport had gone up fantastically and I had to sell practically all my clothes to be able to pay for it. The whole procedure lasted again for almost two

months, during which all the influence in Communist quarters we could possibly get was used. At last, however, my passport was handed to me and I was allowed to leave. My husband accompanied me to the frontier—we were parting not for long this time—as he was going to apply again for a post on board one of the steamers and had been promised one on a very modern steamer in the autumn.

Many of my friends came as usual to see me off at the Finland Station, and of course my faithful Verochka and Kapitolina, the latter weeping bitterly at the thought of parting with me. When the last whistle blew, she began howling and wailing in the real peasant way (as the peasants do at funerals): "To whom are you leaving us to," she wailed, rocking to and fro. "Oh, Gospodi, Gospodi, fancy sailing on the seas in a great boat! You will be drowned and we shall never see you again!" I saw Vera poking her and ordering her to stop that noise—but there she stood on the platform, crying loudly and wiping her eyes with the corner of her shawl. That was the last I saw of Kapitolina.

# PART FOUR

1928–1930

# CHAPTER I

## BAD NEWS

IT was, however, only in the late autumn of that year that my husband managed at last to resume his old job as a ship's doctor. This time it was on board the s.s. *Rykoff*, one of the beautiful luxurious new steamers built in Leningrad. It was very well equipped—very different from the one I had sailed in in 1924. The Soviet Government prided themselves that every rivet had been made in Russia (this was almost the first ship to be built *entirely* in Russia). It was such a great joy for us all to have my husband over in London, even though only for a few days at a time. But to our great disappointment, when the winter set in the *Rykoff* sailing between London and Leningrad was transferred to the South and now sailed from Odessa to Marseilles. This was a great blow to us—but there was nothing to be done. The work on board was very uninteresting for a capable and talented surgeon like my husband and gave him no satisfaction—he had merely taken this post so as to be able to see us—and now this was impossible. He resolved, however, to stick to it because his salary was paid partly in English money ; though it was ridiculously small—it just enabled us to pay for the children's schooling.

During the last years my father's affairs had changed very much for the worse, the general slump had affected his business and in addition he had lost

the law-suit which he had been compelled to institute so as to recover a very large sum of money and jewels that he had lent to the British Government and which had been stolen from the British Embassy in St. Petersburg in the course of the raid on the British Embassy, which I have previously described. This was a great blow and considerably complicated things, and my husband and I could not help feeling that our family was an extra burden on my parents who had lost everything. But it was impossible to think of going back to Russia now whilst my husband was at sea, so we put it off till the summer when the *Rykoff* was to resume its Leningrad-London run. In the meanwhile I had been looking out for a Preparatory School for Tsapik and had found an ideal one in Hertfordshire near Cheshunt which he had entered.

In the spring the *Rykoff* resumed its Leningrad-London runs, and my husband came every three weeks to London. It was a lovely summer. Every time he was back we used to go out to "The Hall" (my little boy's school) to see Tsapik, who was so happy there. My husband, who had never seen an English school, was delighted with the school, the headmaster and the staff, the perfect discipline and friendliness that reigned there, the delightful, homelike atmosphere and the beautiful surroundings. Every time we visited him we would return with a feeling of joy and gratitude that our little son was in such good hands.

"It is really marvellous of you to have found such a wonderful school," my husband would say admiringly, attributing it all to me as he always did.

Mary was at Challoner School now—where her brother had been. She had a definite capacity for dancing and was learning with Madame Karsavina—our greatest living ballerina. This was also a tremendous piece of luck and what we both had dreamed of.

With both our children in such good hands, we knew that it would be almost criminal to take them back to Russia, where they could not have anything like it, especially as things there were getting definitely and steadily worse, both in the matter of food and in that of housing. Each time my husband came from Leningrad he told me some news—all the shops were closed now, only State Co-operative Stores remaining. Even our flat was now no longer our own: there were two families living in it and they occupied the study and our bedroom, my husband having retained for himself our big drawing-room. The political position was also becoming worse: the Five Year Plan had started and was already promising to be a failure ; and victims on whom to throw the blame were of course to be found among the sad remains of the Intelligentsia. Arrests were getting more and more frequent and it was always with dread that I parted with my husband ; there was always the fear that he too would again become a victim of this senseless persecution. I wanted to return with him and desired that he should temporarily give up the post on board, but he would not hear of my going back now when conditions were getting so bad in U.S.S.R. He felt confident nothing would happen to him as he kept conscientiously to his work, leaving politics strictly alone.

"Even if I do get arrested again it can only be by mistake as before," he used to say to me, "and I shall be released for certain. We specialists are safer because we are badly needed—that is a comfort. But you must promise me one thing—if I should get arrested again—not to dash back so recklessly as you did that time. It was madness then, but now it would be fatal—you would be arrested for sure—and *then* what would become of the children? You must always stay with them. Also, if I do get into a muddle it will

be easier for me to get out of it by myself. The thought that you and the children are safe will give me confidence and courage."

The winter of 1929-1930 set in and my husband was still occupying the post of doctor on the *Rykoff*. The boat was in London at the end of December and he was with us to greet the New Year: the terrible year of 1930 that was to bring misfortune and disaster to so many in Russia—and to wipe out the remains of the Intelligentsia.

We had several friends to greet the New Year with us, and as my husband was there I woke up and brought down the children, as is our Russian custom. We were all merrily seated round the table when I suddenly counted the number, and to my horror—we were thirteen. Quickly, not saying anything to anybody, I told the children to get down and invented some game for them, but my heart was heavy and oppressed though I tried to assure myself that it was nothing but a silly superstition. My husband was back again at the end of January, the *Rykoff* was put in repair and he stayed for ten days.

Tsapik had gone back to school a short time before. Suddenly one day we were summoned to the school—Tsapik had an attack of appendicitis and had to be taken home. We brought him back in a taxi and after a consultation it was decided that he would wait to be operated till my husband returned on the next trip. The *Rykoff* sailed on the 30th of January and was due in London in a month's time. It sailed at two o'clock in the morning. I stayed on board till the last minute —every parting was like a piece of one's heart torn away. "It is impossible to go on like this, Sasha," I said to my husband, "I can't bear it any more. We mustn't part again—nothing is unbearable when we are together. This is the last time. We must decide

on something next time—either the children must go back, or you must stay."

"Yes, we must do something, going on like this is impossible," he said, and blessing me he added gravely: "God grant all will be well again." Then we went out together and he put me in a taxi at London Bridge. We had parted for ever.

I never saw my husband again. The *Rykoff* came back to London on the 4th of March. My husband's things were all on board but he was missing. He had been arrested on the 26th February, the night the ship sailed, just as he was stepping on board—with actually one foot on the gangway.

The news of my husband's arrest came like a thunderbolt. The captain and the first mate were unable to give me any explanation, it all happened most unexpectedly, at the last minute and without any warning ; it was a great blow to the whole crew. But it was evident that it had all been planned out very carefully by the G.P.U., for within half an hour of my husband's arrest, a young Communist doctor arrived on board—all ready packed and prepared for the journey—to take his place. However, the captain and all the staff comforted me by saying they were perfectly confident that it was one of the usual G.P.U. "mistakes", and that my husband would be released before long. He was so tremendously popular with the crew—they all adored him—and his name as an excellent doctor and brilliant surgeon was well known to the G.P.U.: surely they could not afford to keep such men in prison when they needed their work.

Their assurance and confidence that all would be well comforted me a little, especially that I knew my husband purposely kept clear of politics and was utterly engrossed in a new technical work on Surgery

that he was writing. So I too felt sure that it was another "mistake" on the part of the G.P.U. which would surely be cleared up before long. I wired at once to my mother-in-law asking her for news of my husband (we generally used a code by calling anyone who was arrested "ill"—the Bolsheviks knew this perfectly well, I suppose): "Very worried about Sasha's illness, please wire his condition." As I afterwards found out it was thanks to my wire that my mother-in-law got the information as to what had happened. His arrest taking place at the moment of departure, nobody suspected it; indeed, all my husband's relatives thought he was safe on board on his way to England. So he had actually been in prison for about two weeks before any of our relatives or friends knew anything about it. This fact is characteristic with the G.P.U. My first impulse was to go back at once—but in a moment I realized that this was impossible: there were three important reasons —Tsapik's appendicitis and forthcoming operation, my utter lack of money, and last but not least, my husband's wish that I should stay with the children and, for their sake, not run into danger. So the *Rykoff* sailed back without me, the captain promising to make all possible enquiries and bring any news he could get. However, I never saw him again as he was transferred from the ship. On my sister's advice and invitation, in the meantime, I took Tsapik over to Paris to the Franco-Russian Hospital at Villejuif where she was in charge of the operating theatre, to be operated on by a famous French surgeon who was a friend of my husband's. It was while we were there that I met Ivanoff—our wounded officer from Teresino, who did his best to cheer me up and comfort me by visiting us and taking us out and spoiling my little boy and me in every way.

When Tsapik had quite recovered we returned to London. It was now spring—my husband had been in prison for four months and the position was unchanged. Every day I woke up hoping and expecting a wire to say that he was free, but none came. I wrote frequently to my mother-in-law and sent food parcels when I could. She used to answer me very guardedly, saying she was taking the food to the "hospital", that she was doing "everything" for our dear patient and hoped he would soon recover and be able to walk again. Month after month passed in suspense and waiting. I was almost at the end of my patience ; with all my being I longed to be there, something seemed to tell me that I must go—yet at the same time I remembered my husband's words about not leaving the children and feared to complicate things for him by my presence in Russia. Also I had no money. All I had, had been spent during Tsapik's illness and operation. I worked hard all that summer giving lessons and doing private nursing, but what I earned was hardly enough to cover the children's expenses.

Time dragged on. I was torn between the longing to go and the uncertainty of what was the right thing to do. My family were strongly against my going out to Russia and I avoided discussing my plans and intentions with them, knowing all they would say. It was during this difficult period of loneliness, suspense and uncertainty that I got to know the value of having an English friend whose unfailing sympathy, understanding and chivalrous kindness helped me through those dark and cheerless months.

The summer holidays were coming at last to an end and soon the children would be back at school again. My mother-in-law's letters were always the same ; I couldn't bear the suspense any longer and I firmly

resolved to go, come what might, as soon as the children were back at school again.

I went to the Sovtorgflot, told them who I was and asked them for a free passage to Leningrad on one of their ships—as my husband had served for several years in their service. They agreed to give me one. Some of my kind and generous friends to whom I shall always be grateful gave me some money and thus enabled me to sail.

My parents and many of my friends tried to persuade me to give up my idea, but my mind was made up, I could not wait any longer and on October the 4th I sailed from London Bridge.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE SHIP

I WAS on board the *Rykoff*—the ship on which my husband had been for the last two years. To my surprise I was given one of the best cabins, in spite of the fact that I had a free passage. The captain and mates were new, but there were few changes among the crew and I seemed to recognize faces I used to see when meeting or seeing off my husband. A Jewish woman doctor now occupied my husband's post.

The passengers were a queer lot. There were eight of us. Two were American engineers, going out to work at the tractor factories on the Volga, and one of them had his wife with him. The other engineer, an elderly man, had been working in Russia before and was returning there after a holiday. He was never sober. Then there were two fat, half-literate Jews from America ; they had emigrated long ago but were now returning to the Ukraine to see how they liked their country in its new aspect. They spoke an appalling mixture of Yiddish and Russian and were most comical. Even I could hardly keep from smiling, although I felt anything but cheerful. The remaining passengers were a young Cockney Jew who was returning to one of the collective farms, and a strangely-dressed but well-bred and good-looking young man, almost a boy, whom I couldn't place.

He sat next to me at table, his manners were charming and courteous and he spoke perfect English with

a slightly unusual intonation. I could not make out who he was, but he was obviously the only person one could have any conversation with.

The three women stewardesses in the *Rykoff* were most attentive and kind to me, though they never spoke to me in public. Only when I was alone, one after another, they would come up to me and whisper a few words of sympathy and encouragement. "You are our doctor's wife, aren't you?" they asked. "Thank God you are going out to him. But do be careful. Do not forget that you have to think also of your children. God grant you may be able to do something. We all loved him so—never have we had such a doctor as he! and never shall we have one like him again, so kind, so good to us—never thinking of himself, always of others.

"Whenever anyone was ill, he would get up several times in the night to visit him—it didn't matter whether it was the Commissar or the deck-boy. And he was a great doctor, one of the *real* ones, not like the half-trained youngsters of nowadays. Look at the ones we have now—a new one each time—they don't know a thing and scarcely budge out of their cabin however ill anyone is.

"We all worshipped your husband. It is terrible and unjust that he should be arrested—he never took part in politics—he was interested only in his work and his whole joy was coming to London to see his family. We all remember you and the children when you used to come to see him off. And how excited he used to get as soon as we reached the Thames. He could never hide his joy or emotion.

"We were terribly upset at his arrest—it was such a blow to us all. We were so sure he would very soon be freed—there was absolutely no doubt about his innocence. And look, it is almost eight months since

our poor doctor was taken. Oh, may God help you, dear citizen, to save him!"

The stewardesses were not the only people to speak to me like this. During my six days' voyage not a day passed without some one of the crew coming discreetly up to me and whispering a few words of sympathy, telling me how my husband was loved and appreciated.

They all did it in secret because everybody distrusted everyone else. This was a special feature of Soviet life that the Bolsheviks had been trying to develop. They had succeeded at last and this was their safeguard, one of their most deadly and powerful weapons.

One of the stewardesses had formerly been employed at the factory where my husband was doctor before joining the Sovtorgflot. "If you only knew how all the work-people at the factory adored him, Madame, how sad we were when he left us for the ship," she told me. "We had two other doctors, but everyone crowded to your husband. And though this used to detain and tire him terribly, he not only never refused to see a patient, but was always most kind and sympathetic and courteous. Why, even when going back in the trams" (the factory was on the outskirts of Leningrad), "he would always give up his seat to us women—however tired he felt. Oh, there are no people left like him now! And it is always the best who suffer."

I would listen to them unable to stop my tears. These tributes to my husband were so wonderful, so touching in their sincerity. The words of those simple people sustained and comforted me and gave me hope and courage.

## CHAPTER III

### MY ENGLISHMAN

IT was during the second or third meal in the *Rykoff* after leaving London that I first spoke to the young Englishman whose presence puzzled me. It appeared that he was a journalist and was to spend a holiday in Russia. He spoke about the Soviet with glowing enthusiasm and from his first words I decided that he was an idealist and a poet.

"Russia is Canaan to me," he declared. I could not help smiling and saying guiltily that I feared "Canaan" would prove disappointing when he actually saw it. But he simply looked at me with astonishment.

We spent a great deal of time together later. I found him a delightful companion, very amusing and, despite his political naïveté, well-read and interested in Russian literature. In fact he seemed an intellectual, but to my surprise he grew quite indignant when I told him so.

"I am a worker, Madame," he replied, "and believe in the Communist Revolution." I was rather taken aback by this piece of news because I had been very outspoken to him about my own views. A sudden fear struck at me, the kind of fear which springs up naturally in such an atmosphere of secrecy and suspicion—could he be a G.P.U. agent? But almost immediately I felt reassured and our friendship grew rapidly.

Sometimes I felt quite sorry for the young Englishman because I foresaw that some big shocks and a rude awakening were ahead of him in "Canaan". One day he confessed that at the outset he had taken me for a Russian Communist. "But how could you possibly have thought that?" I inquired.

"Well, you see," he replied, "you were obviously the only cultured and intelligent person among the passengers." This naïve remark staggered me. "If you really imagine that the Bolshevists are cultured and intelligent you have much to learn," was my warning to him. The Englishman bestowed upon me another glance of astonishment and pity.

Then I told him the reason for my journey to Russia and explained my husband's fate. At once he was sympathetic and promised to do anything he could to help me. At his suggestion we decided that he should refuse the services of Soviet guides and that he should accompany me whenever possible.

His first service to me was to take through the Customs at Leningrad in his luggage a suit and a pair of boots I had brought from London for my husband. Had I declared them they would have been confiscated—as some of my own things were—on the pretext that I would speculate with them!

When the *Rykoff* anchored in the Neva, a G.P.U. launch came alongside and transported us all to the Customs shed at the Nicolai Bridge. This was the place of the parting of the "sheep" (those fortunate beings with foreign passports) from the "goats" (the unfortunates with Soviet passports). I was the only "goat" and speedily found myself locked up alone in a room on the landing-stage. While the luggage of the other passengers was being examined I was held a prisoner for two hours. Through a window I saw a familiar and cheering face. My faithful little

Verochka had come to meet me and was walking up and down the quay.

By signs I made her understand that I had to sit helplessly and await the attentions of the G.P.U. agents. I was by no means sure that I was not already under arrest and that when I did leave my quayside prison it would only be to go to a much more terrifying gaol.

At last I saw all my fellow passengers led out from the Customs shed to the hotel bus awaiting them. My English friend caught sight of me and turned back apparently to join me, but the officials made him follow the others. With an apologetic glance and a wave of his hand he departed with the rest.

At long last I was summoned for examination. I was now tired, nervous and depressed and could scarcely remonstrate when the Customs officials "retained" half my clothes, saying that they would be given back to me when I left Russia. The ordeal of examination finally ended. I found that I was not under arrest and in a few moments I was being tearfully embraced on the quay by Verochka.

We hailed an "izvoztchik", just as I had done three years before when I met my Tsapik at this very spot, and drove off to my home in the Konoushenny Pereoulok. On the way Vera told me that the latest news my mother-in-law had received from the prison was that my husband's case had been heard and the sentence was being considered. Vera said, comfortingly: "Doctors are so badly needed all over Russia that even if Alexander Vladimirovitch is exiled to Siberia it will surely be to work as a doctor, and you can always follow him and stay for a while." Vera warned me that I might not be able to live in my flat as the lodgers there had been forbidden by the G.P.U. to allow me to enter.

"But how can they forbid me to enter my own home?" I asked indignantly.

"Oh, Maria Carlovna, you have forgotten where you are now," Vera answered, dropping her voice to a whisper in case the driver should overhear. "The G.P.U. can do anything and everything and they are everywhere. You do not know how terribly things have changed in the years you have been away. You cannot trust anybody now. We are all afraid of each other, afraid of being denounced to the G.P.U. They make arrests right and left and never give reasons.

"The prisons are full, but the arrests go on. You will have to be very careful. Don't forget that you are in great danger, and don't trust a soul."

When we stopped at my home the door was opened by a stranger—one of my "lodgers". I told him who I was and that I wanted to come in. He hesitated and then extracted a promise that if he admitted me I would stay only a few moments.

I found that the "lodgers" had taken possession of my bedroom and my husband's study. Our main room—a drawing-room and dining-room combined—was in a state of chaos. There had been two searches and the floor was littered with papers, photographs, pictures, old letters and the general wreckage of what once had been my charming home. The cupboards and trunks into which my household linen and other treasures had been crammed were locked and sealed with the ominous mark of the G.P.U. It was dreadful, but remembering my promise not to stay long, I tore myself away and walked sadly with Vera to the Tsarskoselski Station.

I was going to the home of my mother-in-law but even she, Vera explained, could not give me a roof for more than a day or two because her house also was

filled with hostile "lodgers". Vera also made me understand that I could hope for little from my terrorized friends. I had come from abroad—my husband was in prison—therefore anyone who showed me kindness would be suspect. One or two old friends, perhaps bolder or simply more fortunate than the others, had sent me invitations however and Vera begged me to see only these. I was not to feel hurt, she added, if friends of other days pretended not to recognize me in the streets, because there were spies at every corner. To avoid arrest myself, I would have to register with the City authorities without delay and until this was done any militia man could at any moment lock me up.

With these last warnings, Vera saw me on to my train. It was late at night when I arrived at my mother-in-law's house. I knocked on the door and waited. For two hours I went on waiting, knocking at intervals, before the door was opened. My mother-in-law had not expected me at such an hour and in the New Russia people are not anxious to answer the door in the darkness.

I found her living in one room. The compulsory lodgers had the others. My mother-in-law repeated all the warnings that Vera had given me and then told me that the next day was the day on which food parcels for the prisoners were accepted at the gaol where my husband was. We therefore needed to be up long before dawn. I spent the night trying to sleep on a large trunk and was hardly sorry when the time came to dress and catch the early train to Leningrad.

With a large bag well-filled with food my mother-in-law and I made our way to the prison. Although we were so early there was already a large queue of prisoners' relatives waiting at the gate. Hours passed and still no one was admitted to the prison and by ten

o'clock the queue stretched the whole length of the great prison wall.

This was just as it had been at the time of my husband's first imprisonment. Indeed, the only changes were that the queue was much longer and that all the people in it appeared to be from the "intelligent" or professional class. In 1924 the relatives of "nepmen" (speculators) had stood in the queue. Now all the unfortunate women, wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, standing under the great wall were people of my own sort.

In 1930 the last remnant of the "intelligent" class was ruthlessly blotted out. Every day there were mass arrests in Moscow and Leningrad. The arrests were as senseless as they were cruel. Among the young and old men and women who were hurled into prison there were people who had no political interests and others who had even aided the Bolsheviks in former times. They had all committed the same crime, the crime of being educated and cultured. In the prison lists of the 1930 terror were men of world-wide renown: writers, historians, engineers, men of science, clergy and, of course, military officers of the old regime. This terror was indeed a war on culture.

Eventually the prison gates swung open and the tragic queue filed slowly in. One at a time we put our heads before a little glass window at which sat a prison official. As each woman appeared he whipped up the window, rapped out a few harsh questions and either took or rejected the proffered food parcel.

My turn came. The window was raised and to my dismay my parcel was rejected. As I walked gloomily away my mother-in-law broke another piece of news to me. For seven months past her parcels had been refused. Not since the first three weeks of my husband's arrest had one been accepted.

"But why did you not let me know of this before," I exclaimed. "Surely it means that Sasha's case is considered serious." With tears in her eyes, Sasha's mother told me she had scarcely dared give me such awful news and had gone on hoping each time that it would be accepted. To-day she had hoped that when I brought a parcel it would reach him.

This news terrified me because I had learned in 1924 that food parcels were denied only to prisoners accused of grave political offences. My poor old mother-in-law had come to this prison gate every week on the "food parcel" day, bearing a heavy bag of provisions which had cost her Heaven knows what sacrifices to obtain, only to receive the blunt order to take the food away again.

I decided to go at once to the headquarters of the Leningrad G.P.U. and asked the Procurator to tell me the charge against my husband and to explain why essential food was denied him. But it was all useless. I was refused even admission to the G.P.U. offices. This was the first of scores of similar visits to Soviet authorities. In the days that followed I went from one official's office to another begging for news of my beloved prisoner. But no one would give me the least clue to his fate.

On these expeditions I had the kind and gallant support of the Englishman from the ship. Despite my anxieties I could not help smiling at his reactions to his first peep behind the scenes of "Canaan". He was always being astonished and bewildered at the hopeless muddling and the rudeness of the illiterate officials we came across.

Not the least of his surprises was the time it took to perform the miracle of securing registration. From office to office we toiled and each time an official told us to go elsewhere, and it was always the wrong place.

It was not until the fifth or sixth day that we unearthed the right official.

An episode as we boarded a tramcar reduced my Englishman to fury but made me laugh. He gave me his arm to mount the high step and for a second his broad shoulders held back the surging tide of people fighting to get into the vehicle. A voice roared out: "Now then, we can't wait all day while you hoist your aristocrat aboard." Actually we had caused no delay and when I translated the message to my companion his opinion of Communist manners was radically changed.

One day I took him to an ordinary proletarian restaurant and made him tackle a dinner there instead of the one provided for him by "Intourist" at the Hotel d'Europe. The place was packed tight with perspiring humanity. After endless manœuvring we managed to grab two chairs at a tiny table and then the Englishman joined battle with a throng of would-be diners to secure food tickets. Then came another queue ordeal before a couple of slices of black bread could be obtained.

We delivered up our tickets and waited for thirty minutes before two plates of cabbage soup—that is hot water with cabbage leaves adrift in it—were slammed under our noses, I pushed mine away, but insisted that he should try his and so learn what kind of food the ordinary "comrade" had to tolerate. "This is the 'milk and honey' of your Canaan," I said maliciously, "you simply *must* taste it." The Englishman gloomily swallowed a mouthful and then I fancy I heard him mutter softly a little ordinary English bad language. The rest of the food was of the same quality. We gazed on it with pained surprise and finally departed from the restaurant with our hunger appeased, but not by eating.

Everywhere I went the young Englishman marched beside me. Events proved that his company was of special value. It saved me from arrest. The G.P.U. agents were puzzled by his unfailing presence and, because he knew some important men in the Russian Government abroad, they were cautious in dealing with me.

He stayed in Leningrad for some weeks and during that time was my faithful companion in everything I undertook. I was unspeakably grateful to him—his chivalrous kindness and unfailing humour brightened those dark days. He always managed to see the funny side of the things that surrounded us and even succeeded in making me laugh in spite of my strain and suspense.

In the spare moments when we were not queueing up for some purpose I showed him my beautiful native town, taking him to the Ermitage, the Museum of Alexander the Third and our beautiful cathedrals and churches, which greatly impressed him.

And always I had the strange subconscious feeling that I was seeing all this for the last time, bidding farewell for ever to the places I loved so well.

He was enraptured with the beauty of the Neva, the magnificent granite quays, and the Winter Palace, while the loveliness of Theatre Street with the Alexandrine Theatre in the distance made him stop spellbound. It was a real joy to show him all this, he appreciated and felt their beauty so keenly.

We went to Tsarskoye Selo to see the wonderful parks and palaces, and I took him to see my mother-in-law so that he should have an idea of the conditions in which Soviet citizens were obliged to live. He was profoundly shocked to see how the heroic old lady contrived to struggle for her existence and was quite overcome by her dignity and courage.

He was very interested to see my flat, and one day I took him there. My trunk had been there since the first night of my arrival and from time to time I would call to get the things I wanted. As I had no definite place to stay in, I wandered about like a gipsy, sleeping one night at Vera's, another at my old servant Nina Arsentievna's (Kapitolina's famous aunt). I preferred going to them as I knew they were in less danger than friends of my own class.

My lodger let us into my flat and I led my young friend into my poor wrecked home. He gasped with horror when he saw the chaos and destruction and litter, but kept repeating so kindly: "Oh, but I can see so well, so well how perfectly lovely it must have been." Stepping over heaps of pictures, books and crockery strewn all over the floor I came up to my beloved Bechstein and opening it I played a few chords. The tone was as soft and rich and beautiful as ever—it had not spoiled a bit in spite of all the months in the unheated dusty room.

"Oh, please play something," begged my Englishman, "something Russian—that 'Exile's Song' that you played on the ship, it is so beautiful." I played the sad haunting melody that I had first heard in a Russian restaurant in Paris ; it seemed so strangely appropriate, so full of meaning. When I had finished, my young Englishman said: "Who do you think has been listening spellbound to your playing? The G.P.U. man who shadows us! I have been watching him from the window."

It was time to go, but somehow I could not stop and I played on and on till it got dark. I was saying good-bye to my Bechstein. I never touched it again.

The next time I went to my flat my lodger met me with a frightened face and said he had orders from the G.P.U. not to let me in any more and also to turn out

my trunk, which he did there and then—throwing it out into the yard. Luckily my Englishman was with me—he picked it up and carried it on his shoulders till we at last found an "izvoztchik" and took it to my faithful Verochka. After staying two weeks in Leningrad my young Englishman went to Moscow. On his return he was very agitated and implored me to return with him to England for the sake of my children. "If you leave Russia with me, you will be safe," he said. "If you stay, God knows what may happen. You may be in greater danger than your husband. He is a doctor and they need doctors. For you they have no use. Please believe me. Come back to England."

It appeared that he had been to see a person of influence in the Communist world and had been strongly advised to see me across the frontier. But I refused. It seemed useless to leave without discovering my husband's fate. The Englishman departed and I stayed on.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WASH-HOUSE

ONE late afternoon when I was on my way to see Vera who was going to put me up for the night, I suddenly thought of having a look at my parents' old house and walked up the street towards it. I tried the garden-gate, it was open so I walked in. There were several crippled children playing in the garden. I came up to them and asked them if they lived here. They said "yes" and told me that the house was now a hospital. Just then a woman in a white overall ran out and called them in. I thought this was a good chance and came up to her. "I would like to look over your hospital, Nurse," I said; "may I?" "Yes, if you like," she answered.

I walked in through the front door feeling quite excited. A hospital! This was something new. Last time I had been here the place had been so desolate, so terribly neglected. Now it was freshly painted and looked bright and clean and cheery. I was in the hall: something had been altered—it looked different somehow—but I could not understand what it was, then in a flash I saw: the old English fireplace had been removed, and two new doors had been made in the wall, but the panelling was still there, the parquet floors were polished and clean. We entered the dining-room. The dear old lamp was still hanging over the table, a long low one with benches on either side. A bright fire was burning in the big Finnish

stove, the birch-logs crackling merrily. It looked cheerful and cosy. We passed on into my father's study and the drawing-room: they had been turned into big, spacious wards and were very clean and well-aired. "May I go upstairs?" I asked the nurse when we were back in the hall. "No, I am afraid you can't," she answered, "the operating-room and dressing-rooms are upstairs and the doctor does not allow them to be visited. The doctor is due in a moment, so will you go, please, or I may get into trouble for letting you in." There was nothing to be done, sadly I turned to go. Then suddenly I thought of something. "May I ask the doctor's permission to see the rest of the house?" I asked the nurse. "Why, yes, if you want, I am sure she will let you, if you ask her. There she comes." A tall figure in a white overall was approaching. I came up to her and asked for permission to look over the hospital. The doctor looked at me searchingly, then suddenly exclaimed:

"Mary! You here!" and to my great surprise I recognized a very dear friend of ours, who had grown up together with my husband. We had not seen her for several years, as she had been working in the provinces ever since the Revolution. "I returned to Leningrad last year, when mother died," she told me, "and several months ago I was appointed as house-doctor here; isn't it strange? Why, of course you can see the hospital! Please, Nurse, bring the citizen an overall."

In a few minutes, arrayed in an overall many times too large for me, I was walking through my old home. The big nursery was a ward, so were the bedrooms, neat little beds stood there in tidy rows. Our class-room was the dressing-room, my parents' bedroom was a beautiful operating-theatre. It was such a joy to see everything so clean and bright, so beautifully

kept, and such a comfort to know that the house was being used for such a good purpose.

We walked through the rooms, from ward to ward, my friend showing me everything most lovingly. "It is such a convenient house for a hospital," she said, "and we take great care of it, mind you tell your mother that."

At last we descended to the kitchen and here my friend threw a shawl over my shoulders and led me out through the back door, across the yard, to the little "wash-house", as we used to call it. This was a small separate building, where our old washerwoman used to live and where the ironing-room had been. This little house, which stood in the garden and was smothered in lilac in the summer, had always been our favourite haunt when we were children. We used to beg our mother to give it to us for our very own, so that we might live there by ourselves. I remember imploring her to let me sleep one night there at least. How long ago was that! We entered it now, the doctor leading the way. "And what have you turned the 'wash-house' into?" I asked her. "You will see in a moment," she answered smiling and switched on the electric light. To my great surprise I saw a charming little room, nicely furnished, the walls covered with photographs and pictures, a bright fire burning, the birch-logs crackling merrily. In addition to the bed there was a huge old-fashioned sofa standing along the wall, and it all looked so delightfully cosy and homelike.

"Welcome to my palace," said the doctor smiling at my surprised face. "And please remember that whenever you are in need of a bed, there is always one waiting for you, at any time. You are always welcome, you know that," she added embracing me tenderly. I could not keep back my tears. It seemed so

wonderful that Fate should have brought me back to my old home, and that I should have found a refuge here, under the old roof, at a moment when I most needed it.

After that I was no more homeless—and the only happy and peaceful nights I spent were those I passed in the little "wash-house".

My childish wish had at last come true!

# CHAPTER V

## IN THE STREET

IT was a dark November evening in 1930. The day had passed wearily—mostly in waiting in the long queues in the street at various Soviet institutions—first for four hours at the prison gate, to give in the food parcel, which had again been refused—then at the G.P.U. to get "information about the prisoners", which had been another useless five hours, for I had got no news as usual and not a single question of mine had been answered; I had been curtly told to "come again in three days' time". Weary and dejected I had turned away. It was now dark, being about seven o'clock. Where should I go now? Who would put me up for this night? I was so afraid of getting my kind friends into trouble by my presence—I had now been round all those who were not afraid of me—but I hardly dared to start the round afresh. Then suddenly I remembered my dear friend the doctor in the little wash-house at home! I had spent two nights with her the week before—such happy nights too! She would not mind if I came again, so with a heart full of gratitude and hope I set out in the direction of my old home. The trams were overcrowded as usual, so I decided to walk in spite of the distance. It was terribly slippery—it had been raining all that day and sleet had been coming down steadily, and then towards the end of the afternoon a sharp frost had suddenly set in, turning the street pavements into a mass of uneven

ice. I made slow progress balancing myself along the badly lighted streets. At last, after crossing the Neva, I reached the "Bolshoi Prospect" and was now nearing home. As I was crossing one of the streets I passed a figure standing at the edge of the pavement. A quiet voice said: "Will someone be so kind as to help me across?" I stopped and saw that it was a woman who held a stick and was groping about helplessly, afraid to descend from the slippery pavement into the road. Looking more closely, I saw that she was blind. Taking her arm I led her carefully to the other side, wondering how she had managed to move at all along the ice-covered pavements. "Oh, I know my way so well," she said, when I asked her how she had ventured to go out. "I go to work alone every day—I make baskets in the N. Street—it is quite a long walk. To-day it has taken me much longer, of course, but thank God, I didn't fall once in spite of it being so slippery. But just now when you passed me I suddenly got nervous and that is why I asked you to help me. Thank you so much." We were walking along together, I was still holding her arm, afraid that she should slip. "Do not trouble to come any further with me," she said, "I can get along quite well now—I think I can even guess where we are," and to my surprise she named the street we had come to which was where I was going. I asked her where she lived —which was in the next block, and said I would take her to her house, but she would not hear of it. She grew so agitated and protested so emphatically that I thought it better not to irritate her by insisting, but resolved to follow her quietly without her knowing it, and be ready to support her up should she slip. So I bade her good-bye, and having thanked me again, she continued her way—with me at her heels.

Slowly we advanced, then she turned a corner

going down a side-street, twice she slipped almost off the pavement into the road and I was just in time to stop her. "Thank you," she said quietly. "The world seems to be full of kind people to-day. You are the second kind soul to help me this evening." I kept silent, not wanting her to recognize my voice. She reached another crossing and again began to try the pavement with her stick, uncertain where she was stepping. Suddenly she slipped and would have fallen heavily had I not caught her arm in time. "Oh, thank you, thank you," she said. "It *is* kind of you. But why have you followed me after all? I know you are the same kind person who helped me across the street just before. I can recognize your scent—though you are so silent. Really, it is too good of you! You shouldn't do it. I know how anxious everybody is to get home at last after working all day and I simply can't bear the thought of anyone going out of their way just because of me. Please, please don't go any further—I am quite near home now and can manage beautifully." But now I firmly was holding her arm and told her she would have to put up with me till we reached her home. "You are very naughty," she said, smiling; "I am sure your mother is waiting for you and wondering where you are." I told her that I was a mother myself and that my children were far away in a foreign country and that no one was waiting for me here, so it did not matter how late I was. "You have a young voice," she said, "I thought you were a young girl. Forgive me for talking so strictly to you. But what you say is so sad—no one waiting for you. Where do you live then? Where are you going to?" I told her I was going to a friend on the L. Street. "Oh, the L. Street," she said, "how well I know it! I lived there all my life—till I lost my eye-sight a few years ago. I know all the houses. Which

number are you going to?" I told her it was No. 5, at which she grew quite excited. "No. 5!" she exclaimed! "Oh, but that is the lovely two-storied house with the big garden! It belonged to some English people—a big family with a lot of children. We lived on the other side only a few houses away and we were always so interested in them. There were three girls and three boys and a baby, and they were all so full of life and so mischievous. They were also very spoilt. They had an ice-hill in the garden in winter and horses and carriages and sleighs and the children had their own little pony-cart, a funny-looking foreign one (a governess-cart) that they used to be taken to school in. Why, we watched them grow up, I remember their first ball, the carriages driving up to the door, their sleighing parties; oh, they had a gay life! Then when the War broke out some of them went to the front—they said that the boys went to fight in the English Army, the girls became nurses on our side. During the Revolution the eldest daughter got married to a doctor—the wedding was a lovely one—they were married in the church opposite their house—we watched it all from our windows. Then some months after, the parents and the rest of the family went abroad—to England, I suppose, and what became of them after that, I don't know. The house was confiscated of course and made into a school or a hospital—I don't remember what. But you must know as you are going there. I suppose you know one of the resident teachers? I wonder if they know what became of these English people—I would like to know so much." I was listening spellbound to all she was saying: so strange it was to hear this unexpected description of my family and our life from an utter stranger—one who had watched and seen us without our even knowing of her existence! Then I told her

—great was her astonishment when I told her that I was one of the three schoolgirls she had just described to me—the very one, in fact whose wedding she had watched from her window! She could hardly believe me—it seemed so strange, so extraordinary that we should have met like this, that at a moment of supreme loneliness Fate should have sent me someone to whom I could talk of my own people. We had now reached her house, and entering the dark, untidy yard, it was with great difficulty that I found her entrance. She here confessed to me that she sometimes spent hours trying to find her own door, when she was by herself. We parted like old friends—she was so sweet and sympathetic, so strange was our encounter. Truly "ships that pass in the night".

## CHAPTER VI

### THE YOUNGER GENERATION

SEVERAL weeks passed. Day after day I visited the prison, the G.P.U., the Procurature—but all to no avail: I could get no definite news about my husband. After hours of standing and waiting in enormous queues, all I would hear (when I at last reached the "officials") was: "We are still awaiting the orders from Moscow" or "The papers concerning the case have been sent to Moscow and it rests with the Moscow Ogpu to decide about the sentence, we know nothing."

This was the only and everlasting answer, which made me absolutely helpless and desperate. At last, unable to bear the suspense any longer, I resolved to go to Moscow myself. This was quite a difficult undertaking. Travelling in U.S.S.R. (if you are one of its citizens and not an "Intourist") is a rather complicated business, and especially so if one has very little money. Hotels everywhere are quite unapproachable, none of us could dream of even taking a room, and as the housing question in Moscow was far worse than in Leningrad, the most one ever hoped for, if one had any friends there, would be a couple of chairs in an overcrowded room. My husband had a cousin living in Moscow. Though I had never seen her I wrote to her asking if she could put me up for a few days and received a wire saying I would be welcome whenever I came. This was a great relief. I

knew, of course, that she would not be able to have me for more than three or four days (because of the ever vigilant "house committee") but I hoped (very naïvely) to get through with my business in Moscow within that time. The day I was leaving I met one of my former pupils on the Nevsky. This chance encounter turned out to be very fortunate for me. She was a young Communist who had begun studying English with me the last time I had been over. When I told her I was going to Moscow she grew very excited: "Do go and see my sisters," she said; "they are both students and 'Komsomolkas' and live quite comfortably. They might be of some use to you, I will write down their address and add a few words." She took out a scrap of paper and scribbled something on it. "Give that to them," she said handing it to me, "and good luck to you, Maria Carlovna," and embracing me, her eyes full of tears, she dashed off. Looking at the paper I saw the address and behind it was written: "Help this citizen" and her signature. I stuck it in my bag little thinking how valuable it was going to prove. That same evening I took the night train to Moscow.

Though the cost of the ticket had doubled since the Revolution, the standard of comfort was in the reverse proportion. The third-class carriage was overcrowded and overheated, the wooden benches were hard and uncomfortable, there were not enough mattresses to go round and such as there were were quite expensive. I was lucky to secure one, and though it was very thin, still it was better than the bare wooden seat. This dreary comfortless journey ended about eleven o'clock the next morning.

I was met by my husband's cousin and her thirteen-year old son, who was a "pioneer" (future Communist). They took me to their home—a small room

in a communal flat, with neither bathroom nor kitchen range (all the cooking was done on a "primus"). The room was tiny but cosy and homelike and they gave me a warm welcome. My bed was made up on the sofa, whilst Ivan my young cousin slept on chairs. After a wash (over the kitchen sink) and a cup of "substitute coffee" (roasted wheat and chicory), I set out for the International Red Cross, and the Lubianka prison which was then the headquarters of the Ogpu. As I did not know Moscow very well, Ivan volunteered to accompany me. He was a bright, intelligent boy, very interested in everything. He plied me with questions on the outside world and I felt at once that hostility to Western civilization which is being artificially implanted in the youth of Soviet Russia. His manner had precocious assurance and he talked sneeringly of "your bourgeois culture" quite openly. He boasted all about the Soviet achievements what they had succeeded in doing, and were going to do in the Five Year Plan. I listened to him in surprise and and with concern—it was so strange that his gentle, very old-regime mother should have such a son. He was a little Bolshevik through and through. All my heart went out to her—I know her life of sacrifice for this child—how terrible it must be for her to watch him grow up like this! Thank God, thank God, my Tsapik was not here! How right my husband had been! Oh, now I saw and appreciated it all as I talked with this poor deceived child.

It was only after a few days, when I had got to know the boy quite well, that I perceived that a lot of his chatter was just boyish bluff. This little old man was showing off a good deal, and was not at all sure at the bottom of his heart that all British workmen toiled in chains as he had been assured by his half illiterate pedagogues.

He always accompanied me on my rounds, standing for hours in the queues with me (it was all the same old routine as in Leningrad, and alas, with the same results).

The streets were thronged with people—a never ceasing hurrying preoccupied crowd seemed to invade the whole town. The battles to board the trams in Moscow were even more desperate than they had been in Leningrad, and as Ivan was not so strong an ally as the Englishman I decided to avoid the fray and walk.

I had not been in Moscow since 1919 and was very interested in all I saw. I had always loved Moscow: its quaint, vivid, deeply original colourings, the mixture of Oriental and European, its atmosphere, peculiar to Moscow alone, had always thrilled and excited me. Even now, despite their fanatical efforts, the Bolsheviks had not succeeded in changing the face of Moscow. Here and there modern houses hideously incongruous disfigured the quaint crooked streets of the old city, but nevertheless Moscow clung to her characteristic and unalterable charm.

There was quite a lot of building going on. I remember that one day, as I walked with Ivan along the quay of the Moskva-River, we came upon workmen erecting a new stone bridge. All around lay slabs of marble and other expensive stones. I saw to my amazement that most of the marble slabs bore inscriptions—"In memory of our beloved so and so" or "Here rests so and so" and the like. They were all tombstones that had been "manufactured" in the Moscow cemeteries for building purposes! I could hardly believe my eyes, but Ivan took this as a matter of course and didn't find it a bit extraordinary.

For several days Ivan and I roamed about the Soviet Institutions, waiting for hours, and I under-

stood to my despair that it was going to take me not several days as I had hoped, but weeks, till I got to know anything. It was getting impossible for my cousin to have me in her room any longer—the house committee were after her. I had no money for an hotel. Where was I to go? My position was desperate. I did not wish to register in Moscow, thus drawing official notice on myself as I had managed to slip through from Leningrad without the attention of my G.P.U. friends.

I then suddenly remembered my pupil's scrap of paper—I would try her sisters and see what they were like. They were Communists—could I trust them? I showed Ivan the address—it was on the opposite side of Moscow, and one morning we set out. We came to a big modern building built for Government Officials. It was quite new, in fact not quite completed even.

As we entered from the cold wet street—we found ourselves in a well-heated vestibule—"Central heating!" I exclaimed with amazement. The house was built in the corridor-system—all small flats. We found our number and rang the bell. A good-looking young woman answered it and asked us in, looking at us suspiciously. I handed her the scrap of paper from my bag with her sister's writing. Her manner changed spontaneously and she welcomed us warmly. "Have you anywhere to live?" was her first question. I told her my plight—how my cousin dared not have me any longer. "Well, come along here, we'll put you up easily," she said heartily at once, and her tone was so sincere that I had no doubt about her really meaning it.

That same day Ivan brought my suit-case from his mother's room and I moved into my new abode. It was a comfortable modern place consisting of two

bedrooms and a living-room, a gas-stove in the kitchen (an unheard of luxury in Russia) and, greatest wonder of all, a nice bathroom with a geyser! I could scarcely believe my eyes—it was really incredible to find oneself in such surroundings in Moscow, where everybody one knew herded together in the smallest space possible with scarcely room to move. In addition to my pupil's two sisters there was a friend staying with them and they all three gave me a hearty welcome, making up a bed for me on a very comfortable sofa. From them, I learned to my surprise that all the "Responsible Workers" (Soviet jargon for bureaucrats in fat jobs) were entitled to flats like this one in the "Government Buildings", and as their father was a high official in the Far East, they were living in his apartment. As well as the luxury of having a roomy flat, they were also privileged in the way of food: every ten days they received a whole store of provisions from the Kremlin ; this was called the "Kremlin Paiok" (rations) so they knew nothing of hours of "queueing up" for every morsel of food that all the less fortunate citizens of Leningrad and Moscow were subject to. Their "Kremlin rations" were indeed royal ones as they included meat, chickens and even white flour and butter—all rare and expensive luxuries in 1930. I could hardly hide my surprise at what I saw, but they only laughed good-naturedly at my amazement and pressed me to eat as Russians always do.

I stayed with my new friends for almost three weeks and was treated most courteously and kindly by them in spite of their having soon realized that I was their "Class Enemy". We had most interesting talks and arguments and I think we learned a lot from each other. I had never been in such close contact with the younger generation of Soviet Russia before, and I

found it most interesting to study and observe them. Their ages ranged from nineteen to twenty-two. My two hostesses were students, their friend was a teacher. She had been teaching some tribe in a distant mountain village beyond the Caucasus and had now come to Moscow on holiday. All three were "Komsomolkas"—future Communists (preparing to enter the Party) and firm believers in the "Cause". To my great surprise I soon learned that they had as little idea about the real condition of things in the country and of the plight of the inhabitants as I had had of their communistic privileges.

They were full of enthusiasm and faith in the Five Year Plan and firmly believed that at its termination Russia would be the leading country of the world!

It was both pathetic and surprising to listen to them—they were so naïve and so ignorant of all that surrounded them. In a way they were just as unconconscious and blissfully ignorant as were the "well bred" and privileged young society girls of before the War. Yet they were at the same time so intelligent, so eager to acquire knowledge, so anxious to learn everything they could. They had all the eager thirst for knowledge which is so characteristic of the Russians. I have never seen young girls work as much as they did, or as willingly. They were out of the house before eight in the morning and every free moment they had they spent at lectures or museums —at their Politgramota (Political Science) lectures which, they acknowledged to me, they hated—but they went from a sense of duty. "We must learn to be good citizens, especially as we are going to enter the Party." They believed all the nonsense and bluff that was crammed down their throats about the World Revolution and asked me the most absurd questions about England and Western Europe. My

answers often surprised and puzzled them, and I could see that they hardly believed me.

But I think that in many ways my stay with them helped to open their eyes to some things. They were genuinely surprised and horrified when I told them the reason of my visit to Moscow, about my husband's arrest and case, and how, for two whole months, I had not been able to obtain any information about him in Leningrad.

"But this is appalling, scandalous!" they cried; "even if your husband were guilty it is not a reason for mocking at you in this way! No, here in Moscow, it will be different, we will take you to the places ourselves in turns." Their surprise was great when they accompanied me to the different places with the same result as in Leningrad. "Yes, our Government has yet much to organize and arrange," they confessed to me after the first day of running about. "But all is sure to come right," they added confidently, "we are but a young State, we have much to learn, of course." Day after day passed in fruitless inquiries and waiting in queues. I was put off from day to day, from week to week. Sometimes in their spare time, the girls would accompany me, but their presence changed nothing and they quickly wearied of the job. I used to come back in the evenings dead tired and almost desperate after my fruitless efforts to get some definite information, but in the morning I would start afresh with new hope.

They always gave me tea in the evenings and as I slept badly I was only too glad to stay up and talk halfway through the night. It was then that we had long talks and discussions. All three girls plied me with numberless questions about life before the Revolution and drank in every word I told them. They said they had never spoken to anyone of the "old regime", and

I think they were quite surprised to find I was not after all the monster their teachers led them to believe we were.

"Ah, but if only your class would stretch out a hand and help us along instead of plotting and working against us for our destruction!" they used to say to me sometimes. I tried hard to make them understand and believe that it was *impossible* for the bourgeoisie to "stretch out a hand"—because the Soviet Government would never trust them—and wholesale murder and prison was all the reward the Intelligentsia ever received for remaining at work in their own country.

"But look at all the dreadful plots you are always forming against us," they answered me. "Last year the mining engineers (Don Bass) and now all the Professors (Ramsin trial, 1930). Why, every day now we have lectures about the treachery of the Bourgeoisie and the "Vreditelstvo" (Sabotage)—and all their deadly conspiring is explained and revealed to us —it is truly monstrous!" When I explained to them how utterly improbable and ridiculous all those "cases" were, how obviously they were all faked just to provide scapegoats on whom to throw the failure of the Five Year Plan—they opened wide their eyes and began to protest fervently. It seemed to me, however, that my words set them thinking.

"Look at all the prisons overcrowded with the last poor remains of the Intelligentsia," I went on. "How can a mere handful of people accomplish the mass of evil with which you charge them! It is ludicrously, tragically false, the Red Bureaucrats are simply fabricating excuses to inflict suffering on persons who were once influential. This maniacal folly inflicts a great and irreparable loss on Russia—they are doing away with all the culture and the brains of our country. They will bitterly regret it soon."

The girls often asked me about Koni. "How lucky you are to have known and been among such people!" they would exclaim pathetically. The eagerness with which they used to listen to me was really quite touching.

My talks with these girls gave me one great happiness. I saw that even Bolshevik "culture" could not destroy the fine flower of sincere intellectual curiosity, which flourished in the Russian society of my youth.

It is true that tub-thumping demagogues now rank as professors in Russia's Universities, and that their perverted outpourings are accepted by students as messages from the Gods. But if my young hosts can be taken as in any way typical, the still, small voice of reason can even now make itself heard. While this remains true we Russians need not lose hope for the ultimate salvation of our country.

In spite of my being their "class-enemy", they were invariably kind and hospitable to me and up to this day I retain a feeling of deep gratitude for the shelter and kindness I received from them during my stay in Moscow.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE BOY BETRAYER

IT was while I was in Moscow that I met an old schoolfriend from whom I had been separated for many years. She told me a grim story which shows a terrible aspect of the life of some Soviet children. It made me thank God that I had been able to bring up my children beyond the reach of Stalinist influence.

My friend's sister, also a schoolfellow of mine, had lost her husband in the first years of the Revolution and since then had lived in Leningrad with her son who was now twelve years old. She worked as typist in one of the State Institutions, while the boy attended a Soviet School and became a "pioneer" (or future Communist).

At the beginning of the Revolution, the boy's uncle who was the only brother of his mother and my friend, had escaped abroad. After years of silence he appeared one night, without warning, at his sister's small flat in Leningrad.

Unable to bear the separation from his country, or to accustom himself to the life abroad, he had risked everything to return to Russia across the Finnish frontier, on a false passport.

He had not lived in Leningrad since his childhood, and as he knew very few people, his one place of refuge was his sister's home. There he decided to settle down under his assumed name, hoping that in

so big a city he would escape the notice of the authorities.

Brother and sister exercised the greatest caution, not breathing a word of their secret to anyone except to three of their closest friends. Eventually the brother got a job and this enabled them to live more comfortably. Suddenly one night in the summer of 1930, their flat was visited by the Ogpu. The brother was arrested and the flat searched from top to bottom for evidence against him.

He was kept in prison for three months, then shot. Strangely enough the sister was not arrested but was summoned several times to the G.P.U. and severely cross-examined.

It became clear to her that her brother had been denounced, but by whom? The three lifelong friends who knew the secret were beyond suspicion. By day and by night the thought of the hidden traitor robbed her of all peace of mind.

One evening as she and her boy were sitting together, he doing his lessons, she mending his school clothes, a terrible suspicion struck her.

"Tell me, Gleb," she said, turning towards the small figure bent over his school books, "can you remember ever mentioning to any schoolfriend of yours—by accident—that Uncle Sergei was here in secret? I know how careful you are, but could it have slipped out by chance?"

The child looked at his mother across the table and she was astonished at the hard bleak expression in his eyes.

"By chance?" he said.

It seemed to his mother that there was actually mockery in his voice. "Not by chance? I did it on purpose. I denounced him to my School Director, and he was arrested the very next night. It was only

my duty towards the Revolution. You forget, Mother, that I am a 'Pioneer'."

The friend who told me this story explained how her sister now blamed herself for having gone to work instead of watching over the child. But somehow, she never, never imagined he could be so impregnated with this strange fanaticism. It is true he had tried to make her take down the ikons at home and refused to enter a church. But the mother felt that many children had to go through this phase before becoming reasonable.

That he would finally become capable of betraying his own flesh and blood to the Ogpu Gunmen was a terrible fact she had not reckoned with. Now, when his mother received visits from her sister, the two women weighed every word they uttered before the boy Gleb. The "duty of the pioneer" might lead this child, who showed no sign of remorse at the fate of his uncle, into even more unnatural paths.

My friend went on: "And what is so terrible—there seems to be no regret, no repentance in his heart for what he has done. He is as hard as nails. It is too terrible. His mother is a broken woman. She can hardly bear to see her own child. I am going back to live with her, I simply cannot leave her alone there now. She has become an old woman within the last few weeks—you know it all happened only last month. And she can't bear to see anyone, to talk of it to anyone."

## CHAPTER VIII

### TWO VISITS IN MOSCOW

MANY of my Russian friends in England and France had asked me to try and see their relatives whilst I was in Russia. I had not dared to make any such calls in Leningrad, but they were possible in Moscow because there I had temporarily escaped the attention of the G.P.U. and was not shadowed. Moreover I was living in communistic quarters and this fact gave me a degree of immunity to make several visits.

The first person I called on was the daughter of some Russian friends of ours in France. She was the only member left in Russia of a big and very affectionate family. Her people longed for news of her—as her letters were very few and guarded, and their greatest wish was to make easier the difficult life that had fallen to her lot. On her part, her passionate desire was to see her parents again, but her husband who was an engineer, occupied a responsible post and was not allowed to go across the frontier. The wife might have gone alone but she would not accept the risk of the authorities forbidding her return.

I found the flat she lived in quite easily and rang the bell. A woman of about thirty-five answered. She told me Citizen X was not at home. "When is she expected back?" I asked again. "I don't know," was the reply. "But what is the best time to find her at home—I have an important message for her," I

urged. "There is no fixed time when you can find her in. You had better give me the message," said the woman. I hesitated, not knowing what to do—she was probably a lodger in the flat—would it be wise to tell her I had come from abroad. It might attract the attention of the G.P.U. to the family. I decided not to risk it. "No, I am sorry but I must speak to Citizen X personally," I answered and turned to go. She thought for a moment, then she suddenly said: "Would you like to write her a note? Here is some paper and a pencil." I took the pencil and started writing.

"Dear Anna Petrovna," I began, "I have brought you a message from your mother . . ." The woman was watching me, I could feel it. I looked up, but she had turned away. Something in the outline of her profile struck me as familiar—where had I seen it before? Suddenly I realized it had an elusive resemblance to my friend in Paris, though one was very dark and the other quite fair. "Tell me, are you not yourself Anna Petrovna," I asked quickly. She started, flushing deeply and then threw herself on my neck weeping violently. "Yes, yes," she sobbed, "it is I, but I was afraid to tell you lest you might be from the G.P.U. You have come from abroad? You know my family? Oh, tell me about them! How are they, how are they?"

And for an hour we talked like old friends—though we had never seen each other—she drinking in every word I told her about her dear ones and heaping messages for them upon me. "Tell them not to worry about me," she said; "we are far better off in the way of food and housing than the average people, even though we are bourgeois, for because my husband is an engineer and doing important work we get good rations and extra food-cards. Our curse is the

terror—no one is immune from the danger of arrest and prison, even important specialists like my husband. Why, almost *all* our friends are already in prison these days. Sooner or later it is sure to happen to us, I know we are all doomed—all those of us who belonged to the Intelligentsia, that is why I was afraid of you at first—we fear every stranger. I was far from thinking you might have come from my people. Tell them that it is my greatest wish, the dream of my life to go to them with my children, but I will only go if my husband is allowed to come also—and that I fear will never be!"

We parted and that evening I described the visit to my Communist hostesses. They were genuinely amazed that anyone working for the Soviet Utopia should live in a constant agony of dread.

My next visit was to one who, like Koni, had remained in Russia, although thanks to her age she was legally entitled to seek refuge abroad. This person belonged to an old and noble family, all the members of which were safely out of the country. They had implored her to join them, but all in vain. She could not tear herself away from Russia, the idea of exile was insupportable to her. Her letters to her relations were brief and rare and she had warned the exiles to be equally cautious in writing to her, so very little was known of her life and I resolved to try and bring back some news of her if I could. One evening I went in search of the narrow, crooked street on the other side of the Moscow River where she lived. The street was ill-lit, so it took me some time to find the house, an old and dingy one, where all the apartments were turned into communal flats. The one she lived in was on the third story. I rang the bell and being told that Citizen Y's room was the fifth door I walked along the corridor till I reached it. There was no answer to

my first knock, so after a few seconds I knocked again. A frightened voice now answered: "Yes, come in." I entered.

It was a long narrow room, containing few but beautiful pieces of mahogany furniture. Some exquisite chairs and a writing-table revived memories of the lovely Russian country houses. On the walls hung portraits and photographs in old-fashioned frames. A grey-haired woman was seated at the writing-table—before her stood a single plate of potatoes and a salt cellar. As I approached her I saw that she was trembling with fear and that her eyes were wide with alarm.

"Olga Nikolaevna?" I asked. She nodded. "I have brought you greetings from your relations, please do not be afraid of me," I said reassuringly. Her whole attitude relaxed and she arose to welcome me.

"Oh, how your knock frightened me!" she said. "I thought they had come for me. They will sooner or later—we are all doomed, and when you knocked I thought my hour had come." She was still trembling as she bade me sit down and I begged her to go on with her potatoes before they got cold. She smiled pathetically. "But they are cold," she said. "I boiled them this morning for lunch. I am very short of kerosene—so I can light the primus only once a day. You see I am old and quite unable to stand for hours in the queues for food and fuel, so I live almost solely on potatoes that I get from a peasant by barter. But let us talk about something more interesting! So you have actually come from abroad and know my people. Well, tell me about them all!"

I sat gazing at her—I had seldom seen a more beautiful face. It was proud and austere and perfectly moulded but at the same time it wore an expression of

ineffable sadness. Her grey hair was parted in the middle and her slight erect figure was clad in a neat black dress with a high collar. She must have been about sixty.

After I had given her news of her family, I asked her to tell me something of her own life, so that I might describe it to her anxious relations. "There is nothing to tell about my life," she said, "you can see how I live and what I eat. But, you know, I scarcely notice that now, because I live only in the past. Only when I sleep—then I am happy. You know, every night I have the most wonderful, the most beautiful dreams —they are all about our former life and I live it all over again. I am always back on our dear beautiful estate, I walk in the old house and gardens, and I ride over our wide fields. I go for long rides—and oh, my joy is so great." Her face was transfigured as she spoke. "Look," she said, suddenly switching on the top light, "here is a branch from our old oak tree—there it is over my bed—I broke it off when I was last at home. I went there unrecognized a year ago. Oh, it was heart-breaking! When I arrived, the peasants who had refused to work in the Collective Farms were being driven to the station to be transported to Siberia and the North. The wailing and the moaning that I heard! Our house had been destroyed by fire and the orchards and woods about it cut down, not a single familiar face remained in the village, and though I have seen it all like this—still, in my dreams it is all as it used to be. I live only for the night." It was wonderful to hear her speak and to see how all her face lit up and a strange mystic look came into her eyes.

When I suggested that she should go abroad, she shook her head: "No, never," she said. "I will die here, in my country. I will never leave it." And I

felt it was final, and to attempt to persuade her was useless.

She then asked me why I had come back to Russia, and was full of sympathy and understanding when she heard my story. "May God help and protect you," she said simply.

At last it was time to go and I rose. "Let me bless you with my favourite ikon," she said, "it is more than a hundred years old and has often done miracles." She untied a small ikon from her bedstead and approached me with it in her hand. I shall never forget the ascetic beauty of her face and the passionate appeal in her voice as she raised her hand and blessed me with it saying solemnly: "Oh, Lord, with Faith and Hope do I implore Thee for this child."

Then we embraced each other crying silently. We were saying good-bye for ever. We both knew so well that never again, in this life, were we to meet.

Opening the door I stepped into the corridor together with my hostess. She was once more nervous and agitated. "Let us speak loudly," she said to me, "so that the people around should not think it was a secret visit." And we passed down the corridor to the front door talking loudly about trivial things.

I walked back home as one dazed in a dream, and the memory of that parting will remain with me all my life.

# CHAPTER IX

## LAST DAYS IN MOSCOW

I HAD been in Moscow almost three weeks but despite my utmost efforts I was no nearer the truth about my husband than I had been in Leningrad. Day after day I would be put off with some excuse or sent from place to place but always with the same cruel result.

I would start out in the early morning, waiting for hours in the queues at the different institutions, only to be told, when at last my turn came, that I had better try another department, and if unsuccessful there, return the next day. That was the usual answer but sometimes an official would say: "Your husband's case has not been looked into yet because we are overburdened with work," or "We have not had time to go through the G.P.U. archives."

During these days of suspense mingled with hope I remember I lived almost entirely on "Antonovka" apples (they were very plentiful that year) which one could buy from the street sellers, because I had no food-card. My physical energy, however, never completely failed me. I was driven on by a dark forboding about which I never dared to reason. Subconsciously I knew that if I stopped I would be brought face to face with the fact that something terrible had happened, but I did not dare to shape any thought, did not dare to stop, glad of any excuse to go on, ready to stand for hours or run about from place to place only

to avoid thinking and reasoning. When I was dashing from office to office I was really in flight from the nightmare of my own mind.

Sometimes while wandering aimlessly through the streets during the intervals in the "hours of reception" at the Soviet institutions I would go into a church and there find refuge and peace.

The churches of Moscow have a fabulous, fantastic beauty of their own. With all their splendour of colour and design their atmosphere is remote, spiritual and mystical. No Russian, I think, can ever stand unmoved before the ancient Moscow ikons richly glowing in the soft light of the candles.

To my surprise and joy I found that there were many more churches open in Moscow than in Leningrad, where my chief comfort had been my beloved Kazan Cathedral. Every day I passed the Church of the Ascension. The doors were always open—services took place morning and evening, and I began to attend them regularly. Always I saw the same people and very soon they became like old friends to me. Most of them were elderly women, obviously belonging to the Intelligentsia, although their clothes were worse than shabby and their heads covered with shawls. They had guessed at once what my trouble was and were full of sympathy and understanding. Whenever we met they would ask anxiously for my news and often advised me of new places where I might find a clue to my husband's fate. Each one of them had gone through trouble like mine—some loved one had vanished into the fatal houses of the G.P.U. and they, as I was doing now, had tried to go to the rescue.

Sometimes when I would be praying, a slight dark figure with a fine spiritual face framed in a black shawl would come up to me and whisper encouraging words.

This was one of the secret nuns of whom there are many now in Russia. They live in the world and no one suspects that they have taken the Vows. Despite the persecution of the church there is a strong undercurrent of deep faith and religious devotion running through the country which, in spite of their desperate efforts, the Bolsheviks are unable to suppress. It is felt both in Leningrad and, above all, in Moscow; likewise in the provinces.

Often in the Moscow churches I would be reminded of the Martyrs of the early years of Christianity. Nowhere have I seen such beautiful, such spiritual faces, full of suffering and serenity, especially was this true of the priests who indeed lived in the Valley of the Shadow of Death.

My new friends of the Ascension Church would sometimes give me pathetic counsel: "Try praying to this Saint," they would whisper, "he has helped me so often," or they would tell me when the day of a particular Saint came round and suggest that I should burn a candle before his ikon.

In this way the days passed until at last I found that my visa allowed me only three more weeks in Russia. When this limit passed my passport would be confiscated and it would be impossible to cross the frontier again. The young Englishman had warned me of this and so had the International Red Cross. I paid a last call at the Red Cross Office and there received the startling information that the G.P.U. files had been thoroughly searched and no trace found of my husband's case. One thing was certain—the case had not been remitted to the Moscow Ogpu. I was told, however, that it might have been sent to the Procurature.

The immediate necessity was to find this out as quickly as possible. If it was not in the Procurature—

I must hurry back to Leningrad. This news staggered me—it seemed monstrous and unbelievable that I had come to Moscow on a fool's errand.

I left the Red Cross building feeling numb and desperate. Not knowing what to do with myself, I wandered aimlessly along the crowded, dismal streets. A boy was selling newspapers, I bought one mechanically and glancing at the date saw it was my Tsapik's birthday. Our little boy was eleven to-day. This birthday had always been such an occasion for my husband and me. The year before, my husband had been in London and together we had gone to Tsapik's preparatory school in Hertfordshire, and had spent such a happy afternoon with him. The Headmaster let us have the boy to ourselves and we all had tea in the private sitting-room and played by the hour at the aeroplane game we had brought him as a birthday gift. Only a year ago! Sasha, I felt, must surely be thinking of our son to-day. Or don't they know one day from another in prison? I now knew where to turn my steps: I must go and burn a candle for my two dear ones. This thought calmed and comforted me a little and I turned at once in the direction of my favourite church. The service had not begun yet but all the familiar faces were there. They surrounded me at once to ask what news I had and were very upset at what I told them, and also gave me some advice: "When you go to the Procurature to-morrow, try and see Krilenko himself," they said. "Do you know, in spite of his cruelty and terrible reputation he has been known suddenly to take pity on people and help them. Try and see him personally. He can do anything. And now we will pray for you."

I prayed fervently; it was Tsapik's birthday—surely God would hear me to-day. After the evening service had finished I went to the Iverskaya Miracu-

lous Ikon which, after adorning the Kremlin Gate for so many centuries, had been taken down and was now hidden away in a small chapel in the old church of Nikola Khlinovsky. Even now Te Deum services were celebrated night and day before the Iverskaya Bogia Mater, which is one of the most revered of Russia's Holy Relics. I found three or four worshippers praying there when I entered. I looked with awe and veneration at the austere and beautiful face of the ancient Ikon and I tried to pray.

It was late when I finally returned to the flat where I was staying. My young hostesses were speechless when I told them of the news given to me at the International Red Cross Office. Like my friends of the Church of the Ascension these young Communists advised me strongly to try to penetrate to Krilenko himself.

The morning came after a sleepless night. It was still dark when I left the house to go to the Spiridonovka, where the Procurator's offices were. When I got there I learned, to my dismay, that Krilenko was out of Moscow. His assistant, however, would be coming to the office and I resolved to stay until I saw him. I found a wooden bench in the great cold vestibule off which there opened several doors all labelled: "Entrance strictly forbidden." Officials, men and women, with listless faces, crossed and re-crossed the vestibule and I would rush up to each one begging them to let me know when Krilenko's assistant should arrive and be able to see me. They all looked surprised and replied that they could not help me.

Three hours passed. Then a tall lean man in uniform entered the vestibule. His face was sharp and stern, but to my relief, I saw that he was a Russian. I stood in his way. "What is it, citizen?" he asked curtly. As briefly as I could I told him about

my husband's case and explained that I had come all the way from England to find out something about him, but had been unable to do anything in Leningrad and had therefore come to Moscow. I begged him to look through the files and discover definitely whether indeed the Leningrad G.P.U. were deceiving me in saying that the case had been remitted to Moscow. The man in uniform—he was Krilenko's assistant—listened attentively. Then he told me to return in three hours in which time he would have searched his files. I went back to the church, but I was too restless to remain there and instead wandered through the streets until it was time to return to the Procurator's offices.

I took up my place on the wooden bench, and again hour after hour passed in that bleak vestibule. When the clock was striking six an official appeared in the hall. I rushed up to him and asked where the Assistant Procurator's Office was. He pointed to one of the doors marked "Entrance forbidden" and said: "Wait a little longer, he will probably be out soon." But I was past waiting. I dashed through the forbidden door into a room crowded with clerks busy at their desks. Someone sternly ordered me out, but I refused to go, demanding that I should be taken to Krilenko's assistant. Suddenly he appeared to find out what all the noise was about.

"Oh, it's you, is it," he said seeing me. "Come with me, citizen." He led me back to the vestibule and declared: "I have looked right through our files. Your husband's case is not here. It has never been here. Nor is there any trace of it in the Moscow Ogpu, I have just made enquiries. The case has never left Leningrad. They have been lying to you and deceiving you to put you off. You must return to Leningrad at once. Go and see the Procurator K. as

soon as you get there, he will be able to tell you the truth."

I looked at him wildly: "But for what reason did they lie to me about it all?" I asked.

"For various reasons, citizen," he answered casually. "I expect it will be cleared up soon."

I turned to go. My heart was like a stone. I had barely reached the door when Krilenko's assistant called me back: "Citizen," he said, "though I have told you to hurry back, you had better not be too hopeful. You may be too late. Perhaps several months too late." With that he disappeared abruptly.

I heard his words but did not then grasp their full significance. I concentrated on just one thought: I must get back to Leningrad quickly, quickly. I think I must have run most of the way back to the flat where I found one of my hostesses at home. I told her I was returning at once to Leningrad and she helped me to pack my little case and gave me some money for my ticket.

Very soon I was on board the night train.

# CHAPTER X

## THE LAST OF MY HOME

I HAD been in Leningrad a few days before I found out the truth. I had hurried back in vain—everything was finished. It was all over. Before I had even started. The "mistake" this time had been fatal. My two months here in Russia had been a cruel monstrous farce.

But although I was the half-English wife of a "spy in the pay of the British Government"—a charge which of course was entirely without foundation—I was to be allowed to leave the country. Two cross-examinations, lasting several hours, at the G.P.U. had failed to prove my guilt.

My flat and all it contained were to be "confiscated" by the State. I was, however, to be given some of my clothes and other effects. I begged only for some of my husband's personal possessions and for my Bechstein, but these were refused.

For two days Verochka and I waited several hours in the street for the Ogpu officials to arrive, because we were not allowed to enter the flat without them. The third day, cold and hungry, we were just going to leave when the great lorry drove up. There were six men in it. We entered all together and the looting began. They opened all the boxes and trunks (several of which were being stored by me for friends) sorting out my belongings. They piled them in heaps—some were to go "officially" to the Ogpu and some "unofficially" into their own pockets and these last, they did

not enter on the list to be submitted to the higher authorities. Now and again I would hear Vera remonstrating with the officials and stoutly defending my interests, as always.

The floor was strewn with books, papers, letters and photographs. I was crawling about, picking up anything, stray letters or scraps of paper which had my husband's writing on them, and the various photographs and snapshots, all of which meant far more to me than my household goods. In one corner was an enormous heap of books that had been flung there out of the two bookcases. I started sorting them to see if there were any more letters or photographs on the floor beneath them. I came on a parcel which was wrapped up in an old newspaper and tied with string. I flung it aside with the others, thinking it also contained books, but it fell with a soft thud which could not have been books, and I thought it was perhaps better to see the contents.

Untying the string, I opened it. Letters fell out. Looking nearer I saw that they were my letters addressed to my husband. Most of them were very old-addressed to the front, to the "Head doctor of the III Kaufman Field Unit", when we had just become engaged. There were actually two letters stamped "Chistopol—May, 1916," that wonderful, unforgettable spring that we had spent together on the Kama. I opened them—some lilies of the valley dropped out. . . . There was another envelope marked in my husband's hand: "Chistopol—May, 1916, Mary's Grandmother's orchard,"—a spray of apple blossom. . . . How well I remembered that sunny, dewy morning among the apple trees in grandmamma's little orchard. . . . The glittering Kama in the distance. . . . How long ago! How far away. . . . There were also mementoes of the War—a small red cross that I had

worn on the front of my apron and that I had given the head doctor, once, long ago, in Teresino . . . or was it during the Retreat? . . .

Then, wrapped up separately, Tsapik's first tiny boots, and a pair of Mary's wee slippers. . . . All put away so carefully, so lovingly.

Then suddenly I noticed on the floor a slip of paper with my husband's writing. It had evidently fallen from the parcel without my noticing it. Picking it up I read the following words: "In case of my personal catastrophe, should a stranger's hand come across this packet I beg that it should be given to my wife. A.B."

It was written some years ago. He had always known, had felt what the end might be. And yet, for our sakes, he had gone on risking his life, separated—for our safety and welfare—from the family he adored. I had never guessed my husband's secret burden, the burden of fear that he might perish at any hour just because he belonged to the Intelligentsia. He had always known exactly how perilous his situation was, always realizing that his disinterested devotion to his country would count for nothing in the eyes of the G.P.U. Yet he had kept those forebodings from me to spare me anxiety. And now it was too late. He had made the supreme sacrifice.

## CHAPTER XI

### FAREWELL

THE "confiscation" lasted two days. Vera managed to wangle out some linen, a bed, and a chair for me. I had been allowed to take some of my treasured books and photographs and, after imploring the officials, my husband's old dressing-gown.

My visa was expiring and all my friends were anxiously urging me to leave immediately. But I could not. . . . I could not leave a day, an hour earlier. I knew I was going for ever. . . .

Secretly, one after another, my friends came to see me and to say good-bye.

I was now living at Verochka's—with the G.P.U.'s permission. My Polia had also turned up and was guarding me like a faithful dog. Together with Vera they spent all the last days in washing, ironing and mending my things and packing for me.

Then, a few days before my departure, on returning home, I found my Varvara Ivanovna waiting for me. She had travelled two days to be with me. And when I saw her suddenly my tears came. The happiest years of my life were so closely connected with her presence. The coming of Tsapinka ; that of Mary. Sasha's boundless love and devotion, our radiant happiness. . . . She was the living witness of it all. . . .

"Varvara Ivanovna, you have come, you have come," was all I could sob and Vera and Polia stood

by crying and saying "Slava Bogu" (thank God!) "at last, at last she is crying."

We spent the last evening in the wash-house—my kind friend the doctor had asked us to tea.

It was late when we parted, but somehow I couldn't think of sleeping, it was such a beautiful winter night, the sky covered with stars, the snow crisp under our feet. Arm in arm, Polia and I walked round and round the garden, talking of old times.

"Do you remember, Maria Carlovna, how the coachman and I carried the big carpet across to the church—for your wedding? It was I who decorated the church, you know! The *Barinia*" (my mother) "always used to say I was the smartest worker of the whole crowd! 'Polina works after my own heart,' she used to say! Oh, bow low to the *Barinia* from me! Tell her that I often think of her and always with gratitude, it was she who taught me to work properly. She was strict but she was also kind and just. Not like the masters of to-day. I have found them out all right now! They have done nothing but deceive us all! And we, fools, believed them! At least, before, if we worked—we had food and clothing and were safe and happy. And now—we work like slaves and are hungry and naked, and, if we happen to get our pay regularly, have to stand in queues even to get a bit of bread."

She then went on telling me about the country, how bad things were in the village and how, in spite of all the persecution of Religion and the Church, not a single peasant would agree to have his dear ones buried without "otpevaniye" (church singing). "If there is no Batioushka (priest) they do it themselves—in secret."

On and on she went as we paced the garden, far into the night, talking like two old friends.

We went back to the dear years of the Cheboksarski Pereoulok (my first flat in the Court Hospital), the episode with the turkey, her night "expeditions" to my parents' house in quest of wood logs when Tsapik was a tiny baby, going all over the sad and happy days that we had shared together . . . and we were more like two sisters, or two friends, than servant and mistress. . . .

The last morning came. My train was leaving in the late afternoon. Vera and Polia took my things to the Finland Station in the morning. I could not go without a last farewell to my beloved Kazan Cathedral. Somehow all the most important events of my life were linked with it. I had gone there in joy as well as in sorrow, and always I had the consoling feeling: whatever happens to me, here everything is always the same—the beauty and the peace will never alter.

As I entered and approached the miraculous Ikon of the Kazanskaya Bogia Mater (Our Lady of Kazan) I saw a small group of people standing near it, watching anxiously. Near the Ikon itself stood three men—two were G.P.U. officials in uniform, the third was a civilian. The civilian had a candle in his hand and was inspecting the precious stones that the Ikon was studded with, and making an estimate. So this was the end! Soon Our Lady of Kazan was to be dismantled. They were going to lay their hands now on this, our greatest holy relic. The man finished his task and blew out his candle. Then, to my surprise, he bowed low and making the sign of the cross, kissed the Ikon fervently before being led away by the G.P.U. men. He was probably some well-known jeweller who had been brought from prison to estimate the stones.

I lingered on praying for the last time in my

Kazansky Sobor, memories surging around me. It was here that I had the last *moleben* before leaving for the front—sixteen years ago—when the strange lady came up to me and asked me to take the letter to her husband. . . . Those first days of the War! How young, how eager, how enthusiastic we were. Our gallant, self-sacrificing soldiers—where were they?

Here it was that my husband and I came the day after his release from prison in 1924. . . .

It was here, two days ago, that I had had the first panihida. . . .

Parting with the Kazansky Sobor was parting with a piece of my own self.

. . . . . .

The train left at six o'clock. My faithful attendants and friends, Varvara Ivanovna, Verochka and Polia, came with me to the station. They hoped to be able to accompany me to the frontier—but this request was not granted.

We sat for a few minutes in the compartment, our hearts too full to speak. Soon it was time to part. We embraced and made the sign of the cross, crying silently. The third bell was just beginning to ring and I was about to re-enter the carriage when a small slight figure dressed in black came running swiftly along the platform towards me. Sister Genia! She had risked it! She was here after all. Silently she strained me to her heart. "Bring them up as the children of a hero," she whispered and was gone.

Slowly the train steamed out. I stood at the window straining my tear-dimmed eyes to see the dear faces. . . .

"Bring them up as the children of a hero."

## CHAPTER XII

### FINLAND

EARLY next morning I was in Helsingfors. My kind friends the British Consul and his wife met me on the platform and drove me to their home. My brother Freddy had been away in the north of Finland and his train was due in Helsingfors half an hour after mine. We had barely taken off our furs when he rushed in. My first question was: "When does the steamer leave for Hull?" I had only one desire—to keep moving.

"The *Oberon* is sailing in two days' time," said my brother, "but surely you are not going on at once? That is quite out of the question. You must break your journey here and rest because you are not fit to travel, especially alone."

The Consul and his wife supported my brother but I would not listen to them. My mind was made up.

"I shall be quite all right, you'll see," I assured them. "Besides it is such luck that it is the *Oberon*. I always try to go by it. I've been many times now and I know the captain and all the crew and I shall be quite comfortable. Please go and book my cabin at once. If you don't I'll go myself."

At last, very reluctantly, Freddy went off to the shipping office. I could hardly bear the thought of waiting here even for two days, and they wanted me to stay a couple of weeks! I felt I had to get back to the children quickly. They alone could help me.

If I sailed on the *Oberon* I would be back in London to spend Christmas with my son and daughter. I had been thinking in this way for about an hour when my brother returned. He came straight up to me and put his arm round me. "Please don't be angry with me, Mary," he said, "but you know—when I got to the booking office I simply couldn't bring myself to buy you a ticket. I *can't* let you go alone. You do not realize it, but you are not strong enough to travel now. You will collapse, as soon as you find yourself alone.

"Stay with me here over Christmas and then I will take you to London myself. For business reasons, it is impossible for me to leave at present, but in two or three weeks I will arrange to go. Please, I beg you to listen to me for your own sake and for the children's."

I felt I could not go on insisting and gave in very much against my own wish. I had suddenly grown tired and limp and the idea of having Freddy with me on the voyage to London was very attractive.

I moved into his flat and very soon realized how wise he had been in refusing to let me travel alone. Several days passed. My mind was a blank and I busied myself with keeping house for my brother, very inefficiently, I am afraid.

Christmas Eve dawned. I was sitting with Freddy when he was called to the telephone. Suddenly I heard him exclaim: "Good God!" and then he called me. "What is it?" I asked, coming into the hall. "Has anything happened?"

My brother looked at me strangely. "Do you know you're damned lucky, after all," he said.

"What makes you think so?" I asked in surprise.

"Perhaps you will think so yourself when I tell you that the *Oberon* has been sunk with almost everyone on board. She collided in the fog with the *Arcturus*

in the Kattegat last night. You've had a narrow escape, my dear, considering you can't swim!"

I stood silent, scarcely believing what I heard. So Fate had saved me once more. But why? I did not want to live. Life seemed so long, so dreary.

Then my mind turned again to the children. *Our* children. They were still so young. They would need me for some years yet. I felt it was for them that I had been spared. And I thought of Genia's words.

E